

THE MINNESOTA
GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL
ON DEVELOPMENTAL
DISABILITIES

PARTNERS IN POLICYMAKING®

CHANGING LIVES. CHANGING POLICIES.





PARTNERS IN POLICYMAKING®

CHANGING LIVES. CHANGING POLICIES.



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I found out about Partners when my daughter with profound disabilities was almost 12 years old. I think that Partners was one of the best things that happened to my life. It changed me and my life completely. Partners empowered me. It uplifted me. It transformed me into a confident, insistent, proud mother and fierce advocate for people with disabilities. The Partners weekend became my oasis, retreat, life lesson, training, adventure and enlightenment all rolled into one. When my daughter was born with disabilities, we went from place to place. Doctors told us there was no hope and she would not amount to anything. We were told to put her in an institution and forget about her and that she wouldn't live past one year. We did not heed that advice. We brought her home and started to explore how we could help her. We tried the newest therapies, the newest available treatments. When I joined Partners, my whole world changed. I began to look at her from a different perspective. I used to value her life but I was still selling her short. I did not recognize her full potential. I thought she wouldn't understand many things but once I realized how she can enjoy life, we took her to Florida to Disneyworld. Even her teacher thought we were brave. But once we set out on our trip, my daughter pleasantly surprised us. Not only did she enjoy the entire trip but she was so happy. She behaved appropriately. It was an eye opener for us. **We realized her potential.** We started taking her horseback riding, swimming, many places. She bloomed into a beautiful flower. Even though she needs help with all daily life activities, her understanding has increased. She is no longer just a passive, nonresponsive girl anymore. She is a vibrant, smiling, full of life girl. If I had not done Partners, I wouldn't be the person I am today.

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On July 26, 1990, with the stroke of a pen, people with intellectual and other disabilities received the same civil rights and protections as other United States citizens. At the signing ceremony, then-President George Bush noted that with "signing of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act, every man, woman and child with a disability can now pass through once-closed doors into a bright new era of equality, independence and freedom."

While the signing ceremony made headlines and led newscasts across the nation, the real story lies in the events that led to the ADA's passage.

This historic milestone didn't happen overnight and it wasn't the work of one person or even a small group of people. For more than 50 years, thousands of people with disabilities, activists and advocates for disability rights, legislators and the legal community worked tirelessly on many fronts for full inclusion in American society for people with disabilities. For some, that fight was very public and meant participating in protests and marches, even crawling up the steps of the Capitol to bring attention to the barriers that people with disabilities faced.

For others, the commitment to equal rights focused on advocacy and changing public policies. In 1986, as the disability

community was rallying support for the ADA, members of the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities realized that self-advocates and parents of young children with disabilities lacked the skills they needed to participate in the policymaking process in a meaningful, effective way. The Council introduced Partners in Policymaking® in 1987 to fill this void.

For more than 25 years, Partners in Policymaking has supported the promises of the ADA by helping people with disabilities and their family members to understand their civil rights and use them to continue the fight for full inclusion. Today, over 27,000 self-advocates and parents of children with disabilities have graduated from Partners in Policymaking around the world and are using the skills they learned to improve their own lives and those of other people with disabilities.

Many graduates describe Partners in Policymaking as life changing and empowering, the same words they use to describe the profound impact the ADA has had on their lives. In the following pages, you will learn why. This brief history of Partners in Policymaking explores the roots of this innovative program, its explosive growth and expansion and its key components.

We hope this history will encourage you and others to continue the legacy of the thousands of people who fought for civil rights for people with disabilities by advocating for improvements in the way people with disabilities are supported, taught, live and work.

Colleen Wieck, Ph.D.

Colleen Wieck

Executive Director

Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities July 2015



CHAPTER ONE

What is Partners in Policymaking®?

Partners in Policymaking is an innovative leadership program created specifically to teach people with disabilities and the parents of young children with disabilities to:

- Become agents of long-term change.
- Become active partners with the policymakers whose decisions will shape their future.
- Dream about a future with possibilities.

Unlike other advocacy training programs, Partners in Policymaking focuses on the "big picture" and creating a shared vision for the future.

It is not intended to introduce participants to services and supports currently available at the state and local levels. Rather, it focuses on eleven broad concepts that affect the way people with disabilities are taught, employed, live and included in their communities. The training emphasizes best practices and offers participants the opportunity to meet and learn from national experts who present the latest thinking and research on these topics. This approach also helps to ensure that the training stays fresh, current and relevant.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE

The program's simple, straightforward structure has changed little since it debuted in 1987. Today,

The experiences I had during my time with Partners taught me to look beyond what I thought I couldn't do, and gave me the education and resources to succeed in life, pursue ultimate and meaningful goals, and gave me the network of people in my life today.

-Kurt Greniger, Self Advocate approximately 35 carefully selected adults with disabilities and parents of young children with disabilities meet for a total of 128 hours over eight weekends.

Participants are carefully selected based on a number of criteria. Parents of young children with developmental disabilities are most preferable along with self advocates with a wide range of disabilities. Current participation in advocacy organizations is not necessary. Participants should reflect the makeup of the general population of the state in terms of ethnic/minority representation, and efforts should be made to achieve a gender balance. All parts of the state should be considered in terms of geography and

economic diversity — everyone brings a different perspective, and adds another element to the shared learning and networking that happens within each class.

The curriculum is sequential, with each weekend session laying the foundation for the next. Each weekend, critical concepts and key terms related to one or two topics are introduced and one or more national speakers discuss the latest thinking around their area of expertise. Because the training is competency-based, opportunities to apply these concepts are incorporated into each session.

CONSISTENT QUALITY

Over the past 27 years, Partners in Policymaking has been replicated throughout the United States and internationally. The *Partners in Policymaking® Coordinators Handbook* serves as a guide to help Coordinators when they are starting new programs, to maintain the quality of existing programs, and to assure that, regardless of location, participants will acquire the competencies and develop the skills that the program offers.

Through Partners in Policymaking, participants:

- Explore 11 critical topics and related competencies.
- Learn and practice leadership and advocacy skills.
- Learn best practices in the field of developmental disabilities — what's possible versus what exists today.
- Acquire knowledge to influence positive systems change.
- Create a shared vision for the future.
- Learn how to build positive partnerships with elected officials and other policymakers who make decisions about services and supports used by individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.
- Explore practical examples and apply best practices.
- Participate in skill building activities and small group discussions.
- Complete homework assignments.

