



Rose Williams

**Poet, Community Leader,
and Advocate for People with Disabilities**

**Recipient of the 2007 JACKIE CREWS
AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP**



Born in Charlottesville, Virginia in 1950 with athetoid cerebral palsy, Rose Williams has never let her disability stand in her way. From the very beginning, her family set an example for achievement and advocacy encouraging her to try everything and fighting to ensure that she would attend school in regular classrooms with full access to the general curriculum. She graduated from high school overcoming physical accessibility and other barriers and obtained a drivers license operating her own car without special modifications. After first volunteering to prove her abilities, she worked at the University of Virginia Medical Center for eighteen years. Along the way, Rose purchased her own home, has served on many volunteer boards, and is an active leader in her church's outreach and pastoral activities.

In 1994, Rose enrolled in college to study computer science, creative writing, and public speaking, then began a new career as a writer and motivational speaker. She enjoys art and photography, participates in community recreation activities, and teaches poetry workshops. In 2000, she joined with others in her community to found the Charlottesville and Albemarle County district of VSA arts. Her poems have appeared in all seven VSA collections of writings by individuals with disabilities and their caregivers. In 2005, she published her first book, *Strike a Pose Rose*, and is currently working on a memoir entitled *A Rose By Any Other Name*. The Charlottesville Parks and Recreation Department recognized her as one of five disability advocates to have their portraits publicly displayed as a part of its "Ability Series" in 2006. In 2005, she became a participant in the Ms. Wheelchair Virginia competition and was third runner-up in 2007.

After two falls and other serious health complications, Rose became completely dependent on a wheelchair for mobility in 2001. In early 2007, after realizing that wheelchair users such as herself could not address the Charlottesville City Council from

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the microphones provided for public speakers, she successfully spearheaded accessibility changes to the Council Chamber. Rose worked with city planners for several months to have a barrier half-wall removed and an automatic door to the Council Chamber installed. Later that spring, Rose again worked with city planners to have automatic doors installed at Charlottesville's recently opened Downtown Transit Station, which also serves as the city's Visitors Center. She now serves as a member of the county's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Advisory Board.

In its third consecutive year, the Jackie Crews Award for Excellence in Leadership continues to recognize self-advocates whose commitment, initiative, actions, and enthusiasm inspire others and make a difference in their communities. Selected by a panel of Partners in Policymaking (PIP) graduates to receive the 2007 Jackie Crews Award, Rose is described by those who nominated and recommended her as "quiet, gentle, well tempered, insistent for architectural improvements and barrier removals in the City of Charlottesville." She is commended for her "ability to challenge and change the public mindset about persons with disabilities in a positive way."

Rose joins previous award recipients Jack Brandt, 2006, who now works with the Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy, and Ed Turner, 2005, the Governor's Special Advisor on Disability Issues, as role models and ambassadors for the values of leadership represented by the four stars on the award logo – *Independence, Productivity, Inclusion, and Self-Determination* – fundamentals of leadership and qualities exemplified by Jackie Crews, a graduate of the Board's PIP program who passed away in April 2004.