



This transcript from the Indiana Disability History Project is under copyright of The Trustees of Indiana University and may be used with permission. Quotes and excerpts must be cited as follows:

Don Melloy, August 15, 2017, interview 101-MI, transcript, Indiana Disability History Project, Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, Bloomington, IN, <https://indianadisabilityhistory.org>

**ORAL HISTORY VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH
DON MELLOY
AUGUST 15, 2017
INTERVIEWER: JENNIE TODD
VIDEOGRAPHER: PEGGY HOLTZ
RECORD ID: 101-DO**

**DM: DON MELLOY
JT: JENNIE TODD
PH: PEGGY HOLTZ
MB: MARGARET BLOME
MLM: MARY LOU MELLOY**

[00:00:10]

JT: Jennie Todd. It is August 15th, 2017. And we are in Indianapolis. And you are?

DM: Don Melloy [assumed spelling] and a longtime resident of Indianapolis, so.

JT: OK. So, what I'd like you to talk about--

PH: Hold on.

JT: OK. So, I'm Jennie Todd again. And you are?

DM: And I'm Don Melloy, father of Cindy Melloy who's developmentally disabled.

[00:00:41]

JT: OK. Don, so you talked about your-- or I'd like you to talk about your experiences with The Arc in the early, early days of how it kind of got going, why it got going, and your role in The Arc?

[00:00:56]

DM: Well, I don't remember the exact dates. It was in late '60s, early '70s when we-- I was on the board-- had been on the board for a very short period of time of the Indiana Arc. And they asked me to work on the objective of developing an Arc in every county in Indiana. And we realized that there was not one in Indianapolis or Marion County. And so that became a primary objective in addition to many trips to other counties after getting off from work to encourage people to form and the advantages of having an Arc in their county, a local Arc.

JT: Can you tell me what a local Arc is and what the advantages would be? For people who don't know what an Arc is, what--

DM: Well, yeah. The association for-- and it's gone through many iterations. It was the Association for Retard Children in the beginning. And that was changed to Retarded Citizens. And that was changed to some other less identifying names. And finally, the state association decided that it was just The Arc of Indiana. And that was the same thing that happened on a national level at the national Arc, Arc of USA, it's called I believe. And in Marion County, we went from Marion County Association for Retarded Children to Retarded Citizens, and then to just The Arc of Marion County. And then the name Noble came in to it. And that had some background with some of the-- our people that were put together in that period of time to form the local Arc.

[00:02:59]

And some of the early meetings were held on what is-- was then known Noble Street. And I think that's where they got the name that is now called I believe College Avenue and it was--

MB: I'm not sure.

DM: Yeah. I think that it was made an extension of College Avenue at some point in time. Regardless, we had the issue that always came up in those days and this was a growth thing in these associations. A huge gap between parents and at that time, these associations were heavy, heavy concentration of parents doing the majority of the-- of volunteer work and paid work in many cases between what was called educable mentally handicapped and trainable mentally handicapped. And I found in going around the state and meeting with organizations, they didn't want to talk to one another. It was rather humorous I thought. But it wasn't humorous to them. And I remember going to one county where I finally got them to agree to have a meeting. And they-- I was all set and I drove up.

[00:04:18]

It was some distance from Indianapolis after I got off from work. And at the very last moment, one of the groups backed out, you know. And they'd-- subsequently over the years though as younger people got involved, I believe they had more influence and they had a great influence on it. And they-- those kind of separations no longer exist.

[00:04:41]

JT: Why did people start creating Arcs? Why were there local associations?

DM: The original focus was to provide programs for children-- handicapped children who were being excluded by the public school systems and generally speaking, concentrated on school-aged children. And in Marion County, the early group, Parents and Friends, I think they were called, even had school that they started for children. But they in themselves had barriers in their minds that it wasn't all handicapped children. There was some distinction between degrees of handicap. And those were artificial barriers that kept rising over the many years of development. But most of them were well intentioned overwhelmingly, well-intentioned people who saw the need to bring together an organization that could exercise influence in the county to get education extended to all handicapped children.

[00:05:59]

And hence we then got into the deal of pushing the-- as it began to grow on a national level in Washington, D.C. in fact, influence coming out of Washington, D.C. was causing local organizations and all the way up to the state level to look at this education of handicapped people in a different light. And it became then almost like a civil rights movement and as much as these children were entitled to the same opportunities for education as anyone else. And so-- And there were many hiccups along the way, many hiccups along the way. But we all-- everyone involved was meeting with the same objectives more or less to get these all passed. And as I think Mary Lou has told you, excuse me, through great effort, this operation child hunt that went on and other activities, interviewing the -- superintendents of every -- in Marion County alone, there's, you know, there were about 11 school districts. And all of that came together when the federal government passed mandatory legislation for special education. And the work that was done in Marion County was very beneficial to that because this county was in a better position then to begin rolling out those programs. And it varied between school distance -- districts tremendously. Some were very willing and excited about this -- needed to be done and others resisted. But over the years, it was a rough bit of effort by everyone but we did get those things done.

