

This transcript was exported on Dec 16, 2020

Note to Readers/Viewers:

Interview has been edited for clarity. Timestamps correspond to the original, unedited video.

The language and terminology used in these historical materials reflect the context and culture of the interviewee(s), and may include stereotypes in words, phrases, and attitudes that were wrong then and are wrong now. Rather than remove this content, Western Pennsylvania Disability History and Action Consortium wants to acknowledge its harmful impact, learn from it, and spark conversation to create a more inclusive future together.

Tina Calabro ([00:00:00](#)):

My name is Tina Calabro. I'm the manager of the Multimedia Histories Project of the Western Pennsylvania Disability History and Action Consortium. Today I'm conducting an interview with Ceil Belasco and Liz Healey, who were at the forefront of the movement to implement inclusive education for students with disabilities in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. In their respective roles within the school district, Ceil and Liz helped bring about system-wide commitment to educating students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms, alongside their peers. The legacy of their leadership continues.

Tina Calabro ([00:00:45](#)):

Today's date is October 22, 2020. The time is 12:30 PM. We are recording this interview at StudioME in the East Liberty section of Pittsburgh. The Multimedia Histories Project of the Western Pennsylvania Disability History and Action Consortium records firsthand accounts of disability history. The story of the movement to implement inclusive education in the Pittsburgh Public Schools is part of that history. It is my pleasure to serve as interviewer today. I have a personal connection to the story of Ceil and Liz as a parent of a son with a disability who received special education services in inclusive classrooms in the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

Tina Calabro ([00:01:37](#)):

My son, Mark Steidl, graduated from Pittsburgh Brashear High School in 2016, and graduated from Community College of Allegheny County this year. Let's start by talking about your early years and how it led to your career path and your interest in advocacy for people with disabilities. Ceil, let's start with you. Would you tell us about your early family life and its influence on you?

Ceil Belasco ([00:02:12](#)):

I was born into a family of nine kids. I was the third of the nine and my youngest brother, his name was Mike, was born in 1958 and he was identified at birth as being a Mongoloid, which at that time was the term for Down syndrome. We grew up in a suburban community and were very active in our local church. We lived in fact across the street from the church. So we knew our parish priest and the school staff very well. When Mike was born, my parents did not identify him as having being a Mongoloid to his siblings at first. I remember being on the playground with a colleague or a fellow student who said to me, "What's wrong with your brother, Mike?" My brother, Mike, has been walking for a long time and it was the first I thought there was anything different.

Ceil Belasco ([00:03:22](#)):

So I went home and talked to my parents about it, and then they sat us all down and said that Mike indeed had been born as a Mongoloid, and we understood the term because we had a cousin who was about five at that time who was also identified as a Mongoloid. They talked to us about what the implications of that would be and how his life was going to be different than ours. But we were all going to work together and we were going to help Mike grow and be the best that he could be. The biggest shocker during that conversation was that Mike would not be going to school with us. That seemed so foreign because being a good Catholic family, we were all about a year apart, so at one point in time we had someone in first through seventh grade one year after the other. To think that Mike was not going to follow in that path was incomprehensible.

Ceil Belasco ([00:04:35](#)):

I remember mourning that fact that he was not going to go to our school, and feeling like something has to be done about this. This cannot be. And at that time, my parents didn't even know if he would be able to go to school. They had been advised at his birth that he should be placed in an institution and not to worry because the doctors had already started the process for them. My parents had outright rejected that concept and said, "He's our son. He goes home with us." And in fact, they called on their parish priest to come to the hospital to verify to the staff that our family would be fine and would survive Mike growing up with us. They basically said, the priest said to the staff, "You don't know this lady. If she says he's going home, he's going home."

Ceil Belasco ([00:05:37](#)):

And so we began our life with Mike and then my parents advocated for him to attend school. And at that time there was nothing in our local school district for him to attend, but rather they had opened a class in a neighboring district and as we sort of a group of parents going and petitioning the school board. So that was my first introduction to advocacy and the effects that advocating for a position and working together with a group that you can make a change. So Mike did go off to school. He was in a class. The classroom was located in a basement of our neighboring district in the basement of the school. There were about 17 or 18 students in that class and they were aged six to 18.

Ceil Belasco ([00:06:40](#)):

In order for him to be eligible to go to school, he had to be able to feed himself, go to the bathroom on his own, ride a school bus without any assistance, and be ambulatory. So he met that criteria when he was about seven. It might've been even eight, and he went off on the school bus to the neighboring district for his first venture into education. But I learned a lot from that adventure and the work of my family and our neighbors. My sisters and I, there were six girls and we were sort of the neighborhood babysitters for all the kids who had disabilities in the neighborhood because the families felt they could trust us and that we would understand and be a support to their loved ones. So that's when I started wanting to be a teacher and wanting to make a difference.

Tina Calabro ([00:07:46](#)):

Now, you grew up in the Pittsburgh area. What was the part of the city that you grew up in? And you also mentioned your parish, and I believe you lived very close by your parish. Could you say what those places were?

Ceil Belasco ([00:07:59](#)):

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Right. We grew up in Scott Township, which is a southern suburb of the city. We lived across the street from Our Lady of Grace Parish and School. So we were active in the parish and in the school. In fact, we were sort of the resident board washers for each class. Like I said, we populated each grade level year after year. And because we lived so close, they often called on us to help out after school or before school.

Tina Calabro ([00:08:37](#)):

And you describe your parents as having strong beliefs?

Ceil Belasco ([00:08:43](#)):

Absolutely. Absolutely. We're very family-oriented. We needed to stick together and help one another out. They were very religious and had a strong belief in the value of all people. So that was instilled in us at a very early age.

Tina Calabro ([00:09:14](#)):

When your parents advocated with others for a classroom to be set up in a neighboring district that was in Carnegie. Is that correct?

Ceil Belasco ([00:09:23](#)):

That's correct. The first school that Mike attended was in the Carnegie School District, not the Chartiers Valley School District where we lived.

Tina Calabro ([00:09:34](#)):

When you're referring to some of the possibilities for services that were available to Mike at the time, you talk about institutionalization that was recommended and you also talk about when the Carnegie classroom was opened that it was in the basement of the building. You also mentioned the criteria for entry into that classroom, which is a rather high bar for attending.

Ceil Belasco ([00:10:07](#)):

For a lot of students, yes.

Tina Calabro ([00:10:08](#)):

This was characteristic of the services at that time.

Ceil Belasco ([00:10:12](#)):

Absolutely. Our parish priest, again, we had a good relationship with him. He was our across the street neighbor and he had suggested to my parents, knowing their religious background and work with their church, that Mike might perhaps attend the St. Anthony School, which was in Oakmont at the time. It was a school that had formally been, I believe, an orphanage but was a residential school for young people with disabilities. And so my parents did consider that, but when they found out that Mike would not be able to live at home, that was no longer an option. It would have provided him with some religious instruction, but they likened it to an institution in their mind. And the term they used to use was, "We're not going to put him away." So, they were very committed to Mike being part of our community and part of our everyday lives.

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Tina Calabro ([00:11:24](#)):

Liz, would you tell us about your early life leading up to your college years?

Liz Healey ([00:11:33](#)):

Well, I was born in Pennsylvania. I was born in York, Pennsylvania, and I went through first grade in York, Pennsylvania, and then we moved to the Boston area and I grew up in Wellesley. I have two siblings, both older. I was the baby of the family. When I was in school, I was born in 1947, so I was the first group of baby boomers. So, in our town, the junior high school had had 250 students up until 1947. And then they were 500. So they had to add additions on and every single speck got used. And so I was put in a homeroom that was in the basement of the junior high school.

Liz Healey ([00:12:27](#)):

The first time that I was aware of kids who had learning differences was, there was this other class that was in the basement and we were in the room next to them. We were the only two classes in the basement. Since it was junior high school, we got to come and go. The other kids didn't. They stayed there. It was sort of a, "Huh?" I knew there weren't any kids like the kids in this room next to us who were in our elementary school. I just wasn't aware. And when I started asking, I found out that there was a real, real old school building that they now used as the administrative offices. And they had a class or two there for kids who I think were non-ambulatory. Kids who really had more significant [disabilities]. I don't know how significant because at that time not everybody got to go to school. But it was kind of an awareness for me to suddenly realize that there were these kids and sometimes they weren't treated kindly, not treated with respect by other students.

Tina Calabro ([00:13:39](#)):

And then you went on to college at Cornell and you majored in child development and family relations, and you also became a social activist at that time. Could you talk about that?

Liz Healey ([00:13:54](#)):

Sure. The Vietnam War was going on when I was in college and I sort of became ... It's different than the kind of news that's on now. We saw every night scenes of what was going on in Vietnam and the death and the brutality, and it just felt wrong. It just felt so wrong. So I got involved in activism on campus, the Berrigans [anti-war activists Daniel and Philip Berrigan] came to campus and there were lots of things. We took over Willard Straight Hall, which was this huge building and held the building for a while. The Black students on campus at one point took over the student union. And then there were fraternities who were going to say they were going to come bust them out of there. So people had to go and stand outside of the student union to protect those students. So, there was a lot of activism on campus when I was there, a lot.

Tina Calabro ([00:14:54](#)):

And is that something that developed in you as you were growing up in Wellesley?

Liz Healey ([00:15:02](#)):

I think so. I think kids often have this kind of black and white, "That's not right." Like as Ceil was saying, it just wasn't right that her brother couldn't go to school. As I got into college, I began to be more aware of conflicting forces, how it was so much more complicated and political decisions that people were

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making. I felt really compelled to try and make a difference. I remember I went out and I worked for George McGovern when I was home one summer from college. I was so committed to having an anti-war president. And then on election night, the only state he won was Massachusetts. It was like I was living in this alternate universe. [Laughter]

Liz Healey (00:15:58):

Those kinds of experiences really gave me a bigger sense. And then when we moved to Pittsburgh ... we'd lived in Washington D.C., and I worked for the coalition to stop funding the war. I was terrible at it. I would get in these meetings with these senators, and they were sort of conservative, and we were trying to convince them that we should be a part of the Paris Peace Accords, and we should honor them. They would say, "Well, I'm not going to do that." And I'd say, "Well, we signed the Peace Accords. We said we were going to do it." And that's not the way you really conduct advocacy with those legislators.

