

Celebrating 30 years at The Legal Center

After Randy Chapman graduated from law school at the University of Texas at Austin, he came to The Legal Center as a VISTA volunteer in August 1977.

At the time, The Legal Center had just been designated as Colorado's Protection and Advocacy System, and recent historic changes in federal law promised new opportunities for people with disabilities. The Colorado Board of Education was debating whether to accept federal funds and implement the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. The U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare had just issued regulations implementing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibiting disability discrimination in federally funded programs. However, the new laws still needed to be implemented, the conditions in Colorado's institutions were deplorable, and children and adults with disabilities were being denied access to services, employment and independent living.

Randy found the opportunity for social change to be exhilarating. The application of law and reason to emotionally charged conflicts in human services and school settings were rewarded with positive outcomes, legal victories and The Legal Center's growing reputation. During his career, Randy has represented people with all types of disabilities of all ages. Early on he represented people with mental illness in employment cases and challenged the hiring practices of the U.S. Postal Service. He represented individuals with developmental disabilities and their families in obtaining appropriate housing in the community and fighting discriminatory zoning laws. He represented former policewoman Dale Coski from 1982 to 1985 in an employment discrimination case against the City of Denver requesting that the City make reasonable accommodations to continue her employment in the Police Department. The Legal Center won the case at the initial hearing but ultimately lost in the Colorado Court of Appeals. Ironically, a similar case was won in Federal District Court after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

His influence is reflected in state statute and policy. In the developmental disabilities arena, he established Human Rights Committees in legislation to review medications, behavioral programs, and insure investigation of abuse and neglect. He added the requirement that people with developmental disabilities be represented on the boards of directors of the organizations serving them. He also drafted the due process language in the developmental disabilities statute and had significant input in the development of the Colorado Department of Education's complaint process for children in special education.

In 1980, The Legal Center and the Association for Retarded Citizens in Colorado (now the ARC) sued the Colorado Department of Education because children living in the institution for people with developmental disabilities in Wheat Ridge were not receiving an education, despite the passage of federal law in 1976 which entitled children with disabilities to a "free, appropriate public education." The Legal Center prevailed in this lawsuit, and the impact of Randy's work on this case laid the foundation of his advocacy in special education throughout his career. His outrage at the circumstances of these children and his pride in the outcome of the case—that for the first time, children with severe disabilities attended public school in Colorado—are highlighted in the Introduction to *The Everyday Guide to Special Education Law* which he wrote in 2005. He dedicated the book "to all of the graduates of the Wheat Ridge State Home and Training School."

Randy's work in implementing special education law in Colorado is legendary, and he is widely respected by parents and educators. In the past few years, his expertise is reaching a national

audience through the distribution of The Everyday Guide and the bilingual version of the book published this year.

Following his 20th Anniversary at The Legal Center, he received the Martin Luther King Jr. Humanitarian Award for his contribution to civil rights in our community. Through his personal representation, and by extension through The Legal Center's staff, he has educated thousands of people, helped them get services, given them courage to fight injustice, or been the force to be reckoned with on behalf of those who couldn't speak for themselves.

To the many staff members of The Legal Center he has worked with over the years, he has been a coach and mentor, and he takes great pride in their accomplishments. When we don't prevail, he reminds everyone how important it is that The Legal Center was here to provide access to the legal system and that our client had representation—something that wouldn't have happened without us. His perspective has enriched the organization for 30 years, and we thank him for his humor, his dedication, and his outstanding work.