

# Western Pennsylvania Disability History and Action Consortium 2023 Impact Report

## Table of Contents

- Letter from the Project Director
- Mission and Vision
- Programs and Impact
- Meet Our 2023 Team
- 2023 Funders, Donors, and Partners
- Get Involved

-----

## Letter from the Project Director

Dear Supporters and Allies,

As we reflect on the past year, I am proud to present the 2023 Impact Report for the Western Pennsylvania Disability History and Action Consortium. It has been an honor to serve as Project Director, a journey that began in January 2020, following years of dedicated service in various capacities since 2015.

Throughout 2023, our Consortium continued to advance our mission with unwavering commitment and passion. Our programming accomplishments stand as testaments to our collective efforts and dedication to inclusivity and advocacy.

**Intersection of Race and Disability Project:** One of our significant achievements was the successful completion of the Intersection of Race and Disability project, a pivotal initiative that shed light on the intersectional challenges faced by people of color who have disabilities. Through this project, we collected and shared oral histories and personal stories for 12 individuals and organizations and promoted greater understanding and empathy.

**Transforming Community Living:** Additionally, our storytelling work around the closing of Polk Center resulted in a compelling video and event, providing a reminder of the history of institutionalization, how far we have come, and what works still needs to be done to ensure home- and community-based services for individuals with disabilities and their families.

**Supporters Program:** In line with our commitment to growth and sustainability, we proudly launched the new Supporters Program, inviting individuals and organizations to join us in our mission to use disability history to ensure disability rights. This initiative continues to garner significant support and enthusiasm, fueling our efforts to effect positive change.

Looking ahead, we are thrilled to announce the receipt of the Gather for Change grant from Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council. This grant will enable us to host six workshops in the coming year, providing invaluable resources and education to our community. These workshops will serve as catalysts for empowerment and advocacy, furthering our collective impact.

As we embark on the journey ahead, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to our supporters, partners, and allies who continue to champion our cause. Together, we will continue to strive for a more equitable

and inclusive society, where every individual is valued and truly given equal treatment and opportunity!

With gratitude,

Cindy Leonard  
Project Director

-----

## **Mission and Vision**

### **Mission**

The Western Pennsylvania Disability History and Action Consortium is a community-based archive that preserves and honors the historic struggle of people with disabilities to attain human and civil rights – and shares the lived experiences of today – in order to promote community access, participation and equal opportunity.

### **Vision**

The Consortium’s vision is to engage the public in the dynamic history of people with disabilities, to honor people who were mistreated or denied their rights, to recognize the efforts of individuals with and without disabilities to effect positive change, and to raise public awareness of contemporary issues, including the ongoing effort to maintain humane policies and laws.

-----

## **Programs and Impact: By the Numbers**

- 12+ New collections & materials advanced to repositories.
- 11 Long-form oral histories recorded.
- 12 “Intersection of Race and Disability” stories documented and shared in 2022-2023.
- 128 “Transforming Community Living” event attendees.

### **Bulk Email**

- 3 newsletters + 17 emails sent
- 10,417 total recipients
- Website
- 6,200 users
- 17,035 page views

### **Facebook**

- 923 followers
- 26,114 total reach

### **YouTube**

- 24 subscribers
- 518 views

###

## Programs and Impact: Intersection of Race and Disability Project

“The Intersection of Race and Disability” project documents and shares the stories of people with disabilities who are people of color. These stories have often been overlooked, not only in the narrative of disability history but also in the contemporary disability rights movement.

In addition to expanding the historic record, these stories provide a starting point for community conversations about the struggles of people of color who have disabilities, and their inclusion in the broader struggle for racial equality, civil rights, and social justice.

These histories feature individuals and organizations who represent different types of disabilities, past eras of disability services, pivotal disability rights movements, and seminal leadership.

### Read the histories:

- **Henry Bell:** <https://www.wpdhac.org/the-intersection-of-race-and-disability-project-henry-c-bell/>
- **Ms. Aurelia Carter:** <https://www.wpdhac.org/north-star-of-the-northside-the-advocacy-of-aurelia-carter/>
- **Ms. Andrea Coleman-Betts:** <https://www.wpdhac.org/hazelwoods-hero-ms-andrea-coleman-betts/>
- **Dr. Diego Chaves-Gnecco:** <https://www.wpdhac.org/the-intersection-of-race-and-disability-project-dr-diego-chaves-gnecco/>
- **The Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center (COTRAIC):** <https://www.wpdhac.org/the-intersection-of-race-and-disability-project-the-council-of-three-rivers-american-indian-center/>
- **Melva Fair:** <https://www.wpdhac.org/people-first-disability-advocacy-melva-fairs-life-work/>
- **David Hale:** <https://www.wpdhac.org/the-daily-encourager-the-life-faith-and-legacy-of-david-hale-1979-2020/>
- **Milton (“Skip”) Henderson:** <https://www.wpdhac.org/the-intersection-of-race-and-disability-project-milton-skip-henderson-sr-1961-2019/>
- **Paul Lee:** <https://www.wpdhac.org/the-intersection-of-race-and-disability-project-paul-lee/>
- **Marilyn McKinney:** <https://www.wpdhac.org/the-intersection-of-race-and-disability-project-marilyn-mckinney-1947-2004/>
- **Maurika (“Rika”) Moore:** <https://www.wpdhac.org/the-wpdhac-intersection-of-race-and-disability-project-rikas-hearts-and-maurika-moore/>
- **Florence Reed:** <https://www.wpdhac.org/intersection-of-race-and-disability-project-florence-reed/>

“Being physically disabled is serious, but we still deserve the patience and gentleness at the same time to accept that we are human.” ~ Andrea Coleman-Betts

“I wasn’t leaning on any support system at that time. I was being what they told you being the strong Black woman is. But I learned that that’s not really what it is. At that time, I was trying to do it myself and keep it to myself.” ~ Cicely Moore, speaking about adjustment to her daughter’s epilepsy diagnosis

-----

# Programs and Impact: Transforming Community Living - From the Era of Institutions to the Innovative Options of Today

On Thursday, October 26, 2023, we held a virtual event to debut our new short film: Polk Center 1897-2023: A Reflection.

