



Advocacy Matters

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

January 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.](#)

Name Change



The New Jersey Self-Advocacy
Project is now

The New Jersey Self-Advocacy
PROGRAM

The New Jersey Self-Advocacy Program has been established since 1983 and we are here to stay so to affirm our solidity and permanence we are changing our name from 'Project' to 'Program'. We will be making the change online over the next few months-updating flyers and graphics online.

Our website name and location will not change. You can still find us at
https://www.arcnj.org/programs/njsap/self_advocacy.html

Council Agenda Items

This month our Council's worked on these items:

- Voting for new officer positions takes place in February. Council's got a refresher training on what the roles of each position entail.
- NJSSAN members began working on planning for Developmental Disabilities Awareness month in March.

- Sarah Adler, from The Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities, came out to a few of the Council's to talk about a new research topic that Rutgers is doing on caregivers with disabilities.
- The Council's participated in a new campaign to welcome Gov. Sherrill to office. The members of the Advisory Board wrote a letter to Governor Sherrill, welcoming her into office and talking about the NJSSAN and the work the advocates do in NJ. **Click on the image below to read the letter sent to Gov. Sherrill.**



Dear Governor Sherrill,

January 26, 2026

I hope this message finds you very well.

We are members of The New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network (NJSSAN). The NJSSAN is a statewide network made up of people with disabilities who come together from across New Jersey to advocate on the issues that matter most to our community. The NJSSAN is grounded in the belief that people with disabilities are strongest when their voices are heard directly and meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives.

On behalf of the NJSSAN, congratulations on your inauguration as Governor of New Jersey. We extend our warmest wishes to you as you begin your service and we wish you lots of success in this important role.

The NJSSAN is organized into 6 regional councils, based on the county in which members live. Each council works collaboratively to identify and advocate for their priorities such as marriage equality for people with disabilities, accessible and reliable public transportation, affordable and inclusive housing, competitive and integrated employment opportunities, access to home and community-based services (HCBS), and other issues that our members identify as important to their quality of life and independence.

As your administration begins, we want to share our enthusiasm for working together in the future. We believe that meaningful collaboration between state leadership and self-advocates is essential to creating policies that are inclusive, effective, and equitable. We look forward to opportunities to engage with your administration and to help ensure that the needs, experiences, and perspectives of people with disabilities remain involved in the decisions being made at every level of government.

Thank you for your commitment to serving New Jersey. We look forward to the possibility of working together to build a more inclusive state for all.

Sincerely,

Evelyn Ramundo

Evelyn Ramundo
President of the Advisory Board
The New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network (NJSSAN)

Advocacy In Action



"I am going to talk about Marriage Equality and that it isn't fair to a person who wants to get married and that you only have so much money to do that and it isn't fair to someone with IDD. They have a right to get married to someone with IDD just like any other couple should and money should not matter at all only their happiness."

-Evelyn Ramundo, NJ Advocate
President of the Advisory Board, NJSSAN
Chairwoman, Council 3

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](#).

On January 14th Bianca presented a 'Workplace Communication' Training to Midland Adult Schools and Midland Adult Day Program. This training had 40 participants. This training is designed to teach you how to speak up respectfully in your workplace.



On January 22nd Bianca provided a training about The New Jersey Self-Advocacy Program for the Youth Transition Conference! These trainings serve as a resource to show different programs and services available to youth with IDD.

New Resources

These new resources are available on [our website](#), or you can click on them to download them directly to your computer!

Job Interview

Do's



Dont's



Keep it simple



A combination of bags, briefcases, and a big coat makes you seem disorganized. Less is more.

Smile Nervously



Smiling too much can make you seem nervous. It's ok to look neutral for the bulk of the interview.

Shoes Count



Choose professional, clean, and comfortable closed-toe shoes in neutral colors like black, navy, brown, or beige.

Purse Your Lips



It makes you look like you are upset or holding something back.

Establish Eye Contact



Sit directly across from the interviewer, maintaining about 3 feet of space, to establish trust and eye contact.

Contract or Expand



Be comfortable, arms uncrossed, but don't stretch out like you're lounging or shrink in like you don't belong.

Be Poised



To help build confidence, practice a "power pose" before the interview.

Touch Your Face & Hair



Try not to touch your face and hair too much. It's a sign of nervousness.

www.njselfadvocacyprogram.org

Looking for a new job? Try these tips when you're in the job interview!

