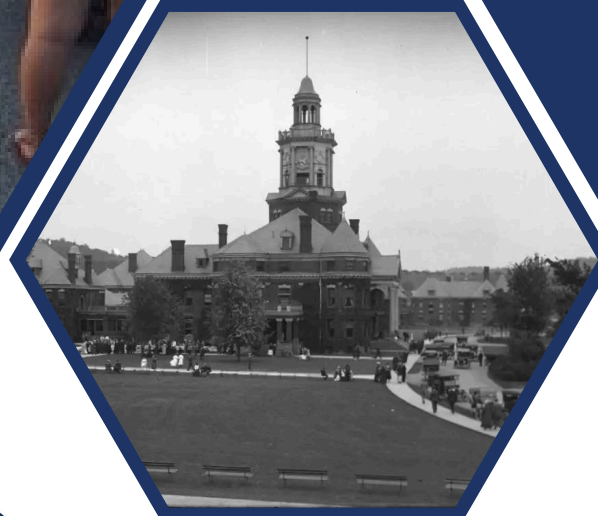


# 2023 Impact Report

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WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA  
**Disability**  
History & Action  
CONSORTIUM



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# 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.

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. 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.

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

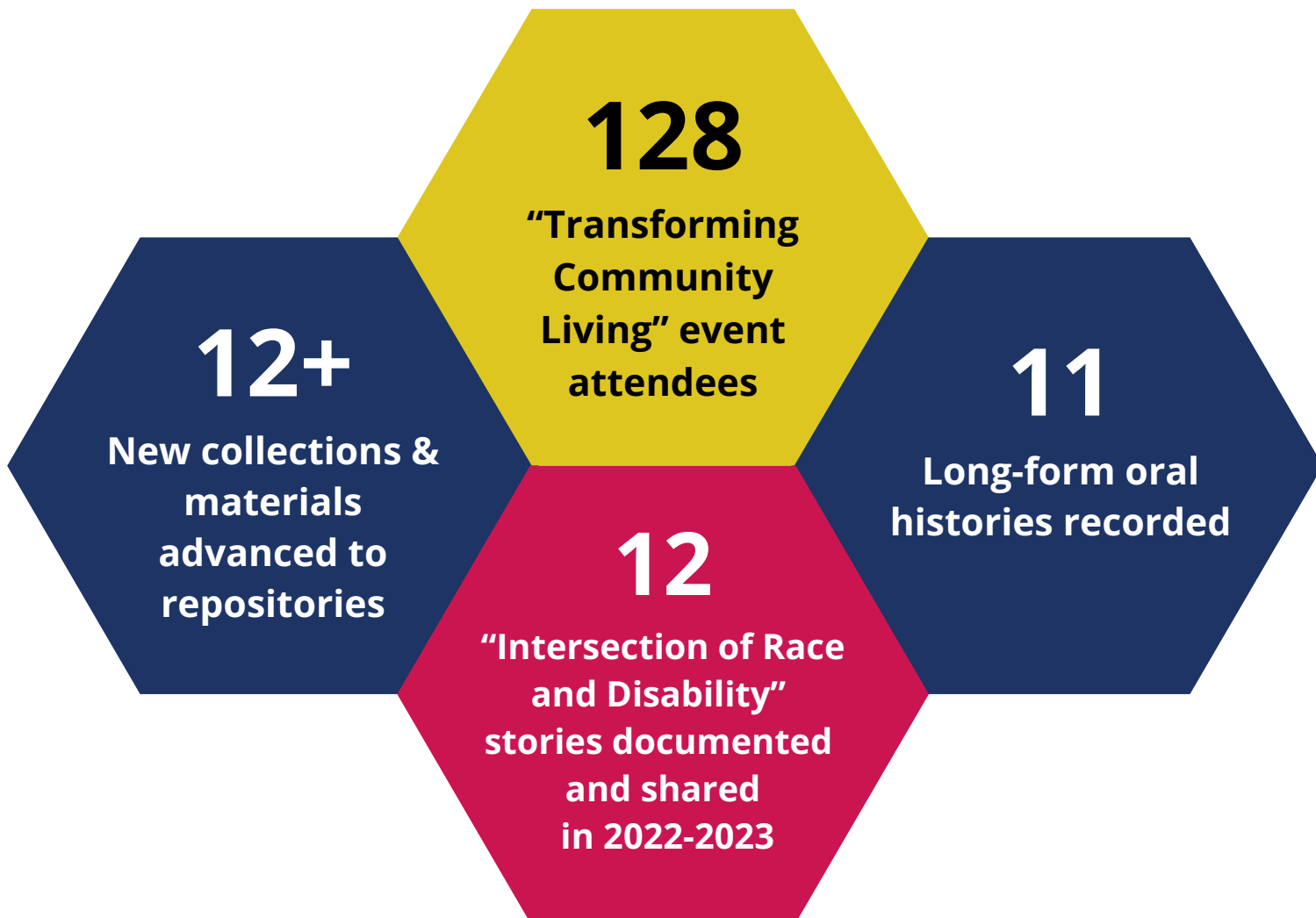
## Mission

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



**BULK EMAIL**  
3 newsletters + 17 emails sent  
10,417 total recipients



**FACEBOOK**  
923 followers  
26,114 total reach



**WEBSITE**  
6,200 users  
17,035 page views



**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.



**Henry Bell**



**Aurelia Carter**

**“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*



**Andrea Coleman-Betts**



**Dr. Diego Chaves-Gnecco**



## Intersection of Race and Disability Project (cont.)



**The Council of Three Rivers  
American Indian Center**



**Melva Fair**



**David Hale**



**Milton ("Skip") Henderson**



**Paul Lee**



**Marilyn McKinney**



**Maurika ("Rika") Moore**



**Florence Reed**

**"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**

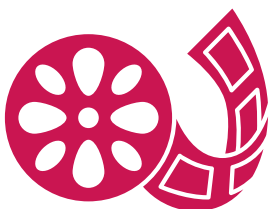
# Programs and Impact: Transforming Community Living - From the Era of Institutions to the Innovative Options of Today



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.



## Keynote Speaker

Jill Jacobs, Commissioner for the Administration on Disabilities, U.S. Administration for Community Living

## Panel Moderator

Chaz Kellem, Highmark

## Panelists

- Deputy Secretary Kristin Ahrens, Pennsylvania's Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) within the Department of Human Services.
- Hope Dittmeier, Executive Director, Mattingly Edge
- Christopher Liuzzo, Independent Consultant and Advocate



# Meet Our Team



## **CINDY LEONARD**

PROJECT DIRECTOR

Cindy Leonard has been the Project Director for the Consortium since January 2023 and prior to that served as the digital communications manager since 2015. Cindy has devoted over 20 years working in and with nonprofit organizations, and has served on numerous boards and committees, in various volunteer capacities, and as a consultant, a trainer, an executive director, a program manager, and an IT director. Prior to this, Cindy worked for a variety of small businesses and large corporations for 10 years, mostly in management capacities. Cindy holds a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science, a Master of Business Administration, and a Master of Education in Instructional Design, all from Seton Hill University.



