

THE ADVOCATOR

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Welcome to the 5th edition of the Self-Advocacy Newsletter! In this issue, we're excited to share updates from our recent Advisory Council meetings, highlight key partnerships, and encourage your active involvement in our initiatives. We believe in the power of self-advocacy and are committed to empowering individuals with disabilities to speak up for themselves and shape their own futures.

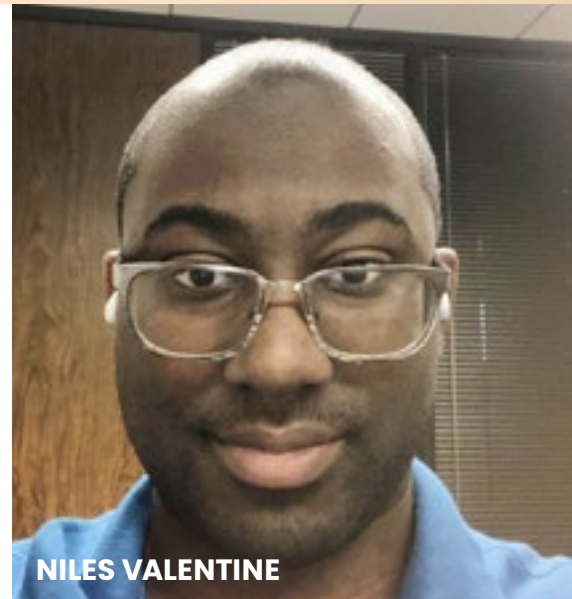
UPDATES

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETINGS:

Our recent Advisory Council meetings were highly productive, focusing on strategies to enhance our outreach and support services. Key discussion topics included:

- **Expanding Community Engagement:** We discussed new approaches to connect with a broader range of self-advocates across Alabama, including virtual workshops and local community events.
- **Legislative Advocacy Updates:** We reviewed current legislative proposals impacting individuals with disabilities and strategized on how to effectively advocate for policies that promote inclusion and independence.
- **Resource Development:** Plans were made to develop new educational materials and resources to help self-advocates navigate various systems, such as healthcare, employment, and housing.
- **Feedback and Future Planning:** We gathered valuable feedback from council members on existing programs and began planning for upcoming initiatives, ensuring our efforts remain responsive to the needs of the community.

Decisions made during these meetings will guide our work in the coming months, strengthening our commitment to empowering self-advocates throughout the state.





WORKING WITH THE ARC OF ALABAMA

The Office of Self-Advocacy has forged a vital alliance with The Arc of Alabama, an organization dedicated to promoting and protecting the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This partnership is instrumental in our shared mission to empower individuals with disabilities to advocate for themselves and lead fulfilling lives. Through collaborative efforts, we aim to expand community engagement, advance legislative advocacy, and develop essential resources for self-advocates across Alabama.

A cornerstone of our collaborative work is the Annual Disability Conference, an event that brings together self-advocates, family members, professionals, and policymakers. This year's conference, held in Mobile, Alabama, from September 22nd to September 25th, 2025, was a resounding success. It provided a crucial platform for sharing knowledge, building skills, and fostering connections within the self-advocacy community.

During this conference, I had the privilege of delivering a presentation that delved into my personal journey with autism. My talk focused on the challenges and triumphs of navigating a world where the necessary support and understanding were not always readily available. I shared my experiences of learning to speak up for my needs, overcome obstacles, and ultimately, embrace my unique strengths. The presentation aimed to inspire other self-advocates, illustrating the power of resilience and the importance of advocating for oneself in all aspects of life. It also highlighted the critical role organizations like The Arc of Alabama play in creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for individuals with disabilities. Our alliance continues to strengthen our collective ability to drive positive change and ensure that every voice is heard.



WORKING WITH DD COUNCIL

The Office of Self-Advocacy is proud to fully confirm its official alliance with the Alabama Council of Developmental Disabilities. This partnership marks a significant step forward in our shared mission to empower individuals with disabilities and their families across the state. By combining our strengths, we aim to amplify advocacy efforts, expand crucial resources, and drive systemic change that promotes inclusion and independence.

A key initiative within this alliance is the upcoming Partners-In-Policymaking (PIPA) course, which is set to begin on October 22nd. PIPA is a highly respected state-by-state leadership and advocacy training program specifically designed for people with disabilities and their families. Its core purpose is to equip participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to become effective advocates for policy and system-level change.