Participants cite the opportunity to network with other people with disabilities and parents of children with developmental disabilities as one of the biggest benefits of the Partners experience.



CHAPTER TWO

The Times

Partners in Policymaking® was created to help prepare parents of young children with developmental disabilities and self advocates to influence and achieve meaningful change in the complex "system" and public policies that support people with disabilities in the United States.

It is rooted in the legacy of several important grassroots social movements that organized to improve the lives of children and adults with disabilities and change society's expectations of people with disabilities.

The successes of the Parent Movement, the Independent Living Movement and the Self Advocacy Movement helped set the stage for the larger Disability Rights Movement that eventually helped to establish full civil rights for people with disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

THE FIGHT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

To understand the significant role that these movements played in passage of the ADA and the development of Partners in Policymaking, it's important to recognize the way people with disabilities were viewed and treated at the time.

I learned a lot about the history of the way people with disabilities were treated in the past and found out what topics. I could talk to politicians about.

-Christopher Eckman, Self Advocate

The vast majority of children and adults with intellectual disabilities lived in public institutions, hidden from view. Residents lived in filthy, dangerously overcrowded conditions under the care of overworked, often abusive caregivers. They typically received inadequate medical care and few, if any, educational opportunities.

Individuals with intellectual and other developmental disabilities were viewed with pity or fear. Many parents were made to feel ashamed of their children with disabilities and were often blamed for causing their children's disabilities. Medical

professionals routinely told parents to

place children with developmental disabilities in institutions and forget about them. Parents who rebelled and kept their children with disabilities at home were instructed to place the child face down in a stroller when out in the community so that members of the public would not be offended. There were no community supports. Few education programs existed because it was assumed that children with disabilities were unable to learn.

THE PARENT MOVEMENT: 1950 TO PRESENT

By the late 1940s, many parents of children with disabilities had become frustrated and angry over conditions in the nation's institutions. Unfortunately, parents with limited resources had no real alternatives to institutional care because no supports were available in local communities. Parents of children with

disabilities responded by coming together to demand access to education and community supports for their sons and daughters.

Parents of children with disabilities organized formally in 1950 when 90 parents from across the United States traveled to Minneapolis to participate in the first national conference for parents of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Arc, a national parents' organization, was created at the conference. Sixty-five years later, The Arc continues to be a leading advocate for the rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Throughout the 1950s, representatives of the Parent Movement collectively pushed for legislative change, initiated and pursued critical court challenges and media exposés, and pressed for their children's educational rights. They urged policymakers to think differently about people with disabilities and pass legislation that would:

- Ensure that children with disabilities received an appropriate education.
- Provide access to vocational training.
- Expand research into the causes and treatment of intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Educate society so that children with disabilities would have more opportunities to become accepted, productive citizens.

By the 1970s, the Parent Movement's advocacy efforts were paying off. Conditions in state institutions were improving; community services, educational and employment opportunities were emerging; new, more supportive legislation was being discussed. As important, legislators, policymakers and service providers were finally beginning to question the belief that

people with intellectual and developmental disabilities were unable to contribute to society in a meaningful way.

Today, parents continue to play a critical role in obtaining full community integration and inclusion for their children with disabilities.

THE INDEPENDENT LIVING MOVEMENT: 1970 TO PRESENT

The Independent Living Movement directly challenged society's assumption that people with disabilities were unable to make decisions that affected their lives, including where, how and with whom they lived. The Movement focused on access to support services that would allow people with disabilities to live and work independently, make their own decisions (self-determination) and be included in their communities. They also demanded the right to use public transportation and easily enter and use public buildings.

Ed Roberts is widely considered the "father" of the Independent Living Movement and was one of the primary drivers behind its growth. After fighting — and winning — the right to live independently and continue his education at the college level, Roberts entered the University of California Berkeley in 1962. While there, he founded the country's first Center for Independent Living. This model was eventually replicated in other states.

The Independent Living Movement has been an aggressive, highly successful force in the fight for civil rights and full inclusion for people with disabilities. Its many legislative victories include:

- Equal access to public transportation.
- Passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, including Section 504 that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities.

The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act

A key milestone in the history of Partners in Policymaking occurred nearly a quarter of a century before the training debuted in 1987.

In 1970, Congress passed the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act). The DD Act has been revised and reauthorized several times over the years, most recently in 2000. When first enacted, the DD Act emphasized planning, coordination, and evaluation. Today, it emphasizes fundamental systems change, advocacy, and capacity building at the state and local levels.

The opening paragraph of P.L. 106-402, the version of the DD Act that was reauthorized in 2000, shows how public perception has changed since the ADA was passed. The DD Act says:

"Disability is a natural part of the human experience that does not diminish the right of individuals with developmental disabilities to live independently, to exert control and choice over their own lives, and to fully participate in and contribute to their communities through full integration and inclusion in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational mainstream of United States society."

The current version of the DD Act focuses on providing support for all people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities. It emphasizes listening to people with developmental disabilities as self-advocates, and helping them and their families obtain the information, assistive technology, and supports they need to make informed choices about how and where to live and work and to be active, involved citizens.

The DD Act emphasizes five outcomes that should be achieved as a result of the funds invested in specific projects and activities set out in each state's Five Year State Plan. They are based on input from individuals with developmental disabilities, family members, and stakeholders. These five outcomes are: Independence, Productivity, Self-determination, Integration, and Inclusion.

Sometimes referred to as "IPSII," these factors drive all projects and activities, and grant making decisions of the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, including Partners in Policymaking.

- Passage of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, the forerunner of today's IDEA (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act).
- Fair Housing Act.
- Americans with Disabilities Act.

Members of the Independent Living Movement played a prominent, highly visible role in the events leading to passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. This effort was in its early stages at the time Partners in Policymaking was introduced in 1987.

THE SELF-ADVOCACY MOVEMENT: 1980 TO PRESENT

The Self Advocacy Movement began to take shape in the early 1970s but truly came into its own in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

For the first time, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities were organizing and using their combined political power to gain control over their own lives, futures, support services and finances. In other words, they wanted the right to self-determination.

An important part of the Self Advocacy Movement's mission is a demand for equality and respect. This included fighting to change the language used to refer to people with disabilities.



While planning the first national self advocacy conference, one self advocate declared that "labels are for jars, not people,"

adding that she wanted to be known as a "person first."
Self advocates who attended an International Conference returned to Oregon and said at a planning meeting, "We are People First."