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

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

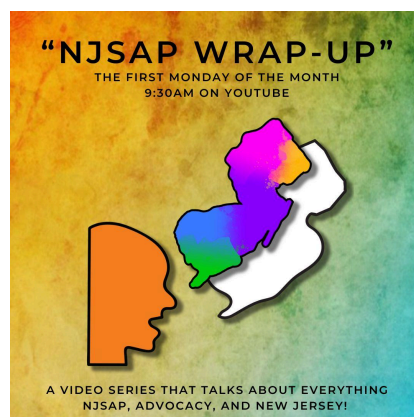
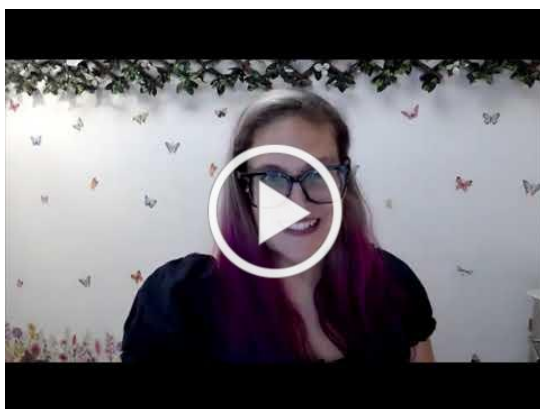


Quick Tip:
Advocacy starts with knowledge. It is important to understand that while you have rights as a human being and an American, you also have responsibilities that you should learn to be an effective advocate.

Learning your rights and responsibilities gives you confidence and supports your well-being.

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 talks about our winter programming: Empowered. This program is a great opportunity to be creative, problem solve, learn about risk taking, and network with other folks from around the state.

Click on the image 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 January 7th Erin Smithers went out to The Arc of Hunterdon County to provide a training to the members of their day program, ArcWorks.

[ArcWorks](#) is a day program facility for adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities in Hampton, NJ. They offer day-time services



to help individuals build work skills, socialize with their friends, and get connected to community events of their interest.

All participants reside in Hunterdon County and have made a conscience effort to give back to their friends and neighbors. The individuals volunteer their time to local organizations such as Meals on Wheels, local food pantries, and Grow-A-Row.

DDAM Contest

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. Each year, NJSAP hosts a Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month contest. In this year's contest, we'd like you to design a graphic for us to use in our March celebrations!



Participants are invited to submit a graphic for the contest fitting the theme: Highlighting Our Abilities. The NJ Statewide Self-Advocacy Network's Advisory Board will select the winning design from the available submissions. The winner will be highlighted on our website and their graphic utilized throughout March for all of our DD Awareness Month celebrations. The winning design will also be featured on a t-shirt available for purchase on Bonfire.com.

Click below on the images to download the entry form and rules!

March is National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

DD Awareness Month Contest

2026 Contest
Highlighting Our Abilities



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How Do I Get Involved?

Create a design using the theme: **Highlighting Our Abilities**. DD Awareness Month is a great time to let folks know all the amazing things people with IDD are capable of. Create a graphic showcasing your skills, strengths, and achievements!

1. Develop a creative and memorable graphic/image to go with the theme: Highlighting Our Abilities.
2. Fill out the form below and submit your image. Submissions will be voted on by the NJSSAN's Advisory Board.

Contest Rules

- Artwork can be any 2D medium, but images should be clear.
- No videos this year!
- Include the theme: Highlighting Our Abilities.
- You must fill out both the form below and attach your image.
- Submissions cannot violate copyright laws, please only use images and fonts you have created or have permission to use.

Please visit [our website](#) for more information.

March is National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

Helpful Tips

- If you are using traditional media, make sure your photo or scan is high quality.
- Please do not copy already existing images/logos. Make sure your artwork is original and unique!
- Winning image may be edited for clarity or restrictions on t-shirt design.

Contest Timeline

1. The submission deadline is February 13th.
2. Voting will take place February 16-20th.
3. Winners will be notified on February 23rd.
4. The winning theme and graphic will be shared throughout March!

Official Entry Form*
"Highlighting Our Abilities"
DD Awareness Month Contest

Individual or Group Name: _____

Contact Person: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Tell us about your design: _____

Typed Fonts Used (if any): _____

Please e-mail your entry form to:
Fbayak@ArcNJ.org by February 13, 2026.

Please visit [our website](#) for more information.

Event Change



Going forward, the Luncheon and the Conference will become one event in the fall.

Interested in attending an event in the spring? Join us for our Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month events in March!

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.

EMPOWERMENT 101

TUESDAYS JAN 13TH TO FEB 17TH, 2026 1 to 2 PM

ACI invites you to join a FREE 6-session virtual workshop (via Google Meet) that will teach you the skills to be an effective advocate.

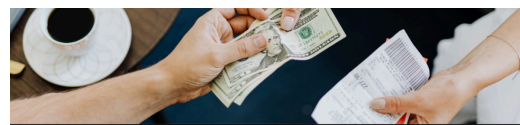
LEARN HOW TO

- Advocate for your rights
- Understand disability history and civil rights
- Speak out with confidence
- Influence the legislative process
- Make your voices heard at Election time

For residents of Somerset County. Space is limited.

