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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.

Mary Hartley ([00:00:00](#)):

The purpose of the Oral History Project of the Western Pennsylvania Disability History and Action Consortium is to record first-hand accounts of disability history. Kate Bayer, who has had a long career in disability services in Western Pennsylvania as part of that history. Kate worked for nine months as a special education teacher at Polk State School and Hospital in Venango County in 1973 and 1974. During that short period, she witnessed treatment that she has described as shockingly inhumane by today's standards.

Mary Hartley ([00:00:35](#)):

She left Polk with what she has described as a personal commitment to make sure that people with disabilities were treated fairly, humanely and with dignity and respect. She went on to work in a disability services agency for 28 years. She began as a direct care professional and retired as director of [development and marketing]. She is retired and lives in Lawrenceville. Today is November 28th. It is 10:08 in the morning, and we are at StudioME in East Liberty.

Mary Hartley ([00:01:17](#)):

Thank you, Kate. Thank you.

Kate Bayer ([00:01:18](#)):

Thank you.

Mary Hartley ([00:01:20](#)):

Where did you grow up?

Kate Bayer ([00:01:22](#)):

I grew up here in Western Pennsylvania in a little town outside of Greensburg called Mount Pleasant.

Mary Hartley ([00:01:30](#)):

Okay. When you were growing up there did you have experience with people with disabilities?

Kate Bayer ([00:01:35](#)):

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No. I had a cousin who had Down syndrome. He was actually a second cousin. He was the only person that I knew of that had a disability. When I went to school, kids that had disabilities weren't seen by the rest of us. They either didn't go to school if they had a severe disability or if they were able to manage being in school they were kept in separate classrooms. So, no, I didn't have any experience.

Mary Hartley ([00:02:04](#)):

Can you just talk a little bit more about your cousin?

Kate Bayer ([00:02:07](#)):

My cousin, his name was Alan. He actually only died a few years ago. At the time, people with Down syndrome weren't expected to live past teenage, early adulthood, but he lived to be about 50 years old. My understanding he did go on after his mother passed and lived in a group home and had a pretty successful life, all things considered.

Mary Hartley ([00:02:35](#)):

As a child, what was your experience with him growing up?

Kate Bayer ([00:02:38](#)):

It was limited. We might cross paths at family gatherings, but it wasn't anything negative. I knew him, and my dad and his mother were cousins, so we would cross paths. But not frequently, and there was nothing negative. I had no negative associations.

Mary Hartley ([00:02:56](#)):

Just one more question about that. Can you describe if he had any education, or community care?

Kate Bayer ([00:03:00](#)):

I don't believe that he did because there was no right for him to have an education. Today, his life would have been much different because he was able to function quite well. I'm sure he would have gone to school, and probably had a job, probably lived independently, but he never had those opportunities in the '50s and '60s.

Mary Hartley ([00:03:24](#)):

You've said that you fell into a career in disability services. You went to Clarion University with plans to become a high school social studies teacher. Tell us about what influenced you to pursue a career in education and about the events that led to your employment at Polk in 1973.

Kate Bayer ([00:03:42](#)):

Well, as a young girl growing up in the '60s and wanting to go on to college, when I told the guidance counselor in 10th grade that I wanted to go to college, I was given three choices. I could be a teacher, I could be a nurse, and I forget what the third one... The third one has something to do with the medical profession. I wasn't interested in the medical profession. I thought, well, but I am interested in history, so I guess I'll be a teacher.

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Kate Bayer ([00:04:14](#)):

That was not a very good time for young women to go into secondary education unless they were able to coach some athletic event like football. I was told that after I graduated, and had my degree in hand and went on many, many, many interviews at school districts, that, "Young lady, you'd be a great social studies teacher, but what can you coach?" Of course, I couldn't coach anything, and of course, I didn't get the job.

Kate Bayer ([00:04:42](#)):

However, as the school year approached, after my graduation, I got a call from the Placement Office of Clarion -- at the time, it was Clarion State College -- saying, "Would you be willing to teach a class for educable mentally retarded students in Mifflintown, PA?"

Kate Bayer ([00:05:03](#)):

My parents said, "Of course she will. It's a job, you'll go take that job." I went over there and that was my first year of teaching. The students there would not even be in a segregated class today, they would have been completely mainstreamed. The deal was you go teach for a year, but then you come right back to Clarion and get your special ed degree. So, I did that. That was when my history and that Polk State Hospital intersected.

Kate Bayer ([00:05:35](#)):

Clarion at the time had an excellent, excellent program in severe disabilities. The professor, his name was Dr. Kenneth Vayda. Their lab was Polk State Hospital. If you got into Dr. Vayda's program, you were going to Polk. They had a program at Polk, it was in the nursery building, where he sent students, and they were trying to make the point that if you early intervene, you can make a difference. The person doesn't have to be as disabled as they're going to be if you can intervene early enough.

