

THE ADVOCATOR

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NILES VALENTINE HIMSELF

Introducing Niles Valentine, New Director of Self-Advocacy

Niles Valentine, a passionate advocate and self-advocate for disability rights, has been appointed as the new Director of Self-Advocacy for the Division of Developmental Disabilities at the Alabama Department of Mental Health. Niles, 28, was diagnosed with autism at 13 and has since been committed to navigating and improving a world not built for people like him.

Niles's journey has been shaped by two key concepts: interdependence and customized employment. He believes in fostering communities where everyone's contributions are valued and tailoring job responsibilities to individual strengths. Niles sees autism not as a limitation, but as a different way of approaching things, often leading to innovation and progress.

In his new role, Niles is excited to launch an Advisory Council comprising self-advocates and representatives from disability organizations. The council will focus on those served by the Alabama Department of Mental Health's Division of Developmental Disabilities, working to identify and address community needs.

The council's priorities include promoting self-advocacy skills, increasing access to customized employment, fostering interdependence, and advocating for policies that support full inclusion in society. Niles is confident that the Advisory Council can make a significant difference in the lives of people with disabilities in Alabama, and he is committed to creating a more inclusive and equitable future for all.

In addition to his work with the Advisory Council, Niles is also a strong advocate for increasing the involvement of people with disabilities in the political process. He believes that it is essential for people with disabilities to have a seat at the table when decisions are being made that affect their lives.

Niles is also a firm believer in the power of education. He is currently pursuing a degree in social work, and he plans to use his education to help others with disabilities achieve their full potential.

Niles is a passionate and dedicated advocate for disability rights. He is committed to making a difference in the lives of people with disabilities in Alabama and beyond.



OFFICE OF SELF ADVOCACY SERVICES

<https://mh.alabama.gov/division-of-developmental-disabilities/self-advocacy-services/>

P.O. Box 301410 Montgomery, AL 36130

334-353-7032 | niles.valentine@mh.alabama.gov



HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

Join a Human Rights Committee: Make a Difference in Your Community

The Division of Developmental Disabilities at the Alabama Department of Mental Health is actively seeking volunteers to serve on Human Rights Committees across the state. These committees play a vital role in protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities and mental health conditions.

We strongly encourage people with disabilities and those who have received services through the Alabama Department of Mental Health to apply. The ideal composition of a Human Rights Committee is 51% individuals with disabilities, ensuring that the voices and experiences of those most affected are at the forefront of decision-making.

Human Rights Committees operate in various locations throughout Alabama, offering opportunities for involvement in your local community. By volunteering, you can make a tangible impact on the lives of others while gaining valuable experience and insights.

Responsibilities of committee members include:

- Reviewing and investigating allegations of rights violations.
- Educating individuals about their rights and how to exercise them.
- Advocating for policies and procedures that promote and protect human rights.
- Monitoring conditions in facilities to ensure compliance with regulations.

If you are passionate about human rights and want to contribute to a more just and equitable mental health system, we invite you to apply today. Your participation can make a real difference.

To learn more about Human Rights Committees and how to get involved, please contact your local Regional office.