THE DISABILITY RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The Parent Movement. Independent Living Movement and Self Advocacy Movement focused attention on specific aspects of civil rights for people with disabilities. Parents fought primarily for education rights, community living, and employment. Members of the Independent Living Movement focused on independence, access and community supports. Self advocates pressed for the right to make their own decisions and have those decisions respected.

However, there was no

Understanding the history of disability and looking at what it what it was like and seeing the pictures of what it was like in the facilities gave me a whole different perspective. I don't ever want to go back to that. I would never want to see my son in an institution like that. If people don't see the history, people could get complacent and things could slide back to the way they were.

Partners helped me understand that disability rights are the same as other civil rights and how they are related, Partners also helps you realize things like how much people have fought to have the right to vote, and how it is important to fight for the right to get children with disabilities the right to have the same access to public schools.

-Parent

14 15

I am no longer content to let decisions be made for my children by people who are 'experts.' I know now that I am the expert when it comes to my children who have disabilities. When I feel that there is something happening, in school or with county programs, that are limiting or adversely affecting my children, I let that entity know. I know how to research the topic, and reach out to policymakers on all levels that can help on our behalf. I reach out to other people who may be impacted by the policy/rule that I am researching to see if they too are having issues. We gain power with our numbers, by making calls and writing letters until someone listens to us. I have the knowledge, skills, and perseverance to do this since graduating from Partners in Policymaking.

-Jill Gebeck, Parent

I found out that I do have a voice, [even if I am] not a very good speaker.

-Judy Olson, Parent

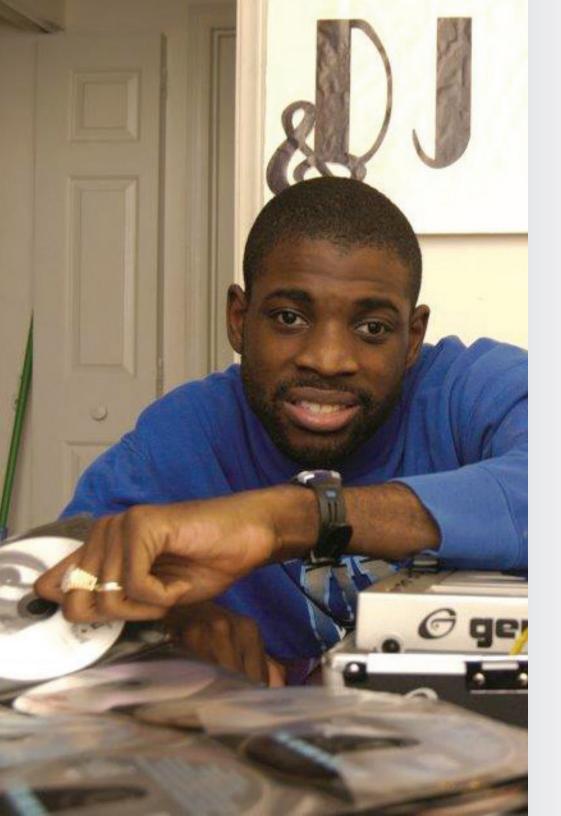


organized effort to establish broad, comprehensive civil rights for people with disabilities. This changed in the early 1980s when the Disability Rights Movement emerged. The Disability Rights Movement was largely responsible for passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA ensured:

- Equal access to education, housing and living in the most integrated setting with community supports.
- Access to equal employment opportunities.
- Access to public transportation, public buildings and information.
- Equal opportunities to participate in community activities and events.

The 1990 landmark decision, *Olmstead v. L.C.*, found the unjustified segregation of people with disabilities was a form of unlawful discrimination under the ADA. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) plays a key role in enforcing the ADA and other civil rights laws.

The OCR investigates complaints alleging violations of the ADA's "integration mandate" that requires that individuals with disabilities receive services in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs, a principle that is central to the *Olmstead* decision.



CHAPTER THREE

A New Way of Thinking

In January 1987, the same year that Partners in Policymaking[®] was introduced, the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities published *A New Way of Thinking*.

This publication reviewed the history of services for people with developmental disabilities and looked at disability policies from different perspectives. This "new way of thinking" challenged the beliefs that many self advocates, parents, legislators and service providers had about the abilities of people with developmental disabilities. It also initiated national discussions about how the system, and its funding, could shift to focus on abilities, independence and inclusion.

In *A New Way of Thinking*, the Council stated that people with developmental disabilities are, first and foremost, people with abilities who have more in common with people without disabilities than they have differences. Based on this belief, the Council then proposed that all services and supports should be designed to meet both the basic and uniquely individual needs of people with developmental disabilities.

The publication explored new ways of thinking about how, when, and with whom people with developmental disabilities could learn, live, and work. It also identified new service

and funding strategies and offered innovative alternatives to traditional approaches.

More than 6,000 copies of the book were distributed in the first three months. Over the next two decades, more than 100,000 copies were distributed. Clearly, parents, self-advocates, service providers and policymakers were looking for new approaches. The ideas presented in *A New Way of Thinking* formed the foundation of Partners in Policymaking.

In 2009, more than twenty years later, the Council revisited the same topics and published the results in *A New Way of Thinking: More Than Twenty Years Later*. Unfortunately, the results indicated that while progress had been made, there is still a long way to go before the ideals identified in 1987 become a reality.

The company of the control of the co

Through Partners, I learned more about advocacy. My son is 41 years old now and he has gone on to learn advocacy [skills] and has become an advocate for others.

-Judy Olson, Parent

Partners has fiven me the confidence and direction for where I want to go and what I want to do as an advocate for myself and others.

-Nichole Villavicencio, Self Advocate

I took Partners to learn more about advocating for my three children. They had just been diagnosed and the way the doctor explained things, the prognosis was not good. They always give you the worse case scenario. They even told us that it might be best to disrupt the adoption. My husband and I knew that was not an option, so we began to educate ourselves and Partners in Policymaking was an [integral] part of that process.

- Monica Mooney, Parent



Filling the Void

By the mid-1980s, a system of community supports and services was beginning to develop. Unfortunately, community supports continued to compete for funding with residential institutions.