Kate Bayer ([00:06:13](#)):

He was pretty successful. That was pre-deinstitutionalization, but it was making the point that don't send them there in the first place, and then the second place, provide some interventions and help them not succumb to the lowest level of their disability.

Kate Bayer ([00:06:31](#)):

That was my start, and I just fell in love with it. It was not my intent, it was never my dream. Fate directed me into it, I guess.

Mary Hartley ([00:06:51](#)):

Can you talk a little bit about when you found out about the Right to Education and how that intersected with that training that you were doing?

Kate Bayer ([00:06:59](#)):

Well, I believe... Right to Education was 1974, and I was not working then, I was home raising my family. I heard about it. I didn't give it much thought at the time, and then in later years when my children were

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eight and six, I started thinking about going back to work, but I knew I did not want to teach and be involved with learning disabilities. That was not for me.

Kate Bayer ([00:07:34](#)):

One day, I was reading the Sunday newspaper, and there was a want ad for special ed teachers at a school in Oakmont. I called them and said, "I'm a special ed teacher." They said, "Well, come on down." What I didn't know was it wasn't... While the program was in a school, it was not a school, it was a program for adults who had aged out of the school system. It was a day program.

Kate Bayer ([00:08:03](#)):

I went down and I met the director and I met the folks. To be honest with you, until that moment, it never entered my mind that people with developmental disabilities grow up to be adults. That they don't stay children, they don't stay in the school system. I never gave it a thought. I walked in and there was a former school with 50-some adults with developmental disabilities in all stages and ranges of their disability.

Kate Bayer ([00:08:35](#)):

I thought, wow, that was a revelation to me. It was also a revelation that I wasn't quite willing to return to a full-time job. But the director was a wise woman and she said, "We always need substitutes if our staff are ill, or they're on vacation. I have ratios I need to maintain. Would you be willing to come in on an on-call basis?"

Kate Bayer ([00:08:58](#)):

That was how I re-entered the field. I said, "Yeah, I'll do that." It worked for me. I did that for about six months or so to the point where I was there every day. She finally said, "You're here every day, why don't you just be full-time and get the benefits of that?" I decided to do that and work there... Worked. That was known as, that was, Allegheny East Mental Health Mental Retardation at the time, and that was the beginning of my 28 years.

Mary Hartley ([00:09:57](#)):

Can you talk a little bit about the education you received at Clarion and how this PARC Consent Decree impacted your academic preparation?

Kate Bayer ([00:10:07](#)):

Okay. As I said, my original degree was in social studies. Once I started working in the field, I then needed to continue my education, which Clarion offered. I took the classes that I needed to take. Some of them involved on the ground study at Polk, and that brought me to the state hospital and was something that was eye opening that I had never in my wildest imaginings even considered an institution. Never thought about an institution. Never thought about who would be in an institution or how they would be cared for.

Kate Bayer ([00:10:55](#)):

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It was at that point in time, the state hospital system was using a medical model and how they treated people with mostly significant disabilities. Medically, they were taking very good care of people. They were making sure they didn't come down with communicable diseases, it was all about their physical health. But somewhere along the lines of that, the humanity got lost, and what you had was an industrialized setting of treatment.

Kate Bayer ([00:11:37](#)):

The Polk State Hospital is on, still is, it still exists, but people with disabilities don't go there. Western Center was another one, huge grounds like a college campus, like a small town. There were many buildings on that campus. There were buildings that housed children, that was called the nursery. That's where I was set to work. There were also other buildings that housed women, that housed men.

Kate Bayer ([00:12:09](#)):

The first two weeks that I worked were orientation. Part of the orientation was a tour of the grounds. We were taken into the building that housed the women. I remember the name of it, it was Garden Center. I can see the picture in my mind even today, it was a very large rectangular room, and there were many tables lined up in the room from one end to the other. Sitting around this table were women. Some of them in strait jackets, some of them not, and some of them we're pounding their head on the table and somebody else was trying to bite the person next to her.

Kate Bayer ([00:12:55](#)):

It was just horrific to see that. As the tour went on, we went past the men's building, but we were told this building is off limits, even if you work here, unless you were assigned to this particular building, you cannot go in there. I can't even imagine what the men's building must have been if the women's building was as bad as it was, the men's had to have been so much worse.

Kate Bayer ([00:13:24](#)):

Today, we can reflect on movies that talk about mad houses and depict mad houses. That's pretty much... I think they pretty much nailed it. If you'd go to see any of those movies where those scenes are, that people were cared for, they were fed, but it was not how you should be treating people.

Kate Bayer ([00:13:47](#)):

Now, my own experience in this building that was called the nursery, and again, as I said, I was only permitted to be working with folks who were under the age of 21. I had a caseload of I don't know how many. I do remember some of the specific individuals that I was assigned to work with. I'm happy to talk about that. I don't know what has happened to them since. I don't even remember some of their names, but I remembered them.

