



I Am an Individual with a Disability. Listen to Me.

Contributed by the North Dakota Disabilities Advocacy Consortium

In the thirty years since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (<https://adata.org/learn-about-ada>), we as a Nation have grown steadily in respecting the needs and aspirations of individuals with disabilities. The journey has been long and hard--and we still have a way to go, even in securing appropriate medical and human services care.

Although all individuals are entitled to the most appropriate medical and human services care possible by right of their personhood, individuals with disabilities--who cover a wide spectrum of diagnoses including physical, developmental, intellectual, socio-emotional, sensory, and health-impaired disabilities--may especially require a dedicated level of care. Healthcare providers offer among the most personal and intimate connections with any person, oftentimes when they are most in need and vulnerable.

That care begins when each of us sees every person as whole, unique, and priceless. It moves forward when we address those limitations that might affect a patient's ability to speak for or advocate on behalf of their own unique needs. We listen first to the *person* before us: an *individual* with a disability.

Within healthcare, each patient, either personally or through a family member or advocate, should be interviewed to ascertain if the individual has a known disability. If an individual has a recognized disability, the type and level of disability should be recorded, and any pre-existing service plan should be noted and honored. In the event of an emergency situation, any medical or human service treatment should be amended as soon as is practicable to incorporate elements of an individual's service plan, including the participation of a family member or an advocate in the medical and human service determination process. A service-plan-designated aide may serve the recognized role of an advocate, and this role should be respected and protected.

Every individual with a disability has a unique story (<https://usafacts.org/articles/30-years-after-americans-disabilities-act-one-eight-america/>). And every individual with a disability seeks and deserves to be respected for who they are and the value they hold. We begin by listening.

Sheryl Scioscia-Beard is an individual with a disability and a real story to share. And Sheryl's story deserves a deep listen: a personal account of what it means to be an individual with a disability in a society that is all too quick to judge and dismiss and live in ignorance. Sheryl's story is our collective story: <https://nddac.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/How-I-Choose-to-Deal-with-Society.pdf>

Our journey together begins with understanding.

Upcoming topics: *Using Person-First Language; Visitation Policies*