JT: I'm going to take you back to some of the-- since The Arc is a national organization, how-- and this is an Indiana history project. How far-- when did Indiana get on the bandwagon? Were they an early Arc member? Were they late to the game? I mean, when did Indiana get involved within Arc movement?

[00:08:27]

DM: Yeah, well the state association was, as I remember, one of the early participants in The Arc movement. But there was a lot of resistance in the state, you know. And we encountered that I don't know if Mary Lou mentioned our experiences when we moved to Columbus, Indiana. They wanted to exclude Cindy. And many, many people all over the state started doing the same kind of things where they could. But there was a local radio station there that had some kind of a women's or ladies breakfast of the morning like broadcast and just people would call in and just talk about their problems and issues they were facing. And she talked to them and got those people interested in this whole movement.

[00:09:30]

And when they-- the schools down there said, well, knowing that we would have trouble doing this, she took it upon herself to encourage the lady that hosted that to say, "How many people out there have handicapped children that they want to send to school?" And this was in reaction to the school corporation that told us well, "If you find me 14 other children and/or 12 other, whatever the number was, and we'll put together a class." And in response to that radio work, I can't remember, was it 35 or--

MLM: Thirty-three.

DM: Thirty-three people came forward with handicapped children. And we got that all set up and the company transferred us and we didn't go back and say we weren't going to be there, Mary Lou-- and that's to be expected in the society that moves people around the way they did.

PH: Go ahead and put your microphone. You don't have to hold it.

DM: I'm sorry. I got that wrapped up in my--

PH: No that's fine.

DM: -- Big feet here somehow.

[00:10:48]

JT: So The Arc wasn't in every county originally?

DM: Not at all.

JT: So do you remember-- when Peggy steps away, we can talk about this. But do you remember how many counties or which counties started them and then how long it took to become in every county?

DM: So far as the numbers, I cannot remember those things at all. They're both and they're on the desk Mary Lou.

MLM: Both of the phones?

DM: Yeah.

JT: We'll just wait a minute.

DM: That's a nice sound to have in the background. [laughing] What are those folks doing?

[00:11:31]

JT: And that's better than my phone.

[00:11:33]

DM: Well you could change it, you know, this-- most of these phones. I had my cellphone, the other one. They don't have an option on here. They played harps. And every time it rings, it'd say I'm getting ready. [laughing]

JT: OK. So when you were in Indiana, there were few counties that had Arcs and then how did it move around?

DM: Well, principally it moved around through the efforts of the committee that was put together to expand it. And the way that happened was I would search out and through The Arc's director at that time and such he had made contacts in other counties and was given names. And I just worked with those people and say, "Hey, let's get together and talk about this, you know." And it was-- it really involved beating the pavement getting out and making the contacts and just talking face to face with people about what we were trying to accomplish. And I don't think any county originated the activity while I was in that capacity to, "Hey, we want to form, come and help us, you know." That didn't happen. We initiated all of these, I recall. And keep in mind that wasn't many, many years ago. And--

JT: So you pretty much went to the counties and help them get started?

DM: Yes.

[00:13:09]

JT: They weren't saying, no, yeah, we're going to do this that works on them?

DM: No, no.

JT: OK. And do you know how long it took to get an Arc in almost every county? Will it take 10 years or 5 years?

DM: I suspect it was close to 10 years before. And I-- they never did evolve into one in every county. What happened was in some counties, you had a consolidation of the counties and they formed an agency for two or three counties, you know. And that was very effective, very effective because the incidences factor in more rural counties is obviously, because the population is lower, was not as great. And therefore you couldn't just find a single agency, but by combining them, they very successful in several of these. And to my knowledge, till today they are.

[00:14:04]

JT: So initially all The Arcs were peer run, lots of volunteers. Do you want to talk about how the-- it kind of went from parent volunteer to having money to hire staff and grow their [inaudible].

[00:14:18]

DM: It started out and you have to give a lot of credit to the United Way and similar community NFPs, not for profits that raised funds for various charitable activities in the county. And they were very instrumental in funding these initial efforts. An example would be the Marion County Association. My figures are not right to the dollar but I recall that our first year as an agency, Marion County, there was a -- our budget was like \$111, 000. And 90, 000 of that came from the United Way. So that's was really what-- now over the years, the fund drives and volunteer efforts. And locally, I have to mention the Broad Ripple Sertoma Club was-- which-- it's not germane to this, is now the largest Sertoma Club in the United States.

