

#ThinkABILITY

APRIL DUNN

I would like to introduce you to Ms. April Dunn who is 30 years old this year. She lives in her own apartment since the flood of August 2016 hit her great city of Baton Rouge and surrounding areas. In 2013 she became involved with advocating. Since then she has accomplished some great things.

Ms. Dunn was diagnosed with fetal alcohol syndrome at birth. Her birth mom gave her up for adoption right after she was born. She lived in foster care for a few months and then was adopted by her mom. Her disabilities are mild cognitive impairment, obsessive compulsive disorder, and cerebral palsy.

Ms. Dunn attended Glen Oaks High in Baton Rouge. She was a member of the JROTC and had a 3.5-grade point average and made honor roll each grading period in high school. Each year in high school she was recognized at the Honor's Breakfast for having made a 3.5 or higher grade point average and good attendance. She received a certificate for having perfect attendance when she exited high school.



Representative Schroder was honored to recognize Ms. Dunn as his new friend and as a champion for individuals with disabilities.

She walked across the stage with her peers on graduation day in 2005. As she exited the stage, she opened her diploma to discover that she had been given a Certificate of Attendance for her 4 years in high school because she could not pass the GEE. She was devastated.

Unsure as to what she was going to do for her future, Ms. Dunn decided she wanted to attend Baton Rouge Community College (BRCC) and because of a loophole was able to enroll. She attended BRCC for years completing over 100 session hours with a 3.050-grade point average. Unfortunately, since she had not received a high school diploma, she was unable to do anything with the hours from BRCC.

In 2013, she met Ms. Ashley McReynolds at a Regional Advisory Council Meeting. This would begin Ms. Dunn's journey to advocacy and her making a huge difference in the futures lives of individuals with disabilities. Ms. Dunn expressed to Ms. McReynolds her concerns about not having received her diploma. She told Ms. McReynolds that she would do what she could to help others not to have to go through what she did.

In 2014, Representative John Schroder agreed to carry the bill that would provide an alternative pathway to a diploma for individuals with disabilities. He spent hundreds of hours working on this bill and meeting with legislators, advocates, school boards, teachers, the state department of education and others to ensure that this bill would pass. Ms. Dunn presented her testimony to the House Education Committee on what her experience was and why she felt this bill was necessary for individuals with disabilities. The bill passed out of the House Education Committee and continued to move forward.

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Ms. Dunn was so happy to know that others would reap the rewards of her advocacy, but she still yearned for her own diploma. Ms.

McReynolds wanted to see it happen. In 2016, she worked with Representative Schroder to carry a bill that would give individuals with disabilities the opportunity to receive a retroactive diploma if they had received all 24 Carnegie units and could not pass the GEE or EOC. Representative Schroder worked closely with Senator Claitor and this bill was added to one of Senator Claitor's bills and became Act 303.

Ms. Dunn has continued to meet and work with legislators on issues that are important to individuals with disabilities. She also serves on many boards and committees. She is Chairperson of the Capital Area Regional Advisory Committee (RAC), Chairperson of People First of Baton Rouge, and Vice Chairperson of the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council. After Act 833 was passed into law, Ms. Dunn sat on the Leadership Committee which was formed to help ensure the smooth transition of the new law. Ms. Dunn sat on the Family and Community Support Task Force and Families Helping Families Ad Hoc Task Force Committee. She is a member of LaCAN and is 2015 graduate of Partners in Policymaking.



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#ThinkABILITY is a month long social media campaign to celebrate the accomplishments of individuals with disabilities. The campaign is coordinated by Families Helping Families of Jefferson and held annually during the month of **March**. Learn more about it at <http://fhfjefferson.org/whats-going-on/special-events/thinkability>

Changing Lives. Every Day.