Liz Healey (00:16:39):

So, I've had a long history of a "growing umbrella" over time that included racial disparities and economic inequities, a number of issues. It wasn't until the birth of my daughter that I really realized that disability was a part of that larger umbrella and that many people within the social justice movement didn't necessarily see disability as a piece of that. And so I felt it was really important to continue that activism and bring into that activism the recognition of the injustice that was happening to people with disabilities.

Tina Calabro (00:17:24):

Ceil, your brother, Mike, made a change from the Carnegie classroom to a new school called Pathfinder. When he made that change ... you followed that change in what was going to be the next phase of his education. You also made a decision to become a teacher. Would you tell us now about that decision to become a teacher and your college and graduate school years at Duquesne? You graduated with a bachelor's in 1970 and a master's in 1973.

Ceil Belasco (00:18:10):

Definitely. All of my high school years, I would take every opportunity I could to go and volunteer in Mike's classroom. When I had a day off and he was still in school, I would go and be there and observe that setting. I often knew many of the students in his classroom, and they had moved to Pathfinder School, which was a consortium of school districts established a school in Bethel Park, again in the South Hills of the city. A group of school districts got together and established Pathfinder. This was in the late '60s. There was at that time raising awareness about students with, at that time they called it mental retardation, because of the influence of President Kennedy.

Ceil Belasco (00:19:13):

He had brought that as a topic to the forefront, how to support people with mental retardation. So, there was an influx of money into systems and into schools. So when I went off to go to college, I was able to access some of that support as part of my education at Duquesne University. I was able to get a scholarship. My parents weren't able to help me with tuition or any of those kinds of expenses. So, thanks to that influx of money into the system to support the development of special education teachers, I was able to access that. It was a fairly young department of special education at Duquesne University and what they were doing was supporting students to become dually certified, they called it at that time. It's now back in vogue, but we were dually certified. So, you chose elementary and special

education, or secondary and special education. So, I had chosen the elementary and special education track.

Ceil Belasco (00:20:34):

I attended there, graduated in 1970, and I had done my student teaching at Pathfinder School. I started student teaching with Liz Flaherty who had been Mike's first teacher at that school in Carnegie. And Liz Flaherty had continued her service as a teacher at Pathfinder. Mike was in an older class. He was not in my student teaching class, but I would see him on a daily basis at the school. So, I student taught with Liz Flaherty there. And then also I student taught at West Liberty School in the Pittsburgh city schools in a first grade class. So I split my student teaching. And then I stayed at Duquesne to get my master's degree in '73. But I had started working for the Pittsburgh Public Schools in 1970 following my undergraduate graduation.

Ceil Belasco (00:21:40):

I was at a school on the South Side of the city of Pittsburgh. It was called Morse School. No longer there, like many of the city schools. No longer there. It was a very small neighborhood school. It had a sister school down the street called Phillips. We were on, I think, 26th [Street] and Phillips was on 21st [Street], so we shared a principal. Most schools were relatively small. There was K-5 in the school and one special education classroom. The title of the classroom was TMR, or trainable mentally retarded, because at that time you either attended special education under TMR, trainable mentally retarded, or EMR, educable mentally retarded. So, my class was one of probably about seven of us across the city. They were geographically placed around the city, but our students came from anywhere if we had an empty seat in the classroom, even though it was on the South Side.

Tina Calabro (00:23:05):

Looking at Duquesne [University] at that time, the field of special education was emerging. And, as you said, it was encouraged by, in the early '60s, John F. Kennedy and his family having an interest. At the time you were there, was there an emphasis on a certain type of special education for students with significant disabilities? Was there enough training at that time for those students?

Ceil Belasco (00:23:39):

No. The main focus was on what I would find out in the school district was called EMR, or educable mentally retarded, where there was a lot of information about how to structure your classroom, how to teach math and reading, et cetera. And, of course, preparing a lot of our instruction within general ed[ucation] at the same time. So, the focus was almost, you might consider it now as sort of a watered down curriculum of the general ed[ucation] curriculum. I believe we had one or two classes, like a three-hour class, regarding students with more significant needs. And most of it involved sort of like the labeling of you might find a student who's a Mongoloid or cretinism, or, at that time, they called autism childhood schizophrenia. And we had short descriptions of those kinds of disabilities, but not a lot of, "Here's how you could best support this group of students in a classroom." So, when I left Duquesne, although my heart was with the TMR population, I really had not a big foundation of educational ideas. And, in fact, when I went to Morse School, the principal handed me a black binder that said Pittsburgh Public Schools on it, and I opened it up and it was tabbed month by month of what my curriculum might include or ideas that I might implement. And many of them were arts and crafts activities. So, it was sort of like, "At Thanksgiving, you could make turkeys this way." It really had no instructional value as far as moving kids educationally, other than sort of socially, et cetera.

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Tina Calabro ([00:26:03](#)):

You mentioned [that] at Pathfinder Liz Flaherty was a long-time teacher of Mike, and you student taught with her as well. What impressed you about Liz Flaherty?

Ceil Belasco ([00:26:17](#)):

Her love for the students and her enthusiasm. She was very creative and energetic and really worked well with the families. I remember her coming and making home visits in our home to help my mom. As Mike progressed in school, she would come and sort of preview like, "Here's the next set of skills we're going to be working on," and encouraged my mom to try this technique. For instance, Mike was having a hard time with solid foods. He didn't want to swallow solid foods, and she gave my mom pointers on that and really encouraged her to help him move past whatever it was that was blocking him from doing that. So, she really had a personal touch with families and that really impressed me.

Tina Calabro ([00:27:18](#)):

Liz, your first job out of college was with the Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare in Boston. Would you tell us about those years, including your continued activism on peace and justice issues?

Liz Healey ([00:27:32](#)):

Well, when I started at the Department of Public Welfare, I started in Mattapan working out of the Blue Hills office that was sort of in the southern part of Roxbury. I got involved in the ... public employee union for social workers in the Department of Public Welfare. I quickly got to know some other folks, and we formed this client-oriented caucus, and we had our little meetings, and we figured out things that we thought should be happening. We had a wildcat strike. I led a wildcat strike at our building that wasn't well appreciated. But we had so many families that we were responsible for that it was really difficult to meaningfully support people's well-being in that kind of stressful situation.

Liz Healey ([00:28:39](#)):

And then later I was moved to the South End of Boston, I think as punishment for having had the wildcat strike. I worked with homeless people and single people. At that point, my job involved going to what we would call flop houses, places where men lived who were alcoholics. It was scary. Sometimes I wasn't sure I was going to come out when I went in, but I had to verify where everybody lived. I had to see the room they lived in. I'd just speak to the person who ran the place, who was usually they weren't sober either. The Black nationalist movement was starting then. And so I had a number of people that I began to interact with who were Black nationalists. It was just sort of a whole lot of new learnings for me, lots of new learnings. But we got very involved in advocating to improve the circumstances of people who are living on AFDC [Aid to Families with Dependent Children], it was called then, and General Relief. It was tough.

Tina Calabro ([00:30:10](#)):

Liz, during your years in Boston, you met your husband, Mike Healey. Could you tell us about that? And then later you moved to Washington D.C. with Mike where he continued on to law school. How did your activism grow during those years?

Liz Healey ([00:30:29](#)):

When the welfare department just became untenable, it was just so tough, I was recruited to go to work for the People's Coalition for Peace and Justice by Mike Ansara. Mike Ansara continued over a long period of time to be an activist, a social activist. Because of the work I had done with welfare rights during my time at the Department of Welfare, I was recruited to organize a public utilities campaign to try and stop winter shutoffs for low-income people. It was terrific. We had people from all over eastern Massachusetts come. We had a big public hearing at Faneuil Hall. It's a very historical Faneuil Hall. We had all the public utility commissioners there and we succeeded in getting them to stop winter shutoffs. So, that was sort of a big victory. But as part of the umbrella of the People's Coalition for Peace and Justice, we were doing anti-war work. We were doing prisoners' rights work. We were doing women's organizing in the workplace. We had a whole host of things that we were connected to. Mike was one of the other organizers for the Coalition, and we met one another then. Then he decided he wanted to go to law school. Down in D.C. then, we continued to be very involved in anti-war work and social justice work.

Liz Healey ([00:33:58](#)):

Michael began his work with the United Mine Workers while we were there. So, that gave me an opportunity to go Harlan County [Kentucky] during the big Harlan County [coal miners] strike. And that was another really big eye opener about what people's lives were like and how difficult it was for them. It was really interesting.

Tina Calabro ([00:34:28](#)):

Ceil, you talked a bit about your first job at Morse Elementary on the South Side, and that you were in a what's called a TMR class. Would you tell us a little bit more about that job, including any mentors that you had there. What was it like?

Ceil Belasco ([00:34:53](#)):

It was my first venture into the Pittsburgh city schools. I had done some observations there, but what I found at Morse, again, it was a very small community

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:35:04]

Ceil Belasco ([00:35:03](#)):

school, and we had a principal who bounced between two buildings, but he was also very supportive of my work. However, he adhered to what at that time was the policy of the school district, which was that all of our students came to the school in cabs. And so, as not to disrupt the entry of all of the K-5 students, our students came in on separate cabs at a separate time than was typical for the start of the day for the rest of the school. So, I believe the students came in around 9:00 [am]. It gave all of the K-5 students a chance to get settled in their classroom. And then my students would arrive and they would come in a backdoor. We would come into the school. And the same was true on dismissal.

Ceil Belasco ([00:36:04](#)):

They left early, so as not to disrupt the dismissal of the K-5. Now that was happening across the city in other TMR classrooms. And I'm not sure the number, it was between five and ten of those classrooms. I don't believe it was as high as 10. But some of the teachers that I met at in-service trainings were Cheryl Casebeer, who became the first teacher who had a class following the PARC [Pennsylvania Association of

Retarded Citizens] Consent Decree [for the Right to Education]. Betty Beaver, who taught in the East End of the city. Ella Mae Smay had retired, but I heard stories about Ella Mae Smay. Her name came up. Linda Yonko had been the teacher at Morse previous to me, and she became the first supervisor for students who were considered TMR. So, she would visit the classroom on a regular basis.

Ceil Belasco ([00:37:13](#)):

We ate all of our meals in the classroom. I had a piano in the classroom, because I was supposed to teach music. We did do music, but I never touched the piano. Didn't know anything about a piano. So, I was expected to do art, and music, and gym, and had cafeteria in the classroom. So, other than mingling, for instance, we were part of the Christmas program, which was really wonderful, so that everyone got to meet and see the students I was supporting. We also did a fashion show and invited the whole school and other TMR classrooms to come and see our students and having a fashion show. But we felt accepted in that building, other than the fact that we were on a separate schedule. The following year, I was moved to Woolslair School...which is in on Liberty Avenue, 40th and Liberty. The district was creating what they were calling mini centers.