The majority of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities still lived in segregated group settings, although smaller "intermediate" institutions were replacing the massive, overcrowded institutions common in the 1970s. In other words, while people with disabilities could now *live in* the community, most had a hard time actually being *part of* the community. Although more individuals with disabilities and their families were receiving some type of support and were more visible in the community, most people with complex, severe disabilities remained isolated in institutional care.

By 1986, fewer self advocates and parents of children with disabilities were involved in legislative advocacy through grassroots organizations. The average age of members of national grassroots organizations was creeping steadily upwards and few self-advocates were involved in setting direction for these organizations.

A DEFINING MOMENT

There were few — if any — leadership development programs designed specifically to prepare people with disabilities and their family members to take on leadership roles in established or grassroots advocacy organizations.

As a result, most people with disabilities, particularly those with significant disabilities, didn't have the skills they needed to influence public policy or explain their needs to policymakers.

Colleen Wieck, Executive Director of the Minnesota

Governor's Council on

Developmental Disabilities, and Ed Skarnulis, Director of the Developmental Disabilities Division of the Minnesota Department of Human Services witnessed this void first-hand in September 1986. The pair had been invited by Senator David Durenberger to travel to Washington, D.C. to testify at Senate hearings on Medicaid Reform.

The proposed reforms were intended to make Medicaid more consumer- and family-friendly. The measure faced an uphill battle. At the time, Committee members had received just

Partners in Policymaking has given me the information, tools, and courage to take a firm stand to advocate for my daughter and the lifestyle she deserves to have and live. Before taking the training, I felt at a loss most of the time about what was right for me to expect of others so I could help my daughter to have the opportunities that every typical child has. Partners has given me the strength to stand up and advocate for my child's rights as an equal person in society, and it has made me more aware of the laws and rights of all people.

-Parent

300 letters from constituents favoring the proposed changes. By comparison, Congress had received more than 30,000 letters from constituents opposed to the reforms. Even though advocacy organizations around the country had sent urgent action alerts and calls for help, few people with disabilities and their family members had contacted their legislators.

After completing their testimony before the Senate Committee on Medicaid Reform, the two Minnesotans watched several other witnesses and noted that the youngest parent witness needed training on how to testify to Congress.

It was obvious that parents and self advocates needed to learn key skills if they were to continue the progress made by members of the Parent, Independent Living and Self Advocacy Movements. Yet, no one was preparing the next generation of leaders.

Wieck and Skarnulis set about developing a solution.

PERFECT TIMING

At the same time, the Minnesota Governor's Council was in the midst of its Three-Year Planning process. As part of its responsibilities under the DD Act, the Council was charged with determining which projects would receive federal grants.

The DD Act identified four funding priorities:

- Case management.
- Child development.
- Alternative community living arrangements.
- Non-vocational social development activities.

The Council chose to focus its efforts on improving case management.

Early grant submissions reinforced the conclusions that Wieck and Skarnulis had come to at the hearings. Many of the grant applications recognized the need for self advocacy and advocacy, and that no training existed to fill this void. Applicants also acknowledged that few disability-related organizations were collaborating on public policy issues. Only one proposal met the Council's focus on changing the system or policies. It received funding.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX BRINGS INNOVATION

Council staff decided a radical departure was needed. The Council's Grant Review Committee outlined a new approach focused on changing the system, rather than filling gaps.

Wieck and Skarnulis developed the approach jointly. Their solution focused on creating a series of sessions devoted either to specific issues that were relevant to people with disabilities or to influencing policymakers at the local, state or federal level. It also recognized that any solution must provide an opportunity for self-advocates to develop a shared vision for the future of people with disabilities in the year 2000.

Council staff also proposed:

- Developing a systematic training program specifically for people with severe disabilities or the parents of children with disabilities that would allow them to learn and practice techniques for influencing public officials.
- Creating a formalized way to share best practices.
- Creating a mechanism for state and national experts in the disabilities field to meet and discuss issues directly with people with disabilities and their families who were either unserved or underserved.

IMPETUS FOR CHANGE

The principles identified in 1986 justified the need and provided the impetus for advancing this concept at a particularly opportune time.



The average age of volunteers in national disability organizations was 54 years old and increasing.

The number of letters in favor of changing Medicaid to make it more consumer- and family-friendly:

300

30,000

The number of letters from those opposed to Medicaid reform

People
with
disabilities
were
inundated
with action
alerts,
but few
people
responded
because
they
didn't

The average age of national leadership was between 60-70 years old.

388

The division was growing between self advocacy and the parent movement; the vision that each had for the role, responsibilities, and participation of people with developmental disabilities in the community was very different.

make calls, write letters, or testify.

know

how to

No one
was preparing
the next generation
of leaders.

 Developing a centralized speakers' bureau that reflected the interests of people who were unserved or underserved and included individuals with disabilities who were trained to speak on issues at local meetings, university classes, conferences, public hearings, state events and national conventions.

The Council's proposal stressed that it was critical that any solution must include individuals with severe disabilities who were not represented in the leadership of most grassroots advocacy movements.

TRANSFORMING IDEAS TO PRACTICE

Within a week, the Council's Grant Review Committee had approved the proposed concept and the funds left over from

Our son's disability was very severe. He had no way to speak for himself. I knew that he had something to contribute to the world and he couldn't do it without someone speaking on his behalf and that person was me.

It is important to help people with disabilities to find their voice. If they need to be heard and they can't speak, they still deserve to be heard by others like myself. For this society to be successful, it's not how much money we make or what we sell. It's about human dignity and worth. People have to discover that dignity and worth. It doesn't matter what the disability is.

-Parent

the case management project, totaling \$ 99,258, were allocated to make the innovative approach a reality. However, the entire project needed to be developed by the end of the fiscal year.

The principles identified in 1986 justified the need and provided the impetus for advancing this concept at an opportune time.

The proposed work program included:

- Identifying training efforts that were already underway in case management.
- Creating a training institute devoted exclusively to consumers.
- Establishing a structured process for public officials to create informal agreements about case management roles and responsibilities.
- Developing and delivering workshops on leadership, advocacy and board member training.
- Preparing information to be used by consumers to influence public decision-making.



A New Way of Leading

The Council hoped that, over time, the training would create a network of highly motivated Partners graduates working at all levels of government to positively influence the people who shape, make and implement disability policies. Few imagined that more than 27,000 people with disabilities and parents of young children with developmental disabilities would graduate from the program over the next three decades.

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

With the Council's support, the training program moved quickly from general concepts to a comprehensive approach focused on teaching best practices in the developmental disabilities field over a wide range of issues, and how to influence public officials at all levels of government.

