

Earl Walden Award for Outstanding Achievement in Rural Advocacy – 2006

- from San Antonio Conference program

Doris Dennison's CIL mates, who nominated her for this award, say she is the model of what an advocate should be and that they would "clone her in a heartbeat" if they could. She is a Native American who lives in a rural Reservation community and, in her 20 years with a disability, she has learned not only how to advocate for herself and to navigate the maze of the service delivery system, she has also been tireless in her efforts to encourage individuals to become self-advocates and will always go the extra mile to help support people in their efforts.

Always willing to take a leadership role, Doris helped organize the first ever Disability Awareness Walk, which culminated in her successfully advocating with the President of the Navajo Nation for an additional 35% in funding for access to Tribal buildings, through the President's executive order. It is well known that Doris sat in the President's office one of the many times they met and refused to leave "until questions were answered and documents were signed."

Doris has the ability to bring people together from many different backgrounds, and motivate them toward a common goal. As the coordinator of the Native American Advocacy Group, Doris brings together support groups, individuals, and other interested people to present a strong voice for people with disabilities. She also successfully advocated with the state legislature of New Mexico for funding for home modifications; and was a tireless and outspoken advocate when the state was considering doing away with personal attendant services.

She is committed to making changes to improve the quality of life of Native American people living with disabilities. At her family's annual "muttonfest", Doris works hard to bring together advocates from all across the Navajo Nation and the Hopi Reservation, giving people the chance to get to know each other better, to share their ideas and stories, and to support and strengthen the group bond.

APRIL is proud to present this year's Earl Walden Award to Doris Dennison

– Congratulations Doris!