Ceil Belasco ([00:38:29](#)):

And we were in the basement of the building. There was K-5. And on the upper floors, multiple classrooms, it was a much bigger school. But all of our classrooms were in the basement. We had a separate entrance for the teachers and the students. We had a separate teachers' room. We were not permitted to go upstairs to the teachers' room. So, we had a room that had been basically a closet, and that was the teachers' room. So, there were one, two, three, four, five, six classes there. Betty Beaver's class moved into Woolslair. Gladys Shaw, Adele Yakapovich, but some new teachers came in. And Cheryl Casebeer also moved there. But we really worked hard together and taught ourselves how to support kids with more significant needs. We would be in the teachers' room and, "So-and-so had this kind of problem today, what can I do?"

Ceil Belasco ([00:39:45](#)):

And we would brainstorm and really work on those issues. So, it was a great learning experience for me. I was only in my second year of teaching, and I thought my mind was exploding. There were all these resources as far as fellow teachers. They called a staff meeting, which we went up the magical stairs and went to attend the staff meeting, and we were uninvited to the staff meeting. "Please don't come, no. You'll have your staff meetings with Linda Yonko." So, we were excluded from staff meetings. I didn't know any of the other staff people there other than the special education teachers. And we also did that separate entrance and separate dismissal. We were not allowed on the playground. So, it was a very different... I was shocked. And the principal wanted nothing to do with us. So, this was very different than my first year experience where [principal] Tom McDonald would come in and, "Hey, kids, how you doing?" And he interacted with us. And my second year, vastly different. It was a difficult time. But it was at that time that I was at, the second year I was at Woolslair, so this would have been about '72, '73, when the PARC Consent Decree came through, and they reconfigured our classrooms, so that Cheryl Casebeer volunteered to take that first group of students who had never been in school before. The PARC Consent Decree mandated that students had a right to an education in the public schools. So, one day it was so shocking to me, we were, again, bringing in the students from this first class and meeting them for the first time.

Ceil Belasco ([00:42:01](#)):

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And some of them were teenagers. They had never been to school. And the bus driver had brought three brothers. And he said, "I was accosted by the neighbors of these three boys. They thought I was kidnapping someone. Or where did I find them? What was I doing with these three boys?" The neighbors had never met or seen these three boys before and they were coming out the door to go to school for the very first time. And I was shocked, like, "How can a young person with a disability live in a neighborhood and no one know that they are there?" But it was not all that uncommon.

Tina Calabro ([00:42:55](#)):

So, you refer to the 1972 PARC Decree that gave students with disabilities in Pennsylvania the Right to Education.

Ceil Belasco ([00:43:10](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tina Calabro ([00:43:12](#)):

You were teaching right in the middle of this big change. And right before an even bigger change with the federal law that guaranteed free and appropriate education in the least restrictive setting [Public Law 94-142, Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975]. So, you're starting your teaching career right at that moment between the two laws.

Ceil Belasco ([00:43:42](#)):

Right. There were a lot of changes going on, a lot going on in school. Like I said, Cheryl Casebeer had said, "I'd really like to try this." At that time, they called them profoundly mentally retarded. And she said, "I'm game, let's do this." And again, that group of teachers at Woolslair, we would gather in the teachers' room and say, "Wow, never worked on that before. How would you approach that?" And we really supported one another to try to figure it out. A new teacher that came in at that time was Linda Cordisco, who ended up being our assistant director many years later, but she was part of that group. And we were all a bunch of hippie young ladies. We wore our long skirts and our long hair, but it was such a time of growth and learning.

Ceil Belasco ([00:44:47](#)):

And we felt well supported together. So, between that year, '72, and '75, when [Public Law] 94-142 came in, which became IDEA [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act], kids were coming in that we had never seen before, because of the PARC Consent Decree. And [the district] had started making mini centers. They started moving students into Conroy Education Center. So, it was a gradual move, because part of the building at Conroy had been condemned. [To Liz] This was so typical, wasn't it?

But they had to demolish that center building before it was usable for all of the kids from the mini centers to come. So, I moved out of Woolslair to Conroy, and I was the only one from Woolslair that went that first year. So, that must have been like '73, '74, because they placed me on the second floor, and they were remodeling the third floor. Then they moved me to the third floor and they were remodeling the fourth floor, and eventually ended up on the fourth floor. And that's when all of the students came in.

Tina Calabro ([00:46:25](#)):

I wanted to ask you [about] when you were at Morse Elementary, and then later at Woolslair, the sense that the administration was segregating special education from the rest of the school. You talk about being shocked by that. But what other emotions did you have at that time about the kind of concerns people had about disruption and just the need to keep special education very separated?

Ceil Belasco (00:46:56):

It was very difficult. And again, found support among my colleagues. We were all feeling the same way of, "How can this be? We're part of this school district, we're trained teachers, and yet there's no interaction between the two systems." And we used to do sort of subversive kind of things. Like they would have an assembly. We had to go into the front office and sign our name that we were in there. We would see notices. So, they'd have an assembly and well, "Our kids will go to the assembly." So, we would go up the stairs and sit in the gym for the assembly, and then we'd be admonished afterwards. And we'd say, "It said assembly for the students; that's us." So, we did little things like that. The principal was afraid of some of the students, is the best way I can describe it.

Ceil Belasco (00:48:07):

[The Woolslair principal] never came downstairs. But again, we would sort of force ourselves upon him. So, we made sure that some of the students he thought were most challenging were the very people who delivered the attendance sheet to the office, or carried messages to the office, so that he would have an opportunity to interact with them and find out, "We're one of you guys. We are part of the school and here we are." So, it was hard though. We felt like we were shunned, which was not a good feeling.

Liz Healey (00:48:54):

I think one of the things that is so frustrating to me is that [the PARC Decree] Tom Gilhool, who is the attorney who brought the PARC case, and was involved in writing what the decision was. And it had written in it that children should be educated with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. That language in fact was adopted and then put into the federal legislation. But Pennsylvania set about building these Taj Mahals of separation [i.e. "center" schools].

Ceil Belasco (00:49:24):

Centers.

Liz Healey (00:49:24):

Yes, and with lots of stainless steel and lots of tile, and lots of... And that was not the intent, so that the early implementation did not follow the spirit or the intent of the original PARC case.

Tina Calabro (00:50:47):

Liz, let's talk about your move to Pittsburgh then with your husband, Mike, in 1977. And Mike took a position with the United Mine Workers. And your daughter Bevin was born in 1980 and was diagnosed with a rare genetic condition. Sadly, she passed away last year at age 39. Could you tell us about Bevin?

Liz Healey (00:51:12):

Well, Bevin was born quite prematurely. And I remember the obstetrician when she was born, what he said to me is, "There's something very wrong with your baby." At many points in her life, but especially

very early on, [doctors] weren't sure that she was going to survive the first few days. She had a whole-body blood transfusion twice where they replaced all of her blood twice, because she had such bad jaundice. And she was on a ventilator and she was just a very, very sick little baby when she was born. And she required surgery, so she had to go to Children's [Hospital of Pittsburgh]. And early on, it was mourning to be able to go back to Magee where there was such a warm kind of intimate sense in the ICU. But once you have a surgery, there's no going back. You're at Children's.

Liz Healey ([00:52:16](#)):

So, we had to learn to adjust to Children's. And we spent a long time in the ICU at Children's and we did a lot to try and make it feel like we were parents of our baby. When she's in an isolette hooked up to a ventilator... They had tried to get some bone marrow to try and do some DNA analysis to see what was going on ... They have this whole body biome where they know exactly what DNA conditions cause different kinds of issues, but they broke her leg. She was so tiny. She was born at, I think, three pounds, nine ounces, and then lost quite a lot of weight. And it was really hard not to be at the hospital, because I felt if I was there, she would be alive. So, she gradually, she got a little better and we were able to begin to take her out of the isolette and give her a bath, or I could take her out of the isolette and hold her.

Liz Healey ([00:53:33](#)):

And we got to be a such veterans there in the ICU. It was a room with eight beds in it, and all the beds were right next to one another. And so, if one child was having an emergency, they just made everybody, all the visitors leave the room. But sometimes I would have Bevin in my arms and I couldn't [leave], with all the tubes, feeding tubes and she had a central line, and IVs and all this. So, we would just sit there and we would be a party to the crisis that some other child was having on a number of occasions, but she grew and she got better. And eventually, a little over three-and-a-half months later, she got to come home from the hospital. And they arranged the day that she came home was Mike's birthday. So, that was really a really special day for us.

Liz Healey ([00:54:39](#)):

And Mike's parents were visiting. And his mom was kind of a stern, direct person. She grew up in a German family and I remember her saying, "We've never had one of these in our family before." I was like, "How can you say..." And then when [Bevin's] care required so much, she'd say, "Well, I don't see what the big deal is." The things we had to do to keep her alive were amazing, really amazing. And at that point, it was long before the medical community had contemplated that a child who was that complex should have any kind of nursing. So, we had no nursing. And she was so tiny and she would go into congestive heart failure at the drop of a hat. So, her feedings were those little tiny volu feeders that they use for preemies. And she could have 35 CCs at a feeding, and she had to eat every four hours, and she had to have chest PT [physical therapy] before she could be fed. And that happened every four hours around the clock. And the chest PT took a half an hour, 45 minutes.

Liz Healey ([00:55:55](#)):

And then the feeding, because she had such difficulty feeding, that would take another hour or so. So, I was up two hours out of... And then try and sleep for two... Oh. And then when Sean [Bevin's younger brother] came along, he very quickly figured out about the alarms and just to sort of make life interesting, he would set them off. You're like, "Oh, what's going on?" So, she had a really difficult start. And I remember there was a case, I think it was, I don't know if it was in 1980 or '81, called the Baby Doe

Case where some parents had petitioned the courts and it went to the Supreme Court. They wanted to be able to withhold feeding and hydration from their child because, I believe, their child had Down syndrome and they didn't want their child to survive. They didn't want to bring it home.

Liz Healey (00:56:47):

And I remember just getting so angry, and having a long conversation with her pediatrician about these... So many people who were [anti-abortion] advocates for the right to life, but they didn't advocate for sustaining life. And the kind of treatment that kids who were as involved and as complex as Bevin, that their lives were not valued to the other people. They didn't appreciate that she was a valued member of our family, and we were very invested in her developing and having as normal a life as we could possibly make happen.

