



Advocacy Matters

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

April 2026

We have a lot to say, so make sure to click
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newsletter.

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here.](#)

Autism Acceptance Month

April is Autism Acceptance Month

“True inclusion means ensuring autistic people have every opportunity to live
life to the fullest. When we listen deeply and create truly welcoming spaces,
that’s when everyone shines.”

– Katy Neas, CEO of The Arc



April is
AUTISM
ACCEPTANCE MONTH



BE KIND • BE PATIENT • BE INCLUSIVE

**Autism
Awareness**



**Autism
Acceptance**

versus

Awareness focuses on acknowledging the existence of autism. Acceptance is actively fostering inclusion, respect, and support for autistic individuals, rather than trying to change or "fix" them. We should always provide opportunities to learn about autism, but it's even more important for people to put what they know into action. Celebrating "Autism Acceptance Month" leads to a better quality of life for people on the spectrum and a more inclusive world.



Awareness is...

- knowing that you have a classmate with a disability.
- simply realizing that someone has a challenge.
- seeing someone with autism do something that you didn't expect from them.
- appreciating the gifts and challenges of those with different abilities.
- agreeing with these statements and then doing nothing.



Acceptance is...

- ✓ inviting a classmate with a disability to hang out with you.
- ✓ engaging in a real conversation with someone who has a challenge.
- ✓ telling someone with autism that they are awesome or cheering them on.
- ✓ volunteering your time to help support people with different abilities.
- ✓ sharing this information and taking action.



Imagery

- ✗ Puzzle piece imagery is now seen as infantilizing, representing a missing piece, and fixing a "problem".
- ✗ General awareness campaigns often used the color blue emphasizing "calm", which goes against the promotion of action and advocacy.
- ✓ Use the gold or rainbow infinity symbol to represent the infinite possibilities and diversity within the spectrum.
- ✓ Red as a color is often supported by the autistic community to "reclaim" the narrative, focusing on acceptance and passion. #redinstead

April Activities

April 20th



Amanda Chirelli spoke with Noah Garber from Representative Van Drew's Office about the importance of Medicaid and Home and Community Based Services (HCBS). Amanda also talked about needing more funding for transportation.

April 28th



NJSAP was present, with Children's Advocacy, at Transitions Ahead: Empowering Your Journey on April 28th. Over **300 people** attended this Transition Fair at Boonton High School in Boonton, NJ! Lots of information about NJSAP and the NJSSAN was given out!

Council Agenda Items

This month our Council's worked on these items:

- Spread information about an upcoming rally at the Trenton Statehouse on May 19th. More information is below in our upcoming events section!
- The councils want to get more involved with the Youth Advisory Board so C4/C5 wants to make videos to play during their meeting.
- The Councils talked about Autism Acceptance Month and what it means. Here is the proclamation from Gov. Sherrill!



Advocacy In Action



"We need you to advocate for people with disabilities!"
-Shondel Greenwood,
President of the Advisory
Board,
NJSSAN

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 April 1st, Bianca Najera delivered a training to The Arc of Salem on Transportation in a Professional World. 130 participants were in attendance! This training is about how to get to work, skills, different ways to travel, staying safe, and more.

On April 9th, Bianca Najera delivered a training to DRNJ on NJSSAN. This training is about what it is, how to get involved, and how the meetings are organized.

THE NEW JERSEY
STATEWIDE
SELF-ADVOCACY
NETWORK
(NJSSAN)

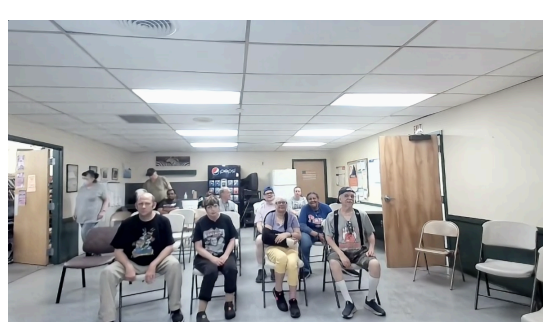
Anti-Bullying



New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project
NJSAP@ArcNJ.org

On April 15th, Bianca Najera presented a training for Midland on Anti-Bullying. There were 37 participants. Bianca covered the different types of bullying, its emotional and social impact, and how each of us can play a role. We also shared helpful resources and strategies for preventing bullying.

