Table Of Contents

Letter from the Project Director
Mission and Vision
Programs and Impact
Meet our Team
Governance
2023 Funders, Donors, and Partners
Get Involved
Dear Supporters and Allies,

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

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

One of our significant achievements was the successful completion of the Intersection of Race and Disability project, a pivotal initiative that shed light on the intersectional challenges faced by people of color who have disabilities. Through this project, we collected and shared oral histories and personal stories for 12 individuals and organizations, and promoted greater understanding and empathy. Additionally, our storytelling work around the closing of Polk Center resulted in a compelling video and event, providing a reminder of the history of institutionalization, how far we have come, and what works still needs to be done to ensure home- and community-based services for individuals with disabilities and their families.

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

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

As we embark on the journey ahead, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to our supporters, partners, and allies who continue to champion our cause. Together, we will continue to strive for a more equitable and inclusive society, where every individual is valued and truly given equal treatment and opportunity!

With gratitude,

Cindy

Cindy Leonard
Project Director
Mission and Vision

Mission

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

Vision

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

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

---

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

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

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

**YOUTUBE**
- 24 subscribers
- 518 views
Programs and Impact: Intersection of Race and Disability Project

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

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

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

“Being physically disabled is serious, but we still deserve the patience and gentleness at the same time to accept that we are human.”
~ Andrea Coleman-Betts
“I wasn’t leaning on any support system at that time. I was being what they told you being the strong Black woman is. But I learned that that’s not really what it is. At that time, I was trying to do it myself and keep it to myself.”
~ Cicely Moore, speaking about adjustment to her daughter’s epilepsy diagnosis
Programs and Impact: Transforming Community Living – From the Era of Institutions to the Innovative Options of Today

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

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

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

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

**Panel Moderator**
Chaz Kellem, Highmark

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

**CINDY LEONARD**  
PROJECT DIRECTOR

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

**TINA CALABRO**  
OUTREACH & PRESERVATION COORDINATOR

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

**RESEARCH & SCHOLARSHIP STAFF**

ALONNA CARTER-DONALDSON, PROJECT SCHOLAR
HEATHER COWIE, PROJECT SCHOLAR
HEATHER GLASBY, PROJECT SCHOLAR
JESSICA C. NEAL, PROJECT SCHOLAR

**ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF**

VICKY ILLAR, DATABASE MANAGER
Governance

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- Guy Caruso, Ph.D., Institute on Disabilities at Temple University, Western Office
- Max Colecchi, disability advocate
- Anne Madarasz, Senator John Heinz History Center
- Nancy Murray, Achieva
- John Tague, accessible transportation advocate

STEERING COMMITTEE

- Bill Chrisner, former chair, Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council
- Holly Dick, Committee for Accessible Transportation
- Melva Fair, Community Living and Support Services (CLASS)
- Paul Freund, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI Keystone Pennsylvania)
- Sierra Green, Senator John Heinz History Center
- Sylbia Kunst, retired principal, Pittsburgh Public Schools
- Vicki Landers, founder and CEO, Disability Pride PA
- Dana Olsen, Pennsylvania History Coalition Honoring People with Disability
- Chris Phelps, Community Living and Support Services (CLASS)
- Laura Power, graduate student, Indiana University of Pennsylvania
- Emily Ruby, Senator John Heinz History Center
- Matthew Seeley, Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council
- Sally Jo Snyder, Western PA United Methodist Church

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- Dr. Alison Carey, professor and author, Shippensburg University
- Al Condeluci, retired executive director, Community Living and Support Services (CLASS)
- Rory A. Cooper, Founding Director, Human Engineering Research Laboratories
- Mary Evrard, Allegheny County Department of Human Services
- Kate Jirik, board member, Pennhurst Memorial and Preservation Alliance
- Sherri Landis, The Arc of Pennsylvania
- Bob Nelkin, retired president, United Way of Southwest Pennsylvania
- Paul O’Hanlon, co-chair, City of Pittsburgh-Allegheny County Task Force on Disabilities
- Libby Powers, Human Engineering and Resource Laboratories (HERL)
- Bob Schmitt, former director, Transportation Advocacy Project
- Tyler Stump, archivist, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
2023 Funders, Donors, and Partners

**FUNDERS**

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

**DONORS**

Guy Caruso
Nancy Murray
Ellen Wilson

**SUPPORTERS**

**Individual Supporters**
James Conroy
Guy Caruso
Max Colecchi

**Nonprofit Supporters**
Institute on Disabilities at Temple University

Our Supporters Program launched in December 2023. Learn more and join the Consortium today: https://www.wpdhac.org/supporters-program/

**PARTNERS**

Achieva
Senator John Heinz History Center
Temple University Institute on Disabilities

Western Pennsylvania Disability History and Action Consortium
Get Involved

info@wpdhac.org
www.wpdhac.org
facebook.com/WPDisabilityHistory
andActionConsortium/
@wpdhacdisabilityhistorycon7888

HOW YOUR CONTRIBUTION HELPS:

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

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