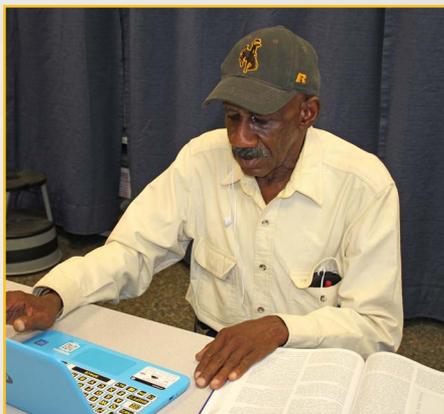


# History of the Wyoming Institute for Disabilities

1994 - 2019



 WIND  
25th ANNIVERSARY

## HISTORY PRE-1900



Prior to the 1800s, living conditions for people with developmental disabilities who lived past infancy were quite dire. While some families had financial resources to provide care at home, widespread poverty left many people with disabilities abandoned to the streets or poorhouses.

Around the turn of the 19th century, institutional care came into vogue, as social reformers began advocating for better care for persons with disabilities, including improved educational opportunities. This led to the establishment of training schools where the goal was to provide vocational skills to help students become productive members of their communities.

The early successes of the training schools gave rise to increased demand and soon these institutions began admitting people with all types of disabilities. Unfortunately, this rapid growth caused many of the schools to devolve into wretched asylums, designed to warehouse and separate people with disabilities from the

community at large.

These facilities, reflecting society as a whole, viewed disability as an illness to be treated or cured medically, rather than as a natural part of the human condition.



*Postcard of the Wyoming State School for Defectives in Lander, ca. 1910 - 1914, which would become the Wyoming State Training School. Courtesy of the New York State Archives.*

## 1900s HISTORY



The Great Depression of the 1920s and 1930s contributed to the growing number of institutions for persons with disabilities, as many parents were unable to afford to keep their children at home. Earlier immigration rates bred a fear of differences in general, prompting an unfortunate rise in the pseudoscience of eugenics.

In the years following World War II, significant economic and cultural changes in the United States created the landscape that brought forth the Parent Movement. While physicians continued to encourage the institutionalization of children with disabilities, parents began to resist these recommendations. Family members organized to demand the necessary supports to care for loved ones at home.

The social and political pressure of the Parent Movement grew stronger and gained a powerful ally in President John F. Kennedy. Kennedy had a sister with a developmental disability, and this experience led him to establish the President's Panel on Mental Retardation. This panel was tasked with assessing the state of existing resources and evaluating needs for supporting people with disabilities and their families.

Two significant pieces of legislation resulted from the panel's work: The Community Mental Health Centers Act (1963) and the Mental Retardation Facilities



*President John F. Kennedy Signs the Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Center Construction Act. Courtesy of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston*

Construction Act (1963). The latter act (commonly referred to as the Developmental Disabilities Act) established a foundation for the creation of university centers like WIND through a number of congressional reauthorizations, each of which would bring changes to the Act.

The 1970 reauthorization of the Developmental Disabilities Act led to state planning councils like the Wyoming Governor's Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities, as well as grant funding for University Affiliated Facilities (UAFs). UAFs were established to build facilities tasked with providing interdisciplinary training at universities that would increase the number of people qualified to provide services to individuals with developmental disabilities.

## EARLY YEARS OF UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS



The 1975 reauthorization of the Developmental Disabilities Act established that people with developmental disabilities have a right to access services, treatment and housing in the least restrictive setting possible, and in an environment with opportunities for developmental potential. Furthermore, it clarified that public funds could not be provided to residential programs that did not meet a certain standard of care.

The same reauthorization also required the establishment of protection and advocacy programs in each state to focus on the legally-protected rights of persons with developmental disabilities. In Wyoming, this resulted in the founding of Wyoming Protection and Advocacy System, Inc.

Funding for University Affiliated Facilities was suspended for most of the 1980s, and when the Developmental Disabilities Act

was reauthorized in 1987, the university centers became University Affiliated Programs (UAPs). With this new designation, programs no longer received facility funding, but were now focused solely on programming to support people with disabilities.