On April 16th, Bianca Najera delivered a training to The Arc of Salem on Advocating for Yourself. There were 40 participants. This training offers tips on how to take advocacy into your own hands and successfully advocate in a number of areas in your life.



On April 30th, Bianca Najera presented a training for The Arc of Middlesex County on Sexual Harassment & Boundaries. There were 23 participants. The training covered the definitions, examples, and resources.

Updated Resource

This new resource is available on [our website](#), or you can click on them to download them directly to your computer!

MY WEEK WITH THE NEW JERSEY SELF-ADVOCACY PROGRAM

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Check social media feed for Veronica's new nutrition video - Check social media feed for a "Quick Tip" post 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Watch the new Stay Healthy at Home webinar at 2 PM -Watch Peaceful Potato's Pot Pourri video 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Interactive Zoom event for HLP:Live at 11 AM -Check social media feed for IHT's new workout video 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Play this week's Brain Game on Zoom at 1 PM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Check social media feed for a "Speak Your Mind" post! -HLP:Live! It's Fitness Friday with IHT on Zoom at 1 PM 	
<p style="text-align: center;">TO DO LIST:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sign up for NJSAP's email list -Request a virtual group training -Join your monthly local NJSSAN Council Meeting 			<p style="text-align: center;">REMINDERS + NOTES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Newsletters each month - Winter: "Empowered" D&D Adventures - Summer: "Trailblazers" Movement Club - NJSAP Wrap-Up: Video updates the 1st Monday of the month - Check out our website for more information and additional activities and campaigns! 		

YouTube Find out more at www.njselfadvocacyprogram.org

Facebook: @NewJerseySAP / Instagram: @NewJerseySAP / BlueSky: @NJSAP / X: @NJSAP/ Youtube: @NJSAP

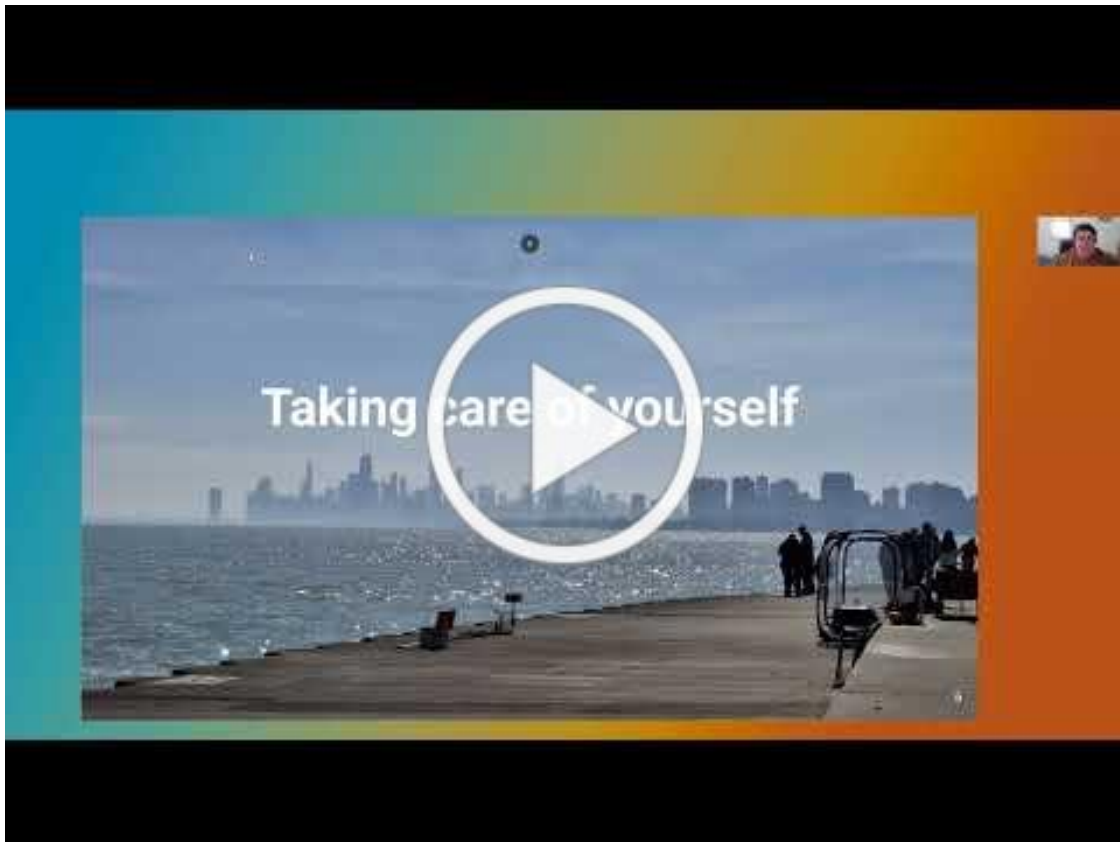
Our weekly planner has been updated! Make sure to check out all we have to offer!

