



Advocacy Matters

A digital newsletter produced by
The New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project

August 2025

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.

August Events

On August 8th Connor Griffin, Director of Health Care Advocacy with The Arc of NJ, presented a webinar on a general overview of the current budget reconciliation bill and what it means for our community. At the end of the presentation there was a chance for participants to ask questions, as well as participate in the "I Am Medicaid" campaign. We will continue to update everyone with as much information as we have as time goes on. Make sure you are connected with NJSAP and Healthcare Advocacy to get the latest information on this bill.

You can watch this special presentation by clicking the video below!

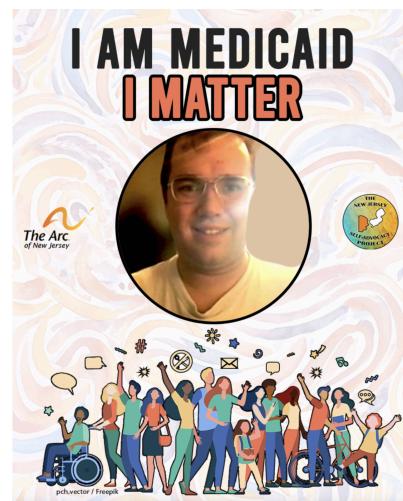
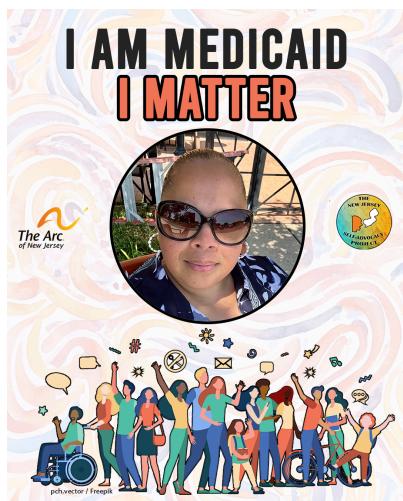
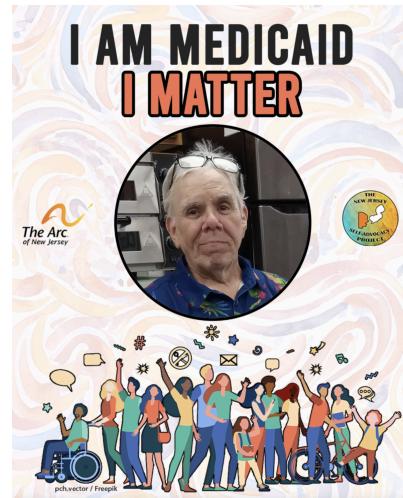
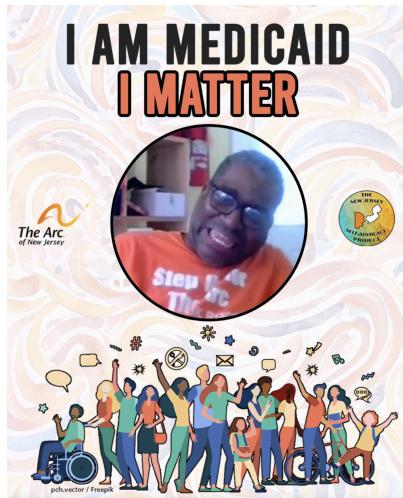


Campaigns

The New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project helps individuals with IDD around New Jersey participate in campaigns.

In August, NJSAP wanted to highlight the importance of Medicaid and the people who rely on Medicaid. NJSAP started the 'I am Medicaid. I Matter!' campaign. Participants were asked to place a picture of themselves in the frame provided. Frames were posted on social media and on the NJSAP website. Legislators were tagged on social media to show how many people rely on Medicaid for daily independence, medical care, and prevention! A few of the templates are shown below but they are [all on our website](#) and on our social media platforms.