Through the PIPA program, participants will delve into various critical areas, including disability rights, the principles of self-advocacy, strategies for community building, and an in-depth understanding of the legislative process. The curriculum is meticulously crafted to empower individuals to foster positive relationships with policymakers, enabling them to actively contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and equitable society.

This alliance and the PIPA course are of paramount importance to the Office of Self-Advocacy. Our commitment lies in empowering individuals to speak up for themselves and shape their own futures. The PIPA program serves as the perfect vehicle for this mission, directly aligning with the goals of our Self-Advocacy Peer Specialist Program. By providing comprehensive training and fostering leadership skills, PIPA will enable our peer specialists and other self-advocates to become even more impactful in their roles, advocating effectively for themselves and their communities. This collaboration will undoubtedly strengthen our collective ability to drive positive change and ensure that every voice is heard in Alabama.

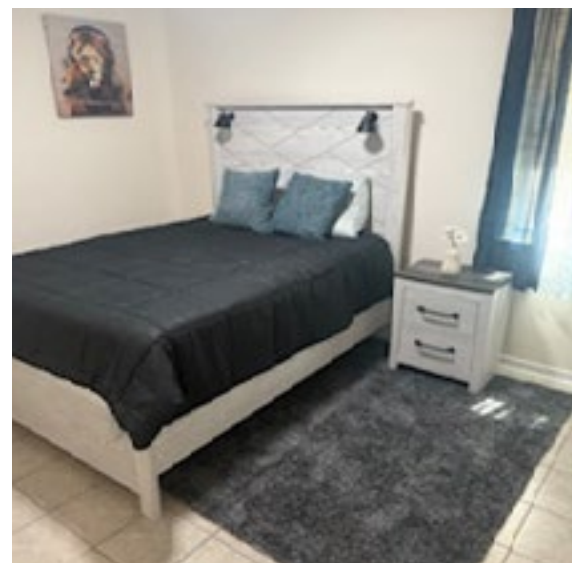
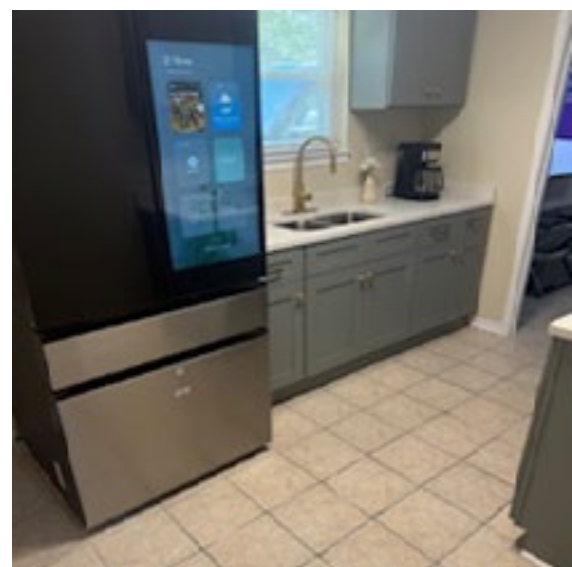
SITE VISITS

Over the past three months, I have had the distinct privilege of being able to count two insightful site visits to Safe-At-Home houses amongst the homes and locations I have visited, one located in Birmingham and the other in Mobile. These visits were specifically focused on observing the latest advancements in implementing assistive technology within a home setting, and I must say, both experiences left me quite impressed.

The Birmingham Safe-At-Home house, served by the Arc of Central Alabama, showcased an impressive array of integrated smart home devices designed to enhance independence and safety for individuals with diverse needs. I was particularly struck by the seamless integration of voice-activated controls for lighting, climate, and entertainment systems, which demonstrated a significant leap forward in user-friendly accessibility. The adaptive kitchen appliances, equipped with features like automatic shut-off and simplified interfaces, were another highlight, offering practical solutions for daily living. Furthermore, the innovative use of remote monitoring systems, allowing caregivers to ensure well-being without infringing on privacy, truly exemplified a thoughtful approach to supported living. The overall design of the house, with its wide doorways, accessible bathrooms, and strategically placed grab bars, underscored a commitment to universal design principles, making it a truly inclusive environment.

