

# The History of Spectrum Institute

Spectrum Institute is a nonprofit organization incorporated in California in 1987. With tax-exempt status under section 501c3 of the Internal Revenue Code, the corporation is designated by the IRS as a private operating foundation.

For the past 10 years, the primary focus of the organization's research, education and advocacy has been guardianship reform, disability rights, and promoting the medical rights of adults with developmental disabilities.

From its inception, Spectrum Institute has devoted its attention to a variety of worthy civil rights and human rights issues.

The [Family Diversity Project](#) (1987-1999) promoted [family registries](#) and the use of broad and inclusive [definitions](#) of "family" in [public policies](#) and [private benefit programs](#). This included advocacy for the rights of [domestic partners](#) regardless of sexual orientation or [gender](#).

The [American Association for Single People](#), also known as *Unmarried America* (1999-2006), promoted [equal rights](#) for unmarried individuals, couples, and families. It published a [newsletter](#) and advanced public awareness in such ways as reaching out to single members of [Congress](#), promoting [Unmarried and Single Americans Week](#), and working with [national media](#). It also advocated for equal rights through [political](#) and [legislative](#) efforts. Its work was highly [acclaimed](#).

The [Emancipation Project](#) (2004-2006) sought to end the abuse of teenagers who were being sent by their parents to private "boarding schools" and boot camps outside of the judicial process for "reformation" or "reprogramming."

The [Disability and Abuse Project](#) (1997-2020) focused on the abuse of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities by promoting risk reduction, effective response, justice, and therapy for these vulnerable victims. Among its activities were a "think tank" [conference](#) in 1997, a na-

tional survey in 2012, and a [conference](#) presentation and [policy report](#) in Missouri. The project ended in 2020.

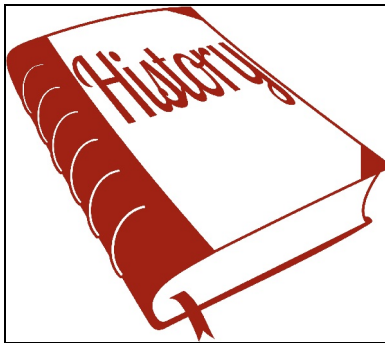
The [Disability and Guardianship Project](#) (2015 - 2023) promoted reforms in the conservatorship and guardianship systems. A [documentary film](#) – *Pursuit of Justice* – chronicles some of this advocacy. The [Mental Health Project](#) (2021-2023) promoted access to mental health services for people with developmental disabilities. A [policy report](#) was released by the project in 2022.

[Publications](#) on disability rights and guardianship reform (2015 - 2023) are available online.

During 2022-2024, Spectrum Institute provided consulting services to the [Alternatives to Guardianship Project](#) in Missouri.

During 2022, the organization operated the [Birds of a Feather Project](#) which conducted webinars and published a book on the history of LGBT legal advocacy of the 1970s. The organization expanded this project in 2024 by digitizing and annotating the historical papers of [Arthur C. Warner](#) which are housed at [Princeton University](#). Warner [advocated](#) for sexual civil liberties from the 1950s through the 1990s. Thomas F. Coleman collaborated closely with Warner on these issues from 1972 to 1997.

[Thomas F. Coleman](#) has served as the executive director of Spectrum Institute since its founding. His work with Spectrum Institute from 1987 to 2009 is discussed in a [book](#) titled *The Domino Effect*. An archives of Coleman's advocacy work from 1972 to 2009 is available [online](#).



<https://spectruminstitute.org/>