One of the first tasks was to find a name for the new program. The Council quickly zeroed in on "Partners in Policymaking." There were no debates, no committees, no focus groups or input from high-powered ad agencies. Simple and direct, the title speaks for itself and became the official trademark registered with the United States Patent and Trademark Office in April 1999.

The next step was to affirm the training's target audiences.

Partners has impacted my life because I am not afraid to advocate for myself or my kids and I know how to advocate for them. Before, it was like "tiger mama." I've learned a lot about how to advocate and how to handle people that are not willing to grant my kids their rights.

-Parent

Again, the answer was obvious and needed little debate. The training would focus on two specific groups: Self-advocates with disabilities and the parents of young children with developmental disabilities. Both were under-served by disability advocacy organizations and under-represented in leadership roles.

FOCUS ON POLICYMAKERS

Council staff also confirmed that the training would focus on developing participants' advocacy

and leadership skills and understanding of the policymaking process. The reasoning was simple. Policymakers are elected or appointed to make decisions about public policies and control the money. By building relationships with elected officials and other policymakers, the people who make the policies that directly impact people with disabilities and their families, participants would have a better chance of influencing changes to existing policies or creating new policies.

Policymakers and policymaking bodies include:

- School principals.
- · School boards.
- Special education directors.
- Local government at the city level (city council, mayor) or county level (county commissioners).
- State senators and representatives.

- Appointed state officials, including the leadership of state agencies and commissions.
- United States Senators and Representatives (Congressional members).
- Appointed federal officials at executive branch agencies.

CORE PRINCIPLES

The program's design, core competencies, curriculum, speakers and dates for the first session quickly came together. The basic design of Partners in Policymaking, identified in 1986, included the following:

- A series of weekend training opportunities.
- Open to self advocates and parents of young children with developmental disabilities.
- Participants would have no previous experience in the disability rights movement.
- Applicants would be identified and recruited through the existing network of organizations.
- Participants would make a strong commitment to the program.
- Mentoring with an elected official would be one aspect of the program.
- Funds would be available to help with childcare, personal assistance and transportation.

By the spring of 1987, "Partners in Policymaking" was ready to be launched. The first class was held on April 30 and May 1, 1987 in Minneapolis with 35 participants, 15 of whom were self-advocates and 20 parents of young children with developmental disabilities.

Four heroes of the Disability Rights Movement – Ed Roberts, Gunnar Dybwad, Lotte Moise, and Dolores Norley – traveled to Minnesota to speak to the group during the inaugural weekend. When extending the invitation, Council staff told these leaders:

"We are selecting people who are highly motivated, fairly young, and intensely interested in developing into a dynamic, well-informed group that can lead policymaking into the 21st century."

Ed Roberts was the first student with severe disabilities to attend the University of California, Berkeley. He was a pioneering leader of the Disability Rights Movement. Roberts became paralyzed from the neck down after contracting polio in 1953 when he was 14. He spent the next 18 months in hospitals, eventually returning home. However, there were few, if any, community services available to assist him or his family.

When Roberts returned to school, he quickly became an activist for disability rights. He eventually needed to fight to receive his high school diploma because he couldn't pass one of the requirements - drivers' education. His quest for inclusion continued when he fought for the right to attend college and throughout his years as a student at the University of California-Berkeley where he paved the way for other students with severe disabilities.

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He created and headed the Berkeley Center for Independent Living (CIL), the first independent living services and advocacy program run by and for people with disabilities. In 1976, California Governor Jerry Brown appointed him Director of the California Department of Rehabilitation, where he served until 1983. He received a MacArthur Foundation "genius" award in 1984 and used it to establish the World Institute on Disability.

At the time that Partners in Policymaking launched in 1987, he was head of the World Institute on Disability, which he co-founded. He was a strong proponent and ally of Partners until his death in 1995 at the age of 56.

Dr. Gunnar Dybwad, Professor of Human Development at Brandeis University, was a lifelong advocate for people with developmental disabilities and a staunch supporter of self-advocacy and civil rights for people with developmental disabilities.

Dr. Dybwad had a profound impact on the Disability Rights Movement. He played a key role in development of the Parent Movement and served as Director of the National Association for Retarded Citizens from 1957 to 1964. He helped shape public disability policies for decades and served as an adviser on disability-related issues to eight presidents, beginning with President Kennedy.

In the 1970s, Dr. Dybwad recognized that legal challenges were an excellent way to improve education for children with disabilities, expand civil rights for the people with disabilities and increase awareness of and respect for self-advocacy. To that end, Dr. Dybwad played a key role in several important legal victories for people with developmental disabilities, including the landmark <u>Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) vs. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania</u> lawsuit that helped to secure a free and equal public education for **all** children, including those with disabilities.

Along with his wife, Dr. Rosemary Dybwad, he received multiple awards for outstanding service from the American Association on Mental Deficiency, the International League of Societies for the Mentally Handicapped and the Kennedy International Award for Leadership in Mental Retardation.

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Delores Norley was the parent of a child with developmental disabilities and a grassroots activist in the Parent Movement.

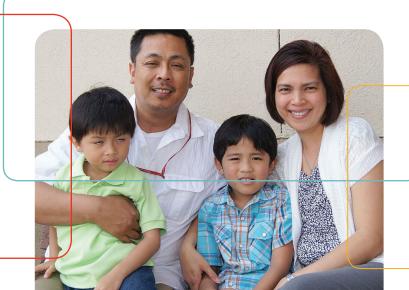
She was a strong advocate for educational rights for children with disabilities in the 1950s when few people thought children with disabilities had the ability to learn. After her son was denied access to public education, she opened a school for children with disabilities. She continued to respond to the needs of people with disabilities by creating employment and supported living opportunities.

In 1966, Norley earned a master's degree in public administration and, in 1975, entered Howard University Law School. She chose Howard, a historically African-American university, for its deep connection to the civil rights movement. While practicing civil rights law, she wrote a training curriculum for law enforcement professionals that taught techniques for dealing with people with development disabilities in the justice system. This curriculum was eventually used in several states and internationally. She also served as a special adviser on disability issues to President Reagan.

In 1984, three years before Partners in Policymaking was launched, Ladies Home Journal named Norley an "American Heroine." The award recognized her work on behalf of people with disabilities. **Lotte Moise** was the parent of a child with developmental disabilities and another leader of the Parents Movement. She was a lifelong advocate for self-determination and inclusion and a crusader for self-advocacy.