If you would like to participate you can [download the template here!](#)



NJSAP also started a fundraiser to promote this campaign and showcase the importance of Medicaid. All proceeds from this fundraiser go towards getting advocates in front of decision makers to advocate for themselves and others in NJ!

[Participate in this campaign and purchase your shirt here!](#)



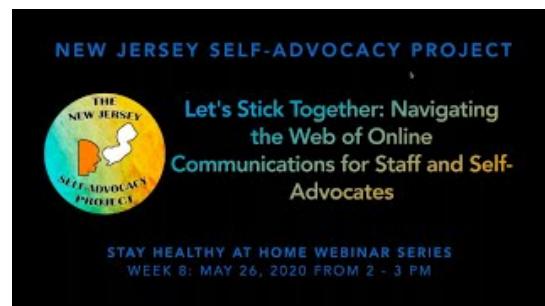
Council Agenda Items

This month the councils worked on these items:

- The Councils worked on setting a location for their upcoming in-person NJSSAN Retreat in February. This retreat will host the members in person and offer networking opportunities. Each Council will also vote on the officer positions. These officers will be in their elected positions until February 2028.
- This month the Councils also participated in the "I Am Medicaid, I Matter" Campaign. [You can see their templates on our website!](#)
- The councils also went over Medicaid updates, after the passing of the Budget Bill. One NJSSAN member testified to Monmouth County Commissioners about how Medicaid cuts will impact her life. Saying "I speak for myself and others who need to maintain their good health!". NJSSAN Member, Ray, stated "Medicaid lets me live without worrying about not being able to afford my healthcare."
- The Ombudsman for Individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities and Their Families, Paul Aronsohn, will be visiting the Councils in October so the groups worked on topics of importance to talk to him about.

Advocacy Trainings

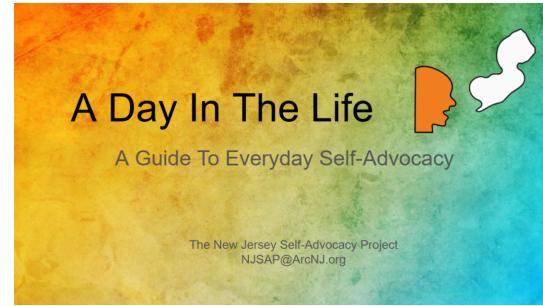
On August 14th Frankie Bayak provided a training for The Arc of Salem on Online Communication. 28 people attended this training! This webinar focuses on staying connected online, as well as exploring a variety of teleconferencing and video chat options that self-advocates, staff, and agency personnel can use for both professional and personal purposes. Phone and computer safety tips are also discussed.





On August 20th Erin Smithers provided an in-person training to The Arc Angels, the advocacy group with The Arc of Morris County. 6 members were in attendance. The training was 'Officer Positions'. The training is designed for new groups. It helps the members know what is expected of their roles within the advocacy group and how they can help to make the group successful. [Click the image to download the flyer!](#)

On August 26th Erin provided a training to The Arc of Ocean on 'Everyday Self-Advocacy' to 15 participants. This training explains what self-advocacy is and how you can advocate for yourself in everyday situations. This training is a highly participative session and relies on input from those who are attending on what they would do in certain situations and how they can advocate for themselves in those situations.



NJSAP Reach

NJSAP would like to stay in touch with advocacy groups around the state!

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), and 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 August 20th Erin visited with the Arc Angels United Advocacy Group. This is [The Arc of Morris Recreation Program's](#) advocacy group. It is a fairly new group and this month they worked on understanding their roles in the group and upcoming advocacy campaigns.

New Resources

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



AUTISM REPRESENTATION



Puzzle pieces are not an acceptable form of representation. Instead use the rainbow infinity symbol!

Bullying and Stress: How They're Connected

Bullying isn't just hurtful words; it's a major source of stress. This stress can lead to anxiety, depression, and even physical health problems.

Stress from bullying can show up as mood swings, trouble sleeping, headaches, or withdrawal from activities.

