



*“I very much believe that God created us all equal and no one person or persons should be excluded. We are all human beings and we should all be considered with respect and human decency whether we are on the job, in school, at church, or gathered together at a public place.”*

*Jackie Crews*

Who was Jackie Crews?

Jackie Crews was a committed advocate on behalf of full inclusion in society for all individuals, especially those who, like her, had or have disabilities.

Jackie was born in 1959 in North Carolina. After finishing high school and dropping out of college, Jackie moved to Richmond, where she would live the last 23 years of her life in a nursing home. Shortly after moving to a nursing home, she became a tenacious, effective advocate on behalf of all facility residents on a variety of issues.

In 2002, Jackie was accepted as a participant in Partners in Policymaking, a program sponsored by the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities that trains adults with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities in advocacy techniques, systems change, and disability issues. Immediately she made a deep impression with her grace and style. Her articulate framing of the importance of inclusion for individuals with disabilities led to her eloquent testimony before Virginia state legislators and a profile in a documentary on the Partners in Policymaking program, which was aired in January 2005 in most major media markets around the state.

Jackie had Spinal Muscular Atrophy, a condition similar to muscular dystrophy. This condition required her to use a wheelchair to get around and made her dependent on close medical monitoring for her survival. Jackie came to desire a life in her own home in the community, even as she acknowledged the kindness and friendship of most of the staff and fellow residents at her nursing home.

She never realized her dream of leaving the nursing home, but through her work as a self-advocate she initiated changes and inspired others who will realize her dream. On the morning of March 15, 2004, she passed away after a brief illness. The Jackie Crews Award will be awarded as a tribute to her willingness to confront both her own physical limitations and those of the community around her.