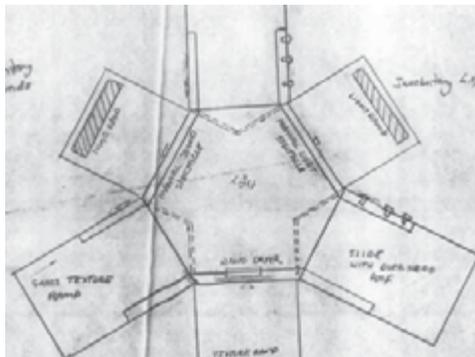




Our Story



Thomas Sayre - UNC - Chapel Hill



Sayre's 1978 sketch of accessible play environments



Bruce Rogers, Inspiration for Journey of Hope, in 1987

IN 1976 DURWARD OWEN, then Executive Director of Pi Kappa Phi, called a meeting of the minds with the leaders of Pi Kappa Phi in an effort to mobilize the work force that was the fraternity's undergraduate members.

At that time, he approached a man named Thomas Sayre who designed a therapeutic play unit for children with severe disabilities. Little did they know that their collaboration would spur a philanthropic initiative that is, to this day, an unparalleled success in the Greek world.

The Ability Experience, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, was founded in 1977 and remains the exclusive philanthropy of Pi Kappa Phi with the purpose of instilling lifelong service in our fraternity members and serving people with disabilities. Ingenuity has allowed for The Ability Experience to develop premier programming for Pi Kappa Phi undergraduates and alumni. What started out as construction of Thomas Sayre's play unit has evolved into nationally recognized projects that work collectively to promote a greater understanding of people with disabilities.

In 1987, a young Pi Kappa Phi alumnus named Bruce Rogers embarked on a daunting journey of cycling across the country in an effort to bring more attention to the mission of The Ability Experience. Inspired by his inaugural trip, a 21- person team began the Journey of Hope in 1988, and now every summer members of Pi Kappa Phi cycle from San Francisco to Washington, D.C. while delivering a message of understanding. A two week cycling trip, fashioned in the likeness of the Journey of Hope, called Gear Up Florida began in 1997 and today is touted as the best two weeks of programming that The Ability Experience has to offer.

The Ability Experience's construction effort expanded in 1989 when the first Ability Weekend was held at Holy Angels in Charlotte, NC. Now undergraduates from all over the country have the opportunity to attend one of these two-day projects, where they work together to construct accessible amenities for facilities serving people with disabilities. Two years later, the first weeklong construction project, Ability Camp, was held at the Clemson Outdoor Lab in Clemson, SC. Today, Pi Kappa Phi members forgo the traditional college spring or fall break experience to attend this week of service, brotherhood and fun. The third construction project, AccessABILITY, was introduced in 1994 and is designed to allow undergraduates and alumni to participate in local service projects that makes homes accessible through the construction of wheelchair ramps. In 2003, the inaugural Build America took members to six camps in six weeks to build accessible amenities and interact with campers for a summer of service.

Undergraduate chapters across the country have and continue to establish volunteer relationships with local facilities that serve people with disabilities in conjunction with fundraising on campus and in their local communities for the programs of The Ability Experience. Members of Pi Kappa Phi have raised millions of dollars for the projects and programs of The Ability Experience as well as donated millions of man hours to renovate facilities that serve people with disabilities across the country. The history of The Ability Experience is not complete. New projects are on the horizon, there are more funds to be raised and millions of Americans to expose to the mission of The Ability Experience and how members of Pi Kappa Phi are bringing that mission to life, every day.