Kate Bayer ([00:14:19](#)):

Several that stick out in my mind, one was a six-year-old male, I think his name was Scotty. He was in a purely vegetative state. Pre-infant, he didn't make eye contact. He didn't react to noises. I don't know what caused him to be in the state that he was in. But his educational plan was to receive 20 minutes of

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being held and rocked by me. That's what I did every day with that child. Otherwise, nobody would have picked him up and done that with him.

Kate Bayer ([00:15:01](#)):

There was another young girl, her name was Sally, and she had no eyes. Yes, she was blind but she was blind because she literally had no eyes, and she was also deaf. I don't remember her age. It might have been 11 or 12. She spent her day ... If you recall, there used to be a child's toy called a Sit 'n Spin. She didn't need the toys. She just sat and spun on the floor. She was -- self-stimming was the phrase for it. Didn't want to be touched, was aversive to people touching and handling her.

Kate Bayer ([00:15:50](#)):

There was another young man who had sexual gender male and female. The staff at Polk made... I don't know what was their intent but for a period of time they would dress him as a male and cut his hair, and then they would decide let's make him a female. Then they would grow his hair out and dress him, her as a female. This went on, when I was working with him, he was 18 or 19 years old.

Kate Bayer ([00:16:29](#)):

This had been going on all of his life, where he was a boy for a while and then he was a girl and then he was a boy and then he was a girl. The other thing that they did there, the residents of the hospital who were very high functioning, in many cases may have even been of normal intelligence but got placed in an institution. People put their loved ones in institutions for a variety of reasons, not having anything to do with whether or not they were disabled and needed that. They could have had an unwanted pregnancy or they were just difficult to get along with or who knows. But those folks would be in charge of feeding and bathing these more severely disabled kids and young adults and older adults.

Kate Bayer ([00:17:20](#)):

The room that they did the bathing in, it was a big cement room, and it had huge water stations, and they would literally hose people off, and the water would go down the drain. This was how that was... It was an industrialized assembly line production. It's like, "Okay, it's seven o'clock, we've got to give everybody a bath, let's move them in and hose them off and move them out." The same thing with meals. The folks who were doing the feeding of folks who could not feed themselves would go behind them and hoist them up into their arm and literally just shovel the food into their mouths and it would be pureed.

Kate Bayer ([00:18:07](#)):

They didn't care what order it was going in. There was no attempt made to make it a pleasurable experience for the person. Maybe they choked, often they choked. There were stories of an individual would get a hold of a rubber glove and would choke to death on it. It was just like, well, they swallowed or they ingested a glove and they died.

Kate Bayer ([00:18:37](#)):

In hindsight, the staff there became so immune to what they were seeing that it ceased to be horrifying. It was just, this is our job, and grandpa worked here, and dad worked here, and now I work here and my

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son works here, and this is the livelihood of the town. Nobody was saying this is abnormal. When we came from the university, we were very much resented as outsiders coming into their environment and trying to tell them how better they could do things. They didn't like us there, they weren't cooperative with us being there. It was an unpleasant for many reasons, work environment.

Mary Hartley ([00:19:31](#)):

Okay, I'm going to go back just a little bit.

Kate Bayer ([00:19:34](#)):

Okay.

Mary Hartley ([00:19:35](#)):

In 1972, was Right to Education. Can you say something to that effect about how this emerging field of special education intersected with this time that you were in school the PARC Consent Decree happened. That was prior to IDEA. That was the first state to do that. Can you talk a little bit about, here you are in school and you're at this historic moment.

Kate Bayer ([00:20:19](#)):

I think it was just a random intersection that took place. The historic movement was happening, regardless of what I was doing. I just happened to be someone who was pursuing a completely different career and couldn't get a job in that career. Fate intervened and I got the call instead of some other social studies grad who didn't get a job, and I was the one who went. Maybe others got the call too.

Kate Bayer ([00:20:55](#)):

I happened to be in the right place at right time, at the right university. If I had been at Indiana or Slippery Rock, things might have been different, but because Clarion had this relationship with Polk State Center and had this particular professor who was doing work there, and I intersected with that, that I ended up there. Otherwise, I think I would have gone in a completely different direction, would never have had the experiences.

Kate Bayer ([00:21:57](#)):

In 1972, the PARC Consent Decree occurred, and that made the difference. It made the difference I'm sure in what was being offered at Clarion. It made the fact that the intermediate units needed to have people providing education to everyone with a disability regardless of whether they lived with their parents, there were no group homes or if they lived in a state hospital. That was the magic moment.

Mary Hartley ([00:23:00](#)):

Can you talk any more about any educational or curriculum goals that were in place that you had to execute? Can you explain a little bit about the process? Because we know with IDEA like today, we know we have an IEP, and we have a process and goals. Let's go from there, and if you could talk a little bit about that.