QUESTIONS & REGISTRATION
 adacil.org | 732-738-4388 | lkoppisch@adacil.org

Join ACI for a FREE 6 week course about effective advocating! Click on the flyer to download it to your device.
[Register for this course here!](#)



Please join us for The Arc of NJ's Project HIRE / Planning for Adult Life (PFAL) **EMPLOYMENT MENTORSHIP PANEL**

ASK QUESTIONS - OR JUST LISTEN - AND GET ANSWERS!


Panel includes:

- Project HIRE participants
- Parents who helped them through the process
- Employers who can tell you what they are looking for
- And Project HIRE Director Colleen Collick, who oversees it all

**FEBRUARY 12
1:00PM-2:30PM
REGISTER HERE!**



Upcoming Employment Mentorship Panel involving The Arc of NJ's Project HIRE and Planning For Adult Life Programs. Join them on Zoom on February 12th, 1pm - 2:30pm.
[Click here to register!](#)



Abilities2Love LLC

Empowering Adults with Disabilities to Build Friendships & Relationships


SPEED DATING

4-Week Relationship Readiness & Social Skills Program


- **Week 1 – Understanding Relationships & Communication** 3/21/26
 - Healthy relationships
 - Boundaries
 - Reading emotions & social cues
- **Week 2 – Developing Foundation Skills** 3/28/26
 - Energy in social settings
 - Initiating conversations
- **Week 3 – Friendship Building & Community Interaction** 4/4/26
 - Start, build, and maintain friendships
- **Week 4 – Relationship Readiness & Safe Dating Basics** 4/11/26
 - Safe dating tips

RSVP by 2/21/26

Practice Social & Communication



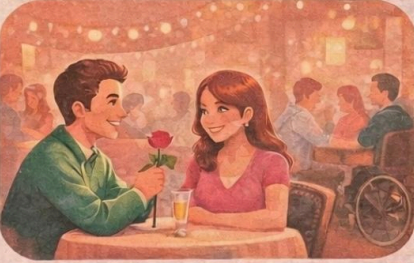
Build Friendships & Meaningful Connections



Speed Dating Event (In-person)

- Post-program event - 4/28/26
- Eligible for adults 21+ who completed the 4 week course
- Enjoy guided social interaction
- Light refreshments
- Certificate of Completion

Serving Warren, Hunterdon, Somerset Counties



Lamani's Coffee Market
156 Hudson Street
Phillipsburg, NJ 08865

Call 908-899-1750
info@abilities2love.com

♥ We Service All New Jersey •
♥ We Are DDD-APPROVED • We also accept private pay

In-person Event!

Call 908-899-1750 to register for this 4 week Course on healthy relationships, dating, and social skills!

Protect Medicaid Coalition

Beginning Wednesday, January 14, 2026 • 1 to 2 PM

Back in February, ACI launched the Protect Medicaid Coalition. From the 800 people who attended our Medicaid rally to town halls, press conferences, voter registration drives, calls to Congress, and testimony at public hearings...we showed up, spoke out, and demanded to be heard.

While federal cuts to Medicaid ultimately went through, our advocacy made an impact at the state level. And we're just getting started...

As we head into the new year, we face:

- Medicaid and SNAP cuts taking effect
- A new Governor and state legislature
- An urgent need to protect disability services and programs

ACI is ready to fight and we need YOU with us!

The Protect Medicaid Coalition will be having virtual meetings every month to build our strategy and take action.

Together, we will protect vital programs and rights. Let's keep the pressure on!

Join the Coalition!

adacil.org | 732-738-4388 | lkoppisch@adacil.org

ACI started a coalition to fight cuts to Medicaid. They hold monthly virtual meetings to take action and build strategy. Click on the flyer to download a copy to your device. [Join the Coalition by registering here!](#)

Bring self-advocacy to your classroom!

Join our Youth Advisory Board (ages 14-17 or 18-21) as a class for monthly online meetings and grow stronger...together!

Interested in a school day session?

14-17 Session: 2nd Wednesday of the month, 9:00-10:00am
18-21 Session: 2nd Wednesday of the month, 10:30-11:30am

- Enjoy ice-breakers and games!
- Make change!
- Talk about what matters to YOU!

Register your class by scanning the QR code to the left or by going to <https://bit.ly/YAB1>

The Arc of New Jersey, Children's Advocacy, and Planning For Adult Life now have a Youth Advisory Board! Join this group to learn about how to advocate for yourself and others in your community!

[Register for the FREE meetings here!](#)

WITH A SUPERVISED ACTIVITY ROOM AND DINNER FOR YOUR STUDENTS!

