



SELF-ADVOCACY: YES, IT'S IMPORTANT!

By: Steven Nguyen

Self-Advocacy is one of the most important skills that will get you through life. Whether you are advocating for yourself (individualized advocacy) or advocating for a group of people (systematic advocacy), it's important! By definition, Self-Advocacy is the ability to do things like speaking up for yourself, understanding your rights and responsibilities as an individual and seeking out the appropriate resources when necessary.

As an individual with a developmental disability, I have been passionate about disability issues for quite some time. It's one of those things that will test your patience and mental fortitude, but once you get through the bureaucracy (aka 'red tape') it could be one of the most rewarding and fulfilling experiences! Here are a few things that I have learned about successful advocacy:

- ⇒ Know and understand what you are advocating for. (Do researches, present the facts, and be prepared to answer the tough questions!)
- ⇒ Know that you are not alone in this world of advocacy.
- ⇒ Form relationships
- ⇒ Share your personal story. Be vocal, but be respectful.
- ⇒ Pick your battles, don't get involved with everything. "Burnout" is a serious thing.
- ⇒ It is okay to hear the word no. It's okay to agree to disagree.
- ⇒ Be persistent and willing to compromise, when necessary.
- ⇒ Strength in numbers! The more people you have advocating alongside you, the better!

Whatever cause you're most passionate about, let your voice be heard. You're not only making a difference for yourself, but also those around you.

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Below is a list of disability-related resources, both from the state and national levels, which you may find helpful.

SEAP Advocacy— Support. Empower. Advocate. Promote.

Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council— The Council's mission is to lead and promote advocacy, capacity building, and systemic change to improve the quality of life for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

Louisiana Partners in Policymaking (PIP) – An initiative of the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council, PIP is a national training program for adults with developmental disabilities and parents of young children with developmental disabilities. The goal of the program is to equip participants with the skills and knowledge to become effective advocates for systems change.

Louisiana Citizens for Action Now (LaCAN) – is a statewide grassroots network for individuals and families advocating for a service system supporting individuals with disabilities to live in their own homes. (Home & Community Based Services)

Louisiana Together Educating All Children (LaTEACH) – is a statewide grassroots network for the purpose of effective systems change. LaTEACH promotes appropriate, inclusive education for all students.

People First of Louisiana— A self-advocacy group run by individuals with disabilities, for individuals with disabilities.

**Be bold enough to use your voice,
Brave enough to listen to your heart,
and strong enough to live the life
you've always imagined!**

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