

NEWSLETTER

July 2026

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Disability Pride Month: Celebrating Our Community



July is Disability Pride Month and at The WILL Center, it's a time to celebrate the people we have the privilege of working alongside every day.

Disability Pride Month is about recognizing that disability is a part of life and that every person deserves to be valued, respected and included. It's also time to celebrate the accomplishments, talents and voices of people with disabilities while remembering the advocates whose efforts helped make many of the rights and opportunities we have today possible.

This month is observed in July because it marks the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act

(ADA) that was signed into law on July 26, 1990. The ADA was a major step forward in protecting the civil rights of people with disabilities. It also helped to create more inclusive communities which is something we continue to work toward.



“Disability is a natural part of the human experience.”

Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)

At The WILL Center, we believe that independence looks different for everyone. For some people, it may mean finding accessible housing, learning to navigate transportation, returning to work or advocating for accommodations. For others, it may simply mean having support, guidance and the confidence to make their own choices. Whatever the journey looks like, every person deserves the opportunity to live the life they choose.

One of the greatest things we witness is the resilience and kindness of the people we serve. Every day people overcome barriers or advocate for themselves and show that a disability does not define a person's potential. Those stories deserve to be recognized not just during Disability Pride Month but throughout the year.

Disability Pride Month is also an invitation for all of us to learn. We can use respectful language or think about accessibility in our workplaces and communities. Inclusion is not something that is created by one person or organization, but something we build together in the communities around us.

We encourage everyone to take a moment to recognize the diversity of the disability community and the importance of ensuring everyone has the opportunity to participate fully in community life.



Did You Know?

- The ADA was signed on July 26, 1990 by George H.W. Bush.
- The ADA is a civil rights law, meaning it protects people with disabilities from discrimination.
- More than 1 in 4 U.S. adults live with a disability.
- Disability is the only minority group that anyone can become a part of at any point in life.

Independent Living Program

Expanding Independence: Disability Rights at America's 250th Anniversary

Krista Smith - Assistant Director

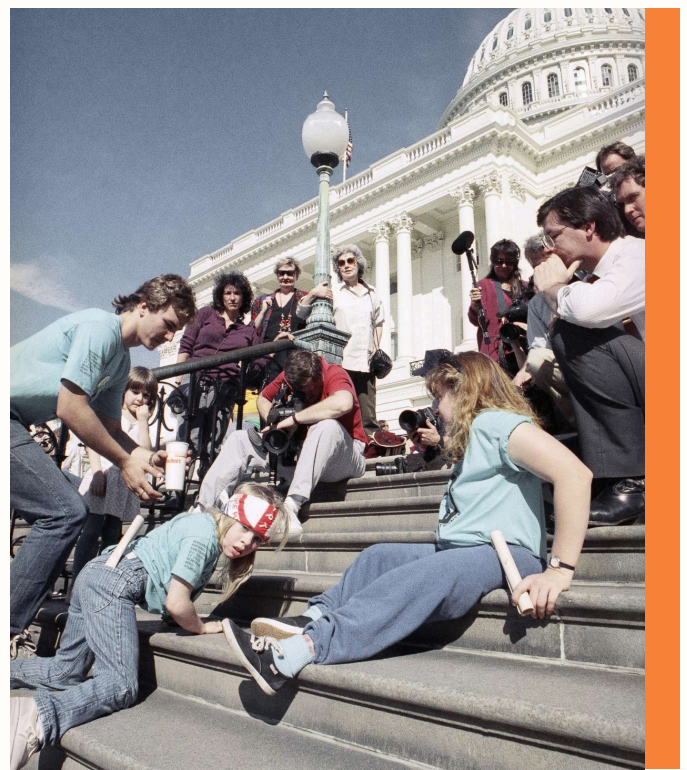
July has long been a time of celebration and recommitment to the ideals of freedom in the United States. As we mark the nation's 250th anniversary, we honor a legacy that began in 1776 with declarations of liberty and equality. Anniversaries like this also call us to look deeper. It's important to ask not only how far we've come, but who has been included in that journey, and who has too often been left behind.

For people with disabilities, the promise that "all men are created equal" did not initially extend to individuals with physical, intellectual, and mental health disabilities. Disability advocates have worked to help the nation expand its understanding of freedom. We shape a powerful civil rights movement that continues today.

In the early years of the United States, disability was largely viewed through a lens of charity or exclusion. People with disabilities were often institutionalized, hidden from public life, or denied opportunities for education, employment, and civic participation. Rather than being recognized as individuals with rights, they were frequently treated as objects of care or pity.

This narrative began to shift as the country entered the 20th century. Veterans returning from wars with disabilities, along with grassroots advocacy groups, began to challenge societal attitudes. These efforts helped lay the groundwork for a movement that would redefine disability not as an individual limitation, but as a matter of civil rights.

The disability rights movement gained momentum alongside other civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Activists demanded equal access to public spaces, education, and employment opportunities. Their work led to landmark legislation that continues to shape our society today.