Tina Calabro (00:57:33):

You have said that your previous work in social justice issues had made you think of social justice as a huge umbrella, but previously in your life, you had not seen disability as something under that umbrella as well. But through Bevin, you did start to realize that.

Liz Healey (00:57:58):

Oh, absolutely. And I have continued involvement with the Rainbow Coalition and other social [justice] movements and kept bringing to the discussion disability. And for some people, it was really a stretch and they couldn't see it. Especially as I got more involved in the school district, there were some people on school issues who didn't think there was any comparison to the kind of oppression that other people were suffering and the oppression that people with disabilities are suffering. So, it felt like it was another thing I had to take on about educating and bringing other people to be respectful and to begin to understand the experience and the isolation of people with disabilities.

Tina Calabro (00:58:50):

So, you started advocating for Bevin to begin her education in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, and also to advocate within the schools for new ways of thinking about special education. Could you tell us about that?

Liz Healey (00:59:06):

Sure. I had tried to enroll Bevin in a number of different preschools, because I knew that there were other preschools especially designed for children with disabilities, but none of them would admit Bevin. And Bevin had been getting some infant [stimulation] kind of stuff, both at DT Watson [school] and for a period of time through the Pittsburgh Public Schools. So, I forget exactly how I began to interact with Dr. [William] Penn, but Dr. Penn, who was then the director of the DEC, I think it was called, Division for Exceptional Children. And Dr. Penn said that while he would agree to admit Bevin at age four to Pioneer [Education Center], even though she really wasn't school age yet and she would be the youngest student in the school. Since there were no other options for her, she could go to Pioneer. So, Bevin started at Pioneer. And I went with her the first day, and I had gone and visited the school. And the school, it was another one of those purpose-built schools, purposely to house children with disabilities. And it was all on one floor, so no one would have to be challenged by stairs, and very few students were ambulatory. And across the parking lot, a shared parking lot, was another elementary school. And the physical therapist, when she began to do an assessment the first day said, "I don't know why parents dress their kids up in all these clothes. They think they look so cute, but it really makes it very difficult for me to get

in and do the work I needed to do with them. And they're funny looking kids anyway, it doesn't matter what they have on." Oh, wow.

Liz Healey (01:00:55):

And I can see this is going to be a challenge. I had this very mixed feeling of being grateful that Bevin was going to begin to have developmental and educational services that were going to be provided by the school district, and at the same time, seeing all of these kids with quite an assortment of different kinds of significant conditions, disabling conditions. Collectively, when you put everybody together, they all look more disabled than they are. You don't see the individual, you just see a collection of people with all kinds of equipment and things that they needed. So, it was difficult. So, I just kept thinking, "There's that school right across the parking lot. Why can't we be doing some interaction with the kids across the parking lot?" So, I had some discussion with Dr. Penn about that. So, I think to try and mollify me, he brought in Linda Cordisco [special education supervisor] to start a parent group to sort of help us understand disability and, I think, sort of help us understand our place in the world as far as Dr. Penn was concerned.

Liz Healey (01:02:09):

But I began feeling like this is like a Johnny Appleseed opportunity to begin to talk to other parents about our kids really ought to be interacting with some of those kids across the parking lot. And Linda Cordisco said to me, "You might want to check out TASH [acronym stood for "The Association for People with Severe Handicaps"] And how did she put it? "I think that the principles of TASH might resonate with your core values." So, that sounded like a really good idea. And by this time, I had begun to work at Arc [Arc of Greater Pittsburgh] as an education advocate. So, we got all the other education advocates, we piled in a car, and we went down to Washington D.C. for the TASH Conference. And it was terrific. It was really terrific. And around that same time, Tom Gilhool, who had been the PARC [Consent Decree] attorney, who was very close to [Pennsylvania] Governor Bob Casey, they were friends. Governor Casey made him the Secretary of Education in Pennsylvania, which is like, "Whoa, he wasn't put in charge of special education, he became the Secretary of Education." And Tom is a very forceful person. He passed away just recently, but Tom was a guy who believed he could change the world and he set about doing it. So, he was suddenly given this opportunity that I think he hadn't negotiated for to be the Secretary of Education. And he set about making sure that inclusion became the expectation in the schools in Pennsylvania. So, he had a tremendous amount of opposition. And he also had some things that I think are endearing that other people might've found challenging.

Liz Healey (01:04:07):

And he didn't last very long. Maybe a little more than a year, maybe not quite a year, but Tom had to leave because the state of Pennsylvania wasn't ready to be where Tom was. But I went to that TASH Conference and I met Lou Brown, who has been a champion of inclusive education for years and is nationally, and I think perhaps internationally, known, and talks about disability in simple human terms about dignity, and respect. Like just figuring out what makes a person tick and then you work on that. And that people with significant disabilities aren't any different in that respect than anybody else who has a little bit of a quirk and you're just figuring out that quirk and you work on it. So, I found him warm, engaging, and another person who he could convince anybody. I felt like he was very persuasive. And I think I remember at that first TASH Conference I went to, I went up and I shook Lou Brown's hand. And I said, "Lou, I've heard you speak a number of times in Pennsylvania and I have the highest regard for you. And I'm from Western Pennsylvania, which Dr. Penn, the special ed[ucation] director champions as a

bastion of segregation. And I'm going to run for school board and I'm going to change it." And so, that was my first sort of personal face-to-face encounter with Lou, although I'd heard him speak several times before that. And then a year later, I went back to the next TASH Conference, I sought out Lou Brown again. And I went up and said, "Lou, I'm Liz Healey. I met you at the last TASH conference. I told you I was going to run for school board. I've gotten elected and I'm going to change it." So, then Lou immediately promoted me to be on the TASH board. So, then I was on the TASH board. But one of the other things that had just happened was NASDSE, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, I think was the title of it. The person who was the executive director of NASDSE was also a TASH person. She was terrific. And this "Winners All" report really talked about how special education and general education were like two separate silos, never to come together and that we needed to break down those silos. And we needed to begin to educate all children with disabilities as part of the general education environment, ensuring that they got the supports and services they needed to be successful. So, when I finally got elected to the school board and I got sworn in, I had a copy of that Winners All report. And Dr. Penn, for the Pittsburgh school board, when the new members come in all the leaders of all the different departments have to be present. So, Dr. Penn was there. So, I brought a copy of "Winners All" with me, and I went up and after the swearing in, he was shaking my hand and congratulating me. We'd had a number of times where we have been butting heads over... I had been advocating that the GATEWAYS [Gaining Access to Education With All Youth and Students] project, that Ceil was able to bring to Pittsburgh, I'd been advocating in the Local Task Force on the Right to Education that Pittsburgh needed to have a GATEWAYS project. Other districts did, there was no reason we shouldn't. At one point, he reminded me of Khrushchev. He banged his hand on the table and he said, "I will not subject a child with a disability to being in a classroom with children who don't have disabilities! That is not fair to them!"

Liz Healey ([01:08:20](#)):

And I remember thinking, "Oh, Lord." So, I was so proud that I had this "Winners All" report, and I was on the school board, so I could finally have some clout and change. So, I went up, shook his hand, handed him the "Winners All" report and said, "I think you're going to find this really interesting reading. And what I look forward to is working together with you to break down the silo of special education and to have special education be part of the education system." Because he went around bragging when he would go to conferences that he was basically the superintendent of the second largest school district in Pennsylvania, because of the number of students who were in the Division of Exceptional Children. And so, then he took a sabbatical. He pretty much immediately took a sabbatical.

Liz Healey ([01:09:07](#)):

And then it really began to create the opportunities for things to change. Ceil and Kaye [Cupples] was involved in it. There was this homecoming initiative that started. And it was heady times, because we had another thing that we did and Ceil was a part of it. There was this circle of friends who had such a strong sense about the injustice of this and the righteousness that we felt and what we were going to do to change it. We started, I think we called it "The Co-Conspirators." And it included Steve Lyon from-

Ceil Belasco ([01:09:47](#)):

Pitt.

Liz Healey ([01:09:48](#)):

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From Pitt, and Ceil, and Debbie Rose, I think. What's her name? She was from Allegheny Singer [Institute] and Barb Minzenberg, and Stephanie Tecza, and I'm trying to think

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [01:10:04]

Liz Healey ([01:10:03](#)):

So we had people. It was sort of inside, outside, and we really tried to keep it very private that we were doing this, but we would coordinate. So there was a time when grading was becoming an issue and it was going to come to the school board. So, we planned how we were going to get people to present testimony in support of what we believed in, so that we were coordinating our efforts on all these specific change agendas as they came up, so that we could prevail. And we did, we made a lot of headway.

Liz Healey ([01:10:40](#)):

I don't like to think of myself as spiteful, but then when Dr. Penn came back at the end of his year of sabbatical, I was able to convince Louise Brennan [superintendent of Pittsburgh Public Schools], that it wouldn't be in the district's best interest for him to come back. At the end of sabbatical, you have a right to come back at a position on your same level on the organizational chart, but not to your specific position. A parallel position on the organizational chart was, Director of McNaugher [Education Center], the school for students...who needed emotional support. But it was a pretty challenging environment at McNaugher, so Louise Brennan appointed him to be the principal of McNaugher, and he quit right on the spot. And I thought, "Hallelujah. We are finally rid of this man who has been such a roadblock and an obstacle."

Liz Healey ([01:11:33](#)):

At that point, the school voucher issue was going on in Pennsylvania, and there was a lot of advocacy around school vouchers. Tom Ridge was the governor. Tom Ridge was in favor of school vouchers. The legislature was opposing it, and Tom Ridge was looking for someone to take over the Bureau of Special Education who would support vouchers. Nobody who had anything to do with special education supported vouchers, because it meant that the regular kids were going to get vouchers, but no child with a disability was ever going to get a voucher. So, within the community, it was pretty much understood that we should oppose vouchers.

Liz Healey ([01:12:13](#)):

So Bill Penn, I don't know whether that's really what he believed or not, but he was willing to be the governor's man and to take that role on. And then it was like, "Oh God, be careful what you ask for. Look what has happened now." We were just having to deal with him to change things in Pittsburgh, and now he's like over the entire state for special education. So, it was a continued push-pull with Dr. Penn when he was in that role. The GATEWAYS project was well underway in many districts across the state. There were all kinds of good things happening. And suddenly, the segregationist was in charge of the state Bureau of Special Education. I felt like it was potentially going to be a big setback.

