

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Lois Curtis

Disability rights activist and advocate

"Silence is the last thing the world will ever hear from me."

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Background Information

Born: December 21, 1946; Died: November 3, 2022

Lois Curtis was born on December 21, 1946, in Atlanta, Georgia. As a child, she struggled in various schools due in part to developmental disabilities. The local school in her area was not equipped to support Lois' educational or developmental needs. After a diagnosis of mental and intellectual disabilities, eleven-year-old Lois was sent to live at the Georgia Regional Hospital.

Curtis' Resistance

Lois spent much of her childhood and early adulthood in various state hospital institutions. As she grew older, she repeatedly requested to leave and live in the larger community. Officials continually denied her requests, even though her treatment team believed that she could live independently with support. Lois decided to act against her involuntary confinement from the public. She began to call representatives from Atlanta Legal Aid. Lois Curtis sued the state of Georgia, and her case went to the Supreme Court. Lois and her legal representative wanted to show that by denying Lois' release from the institution and not giving her support to live in the community, Georgia had violated the Americans with Disabilities Act. In the 1999 Supreme Court case, *Olmstead v. LC*, the Court said that unnecessary institutionalization is a form of segregation and is illegal under the Americans with Disabilities Act.ⁱ The Court decided that Curtis and other people with disabilities have a right to live in the community. The case also said that people with disabilities should be provided proper support upon release from institutions. After the decision, states began developing and implementing policies to increase community-based programs and meet their obligations to individuals with disabilities. The court's ruling opened doors for many people with disabilities to move out of hospitals and centers. Some people even gained federal and state monetary support if needed. After 18 years of living in an institution, Lois left at 29.

Achievements

In 2007, Lois received the Harriet Tubman Act of Courage Award. She earned a Catalyst Award as the Self-Advocate of the Year in 2017. The Association of People Supporting Employment First created the Lois Curtis Award in her honor. The award recognizes an individual's personal achievement in advocating for inclusive, individualized, community-based employment and/or independent living.ⁱⁱ

Essential Questions

1. How did Lois Curtis challenge discrimination against people with developmental disabilities?
 - a. Why is it important to advocate for yourself?

2. How did the Supreme Court case *Olmstead v. L.C.* impact people with developmental disabilities, and people living in state-run institutions/hospitals?

3. "***Silence is the last thing the world will ever hear from me.***"
 - a. What does the author mean in this quote?
 - b. Why is it important to speak up for yourself, even if you are afraid?

ⁱ <https://www.innow.org/2022/02/24/black-history-month-profile-lois-curtis/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2022/11/04/disability-community-remembers-pioneering-advocate-lois-curtis.html#:~:text=The%20Association%20of%20People%20Supporting,employment%20and%20For%20independent%20living.>