- **The Rehabilitation Act of 1973:** Especially Section 504, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability in federally funded programs.

- **The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975),** now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): Guaranteed access to free and appropriate public education.

- **The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990:** A transformative law extending civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities across many aspects of public life.

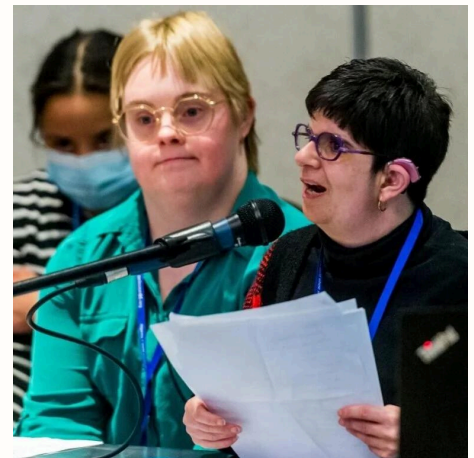
Because of these laws accessibility, inclusion, and equity became not just ideals, but rights.

Barriers remain despite significant progress. People with disabilities continue to experience higher rates of unemployment, limited access to healthcare, and disparities in housing and transportation.

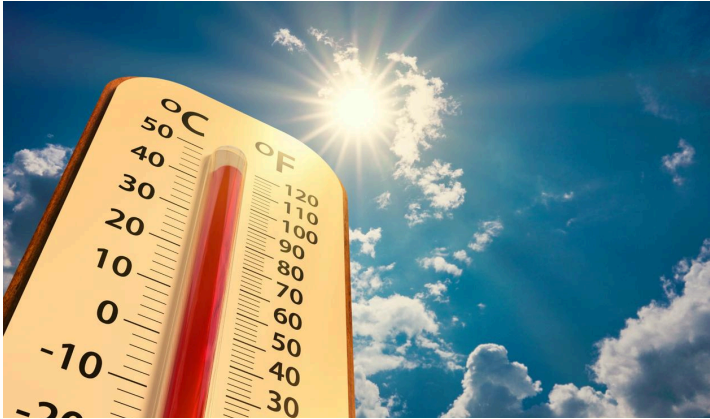


At The WILL Center this mission is central to everything we do. Through advocacy, education, and community engagement, we strive to create a world where disability is not a barrier to opportunity. We work for a world where human diversity is valued and celebrated. Each of us has a role to play by listening to the voices of people with disabilities. We can do this by supporting policies that promote accessibility and build communities where everyone belongs.

As we celebrate 250 years of American independence, ask yourself “What does independence truly mean?”. Anniversaries are not just about looking back. They are about looking at our future. This year let us celebrate not only the birth of a nation, but the ongoing work to make its ideals a reality for all. TRUE independence means everyone is included.



Staying Safe During Indiana's Summer Temperatures



As summer settles in across Indiana, warmer weather brings opportunities to enjoy community events, family gatherings and time outdoors. However, periods of extreme heat can also pose serious health risks, making it important for everyone to take precautions. This is especially so for older adults, children and people with disabilities or certain medical conditions.

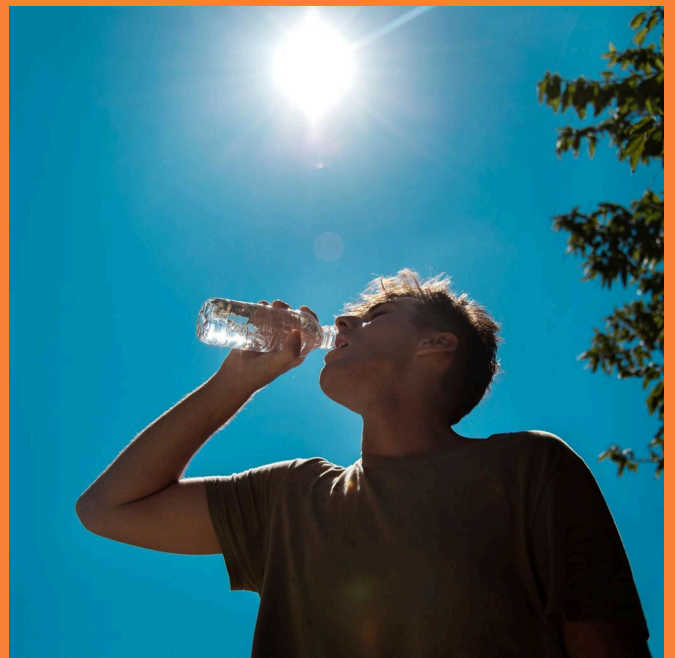
When the temperatures climb, the body's ability to cool itself can become overwhelmed. Heat related illnesses such as dehydration, heat exhaustion and heat stroke can develop quickly and particularly so when the humidity is high. Some medications and health conditions may also make it more difficult for the body to regulate its temperature.

One of the easiest ways to stay safe is to drink plenty of water throughout the day, even before you begin to feel thirsty. Wearing lightweight clothing, limiting outdoor activities during the hottest parts of the day and taking breaks in air conditioned spaces can also help to prevent any heat related illness.