Kate Bayer ([00:23:26](#)):

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Well, I'm not sure. I know I did have goals for the individuals that I was working with. How that was written up, I don't recall. I know that if you were a resident of a state hospital like Polk, there was copious amounts of paperwork. People had... They had regular meetings about the folks under their care. Again, it was a medical model. There were doctors there, it was very medically focused.

Kate Bayer ([00:23:58](#)):

I'm sure there was something, but I don't recall. I know I would have had to have done something for the intermediate unit. But what that was, I just don't remember.

Mary Hartley ([00:24:08](#)):

Were there any other children that you worked with that actually met some educational goals that you felt you were excited about the process?

Kate Bayer ([00:24:16](#)):

I wasn't at Polk long enough to see that. To be there for nine months when someone had been neglected educationally for 18 or 19 years was not going to do it. I don't recall anyone there that I worked with that I saw and felt other than from bringing to my interactions with them, compassion, and caring, that this was someone who I could care about the person and express that and maybe nobody ever had.

Kate Bayer ([00:24:53](#)):

They were getting good physical care. They were giving good medical care. I'm sure some of the people that worked with them cared about them, but maybe not as a person, it was different. At least they got that from the limited time that I was able to intersect with them, before I went on. I was only there for that one nine-month period, and then I got myself transferred to a primary class in Clarion, which was a much more beautiful experience.

Mary Hartley ([00:25:30](#)):

When you were at Polk, can you just talk about what your day to day work looked like? You talked a little bit about some of those residents, did you have a caseload?

Kate Bayer ([00:25:41](#)):

Yes, I had six or eight students that I was supposed to spend time with every day. I've talked about a couple of them. The rest, I don't remember very well, other than the fact that they were all significantly disabled with severe needs. I do remember one other person and I believe it was a female. They called them cart kids, because they never left their wooden carts that they were in.

Kate Bayer ([00:26:17](#)):

The person, it may have been a male, I don't remember, but they had hydrocephaly, which is fluid leaks into the brain and the brain, it just gets... The head was the size of a pumpkin. It was so large the person did not have the musculature to hold their head up in a sitting position, so they had to be reclining. Of course, cognitive functioning was practically nil for this person.

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Kate Bayer ([00:26:47](#)):

That was another person that, what do you do with a person like that? You may provide some sensory stimulation, they're not cognitively aware, they're not recognizing you, they're not even awake. Those were difficult... You're trying to get a response from someone when you're probably not, and the life expectancy was minimal at that point.

Mary Hartley ([00:27:15](#)):

Can you talk a little bit about the elderly woman you met?

Kate Bayer ([00:27:57](#)):

Okay. When I rejoined the workforce and worked for what was then Allegheny East Mental Health Mental Retardation Services, and is now Milestone Centers. Allegheny East was in the business of opening group homes and providing day services to people with severe disabilities. One of the women that we served, whose name I don't recall, and if I did, I wouldn't say it anyway, Allegheny East brought her out of Polk State Center as a 60, 70 year old woman, and moved her into one of their group homes.

Kate Bayer ([00:28:35](#)):

When the woman was about 80 years old, her daughter found her and the story was that when this woman was a teenager, she had a love affair with a young man, and he went off to World War I. She was pregnant, but he didn't know it. Her family took the baby from her, placed her at Polk and they raised her daughter.

Kate Bayer ([00:29:05](#)):

The woman lived at Polk all of her adult life, and of course, was given a diagnosis. If you think about it, if you were institutionalized and you shouldn't have been, you would probably act a little crazy yourself, and then you would be given medication so you stopped acting crazy. That's what happened to her.

Kate Bayer ([00:29:32](#)):

When her child became an adult, and started looking into her parentage... The other thing that happened was the young man came back from the war, went looking for her, and was told she's dead. Didn't know anything at all about a child. But the child grew up and decided they wanted to find their parents and the child found the father and told him what had happened, and they found the mother.

Kate Bayer ([00:29:59](#)):

The woman at that point in time, had been brought back into the community by Allegheny East and was living in a group home and finally got to meet her daughter. It was a beautiful end to the story because they did have those last years where they had a relationship. But that's what happened to people. These state hospitals became a place where if you had somebody that you wanted to get out of your life, especially if it was a woman, I think it only took one or two physicians to sign a statement that you needed to be placed in an institution for your own protection and off you went. I'm sure there's historical backup to that. I've met such a person.

Mary Hartley ([00:30:51](#)):

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Wow. Okay. Let's go back a little bit to Plum Borough and working in the classroom, what you did after Polk. Can you talk about that?

Kate Bayer ([00:31:04](#)):

Yes. After Polk, I got married, and my husband got a job here in Pittsburgh and we moved here. Somehow or other, I ended up teaching for one year in a learning disabilities class in Plum Borough, and I didn't like it. I didn't like it at all. The children I was trying to teach, aspired to go into the [coal] mines with their dads and their uncles, and they weren't interested. We had not developed how you teach kids with dyslexia, and other learning disabilities into the science that it is today.