Tina Calabro ([01:12:58](#)):

We're going to go back just a little bit in time to you, Ceil, with your change to Conroy School, which is a center school for students with disabilities and your experience there, and then also, including meeting

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your husband, David. I'd like to ask you about that. Also, I'd like to ask you about your son, Eddie, who's your youngest, is that correct? And he was born and diagnosed with Down syndrome. So, I wanted to talk about him a bit.

Ceil Belasco ([01:13:39](#)):

So, I was at Woolslair about two years and I was the only staff person to then move to Conroy. But within two years, all of those mini-centers collectively became Conroy Education Center. So, all of the staff people that I knew from my previous life at Woolslair and all those mini-centers were now all in one building.

Ceil Belasco ([01:14:13](#)):

It was kind of an exciting time because, for the first time, you had fellows, special education teachers who you could talk to, work with, there was all kinds of committee work going on, trying to refine what we were going to be doing. They set up a sheltered workshop. It was a big time of change. We were also heavily embedded in trainings for IEP [Individualized Education Plan] development. [Public Law] 94-142 had come in in '75. And now everyone had to understand how to do IEPs, individualized education programs. Nobody had ever written one before. Dr. Penn was in charge of that training.

Liz Healey ([01:15:06](#)):

Oh, Lord.

Ceil Belasco ([01:15:07](#)):

It was a really intense kind of time. But in all of this, as the building was renovated to accept more and more students, they were moving my class from floor to floor. On my final move to the fourth floor, someone lost all the keys to all of my cabinets, et cetera. And you had to keep paper roll books and paper grade books, et cetera. All of that was inside my desk, which was locked, and no keys to be found. So my future husband, they sent him into my classroom. He was one of the few male staff people. And they said, "Go and see if you can pick the lock on that desk." So, that's how I met him, he came to pick the lock on my desk.

Ceil Belasco ([01:16:06](#)):

We got married in December of '75, and we had four kids. All the while, I was teaching at Conroy and he was there, as well. So we had David, Theresa, Catherine, and Eddie was our youngest, and he was born in '86. So I had already been teaching 15, 16 years when Eddie came along, and Eddie was also diagnosed with Down syndrome, just like my brother Mike. Mike was about 30 at that time, when Eddie was born. So, I immediately joined parent groups and started to work with other parents whose kids had disabilities. I'd met Liz at an early intervention conference in Hershey, PA.

Liz Healey ([01:17:11](#)):

Oh, yeah.

Ceil Belasco ([01:17:12](#)):

And I had been asked to do a presentation, because Eddie had a difficult medical history those first couple of years, and as result of spinal meningitis, ended up with a hearing loss and needed early intervention for hearing services. I advocated for him to go to DePaul [School for Hearing and Speech]

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right away. The recommendation was he should go to Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, but it was residential program. And I was like, "No, no. He's hanging out here." I had advocated for him to go to DePaul. They initially were resistant. There was not another student who had that dual diagnosis of a cognitive impairment and a hearing impairment. But he indeed went there.

Ceil Belasco (01:18:16):

As a result of my advocacy there, I ran into a wide variety of people, someone from... Steve Bagnato, from Children's Hospital-

Liz Healey (01:18:28):

Oh, yes.

Ceil Belasco (01:18:28):

... he was working in the Child Development Unit, and he asked me to come and do a presentation at this early intervention [program] about basically advocating for your child and helping others see the possibilities, et cetera. So, I went and was part of a panel. [To Liz] I don't know if you were on that panel, moderated that panel, was in the audience?

Ceil Belasco (01:18:51):

But I remember standing in the hallway after that presentation, and [you and I] started a conversation, and I think we've been talking ever since.

Liz Healey (01:19:01):

Yeah.

Ceil Belasco (01:19:01):

I don't think the conversation ever stopped. It was a instant connection of like minds. So, Eddie probably was about two then, when I really started to re-examine the educational system, the educational possibilities for him. After that work to advocate to have him part of DePaul on that early intervention level, I began to examine where should he be in school and reflected on feeling like, "How could it be he won't go to school with everybody else?" So, I started working again with my parish school. My kids were in the parish school, and went and talked to the principal there and said, "I'd like to enroll him in the preschool." I can remember feeling so emotional and so anxious about that, and she opened the door wide open, and said, "Sure, why not?" I was like, "Well, that was much easier than I ever thought it would be."

Ceil Belasco (01:20:15):

So, he attended the preschool for two years, [at the same location] where my other kids were at school. And then again, through my work and meeting other families, [you and I] ended up at a school board meeting. I was still teaching at Conroy, but we were advocating and trying to get the GATEWAYS project in Pittsburgh. I had met Stephanie Tecza previous to that, again through the Parent-to-Parent organization. She had began advocating for her daughter to attend her neighborhood school. Her daughter, Leah, also had Down syndrome. So, a little bit older than Eddie, but [Stephanie] ... put her foot down and said [to the Pittsburgh school district], "It's this [Leah's inclusion in neighborhood school] or we do due process. Let's do this." So I got called into Dr. Penn's office. And he basically said something

like, "Well, you think this is such a good idea, you do it. You show me how to get Leah to attend her neighborhood school." It's like, "Okay, challenge accepted. Let's do this."

Ceil Belasco (01:21:34):

So, I started off just one day a week, and sort of a process of finding out what her special education teacher was thinking, talking to the general ed[ucation] teachers, the supervisors, everybody. By the end of the school year, I was two days out of the classroom working with Leah, and then other families were like, "What's going on over there? Let's try that, too." So, by the end of the school year, I think there were four students I was supporting. So, in pretty short order, kids started to pop up. So I had a sub[stitute] who was dedicated just to me, so that when I was out, she was... so it was like a co-teaching kind of thing.

Ceil Belasco (01:22:28):

By the end of that school year, I knew I could never go back [to Conroy Education Center, a special education center]. I really needed to address [inclusion of students with disabilities in neighborhood schools], and in a much stronger way. So, Dr. Penn created a full-time position for me. But I had the caveat, like, "If this goes south and I need a job, I have to have a job when I'm done with this." He guaranteed that, so I became the first inclusion facilitator for the school district.

Ceil Belasco (01:23:06):

We had a long discussion about what I should be called. The position was considered a "teacher on special assignment." I was not a supervisor. I was a peer to the teachers. [Dr. Penn] he wanted to say "inclusion specialist." I said, "I don't like the specialist word." I said, "Let's do facilitator." So we settled on inclusion facilitator. And he introduced to the staff, the administrative staff within the district department. I went with one of the school psychologists to do a training with a staff, preparing them for the entrance of a student. The school psychologist stood up and said, "I'd like you to meet Ceil Belasco. She is our new intrusion specialist." And it was like, he sort of had it, just a little bit off. But it became a great joke among the GATEWAYS projects on the state level. I made sure I told that story when we all got together. So we all called ourselves intrusion specialists.

Tina Calabro (01:24:30):

Ceil, I wanted to ask you just a little bit more about Eddie. You have said in the past that Eddie and Mike had the same diagnosis, but they were born in different eras, and so their journeys were different. When Mike was in school, there was an assumption of separation. There was no assumption of being included in regular school, or even much in the community. But when Eddie was born, it wasn't really a question of *if* he would be included in regular school and the community, but really, *where*. You had more of a choice. So, the educational system had evolved, and also, your advocacy around that had contributed. I'd like to ask you, what is Eddie up to these days? Is he around 33, 34 years old?

Ceil Belasco (01:25:29):

He is 33. He'll be 34 in December. When he left [Canevin High] School, he had a job within the first year. He was hired by Giant Eagle, and started off as a bagger for about 16 hours a week. As he had been working when he was in high school, and he had attended Duquesne University [under the St. Anthony School Program] for a while. [While at Canevin and Duquesne] he had been working at a Subway store in our neighborhood, but he was only working very limited hours because, at that time, he was involved in school and was on the bowling team, was playing in the band, involved in a lot of social activities at the

school. So, he worked very limited hours at Subway. So, when he got his job at Giant Eagle, the first time he got a paycheck, he was thrilled. He held that check up and he said, "Now that's what I'm talking about, higher money."

Ceil Belasco (01:26:40):

He was always motivated to make that higher money, as he would say, because he had goals for himself. He always has had goals for himself, and we've had to hustle and try to keep up with him. But he wanted to get his own apartment. He wanted a job. He wanted to make higher money. He wanted a girlfriend. He had lots of goals. So, when he started at Giant Eagle, he started saving money. We had applied for a Section 8 Housing Voucher [federal program for low-income renters] when he was still in school. They told us it would take seven years or something, but lo and behold, it was much sooner than that. So he moved into his own apartment in ... it had to be about 2013, he moved into his own apartment. He furnished that apartment with his own money.

Ceil Belasco (01:27:50):

It was a great motivator. As he was growing up, he wanted to know, what did he need to do to be in an apartment? So he had to learn to cook and he had to learn to clean and he had to learn to do laundry, all of the things that grown-ups do when you have your own apartment. So, he was very motivated to learn those skills all through those years.

Ceil Belasco (01:28:15):

So, now he's in his own apartment. He's supported ... [by] his sister, Cat, who is just the sibling closest in age to him. Cat has a little boy and a partner, and they all live together [in the same apartment]. So, Eddie has a great degree of independence, and he is now working, still at Giant Eagle, and his job skills have greatly expanded. So, now he works anywhere between 24 and 35 hours a week. They really like him. He's a really hard, focused worker. So we're really proud of him, very proud of him.

Tina Calabro (01:29:17):

Liz, in the early days, when Bevin was at Pioneer [Center], you talk about how your increasing interest in inclusive education was not always received very well by the school district, and you discovered some opponents within the school district, but also other people who championed the same ideas that you had. You ran for the school board, you won your seat, you served for eight years. Could you tell us a little bit about some of the early champions in the school district who you had a meeting of the minds with about the vision for inclusive education in the Pittsburgh Public Schools?

Liz Healey (01:30:04):

Well, Ceil and Barbara [Minzenberg] were folks I had met early, I think before I was on the [school] board. Our thinking about life in the world and where kids should go to school and how they should go to school were really well aligned. And Kaye Cupples at some point ... Kaye didn't replace Dr. Penn immediately, but after Dr. Penn left, within several years, [Kaye Cupples] was appointed the director [of special education]. And Kaye, I think at the urging of Ceil and other people in the department, as well as lots and lots of parents, started a Homecoming Project. The goal was to offer to every parent whose child was in a special school in Pioneer or Conroy (not so much McNaugher, I don't think) ... there was a discussion had with each parent about whether they would be interested, would they like to have their child be able to go to school with their neighbors, and not be bused across the city to a special school.

