



Advocacy Matters

A digital newsletter produced by the
New Jersey Self-Advocacy Program

March 2026

We have a lot to say, so make sure to click
"View entire message" if it appears at the bottom of this
newsletter. [If you have been forwarded this message, you can
subscribe here.](#)

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month!

March is

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month



Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month (DDAM) is an opportunity to promote respect for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and to educate others about the abilities people with IDD possess.

This month is also a chance to provide understanding, encouragement and opportunities to help persons with developmental disabilities lead productive and fulfilling lives.

DDAM Activities

NJSSAN Advocates testified to the Senate and Assembly Budget Committees.
Click on each image to download their testimony.



**New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project
&
Statewide Self-Advocacy Network**
A program of The Arc of New Jersey since 1983

March 24, 2026

Dear Senate Budget Committee,

My name is Ginamarie Williams, I live in Warren County. I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony on the FY27 NJ State Budget. I have been on the disability spectrum since before I was even aware that it had a name. Like many other people with disabilities I have come to embrace my disability because it has become my power! I was born in New Jersey and have lived in multiple counties in the state. I have worked in the private and public sector. I have worked at the county, state, and federal level. I have used many resource programs that are available to people with disabilities. This gives me an advantage to see a lot of different sides of these different programs and how they operate.

I am coming to you with some concerns today. A lot of times people with disabilities live in poverty. We are at the mercy of the services and programs that are made available to us. Current laws and decisions keep us at the poverty level. We struggle to embrace a fully financially independent life. A lot of people with disabilities rely on public transportation and Medicaid for everyday life. As you know, Medicaid is being threatened and public transportation is not fully available and is constantly getting cut.

Medicaid is extremely important for me, and many other people with disabilities, to live my daily life. I need support to stay healthy and keep my independence secure. It is hard to save money for emergencies. My disability makes me have a lot of doctors appointments and the doctors that I need are not in my area because there is a shortage of doctors and providers that take our insurance. People are having no choice but to use the ER as their healthcare provider. We are a state in crisis. I have had many issues with getting the medication I need to survive. This is concerning and messes with our health.

Transportation is another area of importance for many people with disabilities. We need to get to our doctors appointments, grocery stores, church, visit family and friends so we aren't isolated. Isolation is a slow killer that never gets a budget line but we all pay for. I have support groups, and programs and services that I rely on daily and transportation is always a wild card. Some people with disabilities are lucky enough to be able to find competitive employment but transportation is still a barrier for a lot of us. For people to get a job and keep their job, they need support. It's really hard for people in community based jobs to keep them. Uber and Lyft



Supporting the rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities
985 Livingston Avenue, North Brunswick, NJ 08902
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**New Jersey Self-Advocacy Program &
New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network**
A program of The Arc of New Jersey since 1983
Promoting Advocacy and Independence for People with
Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities



March 24, 2026

Dear Assembly & Senate Budget Committees,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on FY27 New Jersey State Budget.

My name is Ellen Moskowitz, and I am a Self-Advocate in Atlantic County. I am currently the Chairperson of Council 5, and a member of the New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network (NJSAN). I have been a Self-Advocate with NJSAP for over 15 years, I've served in the past as President of NJSAN, and I am fully committed to continue learning and advocating for myself and for others in New Jersey. I enjoy speaking up for myself or others when it is appropriate.

I am writing to you today to respectfully request that more funds be added to the FY2027 Budget for Direct Support Professionals (DSP)s. The role of a DSP is so important to individuals with disabilities as well as their families. I believe that DSPs deserve to have a living wage. I have lived at The Arc since 1989 and my DSPs have always supported and respected me.

Unfortunately, because of the low wages for DSP, I often lose trusted support because of financial challenges. I am very open and comfortable with my staff and wish that I did not have to see people leave so often. It hurts me to see staff having a hard time in their own lives, because they help me so much with mine. It upsets me knowing that someone I trust to care for me, is leaving because the organization can not pay them adequately. Losing staff is something that most people with IDD know all too well. My ask is that more funding is given to DSPs to ensure lower turnover rates.

We are hoping, with your help, that we can increase their wages. When DSPs are not paid what they deserve it creates a high turnover rate for staff. This disrupts my life, as well as their own. It is important, and fair, that we give direct support professionals a wage increase. They deserve to be making enough to support themselves and their families, because they do so well at supporting me and other adults with IDD.

Thank you for reading my testimony and allowing me to share my voice and address my concerns.

