Self-Advocacy - Why It’s Important

The term “self-advocate” has long been associated with the disability rights movement, often when referring to a person with a disability who is speaking up about issues that are important to them and participating in making decisions regarding their everyday life. There are many components to advocacy and being a self-advocate is the starting point.

We are often asked why being a self-advocate is so important. The ability to understand and communicate your needs and wants to others is a skill all people need. Those who are skilled at self-advocacy are more likely to have a sense of control over their lives and feel more confident and competent. This sense of confidence and competence inspires people to a greater level of self-determination.

Self-determination is an important component of being a good self-advocate. Having self-determination means that a person has the attitude, abilities and skills to identify personal goals and take the initiative to develop and follow a path to reach those goals. A self-advocate with a strong sense of determination can have a meaningful impact on issues that are important to them by engaging in public advocacy.

Public advocacy increases awareness and educates others about a particular topic, issue or concern. Self-advocates often engage in public conversations, speaking to members of their community to raise awareness of barriers or the need for resources.

Public advocacy often includes a call to others to join together and address an issue or concern. As others join and organize to develop a plan for change they engage in systems advocacy to convince decision-makers to take action for the change people want to see.

Self-advocacy, self-determination, public advocacy, and systems advocacy are all necessary for change - whether you have a disability or not. How can ID Action help you be a part of the change you want to see?

- ID Action Team
Legislative Update

The Iowa legislature is more than halfway through the 2012 legislative session. Legislators are set to adjourn on April 17, 2012, which will complete the 84th General Assembly. In the first half of session, legislators passed and Governor Branstad has signed into law a bill that will replace all references of “mental retardation” to “intellectual disability” in Iowa law.

Mental Health/Disability Services (MH/DS) Redesign legislation is continuing to move forward in the legislature. The House and Senate have different versions of what this redesign will look like. Many of the recommendations of the interim workgroup have been considered, but there are key differences between the House and Senate that haven’t been resolved. One of the largest areas of contention between the Senate and House is the source of the funding for the MH/DS system. The current bill numbers are House File 2431 (HF 2431) and Senate File 2315 (SF 2315). These bill numbers may change as the legislation goes through the process.

For more detailed information on these bills and others, as well as information on how to contact your legislators, visit www.infonetiowa.com.

Let Your Voice Be Heard - Sean Proctor’s Story

Sean Proctor has been involved with Iowans with Disabilities in Action (ID Action) for several years now. He has been able to develop strong relationships with legislators and other elected officials because of his involvement with ID Action. In fact, Sean can list off nearly every Des Moines area legislator due to his active participation in the political process. Sean lives with his brother in Urbandale, Iowa and is a passionate sports fan as well as an engaged citizen.

When asked when and why he became involved in ID Action, he notes, “I became involved about four or five years ago because I felt like I needed to get my voice heard. I also wanted other people to get out and have their voices heard”. Too often, the people making decisions about important issues like disability services in Iowa do not have a first-hand perspective allowing them to make an informed decision. Sean is a trusted expert in many areas and around many topics legislators discuss. He considers his own state senator a friend and an ally. Sean’s responsibility is to hold legislators and other elected officials accountable for decisions they make because Sean is an educated voter who understands the impact legislation can have on him and his family.

Recently, Sean attended a proclamation signing declaring March as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. Sean joined Governor Branstad in his formal office at the State Capitol to support the proclamation. The purpose of the proclamation and the theme of Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month were to recognize the impact persons with disabilities have in their communities. Sean is no exception.

Sean participated in the 2012 Iowa Caucuses in January and understands first-hand how participating in the process will impact the community. He learns most of his information about caucusing, upcoming elections, and other advocacy events by reading updates from ID Action and InfoNET.

“InfoNET allows you to know where the candidates are going to be and when their forums are,” Sean said when asked how ID Action has helped him stay informed about current events. Sean also mentioned how valuable “Advocating Change Day” is to build relationships with legislators and really making a difference.

