



## Disability History and Awareness Month 2023

### Judi Chamberlin

Judi Chamberlin was an American activist, leader, organizer, public speaker, and educator in the psychiatric survivor's movement. Her political activism followed her involuntary confinement in a psychiatric facility in the 1960s.

After recently being married, Chamberlin suffered a miscarriage and became severely depressed and voluntarily admitted herself into an in-patient psychiatric facility.

However, after a handful of voluntary admissions, she was diagnosed with schizophrenia and involuntarily committed. As an involuntary patient, she witnessed and experienced a range of abuses: Seclusion rooms and refractory wards were used for resistive patients, even when their forms of resistance were non-violent. She was given made her feel tired and affected her memory. The derogation of her civil liberties that she experienced as an inmate provided the impetus for her activism as a member of the psychiatric survivor movement.



After her involuntary commitment, Chamberlin became deeply involved in the nascent psychiatric patients' rights movement. In 1971 she joined the Boston-based Mental Patients Liberation Front (MPLF) and became associated with the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Boston University. Her affiliation with this center facilitated her role in co-founding the Ruby Rogers Advocacy and Drop-in-Centers, which are self-help institutions staffed by former psychiatric patients. Chamberlin was also a founder and later a Director of Education at the National Empowerment Center. She also published a book detailing her experiences from her involuntary commitment: *On Our Own: Patient Controlled Alternatives to the Mental Health System* (1978).

Chamberlin also received several awards for her mental health advocacy work, including the Distinguished Service Award of the President of the United States from the National Council on Disability.

**Profiles by Andrew Caruana, Policy and Research Intern, Office of Senator Sara Gelser Blouin**

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