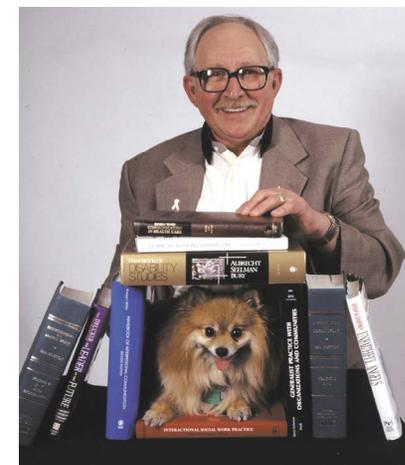
## THE WYOMING INSTITUTE FOR DISABILITIES



In 1987, Dr. Keith Miller, a professor of social work at the University of Wyoming, learned about new funding opportunities available for starting a University Affiliated Program at UW. At that time, Dr. Miller was not familiar with the network of UAPs, but with his academic discipline, and a family member with an intellectual disability, he was intrigued and began researching the possibility.

For several years, there seemed to be limited interest from both the university and the community, but Dr. Miller persisted. As part of his research, he worked with the Wyoming Governor's Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities to conduct a statewide needs assessment to gain a better idea of what services and programs were most urgently needed by people in Wyoming with developmental disabilities, their families, and care providers.

A major shift in Wyoming came in 1990, when a lawsuit was



*Dr. Keith A. Miller, first executive director of WIND (and Miss Buffington Miller). Courtesy photo*

# WIND CHARTS A PATH



UAP requirements, grant availability, and the needs of Wyoming families guided the initial areas of focus at WIND. Early successes came from programs providing continuing education for teachers of students with autism and early childhood special education programs. Additionally, WIND was active in providing accessibility, including recreation, through an assistive technology program for Wyoming residents.

The Administration on Developmental Disabilities, the agency that provided UAP funding, scheduled an initial site visit at WIND for the summer of 1995, less than a year after the doors opened. A team of experienced UAP directors came to evaluate and provide technical support to the new center and issued very positive reviews of WIND's early work. The team members also advocated for UW administrators to provide additional physical space.

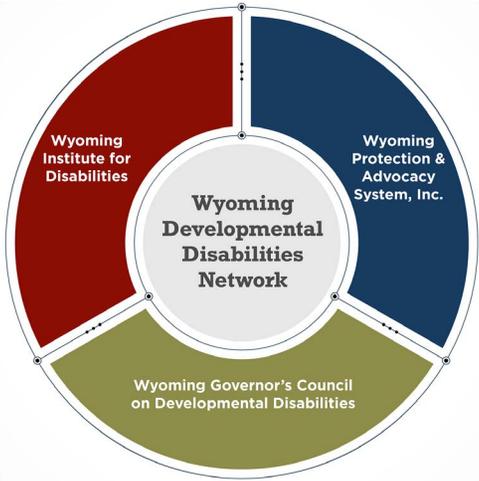
The 1987 reauthorization of the Developmental Disabilities Act also increased the emphasis on including people with disabilities, their families, and service providers in the decision-making and work of UAPs. That emphasis led to a requirement that UAPs establish a Consumer Advisory Council (CAC). With a true majority of members being people with disabilities and their families, the WIND CAC helped guide the organization to better serve the state's needs.

With the 2000 Reauthorization of DD Act, University Affiliated Programs would become University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs). Presently, 67 UCEDDs are part the national network, with at least one in each of the fifty states and U.S. Territories.

Recognizing the importance of an established academic program,

filed by Wyoming Protection and Advocacy System, Inc. against the state of Wyoming on the behalf of Anna Maria Weston, a resident of the Wyoming State Training School in Lander. The lawsuit sought to increase the capacity of communities in Wyoming to serve people with disabilities who were determined to benefit from supported community living, rather than remaining at the training school. When the litigation was settled in July of 1991, there was a rapid movement of residents from the school back to communities. This sudden influx resulted in much higher demand for services, leading to greater overall interest in establishing a UAP in Wyoming.

The results of the needs assessment, together with the increase in university and community interest after the Weston settlement, changed institutional perceptions regarding the need for a Wyoming UAP. In the spring of 1994, WIND's application to join the UAP network was sent off to the Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD), the national agency charged with oversight of the UAP network. The Wyoming Governor's Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities supported the process by funding the application fee. By the fall semester of 1994, WIND was officially established, with Wyoming becoming the final state to create a university center for developmental disabilities.



