DISABILITY LAW CENTER ESTABLISHES FELLOWSHIP TO ENSURE FUTURE GENERATIONS OF DISABILITY ADVOCATES

Barbara G. Toomer used a wheelchair after contracting polio in 1956. She was a trailblazer who championed civil rights for people with disabilities in Utah and across the nation. She helped organize and lead many disability advocacy groups including Community Shares, the Utah Independent Living Center, ADAPT/Utah and the Disabled Rights Action Committee (DRAC) among others. She served on the Martin Luther King Jr. Human Rights Commission and the Professional Ethics Committee of the Utah State Bar. Recognized by the National Organization for Women with their Woman of Courageous Action Lifetime Achievement Award, she was a tireless advocate who wrote letters, made phone calls, gave testimony and met in person with many leaders in Washington D.C. and at the Utah legislature. When she felt diplomacy had failed to yield results, Barbara, and her army of volunteers, turned to non-violent direct action to champion the cause of equality and to fight for the respect and basic human dignity for people with disabilities.

Barbara passed away in April of 2018 at the age of 88. Her nearly four-decade legacy as a civil rights champion inspired the Disability Law Center to create a fellowship in her name. The Barbara G. Toomer Disability Rights Fellowship is a nine-month intensive experience designed to nurture new and emerging leaders in the disability community. Barbara’s daughter, Jean Layton, said,

“...the Fellowship will empower the next generation so their voices can speak for those who are not heard...My mother realized early on that it is not enough to just get a seat at the table. To truly effectuate change we need to raise our voice to speak truth to power and point out injustice. It is my greatest hope that this Fellowship teaches people how to fight and not just sit around a table and talk policy. Teaching the next generation to fight for their rights is the best way to honor her legacy.”

The highly competitive, paid fellowship offers students, recent graduates and/or those in the early stages of their careers the chance to work alongside skilled professionals to gain practical experience in leading change initiatives, understanding disability culture, engaging in citizen politics and pursuing legal, legislative and advocacy efforts. Participants will gain experience while contributing to projects that make a positive difference in the lives of people with disabilities in Utah. Qualified applicants must identify as a person with a disability.

To learn more about the fellowship, please visit http://disabilitylawcenter.org/toomer-fellowship/ Applications are due by Friday, March 15, 2019.

The Disability Law Center is a private non-profit organization whose mission is to enforce and strengthen laws that protect the opportunities, choices and legal rights of Utahns with disabilities. Services are available statewide and free of charge, regardless of income, legal status, language, or place of residence.

###