In the 1950s, Moise took on the local school system while fighting for educational rights for her daughter and other children with disabilities. When the school refused to accept children with developmental disabilities, Moise responded by founding and teaching at a school for children with developmental disabilities. She was a proponent of person centered planning long before the concept had a name and was a firm believer in community living and full civil rights for people with disabilities.

One her most notable accomplishments was writing "As We Grew Up With Barbara," published in 1980, and its sequel "Barbara and Fred - Grownups Now," published in 1997. The books chronicle the family's real life experiences raising a daughter with developmental disabilities. The books document Barbara's journey from childhood to independence, including her adult life and relationship with Fred, another person with developmental disabilities.







CHAPTER SIX

Built on Best Practices

The eleven core topics addressed in Partners in Policymaking[®] have changed little over the past 27 years. However, since the training is based on best practices, the information that is presented has changed dramatically.

The eleven core topics are:

- 1. History of Disabilities
- 2. Inclusive Education and Lifelong Learning
- 3. Service Coordination and Case Management
- 4. Supported and Competitive Employment
- 5. Supported Living and Home Ownership
- 6. Assistive Technology
- 7. Person Centered Planning
- 8. Local and State Government
- 9. Federal Government and Federal Issues
- 10. Community Organizing
- 11. Parliamentary Procedure and Serving on Boards

TOPIC 1: HISTORY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

This topic focuses on the history of people with disabilities and what happens when people with disabilities are marginalized, discriminated against and isolated. By learning about the past, participants have the opportunity to recognize and respect the earlier contributions made by those who fought for civil rights for people with disabilities. This common understanding also encourages participants to safeguard these rights and improve the future by advocating for policy changes and full inclusion.

Competencies:

Participants will be able to:

- Describe the history of services for, and society's perceptions of, people with developmental disabilities.
- Describe the history, role, and significant contributions of the Parent Movement, and its impact on individuals and families of individuals with developmental disabilities,
- Describe the history, role, and significant contributions of the Independent Living Movement, and its impact on individuals with disabilities.
- Describe the history, role, and significant contributions of the Self Advocacy Movement and its impact on individuals with developmental disabilities.

TOPIC 2: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

A quality education helps to pave the way for a life of opportunity and contribution for everyone, including children and adults with disabilities. The value of an inclusive education goes far beyond academics. An inclusive education helps children develop values, responsibilities and social skills, and offers important life lessons. Students who miss out on these opportunities are ill-equipped to deal with life as adults. Participants learn about their children's educational rights, key laws and inclusion strategies.

Competencies:

Participants will be able to:

- Describe the benefits and values that support inclusion and a quality education.
- Describe and outline specific strategies to achieve inclusion and a quality education for all students.
- Describe some state-ofthe-art technologies for students with developmental disabilities.
- Demonstrate how to be effective in team meetings.

TOPIC 3: SERVICE COORDINATION AND CASE MANAGEMENT

Service coordination has evolved into a very important part of the service system. People with disabilities need to understand how essential services are delivered in order to compare the *concept* of

I have two young adult sons with developmental disabilities. When they were in elementary school, I was confronted with the low expectations almost everyone had for them. I expected them to thrive like every other child. So what if they moved forward in their own way and at their own pace? I believed they could learn and have friends and live in our community if I could get the schools, the doctors, even the churches to not pre-judge them but get to know them and see the strengths I was seeing. I went through Partners in Policymaking and found out I was not alone!

-Bonnie Jean Smith, Parent

service coordination against what *really* happens. This analysis can then be used to identify ways to improve the system and identify policies that need to be changed.

Competencies:

Participants will:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the state's case management/ service coordination system and what services may be available.
- Be aware of services that are currently available or should be available.
- Create a shared vision for the future for people with developmental disabilities.
- Be able to demonstrate how to meet with a public official at the county level and discuss issues.

TOPIC 4: ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Partners has made me a much better self advocate as far as health issues, work issues and housing issues.

-Self Advocate

When assistive technology is developed and applied creatively, people with disabilities often experience a dramatic improvement in their quality of life. Appropriate assistive technology builds on a person's abilities to help them communicate, move, meet their own needs, learn, control their environment, work, and become more self-reliant. It also can make inclusion, productivity, and participation a reality. Many people think of assistive technology in terms of the latest computer, software or other

high tech solutions. However, many types of assistive technology are low tech or even "no tech."

Technology is ever changing. The 21st Century digital technology age includes a broad range of communication tools, such as smartphones, tablets and apps, and many forms of social media that allow people to stay connected with friends and family, and build networks that can be critical in addressing public policy issues.

Competencies:

Participants will:

- Understand the concept of assistive technology and its importance.
- Explain how assistive technology can be used to support an individual with developmental disabilities.
- Describe examples of state-of-the art technology.
- Understand the difference between an assistive device and an assistive service.

TOPIC 5: SUPPORTED AND COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT

The Rehabilitation Act recognizes that "disability is a natural part of the human experience" and "in no way diminishes the right" of individuals to live independently, enjoy self-determination, make choices, contribute to society, pursue meaningful careers, and enjoy full inclusion and integration in society. Real work for real pay is an important aspect of all of these dimensions. Throughout history, people with disabilities have been denied opportunities to work. As a society, we need to figure out why this continues to happen, then work together to change policies and raise society's expectations.



It helped me see my son, who was a child at the time I attended Partners, as a potential self advocate, rather than someone for whom I would be advocating all his life.

-Parent

Partners taught me how to deal with housing for people with disabilities. I have been able to get out of the group homes and I now live independently with support in the community.

-Allie O'Muircheartaigh, Self Advocate

Competencies:

Participants will:

- Understand the importance and key differences of supported employment, competitive employment, and customized employment.
- Understand the public policies and laws that ensure equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Apply the concept of "reasonable accommodations."

TOPIC 6: SUPPORTED LIVING AND HOME OWNERSHIP

Society has learned that it makes far more sense — morally, socially and economically — to support families so they can stay together, as opposed to forcing people with disabilities to live in institutions. Everyone benefits when people with developmental disabilities are supported to live independently in the community, as part of the community. However, this can't happen if people with disabilities don't have access to critical resources, supports and services.