REGIONAL OFFICES

Region 1

401 Lee St NE,
Suite 150, Decatur, AL 35601
256-898-2789

Region 2

1305 James I. Harrison Jr. Pkwy,
Tuscaloosa, AL 35403
205-554-4302

Region 3

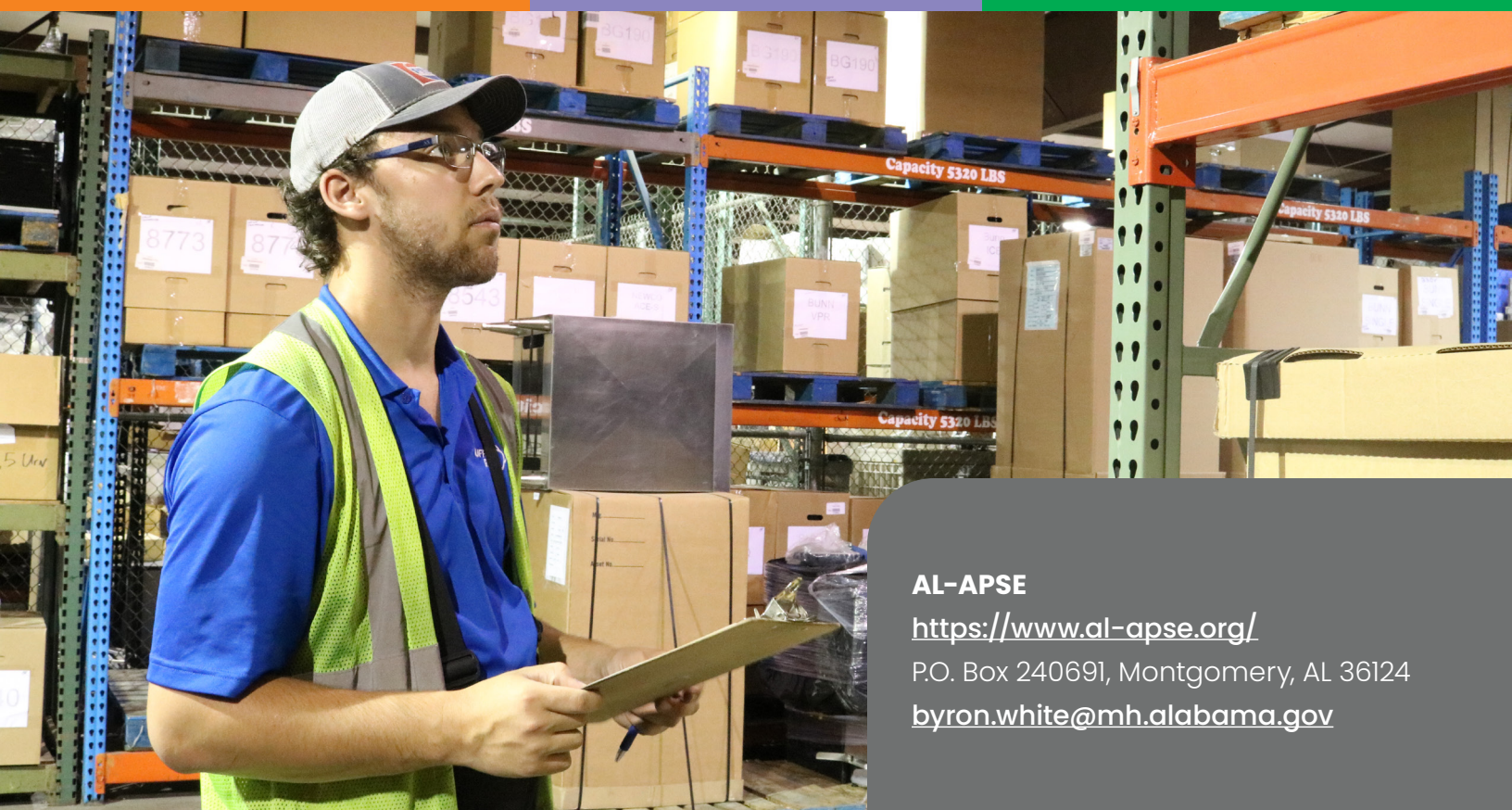
3280 Dauphin St, Building B,
Suite 100, Mobile, AL 36606
251-283-6200

Region 4

400 Interstate Park Dr,
Suite 415, Montgomery, AL 36109
334-676-5565

Region 5

631 Beacon Pkwy West,
Suite 211, Birmingham, AL 35209
205-916-7800



AL-APSE

<https://www.al-apse.org/>

P.O. Box 240691, Montgomery, AL 36124

byron.white@mh.alabama.gov

CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT AND COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT

The Office of Self-Advocacy recognizes the importance of understanding the distinction between customized employment and competitive employment. We are committed to collaborating with the AL-APSE program to promote awareness and understanding of these employment models.

CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT

This approach is centered around designing a job that compliments an individual's strengths while offering opportunities for growth in areas of weakness. It's a personalized approach that fosters a mutually beneficial relationship between the employee and employer.

COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT

Competitive employment adheres to standard labor market practices. This means individuals earn the prevailing wage, which is often higher than the minimum wage, and work in integrated settings alongside colleagues without disabilities. While not as individualized as customized employment, accommodations are made to ensure accessibility and success.

OUR ROLE IN PROMOTING AWARENESS

The Office of Self-Advocacy is actively discussing with ADMH to consider and explore a marketing campaign aimed at raising awareness about customized and competitive employment. We believe that by educating individuals, employers, and communities about these options, we can create more inclusive and fulfilling employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

COLLABORATION WITH AL-APSE

The Office of Self-Advocacy is looking to partner with AL-APSE in this endeavor. Our partnership with AL-APSE will be instrumental in advancing our shared goals. Together, we will work to provide resources, training, and support to individuals and organizations interested in implementing customized and competitive employment strategies.

LOOKING AHEAD

We envision a future where customized and competitive employment are widely understood and embraced. Through our collaborative efforts, we aim to empower individuals with disabilities to achieve their employment aspirations and contribute their valuable skills to the workforce.

SELF-ADVOCACY PEER SPECIALIST TRAINING PROGRAM

The Division of Developmental Disabilities at the Alabama Department of Mental Health is developing a new Self-Advocacy Peer Specialist training program to empower individuals with cognitive, developmental, and intellectual disabilities. This initiative aims to educate participants about their rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and equip them with the skills to advocate effectively for themselves and others.

UNDERSTANDING THE NEED

People with cognitive, developmental, and intellectual disabilities often face unique challenges in understanding and navigating their rights. They may encounter discrimination, communication barriers, or difficulty accessing necessary accommodations. The Self-Advocacy Peer Specialist training program addresses these challenges by providing comprehensive knowledge and practical tools for self-advocacy.

PROGRAM CURRICULUM WILL COVER A WIDE RANGE OF ESSENTIAL TOPICS, INCLUDING:

- **The ADA and its Protections:** Participants will gain a deep understanding of the ADA, its history, and the rights it guarantees to individuals with disabilities.
- **Identifying Rights Violations:** The program will teach participants how to recognize instances of discrimination and rights violations in various settings, such as employment, education, healthcare, and public services.
- **Effective Communication and Self-Advocacy:** Participants will learn how to communicate their needs assertively, negotiate for accommodations, and resolve conflicts effectively.
- **Building Confidence and Leadership:** The program will foster self-confidence, leadership skills, and the ability to support and mentor other self-advocates.
- **Navigating Support Systems:** Participants will learn how to access and utilize available resources and support systems within their communities.

PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT

A key component of the program is the emphasis on peer-to-peer support. Participants will have the opportunity to learn from experienced self-advocates who have successfully navigated similar challenges. This peer-to-peer learning environment fosters a sense of community, shared experiences, and mutual empowerment.

EMPOWERING SELF-ADVOCATES

Upon completion of the program, graduates will be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to:

- Advocate for their own rights and needs effectively.
- Educate others about disability rights and the ADA.
- Support and mentor other self-advocates in their communities.
- Promote a more inclusive and accessible society for all.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The Self-Advocacy Peer Specialist training program will be a major component of the Self Advocacy Office and represents a significant step forward in our commitment to empowering individuals with disabilities. By providing comprehensive training and fostering a supportive community, we aim to create a network of skilled and passionate self-advocates who can drive positive change and ensure that the rights of all individuals with disabilities are respected and upheld.