NJSAP Webinars

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

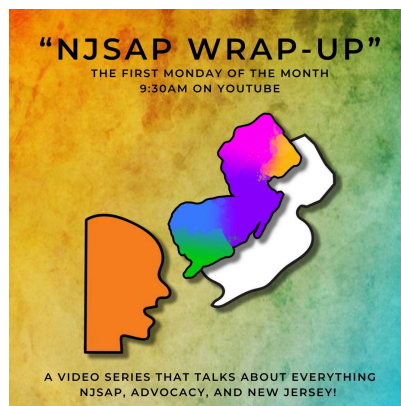
We present hour-long trainings every Tuesday at 2 PM on a variety of topics relating to self-advocacy and healthy living, available to view right from your home, office, classroom or wherever you may be!

View our latest advocacy webinar below: Domestic Violence and People with Disabilities - Part 2, Dynamics and Systemic Barriers.



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 how NJSAP can help support advocacy groups and advisors.

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 April 2nd Erin Smithers provided a training to 14 students at 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.

On April 7th Erin Smithers provided an NJSAP and NJSSAN training to 29 participants at Community Access Unlimited (CAU).

[Community Access Unlimited](#) is a Union County-based nonprofit that serves people with disabilities and at-risk youth across New Jersey. We give a voice to individuals who historically hold little power in society, assisting our members with housing, life skills, employment, personal finance, relationships, civic engagement, and much more. With more than 3,000 members and growing, we will never stop striving to create an all-inclusive, accessible world where everyone can lead a fulfilling life as part of the greater community.



Upcoming NJSAP Events

Save the Date for NJSAP's Annual
Fall Conference!
In Person!
October 2nd, 2026 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



JOIN US FOR A
PANEL DISCUSSION
With New Jersey Statewide
Self-Advocacy Network
Members

Members will discuss
-Council meetings
-Advocacy
-How to get involved
with the NJSSAN
-With a Q&A after

Register Now at www.NJSelfAdvocacyProgram.org

NJSSAN members will be doing a panel
for Children's Advocacy and family
members on May 22 at 11am.

NJSSAN members will be talking about
why advocacy is important, how others
can get involved with the NJSSAN, what
the NJSSAN involves, and there will be
time for a Q&A portion!

