

SELF-ADVOCACY

Newsletter



Disability Day at the Capitol



On March 10th, over 20 advocates from ADS, Newtrax and Labore attended Disability Day at the Capitol hosted by MOHR and ARRM. The event was a great success; over 1,000 advocates rallied around the capitol to support their support staff.

The event focused on improving the quality of care for people with disabilities, and building a sustainable and competitive workforce for Direct Support Professionals. DSP wages have not increased over time, resulting in an increased statewide staff turnover rate which affect the quality of care delivered. In the 2019 Department of Human Services Labor Market report, the average hourly wage for direct care work is \$13.15 which is 17% less than jobs requiring similar skills and experience.

Self-Advocates from Merrick shared their need for stable and sustainable services; that begins with strengthening the direct care workforce. The advocates will continue to play an active role in making sure the individuals who empower people with disabilities are able to support their own needs. Thank you Will P., Emily G., Megan K., John S., Donna T., and JWB for advocating along with us.

Sean's Corner

About the author: Sean is outgoing, social and enjoys working at Kowalski's Market. He's been participating in Self-Advocacy activities for many years, and researched anti-bullying topics for the advocates to discuss in their weekly meetings. Sean's corner features his interviews with Merrick's amazing staff and other Self-Advocates.



What do you hope to learn at the capitol?

I want to learn more about the President and who to vote for in the future because I don't like our president now.

- Bill

Do you think it's important for Self-Advocates to attend Disability Day at the Capitol?

Yes, so they understand what's important to us.

-Tina



What have you accomplished so far this year?

I voted for the first time in March with my mom and brother!

-Chris



What was your favorite part of attending the event at the capitol ?

I absolutely loved seeing Self-Advocates take part in an event revolving around legislation that affect their lives so directly. Watching them advocate for themselves and fellow individuals with disabilities made me so proud.

-Emily



Staff Spotlight



Name: Jesse

- Did you accomplish any of your goals in 2019?

Yes, I got to my goal weight and i feel healthier!

- What do you hope to accomplish in 2020?

I want to go back to school for business marketing.

- What is your pet peeve?

When someone starts a job and does not finish it. .

- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

I want to be married and a home owner.



Self-Advocates share their story with legislators

My name is Amanda Miller and I live in Oakdale, Minnesota. I have a disability that interferes with the way I learn new things, but I am a very hard worker. I work at Merrick doing a variety of jobs; they involve sorting and packaging material.

I enjoy shopping, games, and going to the movies. In the past years, the opportunity to do what I want in my free time has been difficult because there are not enough PCAs/DSPs. When I do get new staff responsible to meet my needs, I don't feel they genuinely want to be there. I believe the low wages DSPs/PCAs receive could lead to the quality of people applying for the positions, and how long they stay with the company.

What I want you to do is increase the wages for DSPs/PCAs. It's very challenging when I have support staff that are great and sincerely want to be there for me, but they're forced to find a new job because they are not making a living wage. DSPs/PCAs play a large role in people with disabilities' quality of life. I hope you understand there are amazing people who want to make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities, but how can they do that if they can't make a wage to make a difference in their own lives?

Thank you for your time,
Amanda Miller



My name is John Cundy and I live in North Saint Paul, Minnesota. I was born with a learning disability, but that doesn't stop me from being an advocate for my community. I haven't been too thrilled with the quality of staff in my home. I feel we have forgotten how far the disability community has come. We fought for our rights to live in our chosen communities, but none of it counts if we lose our rights in our own homes.

What I want is for independent Living Specialists to be required to do more Person-Centered Training. I want individuals with disabilities to have the chance to be actively involved in the onboarding process of new staff/hires. I believe that we have a right to voice who we would like, or not like in our homes. Our homes should feel safe and secure and that starts with competent staff who respect our homes and choices.

Thank you for your time,
John Richard Cundy

Every vote Counts!

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the *Help America Vote Act*. The law aimed to modernize the country's election process and provided funding for states to purchase accessible ballot marking devices. The first accessible voting machine was designed for people with vision impairment, but since then machines have gradually improved to meet the needs of all people with disabilities.

Merrick's Self-Advocates believe in order for people with disabilities to have the chance to vote privately and fairly, much more needs to be done. Because of the Self-Advocates' active role in voicing their concerns, election administrators from Minnesota's Secretary of State's office have come to Merrick with existing voting machines and rely on the Self-Advocate's advice to improve the voting process and make it accessible for all.