This film offers perspective on the 2023 closing of the institution and the remarkable evolution in community living over the last half-century.

The event examined the development of home- and community-based services and looked to the future with an engaging program that featured two impactful short films, a keynote address by a distinguished guest, and a thought-provoking panel discussion with experts in the field.

Watch the event recording & view related resources: <https://www.wpdhac.org/transforming-community-living-event-recording-and-resources/>

-----

## Meet Our 2023 Team

### Governance

In the lists below, one asterisk at the end indicates that person identifies as a person with a disability, and two asterisks indicates that person has a family member with a disability

#### Executive Committee

- Guy Caruso, Ph.D., Institute on Disabilities at Temple University, Western Office
- Max Colecchi, disability advocate\*
- Mary Hartley, Arc of Greater Pittsburgh/Achieva\*\*
- Anne Madarasz, Senator John Heinz History Center
- John Tague, accessible transportation advocate\*

#### Steering Committee

- Bill Chrisner, former chair, Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council\*
- Holly Dick, Committee for Accessible Transportation\*
- Melva Fair, Community Living and Support Services (CLASS)
- Paul Freund, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI Keystone Pennsylvania)
- Sierra Green, Senator John Heinz History Center
- Sylbia Kunst, retired principal, Pittsburgh Public Schools
- Vicki Landers, founder and CEO, Disability Pride PA\*
- Nancy Murray, Achieva\*\*
- Dana Olsen, Pennsylvania History Coalition Honoring People with Disability
- Chris Phelps, Community Living and Support Services (CLASS)
- Laura Power, self-advocate\*
- Emily Ruby, Senator John Heinz History Center
- Matthew Seeley, Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council\*

- Sally Jo Snyder, Western PA United Methodist Church

### **Advisory Committee**

- Dr. Alison Carey, professor and author, Shippensburg University
- Al Condeluci, retired executive director, Community Living and Support Services (CLASS)
- Rory A. Cooper, Founding Director, Human Engineering Research Laboratories\*
- Mary Evrard, Allegheny County Department of Human Services
- Kate Jirik, board member, Pennhurst Memorial and Preservation Alliance\*
- Sherri Landis, The Arc of Pennsylvania
- Bob Nelkin, retired president, United Way of Southwest Pennsylvania
- Paul O’Hanlon, co-chair, City of Pittsburgh-Allegheny County Task Force on Disabilities\*
- Libby Powers, Human Engineering and Resource Laboratories (HERL)\*
- Bob Schmitt, former director, Transportation Advocacy Project
- Tyler Stump, archivist, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

### **Leadership Staff**

- Cindy Leonard, Project Director
- Tina Calabro, Outreach & Preservation Coordinator

### **Research & Scholarship Staff**

- Alonna Carter-Donaldson, Project Scholar
- Heather Cowie, Project Scholar
- Heather Glasby, Project Scholar
- Jessica C. Neal, Project Scholar

### **Administrative Staff**

- Vicky Illar, Database Manager

-----

## **2023 Funders, Donors, and Partners**

### **Funders**

- Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
- Edith L. Trees Charitable Trust
- FISA Foundation
- Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council

### **Donors**

- Guy Caruso
- Nancy Murray
- Ellen Wilson

## Supporters

### Individual Supporters

- James Conroy
- Guy Caruso
- Max Colecchi

### Nonprofit Supporters

- Institute on Disabilities at Temple University

Our Supporters Program launched in December 2023. Learn more and join the Consortium today:

<https://www.wpdhac.org/supporters-program/>

### Partners

- Achieva
- Senator John Heinz History Center
- Institute on Disabilities at Temple University

-----

## Get Involved

### Get in touch or follow us

- Email us: [info@wpdhac.org](mailto:info@wpdhac.org)
- Website: <https://www.wpdhac.org>
- Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/WPDisabilityHistoryandActionConsortium/>
- YouTube channel: @wpdhacdisabilityhistorycon7888 or <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCq2UmyBriNecryGq9V0EYAq>

## How Your Contribution Helps

Your tax deductible gift to the Consortium helps to cover costs for the following activities:

- Source Disability History Collections: Enabling us to gather new stories, documents, photos, and other materials that showcase the rich history of disability rights in our region.
- Collection Processing: Coordinating with the Heinz History Center to process historic artifacts and materials, ensuring their preservation for future generations.
- Facilitating New Collections: Facilitating the donation of collections generously offered by individuals, families, and organizations, ensuring that these valuable resources are properly cared for.
- Preservation Education: Supporting individuals and organizations involved in safeguarding the history and heritage of Western Pennsylvanians with disabilities.
- Content Creation and Sharing: Generating and sharing new content and materials on our website and other digital channels, ensuring that the stories and struggles of the disability rights movement are widely accessible.

- Outreach and Advocacy: Funding initiatives to conduct outreach and advocacy, promoting disability rights and working towards improving community access, participation, and equal opportunity for all.

Donate online or join our Supporters Program at:

- Donate: <https://www.wpdhac.org/> (Donate button in upper right of screen)
- Join: <https://www.wpdhac.org/supporters-program/>