OPPORTUNITY ENTERPRISES

October 2026

T.E.A.M. Self-Advocates

Justin Dart Jr. – A Leader Who Helped Change Disability Rights

Justin Dart Jr. was a disability rights activist and advocate. He believed that people with disabilities should have equal rights, choices, opportunities, and a voice in their own lives.

He was born on August 29, 1930, in Chicago, Illinois. Justin contracted polio as a young man which left him using a wheelchair. Instead of allowing his disability to stop him, he became a leader and dedicated his life to human and disability rights.

He Helped Make History

Justin Dart was one of the important leaders behind the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA became law on July 26, 1990. It helps protect people with disabilities from discrimination and supports equal access to things like:

- Employment
- Transportation
- Public places and services
- Accessibility
- Equal rights

Left: Pres. Bush signs the Americans with Disabilities Act with Justin next to him. Right: Pres. Clinton presents Justin with the National Medal of Freedom.

Together, Everyone Achieves More

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Justin traveled across the country listening to people with disabilities and learning about the barriers they faced. He believed that people with disabilities needed to be part of the conversation about their own lives.

He coined the movement's famous rallying cry, "Nothing about us without us." It was his way of encouraging people to keep moving forward, keep speaking up, and keep working for equality.

He also believed strongly in empowerment, helping people have the ability and opportunity to make decisions and have control over their own lives.

Justin Dart Jr. received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1998, the highest civilian honor in the United States. He passed away June 22, 2002. He co-founded the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) and is regarded as the "Godfather of the ADA." His message of empowerment and advocacy continues to inspire people with disabilities today.

The Justin Dart Jr. Personal Achievement Award is an annual award presented by the Indiana Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (INARF) to recognize individuals who, like Mr. Dart, have maximized their skills and abilities to achieve personal goals, excel in upward mobility, or demonstrate a dedication to volunteerism and disability advocacy.

Why Does Justin Dart Matter to Us?

Justin Dart Jr.'s work reminds us that your voice matters. You can be an advocate by:

- Speaking up when something isn't right.
- Asking for what you need.
- Supporting other people.
- Sharing your ideas and opinions.
- Making choices about your own life.
- Knowing and understanding your rights.

You don't have to be a famous leader to be an advocate. **Every time you speak up for yourself, you are practicing self-advocacy.**

REMEMBER:

Your voice matters.
Your choices matter.
Your rights matter.
You matter.

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Meet Meagan

Meagan is a passionate self-advocate, leader, and educator who uses her voice to create positive changes throughout her community. Through her involvement with Opportunity Enterprises' Self-Advocates program, presentations with The Nora Project, and advocacy efforts with local and state leaders, and commitment to prompting inclusion and accessibility, Meagan has become a powerful force for people with disabilities.

Meagan was awarded the Justin Dart Jr. Personal Achievement Award INARF 2026 celebrating her incredible achievements and the impact she continues to make every day.

Opportunity Enterprises Self-Advocates works to encourage and empower individuals to use their own voices to make choices and decisions that affect their lives.
We educate for equal rights, respect and inclusion for all!