Panel Discussion

On February 11th, Colleen Wieck, Executive Director of Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, interviewed six Self-Advocates who have experienced problems with voting. Based on testimonials, both Kellianne and Michon were invited to participate in a panel discussion with United States District Judge Donovan Frank and Minnesota Secretary of State, Steve Simon. The event will be shared online.



Kellianne's testimonial:

"I believe that people with disabilities have the right to vote just like everyone else. I choose to vote at the local rec center, but it is such a difficult process that I am discouraged to go. I believe the problem is the lack of accessible machines at the polling sites. When there are only 2 machines for so many people, the wait time is long and can be over stimulating to individuals with disabilities. What I want changed is more Accessible Voting Machines at Polling Sites. I believe there should be a survey available where myself, and others can express concerns on how polling locations can improve and be more accessible for people in their communities."



G U E S T S P E A K E R

In 1964, Kathy Miller caught the polio virus when she was just 18 months. It resulted in her losing all function of her right arm. Two weeks later, her aunt Doris also caught polio and was confined to live in an iron lung for 37 years.

Doris wrote about her experience and published a book called "Through the Looking Glass", which is available in Merrick's library.

Kathy attended a SA meeting and spoke to the Self-Advocates about her physical disability and Aunt Doris. She shared that she had a supportive family that never limited her from doing what she wanted. She said, "You shouldn't let your disability define you. Do what you can and do it great."

The Self-Advocates shared their own stories of a time they were told they could not do something and how they proved it wrong.

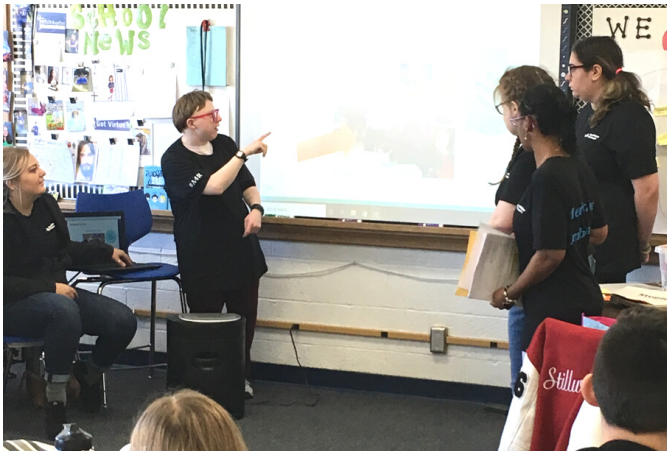
Self-Advocates learned the importance of making sure the people you surround yourself with want what's best for you.

We appreciate Kathy joining us and we hope to have her visit again!



Ambassadors for Respect

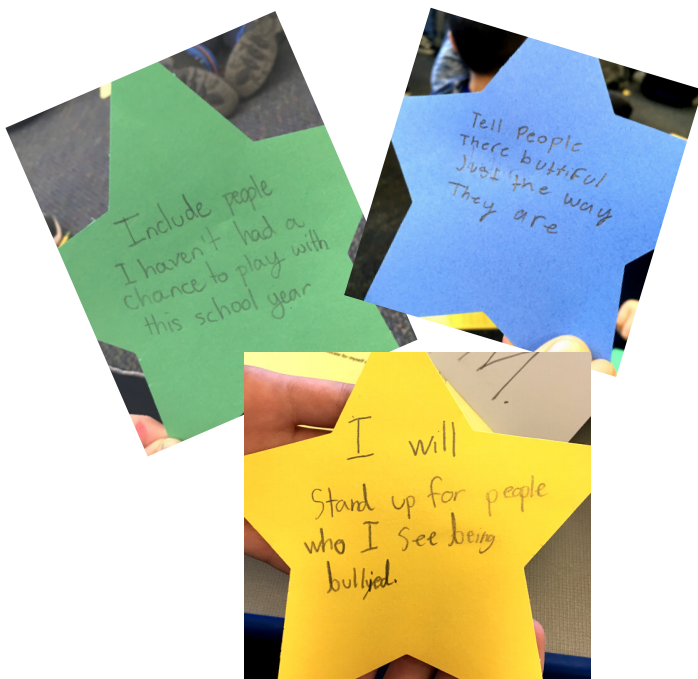
In March, Ambassadors from Merrick, Inc. visited St. John the Baptist Catholic Parish School in New Brighton, sharing their anti-bullying message with 37 4th grade students. The ambassadors were nervous, but worked as a team to remind one another of their lines and parts. They received great performance appraisals from the teachers and students. Due to school closure, A4R school visits have been cancelled for the rest of the year but will continue when schools are up and running again.



