



SEPTA's Culture of Disdain for the Disabled

by Zach Lewis

It has been three months since the Local 234 SEPTA operators returned from their strike. Governor Rendell, Congressman Brady, and Mayor Nutter have moved on to other important things, and people are no longer stranded—except for my community, the disabled.

At about 5:00 PM on a rainy Friday the 13th, two Route 66 Buses passed by me and a co-worker, both of us power wheelchair users. The first driver stopped, opened the door, and claimed the bus was full—although there was clearly space in the rear. I suggested that the driver request that the able-bodied passengers in the



disabled seats move to the open seats in the back so that we could get on the bus. Without asking the passengers occupying the accessible seats, he told us, "they will not move", then abruptly closed the door and pulled off. A second bus approached; the driver made eye contact with me, and kept going. I then got in the middle of the street to guarantee that the next bus would either hit me or stop.

Correction: In the Fall 2009 issue of Liberty Works, the cover story, *BITE is Making a Mark*, was authored by Faith Haeussler, but was mistakenly attributed to Jennifer Barnhart. Apologies, Faith!

Continued on p.2

This is nothing new for a disabled commuter, who already has limited options. While SEPTA has made many of the buses in their fleet usable for people in wheelchairs, they still fail to achieve the minimum level of accessibility as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. To make matters worse, SEPTA has managed to undermine its own accommodation efforts. In determining that the now-accessible buses sufficiently meet the needs of many people with disabilities who were formerly eligible to ride CCT Para-transit—itself a flawed, inconvenient, and segregated alternative—SEPTA has cut many people with disabilities off from CCT as their primary means of transportation. I actually prefer riding a bus because it saves taxpayers money, does not require advanced scheduling, and provides an integrated transportation environment. But many of those who have been denied Para-transit service because SEPTA has wrongly assessed that these individuals can safely and comfortably use an accessible bus don't have the luxury of a choice.

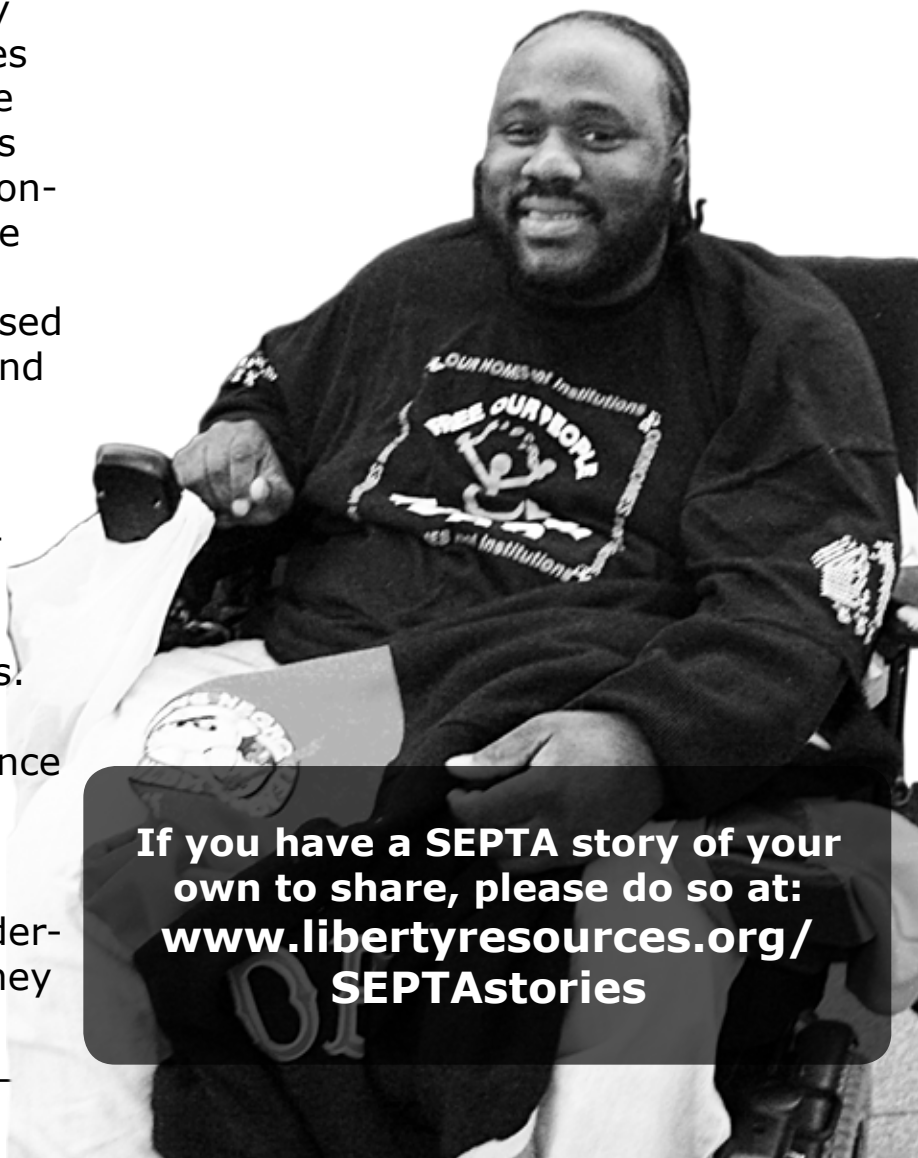
We complained to SEPTA management. SEPTA's General Manager Casey told us that drivers should accommodate disabled passengers. He then told us that he could do nothing to improve driver compliance and etiquette because of SEPTA's contract with the union.