[Register here](#)

On July 17, 2026 NJSAP will set up a
table at Pier Village in Long Branch, NJ.
We are inviting advocates from around
NJ to come give out information on
Disability Pride Month, The Anniversary
of the signing of the Americans with
Disabilities Act (ADA), and information
about NJSAP and the NJSSAN.
The table will be set up from
10am - 2pm.

[You can learn more here!](#)

**RSVP
Here**

Come Celebrate Disability Pride & The ADA Anniversary with NJSAP!

When
July 17, 2026
10am - 2pm



Where
Pier Village
Long Branch

Come hand out resources,
spread information, and have
fun!

Visit <https://www.arcnj.org/programs/njsap> for more details!

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.



Summer EBT is a Federal Child Nutrition Program that provides qualifying families with a one-time \$120 EBT card per eligible child to help purchase groceries during the summer. Eligible students will receive a new Summer EBT card each year!

Remember, Summer EBT Benefits have a strict time limit. Eligible Families who receive Summer EBT funds have 120 days (approximately 4 months) to use their benefits. Benefits are not used within the 122-day time period, the funds will be returned to the federal government and cannot be reissued.

Dual participation in the Summer EBT program is prohibited. This means that children may not receive multiple benefit allotments from the same State, or from more than one State, each summer.

To see if your child is eligible to receive a NJ Summer EBT benefit card this summer, use the [Summer EBT Student Eligibility Look-Up Tool](#).

I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT:	WHO DO I CONTACT?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activating My Card My Summer EBT Balance Changing My PIN Reporting a Lost, Stolen, or Damaged Card Request a Replacement Card Lock/Unlock My Card 	EBT Card Customer Service 1-800-997-3333 ConnectEBT Mobile App Available on Apple and Android/Google
If your child attends a participating school: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> My Child's Eligibility Status The Address Where My Card Was Mailed The Date of Birth Listed for My Child 	Scan Here to Confirm Your Child's Eligibility Or Call Your Child's School to Confirm Eligibility
If your child <u>does not</u> attend a participating school or is home-schooled and between the ages of 6-16: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> My Child's Eligibility Status The Address Where My Card Was Mailed The Date of Birth Listed for My Child 	Scan Here to Confirm Your Child's Eligibility Or Email: DNSummerEBT@ag.nj.gov
To Opt Out (Decline) Receiving Summer EBT Benefits	Scan the QR code to Find the "Opt Out" Form And Click This Button to Opt Out:



New Jersey Rally for At-Home Care

TUES MAY 19 - TRENTON
STATE HOUSE ANNEX

Patients, caregivers, healthcare
workers & family advocates—join us!

homecarenj.org/rally

Raise the rate!
Home care can't wait!

HELP PROTECT
PDN & PCA
in NJ HOME CARE



Join Home Care & Hospice Association of NJ and show lawmakers the real human impact when Medicaid does not adequately reimburse medically and fundamentally necessary human support.

May 19, 2026 09:00am
The NJ State House Annex

Summer EBT is a Federal Child Nutrition Program that provides qualifying families with a one-time \$120 EBT card per eligible child to

help purchase groceries during the summer. Eligible students will receive a new Summer EBT card each year!

131 - 137 W. State Street, Trenton, NJ 08608

Join us at PALS Programs

PALS New York
• June 14 – June 20
• Fordham University
• Ages 18-30

PALS New Jersey
• June 21 – June 27
• TCNJ
• Ages 12-30

PALS Boston
• July 5 – July 11
• Stonehill College
• Ages 12-30

About PALS Programs
PALS Programs creates inclusive camp experiences for individuals with and without Down syndrome. Our volunteer led programs change attitudes, transform lives, and inspire a world of belonging.

Summer 2026
Our program pairs individuals with and without Down syndrome together for a week of new adventures, while learning more about themselves and others as they build transformative friendships.

Participants spend a full week together (7 days, 6 nights) living in dorms, participating in on-campus activities, and taking on attractions in the local area. The cost is \$2,300 for one week, and tuition support is available.