The Ambassadors for Respect program was designed to be presented in 4th grade classrooms because studies show the frequency of bullying peaks around the 5th and 6th grade. We believe promoting active engagement in anti-bullying efforts within the student body can affect positive change in a school's culture.

What did you learn or what will you do as a result of this training?
 To not treat others different because of looks or sounds.

How could we have done better?
 It was wonderful. Couldn't be better!



Act of Kindness

At the end of each presentation, students are asked to think of one act of kindness they will do during the school year. The stars are hung up in their classroom as a reminder of the promise they made.

Disability Power Day

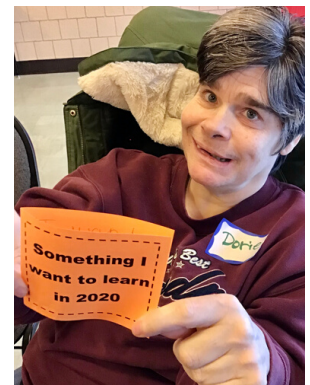


Disability Power Day has been a huge hit! Every month, 10 Self-Advocates have the opportunity to attend the event in Saint Paul and meet with participants from other programs. The times we've attended, advocates have reconnected with individuals they went to high school with or once lived with.

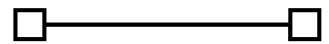
In January, they reflected on what went well for them in 2019 and created "vision boxes" to capture their hopes and dreams for the new year. Dori said she would like to learn sign language in 2020.

For the February session, the Self-Advocates had the opportunity to meet with MN State Senator John Hoffman. Hoffman has been a strong representative for the disability community for many years.

He discussed the policies legislators were focusing on for the fiscal year 2020 and was also involved with the passing of SF 4200 a bill which allowed Merrick staff to help in group homes during the shelter in place Executive Order.



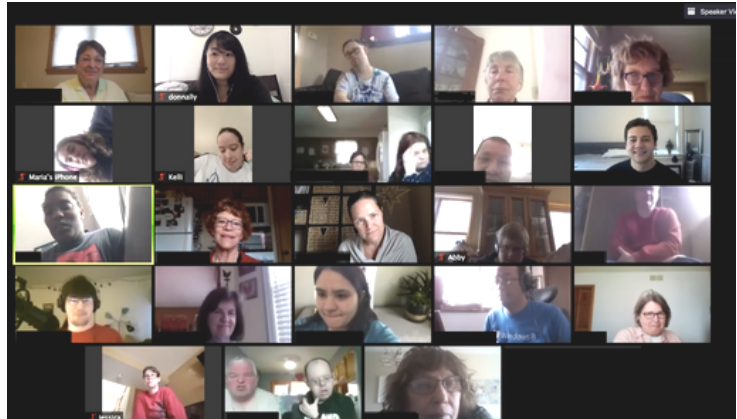
I want to learn sign language.
-Dori



Social Hour

Feeling a sense of community can be beneficial during these times of isolation. Some Self-Advocates from Merrick have been meeting with other Self-Advocates from all areas of Minnesota.

ACT (Advocating Change Together) facilitated online meetings throughout the week for advocates to check in and socialize. On Tuesdays, advocates have the opportunity to meet for coffee hour and talk about whatever is on their minds.



On Fridays, there were lessons on how to reduce stress and anxiety by practicing mindfulness and meditating. During session, teachers from Cow Tipping Press, led participants in creating their own poems and stories. The participants expressed how great it was to see familiar faces and to make new friends.

A Blast from the past!

Snippets from previous newsletters - Fall 2012

We had a visitor: Honorable Judge Frank

On Wednesday the 28th of November Shooting Stars had honorable Judge Donovan Frank who is a dear friend of ours. Shooting Stars honor him with a picture book to thank him for giving us \$1,000 for anti-bullying project, from 11 a.m. -1 p.m. in afternoon. Katie and Mary helped out with all different groups of self-advocates came down to large conference room where there was an ice cream social it was a fun day, also Becky, his assistant came to visit telling good stories.



Shooting Star - Dayne N.

What's up my name is Dayne N.

I've been at Merrick for about 12 years its been a long ride. I like my job at Otto Bock & also work on Med Tox. I like volunteering with Feed My Starving Children and Arc Value Village. What can I say I am a people person. This past summer in August I got my 10 years. Self advocacy has

changed my life . It helps me to speak up for myself with more confidence so I



Dayne hanging in commons after work

can dance the night way in my spare time. Also in my spare time I love going to the movies & lunch outings. On a positive note, I have big dreams to be a rock star or an actor in movies. Making all kind of friends in high places in Hollywood.



Announcement: All Self-Advocacy meetings are cancelled until further notice.