

Shirley Dove

My daughter is 62 years old. At 6 months old, she had an allergic reaction that began a journey we are still on today. I was told three times to put her in an institution and move on with my life - but she is my life. She changed my life and I think for a purpose and definitely for the better.

In 1967 Vera was attending Driffel School in Oxnard and I attended a parent meeting of the children with special needs. I met Hazel Kay, Mary Stephenson, and many other parents who were actively advocating in Sacramento and directly with the Governor for more opportunities for their children to learn and play like all the other kids. I knew right away I belonged in this group.

I was fortunate to travel with them to meet with Governor Pat Brown. He was listening to us, as was Assemblyman Frank Lanterman. It took another year and the next Governor - Ronald Reagan, but finally the Lanterman Act was law. Of course it took time and continuing effort to implement the law - and it also took continuing advocacy -- that continues today - right now.

I was a working mom then in 1969 - I had to work because I had a child with medical needs. So I did the most logical thing - quit my high paying management job and went to work at The Arc for half the pay. Someone had to make a difference and I thought it should be me.

I retired from The Arc in 1995 - or should I say I stopped being paid in 1995? I have never stopped working and advocating for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and, by God, I never will.

I have sat on the Board of The Arc of Ventura County, The Arc California, The Arc national board, and currently sit on Tri-Counties Regional Center Board. While President of The Arc California, we formed the Coalition to Preserve the Lanterman Act, which has now grown into the Lanterman Coalition; a powerful advocacy group made up of 20 or so agencies with thousands of members - and boy are our voices heard now.

This is how we protect our love ones and ensure that they have full rights in our world - through advocacy. All of us - parents, families, people with disabilities, people working in the field - we have to keep up the pressure. We have to stay informed and we have to be vocal.

Please make a commitment to get involved. You are the master to what happens next. If your legislator has an event locally - attend. Take your loved ones. Be seen

and heard. Parents started this movement and we're proud of our work. Let's not let it go.