

Doug Usiak - A retrospective on his 44 years with WNYIL

Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 1

Welcome to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York Independent Living (WNYIL). Our guest today is Douglas Usiak, the recently retired CEO of the WNYIL family of agencies. I'm your host, Ernie Churchwell. Welcome to the program, Doug.

00:00:17 Speaker 2

Glad to be here, Ernie.

00:00:18 Speaker 1

And we're delighted to have you between volunteering and your formal position. You've been with the agency, I believe, 44 years.

00:00:29

So, what stands out to you as the high points in that period?

00:00:34 Speaker 2

Looking over the four decades of activity I would think there's different categories of successes that we could point to as a small organization in the North Buffalo area serving the eight counties and

00:00:49

eventually, 37 counties within New York State, and that's part of when looking back as the growth of the organization as we networked with other organizations.

00:00:59

And push the issue of accessibility for people with disabilities on governmental front, public accommodations fronts in the streets and in the schools.

00:01:09

You are watching the landmark decisions that were being made to accommodate people with disabilities as first-class citizenships within the agency itself. It's the number of programs and services.

00:01:25

We first started with peer counseling, independent living skills, information referral systems advocacy, and then expanded into all types of supportive programs of getting people out of nursing homes setting up.

00:01:41

Cost savings measures to get people to live in the community educational programs for various levels. In fact, programs that you were involved when you used to work with the medical students over at the University at Buffalo

00:01:56

was getting the word out about the abilities and capabilities of people with disabilities, and then finally, I would focus on the aspect of the family of agencies where the Western New York Independent Living Project then later changed his name to Western York. Independent Living became

00:02:16

what is known now as the family of agencies with the Independent Living in Niagara County,

00:02:21

the Independent Living of the Genesee Region, Mental Health Peer Connection. The Buffalo based independent living services and then we can look at two other nonprofits that we absorbed and that's the Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service and Parent to Parent of New York State, which actually has programming

00:02:42

consultations for parents of children with

00:02:46

special needs from Buffalo to Long Island.

00:02:49 Speaker 1

Though the agency has made the difference in the lives of a great many people with various disabilities, it's been an active proponent of the rights of people with disabilities and making sure that appropriate.

00:03:06

Legislation is pressed in the various levels.

00:03:11 Speaker 2

That's true. Or the fact that we were

00:03:15

in the forefront of pushing for rights at the federal level. In fact, our agency had representatives at the White House with the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act back 35 years ago, when George Bush the first signed that piece of legislation. We were involved with the Restoration Act, the Air

00:03:36

Carriers Act, Fair Housing Act.

00:03:40

All rights of pushing for people to be able to live without barriers in the community and contribute and be active and be first class citizens and be proud of who they are and how they can contribute and not deal with the shame of having a disability or being embarrassed by having a disability.

00:03:59 Speaker 1

And of course, now we're doing a rear-guard action as the current administration seems bound and determined to diminish the resources that that people with disabilities and others have to improve the quality of their life.

00:04:14

But I guess we'll see what happens on that front. Would you believe we're almost out of time? I'm sure people will have questions. How can they reach you?

00:04:23 Speaker 2

They could contact me by going through the West York Independent Living Main Center at 716-836-0822 and leaving a message for me. Or they can shoot me an email at dusiak@wnyil.org.

00:04:39

I'm still involved as a volunteer with the organization.

00:04:46 Speaker 1

Thanks so much for being with us, Doug.

00:04:47 Speaker 2

It's been my pleasure, Ernie.

00:04:49 Speaker 1

You've been listening to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of WNYIL. Our guest today has been retired CEO Douglas Usiak and I've been your host, Ernie Churchwell.