

family

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Abstract

The Center on Human Policy at Syracuse University in USA works for positive change for people with disabilities. This article by a self advocacy co-ordinator and the person who was his personal care assistant discuss their working life at the Center and what self advocacy has meant to them. **Keyword: Advocacy**

CARING PEOPLE WORKING TO MAKE A CHANGE

By Michael J. Kennedy and Irene Sloane

Michael J. Kennedy, a self advocacy coordinator, began working at the Center on Human Policy on October 13, 1983. Irene Sloane was Michael's personal care assistant, through Syracuse University's work study program, and worked at the Center on Human Policy from 1985 through 1988.

"Together we would like to share our views and feelings about working at the Center on Human Policy due to the enormous personal growth we both experienced as a result of working here. Ever since we began working here, the people at the Center have always been caring and kind, and they continuously work for positive change for people with disabilities, no matter how severe their disabilities may be."

Michael: I feel very honoured to have been chosen for the position of Self Advocacy Coordinator. **Burton Blatt, Douglas Biklen, Debbie Olson and Steven Taylor** didn't hire me for my disability, but for my expertise. This shows that they perceived me as able, not "a poor handicapped person."

The position opened new doors to my life. It helped me know what my rights were and also helped me fight for them. It also helped me teach other people about their rights. Through my position at the Center, I not only meet new people, but also see and understand what other people with disabilities go through. The Center also gave me the opportunity to speak at many conferences and educate people about self-advocacy.

I learned through working with other projects at the Center that we all work toward a common goal: Helping people with disabilities live as normal as possible and teaching parents how to help their children with disabilities achieve this goal.

Irene: I came to Syracuse University's College of Nursing in order to learn how to help people, and through the College of Nursing they taught me a lot about how to respect and help people.

The Center on Human Policy was an additional education experience which stressed helping people to help themselves with dignity and respect. The Center expanded my awareness and helped clarify my feelings on the helping professions. I found a place which reinforced my strong feelings that all people should be treated with respect and also learned that "people are always people first."

Through working with Michael, I learned much about courage and human spirit. Here was a living example of how an individual broke through all labels and barriers that society imposes on people with disabilities. I have learned tremendously important information from Michael and many of the people who work at the Center. Everyone here

really cares about what they value and feel is right and they are doing something to change the "system".

Michael: I feel that working for the Center on Human Policy has helped me contribute to society. Through my position I have been able to speak to other organisations that are associated with people with disabilities. I also have been able to write articles, start a local self advocacy group and testify in front of **Senator Weicker's** Subcommittee on the Handicapped. Overall I have been able to meet a lot of people who see people with disabilities as individuals instead of disabilities.

The people at the Center also see beyond the disabilities. They see all people as human beings no matter what the disability is. The Center is very supportive. They gave self advocacy a chance to grow and did everything possible for its success.

The Center also backed up another disability organisation to fight for accessible transportation. Their support over the last 13 years helped Disabled in Action put the wheelchair lifts on Centro buses through lobbying, letter writing and talking to legislators.

The Center on Human Policy also helped self advocacy in a major way by sponsoring two successful self advocacy conferences.

Both of us feel that we have grown tremendously by working at the Center that provides people with or without disabilities the chance to make a difference in society. We would like to thank all the people at the Center on Human Policy for caring and working to make a change.