**Disability Pioneer Sally Johnston Dies**

By Allison Howe

Disability rights advocate Sally Johnston recently died at age 80, leaving behind a decades-long legacy of activism.

Johnston, of Syracuse, N.Y., died after being hospitalized with pneumonia, according to an article by “Syracuse.com.”

According to the news outlet, she was born with arthrogryposis, a condition that causes stiffness and loss of motion in the joints. Early in her career she began building relationships with county officials, which helped her lead the way to accessibility in public office buildings throughout Syracuse and Onondaga County, more than 15 years before the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed.

For 14 years, she worked with activists across Syracuse to make buses accessible. Throughout those years, she would lie down in front of buses or chain herself to them to bring attention to this cause. Buses in Syracuse were accessible, also prior to the ADA.

She went on to get involved in long-term care, helping people get out of nursing homes and back into their communities. A demonstration program was created that would run in New York City and Onondaga County.

That program lead to the start of the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program (CDPAP), which went on to be implemented statewide.

“She brought together all the advocates who fought for the program, and the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Association of NYS (CDPAANYS) was born,” said Bryan O’Malley, executive director of the organization. Johnston was its first board president.

In 2011, Johnston received the CDPAANYS Advocacy Award, which that year was permanently renamed The Sally Johnston Award for Advocacy.

In 2022, the New York State Independent Living Council (NYSILC) inducted her into the New York Disability Rights Hall of Fame.

“Sally was the voice of conscience in our movement,” said O’Malley. She dedicated her life to improving the lives of others.”

In 2020, Access CNY established The Sally Johnston Advocacy Center in recognition of her more than 35 years with the organization as their advocacy coordinator.

“Sally Johnston is one of our community’s true heroes,” said Paul Joslyn, Access CNY executive director. “She revolutionized the lives of thousands of individuals with disabilities, not just here in Central New York, but across the state. From the creation of the area’s first homes for people with disabilities, to equal employment, to accessible transportation and consumer directed homecare, Sally has lifted up so many.”

Johnston was the founder of Disabled in Action of Greater Syracuse. She worked for the Easter Seals and Cerebral Palsy Center. In addition, she served on many city and county community boards including the Diocesan Commission on Disabilities.

Last year she gave testimony to the State Legislature to support a Fair Pay for Home Care bill.

“I need help getting out of bed, going to the bathroom, getting a shower and getting food to eat,” she said in her testimony. It’s been very difficult for me to keep a personal assistant, because the agency can only pay minimum wage, which is $13.20 an hour.”

“She will be with us in every fight, because her legacy lives on in every person who makes a phone call or sends an email or meets with their Legislators or gets arrested,” said O’Malley.

Johnston was predeceased by her husband nearly 52 years, James Johnston and her parents Maurie and Katherine Woods. she is survived by her son, James, as well as a granddaughter, grandsons, two brothers, a sister, and many nieces and nephews.

Contributions in her honor can be made to the Self Advocacy Association of New York State.