

# THE ADVOCATOR

Vol 3, Issue 4

Welcome to the 4th Quarterly Newsletter from the Office of Self-Advocacy! We are thrilled to share the remarkable progress and exciting initiatives undertaken in support of self-advocates this quarter. Our collective efforts continue to foster growth and empowerment, and we are delighted to highlight the positive strides being made.

## UPDATES

### ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETINGS:

The Advisory Council for the Office of Self-Advocacy held its regular meetings in April, May, and June, helping shape the office's direction and showing strong commitment to supporting self-advocates across Alabama.

In April, the Council focused on finalizing the Self-Advocacy Peer Specialist program—a new effort to train self-advocates to support and mentor others. They discussed launching it as part of the 2025-2026 Partners-In-Policymaking class.

In May, the program was officially approved, marking a big step forward. This showed the Council's strong role in turning ideas into real programs that benefit self-advocates.

Throughout all three meetings, the Council also explored supported employment. In June, they voted to make it the office's next major focus, aiming to help self-advocates find competitive, integrated jobs. They called for partnerships with AL-APSE and Vocational Rehabilitation to remove job barriers and create inclusive workplaces.

This new direction matches the Council's mission to promote independence and opportunity for self-advocates. The Office of Self-Advocacy is now poised to embark on this significant endeavor, guided by the Council's vision and supported by their continued oversight, to make a tangible difference in the landscape for self-advocates across Alabama.

### AL-APSE CONFERENCE (JUNE 25TH-27TH):

The Office of Self-Advocacy recently took part in the AL-APSE Conference from June 25-27. This event was a key opportunity to connect with others working to support employment for people with disabilities. Our participation highlights our strong commitment to helping self-advocates succeed in the workforce.

A main goal was to build relationships with professionals in the supported employment field—like employment specialists, service providers, employers, self-advocates, and policymakers. These conversations helped us learn about current best practices, future needs, and new ideas to improve employment services.

We focused on finding future partners for projects aimed at improving vocational rehab and making job opportunities more inclusive. We also shared updates on our new Self-Advocacy Peer Specialist Program and our upcoming supported employment project. The feedback and support we received were very encouraging.

Informal networking was just as valuable. These conversations helped build community and gave us real-world insights from people doing this work every day.

We're now following up with potential partners and excited about what these new connections could mean for self-advocates in Alabama. This conference was an important step in moving our mission forward—creating real job opportunities for people with disabilities.



### UPDATE ON SITE MONITORING:

Since our last newsletter in April 2025, the Office of Self-Advocacy has undertaken a comprehensive series of site visits, conducted on April 10th, May 21st, May 22nd, May 29th, May 30th, and June 4th. These monitorings were essential in gaining valuable, firsthand insights into the daily operations and the quality of services being provided across various sites. Our objective was to observe, assess, and identify both areas of excellence and opportunities for further enhancement in supporting self-advocates.

The overall impression from these visits was overwhelmingly positive. We were genuinely impressed by the dedication and unwavering commitment consistently demonstrated by the staff at these sites. Their passion for fostering independence and promoting the well-being of the individuals they serve was clearly evident. Many sites have cultivated truly welcoming and supportive environments, which are absolutely crucial for empowering self-advocates and ensuring they feel valued and respected. The proactive and compassionate approach of the staff directly contributes to the positive experiences reported by many individuals receiving services.

However, in our commitment to continuous improvement and ensuring the highest possible quality of support, our observations also highlighted multiple areas where ADMH services could be further refined to enhance support for self-advocates. While these observations do not diminish the excellent work being done, they serve as valuable insights for strategic development.



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