We have supported the SEPTA underdogs in their efforts to get what they

need to live and what they deserve as laborers. But it's hard to understand why the same SEPTA underdogs can't find it within themselves to help us get what we need to live and what we deserve as laborers—and let us get on the bus.

About the author:

Zachary Lewis is a member of the Philadelphia Chapter of ADAPT. ADAPT is a national grass-roots community that organizes disability rights activists to engage in non-violent direct action, including civil disobedience, to assure the civil and human rights of people with disabilities to live in freedom. ★



**If you have a SEPTA story of your own to share, please do so at:
www.libertyresources.org/SEPTAstories**

Get to Know LRI's Homemaker Services

by Heather Lawson

Picture it: 2004 at Liberty Resources. I was a new Supports Coordinator trying to figure out what eligibility criteria was and how services worked. I would prescreen Consumers for community services only to find out that there was only a need for housekeeping. Where was I to turn? Where was I to refer these Consumers? The response was "refer them to the Homemaker Services Program." What was this Homemaker Services program? I was unsure what the program could offer Consumers, and equally unsure of who to call to get answers. Was the elusive five year waiting list an urban legend?

Picture it: 2010 at Liberty Resources. Now, in my role as Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Program Manager, I have a better answer for our Consumers. Through the years the Homemaker Services Program mystery has been solved, thanks in part to Liberty Resources receiving the Homemaker Services Program contract in 2007 through the Office of Supportive Housing.

The following information we now know to be true about the Homemaker Services Program: Services are provided by Philadelphia's Office of Supportive Housing and are financed by the Human Services Development Fund. The program serves Consumers in Philadelphia County who may be

at risk of nursing home placement or even eviction. The Homemaker Program provides Consumers with minimal personal assistance, chore services, meal preparation, and light housekeeping in their home within the community. Through the contract, Liberty Resources is able to provide services to forty Consumers while maintaining an active Wait List. While awaiting services, LRI HCBS staff contact Consumers on a monthly basis to note any change in need or service requested.

The Homemaker Services Program has two Supports Coordinators, Philip Lefebvre and Mary Beth Morgan, whose jobs are to provide case management assistance to enrolled Consumers. During bi-monthly visits, both Philip and Mary Beth have worked with Consumers to establish Independent Living (IL) goals and offer tools to use towards goal achievement. For example, they have played a key role in supporting Consumers' IL goals through referrals to the Center's Independent Living Services Department (ILS), the Academy, work places, and volunteer opportunities. We have seen many Consumers make great accomplishments over the years!

