

Celebrating the Life and Legacy of Ed Roberts

Ed Roberts was a pioneering disability advocate striving for autonomy, dignity, and respect for people with disabilities.

DETROIT, MICHIGAN, UNITED STATES, March 26, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Ed Roberts was a

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Steve Locke

pioneering disability advocate striving for autonomy, dignity, and respect for people with disabilities. January 23rd is recognized as Ed Roberts’ day in honor of his leadership as the “Father of Independent Living.” As disability advocates and allies, MiSILC is proud to carry the torch for his movement and eager to celebrate his legacy.

Roberts contracted polio at age 14 in 1953, which resulted in quadriplegia and required him to [sleep in an iron lung](#). He became a disability advocate in high school, when

administrators threatened to withhold his diploma because he hadn’t completed drivers’ training or physical education. He would later become the first wheelchair user to attend the University of California - Berkeley and formed the university’s first disabled student group, known as the “Rolling Quads,” which began to challenge stereotypes about disability and barriers on campus.

Roberts’ tenacity stemmed from an unwavering belief that choice is the foundation of freedom, and that people with disabilities deserved the same autonomy and control over their lives as anyone else. This belief is the basis of the Independent Living philosophy and helped transform the perception of disability from the “medical model,” which viewed people with disabilities as “problems” that needed to be “fixed,” to a social one that views disability as a lack of access caused by societal barriers.

Roberts built a movement around the quest for dignity, autonomy, and independence for people with disabilities, opening the first Center for Independent Living (CIL) in Berkeley in 1972. The center was revolutionary as the first program run by and for people with disabilities, and provided peer counseling, housing assistance, vocational training, and other services empowering people with disabilities to live in their communities instead of institutions.

Over the past 50 years, the Independent Living movement has had a profound impact on improving the quality of life for people with disabilities. It influenced the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 and played a crucial role in changing public perceptions, celebrating disability as diversity, and affirming the value of people with disabilities.

Today, Centers for Independent Living exist worldwide, providing crucial resources and promoting Roberts' vision of a society that embraces difference, cultivates talent, and protects individual autonomy for people with disabilities. Ed Roberts' commitment to equality and inclusion has changed our world for the better and made the future even brighter for people with disabilities.

Tori Sullivan-Cortez

Michigan Statewide Independent Living Council

+1 313-644-2048

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