PALS PROGRAMS

www.palsprograms.org 267-477-7257

NEW JERSEY APSE
Employment First
Employment for All

Adam Kubler,
Vice President of NJAPSE

Benefits & Employment

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/198457034231?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:

KESSLER FOUNDATION **PROGRESSIVE CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING** **Stride** **SETWorks**

PALS Programs offers week-long experiences where individuals with and without Down syndrome come together to build friendships, gain independence, and enjoy a fun, supportive campus environment. **Click on the flyer to download it to your device!**

NJAPSE is hosting a Benefits and Employment Training on two separate days: 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!



TAKE ACTION: Share why Public Education matters to you!



ACT NOW: Share what Medicaid means to you!

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



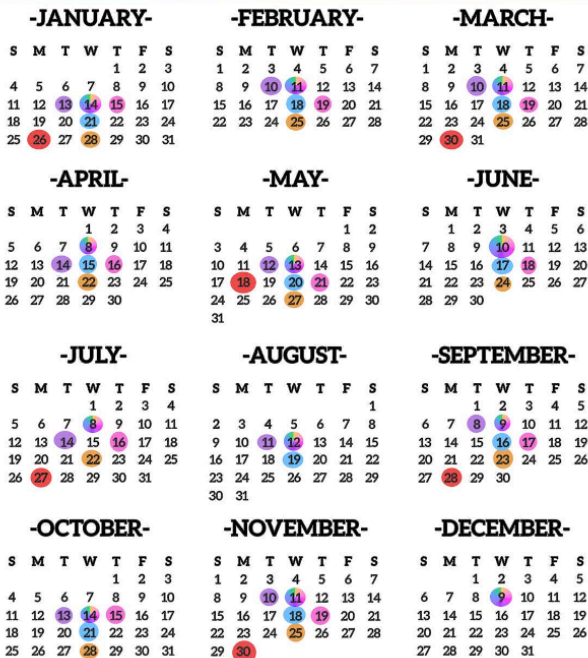
We are holding monthly NJSSAN Council meetings *virtually!*
[For information regarding your Council area, please click here.](#)



NJSSAN Council Meetings 2026

2026 Calendar

Click on the image to download
the calendar



Council 1: 3rd Wed. 5:30PM - 7PM
Council 2: 4th Wed. 3 - 4:30PM
Council 3: 2nd Tues. 5:30 - 7PM
Council 4/5: 3rd Wed. 3PM - 4PM
Statewide AM Council: 2nd Wed. 10- 11 AM
Advisory Board: Last Mon. 3-4PM. Every other month. By Invite only.

Interested in joining the NJSSAN? See below to sign up for emails from your Council!

Council 1
Hunterdon, Morris, Sussex & Warren
Counties

[Join Council 1 Email List](#)

Council 2
Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Passaic & Union
Counties

[Join Council 2 Email List](#)

Council 3
Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean &
Somerset Counties

[Join Council 3 Email List](#)

Council 4
Burlington, Camden, Gloucester & Salem
Counties

[Join Council 4 Email List](#)

Council 5
Atlantic, Cape May & Cumberland Counties

[Join Council 5 Email List](#)

Statewide A.M. Council
All NJ Counties

[Join Statewide A.M. Council
Email List](#)

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

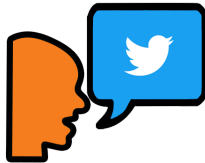
The New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project (NJSAP) is a program of The Arc of New Jersey established in 1983 to challenge individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to become involved in events, legislative policies, and issues that affect their lives or lives of others with disabilities.

We work together with these individuals to form The New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network (NJSSAN), which is used as a 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/Arctn.org NJSSAN POSITION STATEMENTS
www.njsapselfadvocacyproject.org 732-749-8314

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Twitter



Facebook



Instagram



Youtube

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



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*

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

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