If you would like additional information about the Homemaker Program, please contact LRI's HCBS Intake Unit at 215-634-2000, extension 557. ★

Celebrating the Life of Karin DiNardi

The Liberty family and the Independent Living Movement lost an amazing friend, advocate, and warrior on January 10, 2009. Karin truly embodied everything for which LRI stands. Her passion and determination made a definite impact in the fight for independent living, and on all who had the good fortune of knowing her.

"My favorite memory happened during an LRI Phillies baseball outing. I introduced my brother to Karin, and he noticed that her beverage was on the ground. He asked her if she was thirsty and wanted help with her drink, and she said yes. Later, an usher walked by and asked if everything was okay. Karin said no, and asked the gentleman if he could take her to see someone about cup holders so that persons in wheelchairs didn't have to put their drinks on the ground. He was very helpful and took Karin to see someone quickly. The entire conversation probably lasted more than 30 minutes, and Karin wasn't sure what would happen next.

My brother and I attended another baseball game later that summer and there were cup holders in our seating area. I inquired about when they were installed and the hostess stated that a lady in a wheelchair had talked to a person in charge, and they were installed the next week. I have no doubt that Karin was the driving force behind the cup holders.

Karin was of the belief that advocacy never takes a holiday. I am proud to call her my friend forever. She will be greatly missed but never forgotten."

—Ann Kleinschmidt

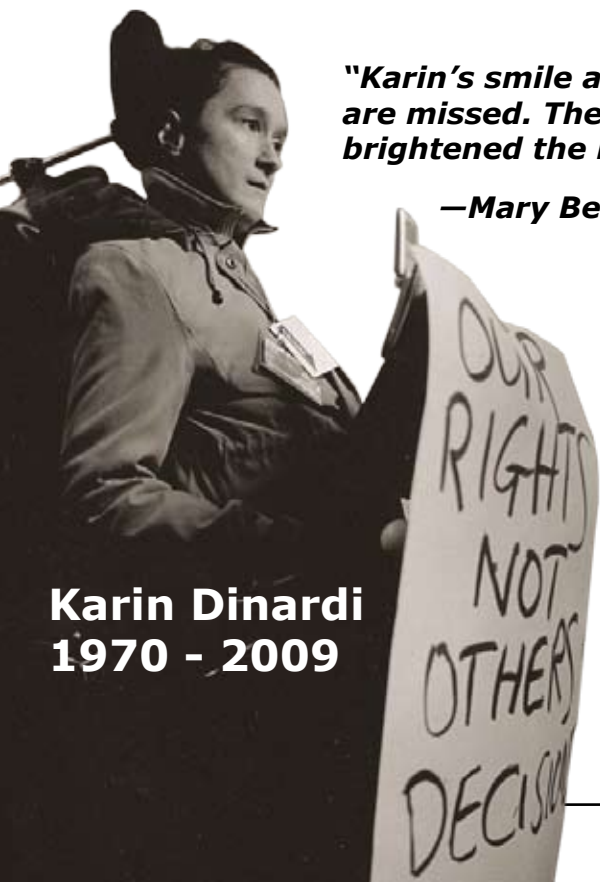
"Karin's smile and humor are missed. They always brightened the moment."

—Mary Beth Morgan

"Karin always had a true love for shoes and fashion. She would always stop and ask me where I got my shoes, or if I was getting rid of any shoes that she would be able to have a look at before I got rid of them, as we shared the same size. She loved this one pair that I gave her—a pair of boots with a chunky heel. She always stated that they made her feel sexy! She was a great advocate for people with disabilities in life, she will continue to be a great advocate for people with disabilities, even in death. Good-bye, my fellow shoe lover. Save me a pair for my arrival later in life!"

—Bazhena Barker

Karin Dinardi
1970 - 2009



"Whenever I wanted to perform an anonymous act of kindness, I could always enroll Karin as my co-conspirator. Karin frequently took consumers with her to concerts and special events to give them a taste of true independent living. Road trips were always interesting because they usually ended in some kind of mayhem or adventure. Karin was known to zap a paratransit van or two at a moment's notice and then hold a press conference about it. Life was always unpredictable and fun when she was around."

—Linda Dezenski

"Karin was the best friend I could ever ask for. She taught me a lot. She taught me about life. She taught me how to feel as a disabled person. And she taught me how to fight for other disabled people."

