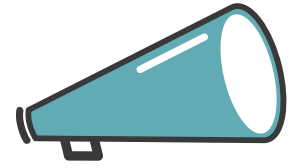


SELF-ADVOCACY Newsletter



Toy and Food Drive

Toys collected:
58 toys

Food collected:
310 lbs
of food

Each year Merrick Inc., Self-Advocacy groups partner with the Vadnais Heights Lions Club for their Toy and Food drive. Last year we received 67 donated toys and 262 pounds of food. The Self-Advocates decided they wanted to beat that goal this year by trying to collect 80 toys and 300 pounds of food for this year's drive. We came up a little short on the toys but we achieved our goal of over 300 pounds of food.

All the donations were brought to the Vadnais Heights Food Shelf located at the Vadnais Heights Commons. On December 18th, the food was distributed to families in need, and the toys were distributed to kids and teens 13 and younger who live in Vadnais Heights.

Thank you to everyone that donated to help make the season a little brighter for families in our area.



The A-Team National Week of Choice



The A-Team is a grassroots organization with a mission of uniting individuals with diverse abilities and their family members to ADVOCATE in a grassroots effort, create AWARENESS in the community and ADVISE those who care for our citizens with special needs to ensure service choices and opportunities.

Today, there are 19 state chapters including Minnesota. During the week of October 18 - 22, 2021, Merrick, Inc. Self-Advocates participated in the A-Team's National Week of CHOICE. The purpose of this week was to use social media to show the community why having the choice of where you want to work is important.

On Wednesday, October 20, 2021, 28 Self-Advocates gathered together to take a picture and advocate for their choices using the sentiment "My Work. My Choice." Throughout the week, Self-Advocates had the opportunity to share different aspects of their lives to show the **CHOICES** that they have made.

The **EMPOWER! Lunch**



After a hiatus in 2020, due to COVID-19, Merrick Inc. held its annual EMPOWER! Lunch fundraiser. On October 14, 2021, five Self-Advocates and three Direct Support Professionals attended the event and had the opportunity to learn from guest speaker, Matt Birk. The retired NFL player spoke about leadership

and focused on the coaches he had when he played for the Ravens and how that leadership created a winning culture.

Between taking shots at both the Packers and Vikings, and reminiscing about his old playing days, Birk delivered an inspirational message that encouraged the lunch guests to look at leadership in a new light.



Ambassadors for Respect

Ambassadors for Respect is back in action this year with the goal of educating fourth graders on the topic of bullying. Ambassadors are selected through a process including submission of an application and informal interview. This year's Ambassadors are Abby Hanson, Mike Munoz, Mike Datz, Christine Gorman, and Jill Spears. The A4R program brings individuals with developmental disabilities into 4th-grade classrooms to teach students to include others, to use Person First language, and to advocate for themselves and others. The purpose of the program is to develop the self-advocacy of individuals with developmental disabilities and to initiate or strengthen schools' bullying prevention efforts. Merrick's Ambassadors will train seven classes (about 140 fourth graders) using the anti-bullying program this year.

Interview with an Ambassador: Abby

What are you most excited about with Ambassadors for Respect?

I like that everyone is included, no one gets bullied, and we are all respecting each other.

Why is it important to teach about anti-bullying?

Teaching anti-bullying is important because it teaches you to stand up for yourself, be strong, be active, and be as independent as possible so that you can fight for what you believe in.

Is the Ambassadors for Respect Program important?

Absolutely, it's important because it teaches others to be active and careful while protecting others from being bullied.



Past Ambassador Still Advocating

On Wednesday, December 1, 2021, Maria Raasch used her experience as an Ambassador for Respect to help Peacemaker Minnesota provide feedback on the Ambassadors for Respect (A4R) program to the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities (MGCDD). Maria joined Mandy Grunklee, the Program Coordinator for A4R, and shared statistics and the impact that A4R has had on her, and on fourth-grade class participants. The MGCDD is the primary funder of the A4R program.