Ellen Moskowitz

Ellen Moskowitz
Chair of Council 4 & 5
New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network



**New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project
&
Statewide Self-Advocacy Network**
A program of The Arc of New Jersey since 1983

Dear Assembly Budget Committee,

My name is Andrew Sharick, and I am a resident of Sussex, New Jersey. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the FY27 NJ State Budget. I am writing today to speak on a critical issue that directly impacts the lives of people with disabilities across our state. There is an urgent need to increase wages for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs).

Direct Support Professionals are essential in the disability service system. They provide indispensable support that allows individuals with disabilities to live safely, independently, and with satisfaction in their communities. DSPs assist with daily living activities, help people maintain employment, attend medical appointments, and stay connected to their families and communities. Without them, many of us would not be able to live the lives we have worked so hard to build.

Despite the importance of their role, DSPs are significantly underpaid. Many earn wages that do not reflect the level of responsibility, skill, and compassion their work requires. As a result, there is a severe workforce shortage. Providers struggle to recruit and maintain staff, and high turnover disrupts the consistency of care. This instability directly affects the quality of life, safety, and well-being of people who rely on these services every day, such as myself.

Low wages force many DSPs to leave for higher-paying jobs in other industries, even though they are passionate about the work they do. This creates gaps in care, reduced hours of support, and, in some cases, individuals being left without the services they need. Families are also impacted, often having to fill in these gaps themselves, which can lead to burnout and financial strain.

Investing in DSP wages is an investment in people. By increasing their wages, New Jersey can build a stable, qualified workforce that ensures consistent and high-quality care. It also shows respect and recognition for the essential work DSPs provide every single day.

I urge you to prioritize funding that will increase DSP wages in the FY27 budget. This is not just about compensation, as it is about stability and the ability for people with disabilities to live full and independent lives in their communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Andrew Sharick
New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network Advocate



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On March 20th The Arc of Middlesex hosted a DDAM Event. Deputy Commissioner Jonathan Seifried spoke to the participants about updates to DDD and presented them with a Proclamation from Governor Sherrill.



On March 31st NJSSAN members Ginamarie W. from Warren County, Donald N. from Union County, and Amanda C. from Atlantic County, met with Assemblywoman Murphy on Zoom.

Tuesday, March 31st at 4 PM

Assembly's Office:

Assemblywoman Carol A. Murphy, 7th District

NJ Statewide Self-Advocacy Network (NJSSAN) and The Arc of NJ:

- Ginamarie Williams, NJSSAN Member, Warren County
- Donald Neunert, NJSSAN Member, Union County
- Amanda Chirelli, MOCEANS HERizon Creator, Atlantic County
- Erin Smithers, Director, NJ Self-Advocacy Program
- Lisa Ford, Assistant Executive Director of Programs and Services
- Celine Fortin, Executive Director, The Arc of NJ

Agenda

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Self-Advocate Budget Priorities and Issues of Importance
 - A. Expanding Public Transportation Options/Opportunities
 - B. Stop cuts to Medicaid
 - C. Higher Wages for DSP's
3. Assemblywoman Murphy acknowledgement of Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month
4. Adjourn meeting



DDAM Resources

Additional resources were created specifically for DDAM!
You can download these files by clicking on the image.

Advocacy can be BIG or Small Actions



Picking out your clothes for the day



Calling your legislator about important issues in your life



Sharing your goals



Picking out your meals



Being involved in vacation planning



Voting in elections

Advocacy is about letting your wants and needs known to those around you. Standing up for your choices and sharing your thoughts with people who can make a difference!



HOW TO FIND Advocacy Groups



Reach Out To Local Service Providers



Search Online



Check For Events at Your Library & Coffee Shops



Ask Your Friends and Family



Utilize Resource Guides



Start Your Own Group, We Can Help!

New Jersey Self-Advocacy Program

A program of The Arc of New Jersey since 1983
Promoting Advocacy and Independence for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Introduction to Advocacy & Misconceptions

Self-advocacy was started in Sweden in the late 1960s. It came to the USA in the mid 1970s.

Advocacy is...

- ✓ speaking up for your wants, needs, desires, and rights.
- ✓ a part of daily life.
- ✓ on a local, state, & federal level
- ✓ enacted by individuals, groups, and organizations
- ✓ a skill you can build over your lifetime and at any age

Advocacy is for everyone!

