D I S A B I L I T Y

H E R O E S

Outstanding Effort
The 70,273 Project

Photo: people seated around a table working on making quilt squares of white fabric with two red X's symbolizing the two X's that doctors put on files determining that the patient was not fit to live. Displayed in the background are already completed quilt squares.

* Between January 1940 and August 1941, Nazis murdered 70,273 physically and mentally disabled people – men, women, teens, boys, and girls. Though they had never even laid eyes on the disabled person they were evaluating, the Nazi doctors read the medical files and, if from the words on the page, the person was deemed "unfit" or an "economic burden on society", the doctor placed a red X at the bottom of the form. Three doctors were to read each medical file, and when two of them made a red X on the page, the disabled person's fate was sealed.

* This summer I attended a conference where AHEAD (Association of Higher Education and Disability www.AHEAD.org) members commemorated these 70,273 people who were so callously and casually murdered by gathering 70,273 blocks of white fabric (representing the paper the doctors read), each bearing two red X's (representing one person), and stitched them together into quilts.

* Aktion T4, began with a father's letter to Adolf Hitler seeking permission to euthanize his son with a disability. Over 400,000 people with disabilities were forcibly sterilized or killed in an effort to achieve through eugenics, the supreme race. Doctors and treatment facilities developed preferred methods of euthanizing children and adults including gas chambers that were replicated at concentration camps. Other groups of "undesirables" were later identified, but the important thing to remember is that people with disabilities were the first group targeted and treatment was carried out by the people whose job it was to care for them.

* In the United States, "ugly laws" perpetuated discrimination and prohibited people with visible disabilities from going outside. These laws were repealed by 1974.