

CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE

# White House honors resident

Founder of Easter Seals Thrive program recognized

Special to the Crier

Three years ago, Sandy Ho of Weston founded the Easter Seals Thrive program to provide young women with disabilities with the mentoring, social engagement and other support that she wishes had been available to her during challenging life transitions.

On July 27, Ho was honored at the White House as one of nine Champions of Change ([www.whitehouse.gov/champions](http://www.whitehouse.gov/champions)) for her efforts to empower young women and facilitate their personal growth, while experiencing first loves, first jobs and other milestones.

“The honor was very humbling, and awe-inspiring,” said Ho, a member of the Easter Seals Massachusetts State Board of Directors and chairwoman of the Youth Leadership and Transition Committee.

An Easter Seals client as a child, Ho uses a wheelchair, is significantly shorter in stature and has

individuals doing extraordinary things to empower members of their communities. This ceremony recognizing disability advocates nationwide took place as part of the 25th anniversary celebration of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA).

Ho traces her beginnings in self-advocacy to her senior year at Weston High School. In addition to being the only member of her family with a disability, she was the only student in the public school who used a wheelchair. The combination, she said, left her with little guidance when selecting a college.

“It seemed like I had to take so much into consideration. I felt totally lost,” recalled Ho, who didn’t meet another person with her particular disability until after college. “I went through the process and survived, but I wish I had had some role models.”

Ho’s advocacy efforts began at Lesley University, from which she earned a bachelor’s degree in global studies while serving as president of Students for Social Justice, as an intern on the Service Nation campaign, as a research assistant at the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at the Kennedy School of Government, and as a research associate in the area of human trafficking for the Protection Project at Johns Hopkins University.

Following graduation, Ho dedicated a year of service as an AmeriCorps member by developing a mentoring

program for first-generation students at Roxbury Community College. She continued her dedication to youth advocacy by developing and serving as coordinator of the groundbreaking Easter Seals Thrive program, which matches young women with adult female mentors who also have disabilities.

Through Letters to Thrive, its social media component, disabled women worldwide share life experiences and words of advice through letters to their younger selves. This past April, Ho was honored with the Easter Seals Empowerment Award.

While Champions of Change celebrates the success of the ADA, Ho emphasizes the disability movement is “certainly not stopping anytime soon.”

“I’m always thinking about how to promote accessibility,” said Ho, noting her gratitude that Easter Seals Massachusetts now has a Youth Leadership Network to provide the peer-to-peer support that she would have benefited from in her youth. “It’s very meaningful that disability advocacy is on the president’s agenda, but there’s always going to be work to be done.”

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Sandy Ho founded the Easter Seals Thrive program. COURTESY PHOTO

brittle bones.

“It was amazing to be in the presence of so many passionate advocates,” she added, “and to experience this validation of my work.”

The Champions of Change program was created as an opportunity for the White House to feature