Advocacy efforts led to The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) on July 26, 1990. Signed by George H.W. Bush

Advocacy isn't...

- ✗ only about governmental affairs.
- ✗ only for folks without guardians.
- ✗ pointless or useless.
- ✗ something you're born knowing.
- ✗ always quick & easy
- ✗ something you need to do alone

Advocacy isn't going away!

www.njselfadvocacyproject.org

Advocacy efforts continue to change medical terms, bills, laws, updates to the ADA, and so much more

Advocacy Stigma

- ⊗ Stigma refers to disapproval or shame attached to a person, group, or behavior. It causes social exclusion & discrimination.
- ⊗ Advocates can be seen as "difficult", "rude" or "problematic" when they advocate or as "inferior", "broken", or "helpless" if they don't.
- ⊗ People with disabilities may be denied jobs, housing, or other opportunities due to false assumptions or stereotypes.

Don't let stigma stop you speaking up!

NJSAP supports advocacy for legislative decisions in local towns and on the State & Federal level!



Council Agenda Items

This month our Council's worked on these items:

- The Councils finished their elections and new membership is involved in the NJSSAN.
- The Councils also worked on filling out templates for DDAM.
- Councils started working on their goals and priorities.
- The Advisory Board also held its elections and we would like to welcome **Shondel Greenwood** as our new NJSSAN President!



Shondel Greenwood Arc Atlantic

Advocacy In Action



"My favorite advocacy quote is 'Nothing About Us, Without Us!'"
-Amanda Chirelli, New Jersey State Advocate

Advocacy Trainings

If you would like the NJSAP team to provide a training to your group please reach out to us at NJSAP@ArcNJ.org or fill out our [training request form here](#). Our Training and Technical Assistance Coordinator, Bianca, will happily get back and arrange a time and day for the training!

On March 23rd Erin Smithers visited The Arc of Hunterdon and presented a training to their advocacy group, ArcWorks. The training was about Advocating For Yourself. This training offers tips on how to take advocacy into your own hands and successfully advocate in a number of areas in your life.



Resource Training



On March 19th, Bianca Najera delivered a training to The Arc of Salem on Resources. 24 participants were in attendance! This training is about NJSAP, NJSSAN, and other programs.

On March 25th, Bianca Najera delivered a training to SCARC on Consent and Respect. 24 participants were in attendance! This training is about what consent is, what consent involves, and what consent sounds and looks like.

CONSENT & RESPECT

THE NEW JERSEY SELF-ADVOCACY PROGRAM

Quick Tip

We offer 'Quick Tips' on advocating, staying connected, and living independently, on our social media platforms:



Quick Tip:

Your health improves when you advocate for yourself. Set boundaries, prioritize movement, and choose habits that support your physical and mental wellbeing. Let trusted people in your life know if you need support or attention!

NJSAP Webinars

NJSAP webinars are for adults and students with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, their family members, and Direct Support Professionals.

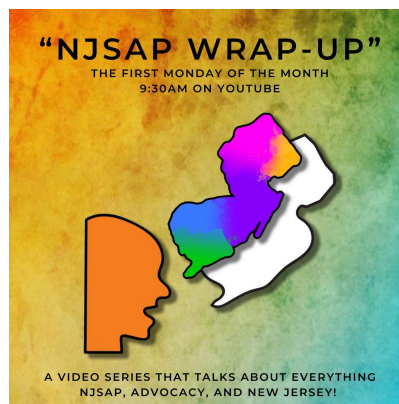
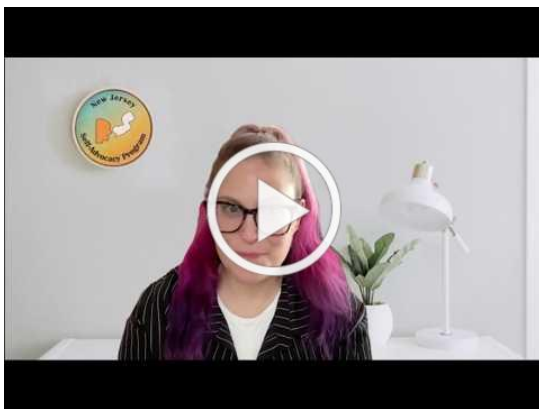
We present hour-long trainings every Tuesday at 2 PM on a variety of topics relating to self-advocacy and healthy living, available to view right from your home, office, classroom or wherever you may be!

