A Quick History of the International Symbol of Access

1968: Susanne Koefed
Susanne, a Danish graphic design student, submitted this entry to Rehabilitation International's International Commission on Technology and Accessibility (RI ICTA) after they requested a symbol for accessibility.

1969: Karl Montan
As Chair of the RI ICTA, Karl humanized the symbol by adding the circle on top that represents the head. World Congress formally adopted this symbol, and it was decided it would legally be kept in the public domain as a “gift to mankind.”

1994: Brendan Murphy
As an Irish graduate student in Cincinnati, Brendan was inspired by a childhood neighbor to update the symbol with a more progressive view of people who used wheelchairs. He wanted to show them as active and independent people, as opposed to rigid and helpless.

2000: Graphic Artists Guild
Adding more rounded, human-like features, the Graphic Artists Guild Foundation hoped that this symbol would promote and publicize accessibility for people with disabilities.

2011: Sara Hendren
As a graduate design student in Boston, Sara became more aware of accessibility issues after giving birth to a son with Down Syndrome. She created a design with a more active feel, made them into transparent stickers, and illegally stuck them on current accessibility signs throughout the city of Boston.

2012: Accessible Icon Project
Founded by Sara Hendren and Brian Glenney, the update to the icon has the following features:
1. Body Representation: Body symbol is consistent with other symbols, thick and rounded.
2. Arm Position: Arm is pointing backward to suggest dynamic mobility.
3. Head Placement: Head is forward to indicate forward motion and progress.
4. Body Orientation: Body is leaning forward to symbolize active status in navigating lived environments.

This version is currently in use, written into law, by the state of New York.

Sources:
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