

Why we Pursued Special Education

Rud and Ann Turnbull

Ann: I think I went into Special Ed early on because it was a way to act on some of my values that related to civil rights or social justice. It was much more appealing to me to have an opportunity to work with students who had special needs as contrasted by typical students.

Rud: I was asked by the then governor of North Carolina to go to a state institution and study something called aversive training. And as I spent some time out there on this review panel, I learned about a little thing called the Learning- To-Be-Better Box. I asked to see the Learning-To-Be-Better Box. It was a little wooden box with two electric batteries and a copper wire and a little switch. I asked what it was all about. They said it's learning to be better; if they misbehave we use this little box on them. I said, what does it do, and they said it emits an electrical current. I asked the professionals, have you ever used it on yourself? They said, no. I took off my jacket, rolled up my sleeve, and put it on my arm, and jumped out of the chair because it was quite an electrical shock that it emitted. Then I went back and I decided at that point that I would spend some of my time and eventually all of my time on disability policy. I was a lawyer, I still am. Obviously Ann and I have parented a child with disability. I came to it by accident and by my son's birth and in part by having been asked to do something that I had no idea what I was doing, until I did this.

Ann: I think our most unique role in the field is as Rud said. We are parents of a young man, now almost 40, JT, who has multiple disabilities and that merged with our academic training. I am a special educator by background and Rud a lawyer as he said. I think that we stand in between these two worlds of research and academia on one side and 24/7 reality on the other and that our greatest contribution is trying to bring more of evidence-based practice to families and practitioners and trying to bring more of 24/7 reality to academics and researchers. I really see us as a bridge.

Rud: That means that we train people, we offer technical assistance, and in my case and in Ann's case as well, and I think in the case of all of us at the Beach Center, we become advocates. It is comfortable for us to have the integrity of being researchers, parents, trainers, and advocates. The Beach Center is really a combination of all four of those attributes. There is no sense in doing something and learning something unless you can actually then use it in a variety of forums to make a difference for people who are affected by a disability.

Beach Center on Disability

The University of Kansas

1200 Sunnyside Avenue, 3136 Haworth Hall • Lawrence, Kansas 66045

Telephone: 785.864.7600 • TTY: 785.864.3434

www.beachcenter.org