Kate Bayer ([00:31:43](#)):

There wasn't the support there to figure out how do I reach this kid who can't read because he sees everything backwards, but he wants to go into the mine with his dad and his uncles, and he doesn't want to be here? It was just distasteful. I walked away from that, I decided I'd rather stay home and have my own kids, which is what I did. If I ever go back to teaching, I will never go back to teaching this type of education, and I didn't. It just didn't appeal to me, and I never went back that way. Now, I have a grandson who has that same dyslexic problem, but his mother is doing nicely with that. That's how I ended up working for Allegheny East in 1985.

Mary Hartley ([00:32:32](#)):

You answered my next question. So, very good. You've said that many co-workers you've met in disability services through the years are people like yourself who fell into it and remained for their whole careers, even when they had opportunities to go into other types of work. Say more about this observation. What kept you in the field for so many years?

Kate Bayer ([00:32:52](#)):

Yes, personally, one of my very best friends, who is now deceased, she was a writer and an English teacher. I said, "Hey, come on down, we could use temporary help down here at Oakmont. She lived in Oakmont. She came down and got involved and fell in love with it and did the same thing that I did, went back to school and got a master's.

Kate Bayer ([00:33:17](#)):

Looking around at the people that I knew, most of them never set out to work in the field of disabilities. A lot of them wanted to teach. It wasn't as easy to get a teaching job then as it may be now, or they heard about it through somebody else and decided it fit with, it was flexible. You could work... It was Monday through Friday, it was nearby. If you got into residential work, that was even more flexible. If you had a family, you could work around your family schedule. They just got into it.

Kate Bayer ([00:34:00](#)):

Once they met the people, fell in love with the people, then they were hooked. It was the people. I have said, I got more out of working with people with disabilities than I ever gave to them. They gave much, much more back to me than I ever gave to them.

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Mary Hartley ([00:34:21](#)):

Thank you. You were talking a little bit earlier about the people who were in the field before this revolution happened and community based services, and how they operated when they were caring for people. You can't judge those people of the past by today's standards, but can you talk a little bit more about that? What those differences were? What the thinking was, by the time you worked in community based services versus the times when other people were working?

Kate Bayer ([00:35:02](#)):

I think it goes back to the fact that prior to community based services, the focus of the field was a medical model. That's how they treated people based on what was their physical condition, and how do we maintain that or improve it or keep it from deteriorating?

Kate Bayer ([00:35:23](#)):

There wasn't a lot of thought put into quality of life issues. That is a more recent term. I don't think it's really fair to judge them because quality of life was outside their paradigm. They weren't thinking about that. They were thinking, this person is under our care, we've bathed them, we've seen to their medical needs, we've fed them and they're not living in Bedlam, as they would have been in the 19th century, so we've done a good job. That was all they knew. They didn't think, is there a better way? Just didn't enter their minds to think about it that way.

Mary Hartley ([00:36:12](#)):

I have a couple little historical questions I just want to throw into this time period, 1972. You remember that people were working at the institution helping others, right? Were they paid a penny a day?

Kate Bayer ([00:36:26](#)):

I don't believe so. That I don't know. I don't really know the specifics of that. My gut feeling is they weren't, but I don't know that for sure.

Mary Hartley ([00:36:37](#)):

Okay.

Kate Bayer ([00:36:39](#)):

One other thing though, I'd like to add about the state hospitals and state centers, they were contained communities, people couldn't go... The residents couldn't get off the grounds. However, the residents had free roam of the grounds if they were able to do so. When I was working in the deinstitutionalization movement in the '80s, we ran into that when we were trying to bring people out. Many of them, it's like, do you have an opportunity for them to garden? They worked in the greenhouse, on the grounds of the state center. They're used to walking around, and how are you going to see that they're safe in the community? How are you going to see that they get to do something they love to do?

Kate Bayer ([00:37:30](#)):

We would write in all of the plans that we would put in for folks that we wanted to serve, that we were going to provide an opportunity for them to garden, for them to go shopping, for them to go to movies,

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because they had that degree of freedom on the grounds of Polk State Hospital, that they did not have on the streets of Oakmont, or Plum Borough or anywhere where they could just walk out on the street and be hit by a car. There were safety issues with that. It was a something that had to be looked at for, we were assuming the responsibility by bringing them into the community, how are we going to keep them safe without infringing on their rights to privacy and to doing what it was that they wanted to do?

Kate Bayer ([00:38:24](#)):

You exchange some things in exchange for others. Living in the community was still better than living in an institution, even though you were still somewhat controlled. Some people couldn't go to the store by themselves because they couldn't go to the store by themselves safely. So, they had to have staff take them. They couldn't drive a car, they didn't have a license, they didn't have the cognitive ability to drive a car. So, they were still dependent on staff, but the freedom was there.

Mary Hartley ([00:38:54](#)):

Great. Can you talk a little bit about the changes you've seen in generations of people with disabilities over these 45 years? People do things today that would have been impossible 45 years ago.