Competencies:

Participants will:

- Understand the importance of home ownership and personal control as one of the defining characteristics of adult life in our culture.
- Understand that a flexible, responsive system of community supports for families of children with developmental disabilities is the cornerstone of a true system of community supports for people with developmental disabilities.
- Understand the need for all individuals to experience

- lifestyle changes across the lifespan.
- Understand the basic principles and strategies that support people with developmental disabilities in their own homes across the lifespan.

TOPIC 7: PERSON CENTERED PLANNING

Until recently, professional service providers were tasked with creating life plans for individuals with disabilities. In most cases, this meant relying on programs and services created by the "system." Over the

created by the "system." Over the last 30 years, however, many individuals with disabilities and their families have taken control over the life planning process. This process goes by many names — person centered planning, whole life planning, futures planning, personal futures planning or lifestyle planning. Regardless of the name, however, the intention is the same — to help an individual with disabilities create a life that is meaningful and interesting to *them*, not a life that an outsider or professional decides is appropriate.

Competencies:

Participants will:

• Describe the importance of person centered planning for

Partners helped me
become a self advocate. I
have advocated for others
but it allowed me to
advocate for myself. I've
been involved with the
Minnesota State Council
on Disability and have
been able to reach out to
Minnesota lawmakers
after I had the training.
It has given me the
knowledge to do that.

-Rev. Dave Sams, Self Advocate

- people with developmental disabilities.
- Understand the principles of choice and control over resources in person centered planning.

TOPIC 8: ADVOCACY AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

It's important to understand the issues. But, it is also important to know how to use this information to advocate for policy changes. This includes knowing how to prepare for and use personal interactions with policymakers and how to mobilize both individuals and groups of people around a shared issue or goal. Advocacy also includes using the media effectively to increase awareness and support for policy changes. This topic introduces basic skills, actions and strategies that can be used to influence professionals, policymakers, and elected officials. There is no magic formula. Creating meaningful change takes creativity, tenacity, focus, vision, determination and the ability to negotiate and persuade.

Competencies:

Participants will:

- Identify strategies for beginning and sustaining grassroots organizing around specific issues.
- Understand when and how to use the media to effectively promote issues.

TOPIC 9: LOCAL AND STATE GOVERNMENT

Partnering with policymakers at the state and local levels is a powerful way to change the system. Every Partners in Policymaking participant has a unique and powerful tool for influencing policymakers — their personal stories of lack of access, discrimination, segregation, bias, abuse and other challenges. Participants learn how to select, fine-tune and practice telling their personal stories and how to use the legislative process to influence policymakers.

Competencies:

Participants will:

- Understand the role of local and state governments.
- Learn how to meet with a public official and discuss issues.
- Describe how a bill becomes a law at the state level.
- Demonstrate successful techniques for advocating for services.
- Prepare and deliver testimony at legislative hearings.

TOPIC 10: FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND FEDERAL LEGISLATION

The majority of services and supports for people with disabilities are funded through federal allocations. As budget cuts strain access to important services, people with disabilities need to band together to protect their

Partners taught me how to testify in front of House and Senate meetings pertaining to special education and other issues important to persons with disabilities. In addition, Partners taught me how to advocate for my son with autistic differences. Because of these advocacy skills, I was able obtain the necessary services he needed to be accepted at school. He graduated from high school in a full inclusion education program. He graduated with a 3.5 grade point average and graduated from college and is now successfully employed in the community.

-Parent

rights. A key part of the Partners in Policymaking experience is learning how to successfully attract and keep legislators' attention in order to increase their understanding of disability issues and the impact their decisions have on people with disabilities.

Competencies:

Participants will:

- Understand how a bill becomes a law at the federal level.
- Identify critical federal issues and the process for personally addressing concerns.
- Demonstrate how to meet with Congressional members/ staff and discuss issues.

TOPIC 11: PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES AND SERVING ON BOARDS

Parliamentary procedures guide the legislative process, regardless of the level of government. This set of formal rules helps to ensure that important issues are brought up for discussion, debates are civil and the voting process is orderly and unbiased. These same procedures are used to guide board meetings and other official meetings, such as public hearings. Participants need to know how to run an effective meeting and participate in the process.

Competencies:

Participants will:

- Gain a basic understanding of parliamentary procedures and responsibilities when serving on boards.
- Demonstrate proper procedures for conducting a meeting.



CHAPTER SEVEN

The Early Years

In the first three years, 100 people graduated from Partners in Policymaking[®].

From the beginning, evaluation has played a major role in the Partners program. In these early years, participants evaluated each training session and then completed a comprehensive evaluation at the end of the program year to determine how well program objectives were met.

Short-term follow-up surveys were conducted six months after graduation to learn about improvements in personal advocacy skills, specific advocacy activities, and the extent of communication with public officials. When asked about the side benefits, the informal learning and other outcomes that were acquired during the Partners program, participants commented on the strong support network that was provided, new relationships, a better understanding of the system and how to access services, and an increase in self-confidence, especially when communicating with legislators.

Lorie Zoeller, who graduated in Class 2, recently reflected on the impact that the Partners program has had on her life as well as her son's life:

"My son is now 32 years old, and has Down Syndrome. It was

really important that our son remain in our home school district. By participating in the Partners program, I learned how to facilitate discussions on what we wanted for our son. There was a speaker that taught us that you can influence the people you sit by, so I would always go sit by the Superintendent. Sometimes the meetings with the school district were very emotional and, while trying to integrate my son into the classroom, we often butted heads with teachers. But many realized that they could do more than they thought and realized they had more to offer. Eric's thirteen years at school were very good and the kids accepted him and he would go to sporting events. Even into high school, when the gap was getting pretty wide in some subjects, the integration specialist came and helped him and the teachers."

Many graduates of those first years furthered their education, attended law school, earned advanced degrees, and went on to work in the social services and education fields.

EXPANDING THE VISION

Initially, the program was offered only in Minnesota. However, leaders of the Disability Rights Movement were keeping a close watch on the progress that Partners was making.

The program had proven itself by 1989. Ed Roberts, founder of the World Institute on Disability (WID), recognized Partners in Policymaking's potential to provide a national leadership training model for people with disabilities. The Council retained the WID to manage the fourth year of Partners in Minnesota. The two organizations also worked together to expand the training to other states.

By 1990, five states had initiated Partners programs. That same year, the Council and the WID conducted a National Academy that each financially supported, in addition to using

grant funds provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Administration on Developmental Disabilities. The goal was to introduce the Partners vision and teach participants to replicate the program in their states.

