



Board Views

Dr. Roy E. Miller
TDI President

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Consumer Advocates: A Rare And Wonderful Breed

It has often been said that “the wheels of government turn very slow.” I can attest to the truth of that saying, having spent several years now as the executive director of a state government agency. There are many reasons for the slowness of governmental entities, including the fact that we have a governmental system that is based on checks and balances, that only holds decision makers accountable at the polls every few years (for example, every six years for U.S. Senators), that gives legitimacy to almost every interest group no matter how small, and that relies on a lengthy adversarial model of judicial litigation as its primary means of conflict resolution. Regardless of the many reasons, governmental entities in the United States, be they city, county, state or national, seldom provide the innovative, creative, “out front” leadership essential for the solution of social problems and the satisfaction of citizens’ needs. Rather, leadership in the struggle for social services and the development of social policy has always been provided first and foremost by consumer advocates. And this is especially true with regard to developing social policy that meets the needs of people with disabilities.

Consumer advocates are the ones who have the vested interests necessary to publicly question and challenge existing laws, regulations, and policies on a daily basis. Consumer advocates know the personal, familial, economic, and social costs that often must be paid by people with disabilities. Consumer advocates know first hand the pain and suffering that accompanies the discrimination and barriers often faced by people with disabilities. And only consumer advocates have the “fire in their bellies” necessary to continually challenge the stereotypes, misunderstandings, ignorance, and false beliefs about people with disabilities that are often held by many people who are not disabled. Indeed, only consumer advocates have the will and commitment necessary to persevere against seemingly insurmountable odds in their efforts to convince the “powers that be” to adopt needed and equitable social policies concerning people with disabilities. Most certainly, consumer advocates are a rare and wonderful breed!

However, regardless of their personal passion for their favored cause, the efforts of consumer advocates often go unrewarded. But every once in awhile one succeeds where others have failed. Or a coalition is formed that by working together for a common goal is able to have a major impact on social policy. Certainly there would not be the telecommunications and media access that people who are deaf or hard of hearing now enjoy had it not been for consumer advocates in the past. Their efforts were largely responsible for the existence of relay services, captioned television broadcasts, decoder chips in most television sets, open captioned movies, and so forth.

And so it is that TDI takes pride in saluting deaf and hard of hearing consumer advocates in this issue of the GA-SK News Magazine. Their efforts truly deserve our deepest gratitude. And hopefully, the success stories that are presented herein will encourage others to join in the continuing struggle for equal access to telecommunications and media for people with hearing loss. **SK**



The “Deaf President Now” movement at Gallaudet University in 1988 is a historic moment in deaf advocacy. The banner “WE STILL HAVE A DREAM” was modeled after Martin Luther King, Jr.’s famous slogan and echoes the sentiment of many local advocates.