

The following is an excerpt from the [National Council on Disability](#) (NCD)'s July 26, 1995 Report to the President and Congress, *Voices of Freedom: America Speaks Out on the ADA* (Americans with Disabilities Act). Reproduced by the Indiana Disability History Project with permission.

## INDIANA SUMMARY REPORT APRIL 25, 1995

**Host organization: Indiana ADA Steering Committee**  
**NCD Member: Larry Brown**

### What Has the ADA Meant to Citizens in Indiana?

Hoosiers gathered at their Town Meeting to let NCD know that the ADA is working for them. In the areas of employment, transportation, and public accommodations the ADA is making a difference in their lives. Some noted particular benefits of the law to people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and others pointed out positive impacts of the ADA on people without disabilities.

"Because of the ADA I got a job at a supermarket," commented **Eve Minton**. "I am so thankful that the ADA exists."

**David Vice**, a mechanic, feels that he owes his job at a major steel company to the ADA. "I wouldn't be working there if it weren't for the ADA," he said. "The company accommodates me, so I can feed my two children and pay my taxes." Vice, a member of United Steelworkers Local 1010, went on to explain that he works with the union to help the company establish compliance standards to provide adequate accommodations for minimal cost. "We've already accommodated several people who work at the mills," said Vice, "and it hasn't been

expensive. In fact, I don't see any costs, except rarely." And, he added, "as a person with a disability, I find ADA one of the best pieces of legislation in recent years."

ADA trainer **Jodie San Pietro** pointed out that employers can save money by providing reasonable accommodations for employees who have become disabled. "It's cheaper to work with an employee to accommodate his or her disability," she said, "than to hire someone else." San Pietro credits the ADA with both saving employers money and with keeping more people with disabilities in the workforce.

The ADA has also made a difference to Indianans in terms of transportation. "Because of the ADA I now have transportation to and from my employment," stated **Sharon Byrnett** in written testimony. Before the ADA, she explained, Indianapolis had a very small paratransit system that allowed few riders. "I could get a ride to my job, but could not get a ride home," she explained. Her husband, who also has a disability, had to pick her up every day, even when a work emergency at his own workplace required him to work late. "Now, because of the ADA" she wrote, "I have the RIGHT AND THE RESPONSIBILITY to use public transportation and to make sure that the law is enforced."

**Larry Snyder**, an ADA consultant, told a surprising story about public transportation in his community of Columbus. In 1992 people with disabilities began asking the Columbus Transit System to use lift-equipped buses. It turned out that ramps had been installed on buses in 1988 during a different administration, "but no one realized they were there because they had never been used," explained Snyder, a wheelchair user. "So the ramps were oiled and they're now in use," he stated. "Now our transportation system is second to none in Indiana!"

Public transportation in Indianapolis has improved dramatically since the ADA's passage, according to **Karen Vaughn of Vaughn &**

**Associates.** "Our paratransit system provides about 400 rides a day," she said, "well over 300 more per day than before the ADA."

Many of the paratransit rides in Indianapolis and other cities are to public accommodations which, thanks to the ADA, are more likely to be accessible. "The ADA has made it possible for me to enjoy my life," stated **Rita Renee Gould**, a single mother who has been paraplegic for six years. "I can shop, go to the beauty shop, and do what everyone else does," she stated. One important reason Gould appreciates being able to get around independently is that she does not want her 12-year old son to be burdened by having to push his mother's wheelchair wherever she wants to go. Gould, who is African-American, believes the ADA is reaching the minority community fairly well but that there are many who still do not understand the extent of the law. "I'm trying to educate," she stated.

While greater access to public accommodations is making life easier and better for people in their own communities, travel is becoming easier as well. One reason for that is the increase in accessible motel and hotel rooms. **Yo Samson** described a recent car trip when she and her friend were looking for an accessible place to spend the night. "We had a hard time finding a place," said Samson, a wheelchair user who is also blind, "not because there weren't any accessible accommodations but because they were all in use!" She attributed the rooms' existence to the ADA.

Sometimes access to public accommodations comes only with great effort. In written testimony, **Suzie Rimstidt** told NCD that she had to fight to get accessible seating at Indiana University basketball games. Because her disability prevents her from climbing steps, Rimstidt wrote to the Sports Department explaining her situation and requesting seats in the front of the bleachers. "In response, and to my consternation," she wrote, "the Sports Department sent me aisle seats 11 steps up,

with no railing or even a wall to hang onto!" Rimstidt then called the Sports Department and was told nothing could be done because all the tickets had been sold. But then when Rimstidt brought up the need to comply with the ADA, "they made far more accessible and safer accommodations for me on a game by game basis."

One group who have particularly benefited from the ADA are the deaf and hard of hearing. **David Reynolds of the Indiana Deaf School** brought a group of middle school students to the Town Meeting. They had been learning about the ADA in school and were eager to offer their opinions about the Act.

**Johnny Mazurkewicz** commented, "I thank the ADA for the state relay service. I can now talk on the phone to anyone I want. It gives me more independence to use the phone." Another student, David Arvey, who goes to the Deaf School half-days and is mainstreamed half-days, thanks the ADA "for mandating interpreters for mainstream students."

Another group of people who benefit from the ADA are people without disabilities. **Russell Goode**, a wheelchair user, cited a study which showed that more than 90% of people will walk to a curb cut rather than step off or onto a curb. And **Alan Spaulding** pointed out that senior citizens who once saw their disabilities simply as aging are now happy to be able to take advantage of curb cuts, assisted listening devices, and other accommodations that help them participate fully in society. "And people without disabilities appreciate automatic doors," Spaulding said, "if their hands are full and they're trying to get into a building."

As **Jodie San Pietro** says, "I look at the ADA as an insurance policy. If I become disabled, I'll know that public accommodations, employment, and state and local government programs are still available to me."

## Common Threads

The following impacts of ADA's first five years were cited by several speakers:

- Many municipal buildings have been made accessible.
- Local transportation for people with disabilities is much better than it was before the ADA.
- People with disabilities feel more confident and more hopeful about their future.
- People with disabilities are more able to get reasonable accommodations to enable them to use their skills in the workplace.
- Many changes that have been made to provide access for people with disabilities have benefited non-disabled people as well.
- The relay service has brought people with hearing impairments into the mainstream where they can communicate by phone with anyone without having to have someone else place their calls for them.

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