



## Transcript for: 60 Years of Learning Disabilities Advocacy: Celebrating Progress, Inspiring Change

**Pat Lillie, Past LDA Board President [00:00:03]:**

I have 2 sons with learning disabilities.

**Connie Parr, Past LDA Board President [00:00:06]:**

My daughter had and has significant learning disabilities.

**Suzanne Fornaro, Past LDA Board President [00:00:12]:**

My daughter was diagnosed with a learning disability in the 2nd grade.

**Cindy Cioletti, LDA Chief Executive Officer [00:00:23]:**

The term learning disabilities was first introduced in 1963 by a group of parents and educators who met at the Palmer House in Chicago. The term was proposed by Doctor Samuel Kirk, known as the father of learning disabilities. As a result of the meeting, the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities was created and incorporated and is known today as the Learning Disabilities Association of America. Over the past 60 years LDA has played an important role in the passage of federal legislation, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, both of which provide essential accommodations and support for students with learning disabilities.

**Suzanne Fornaro, Past LDA Board President [00:01:06]:**

LDI was started in 1963 at a conference in Chicago, organized by parents who were seeking services for their children. In 1975, after a two and a half year study, Congress passed public law

**Suzanne Fornaro, Past LDA Board President [00:01:22]:**

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act. These parents who had organized ACLD were

primary movers to get this act in legislation. And then in the late seventies, when my daughter was diagnosed, the local affiliates would hold meetings with speakers on various topics related to LD. And most important, they provided opportunities for parents and professionals to interact to get to know each other and to share information to make changes to the system.

Representatives of LDA spent time advocating in Congress, and LDA also informed our affiliates and states and cities across the US about the work at the national level and encouraged advocacy locally and at the state level. That encouraged legislation to improve special ed and their schools.

**Cindy Cioletti, LDA Chief Executive Officer [00:02:18]:**

In 2002, Learning Disabilities Association of America created the Healthy Children Project to raise awareness of toxic chemicals that can harm brain development, contributing to learning disabilities and behavior disorders. We aim to build a nationwide network of LDA members working to protect children's brain health and reduce toxic exposures that may lead to learning disabilities in current and future generations. LDA has advocated against the use of PFAS chemicals, lead, pesticides, BPA, mercury, and other harmful chemicals that are found in unsafe levels in food, water, and the environment. LDA believes that all children deserve healthy places to live, learn, play and grow. And that's why we've been advocating for safer food, safer water, and a safer environment for the past 20 years through the Healthy Children Project.

**Charles Giglio, Past LDA Board President [00:03:24]:**

I made a number of trips to Washington with our staff. We went through the halls of Congress to tell people who we were and what we need and what our kids...And I say kids, now, of course, they're all grown up. So it's kids and adults, with learning disabilities And the thing that strikes me, I mean, I took my daughter to work this morning. LDA helped her get her job with the state of New York, and she just got her 25 year certificate. But I'm thinking without LDA, Annie's life, I'm not sure what it would have morphed into.

**Beth McGaw, LDA Past Board President [00:04:02]:**

I think that LDA impacted me the most personally was, you know, for my son and how I was able to help him through the resources that I got through LDA.

**Dr. Monica McHale-Small [00:04:16]:**

If it wasn't for the parents and the professionals who were involved and started LDA in the beginning, I sincerely, I don't just doubt, I know, that learning disabilities would not have been included in the IDEA as one of the 13 disability categories.

**Charles Giglio, Past LDA Board President [00:04:32]:**

I always admire our organization and the parents, who worked very hard to, not only for their own children, but to make LDA strong for other people, for other people's children.

**Suzanne Fornaro, Past LDA Board President [00:04:54]:**

LDA's National Conference offers the premier opportunity for parents and adults with LD, educators, professionals, and students to establish productive relationships with each other to share ideas and information to get questions answered, and then take these experiences back home to their families, their classrooms, their students, their clients, and their friends to improve the lives of individuals with LD.

**Pat Lillie, Past LDA Board President [00:05:24]:**

LDAs always had a marriage between parents and professionals. We've always appreciated the professionals in our field because they understand us. They understand what our kids need. They're part of our priorities, they're part of our friendship with each other. It's really wonderful.