Kate Bayer ([00:39:07](#)):

I have an excellent example of that that's recent. Our youngest daughter and husband live in Olney, Maryland, and they live in a very lovely community that has its own pool. Last summer, we were down there babysitting our granddaughters and going to the pool. One day when we were at the pool, there was a young Down syndrome man talking to the lifeguard and swimming. You would have been hard pressed, other than him obviously being Down syndrome, he was doing nothing that indicated that he was disabled in any way, shape or form.

Kate Bayer ([00:39:44](#)):

I looked at him and I thought 40 years ago, this would not be. You would have been probably institutionalized or certainly restricted, segregated, but it's clear that this young man, and was probably 18, 19, 20, he had to have been completely mainstreamed, just by watching him. There was nothing unusual about him, other than he physically looked like he had Down syndrome. That was amazing to me. That made me feel very good that I had some small part of making that happen for that young man, and who knows how many others.

Mary Hartley ([00:41:19](#)):

Can you go through a little bit of your history and your work at Allegheny East, and from where you started and where you ended up, and your process.

Kate Bayer ([00:41:33](#)):

Okay. I walked into an Allegheny East day program in Oakmont in 1985. That was the first time I gave any thought to the fact that people with developmental disabilities became adults and left the school system. They were all around me and some of them they came up to me and wanted to talk to me. I guess I fell in love with that program, and then went to work there. I was a direct care worker, I was an instructor, and I was responsible for writing goal plans and doing basic teaching, and working with things

like cooking, doing laundry, personal care skills, brushing teeth, just the things that I we knew then they were going to need to live in the community somehow, either in a group home or with their parents, or maybe hopefully by themselves.

Kate Bayer ([00:42:40](#)):

I did that for five years, and I had a wonderful time. I loved it. I loved every minute of it. I never dreaded going to work, I had the best time at work. Made many great friends there. Then, about five years was my life cycle, and I needed some kind of change. I decided I thought I'd like to be a case manager. An opportunity came up again with Allegheny East. I moved into the case management end of things. That gave me a different viewpoint, because I had a caseload of folks who it allowed me to interact with their families in certain ways that I wasn't able to do before, and be the oversight of, were they getting the most appropriate services that they needed to have? If they needed to be having a different level of service, how can I help this family get that for them?

Kate Bayer ([00:43:40](#)):

This memory just popped into my head. I had one family call me. It was a Monday morning and I went to my office, and there was a phone call from a family from somebody on my case list and they said, "I'm so and so. You're so and so's brother. Our mother died last night. I'm not taking care of my brother, I'm bringing him down to you. He'll be right down." There we were. We had a person who could not care for himself literally dropped on the doorstep of Allegheny East Mental Health and Mental Retardation on South Avenue in Wilkesburg. You need to find a place for him because I'm not taking care of him.

Kate Bayer ([00:44:23](#)):

That was the schedule then for that day. The whole unit jumped in, where are we going to find a place? We've got to find... That was how life was professionally sometimes working with emergency placements for individuals, or individuals who were so unmanageable in their home that you would need to find somewhere they could be safe and go through a 302 process with Western Psychiatric, which was a long involved. You had to get them committed to Western Psychiatric and get them evaluated, and then a social worker would have to try to help you find a place where they could be safe. In some cases, it was not to return to their family, that their family couldn't manage them.

Kate Bayer ([00:45:16](#)):

That was all part of that... Again, when the state hospitals were running, it wasn't an issue because they just managed them there, and if they needed a psychotropic or whatever, the doctors just wrote for it, and they gave it to them, and that was that. Now, you're in the community and things don't quite work that way. But there were still ways that could be found to make sure that people stayed safe. Sometimes you disagreed with that, but in some cases, the person was... It was clear to even me that his mom can't care for him anymore, because he's not responding to her and he's mobile and aware enough that he can be out and come to harm himself.

Kate Bayer ([00:46:03](#)):

You had to do what you had to do. That was some of those growing pains of moving from a completely hospital based medical model into one that was community based quality of life model for people.

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Where it is today, I've been out for five years, so I don't know. I'm sure it's continued to move on the quality of life continuum from what I've seen and what I know.

Mary Hartley ([00:46:30](#)):

Great. Then after being a caseworker?

Kate Bayer ([00:46:33](#)):

Okay. I was a caseworker for about 18 months, and then something unusual came to Allegheny East. There was a Goodwill of Southwestern Pennsylvania who is still in operation today. They're in Lawrenceville. They have a wonderful, wonderful program. They were on the South Side. The folks who could do workshop work went there. But South Side there was a problem with the folks who lived in... The Goodwill of South Side also had a Goodwill in the East Hills. Those individuals who went to the East Hill's Goodwill were not going to the South Side. Their parents put their foot down and said, "We are not sending our sons and daughters." They were very beloved, the sons and daughters, I knew all of them. "We're not sending them to the South Side on a bus. That's not safe for them."