MARCH 18 WEDNESDAY 5:00-7:00PM

DINNER AND DEETS

ABOUT TRANSITIONING TO ADULTHOOD

Event

register here:

With presentations from

- THE ARC OF NJ'S PLANNING FOR ADULT LIFE: "SSI, MEDICAID, AND DDD SERVICES EXPLAINED"
- COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED: "SELF-ADVOCACY FOR STUDENTS WITH IDD"
- THE ARC OF ESSEX COUNTY: "ALL ABOUT THE ARC OF ESSEX"

Come for the dinner, stay for the information!

FREE PARKING | FREE EVENT

THE ARC OF ESSEX

50 BURNETT AVENUE # 3 MAPLEWOOD, NJ 07040

Join The Arc of NJ, CAU, and The Arc of Essex County for a free night of information all about planning for adult life and transition. All are welcome to attend this meeting! Click on the flyer to download a copy to your device. [Join the Coalition by registering here!](#)

CLICK HERE FOR ASL VIDEO

Help us learn about the challenges and frustrations faced by disabled people

Are you a person with a disability?
Or do you support a person with a disability?
Consider sharing your experiences.

Interested?
Fill out this short survey to be considered for an interview.

Selected participants will be paid for a 1.5 hour interview.

Need help?
Email us: ValdezLabUVA@virginia.edu
Call us: 434.982.2510

This study is funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).
UVA IRB-SBS #6677
PIs: Dr. Rupa S. Valdez and Dr. Bonnielin Swenor

AAPD is conducting a research project on ableism. This study is seeking input from disability advocates to better understand how ableism shows up in everyday life and how it can be addressed. Click on the flyer to download it to your device. [Click here to take the survey!](#)

Let's Talk About It! Disability, Sexuality, and Supporting Teens and Young Adults with IDD

Featuring Kristyn White and Natalya Mason

How to talk to your teen/young adult with IDD
about sexuality and gender identity.

When

Friday February 6, 2026, 12:00 PM



Children's Advocacy is hosting this free webinar. It will show a presentation on disability, sexuality, talking with families and caregivers about sexual identity, pronouns, and gender, as well as supporting teens and young adults with comprehensive sexual health education. [Register for the webinar here!](#)

GAMEU
www.game-u.com

WHY GAMEU?

Learn how GameU's 1:1 Technology Classes Are Designed to Support Students of All Ages and Abilities.

Join this dynamic educational presentation and discover how GameU empowers students through engaging, one-on-one live online lessons led by industry professionals.

Thursday, February 12th
12:00pm ET

CLICK BELOW TO JOIN
THE ZOOM LINK

JOIN PRESENTATION

Hosted By
Brett Winters

Students Thrive With a Customized Curriculum in Topics Such As:

- GAME DESIGN
- 3D MODELING
- CODING
- ANIMATION
- DIGITAL ARTS

Program Benefits

- Promotes Socialization
- Encourages Future Pursuits
- Improves Critical Thinking
- Develops Motor Skills

Can't make the presentation but want to connect?
Contact Us At:

516-265-7555 | accinfo@game-u.com | www.game-u.com

Join Brett Winters from Game U for this exciting webinar on how to learn about GameU's 1:1 Technology. All the classes are designed to support students of all ages and abilities. Join this dynamic educational presentation and discover how GameU empowers students through engaging, one-on-one live online lessons led by industry professionals.

[Click here to Register!](#)

Take part in these current action alerts!



[TAKE ACTION: Protect Special Education. Defend Students' Rights.](#)



[ACT NOW: Medicaid Saves Lives. Sign the Petition to Save Medicaid.](#)

NJSSAN Calendars



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

2026 Calendar



Click on the image to download the calendar

NJSSAN Council Meetings 2026

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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

Statewide A.M. Council
All NJ Counties

Join Council 5 Email List

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

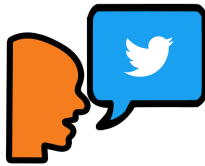
The New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project (NJSSAP) is a program of The Arc of New Jersey established in 1983 to challenge individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to become involved in events, legislative policies, and issues that affect their lives or lives of others with disabilities.

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](#)

NJSSAP/ACNJ.org -- NJSSAN POSITION STATEMENTS
www.njselfadvocacyproject.org -- 732-749-8514

*You are encouraged to share this information with others who may also be interested. However, if you are forwarding this email, please delete the "unsubscribe" link at the bottom of this page. If you do not remove the "unsubscribe" option and a person who receives your forwarded email clicks "unsubscribe," it would result in **your name** being removed from our distribution list.



Twitter



Facebook



Instagram



Youtube

www.njselfadvocacyprogram.org



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*



Try email marketing for free today!