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Liz Healey ([01:31:29](#)):

Not every parent wanted it, but it really, that Homecoming Project really, I think, dramatically impacted all of the schools. I think, as Ceil's been talking about, some principals were more on board with it than others. As soon as I got on the school board, my intent, of course, was that Bevin was going to leave Pioneer. We hadn't been able to leave Pioneer any other way. I had tried at one point.

Liz Healey ([01:31:56](#)):

They had an ESY [Extended School Year] program, a summer program, and it would be broiling hot, and it was a flat top school, and it would be really hot, all these kids who had bracing and wheelchairs and lots of stuff that held heat around them. I had this devious plan for inclusion that what I decided I could do is, I went right about noon, when it was dismissal time, and measured the temperature in every classroom. In every classroom, it was well over 90 degrees, some 95. I measured the temperatures on each of the buses, the little mini-buses waiting to pick up the kids. So I got all the temperatures of all the buses, all the temperatures in the classrooms.

Liz Healey ([01:32:37](#)):

I went to the school board and I asked them to move the summer program to one of the schools that was air-conditioned, because I thought, "Hey, once we move all this equipment there, what's the point of bringing it back? We can suddenly get all these kids, people will see that they, these kids, can go to school with other people, and it won't just be the summer program. It could become a year round thing." I was so persuasive that they air-conditioned Pioneer. It was another one of those examples of, be careful what you wish for, because you never know what's going to happen.

Liz Healey ([01:33:12](#)):

I would say [the Homecoming project] had a tremendous success and we had a tremendous number of families who really wanted their kids to be able to go to school closer to home, not have to be bused across the city ... And people, just like at Western Center [state institution in Canonsburg, PA], where some people fought tooth and nail for their kids not to leave that facility because they felt that's where they were, could best be served. There were some parents who felt that their kids needed to stay in the special environments where they would be accepted, but it was becoming a much more acceptable view that people with disabilities are just part of the human experience, and we should grow up together. We should know one another, and we all need a little support from our friends. Some of us need different kinds of supports than others, but I don't know. [To Ceil] How many students do you think? It was a large number because there was...

Ceil Belasco ([01:34:15](#)):

It was a major change in the school district-

Liz Healey ([01:34:19](#)):

Major.

Ceil Belasco ([01:34:19](#)):

... when Kaye announced, he called it his Homecoming Project. It was following the GATEWAYS [Gaining Access to Education With All Youth and Students] project and following the MOSAIC [Model Opportunities for Students to Attend Inclusive Classrooms] grant.

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Liz Healey ([01:34:30](#)):

Yes.

Ceil Belasco ([01:34:31](#)):

So we were a couple of years in, but we were seeing this sort of domino effect, because at that time, there were not special education services in every building.

Ceil Belasco ([01:34:47](#)):

We had over 90 buildings, over 60,000 students, something like 7,000 or 8,000 special education students. But, there were not services in every one of those buildings. What was happening is, [Kaye Cupples] offered this Homecoming [project], and what was happening is, I'm going to use the name of a school, not necessarily the actual school, so a parent would say, "My kid belongs at Manchester, but there's no special education teacher there."

Liz Healey ([01:35:22](#)):

Yeah.

Ceil Belasco ([01:35:23](#)):

So we had this domino effect of kids were being bused all over the city to attend where the special education teachers were based, their classrooms.

Liz Healey ([01:35:38](#)):

And they were clustered.

Ceil Belasco ([01:35:39](#)):

And they were clustered. Then families started saying, "Well, all the rest of my kids go to Manchester. How about my kid goes to Manchester?" So, what [Kaye Cupples] did through the Homecoming project, initially, he was going to do it in maybe like eight schools, like where all these pop-ups were happening. But what happened was, "Oh my golly, what about the busing? Oh my golly, what about the teachers and the teacher union, if I start moving teachers over here and aides over there and busing..." [Kaye Cupples] said, "You know what? We're biting the bullet. We're doing it all in one year. Everybody's going back to their home school. Boom, done. Teacher here, teacher there, everybody's moving, it's done. Kids belong where their siblings attend school, where their neighbors are." So it was a major, major undertaking.

Liz Healey ([01:36:43](#)):

I think part of the opposition was, for some of the teachers who'd been in their own self-contained classroom for years and years and years, their role was going to change pretty dramatically, because they were going to have to be partnering with the general education teacher, going into that classroom to make sure their child was getting supports. They were going to be having to work together. They no longer had all their kids in the room and all that control. They had to begin to think differently about "How can I support this child's learning in an environment?" For the kids, it was so motivational for them to be able to want to keep up with their classmates. So, behaviors that might've been challenging, kids pretty quickly realized this is the way you behave in this classroom. Teachers also, another thing that I thought was one of those ideas from Lou Brown [of the University of Wisconsin, national leader on

inclusive education], you can differentiate instruction. So, you could have all the kids working in the same content, but some kids may have, be working with a greater complexity of the subtleties of the concept, and some kids who might be... I remember Lou Brown, and what he used to talk about, this volcano example, where he was working with some teachers and the general education students in the classroom, and they were all learning about volcanoes and how the core of the earth is hot, and all these things, and these forces that produce a volcano and the lava comes out.

Liz Healey ([01:38:17](#)):

There was a student who everybody thought had really significant learning disabilities, really significant. And that little guy learned that, and he loved when you can do those -- what do you do it with? -- baking soda and vinegar, and you make a volcano. That child learned really quickly about, what were the visible signs of a volcano? What was a volcano about? So, he could be on par with his other friends who were understanding the core of the earth, and that was a level of complexity that he might not be able to master right away. But he was able to participate in the same activity in a way that was meaningful for him, and it didn't diminish the activity for the other kids, so that everybody had a learning experience that was meaningful for them.

Tina Calabro ([01:39:08](#)):

So, all across the country -- and really in a good bit of the world, as well, too -- people were starting to understand how do you include students with disabilities in regular classrooms and regular schools? [What were] a few of the tangible steps forward for the school district?

Liz Healey ([01:39:30](#)):

There's one thing that I think was brilliant in the MOSAIC [Model Opportunities for Students to Attend Inclusive Classrooms] project, because the MOSAIC Project was for preschoolers. Preschools, up until that time, largely had been, there were separate preschools and there were regular preschools. The MOSAIC program began to do inclusion in preschool. So, all those parents who really didn't... they're learning about disability as their children are growing, suddenly believe, "Well, my child belongs with everybody else. Why would they be in a special class? They're in the regular class in preschool. They're doing well. We're seeing great gains. We should continue that." So out of that MOSAIC project came a whole generation of parents who were saying, "Well, you can't put my child in a separate school. This is where they belong. They belong with their peers." So I think that that was another, that was really a brilliant... It was the right thing to do, but it also created a huge sea change.

Tina Calabro ([01:40:33](#)):

I just wanted to read off what these terms mean. GATEWAYS was a statewide grant program. [The acronym stands for] Gaining Access To Education With All Youth and Students. The MOSAIC program was a federal program. [The acronym stands for] Model Opportunities for Students to Attend Inclusive Classrooms]. Pittsburgh Public Schools was the only school district in the United States to get this [MOSAIC] grant. The rest were universities. Out of MOSAIC came the Advisory Board on School Inclusion, and out of GATEWAYS came the Summer Institute on School Inclusion. Both of you were very involved in these activities. There also was the Leadership Institute on School Inclusion that came out of, followed these grants and received other grants.

Tina Calabro ([01:41:29](#)):

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And, as you're saying, there were many parents whose children started out in inclusive education and preschool in the early years, and continued to advocate for inclusive education as their students progressed through the system. I wanted to touch just briefly on the role of the unions, the teachers union, in this whole process of making inclusive education more systemic. Early on, the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, along with the American Federation of Teachers, was not a proponent of inclusive education. Could you talk a little bit about that?

Ceil Belasco ([01:42:19](#)):

During those early '90s, after Dr. Penn had established a full-time position of inclusion facilitator, we began writing grants to expand the program and give it a strong foundation. We wrote for a GATEWAYS grant, the Gaining Access To Education With All Youth and Students. That was a state-level grant, but it was called a systems-change grant. Other school districts had already implemented that grant and received funding from that. So, we got the GATEWAYS grant and then following right on the heels of that was the MOSAIC grant. As Liz said, it was a stroke of genius that we wrote it to be a preschool program, because it was part of the plan that parents would experience inclusive education in those early years, and then begin to advocate for it up through the school system.

Liz Healey ([01:43:24](#)):

They just expected it.

Ceil Belasco ([01:43:25](#)):

Yes. We got both of those grants. When we went for the MOSAIC grant, the first time we had a meeting in Washington [D.C.], the name that was above mine or below mine on the sign-in list was Lou Brown. I was like, "Oh, we have arrived." But all of those federal grants that year had been granted to universities who were doing research, et cetera. We were the only school district in the country who got a demonstration grant, so we were pretty proud of ourselves.

Ceil Belasco ([01:44:03](#)):

But as an outcome of those grants was, the Advisory Council on Inclusive Education and the Summer Institute on Inclusive Education. So through the Advisory Council, we gathered both like minds and unlike minds together, and made sure that we included the representation from the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, because we would need their support as we moved this forward, because it was going to create changing teacher roles and changing expectations. We needed to make sure that they were well-informed, part of the groundwork of what was going forward. The process of the Advisory council was, we would ask teachers to bring to the table ... some of their issues, concerns, and then we would work in committee-

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [01:45:04]

Ceil Belasco ([01:45:03](#)):

Some of their issues, concerns. And then we would work in committees to try to address their concerns. So, all of that work was going on. And in January of 1994, the American Federation of Teachers, under Al Shanker, published a moratorium on inclusion. They were asking that all schools nationwide stop their inclusive efforts because it was unfair to students, sort of reflective of what you-

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Liz Healey ([01:45:39](#)):

And a big part of what [Al Shanker] was arguing was they really needed 15 years so that they could study it and become well-informed and prepare it. So he was asking for a pause, a 15-year pause on efforts to include students in public education.

Ceil Belasco ([01:45:55](#)):

Parents didn't have 15 years to wait. So...

Liz Healey ([01:46:00](#)):

A whole generation would have finished school by then.

Ceil Belasco ([01:46:01](#)):

Exactly. So, it was pretty intense. So, Barb Minzenberg and I were both members of the union. Barb was now the project director for MOSAIC, and I was project director for the GATEWAYS project. And being union members, because we were still considered teachers on special assignment, we decided to attend their nationwide meeting in Washington, D.C., that called for this moratorium on inclusion.

