The first disability services recorded at MSU were for students with blindness, starting with the MSU Tower Guard, founded in 1934.

Beginning through student grassroots efforts, Judy Taylor Gentile served for over twenty years as the center’s first director. The Office of Programs for Handicapper Students originated as part of MSU’s campaign for equal access to a university education. The first decade of disability services at MSU focused efforts on the needs of students with visible disabilities. MSU began addressing architectural barriers for physical access through curb cuts, ramps, and transportation.

Disability services expanded in the early 1980’s to accommodate more students who were deaf or hard of hearing. Students with learning disabilities were welcomed through reading and testing services like those already helping blind students. Deployment of early computerized reading devices energized a sense of independence and autonomy for many.

The 1990’s saw increasing numbers of students identifying with disabilities. Increasingly, students with invisible disabilities such as learning, attention deficits, chronic health conditions, psychiatric, and brain injuries registered and expanded diversity of needs. In 1998, the mission of the department broadened to include employees with disabilities and in 1999 the office was renamed Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities, reflecting the expanding mission and new “person-first” language.

We innovated with private gifts establishing scholarships and programmatic endowments that helped students thrive. RCPD emphasized career outcomes with Career Services and Vocational Rehabilitation. New partnerships welcomed students to study abroad, further enhancing career competitiveness. Our leadership in web accessibility and assistive technology expanded Internet accessibility. MSU enjoyed broad recognition for leadership in digital textbook accessibility, accessible pedestrian intersections, and web content accessibility including helping MSU Federal Credit Union become one of the first financial institutions to deploy accessible ATM’s.

RCPD built initiatives that increased outreach and linkages to students on the autism spectrum. Programmatic efforts trended toward health, wellness, and resiliency. Efforts in E-book and Braille production grew and RCPD developed signature smartphone apps that enhanced campus mobility and culinary access for all.

RCPD met a global pandemic with awareness that each challenge provides a call for creativity and solutions. We innovated with ambition, partnership, technology, communities of support, and a spirit of ability that upheld our mission through great uncertainty and need. Working together, this community endured and innovated. We are ready to engage the challenges ahead as we join new DEI and Health/Wellness efforts ahead. Disability shapes our perspectives and calls on each of us to create the future we desire.