—Sonya Pascone

"Karin was a great friend in grade school. We believed in following our dreams for independence and freedom. It was seen in the things she collected and loved. Angels were the images for dreams and or wishes. Unicorns and butterflies an image for freedom."

—Michelle McCandless

"Going out with Karin was like going out with any other human being I know. She didn't let her disability interfere with her life. She always wanted me to become independent, even when I was living with my parents. I remember how excited she was when she and I went to see Bon Jovi live. I will surely miss Karin and the good times we shared."

—Tracey Brock

*For more memories of Karin, visit:
www.libertyresources.org/rememberingkarin*

Arts Studio Welcomes Kong Ho, Mural Artist



IAS Executive Director Barbara Gregson, Mural Artist Kong Ho, and LRI CEO Tom Earle at a January 11 welcoming reception for Kong Ho, who also gave a presentation on mural design and painting.

The Independence Arts Studio received a Partners for the Arts Project grant of \$1,920 from Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, The Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, and PECO to put towards the design of a mural for the outside wall of the Sovereign Building.

The design phase will be done by Kong Ho, a Chinese muralist from Hong Kong and professor of mural arts at the University of Pittsburgh, Bradford campus, working with a committee of Consumers and IAS artists.

For more information, please email Barbara Gregson, BLGregson@gmail.com or German Parodi at GermanParodi@LibertyResources.org.

The Transition to Freedom Fund:

Ensuring Independent Living for people with disabilities, one liberation at a time.

In support of our mission to help Philadelphia's disabled community take control of their lives and live independently, Liberty offers a vast array of resources and programs. These services include advocacy, peer support, information & referral, skills training, housing counseling, vocational training, nursing home transition services, attendant care, and supports coordination. The commonality among all of our services and programs is the drive to obliterate barriers to independence in our communities. This is an enormous undertaking, but like anything else, it starts with one person, one barrier at a time.

The right to live independently should be afforded to everyone, and you can help to ensure this right by donating to Liberty's Transition to Freedom Fund. Often, the barrier keeping someone from successfully transitioning to independent living is as simple and as insurmountable as a lack of funds for a security deposit on an apartment, the cost to make a bathroom accessible, or the cost to service a power wheelchair so that the individual can get around the neighborhood. The Transition

to Freedom Fund is used to make grants of up to \$500.00 to individuals to complete their transition. When you give to the Fund, you can be certain that every dollar goes directly to helping a person with a disability transition from a nursing home or other institution to their own home in the community.

Even a small donation can directly ensure success and independence for a person with a disability, who can then manage their own care, keep their own home, make their own decisions, take risks, laugh, love, and live as all Americans are entitled to live.

Please partner with us by mailing your contribution in the attached envelope to the Transition to Freedom Fund. Your donation is greatly needed and appreciated, and will help make real strides toward ensuring everyone's right to live independently. Thank you for your generosity.

Sincerely,



Thomas H. Earle, CEO

The Academy Steps Up Outreach

by Lynne Maleeff

In 2009, The Academy hosted two first-time events that created new relationships in the local community and enhanced our reputation as a pre-vocational school.

On September 23, The Academy held a "Taste Of Technology" open house for disabled veterans. Approximately 50 people attended making the event quite a success, strengthening the Academy's relationship with the veteran community and spurring continued outreach to our veterans.

The open house showcased Liberty Resources Academy, which has customized programs for preparing adults for a variety of careers. These programs build on veterans' existing skills, whether it is transitioning military experience to the civilian job market or the need to use technology to maximize performance, regardless of disability type or severity.

Our keynote speaker was Bill Walsh, a retired U.S. Navy captain, and current District Director for Congressman Joe Sestak (D-PA). Walsh used his personal experience from the military to speak about employment opportunities and transferrable skills from military to civilian life.

"We invited related disabled veteran service providers and other veteran

organizations to attend so we can get to know each other," said Liberty Resources, Inc.'s Academy Program Director, Marie Palladino. "There are so many resources that The Academy and Liberty Resources can provide to our disabled vets." Additional Liberty Resources services such as Housing, Advocacy, and creative art workshops were discussed and referrals made.