It is also equally important to recognize the warning signs of heat related illness. Some symptoms to pay attention to are heavy sweating, dizziness, muscle cramps, nausea, weakness or headaches. If someone becomes confused, loses consciousness or has a high body temperature, seek emergency medical attention immediately, as these may be signs of heat stroke.

Extreme heat can also affect those around us. Checking in on neighbors, friends, family or anyone who may live alone is a simple act of kindness that can make a meaningful difference during a heat wave.

Summer should be a reason to enjoy, not endure. By planning ahead and looking out for one another, we can all help to make our communities safer during periods of extreme heat.



The American Flag

Jared Price - IL Coordinator

The American flag is one of the most recognized symbols in the world. It has 50 stars — one for each state — and 13 red and white stripes that represent the 13 original colonies. The flag's colors each carry a meaning: red stands for courage, white stands for purity, and blue stands for justice. People often call it "Old Glory," a nickname given by sea captain William Driver back in 1831.

The first official flag was adopted on June 14, 1777 — a date now celebrated every year as Flag Day. Since then, the design has been updated 27 times as new states joined the country. The current 50-star flag became official on July 4, 1960, after Hawaii became the 50th state. It is the longest-serving design in U.S. history.

The U.S. Flag Code gives Americans guidelines for how to handle and display the flag with respect. Here are the most important rules:

- Never let the flag touch the ground, the floor, or any water.
- Display the flag from sunrise to sunset. You can fly it at night only if it is properly lit.
- When hung on a wall, the blue field of stars should always be in the upper left corner (from the viewer's perspective).
- Do not use the flag as clothing, bedding, or decoration.
- When flying it with other flags, the U.S. flag must always be the highest.
- On Memorial Day, fly the flag at half-staff until noon, then raise it to the top.



When a flag becomes too worn, faded, or torn to display, it should not be thrown in the trash. That is considered disrespectful. Instead, the U.S. Flag Code says it should be "destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning." Many organizations hold special flag retirement ceremonies — often on Flag Day, June 14. During the ceremony, the flag is folded one final time, then placed respectfully into a fire. Participants stand quietly, and the ashes are buried afterward. You do not have to be in the military to take part in or attend one of these ceremonies. If you need to retire a flag, here is where you can take it:

- Your local American Legion or VFW post
- A Boy Scout, Girl Scout, or Cub Scout troop
- A flag collection box at a city hall, library, or civic building

Note: Most flags today are made of nylon or polyester. Burning them can release harmful fumes, so many programs retire synthetic flags by burying them instead. Either way, the goal is the same — to honor the flag with care and respect.

How to Pick the Perfect Melon

A Quick Guide to Choosing Sweet Watermelon & Cantaloupe

Best Time to Buy: June–August

A ripe melon is sweeter, juicier, and more flavorful. Instead of guessing, use these simple tips before adding one to your cart.

Watermelon

Choose a watermelon that has:

- A creamy yellow field spot – This shows it ripened on the vine.
- A dull, not shiny rind – Shiny melons are often picked too early.
- A heavy feel for its size – Heavier melons are usually juicier.
- A deep, hollow sound when tapped – A sign of ripeness.



Cantaloupe

Look for a cantaloupe with:

- A sweet, slightly musky aroma at the stem end.
- A golden-colored rind beneath the netting (avoid green).
- A slight give at the blossom end when gently pressed.
- A heavy feel for its size – An indicator of good flavor and moisture.



TIP: Don't rely on just one sign. The best melon usually checks several boxes. A heavy watermelon with a yellow field spot or a fragrant cantaloupe with a golden rind is likely to be sweet and ready to enjoy.

L.I.V.E. Program

Caring for Your Eyes at Every Stage of Life

Our eyes play an important role in how we experience and navigate the world each day. While vision can change over time, there are steps we can take to support eye health and maintain independence.

Regular comprehensive eye exams are one of the best ways to protect your vision. Eye exams can detect early signs of conditions such as glaucoma, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, and age-related macular degeneration—often before noticeable symptoms appear.

Simple habits can also help protect your eyes. Wearing sunglasses that block 100% of UVA and UVB rays, eating a balanced diet rich in fruits and vegetables, managing chronic health conditions, and avoiding smoking all contribute to long-term eye health.

In today's digital world, giving your eyes regular breaks is also important. The 20-20-20 Rule—looking 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes can help reduce eye strain from screens.

If you notice sudden changes in your vision, such as blurriness, flashes of light, or loss of sight, contact an eye care professional right away. Whether you are protecting your current vision or adapting to changes, taking care of your eye health helps support independence, safety, and quality of life.



It is also important to recognize that not all vision loss can be prevented. Many people experience low vision due to inherited conditions, age-related changes, medical conditions such as diabetes, or injury. For those living with low vision, assistive technology, vision rehabilitation services, and accessibility features on devices can support independence and daily activities.

