

# BRIANNA HAMMON



## A Silent Voice That Can't Be Ignored

With a determined attitude and a willingness to teach - or take legal action if she's not being heard - Brianna Hammon is a young woman who personally made the state of Nevada a better place to live for people with disabilities where she helps people who need speech generating devices, or supportive services. Brianna, 27, is the librarian for the Center for Self Determination. The Center houses a library full of materials Brianna has chosen personally since she graduated from high school eight years ago. She has books (print, braille, and audio), videos/DVD's which cover topics like disability history, disability culture (art, poetry, films and essays by people with disabilities) educational strategies and civil rights.

She is the Treasurer for the local chapter of PEOPLE First, a group that advocates for the rights of people with developmental disabilities to make their own choices. She hosts two PEOPLE

First meetings each month in Reno. Brianna is a proud woman with disabilities who stays busy! She even works with a national project that seeks to end the use of seclusion and restraint against children with disabilities in American schools ([www.ourchildrenleftbehind.com](http://www.ourchildrenleftbehind.com)).

In 2007, Brianna discovered that Nevada state officials made a rule so people using Medicaid could not get speech generating devices. The rule was illegal under federal law. Brianna's mother drove her to a Medicaid public hearing to see if they could help state officials understand why they were wrong. Because Brianna did not have a device, even though she needed one, her mother had to testify, asking Nevada officials to fix the rule. For many months, officials ignored Brianna's plight, and changed nothing.

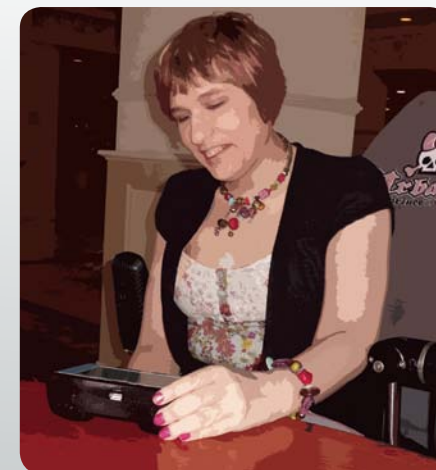
Finally, Brianna introduced her local ADA attorney to two attorneys from the National

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Assistive Technology Advocacy Project. The attorneys found four other people who needed devices and they filed a class action lawsuit on Brianna's birthday, May 19, 2008. The Nevada officials finally gave in, changed the rule, and settled the lawsuit.

Finally given the ability to speak for herself when the device came a month after the settlement, Brianna began to conduct trainings with two other PEOPLE First members called the Hearts and Minds Project. The training helps people to understand issues facing people with disabilities including segregation, lack of choices and problems with access to medical care. Brianna and her friends trained advocates for the Center and made a presentation to the attendees at the statewide PEOPLE First conference in 2009.

Brianna's best and most important teaching has been at the Town Hall meetings held by the Nevada Legislature. Brianna testified in February of 2010 when Nevada was proposing to eliminate millions of dollars in funding intended to improve and support the lives of people with developmental disabilities. She waited all day in the midst of cranky people who simply did not want to pay taxes to help anyone and who testified over and over again about their desires. When she finally testified, late in the day, it



was the most powerful three minutes many people have ever witnessed.

Brianna's testimony was instrumental in restoring millions in proposed cuts to programs for people with disabilities, as well as setting the tone for the work the legislators had to do to fix the budget.

Brianna is absolutely in love with her Dynavox speech generating device. She can say all the things she has always wanted to say and she can say it fast as anyone else too! She can answer the phone, tell jokes, and help people to understand that having a disability is just a different way of life, and by no means a reason to give up or stop being a part of the community where you live. ❁

**Brianna's testimony can be seen at:**  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=0iArYnq9L\\_I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0iArYnq9L_I)