"We are thrilled to offer our services to disabled veterans," said Linda Dezenski, Chief Operating Officer of



Veterans who have benefitted from the Academy's services (left to right): Michael McShea, John Quann, Wilbur Justice III, Martin Chandler (sitting), and Leroy Frazier.

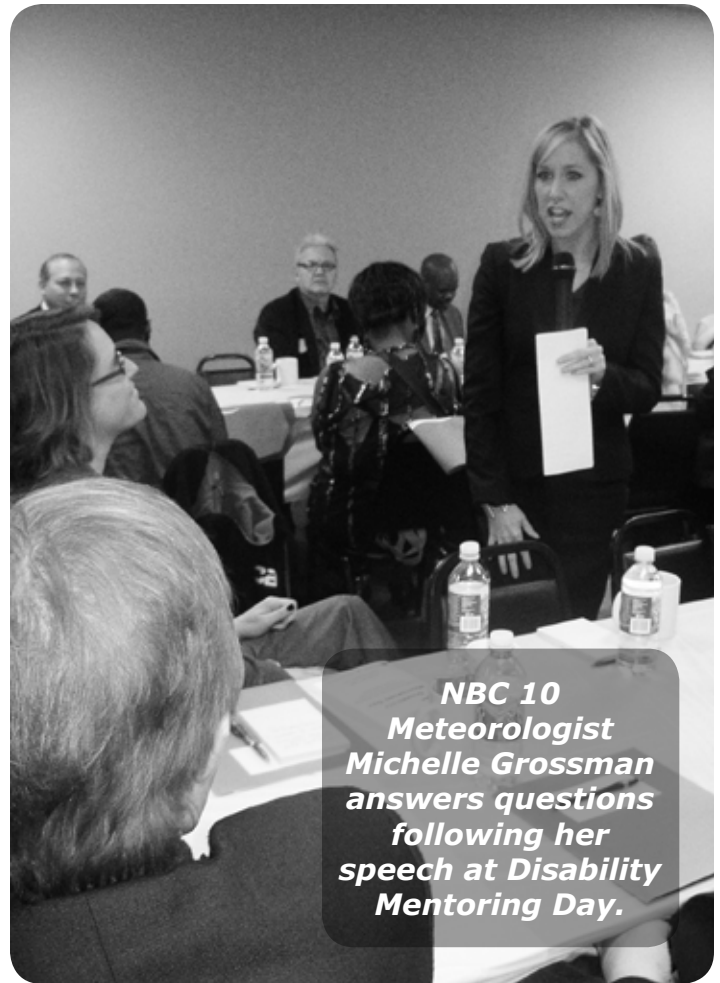
Liberty Resources Inc. “Working with veterans groups was a natural outreach for Liberty and a match for our disabled veterans.”

Another event that increased The Academy’s visibility in the local community was Disability Mentoring Day. The event was held on October 20, co-sponsored regionally by Liberty, The Sierra Group, and the Pennsylvania Business Leadership Network. Nationally, this was the 10th annual event, and the theme was, “The Benefits of Hiring People with Disabilities—An Untapped Source of Talent for your Organization.” Local employers were connected with job seekers with disabilities as part of ongoing efforts recognizing October as Disability Awareness Month.

Keynote speaker Michelle Grossman, Meteorologist for NBC10, discussed the hard work and persistence it took to realize her goals. She described her philosophy that self-confidence, identifying and using transferable skills, and the importance of going “the extra mile” are critical to success.

“Speed matching”, which worked like speed dating, was a highlight, matching 40 job seekers with business representatives from companies including Aramark, Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and, The Marriott.

Opportunities for networking were present throughout the day-long event, which included an update on the Americans with Disabilities Act



**NBC 10
Meteorologist
Michelle Grossman
answers questions
following her
speech at Disability
Mentoring Day.**

(ADA) and a question and answer session for employers. Citing a study by the Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, it was pointed out that 97% of employers who had hired someone with a disability would do it again.

The relationships that were formed through Disability Mentoring Day and the Taste of Technology for Disabled Veterans will continue to be rewarding for Liberty Resources Academy, the students, and the employers. Quarterly meetings will continue as we move forward with a shared passion for hiring people with disabilities.