Ceil Belasco ([01:46:39](#)):

So we marched in, naive as anything, thinking we're going to find like-minds at the meeting. We did not. And in fact, part of the meeting, they asked people to come forward, come to the mic and express their concerns. And so we, Barb and I, put our little heads together, "What can we go and say?" And all of [what was being said] was really, really negative, and [we] felt that we were in a very, very bad crowd, that we were going to get jumped on. So we put our heads together. "How can we approach this? What can we say?"

Ceil Belasco ([01:47:22](#)):

So, we came up with a little statement and Barb approached the microphone. And they, in fact, ask her who she was and that she wasn't on the agenda or list of speakers. And she held her position and she said, "No, I'm a member. I've come. I have something else to say."

Ceil Belasco ([01:47:45](#)):

So, she was the last person up to the microphone and the only person in the room who advocated for -- instead of a moratorium on inclusive practices -- how 'bout advocacy for more support and training for teachers so that we could implement the IDEA, the least restrictive environment. There were many, many national resources, many people doing research on this. And we were, in fact, kind of late to the game, and that we needed to step forward and be a leading voice, and offer supports for teachers.

Ceil Belasco ([01:48:29](#)):

Silence in the room. No response. "And now next on our agenda." End of discussion.

Ceil Belasco ([01:48:38](#)):

So, soon after that, the meeting DELETION HERE wrapped up and we were getting our things together, and a gentleman came up and tapped us on the shoulder and said, "Judy Heumann wants to speak with

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you." We were like, "Judy Heumann? Oh my goodness." She was in this meeting. She was the... [To Liz] Give me the title.

Liz Healey (01:49:07):

Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services.

Ceil Belasco (01:49:13):

Right. So she was like the assistant secretary for special education for the country. But everybody in the disability field knew Judy Heumann. She was one kick-butt advocate.

Ceil Belasco (01:49:28):

So we were shaking in our boots. And she was so warm and welcoming. And she said, "I cannot believe that you girls got the guts up to say something like that in this room." She was like, "I want to work with you."

Ceil Belasco (01:49:46):

So, it was an amazing partnership. Talk about a power broker and an advocate of the highest degree. So she said, "I'm coming to Pittsburgh. We're going to put our heads together. You get together a group of people who want to talk about this, and we're going to figure this out."

Ceil Belasco (01:50:05):

We were beside ourselves that Judy Heumann was going to come and help us in Pittsburgh. So she did come. And I think we invited you, [Liz], to that meeting. So, I think our co-conspirator group got together and we really strategized....And then we had made it known on the state level, like, "We know Judy Heumann."

Ceil Belasco (01:50:33):

So, then when they were planning the state conference the next year, the Department of Education for PA, we invited Judy to be the keynote speaker. And again, she was such a powerful voice, an amazing advocate.

Ceil Belasco (01:50:54):

So, we continued with our work and felt strengthened by her support. And one of the things we did do through the Advisory Council and working with the union, one of the big issues that kept coming up to us was the issue of grading. "Oh yeah, well, now kids are in my class, but he's not doing the same thing everybody else is doing. How am I supposed to grade him?" And it was an ongoing discussion.

Liz Healey (01:51:24):

You can't get a passing grade if you can't do all the work.

Ceil Belasco (01:51:27):

Exactly. You have to be on grade level and all of those arguments. So we, again, "Let's get to work on this." Did our research. Worked within the Pittsburgh [Public Schools] legal department. And we devised

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a document that was approved by the Pittsburgh [Public Schools] legal department and other educational advocacy groups, et cetera. And we called it the "Roll Book Reference on Grading." And it was a two-sided sheet printed on cardstock, and Kaye [Cupples] was a big proponent of this. And it was three-hole punched, so it would be the first page in your roll book that you kept on your desk, so that when you were doing those grades, you would have some immediate reference. But in order to distribute that throughout the whole district, we met with the PEP Committee, which was the Professional Education Partnership. So, it was board administrators and all the higher-ups of the union.

Liz Healey ([01:52:32](#)):

It's in the union contract that any change in work conditions had to be negotiated through the PEP Committee before it could be implemented.

Ceil Belasco ([01:52:42](#)):

And my best buddy, who took me to that meeting was Kaye Cupples. He said, "We're going to do this, and we're going to do it right. And it's going to be okay." Because the president of the PFT [Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers] at that time was Al Fondy, who was not known for his calm and collaborative manner. And so, I was seated across from him, and I was afraid he was going to have a stroke. His face was beet red. He was pretty aggravated about this whole idea. But it passed through the committee and became part of like district policy. And everybody in the district -- special ed[ucation], general ed[ucation] -- got a roll book reference on grading. And it became sort of like the Bible, like you couldn't question. So, that was one very effective piece that came out of that Advisory Council.

Liz Healey ([01:53:43](#)):

And another one that I think of was the magnet school lotteries, that students with disabilities were not permitted to participate in the magnet lotteries. And so, we took that on, and again, through the same process and came up with some recommendations. And that changed.

Ceil Belasco ([01:54:04](#)):

Right. And there was another issue of, in CAPA [Creative and for Performing Arts], which is a premier arts school, beautiful, stellar reputation. But it became a really hot point of-

Liz Healey ([01:54:23](#)):

They have a level of performance standard, that you had to be able to meet their standards of performance in order to be able to be considered for CAPA.

Ceil Belasco ([01:54:33](#)):

But there was a question as to whether adjunct teachers at CAPA, did they have to follow the same rules or could they just make the decision on their own because they really weren't employees at the school district?

Liz Healey ([01:54:48](#)):

And they also weren't teachers. You know, they were artists and performers and musicians.

Ceil Belasco ([01:54:53](#)):

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So again, went back, worked with the union, worked with the legal department, and lo and behold, they really had to follow the same rules. But a lot of those nitty gritty, everyday things that teachers were dealing with... [A] major change was in the pay system, teachers who were working within special education were given a pay differential.

Liz Healey (01:55:27):

Oh, be compensated with working with "those kids."

Ceil Belasco (01:55:30):

"Those kids." So if you worked with TMRs [Trainable Mentally Retarded], you got more money than the teacher who was in general ed[ucation]. So that became a big bone of contention when we began including kids in general ed[ucation] classrooms. And teachers were saying, "I don't get that differential." And it really comes down to about \$1.25 a day, but I'll be glad to pay that to you. However, what we did is we actually advocated that that pay differential be taken away. And it was. And again, working through the union, let's level the playing field. Everybody's working with general ed[ucation] and special ed[ucation] kids, level the playing field.

Tina Calabro (01:56:23):

I wanted to go back to talk about Bevin's educational career. You worked to have her move on from Pioneer Center School, which she could have stayed [at] til the age of 21. But you had started to work -- probably almost since the time she started there -- to have her not be at Pioneer School, segregated from her peers in the general population of the district. And you made plans to have her enroll at Reizenstein Middle School. And she was the first student with significant disabilities and medical needs to be at Reizenstein. So, tell us about her transition to Reizenstein and also her going on from there to Allderdice High School.

Liz Healey (01:57:13):

Once I got on the school board, there was a willingness to have Bevin leave Pioneer and go to Reizenstein. And Bobbie Feldman was the principal of Reizenstein, and Reizenstein was a neighborhood school. It was not a magnet program. And it combined racially and economically diverse students into the same building. So, for some people it was like, "Oh, I don't know about Reizenstein." But I was so thrilled. Reizenstein. "Oh, I'd love to have Bevin be in Reizenstein."

Liz Healey (01:57:48):

And so, Bobbie Feldman really was, for the first time since Bevin's career in school, when I had tried the air conditioning, and I tried this and I tried that, finally, "Yes, yes, yes, we can do that."

Liz Healey (01:58:01):

So, Ceil, my partner, we started planning for Bevin to come to Reizenstein, and Bobbie Feldman very much wanted to be a part of that. And she was really instrumental in making it be successful. And I'm sure that her hope was having the child of a school board member in her school was going to be helpful to her school, that I could help bring additional resources to the school.

Liz Healey (01:58:26):

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And so, Bobbie had decided that we should select the best kids. We should figure out who the best kids were. And she brought together a group of kids. And we had a number of after-school activities where those kids were invited to stay after school, and Bevin hadn't yet started. She moved to Reizenstein in the middle of the school year. So Bevin came to those after-school activities. And Ceil did a terrific job of engaging kids in discussion and thinking about an activity and was able to incorporate Bevin. And it was a good experience for those kids. And I think Bobbie Feldman felt like she had really laid the foundation so that when Bevin came there, she was going to have a group of kids who were going to be looking out for her.

Liz Healey ([01:59:18](#)):

And simultaneously, we organized and planned orientation for the teachers. And most of the teachers had never, ever had a student like Bevin. She had a trach[eostomy], and she had oxygen, and she had a G-tube, and she had a lot of things they'd never experienced. And it looked to them like a lot of things could go wrong.

Liz Healey ([01:59:45](#)):

So, it was another kind of brilliant thing. We had Dr. Heidi Feldman, who headed up the Developmental Support Unit at Children's Hospital and is kind of nationally known. She now heads up Stanford Children's Hospital. And we had Heidi come, and Heidi was just in a very matter-of-fact way explaining, "Well, this is what this is for, and this is what this is for. And she's really going to be okay." And she was going to have someone else that was going to be with her.

Liz Healey ([02:00:21](#)):

And Bevin, almost on cue, started coughing. And when she coughs, it's pretty dramatic and her face gets really red, and you think like, "Oh my God, this is it." And Heidi just very calmly said, "Now, if you see what's happening. This is really a very strong feature that Bevin has. She's able to clear her lungs. She can do that independently. You're seeing this. Her face is red. There's a lot of movement, but she's just fine. And this is a good thing that this is happening." And she just had a way of putting everybody at ease.

Liz Healey ([02:00:50](#)):

And the other thing that I think was another one of those strategic things that Ceil did, was we asked the superintendent to come and introduce this... It was almost a day. It seemed like it went on forever. I don't think it was a whole day, but it was-

Ceil Belasco ([02:01:08](#)):

At least a half day, it was.

