

I think it is safe to say that my life would have looked quite different if I hadn't met Lester and Barb and worked for the Campaign for Real Choice in Illinois! I probably would not have attended a protest or spoke at a legislative hearing or met all of you. Before the Campaign, I just wanted to work in a nonprofit that helped people. I didn't have any understanding of power or direct action organizing or policy changes. Well, that's all changed...

It is difficult to put into words the affect the Campaign has had on my life, because it has had a transformational impact. I remember when we were fighting the reopening of Lincoln and Lester banged his fist on the table and yelled that people were more important than jobs. I was re-voicing for him that day, and remember trembling inside but trying to re-voice with the same passion he had. I didn't quite pull it off, but thankfully I had several years to let his clarity of vision, passion, and courage soak in.

Over the six years I worked for the Campaign I collected countless memories with all of you. From the first meeting on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004 where we decided we did want to take on LDC to Freedom Quest 2009 where people with developmental disabilities spoke strongly about how they wanted to live their lives as they chose. Of course, freedom was a central theme for the Campaign, as our other main events were called Freedom Ride and Liberty Launch! And, in fact, freedom was the whole point. Freedom from demeaning institutions. Freedom from tiny expectations. Freedom from the control of others.

The lessons that I learned from Lester and all of you guide me as I work with Community Choices (a cooperative that we have formed in Champaign) and The Alliance (a self-advocacy network in Illinois). Every day I strive to live by the principles I learned through working at the Campaign. They are: 1) Recognize that people with disabilities are experts in their own lives, 2) The quality of support will often determine the quality of life for a person, 3) Always put people first, 4) Don't be afraid to pound your fist every once in a while, 5) Question why, and 6) Celebrate every victory.

Lester, I promise that I will keep fighting for justice and for freedom for people with disabilities. Thank you for believing in me, challenging me, and laughing with me. Your spirit will live on in me and all of us whose lives you touched. We love you. We love the work you did, and we love the spirit of hope that you brought all of us. While the Campaign is ending, the work will go on. We hope we can make you proud!

Jennifer Knapp