

Two Inducted into NYS Disability Rights Hall of Fame

Albany, New York Jun 9, 2023 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - The New York State Independent Living Council (NYSILC) inducted two veteran advocates for individuals with disabilities, Debra (Debbie) Bonomo and Kathy Lynch, into the New York State Disability Rights Hall of Fame in a virtual ceremony on Thursday, June 1.

NYSILC created the NYS Disability Rights Hall of Fame in 2018 to recognize individuals who have made lifelong achievements that positively impact people with disabilities in society.

Areas of lifelong achievement include improving public policy and programs/services, advancing new knowledge and/or concepts, eliminating barriers, and promoting a positive image for people with disabilities.

Ms. Bonomo's accomplishments include successfully leading the fight for accessible buses in the Rochester area and advocating for improved personal assistance services for individuals on Medicaid, which led to statewide mandates for accessible buses and Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Services.

"I'm just feeling really humbled and I'm so pleased with what I was able to do, and to get the recognition from my peers is just unbelievable," Ms. Bonomo said in her acceptance speech. "I had to do a lot of outreach and education because no one knew what it was like growing up in a small town with (cerebral palsy). I'm glad I was able to reach out and educate people, although, at the time, I wasn't aware of what actually I was doing, because growing up in a small town, you don't get that full education" in advocating for disability rights.

Ms. Lynch has dedicated herself to improving the quality of life for individuals with psychiatric disabilities. In doing so, she has changed the public's perception of mental illness and those living with it.

Her efforts helped establish the peer support movement for people with mental illness and steer state funds toward assisting this population to remain in the community and out of institutions.

"I was quite humbled and also shocked, and I also felt very honored," Ms. Lynch said of learning she had been nominated for the Hall of Fame. She noted that when she began her work, the effectiveness of peer support for those with mental illness was not recognized. "Psychiatrists at the time really believed that peers helping peers was detrimental to our well-being," but once groups started forming, "all of a sudden they recognized they weren't receiving so many crisis calls, that peers actually were helping peers heal."

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Source : New York State Independent Living Council

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