

AWS Foundation often speaks of the importance of inclusion, specifically regarding individuals with disabilities. Our efforts towards an inclusive community benefit those with disabilities in many ways and often the “feel good” benefits take precedence. However, the more significant benefit of inclusion is in having all voices and perspectives heard. Positive change does not come unless those in power and privilege hear those voices and truly listens.

Justin Dart Jr., “father of the ADA”, was instrumental in passing the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 as part of the G.H.W. Bush administration. Dart, however, did not start his activism with disability rights. Even though he was nearly denied the right to graduate high school due to his disability, his early work in activism fought against racial inequality. While attending Houston University, then an all-white college, he led a group of students to demand integration in their school, an effort that was not successful. Justin stood up for equality even before the Civil Rights movement began, because he listened and learned.

Dart was later appointed as head of the Rehabilitation Services Administration, a position he later lost because he spoke of the inept management of government agencies in a congressional hearing. That rejection only fueled his momentum to advocate for the rights of those with disabilities.

To accomplish change, those in positions of privilege and power must listen to the voices of the oppressed. We must learn from the black community, the disability community, the LGBTQ+ community, immigrants, women and any group who has ever been marginalized. Everyone has a voice and deserves to be heard.

Justin Dart first fought for racial equality. This is a time for each of us to listen to the voices of those who are telling us of their oppression. We must all use what is heard and continue the conversations. We must use what is heard to make this a community of justice and equality for all. Everyone must use their voice to stand up against injustice. Silence implies complicity. We support that platform to share your voice and amplify the voices of others.

- AWS Foundation Team