Liz Healey ([02:01:10](#)):

Yes, it was a pretty long orientation. And so the superintendent [Louise Brennan] was invited to come. And other than the superintendent wanting to keep me happy, she was clueless. So, Ceil said she would write something for her to say. So, Ceil wrote this wonderful speech about inclusion, the value and importance of inclusion, how this is where our schools should be going. And Louise [Brennan] delivered it beautifully and it was videotaped. And then we had Louise, the leader of the school district then, we're able to show this video all around to all these different schools. So that was terrific.

Liz Healey ([02:01:47](#)):

And so after we did all this preparation, we had the kids ready, we had the teachers ready, we had everything ready to go, first day, Bevin goes on a little short bus, and her little short bus came to pick her up and get her to Reizenstein. And it was the middle of the year and a new route. And things didn't go off as planned. So she was late getting to school.

Liz Healey ([02:02:06](#)):

And I just wanted to make sure everything was really going to be okay. So I had gotten in the car and kind of followed them to school. We all got out. They had sort of repurposed what was kind of a closet as a space where Bevin could... You know, like when she needed chest PT [physical therapy], and when she needed personal care, things to be done in private, she could go into that room.

Liz Healey ([02:02:26](#)):

So Bevin went there and she had missed homeroom. She had missed all that stuff. We're getting her jacket off, getting her all ready, getting ready to go catch up with the schedule. And Bevin was heading down the corridor at Reizenstein, and at Reizenstein they had two or three probation officers in the school for a middle school. And so, there was a great effort on order and control and making sure that there was a safe environment for everyone.

Liz Healey ([02:02:53](#)):

So we started heading out of this little room down the corridor, and I think Ceil was there, and I was there, and her aide was there. And we saw coming up the corridor, the long corridor, at the other end of the corridor was a young student. And immediately... Kids aren't supposed to be out in the hall during class time, so this was probably a problem actor in the school.

Liz Healey ([02:03:21](#)):

But this young girl is coming up the corridor and she said, "Who's that?" And we said, "It's Bevin." She said, "She a baby doll?" Said, "No, no, no, no, she's a student. This is her first day. She's going to be here in Reizenstein." "Why is she in that chair?" "Well, she can't walk." "Oh. Well, Bevin..."

Liz Healey ([02:03:42](#)):

So she started to talk to Bevin, and Bevin didn't answer. We said, "Bevin isn't able to speak. She can hear what you're saying. And she really likes to have people talk to her, but she's not able to answer you. So, one of the ways that we communicate with Bevin is we touch her and we say, 'Hi, Bevin. I'm Ceil. Or hi Bevin.' Let her know what's going on."

Liz Healey ([02:04:06](#)):

So this little girl comes up and she puts her hand on Bevin and says, "Bevin, you're going to need somebody to watch your back in this school. I'm going to be looking out for you." And it was like all that we had, all the best, gifted students all ready to go. And yet it was another kid who felt vulnerable in some ways who immediately latched on and said I'm going to look out for another vulnerable person in this school. So, it was joyful that it happened so spontaneously. We didn't need to do all those things after school. We didn't need to do all that. Kids spontaneously got it.

Tina Calabro ([02:04:41](#)):

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And then Bevin went from Reizenstein over to Allderdice for high school. And how was that?

Liz Healey (02:04:48):

Well, yeah. And Allderdice is sort of considered the flagship school of the district, the most heavily academic. So, we were a little worried about how welcomed she was going to be when she got there. And I was still on the school board. So, the principal was sort of on board with it.

Liz Healey (02:05:06):

And it was so surprising. There were a couple of teachers that... There was one teacher, and I can't even remember what subject he taught, but he said to me, "I went to Pitt, and I was in this large lecture class. And there was this kid in a wheelchair. And he came in and he sat right next to me. And in the first lecture, he started to drool, and he was sort of indicating, could you wipe this for me?" And [the teacher recalled that he said to himself], "Oh, I can't believe I'm sitting next to guy. I can't believe this."

Liz Healey (02:05:49):

And then, as he got into the course, [the teacher recalled], "It was that other guy who got me a passing grade. He got me through that course." And [the teacher] said, "It was a game-changer for me. I began to see people differently. And Bevin is so welcome here." And it was like, wow.

Liz Healey (02:06:05):

After all these things with AFT [American Federation of Teachers], [we expected to hear] "We teach academics here." And Bevin was not a student who was going to be able to participate in a lot of the academics, but she certainly enjoyed the interaction with other people. And it was a terrific experience for her because through those relationships that she built at Reizenstein and at Allderdice, up until her death, we would be out and about, and people would come up and say, "Hey Bevin, we went to Reizenstein together." Or, "Bevin, we were in this class together."

Liz Healey (02:06:43):

And it accomplished what I had hoped to accomplish, that Bevin was going to be recognized in the community. She was going to be a valued member of the community. She was going to be welcomed there. She was going to be known by others who cared about her. So for Bevin, her school experience really laid the foundation for the life that we had hoped for her.

Tina Calabro (02:07:11):

And Ceil, I understand you had a student later on at Chatham University who was a classmate of Bevin's, and she wrote about that. Could you tell us about that?

Ceil Belasco (02:07:20):

For a period of time, I was an adjunct [professor] at Chatham University. And following the end of the class, I always asked the students to write a reflection on their experiences in the class, or their experiences with a person with a disability, or what was motivating them towards a teaching career.

Ceil Belasco (02:07:44):

And the students in the class did not know my background or whom I had worked with. They knew I was working in the Pittsburgh city schools. But lo and behold, one of the letters comes back and it was a

student who reflected on her time at Reizenstein and having met Bevin, and felt she had made such a contribution to the school, and that she influenced this student to think about ways that she could support students in the future. And [Bevin] was basically the motivation for her to go into education. So, [Bevin] did have long-lasting effects on the students she came into contact with. But that was a wonderful aha moment. Wonderful.

Tina Calabro ([02:08:41](#)):

Liz, when you left the school board, a little bit after that, you founded the PEAL Center, Parent Education and Leadership Center, here in Pittsburgh, but it's now serving the entire state of Pennsylvania. You're the founding executive director. You retired from [PEAL] in 2017. And Ceil, after you retired from the Pittsburgh Public Schools in 2007, you went to work for the PEAL Center as the director of training.

Tina Calabro ([02:09:16](#)):

[PEAL] is an organization that has helped to continue to advocate for inclusive education, and keep that going in Western Pennsylvania, across the state, and even nationally.

Tina Calabro ([02:09:34](#)):

I want to ask you about inclusive education in the Pittsburgh Public Schools today. We know that back in the time when these very significant changes were happening, the school district was larger than it is now. At the time of the GATEWAYS grant, there were 67,000 students and 97 schools. And now in 2020, there are about 23,000 students and 54 schools. So it's a much smaller district than it was.

Tina Calabro ([02:10:09](#)):

What's your impression of how inclusive education has been carried out in the district after you left your active roles with the district?

Ceil Belasco ([02:10:24](#)):

I am no longer in touch with the folks in that department, but understand there are no longer inclusion facilitators. And when I left, there were four of us. So that focus has shifted.

Ceil Belasco ([02:10:43](#)):

I'm not sure of the dedication to inclusive practices right now. I remember attending... I was working at the PEAL Center, and the school district had invited me to come to a Right to Education Task Force meeting. And there was a supervisor who was presenting an idea to do a... What did we call it? A shortcut IEP [Individualized Education Plan]. But a single page IEP. Again, a reference tool for teachers that we had done previously in previous years. And the supervisor was presenting this as an "aha moment," and what a cool idea this might be for teachers to use. And in my head, I thought, "Didn't we do that about seven years ago?"

Ceil Belasco ([02:11:49](#)):

So, I don't know what the dedication is right now, or the focus is. I'm hoping kids are attending neighborhood schools, and I'm hoping that they are receiving the supports they need to be successful in schools. I'm unsure as to the progress at this point in time. It is a greatly changed school district from when I was there. Your reflections, Liz?

Liz Healey ([02:12:23](#)):

I think it's not one of the core principles of the leadership of the school district. There are two school board members presently who both have children who receive special education services. My sense is that for some kids, if their families are able to advocate effectively, that they can marshal resources and get the attention that their child is going to need to be successful. But I don't think that that's uniform at this point.

Tina Calabro ([02:13:11](#)):

As you look back at the role you played for more than 20 years in trying to move the school system forward, how would you summarize the role that you played during those years?

Ceil Belasco ([02:13:30](#)):

Co-conspirators. I like to think that we were part of that systems change that moved the school district from sort of a segregation-as-bedrock principle, to become more open, more well-trained, more well-informed, and interested in supporting students and staff as well.

Ceil Belasco ([02:14:05](#)):

I think what I observed was [that when] there's a change in leadership -- and that includes both at school level, and also administrative level -- there's a change in philosophy. We were fortunate to work with Kaye Cupples for many years, and Linda Cordisco, who were partners in this, and encouraged us to seek out information, resources, gave us the tools we needed to support kids, families, and teachers.

Ceil Belasco ([02:14:49](#)):

I don't know if that's present right now, but I felt supported when I was there. And I felt like there were real partners and leaders in the school district. And I feel like I was fortunate to be part of that team.

Liz Healey ([02:15:09](#)):

And I think that there was a change in beliefs. And it may not have been sustained over time as the school district chose new leaders. There were some really pressing issues for the district when they had to select new superintendents several different times. When I was on the board, that was one of the seven or eight questions every candidate was asked about ... And I'm not sure that it has that level of priority now.

Liz Healey ([02:15:48](#)):

But I even think Kaye [Cupples] went through a change. I remember my earliest interaction with Kaye. I would say he was not so convinced about the value of inclusion, but I think as people began to work with it, began to see people sincerely making it happen, and began to see what an impact it was having on people's lives, I think we really... I think there were significant changes and foundational beliefs for people. And I regret that as there was turnover in positions, that the new people coming in may not have always held those same beliefs.

Liz Healey ([02:16:38](#)):

And I think that there are still many kids in Pittsburgh who are included, but as you said, it's a much smaller district. And ensuring success for every single student may not be as important as creating a more equitable district at this point in time. It's a huge issue at this point in time. When you think about

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during [the] COVID [pandemic], when kids who are economically disadvantaged or [who] become disenfranchised from education, those are really pressing issues. And we understand why they're really pressing issues.

Liz Healey ([02:17:19](#)):

... I think people perhaps are so focused on some of these other inequities that it's not as large a priority at this time.

Tina Calabro ([02:17:38](#)):

Thank you for those closing comments. Is there anything else that you wanted to add?

Liz Healey ([02:17:48](#)):

Thank you for this opportunity.

Ceil Belasco ([02:17:50](#)):

Thank you.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [02:17:51]