

Chester A. Finn

Albany, NY

Chester Finn of New York is a Special Assistant in the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities, a position he has held since 1997. He was first appointed to the National Council on Disability by President Obama in 2010.

In 2008, Mr. Finn, who is blind and has a developmental disability, co-founded the

Community Empowerment Programs Incorporated, which provides community services and educational programming for people with disabilities.

He served as President and Chairman of the National Self Advocates Becoming Empowered from 2002 to 2006 and then again from 2009 to 2011.

In 1995, he received the New York State Self Advocate of the Year Award. Mr. Finn received an A.A. from Genessee Community College.



Additional Comments

When Mr. Finn is funny, he's really funny, especially on the subject of his childhood version of "right to risk" but for every laugh Chester gets, he gives a message. "I self-advocated every day, even as a child" says Chester. "I self-advocated to cross the road, to ride a bike, for a later bedtime." He even had to "self-advocate" himself away from the faith healers who wanted to pray over him while they anointed him with oils. "They wanted to 'fix' me. It didn't occur to them that there's a reason for this." Chester says he represents people who "...don't mind getting the help we need or ask for. What we do mind are people who say, 'Oh you poor little disabled person. If the whole world looked at things the way we

do, by learning about each other, there would be peace. We understand each other and know about our disabilities so we know how to help each other." He may not be the father of self-advocacy, but he is certainly a valuable member of the family.

If you're a fan of irony, here's a little piece for you: Chester Finn also has a visual impairment, yet he sees himself and the world more clearly than most. He refuses to be defined by his disabilities. In fact, it's the other way around. Through them, he has choreographed a life of participation, contribution, enjoyment and prestige. As he says, "You learn to deal with what you have. I know who I am and I can tell people what it's like to be me. Among the most telling words that Chester uttered were, "I love being me."

For anyone who doubts the value of self-determination and self-advocacy, there can be no better lesson. For those of us who participate in the journey, there can be no greater validation.