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# Dan Johnson Advocacy Award Criteria

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## About Dan

Dan Johnson loved life and lived it to the fullest. He was born Christmas day 1947, and his childhood was pretty normal. He lived with his parents and sisters in the country outside of Racine, Wisconsin. As a high school freshman, Dan played football and was also a member of the wrestling team. However, the days following President John F. Kennedy's assassination were unlike any other. The entire country was in shock, but it was the decision by Dan's wrestling team to meet that Saturday for practice that would change Dan's life forever. During practice Dan's wrestling partner came in low. As Dan attempted to jump over him, his legs tangled, and he landed hard between the mats arranged around them for protection. Dan knew instantly something was terribly wrong when he could not move—or feel—his legs. His family doctor told him he had fractured his fourth and fifth cervical vertebrae, damaging his spinal cord. He needed immediate surgery and would have a lengthy recovery.

Once Dan began rehabilitation, his doctors were direct; he was paralyzed and would not walk again. He would always require a wheelchair for mobility and would need to depend on others for bathing, dressing, toileting, and transfers. However, he was told through hard work he could learn to do many things for himself, complete his education, and become employed.

In the 1960s, there were few services available for people with physical disabilities or their families, and Dan's family struggled both financially and emotionally. His parents spent the time Dan was in rehabilitation preparing for his new life and making their house wheelchair accessible so their son could return home. To ensure Dan did not fall behind his peers in school, he was provided with a tutor during his rehabilitation. Dan returned home with support from his family and went back to Horlick High School in the fall of 1964. For the remainder of Dan's time in high school, his friends transported him in his manual wheelchair to classes. After high school graduation, Dan attended the University of Wisconsin—Parkside, he sought help from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, which provided support for him. Dan's first job was as a manager trainee at Goodwill Industries, and he purchased his first home in Racine at the age of 25.

Dan made it his life's work to advocate for people with physical disabilities and to ensure they have access to the same opportunities as any other person. Dan had many professional accomplishments including:

- Founding Society's Assets, one of the first independent living centers (ILCs) in the state of Wisconsin.
- Supporting expansion of a lawsuit to prevent public transit authorities from purchasing inaccessible buses to cover all of the public transportation systems in the South Eastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission.
- Securing Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) funds in 1976 to provide employment benefits counseling and placement service for people with physical and sensory disabilities.

- Developing a curriculum to provide a training program for CETA recipients to become personal-care attendants.
- Developing educational materials on the need for agencies receiving federal funding to become accessible (both facilities and programs), according to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.
- Creating the first telephone message relay service in the Racine area for people who were Deaf or hard of hearing, as well as for people with speech impairments who required telephone assistance. Society's Assets was the first state and national contractor of the message relay service.
- Becoming the first board president of Wisconsin Disability Coalition, this group worked to pass amendments to the 1978 Rehabilitation Act and on the Community Options Program (COP) as an alternative to institutional care.
- Working to increase funding for ILCs, this led to the creation of four more ILCs and the provision of independent living services statewide.
- Creating the taskforce that led to the creation of the Wisconsin Council on Physical Disabilities.
- Working on an initiative to improve the employment outcomes for people with physical disabilities and the creation of the Ticket to Work Act.
- Developing a model of supported employment for people with physical disabilities called Vocational Futures Planning, which piloted in Dane County with 40 individuals on long-term support waivers securing employment.
- Working with the Department of Health Services to establish the Medicaid Assistance Purchase Plan (MAPP). MAPP provides work incentives that allow people with physical disabilities to earn money, save for their futures, and retire with access to the health and long-term care they need.
- Identifying individuals to serve as a steering committee for people with physical disabilities. Recommendations from this committee were used to support the development of Family Care and the Wisconsin Partnership Program.



Dan was one of many individuals who have had their lives turned upside down by an injury. Dan was much more than an advocate who possessed courage and unwavering persistence; he was generous, kind, compassionate, wise, funny, and gentle. His life was full of colleagues, friends, and family. He always had his work cell phone on, because someone might need his mentoring skills. Among his many accomplishments, he treasured the family he created as a foster parent and adoptive dad. In his wife Kathy, he found someone who shared his passion for family and adventure. He loved camping, raising kids, being a soccer dad, and driving. He was a great son, brother, cousin, uncle, friend, husband, father and grandfather. Doug Nelson, former president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, now retired, met and became good friends with Dan during Nelson's time as the deputy secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services. Nelson wrote, "I have never known a finer human being, or a friend I was prouder to have, than Dan Johnson."