Kate Bayer ([00:47:34](#)):

Frankly, I agreed with them. I couldn't take a bus to the South Side. That made sense to me. I understood why they didn't want their sons and daughters taking a bus from Penn Hills to the South Side. They agitated at the county, Allegheny County level, and they agitated with the Board of Allegheny East Mental Health, Mental Retardation, that we want Allegheny East doing a workshop for our sons and daughters. They're our home agency. We know them. Our case managers are there. We trust them. We demand that you, the county, give them the funds to open up a workshop.

Kate Bayer ([00:48:13](#)):

The county did just that. Allegheny East opened up a program in Monroeville in the industrial park, it is still there to this day, and they began a workshop. The folks went. I was part of that, opening that program up, I was the program specialist and I brought them all in. We had somebody who went out and got paid work and brought that in. As I said, it is a very successful program, it's still there today, which, workshops, there are not as many as there used to be.

Kate Bayer ([00:48:52](#)):

The fact that it's still there is, their day program is very successful day program. They take individuals who have some really significant disabilities into those programs and work with them. I was part of that.

Mary Hartley ([00:49:32](#)):

Just a question, if you could lace this in there, were there people who left the workshop?

Kate Bayer ([00:49:43](#)):

Okay. That's the next part of my story and their story moved along together. At the time, I was getting my master's degree from the University of Pittsburgh in severe disabilities. It was a program run by Dr. Steve Lyon, and I think he's still at the University of Pittsburgh, but I don't believe the program is. Part of that was, I was a big, big, big believer in the fact that people with severe disabilities could work. That

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drove me. I absolutely believed that. Supported employment was my cup of tea, and I jumped into that, and I advocated for that.

Kate Bayer ([00:50:28](#)):

When Allegheny East got the money to do that, I was the person they put in charge of setting it up. We didn't have a job coach, but we hired one, and she's still a dear friend of mine to this day. In fact, she's the director of the program at Milestone that I used to run. We got a job coach and we went out and we actually were handed four or five people that were disabled and working in the communities. One was a young man, he worked at the Arby's in Monroeville on Route 22. There were two or three others.

Kate Bayer ([00:51:01](#)):

We got handed these folks and it's like, go work with them, make sure they keep their jobs. We just built on that. There was money coming through the pipeline from the state to build supported employment. We went for all that money, and we got the money. At one point, we had nine job coaches placing people. I believe now they have four or five, it's whittled down, but I think the last I was in contact with anyone, they had four or five job coaches who made sure that... People that had been working for 20 years, people with disabilities doing wherever they were in the community.

Kate Bayer ([00:51:41](#)):

That was really the most rewarding thing, to see people get jobs, to see them get paychecks, to see them live as independently as they could live, and really have quality of life. My boss, who is deceased, her name was Barbara Conniff. She was an old social worker. Barb one day... Our Milestone had a program here in Lawrenceville called Everyone an Artist, and they don't have it anymore. But at the time, it was people with disabilities were showing talent with art.

Kate Bayer ([00:52:20](#)):

We had a show at the... I can't remember the name, but it was Art Center downtown on the Boulevard of the Allies. Barb stood there looking at their art, and said, "This is why we brought them out of the institution. This is..." It was all about quality of life for her, and that she strongly, strongly believed people should not be institutionalized.

Kate Bayer ([00:52:47](#)):

That was the basis for our agency, that was our mission statement. She believed that if you didn't believe that, you weren't working for her. She would find that out and you would be gone, because that was what we were about to do, was to make sure people had quality of life living in the community, and their group homes are everywhere in the Penn Hills Eastern suburban area, Monroeville, Penn Hills, Wilkins. The day program is in Monroeville so they're still a big player in this area.

Mary Hartley ([00:53:23](#)):

Was there another part of your career after that?

Kate Bayer ([00:53:32](#)):

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I went from being a direct care worker to being a case manager, to being a program specialist when we opened the workshop. Then I became an assistant director. Then somehow or other, I wandered into... It started with writing grants, and then I wandered into development, and started educating myself as to what it meant to be a fundraiser. Got my certified fundraising executives certificate, and became the director of development and marketing, and working with donors and people making donations which you have to believe in the mission. If you're going to ask people to give you money, you better believe in what you are doing.

Kate Bayer ([00:54:33](#)):

As a member of the senior staff, I had to go to board meetings for many, many, many years. When the agency was deciding they wanted to have somebody do fundraising, the board looked at my CEO and said, "We don't want an outsider coming in here. We want her because she's ours, and she believes in this." I didn't have a choice. It was like, "You're going to go do fundraising now, we've got other people that can run these programs, but we need somebody to bring money in so that we're sustainable." That's how I finished out my... Until I retired I was doing development and marketing and promoting the agency that way and promoting the individuals that way without actually working with them directly.