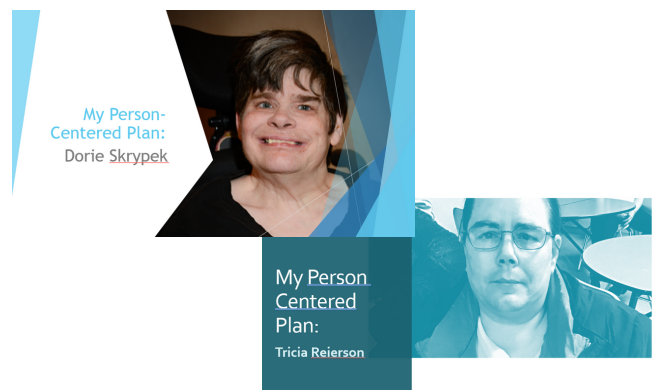
Maria spoke about her participation in the A4R program. She described her experience, "I learned that I like to teach others how to stand up for themselves. When we train the students, I can see that it is helpful for the kids to learn by doing the activities. I also like sharing my story about how I was bullied as a kid with a disability. Because of A4R, I have learned how to advocate for my peers who get bullied. I also teach them to stand up for themselves and that, 'You don't have to like this person, but you have to respect them as a person.'"



Training Staff



Every time a new employee starts at Merrick, they have a training session with Tricia Reiersen and Dorie Skrypek. This training is all about person-centered planning and Self-Advocacy. Both Dorie and Tricia provide information on the same topics but show new staff how everyone has a different plan and why these individual plans are important.



When asked why doing this training is important Tricia said, "It's important for people to learn about us as individuals." On top of the importance of this training, Dorie told us, "I like to get to know the new staff and it is fun." Dorie and Tricia are some of the first clients that new employees get to meet, and they both enjoy providing a fantastic first impression.



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. He is especially proud of his research of anti-bullying topics for the advocates to discuss in their weekly meetings. Sean's Corner features his interviews with Merrick's amazing staff and Self-Advocates.



What goals do you have?

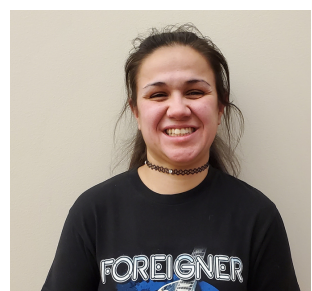
I want to help everyone out around Merrick and be a friendly face for people.

-Tina, Self-Advocate

Why do you think Self-Advocacy is important?

Self-advocacy is important because it lets you learn to stand up for yourself and you get to meet lots of people.

-Erin, Self-Advocate



What is your favorite part about Self-Advocacy?

I get to hang out with friends while learning.

-Andrea, Self-Advocate

What is it important of promote Self-Advocacy?

We want to help teach clients to use their voices and help them know that they have rights and opportunities just like everyone else.

-Kathy & Joann, Self-Advocate Advisors



Staff Spotlight



Name Kristina Skiles.

Assistant Program Director for Employment Services

What goals do you have for 2022?

My goal is to find employment for all those that want employment and that they are employed in positions they prefer.

Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

I see myself at Merrick growing employment services.

What is your pet peeve?

My biggest pet peeve is a lack of communication.

What is a fun fact about yourself?

Both my parents have intellectual disabilities.

Community Activities

Community Bridge

Community Bridge is sponsored by District 622 and is geared towards adults with disabilities. The mission of Community Bridge is to provide inclusive opportunities for adults with disabilities and maintain friendships, learn, serve, and become active members of the community. They offer activities for everyone through activities such as music and dance, art, recreational activities, and performances. These activities range from a Valentine's dance to learning how to make maple syrup. The best part of these activities is that they are an affordable way of getting out in the community and having fun with each activity only costing between \$5-\$20 depending on your interests. For more information, can find a list of program activities on the Community Bridge website at isd622.org-communitybridge.

SA Weekly Schedule

Monday	9:30 - 11:00 (NSP only)
Tuesday	9:30 - 10:30
Wednesday	9:30 - 10:30
Thursday	9:30 - 10:30
Friday	10:00 - 11:00



Real Movies for Real Needs



This program is run by Marcus Theatres and provides sensory accommodations for certain movie showings, so more people can enjoy the movie theatre setting. With reduced volume and some light maintained within the theater, these showings occur one Saturday each month at 10:30 am. The program is currently on pause do the COVID-19 pandemic however, you can check the Marcus Theatre website at marcustheatre.com to stay up to date with movies and times when the program resumes.