Sean is a great example of how individuals with disabilities can “let your voice be heard.” He pays attention to events, town halls and other public forums so he can participate and let his voice be heard. He is committed to working with others so they will participate like he does.
Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

Proclamation Signing
Governor Terry Branstad helped ID Action kick off the month by signing a proclamation declaring March as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. Several ID Action advocates joined us for this event along with Senator Pam Jochum and Representative Kevin Koester. This event provided the opportunity to raise awareness throughout the state about the positive impact those with disabilities have in their communities.

Community Conversation
The Arc of East Central Iowa and The Arc of North Central Iowa partnered with ID Action to host Community Conversations in their communities. These events brought together service providers, individuals with developmental disabilities, elected officials and members of the business community to celebrate and share personal stories of those with developmental disabilities and how they are getting involved and taking action.

Luvoria Sanders joined us for the event in Cedar Rapids and shared her story of how she took action to eliminate a barrier at a local restaurant that prevented access for those who use wheelchairs. Luvoria, and others in the P.A.D.S. advocacy group, worked over several years to make this change happen and while it took time, she never gave up because she knew she could make a difference.

ID Action would like to partner with organizations to host Community Conversations around the state throughout the summer. If you are interested, contact us at 866-432-2846 or contactus@idaction.org.

St. Ambrose University - Spread the Word to End the Word
St. Ambrose University sophomore Emilee Steinbach is reaching out to help end the use of the “R”-word. March 7 was National Take Action Day to “Spread the Word to End the Word” and Emilee took action on campus by asking others to pledge to eliminate the “R”-word from their vocabulary. She collected over 200 signatures from fellow students, faculty and staff that are committed to changing their vocabulary and spreading the word about the impact that the use of the “R”-word has on those with disabilities and their families.

ID Action on the Ground - Volunteer
ID Action would like to encourage you to get involved in your community this year. You can make an impact by volunteering, taking on a leadership role or being involved in voter outreach during this important election year.

Opportunities to be involved through volunteering are virtually endless. Find something that you are passionate about and start there. By volunteering you will meet new people, build your skills and increase your confidence along with helping others and your community. Check out www.idaction.org for ideas on how you can get involved in your community.

Make Your Mark – Vote!
The Iowa Disability Vote Coalition (IDVC) in partnership with ID Action will be offering voter trainings leading up to the 2012 elections. Issues that affect our everyday lives and our future are decided by those we put into office. You have an opportunity to make an impact on the issues that are important to you by voting.

The IDVC will be attending events across the state to educate Iowans on how to vote, the importance of voting and their voting right.

If you are interested in having ID Action in your community to hold a voter training or to work with your local election officials to better understand voting rights of persons with disabilities, don’t hesitate to contact ID Action directly at 866-432-2846 or by email at contactus@idaction.org. We would be happy to work with you or your organization to host a training in your area.

Attend a voter training and learn how you can Make Your Mark this fall. We will cover:
- How to register to vote
- Your voting rights
- How to find candidate information
- What to do on election day

Check our calendar of events at www.idaction.org to find a voter training scheduled in your area. If you are interested in hosting a voter training you can contact us at 866-432-2846 or contactus@idaction.org and we will work with you to get one scheduled.
ID Action Calendar of Events

Check out the new ID Action calendar of events on www.idaction.com. We want you to get involved in your communities and take action. There will be many events to choose from leading up to the election and ID Action will keep you informed. If you know of an event, let us know and we will see if it is a good fit for the ID Action calendar.

Update Your Information

ID Action has a large mailing list, so we appreciate your help in making sure we have your correct contact information.

Please let us know if any of the following affect you:

- ✔ Different address
- ✔ Name change
- ✔ You and your spouse are receiving multiple copies of the same mailing
- ✔ You would prefer to receive the ID Action mailings electronically

To make any of these changes, contact ID Action at contactus@idaction.org or 866-432-2846.