My visit to the Mobile house serviced by Northview Health Services was equally inspiring, revealing a different yet equally impactful set of assistive technologies. Here, the focus on personalized solutions was particularly evident. I observed cutting-edge communication devices tailored to individual speech patterns and cognitive abilities, enabling residents to express themselves with greater ease and confidence. The implementation of advanced movement and time-of-day detection systems, utilizing discreet sensors and immediate alert protocols when needed, provided a tangible sense of security. What truly resonated with me in Mobile was the emphasis on creating a stimulating and engaging environment through interactive sensory rooms and therapeutic technologies. These elements not only addressed physical needs but also fostered mental well-being and social connection. The dedication to continuous innovation and the willingness to adapt technology to individual preferences were clearly apparent, making the Mobile house a beacon of person-centered care.

Both assistive technology houses demonstrated an unwavering commitment to empowering individuals with disabilities through the thoughtful application of assistive technology. What impressed me most was not just the technology itself, but the philosophy behind its implementation – a philosophy centered on promoting autonomy, dignity, and a higher quality of life. These visits reinforced my belief in the transformative power of assistive technology and the incredible potential it holds for creating more inclusive and supportive home environments. The dedication of the teams behind these initiatives is truly commendable, and I am excited to see the continued evolution of these vital programs.





SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVE

The Office of Self-Advocacy is committed to zealously pursuing the Supported Employment Initiative, recognizing its critical role in empowering individuals with disabilities to achieve meaningful and sustainable employment. This initiative is a cornerstone of our mission, aiming to foster economic independence, enhance self-esteem, and promote full inclusion within the workforce. We believe that every individual, regardless of their disability, deserves the opportunity to contribute their talents and skills to the community.

To ensure the resounding success of this vital initiative, the Office of Self-Advocacy has proudly aligned with AL-APSE (Association of People Supporting EmploymentFirst). This strategic partnership is instrumental, as AL-APSE is a leading advocate for EmploymentFirst policies and practices in Alabama, dedicated to advancing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Our collaboration with AL-APSE will leverage their expertise, resources, and extensive network to strengthen our outreach, enhance our training programs, and advocate for policies that remove barriers to employment. Together, we will work to create a more inclusive job market where individuals with disabilities are not only employed but also thrive in their chosen careers.

Furthermore, the Office of Self-Advocacy understands that a truly comprehensive and effective Supported Employment Initiative requires a collaborative approach. We are actively planning to reach out to a diverse array of other necessary organizations, including vocational rehabilitation agencies, local businesses, educational institutions, disability advocacy groups, and community service providers. These partnerships will be crucial for developing a robust ecosystem of support that addresses the multifaceted needs of job seekers with disabilities. By fostering strong alliances, we aim to:

- **Expand Job Placement Opportunities:** Collaborating with businesses to identify and create inclusive employment opportunities, and providing ongoing support to both employees and employers.
- **Enhance Skill Development:** Partnering with educational and training institutions to offer tailored programs that equip individuals with the skills demanded by today's job market.
- **Provide Comprehensive Support Services:** Working with various agencies to ensure access to essential services such as transportation, assistive technology, and benefits counseling, which are vital for sustained employment.
- **Advocate for Systemic Change:** Collaborating with advocacy groups to influence policy and legislation that promotes equitable employment practices and eliminates discriminatory barriers.

Through these concerted efforts and strategic partnerships, the Office of Self-Advocacy is dedicated to building a future where individuals with disabilities have every opportunity to achieve their employment goals and lead fulfilling, independent lives. The Supported Employment Initiative is not just a program; it is a commitment to fostering a truly inclusive and equitable society for all Alabamians.

GET INVOLVED

Your voice and participation are essential to the success of the self-advocacy movement. We encourage all self-advocates to get involved and make a difference in their communities. There are many ways you can contribute:

- **Attend Meetings:** Participate in our Advisory Council meetings or local self-advocacy group meetings to share your insights and help shape our initiatives.
- **Volunteer:** Offer your time and skills to support our events, outreach efforts, or administrative tasks. Every contribution, big or small, makes a difference.
- **Share Your Story:** Your personal experiences are powerful. Share your self-advocacy journey with others to inspire and educate.
- **Become an Advocate:** Learn about legislative issues impacting individuals with disabilities and contact your elected officials to advocate for positive change.
- **Spread the Word:** Help us reach more self-advocates by sharing information about our newsletter, programs, and events with your friends, family, and networks.
- **Provide Feedback:** We value your input. Let us know your thoughts on our programs, what topics you'd like to see covered, or how we can better support you.

For more information on how to get involved or if you have any questions, please contact the Office of Self-Advocacy.



OFFICE OF SELF ADVOCACY SERVICES

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

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