Encourage healthy ways to cope, like talking to someone you trust, practicing mindfulness, or engaging in hobbies you enjoy.

Speak out against bullying, support peers who are struggling, and create a positive environment where everyone feels safe.



PERSON FIRST LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY FIRST LANGUAGE

Person First & **Identity First**

Puts the person before the identity. Example: A person with disabilities.	Puts the identity before the person. Example: A disabled person
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Person First Language aims to recognize that people with disabilities are people first. Many people with disabilities prefer language that emphasizes the person foremost, fighting against decades of discrimination that defined people solely by their disability.

Identity First Language emphasizes what people consider to be a core part of their identity. Certain communities & people want to express that they can not separate themselves from their disability and hope to bring understanding that it is not shameful.

When in doubt, just ask their preference!

The Arc of NJ and NJSAP use Person First Language on all documents unless otherwise asked.

MAKING NATURE ACCESSIBLE & INCLUSIVE

A OVERVIEW BY THE NEW JERSEY SELF-ADVOCACY PROJECT

Accessibility: An environment is designed, constructed, and operated to be usable by people with disabilities, ensuring they can participate fully.	Inclusivity: An environment where everyone feels welcome, valued, and has equitable opportunities to participate fully, regardless of their varied abilities or backgrounds.
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ADA Compliant: Includes having even, slip resistant surfaces of at least 36 inches wide. No obstacles higher than 1/2" and no slopes greater than 5% without ramps. Compliant parking spaces and restrooms on site.

Inclusionary planning: Includes inviting all local residents to the decision-making process. Advocates have a chance to speak out and make sure their needs are being met.

Other examples: clear signage with important information available in braille/audio format, travelable using public transportation and Access Link, Accessible boat launches, playground equipment, ground level activities, trail programming for people with disabilities, multi-use paths, predictable loops,

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



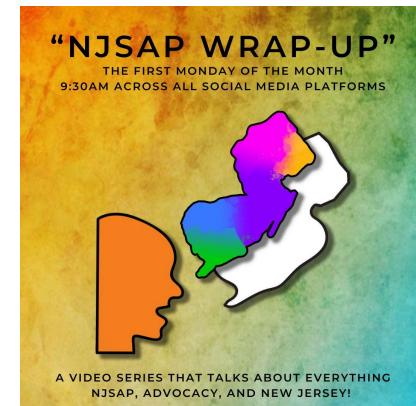
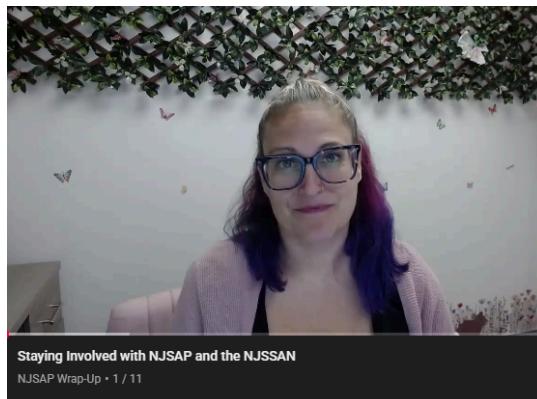
Quick Tip

Set SMART goals! S=Specific, M=Measurable, A=Attainable, R=Relevant, T=Time Bound.

SMART goals offer numerous benefits for individuals and teams. They provide clarity, focus, and a roadmap for success by breaking down large objectives into manageable steps. This framework enhances motivation, improves tracking of progress, and ultimately increases the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes.

