

Lonny Morrow, Board President, Disability Rights Iowa



Lonny Morrow made a career by helping people with mental and physical disabilities. Now retired, Morrow worked as a private practice psychologist, professor of special education at Truman State University, and as a school psychologist. He was also a due process hearing officer in addition, the governor of Missouri appointed him to the Missouri Protection and Advocacy Council. When Morrow returned to his home state of Iowa, he wanted to continue his involvement in disability advocacy.

After just over a year of serving as the President on Disability Rights Iowa's Board, Morrow reflected on his passion for disability rights, his many advocacy experiences, and what he wants to see in the coming year for DRI and disability services in the state of Iowa.

Morrow sees litigation as a key in regaining services for many Iowans who have struggled under the Managed Care Organizations. But he was quick to add, that just regaining services is not enough. "Have we made progress? Yes. Are we making adequate amounts of progress? That is a resounding no. There is nothing for me to believe we will make big gains in this without litigation," Morrow said.

For Morrow, the lack of services, and training in the community are major hurdles to overcome. "Somehow we have to view people with disabilities as important as anyone else. Folks with disabilities can work. They can make meaningful contributions to society, but there has to be money and training," Morrow said.

Looking forward to 2018, Morrow said his goals for DRI include increased awareness and training for mental health services. DRI recently filed a federal class action lawsuit against director of the Iowa Department of Human Services, the Administrator of the Division of Mental Health and Disability Services; and the Superintendent of the Boys State Training School for lack of mental health services and other allegations.

Morrow noted that DRI and other service providers need to inform the public about successes and the positive impacts they have on the community as a way to combat the negative stigma surrounding disabilities.

Morrow added that if people are serious about mental health services in the state, they need to contact their legislators about the issue. "Legislators can't be experts in everything. They need to hear from people. Not just complaints but also solutions," Morrow said.

The new year provides Disability Rights Iowa staff, board members like Morrow, and advocates a fresh opportunity to work towards these important goals. "I'm enthused about the work we are doing on creating systemic changes in Iowa. I have hope," Morrow said.