Reflecting on Our History:

The Story of Wade Blank, ADAPT Founder

The following history of ADAPT's founder Wade Blank and ADAPT's formation is used by permission of the author, and originally appeared in the July/August issue of disability rights magazine, The Disability Rag. It was reprinted in The Ragged Edge: The Disability Experience from the Pages of the First Fifteen Years of The Disability Rag, Louisville, KY: Advocado Press, 1994.

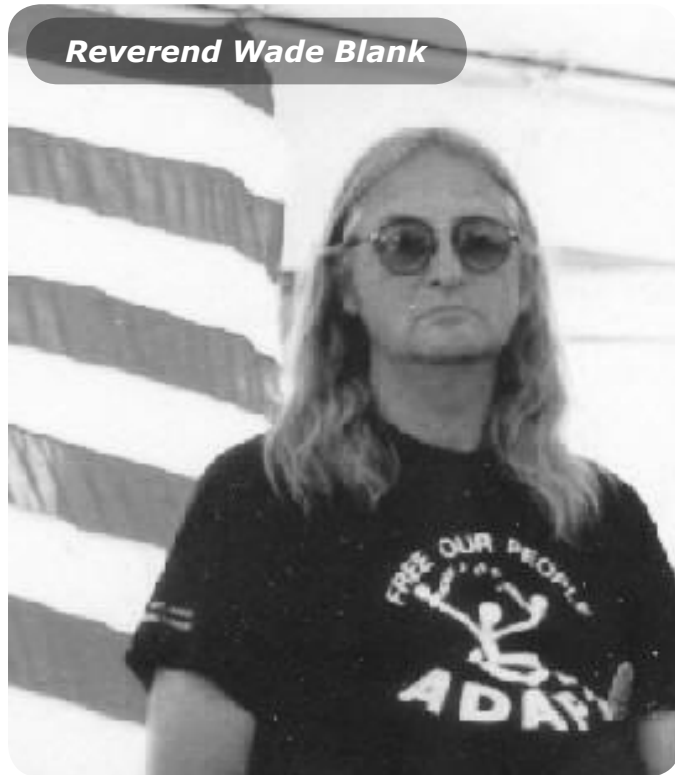
by Laura Hershey | www.laurahershey.com

The death of the Reverend Wade Blank on February 15, 1993, left a profound emptiness in the hearts of many people who loved and respected him. But any void in the disability rights movement is only momentary, for Blank left behind scores of human values, a keen analysis, and scores of skilled, committed leaders ready to carry the movement forward.

American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today (ADAPT) and its mother, the Atlantis Community in Denver, both embody the spiritual, organizational, and strategic lessons Blank carried over from the 1960s black civil rights movement. He had been a Presbyterian minister, a War on Poverty field organizer, and a disciple of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. before becoming an orderly, then an assistant administrator in a Denver nursing home.

Early in his career as an iconoclastic minister and civil rights worker, Blank developed the concept of a

Reverend Wade Blank



“liberated community”—a society where human beings could live in equality and develop the power to affect change. When, at the Heritage House nursing home, he found himself in the midst of a “community” of people with severe disabilities whose only community structure was one of oppression—the confines of the institution—he took on the challenge of making the “liberated community” a reality.

It all started when Blank came to Denver seeking a change. “The nursing home industry in Denver recruited its nursing home administrators from the ranks of ex-ministers,” he recalled recently. A nursing

home executive phoned Blank. "They said, 'You're young. You're hip. Could you start a youth wing for us?' So, I started a youth wing."

Hired by Heritage House in December 1971, Blank went to visit the residents the evening before he began his new job. "I remember for dinner that night we had baked potatoes, applesauce and scrambled eggs, and that was near Christmas. The place was like a morgue. The food was cold." Blank chatted with severely disabled individuals, some of whom would later become ADAPT organizers. "Little did I know," Blank recalled, "that I was to enter the most important moment of my life."

"I had 60 young people I recruited. Every morning at 7:30, they'd get dressed and get on a school bus, and go to a workshop and count fish hooks. [They] called it a work activities program."