You know, those type of organizations are diminishing significantly but they are continuing to grow. And they started out supporting the parents and friends over in the Butler area and have over the years. I think they more-- maybe a year or two ago, they reached over a million dollars that they had contributed to The Arc for these activities. And they even built a house there on that one camp-- campus to they-- where the old Park Tudor School was. And the purpose of that was to teach children-- handicapped children as they get older to live in a house and be responsible for activities in the house and such. So, all of these things were driven by The Arc movement. And The Arc movement goes, as any organization does, goes through phases.

[00:16:28]

There were times when the principal focus was to educate the youngest and the children and bring them on. Then they also moved in to development of sheltered workshops. And then over the years, when mandatory special ed came in, that activity diminished when it came to educating them. Although there still is a significant program that it's called-- I just lost the name of it. What is that part of the where the secretary's kids went, you know? Preschool, preschool. They had a strong preschool program for handicapped children that were identified at birth are there about. And that became a very, very strong program and is active today. And then the cycle is changing on sheltered workshops. They don't like that.

They don't call them that anymore. There's a more and more of an effort to put the adult handicap out in the employment community to work and-- in the community and alongside of normal people with parenthesis, with-- it's hard to judge what is normal in today's world I supposed. But it is. It has been very beneficial in many ways. And we were reluctant to when they said Cindy ought to be in the community working, and very reluctant. I don't know Mary Lou, did you-- you talked about that so I don't need to cover that again. And we, having fought for all these changes and improvements and better things, finally reached a decision on our own to say, you know, if we're going to be out here trying to help the situation, we got to be willing to accept what comes along and at least give it a try.

[00:18:30]

And it was the best thing we ever did. And so-- but the growth has been astronomical, that \$111,000. I don't know now what Noble's budget is but it's in the millions. And that was a good program. And that's been the story all over the state. Now, it takes different forms, you know, Vincennes went on the

form of having a-- they didn't even call it a workshop-- sheltered workshop. They called it an industry. It was their own business. And they had handicapped people and normal people working side by side. And that's been a very successful program down there. So each-- then that's just one I can remember right at this minute. It's all over like that. Now, one of the things that I think has changed and needs more attention is-- has to do with the funding sources.

[00:19:39]

And many agencies though, as the government began to pay more tax dollars into these, which I think was a very appropriate thing to have happened, they relied-- the agencies then relied less and less on parents. And consequently then, new parents were less and less involved. I think the agencies missed something by that. But they're-- most of them are being very successful and are serving a need in the community. And the individual handicapped people that they're serving are the beneficiaries of that. We can always look and find places where it breaks down and that's not limited to agencies that serve the handicapped. That's in all aspects of our life, we'll find areas that break down.

JT: Right.

DM: And things happen that you don't want to happen. But no one, none of these agencies to my knowledge has there even been a case where there was an intentional problem created by one of these agencies. They all seem to step up. And we have met some really outstanding people in these field.

[00:20:59]

JT: Well, one thing I think it would be fun here because we did interview John Dickerson at length, And if you could talk about when John came to apply for the job or interviewing John--

DM: Yeah.

JT: And then kind of his roles through the years if you stayed in touched with it.

DM: Oh we have. We still considered John a very good friend.

JT: OK. So how about the early days of meeting John Dickerson?

[00:21:25]

DM: Well, John came to by-- what is now Noble, or Noble of Indiana or-- I think that's what they call it now, the Marion County Association. And I don't know how long he'd been out of college but not very long. And he was young and energetic as most of these kids, people are, you know. They come in excited about it. And we talked about hiring him, he's good applicant, and so we did, feeling that he would grow as we moved into it. And if there ever was a case of a man who did, it's John Dickerson, you know? John pitched in and now he's had the personality that would challenge the old school all the time. And while many of us-- many folks are going to say, "We don't need this."

[00:22:26]

What's he doing? Coming in here this young kid and telling us things." That's good that he did that because good things happen when you take a look at other outside, the old phrase, thinking outside of the box, you know. Only it's not always going to be the way you think it's going to be. And good things happen. And John was a very good addition to the staff there. And then moved on to the state and did-- and has done an outstanding job as a director of the state. And some of the things you've seen, one the most-- one is up at Muncie, Indiana where they've got that program going with training people in hotel industry staff and such and they even built a hotel in conjunction with appropriate businesses. And I-- to my knowledge has been very successful. And you just-- you have to have people coming in to any organization that are willing to take a look at it from a different point of view.

And I've served on the boards of many agencies and I've served in that role with-- that John had played with us as a staff member in making changes from an old established organization that brought it in to the 21st century or in my case, the 20th century at least. And so that's something that we've always admired about John. Not always that we do agree with him eye to eye, but I would be very disappointed if that were not true. Just because you don't agree readily with someone does not mean that both of you don't have good ideas about how to get the job done. And so that's been a real experience for us and so.

[00:24:29]

JT: Great, sounds good. Do you have anything else that [inaudible]?

[End of interview]