

Earl Walden Award for Outstanding Achievement in Rural Advocacy – 2005

- Post Hawaii Conference newsletter article

Kathy Hoell Interview

As soon as she was honored as 2005 recipient of the Earl Walden Award for Outstanding Rural Advocacy, Kathy Hoell immediately donated \$500 to APRIL's Katrina Fund, saying "It just seemed like the right thing to do. When Katrina happened soon after I was notified I'd received the award, donating part of it to APRIL's efforts felt like the next logical step."

Kathy started in the mid-1980s as a self-advocate, working diligently to get the kinds of services she needed personally, when she realized, "if I have to fight this hard from my own stuff, how can folks get what they need who can't fight?" This led to a move to Omaha, Nebraska where she immediately went to City Hall to find out where local services might be located. She was told, "No people with disabilities live here." To which she answered, "Well, they do now!" And that was the beginning of an on-going personal mission to fight for the rights of people with disabilities.

Kathy was involved in opening the first CIL in Bellevue, a branch of the League of Human Dignity in Omaha and in 1995, became a SILC member, going on to become Chair in 2000. Once the SILC acquired its 501©3 standing in 2002, Kathy became the first Executive Director and still holds that position.

She is most proud of recent technical assistance the SILC has been able to provide to the Nebraska CILS in the form of DVDs and players, videos, and books. Working with the Nebraska Consortium for People with Disabilities, Kathy has also helped to get crucial Medicaid Buy-In legislation introduced in the state and is hoping it will pass in the coming year.

Kathy feels the greatest challenge for people in rural independent living is "letting people know we exist. Folks think they're out there all alone and we need to somehow get to them so they don't feel so isolated." She says "the disability community needs to develop power and the only way to do that is through the political system." Kathy paraphrased Justin Dart's words, saying "we have to vote as if our lives depend on it, because you know what, they probably do." Congratulations to Kathy from all of us at APRIL!!

More about Kathy...

Kathy Hoell, Executive Director of the Nebraska Statewide Independent Living Council in Lincoln, Nebraska, is a known and respected individual in Nebraska and other states. For the past 15 years she has networked with many states to affect change for people with disabilities. Kathy has served as the Nebraska SILC's ED for 3 years, but served on the SILC as Chair for many years prior to that.

Ms. Hoell's commitment to the Independent Living Movement has been demonstrated by her passion as she testifies before legislators on the MiCASSA and Money Follows the Person Acts, as well as when funding cuts threatened Medicaid, housing, transportation and other areas that would have lessened the ability for people with disabilities to live where they choose and how they would get there. Legislators know her zeal since she has met personally with many of them – even Nebraska's Attorney General Jon Bruning wasn't going to get pas her!

Ms. Hoell is involved with others with disabilities as a mentor – helping them know they don't have to be second class citizens and that their lives and votes count! She has generated a new generation of enthusiasm with her gusto and love of life.

Throughout her own life she has shown that having a disability is having a quality of life that is of value and more importantly, a lot of fun. Ms. Hoell embodies the independent living philosophy and knows how to have a great time. She has not only given of her time, but also her own resources, to lead the way for others with disabilities to live a full and inclusive life. She is an adamant supporter of APRIL and has been

to several conferences. Only missing the New Hampshire Conference because she grew up there, still has family and friends there, and knew that it would be an accessibility nightmare (and it was!).

A partial list of organizations she has been actively involved with include: National Council on Independent Living (NCIL), Nebraska SILC, ADAPT, APRIL and the League of Human Dignity.