

FAMILY SUPPORT ADVOCACY UPDATE

January 31, 2014

What is self-advocacy?

Self-advocacy is:

- ◇ Speaking up for your own interests, desires, needs, rights, strengths and weaknesses;
- ◇ Knowing yourself, making informed decisions based upon what you think is best, and taking responsibility for those decisions; and
- ◇ Supporting others so that everyone can express their own opinions about all aspects of life.



Where can you do self-advocacy?

Self-advocacy occurs in all parts of life, including:

- ◇ **Home.** Self-advocates develop skills that are needed to live as independently as possible and have control over their daily lives
- ◇ **Work.** Self-advocates work with others to voice concerns about their jobs and make working conditions better for all workers
- ◇ **The Community.** Self-advocates choose how much they want to take part in the community; they are able to participate and be informed about voting and other political activities
- ◇ **Relationships.** Self-advocates develop and deepen relationships with the people in their lives by sharing experiences, concerns, and opinions

Who is involved in self-advocacy?

Many people are involved in self-advocacy. These include:

- ◇ **The Self-Advocate.** The biggest contributor to self-advocacy are the self-advocates themselves! Only the self-advocate knows what the best choice is for his or her life.
- ◇ **Like-minded People.** Groups of like-minded self-advocates come together to support each other to express opinions and ensure that everyone can speak their mind; two local and national groups that do this for people with autism and other developmental disabilities are Autistic Self Advocacy Network ([www. autisticadvocacy.org](http://www.autisticadvocacy.org)) and Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (www.sabeusa.org)
- ◇ **Everyone Else.** All people participate in self-advocacy by helping develop the ability of people to determine their own future and by encouraging people to take leadership roles in their own lives

How can I do self-advocacy?

(Contributed by Self Advocates Becoming Empowered)

- ◇ Get to know yourself, be proud, and feel strong
- ◇ Belong to a local self-advocacy group, get to know the people around you and make friends
- ◇ Learn new things, solve problems, make your case, and negotiate for what you want
- ◇ Make your own decisions and know your responsibilities
- ◇ Think of all other civil rights and social justice movements and preserve your rights
- ◇ Realize you are not alone; there are other people who are just like you
- ◇ Be part of your community
- ◇ Listen to people's ideas and respect their opinions
- ◇ DO NOT judge people because of the way they look or speak
- ◇ Meet politicians and tell them like it is
- ◇ Spread the word and get others involved in self-advocacy - the earlier, the better
- ◇ Help others become leaders

SELF-ADVOCACY: MOVING FORWARD IN 2014

Self Advocacy is a world wide movement of people with disabilities who are leaders on important issues that affect people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. It's about people with disabilities speaking up for themselves and their rights—legal, human and civil rights. The national self advocacy group for the United States is called Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE); they define self advocacy as:

“independent groups of people with disabilities working together for justice by helping each other take charge of our lives and fight discrimination. It teaches us how to make decisions and choices that affect our lives so we can be more independent. It also teaches us about our rights, but along with learning about our rights we learn responsibilities. The way we learn about advocating for ourselves is by supporting each other and helping each other gain confidence in ourselves so we can speak out for what we believe in.”

Community Advocates Board

Self-advocates who participate in Beaverbrook STEP's programs and services formed their own Community Advocates Board (CAB) over 20 years ago. CAB members not only discuss, plan and initiate their own recreation, leisure and civic activities, but they also educate and support each other as self-advocates. Their efforts focus on encouraging self-actualization, effective communication and positive social relationships while broadening the horizons of adults with disabilities. Community inclusion is fostered through active volunteerism, use of community services and civic responsibility. CAB is affiliated with the State self-advocacy organization, MA Advocates Standing Strong (MASS) and the national group, Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE). Over 30 CAB members from Beaverbrook STEP attend the Bi-Annual SABE conference held in different states across the U.S.



CAB has very strong ties to our state organization (MASS). We host their monthly meetings at our main office in Watertown and participate in statewide advocacy including frequent visits to our Massachusetts legislators at the State house in Boston. Our self-advocates are currently working with MASS to implement their latest venture, “New Freedom Volunteer Driver/Supporter Project”.

The goal of the project is to provide accessible and convenient transportation and other supports to assist self-advocates in attending meetings of self-advocacy groups, citizen advisory boards, human rights committees and other civic groups. CAB project participants are reaching out to the community to recruit volunteer drivers and supporters in the Greater Boston area.

CAB members work closely with other STEP individuals, staff and managers to co-host social events for individuals served, family members, guardians and volunteers each year. The goal is to encourage relationships, foster communication and share information and concerns. Over the past several years, CAB and STEP have co-hosted the following events often with over 400 individuals, staff and family members attending the larger events:

- ◇ Annual CAB/Family Support Summer B-B-Q held in September.
- ◇ Annual Holiday Party held in December.
- ◇ Annual Meeting held in June.

Additionally, the CAB is actively engaged in many community volunteer projects. Each year CAB members participate in the Walk for Hunger campaign, Clean Up the Charles River Day and other local charitable events. They also attended the springtime Legislative Forum co-hosted by Beaverbrook STEP and attend rallies and other events at the State House. This year Beaverbrook STEP's self advocates and self-advocacy efforts will play an important role in the development of a Guardianship Program and likewise in our state certification process this summer.