Mary Hartley ([00:55:24](#)):

You said that special education intrigued you because there was a science behind it that if you improved life in a methodical way you could help a person get a better quality of life. Can you talk about the science of special education?

Kate Bayer ([00:55:47](#)):

Yes, and that goes back to Clarion and Dr. Vayda, because that's what he believed in, that yes, you can teach somebody with a severe disability skills so that they have a better quality of life. I don't remember the person who invented the technique, but there was somebody, he used bicycle brakes, and he set out to prove that I can take the most severely developmentally disabled person and teach them how to assemble a bike brake, because I'm using a scientific step-by-step-by-step process. I will break that down into the most minute steps possible, and I will take whatever time is needed, but I can teach that person to put that bike brake back together, and he did.

Kate Bayer ([00:56:36](#)):

It's like, yes, if you have enough patience, and can put enough resources, if you can teach a person to put together a bike brake, which has no purpose outside of braking a bicycle, then I can teach them to brush their teeth, I can teach them to wash their hands. I can teach them to set a table. I can teach them to heat soup up or make pudding. I can teach them to dress themselves. I can teach them to go out in the community and be appropriate.

Kate Bayer ([00:57:12](#)):

If I can break it up into enough small minute steps, I can teach them to do that, and they will be able to live in the community as independently as they can live. That was that scientific. Again, I don't remember the fellow's name who actually did that bike brake, but that was the key to it. Because think about it, none of us here could probably assemble... If I gave you the parts to a bike brake, you couldn't put them together, but he could teach somebody with a severe disability to do that.

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Mary Hartley ([00:57:44](#)):

That was functioning. Did you learn education too? Did you learn reading and writing? Did you apply that same thing or did the kids not have that?

Kate Bayer ([00:57:54](#)):

Most of them weren't going to be able to do that, but I believe now they've learned, yes, they can. Many of them can. Prior to the '70s, it's like if you can't fit in with regular first grade, you just don't come to school, so they didn't learn anything. But then after the Right to Education, and you started getting people getting kids in, and parents started demanding mainstreaming, they found out that you can learn a lot of things if you start at the right time, and if you do it the right way.

Kate Bayer ([00:58:33](#)):

Now, it's a completely different story. I've met folks with Down syndrome that can read, and I've even read... I've not seen this myself, but there are some folks with Down syndrome who have absolutely... They've gone to college. That doesn't necessarily mean you have Down syndrome, therefore you have a developmental disability. Most do, many do, but not always. The early intervention is really... They found that with autism too.

Kate Bayer ([00:59:06](#)):

One other thing I'd like to say about autism, I know that many of the people that I worked with had autism, we just didn't call it that. It wasn't a recognized part of the whole scale of developmental disabilities, but that's, in fact, they were autistic. In fact, had they had early intervention would probably have never seen our organization or received our services, they would have just been out, living their lives as they should.

Mary Hartley ([00:59:35](#)):

I'm just amazed at the trajectory of your career. You have seen every developmental stage of the process of how to serve people with disabilities and support them.

Kate Bayer ([01:00:12](#)):

Having entered the field purely by accident and fate, and seeing some really misguided, inhumane treatment of people, all the way to learning and knowing firsthand that disability is a misused term because we all have a disability. It's, I can't find my way around the streets. No matter how many times I drive around Pittsburgh, I never know where I am. My husband's like, "Why don't you know where you are?" We were just down the street two weeks ago and you're acting like you've never seen it before." That's a disability for me, being lost on the streets of Pittsburgh, or just being lost because I can't figure out where I am directionally.

Kate Bayer ([01:01:08](#)):

We all have something about us that isn't working perfectly. Knowing that... Unfortunately, some people have more than their fair share of that, and they really got a load of things that make life challenging for them. But, there are things that they can do, that they should be encouraged to do. Whatever their

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shining star is, you just have to uncover it and let them shine, and they'll bring joy to the people that they come in contact with.

Kate Bayer ([01:01:46](#)):

In hindsight, my dream, I wanted to be a social studies teacher, I never got to do that. I guess it just wasn't meant to be because I ended up doing what probably was the best thing for me in the long run of things. I look back on it with a lot of fondness. It may help me grow professionally, and help me grow as a person. I learned to be more compassionate, more understanding of other people. In today's age, it helps to be more understanding of why is someone acting the way that they are. Maybe there's a reason. Knowing people in my own neighborhood, we just lost one of our long standing community members to long term struggle with mental illness. I understand that and I loved him, he was a beautiful person who enriched my life.

Kate Bayer ([01:02:40](#)):

Being able to see that in other people and be accepting that not everybody... If you think you're perfect, then that's probably your disability that you think that, and that this quirky person that you see on the street, maybe there's a reason they're acting quirky. Trying to just be a little bit more compassionate towards other people.

Kate Bayer ([01:03:04](#)):

That was, I think the final thing that I took away from working for 28 years with people who weren't as fortunate physically and mentally as I was.