NJSAP Wrap-Up

Every month Erin Smithers presents a short video on different aspects of The New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project. 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 to get more involved with NJSAP and the NJSSAN.
[Click on the image to visit the playlist and watch the video.](#)

Get Involved

Want to get involved in advocacy campaigns, action alerts, or upcoming events? Here is what is available:



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

[ACT NOW: Share your Medicaid
Story!](#)

10.03.25

Pines Manor
2085 Lincoln Hwy.
Edison, NJ 08817

**PLAY
YOUR PART**

Registration opens in August

The 41st Annual Fall Conference will be held on **October 3rd, 2025** at Pines Manor in Edison, NJ. **Registration is now open and tickets are limited!** [See the schedule, Buy a t-shirt, and Register here!](#)



The New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities (NJCDD) is creating a five-year plan that will guide their work from 2027 to 2031.

[Attend the final listening session on September 3rd and let them know what you think or need!](#)



Respectful and inclusive language is essential for the dignity and humanity of people with IDD. However, much of society still does not recognize the hurtful and dehumanizing effects of the "R" word. [You can help spread awareness and erase the word by signing our petition!](#)

Do you want to plan your own event with NJSAP? Reach out to Erin Smithers to get started: ESmithers@arcnj.org.

NJSSAN Calendars



We are holding monthly NJSSAN Council meetings *virtually*!

For information regarding your Council area, please click here.

2025

January	February	March
1. January 16 2. January 23 3. January 14 4.5. January 15 AB. January 27	1. February 20 2. February 27 3. February 11 4.5. February 19	1. March 20 2. March 27 3. March 11 4.5. March 19 AB. March 31
1. April 17 2. April 24 3. April 08 4.5. April 16	1. May 15 2. May 22 3. May 13 4.5. May 21 AB. May 19	1. June 19 2. June 26 4.5. June 18
1. July 17 2. July 24 3. July 8 AB. July 28	3. August 12 4.5. August 20	1. September 18 2. September 25 3. September 09 4.5. September 17 AB. September 29
1. October 16 2. October 23 3. October 14 4.5. October 15	1. November 20 2. November 20 3. November 11 4.5. November 19 AB. November 24	1. December

NEW JERSEY STATEWIDE SELF-ADVOCACY NETWORK

COUNCIL 1

3rd Thursday of each month*, 5:30-6:45pm
Hunterdon, Morris, Sussex & Warren
Advisor: Frankie Bayak
Fbayak@ArcNJ.org/732-749-8514

COUNCIL 2

4th Thursday of each month*, 4-5:30pm
Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Passaic, and Union
Advisor: Erin Smithers
ESmithers@ArcNJ.org/732-246-2525, ext. 26

COUNCIL 3

2nd Tuesday of each month*, 5:30-7pm
Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth,
Ocean & Somerset
Advisor: Blanca Najera
BNajera@ArcNJ.org/732-246-2525, ext. 37

COUNCILS 4 & 5

3rd Wednesday of each month*, 3-4pm
Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, Salem
Atlantic, Cape May, & Cumberland Counties
Contact Erin or Frankie as seen above

NJSSAN ADVISORY BOARD

Last Monday, every other month*
Only Open to Advisory Board Members

*Check the calendar image for exact dates

For more information, contact: Frankie Bayak
NJSAP@ArcNJ.org / 732-749-8514
www.njselfadvocacyproject.org

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 support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to be 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

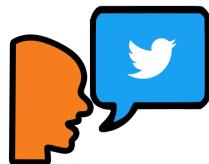
5. Raising Awareness of IDD Issues

NJSAP@ArcNJ.org - NJSSAN POSITION STATEMENTS - www.njselfadvocacyproject.org - 732-749-8514

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 5 Councils based on geographic location within the state.

You can read the current NJSSAN Priorities here.

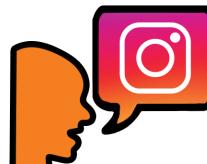
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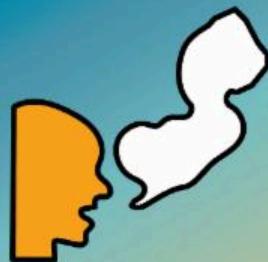


Instagram



Youtube

www.njselfadvocacyproject.org



New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project & 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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