## About the Award

The Wisconsin Council on Physical Disabilities (CPD) is pleased to announce the Dan Johnson Advocacy Award. This award is in memory of Dan and his many accomplishments and was created to recognize people with physical disabilities who are outstanding advocates.

Please note the Dan Johnson Advocacy Award is aimed at recognizing excellence in advocacy, and public policy change for people with physical disabilities, rather than disability advocacy, for which there are many other prestigious awards. CPD reserves the right not to select an award recipient in a given year, or to name more than one award recipient in a given year at the discretion of the CPD and its members at the time.

## Criteria and Eligibility

### Criteria

Awardees will be selected based on the description or evidence provided in the nomination package that shows how they are currently or have previously contributed to physical disability advocacy.

Awardees are individuals with physical disabilities who advocate for people with physical disabilities and have had a positive impact on federal or state legislation, public policy, or programs that affect people with disabilities in Wisconsin. These individuals should be extensively involved in the disability community and their local community. They should work to educate decision-makers, the public, and media about issues faced by people with physical disabilities. The advocacy work should exceed normal expectations of regular advocacy practice, and should be inclusive and respectful of the values and independence of those who are affected by it.

### Individuals can be nominated if they meet one or more of the following criteria:

- The individual's advocacy work has resulted in a significant act(s) or specific decision(s) advantageous to Wisconsinites with physical disabilities, and the advocacy work has been the primary reason the decision was made.
- The individual has worked on implementation of extensive or innovative policies, programs, or services which increased the independence of people with physical disabilities in Wisconsin or increased the potential of people with physical disabilities to participate in the community.
- The individual has served as an officer or committee member in an organization whose primary purpose is to advocate for people with physical disabilities.
- The individual has been extensively involved in the development or increased awareness of services, and local community activities for people with physical disabilities.
- The individual's advocacy work mobilized grassroots advocacy at the local, community, regional, or state level for people with physical disabilities.

### Other criteria include:

- Sharing their knowledge of and passion for advocating for people with physical disabilities through service, writing, speaking, or consulting.
- Playing a lead role in developing community, state, or national awareness related to people with physical disabilities and being generally recognized as a leader in this field.

- Actively participating in stakeholder groups dedicated to advancing advocacy or policies related to people with physical disabilities.
- Actively championing for programs or strategies that serve people with physical disabilities.

Within the above criteria, additional consideration will be paid to these following factors:

- Advocacy efforts that include multiple components and serve to frame an issue, develop alliances, and gather and disseminate information relevant to moving the initiative or activity forward.
- Consistency of effort.

## Eligibility

The nominee must be:

- A person with a physical disability. Physical disability is defined in Wisconsin State Statute 15.197(4).
- Alive (or living at the time of nomination).
- Advocating for, or has advocated in the past, for people with physical disabilities in Wisconsin.
- An individual who represents, or is drawn from, a stakeholder group across the physical disabilities continuum: academic; community partners; individual consumers; industry; government; and non-profit sector.

## Application Process and Timeline

### Governance and Awardee Determination

CPD is a governor-appointed council, established by Dan Johnson, and created by the Wisconsin State Legislature in 1989, to address the needs of people with physical disabilities. CPD is chaired by an elected council member and is comprised of 14 members, who govern the award process. CPD is responsible for the call for nominations, evaluation of the nominees, and selection of award recipient(s).

### Timeline and Submission

CPD will open the nomination process and make applications available April 1. **The nomination deadline is June 30.** CPD will review applications at their July quarterly meeting. The award recipient(s) will be notified following the approval of the nomination by CPD members. The award will be presented at the Dan Johnson Advocacy Award ceremony in October. The name of the awardee will be kept confidential until the award is presented.

CPD will make their decision based on evaluation of the nomination packages received. Each nomination package must include a completed application form, a letter of recommendation, and any additional information that will assist CPD during the evaluation and award process. Nomination packages can be emailed to Maia Stitt at [maia.stitt@dhs.wisconsin.gov](mailto:maia.stitt@dhs.wisconsin.gov),

### Profiling the Award Recipient

CPD will work to elevate the profile of the award recipient by publicizing the award, the recipient's accomplishments and contributions, and the award event itself through its website, social media, local and state publications and networks. CPD will make every effort to organize speaking engagements, interviews, blog posts, and other opportunities to promote the award recipient's accomplishments.