At council meetings of the young people, the residents made simple requests, and an idealistic Blank tried to implement them. "I let them evaluate the nurses," he said. "They wanted co-ed living. They wanted to have pets. They wanted to have rock 'n' roll bands. So three years into this experiment, the nursing home is just like a college dorm on a crazy weekend all the time."

"I was trying to change it from inside, and I didn't understand the monster I worked for," he recalled.

In 1975, Blank proposed "that we move a few of them out into

apartments, and we let the aides and orderlies punch in at the nursing home, then go to the apartment and give them service." That idea got Blank fired. "The nursing home saw where I was going, and they couldn't let me go in that direction."

Once Blank was fired, the nursing home erased all his reforms. "They came in and they took all the stereos and TVs out of everybody's rooms, had the dog pound come by and get all the animals and in one day it went from everything I'd built for four years—to that."

But Blank wasn't about to give up. Thinking to himself that he'd "recruited all these people to this hell," he decided simply to move them out "and do the care myself."

"Within the first six months, I'd moved 18 severely disabled people out. So now I was wed to the concept. You know, I couldn't walk away from it."

That exodus laid the foundations for the Atlantis Community and its political-action offshoot, ADAPT. "We began to learn about power and what empowerment is, and how to use it," Blank said. While Atlantis was liberating people from nursing homes, ADAPT (which then stood for American Disabled for Accessible Public Transit) took on discrimination in Denver's, and then the nation's, bus systems. Using non-violent, direct-action tactics similar to King's movement, ADAPTerS made bold demands and achieved extraordinary results.

Blank had found himself at the center of another civil rights campaign, similar to the one he had seen African Americans wage. "All the issues are the same," Blank asserted. "The black movement wanted to ride the buses equally. The black movement wanted to eat at the Woolworth's counters. The black movement wanted the right to vote. The black movement wanted the right to keep their families together. The black movement wanted the right to be integrated into the school system. That's what the disability rights movement wants, exactly."

"My members are into confrontation. We'll tell somebody what we want, and we'll talk about it once or twice, but that's it. Then we deal with you. Either we'll shut you down or whatever."

Confrontation worked, Blank believed, because it took society's fears—those fears we're always trying to dispel in disability awareness workshops—and turned them to a new use.

"So I said," (Blank explained, recalling earlier successes in the black civil rights movement), "... 'Let's take 25 wheelchairs and go out and surround a bus and hold it and see what happens.' Bam! Just like magic. It worked. Total power. Police couldn't move the wheelchairs because they were afraid. The mayor said, 'Don't arrest disabled people.' We win."

Blank's focus on fundamental human rights and on the most impoverished members of the disability community distanced him from more affluent

groups. In this, too, he emulated Martin Luther King. "King involved the poorest in the community," Blank said, "and a movement cannot really change things unless they address the poorest, the least. When King was shot, he was beginning to attack the ghettos." For Blank, "Our ghettos are the nursing homes, and we need to address the ghetto."

Blank attacked not only the mainstream disability movement's economic hierarchy but also its disability hierarchy. "You go around to independent living centers and you'll see a lot of post-polios and a lot of spinal cord injuries," he said. "But you won't see people that slobber and can't speak clearly. These are the people often excluded or left behind by more 'respectable' advocacy organizations", he pointed out.

Blank found leadership qualities in people who had never before thought of being leaders: former nursing home residents, people with speech impairments, people labeled retarded, and others typically disenfranchised both by society at large and by traditional disability organizations. Blank had little patience for people who put their own egos or their own careers above the movement.

But more people were and are being empowered every year to free Americans with disabilities from institutions. All are encouraged to help plan protests, identify issues and targets, hold press conferences, and become a part of the "liberated community." ★

WHAT'S INSIDE...

SEPTA's Culture of Disdain for the Disabled	1
Get to Know LRI's Homemaker Services	3
Celebrating the Life of Karin DiNardi	4
Arts Studio Welcomes Mural Artist	5
The Transition to Freedom Fund	6
The Academy Steps Up Outreach	7
Reflecting on Our History: Wade Blank	9

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