## **TINA CALABRO**

OUTREACH & PRESERVATION COORDINATOR

Tina Calabro is a writer and speaker specializing in disability issues, and the parent of an adult son, Mark Steidl, who has cerebral palsy. Her work as a communicator and community builder is focused on expanding public understanding of disability and highlighting the work of people and organizations that create opportunity and positive change. Her feature articles and first-person pieces appear in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Philadelphia Inquirer and other publications. Tina's work is inspired by the remarkable people in the disability community who have shared their stories, perspectives and journeys with her. She counts her son Mark among her most influential teachers.

## **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

# Governance

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## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- Guy Caruso, Ph.D., Institute on Disabilities at Temple University, Western Office
- Max Colecchi, disability advocate
- Anne Madarasz, Senator John Heinz History Center
- Nancy Murray, Achieva
- 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
- Dana Olsen, Pennsylvania History Coalition Honoring People with Disability
- Chris Phelps, Community Living and Support Services (CLASS)
- Laura Power, graduate student, Indiana University of Pennsylvania
- 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

# 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



Institute on Disabilities

# Get Involved



[info@wpdhac.org](mailto:info@wpdhac.org)



[www.wpdhac.org](http://www.wpdhac.org)



[facebook.com/WPDisabilityHistory  
andActionConsortium/](https://facebook.com/WPDisabilityHistoryandActionConsortium/)



[@wpdhacdisabilityhistorycon7888](https://@wpdhacdisabilityhistorycon7888)

## HOW YOUR CONTRIBUTION HELPS:

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

- Source and update our collections with new stories, documents, photos, and other materials.
- Coordinate physical artifacts and materials archival processing with Heinz History Center.
- Process donations of collections given to us by individuals, families, and organizations.
- Conduct other preservation activities.
- Generate and share new content and materials on our website and other digital channels.
- Conduct outreach and advocacy to promote disability rights and to improve community access, participation, and equal opportunity.