

Access Press

The Arc Minnesota marks 70 years of change and progress



The Arc Minnesota is marking 70 years of service to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families this fall. Here are some highlights from that history.

Dr. Reynold Jensen, a professor of psychiatry and pediatrics at the University of Minnesota, in 1947 challenged the prevailing practice of immediately separating children born with disabilities from their parents, counseling parents to delay the decision to place their child in an institution.

Jensen's ideas spread and in September 1950 the National Association of Parents and Friends of the Mentally Retarded held its first-ever national convention of parents in Minneapolis. Five years later the Minnesota Association for Retarded Children incorporated to coordinate local, state, regional and national initiatives and provide leadership in government affairs.

Much focus over the next several years was to get laws passed, to mandate special education for educable students, provide funding for teacher training, establish day activity center services, fund prenatal care services for high-risk women and support research into the causes of mental retardation. Many gains could be celebrated at 1960's 10th anniversary conference in Minneapolis.

President John F. Kennedy signed legislation in 1963 providing \$355 million for a federal and state mental health and mental retardation program. The next year Minneapolis parents succeeded in establishing classes for students with disabilities in the Minneapolis Public Schools, 11 years before federal legislation mandated special education services.

Arc members continued to be active at the local, state and federal levels, on a wide range of issues. The 1970s and 1980s were a time where many more significant measures were passed at the state and federal level. Many changes were made to help people with disabilities and their families be effective advocates, find meaningful work and live in their own communities.

In 1980, the TapeMark Charity Golf Tournament began, benefiting Arc and other organizations that support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Arc's Value Village Thrift Store opened in 1982 in Richfield to provide funding for the Arc.

One big change affects the way people with intellectual and development disabilities are described. The Arc in Minnesota in 1990 stopped using the name "Association for Retarded Citizens" out of concern about the label "retarded." The national Arc changed its name a year later. The Arc is used as a noun and not as an acronym.

Much more public policy work continued through the 1990s, with a strong presence at the state capitol that continues today. It marked the rise in prominence of effective self-advocates. Conferences, educational opportunities and resources helped everyone have a voice. Sharing of stories became an important communications tool. Many voices were needed at times when supports and services were threatened by state budget cuts.

The 2000s were a time of more growth and change. Arc members also focused on Get Out the Vote training, candidate forums and helping people get to the polls. Efforts were stepped up to help people find meaningful work.

A big change was in January 2018, when seven chapters of The Arc across Minnesota merged as one organization to provide consistent and essential services to support more people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the [Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities](#)