**Kevin Gailey, LDA Board Chair, '22 - Present [00:05:42]:**

So whether it's public or private education, I think LDA plays a role in being a voice for all kids who have any kind of learning difference, learning disability. However, you wanna phrase it.

**Charles Giglio, Past LDA Board President [00:05:57]:**

People with disabilities wanna be just like everybody else. And so that was my mantra as I was going through the halls of LDA, whenever we tried to establish policies that would better the lives of our students and young adults. And now retired and old adults.

**Dr. Monica McHale-Small [00:06:16]:**

I've been involved with LDA as a member of the board and executive committee, and a member before that, probably for about 12 years now. I am very passionate about the work of LDA, and the longer I'm involved, the more passionate I get about it. I am passionate about learning disabilities because I started my career as a school psychologist, and as a school psychologist, and maybe you out there who've done that work know that most of the kiddos who are in special education are classified as students with learning disabilities. And as someone who now is a trainer of school psychologists, and also someone who is the parent of 4 now adult, very successful children who struggled with learning and attention difficulties. And some of them, a couple of them had IEPs for learning disabilities. I have found through my career that we send folks out there into the world of education not knowing enough about learning disabilities. So I really see LDA as a prime source of information for professionals and for parents about learning disabilities, how they should be evaluated, how to understand them, and how to best instruct and intervene with individuals with learning disabilities.

**Suzanne Fornaro, Past LDA Board President [00:07:39]:**

LDA has always been the leading resource for the most up to date information about learning disabilities. With the means of sharing that information evolving over the years from printed materials and mailings, to websites updated through the years, podcasts on current topics, and webinars for parents and professionals.

**Lauren Clouser [00:08:00]:**

I'm Lauren Clouser. I'm LDA's marketing and communications coordinator, and a lot of my role has been sort of moving us into the communication future. So we're really trying to meet people where they are right now, so that involves social media, we have the LDA podcast that's been going on for a little over 2 years now, and email as well has always been huge. So I'm just trying to sort of revolutionize the way that we are getting our message across so we can reach more people and let them know that LDA has the services and resources that they need.

**Kevin Gailey, LDA Board Chair, '22 - Present [00:08:32]:**

LDA is a wonderful organization, it is an organization that has always been rooted in the effort of a combination of volunteers and a small group of employees, and that still is so. LDA has grown dramatically during the last 6 years.

**Beth McGaw, LDA Past Board President [00:08:51]:**

I think the most fun about being a part of LDA is the people and sharing their passions with each other. I love sharing ideas, coming up with those solutions.

**Pat Lillie, Past LDA Board President [00:09:04]:**

There were just so many amazing, awesome people I met through LDA that because of their carrying their interest for their own children, it really went on and made a mark in the field. And, they were just absolutely amazing.

**Suzanne Fornaro, Past LDA Board President [00:09:23]:**

The thing I enjoyed most about being president of LDA was working with the executive committee, the board of directors, and the committee chairs, who were so supportive and dedicated to LDA. And this was a wonderful experience. I think that the things we've pulled together, the challenges that we face during that time. We all worked together for a great time during my presidency.

**Connie Parr, Past LDA Board President [00:09:52]:**

It's just a fantastic organization. It has my heart. Even though I'm not heavily involved like I used to be, I do recommend it to my patients.

**Beth McGaw, LDA Past Board President [00:10:02]:**

This organization is as relevant today as it was 60 years ago. And it's going to be relevant 60 years from now. Because as I said earlier, learning disabilities don't go away. It's lifelong. And if you have a learning disability, there's a good chance your children will have learning disabilities, and it goes on into the future. So history will repeat itself, and we need to keep fighting for a better understanding of learning disabilities by teachers, by professionals, by parents, employers, and frankly, the individuals themselves so that they can advocate effectively. So we all need to keep the narrative alive and the vision of LDA alive. And, I was there when we created this vision, and it is so that learning disabilities are universally understood, and all individuals are accepted, supported, and empowered to live a self-determined life. And I think we need to keep that vision alive not just now, but 60 years or more into the future.

**Cindy Cioletti, LDA Chief Executive Officer [00:11:15]:**

LDA is proud of its long history of supporting, educating, and advocating for individuals with learning disabilities, and we look forward to our next 60 years.