

Moving Forward

By: Greg Bott, Director of Development

The 1960's spawned many, many things. The Civil Rights Movement. Hippies. Woodstock. The Beach Boys. Nondairy Creamer. And, lest we forget, the Independent Living Movement.

The '60's truly were an era of innovation. We put a man on the moon. Astroturf was invented. And, Arpanet, the first iteration of the internet, was created. Amid all this technological development one of the most iconic images was created: the International Symbol of Accessibility (ISA).

As one of the most easily recognizable symbols in the world, the ISA is synonymous with people with disabilities. The original symbol was designed in 1968 as a way of educating people across the globe about accessible spaces; before the ISA, each country had its own symbol for accessibility. The ISA was a bold and innovative idea that truly revolutionized the way in which communities think about and promote accessibility. But, take a second look at it... What does this symbol really tell us about people with disabilities?

The person in the ISA is static. Motionless. Immobile. He is blocky and rigid, and looks as though he is just leaving a hospital or, worse, an institution sitting in one of those very recognizable wheelchairs. What does this image tell us about people with disabilities? Are people with disabilities immobile? Do they just sit around all day doing nothing? Do all people with disabilities live in hospitals, nursing homes or institutions? Of course not!

In 2009, artist and researcher Sara Hendren set out to change the ISA for good. Hendren could not accept the ISA as it stands as a symbol for not just accessibility but for people with disabilities. The people with disabilities that she saw were not motionless or immobile. They were constantly in motion—constantly **moving forward**. Her design would become the Accessible Icon Project.

This new design has revitalized the ISA symbol. The wheel cutout symbolizes motion, the placement of the arms suggest motion, and the lean of the body depicts motion. By all accounts, the new ISA symbol depicts someone who is **moving forward**. This design completely changes the way in which people with disabilities are viewed.

New York City has adopted this new symbol. The Jacksonville Jaguars football team has adopted this new symbol. And, it's used in several southwestern states. So, why not right here in the Lehigh Valley? The redevelopment of downtown Allentown is the perfect starting place. If we truly want to make the Lehigh Valley more welcoming to people with disabilities, let's start by using this new symbol that shows people with disabilities **moving forward**.

For more information on the Accessible Icon Project or to learn how you can be a part of the change, visit www.accessibleicon.org.