Dr. Miller created WIND courses in disability supports and services through partnerships with other departments. He also established support for independent undergraduate research in disability policy. Having built the infrastructure necessary for a disability studies minor program, WIND was able to gain funding for a full-time disability studies faculty member. Dr. Michelle Jarman was hired in 2007 to create and lead the academic program. She solidified and expanded the presence of disability studies within the University of Wyoming academic fabric. Between 2008 and 2019, over 120 students graduated with a disability studies minor.

## WIND LEADERSHIP



Dr. Keith A. Miller served as executive director from 1994 - 2009. Dr. Miller always maintained the premise that, “The primary goal of WIND is to help communities become more inclusive of and supportive of people with disabilities.” After Dr. Miller’s retirement in 2009, Dr. William E. MacLean, Jr., a professor of psychology at UW, became the executive director. Dr. MacLean guided the organization with the fundamental question: “What did we actually do to help people with developmental disabilities in the state of Wyoming?” This question would drive him to foster a culture of inquiry at WIND, focusing on ensuring that WIND programs fulfilled UCEDD functions in meaningful and demonstrable ways,



*Dr. William MacLean, executive director from 2009 to 2013.  
Courtesy UW Photo Services*

including a focus on data, publications, and conference attendance.

WIND’s current executive director, Sandy Root-Elledge, began working at WIND in 2004, serving as an assistant director and interim executive director before she was appointed as executive director in 2014. As the parent of two adult children with developmental disabilities, she brings a perspective that is both empathetic and practical. She emphasizes the importance of WIND partnerships with families, communities, and organizations to further improve the capacity of communities to meet the needs of people with disabilities throughout Wyoming.



*Sandy Root-Elledge, current executive director of WIND.  
Courtesy UW Photo Services*

## RECENT HISTORY



Beginning with its founding, WIND has developed important partnerships to address activities identified in the Developmental Disabilities Act, working with individuals, families, state agencies and organizations to advocate and enhance systems and services for people with developmental and other disabilities. With the help of the Consumer Advisory Council, WIND has conducted research to help identify state needs. Working with our state Developmental Disabilities Network partners, the Wyoming Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities and Protection and Advocacy System, Inc., WIND has further distinguished and prioritized potential issues and barriers that affect individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Wyoming.

Twenty-five years of impactful contributions have included trainings, technical assistance, services and programs in a range of areas including: assistive technology, autism, education, employment, screenings and assessments, access to specialty health care, recreation, equal access to justice, aging, and friendships.

## WIND: 25 YEARS LATER



Since 1994, the world has witnessed significant changes in policies, technologies and systems of care. Since its inception, WIND has been adaptive to the rapid pace of these transformations. With the passion and expertise of the WIND faculty and staff, along with continued partnerships, a bright future lies ahead as WIND continues to envision a *Wyoming where all people can participate in everyday community life as they choose.*



*Dr. Michelle Jarman (center, back row) with the students from the 2016 Disability Justice & Advocacy course. Courtesy photo*

This history of the Wyoming Institute for Disabilities was written by Dr. Keith Miller, Emeritus Professor and WIND founding Director, and Charleigh Wolfe. It was edited and produced by Betsy Bress and Sandy Root-Elledge.

### Sources Cited

The Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. (n.d.). *Parallels In Time: A History of Developmental Disabilities*. Retrieved from <http://mn.gov/mnddc/parallels/index.html>

(n.d.). *History of the DD Act*. Retrieved from <https://acl.gov/about-acl/history-dd-act>

### Image Credits

(n.d.). *Color postcard portrait of the Wyoming State School for Defectives facility*. Retrieved from <http://digitalcollections.archives.nysed.gov/index.php/Detail/objects/41980>

Stoughton, C. (n.d.). *President John F. Kennedy Signs the Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Center Construction Act*. Retrieved from <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKWHP/1963/Month 10/Day 31/JFKWHP-1963-10-31-A>

Wyoming Institute for Disabilities

University of Wyoming

1000 E. University Ave., Department 4298

Laramie, WY 82071

(307) 766-2761

TTY: 1-800-908-7011

[uwwind@uwyo.edu](mailto:uwwind@uwyo.edu)

[uwyo.edu/wind](http://uwyo.edu/wind)