View our latest advocacy webinar below: Domestic Violence and People with Disabilities - Part 1, Prevalence and Types of Abuse.



NJSAP Wrap-Up

Every month Erin Smithers presents a short video on different aspects of The New Jersey Self-Advocacy Program. Visit our [Youtube Playlist](#) to see all the NJSAP Wrap-Up videos and learn all about our program!



This month Erin Smithers talked about the resources that are available on the NJSAP website. **Click on the images to visit the playlist or watch the video.**

NJSAP Reach

The Director of NJSAP, Erin Smithers, would like to attend your advocacy group to connect our program to yours, provide trainings and resources (including advisor trainings), or to help you start an advocacy group if you don't have one!

Please reach out to Erin Smithers to schedule a visit: ESmithers@arcnj.org



On March 11th Erin Smithers provided an NJSAP and NJSSAN training to parents, teachers, and alumni to Celebrate The Children in Denville.

Celebrate the Children (CTC) has been providing services for children with difficulties in relating and communicating since 1995. Celebrate the Children is a progressive program based on the Developmental Individual Relationship Based (DIR®) Intervention Model developed by Dr. Stanley Greenspan and Dr. Serena Wieder. This New Jersey state-approved comprehensive school program uses a dynamic interdisciplinary approach that prepares students ages 3-21 for success in the 21st Century.

Get Involved

Want to get involved in advocacy campaigns or upcoming events? Here is what is available.

**Plan your own event with NJSAP! Reach out to Erin Smithers to get started:
ESmithers@arcnj.org.**

**Save the Date for our Annual Fall Conference!!!
October 2nd at Pines Manor in Edison!**

Save the Date

The 42nd Annual
NJ Statewide Self-Advocacy Network

Fall Conference



Pines Manor
2085 Lincoln Hwy.
Edison, NJ 08817

Registration opens
this summer



Family Connections
Connect and grow your family network!

DOOR PRIZES!!

Come enjoy a complimentary dinner and learn about
Planning for Adult Life for your child 18-21.

CAU Planning for Adult Life
"Self Determination and Self Advocacy for Students with IDD"

The Arc of New Jersey
"SSI, Medicaid, and DDD services Explained"

CAU PACES
"Education & career resources for youth in foster care"

APRIL 14, 2026
6:00PM - 9:00PM

IN-PERSON: COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED
80 W. GRAND STREET, ELIZABETH, NJ 07202

To register
[CLICK HERE](#)
Or Scan QR Code

Do you have accessibility requirements? Contact
Mary Olive Smith, Family Mentor & Advocate, CAU
Phone: (908)845-4666 Email: msmith@caunj.org

WELLNESS FAMILY FESTIVAL
AND CHUCK ENERGING HEALTH FAIR

APRIL 5, 2025
10-2 PM

West Milford High School
For more information contact:
Highlands Family Success Center
(973) 506-6575

Snacks generously donated by
Inserra Supermarkets!
Food Trucks:
Kona Ice - Freakin' Vegan
Brownie Bar - Mexi Boys

HEALTH FAIR:

- GLUCOSE: 2 hour fast
- BLOOD PRESSURE
- CHOLESTEROL
- BREAST EXAM
- GLAUCOMA TESTING
- VISION
- HEARING
- SENIOR SUPPORT
- MENTAL HEALTH
- SUBSTANCE USE
- EDUCATION
- COMMUNITY PROGRAMS
- SCHOOL PROGRAMS

FREE!
Rain or Shine
Snacks
Giveaways

SPECIAL NEEDS
for all ages:

- PHYSICAL THERAPY
- SPEECH THERAPY
- FEEDING THERAPY
- OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY
- EARLY INTERVENTION
- ABA THERAPY
- TRANSITION INTO ADULTHOOD
- DEVELOPMENTAL SUPPORT
- AUTISM SERVICES
- MEDICAID & MEDICARE
- DISABILITY SUPPORT

CHILDREN'S CORNER:

- TOUCH-A-TRUCK
- KANDY THE CLOWN
- FACE PAINTING/PHOTO BOOTH
- DJ: TWIN OAKS ENTERTAINMENT
- INFLATABLE OBSTACLE COURSE
- SERVICE DOGS
- LAWN GAMES
- SPIDERMAN
- STAR WARS CHARACTERS
- EASTER BUNNY
- LOKAI ROSE
- BRICKS 4 KIDZ
- SCOUTS AND MUCH MORE!

