

## Jean's Page on PennTASH Website (3-3-14)

Welcome to our website! We hope we inspire you to help people with disabilities. As a self-advocate, and the first with a cognitive disability to be elected president of a TASH chapter, I have seen firsthand how our nation has come a long way in gaining rights for people with disabilities. But there are still wrongs to be fixed. Millions of children and adults are still living in institutions, still suffering from physical and mental abuse and neglect, and still being denied their rightful place as citizens of our world. We must end this. I want to end this in my lifetime.

When the foster care system failed me as a child, I was placed in an institution for seven years, and another for three more, robbing me of ten years of my childhood. It was like jail. My special education was not special. I wanted to be in school with the other kids and learn what they were learning. Had there not been a group of courageous parents and advocates joining forces with attorneys, judges and legislators to fight against the horrible place called "Pennhurst," I would have been exiled again, for a third time, as another statistic in that dark insidious world. It was Judge William Broderick's court order to close Pennhurst that allowed me to leave Stillmeadow, at twenty-one years of age, and move to a real life in a real community. This is how I began my long journey toward freedom and contentment. These were feelings I had never known growing up

It is moral and right to welcome children with disabilities into our families, neighborhoods and schools. It is moral and right for adults with disabilities to belong to our communities as welcomed, respected neighbors, workers and citizens. But more than that, my hope is that all people who were ever born with a disability, or will ever acquire a disability, experience the closeness of a loving family and true friends every day of their lives.

Help us fight for these outcomes!

~ Jean Searle, President of PennTASH