

## Does True Access Exist? A Reflection From Then – 1990, To Now – 2022

BY SHARON MCLENNON-WIER

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**O**n July 26, 1990, Pres. George H.W. Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Since this seminal piece of legislation was enacted, July has been disability pride awareness month, and we take this opportunity to reflect on the accomplishments that this critical legislation provided for people with disabilities living in the United States.

This law characterized that a person with a disability was classified as having a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a person from completing a major life activity. Life activities such as seeing, hearing, understanding and processing information, writing, reading, talking, walking, breathing, thinking and so much more.

This legislation provided the disabled person the right to access and further required integration for persons with disabilities into life activities such as employment, entry into environmental spaces, transportation, technology and recreational spaces.

In 1990, I was an undergraduate-biology student attending Syracuse University. I was totally blind, and I had much optimism for this new legislation. I had the conviction that despite my blindness, I could work hard and I would achieve a degree in medicine.

My belief was that my hard work, fortitude, intelligence, passion and resilience coupled with this new legislation providing access to the sciences would help me to achieve my medical goal. I did not think that one's preconceived notions, ableism, prejudice and stigma would be further obstacles in the road to my vocational goal.

Legislation can help to remove the obvious physical barriers for people with disabilities, but there are so many invisible barriers encompassed via the human disposition toward preconceived notions, ableism, prejudice and stigma. Therefore, as we reflect on this disability pride awareness month, we acknowledge the many accomplishments that this legislation achieved for people with disabilities.

More people with disabilities became employed. More people with disabilities have access to standard bus and train service. More people with disabilities can use a restroom which provides room for their wheelchair. More people with disabilities can cross a street in the middle of New York City by using audible pedestrian signaling and curb cuts. More people with disabilities can use a bank ATM independently and so much more.

However, we still have a long way to go. We still need to improve the way people without disabilities think about people with disabilities. Having a disability does not mean that your life is over. At times, it could mean that it is just beginning.

We need to remember that the life activities such as family, love, work and play are critical for all. We all want to achieve these milestones, we just need an environment free of physical and human-dispositional barriers. As a result, we have disability-rights organization like CIDNY to help advocate and educate all people regarding diversity, equality and inclusion for a society built on difference.

We all can achieve our goals – it just takes one step at a time. By the way, I am happy to report that I was able to achieve a career in the field of human service and psychology despite having a visual disability. Please pursue your dreams and CIDNY is here to help you!