PAIN MANAGEMENT:

- MASSAGE
- REIKI
- ACUPUNCTURE
- CHIROPRACTIC
- YOGA
- PHYSICAL THERAPY

OVER 70 RESOURCES
AND FUN FOR ALL AGES!

growing our community together

Join The Arc of NJ, CAU and DDD for a free dinner and a night of information all about planning for adult life and transition. All are

This festival is a combined family event and community resource fair where state, county, local, and nonprofit organizations come together to connect residents with available

welcome to attend this meeting! **Click on the flyer to download a copy to your device.**

services, volunteer opportunities, and networking with others.

**Targeted Hiring Event for
Individuals with Disabilities and
Service-Connected Veterans**

Hosted By: **NJ Division of Vocational Rehabilitation**

Consumers and Resource Providers
must **register** at the link below.

LOCATION/DATE/TIME:
Camden County College
200 College Drive, Connector Building
Blackwood, NJ 08012



**Wednesday, April 29, 2026
10:00am to 2:00pm**

Set-up: 9:00am for Resource Providers

Register, mark your calendars and Spread the Word!

All counties in NJ are welcome.

<https://forms.office.com/g/PQd1q7A49j?origin=lpLink>



**Benefits &
Employment**


Adam Kubler,
Vice President of NJAPSE

Back by popular demand! Adam Kubler, Vice President of NJAPSE, discusses, in plain terms, how working affects Social Security Income and Medicaid. He will also touch on how Social Security calculates income, work incentives that allow individuals to earn more money while collecting Social Security Income, and how Medicaid plays into all of this. Information on resources such as, nj.DB101.org, how to report your income, where to get benefits counseling and what to do if something goes wrong. Reserve your virtual seat now!

**Wednesday, May 6, 2026
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
REGISTER HERE:**
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1984570342317?aff=oddtcreator>

**Thursday, May 7, 2026
6:30 PM - 8:30 PM
REGISTER HERE:**
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1984772329466?aff=oddtcreator>

This event is made possible with support from our sponsors:



Join New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for this in person, job fair, event in Blackwood. Click on the flyer to download a copy to your device.

[Register here to attend this event!](https://forms.office.com/g/PQd1q7A49j?origin=lpLink)

NJAPSE is hosting a Benefits and Employment Training on two separate days. One on May 6th at 10am & May 7th at 6:30pm. Click on the flyer to download it to your device and to register!

Take part in these current action alerts!



[**ACT NOW: Tell Congress to Increase the SSI Asset Limit!**](#)



[**ACT NOW: Tell Congress to Protect Voting Rights for People With Disabilities!**](#)

Want to see everything The Arc of NJ has to offer?
Sign up below to receive the newsletters from the different programs at The Arc of NJ



Sign up for CJAP



Sign up for Children's Advocacy



Sign up for Family Institute



Sign up for PFAL



Sign up for Healthcare Advocacy



Sign up for The Arc of NJ

NJSSAN Calendars



We are holding monthly NJSSAN Council meetings *virtually!*
[For information regarding your Council area, please click here.](#)

The New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network (NJSSAN) is made up of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) throughout the state. The NJSSAN is used as a means of supporting positive change on both a personal and social level. It consists of 6 Councils based on geographic location within the state.

[You can read the current NJSSAN Priorities here.](#)

NJ Statewide Self-Advocacy Network Position Statements

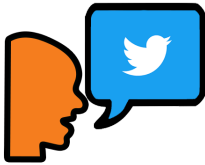
The New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project (NJSAP) is a program of The Arc of New Jersey established in 1983 to challenge individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to become involved in events, legislative policies, and issues that affect their lives or lives of others with disabilities.

We work together with these individuals to form The New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network (NJSSAN), which is used as means of supporting positive change on both a personal and social level. The NJSSAN consists of five Councils based on geographic location within the state.

1. [Home & Community-Based Services \(HCBS\)](#)
2. [Housing for People with IDD](#)
3. [Transportation](#)
4. [Supported Decision Making and Alternatives to Guardianship](#)
5. [Raising Awareness of IDD Issues](#)

NJSAP@ArcNJ.org — NJSSAN POSITION STATEMENTS
www.njsap@arcnj.org — www.njssan.org — 732-749-8314

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Instagram



Youtube

https://www.arcnj.org/programs/njsap/self_advocacy.html



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New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project | 985 Livingston Avenue | North Brunswick, NJ 08902 US

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