Representatives from 13 states participated in the first National Academy, held in 1990. The following year, Partners had expanded to 12 states.

A second National Academy, offered in May 1992, generated

THE WORLD INSTITUTE ON DISABILITY

The World Institute on Disability (WID) is an internationally recognized non-profit public policy center that focuses on issues and problems that directly affect people's ability to live full and independent lives. Ed Roberts and other leaders of the Independent Living Movement established the WID with grant funds that Roberts received from a MacArthur Foundation "genius" award in 1984. The WID is still in operation and conducts research, analysis, and public education on issues of importance to people with disabilities.

One of its major priorities is closely aligned with the Council and Partners in Policymaking – to support the efforts of unserved and underserved individuals with disabilities to improve the quality of their lives.

similar results. Representatives from 24 states attended and, by the following year, Partners had expanded to 20 states. Representatives from 35 states attended the third National Academy in 1993 and, by the following year, Partners was changing lives in 24 states — nearly half the country.

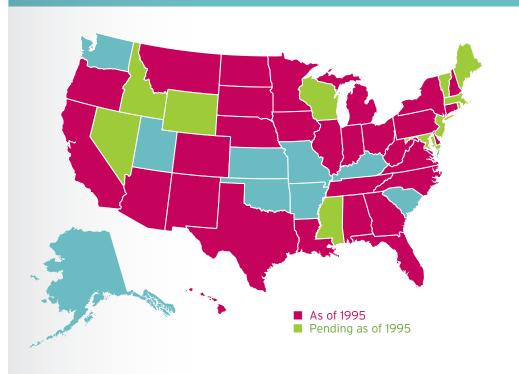
On the 10th anniversary of Partners, the program was available in 41 states, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the United Kingdom.

By 2000, Partners programs had been implemented in all but three states, as well as in the United Kingdom. More than 8,000 Partners graduates were part of a growing national and international network of community leaders serving on policymaking committees, commissions, and boards at local, state, and national levels.

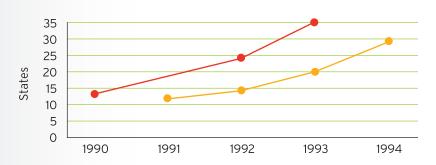
Prior to my participation with the Partners in Policymaking course, I was not a very good advocate for my son, or others in the community, yet I was always frustrated with outcomes that were not beneficial for our son. His IEP was weak at best, he wasn't included in community events, etc. Taking this course first of all gave me a voice — to name it and claim it and not be embarrassed by his disabilities. I now look at inclusion as a way of life for our immediate family and everyone I come in contact with.

-Leesa Avila, Parent

States with Partners in Policymaking Programs in 1995



Partners in Policymaking Growth as Compared to National Academy Attendance



- States Attending National Academies
- States with Partners in Policymaking Programs

Source: The Status of Partners in Policymaking (1987-1994)



CHAPTER EIGHT

Staying True to the Vision

As Partners in Policymaking® expanded its reach to new states, Wieck and members of the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities became increasingly concerned about maintaining the program's integrity.

The first replications outside the state of Minnesota proved that the Partners model would work in a variety of settings. These initial replications also offered two valuable lessons:

LESSON 1: Individual programs almost always tried to modify the quality principles of the program. Some hoped to improve the program or to adapt it to their own state's challenges. Others, however, looked for ways to cut budgetary corners. Regardless of their intention, modifying the program invariably led to inconsistency and quality concerns.

LESSON 2: Programs often tried to take short cuts with the evaluation requirement. Some programs chose not to use an external evaluator to track long-term outcomes. Others decided not to ask participants to evaluate each speaker, opting instead to solicit formal feedback only on the main speaker or replacing a formal evaluation process with informal, group discussions. In either case, programs that weren't able to demonstrate their effectiveness risked losing all or part of their funding.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

To help ensure the program's quality, the Council began providing technical assistance to other state programs. The Council continues to act as a technical advisor as needed to all Partners programs in the United States and internationally.

This support includes responding to questions from program coordinators, encouraging coordinators to visit Partners programs operating in other states and inviting new coordinators to visit the Minnesota program. In addition, the Council provides access to extensive resources, including the *Partners in Policymaking® Coordinator's Handbook*, the *Coordinator's Handbook Supplement: Integrating Online Learning*, and *Curriculum Highlights*, the primary resources for understanding the basics for starting a Partners program; sample forms; and the five online courses that serve to supplement and strengthen the classroom learning experience.

INTRODUCING THE LATEST THINKING AND BEST PRACTICES

From its creation, Partners has focused on "best practices" information delivered by nationally recognized experts in the field of developmental disabilities whose presentations emphasize current thinking about the topic areas that are incorporated into a quality classroom program.

Best practices reflect the most current and innovative ways of doing things — what's possible vs. what simply exists. By having the latest information, Partners participants understand the larger picture and are able to "dream big," turning their personal life goals into reality. It is important to remember that best practices are constantly evolving — what is considered a best practice today may not be relevant in six months or a year. Staying current on changing policies and practices allows

Partners to stay ahead of the curve and become trusted resources for educating policymakers.

National experts, who are known for their groundbreaking efforts and actually work in the field, are able to share their knowledge, provide personal insights into new developments, and share the success stories that encourage are out there, and how to take advantage of them. It gave me the confidence to advocate for his needs.

Partners showed me how

laws that provide for my

son and the services that

I am impacted by the

- Heather Duvall, Parent

Partners participants to work towards what is possible and actually happening rather than perpetuating the status quo.

FOCUS ON SYSTEM CHANGE

Partners in Policymaking is about system change. In terms of disability issues, system change means:

Modifying, altering, reorganizing, dissolving, and/or creating any system or policy that serves or affects people with disabilities and their families. A system can be local (schools, city government, park boards and community service providers), the county and state levels (case managers, attendant services and state government) or the federal level (assistance programs and laws).

Partners in Policymaking graduates are being trained to be tomorrow's leaders. The goal is to create a cadre of capable disability advocates who are able to help reshape the way services for people with disabilities are created, delivered and evaluated. Historically, society's systems and policies (from local to federal) have not served people with disabilities and their families well. Appointed and elected officials have traditionally made policy decisions about people with disabilities and their families without any input from those who would be directly affected by these decisions and without the historical context in which programs and services were created. Partners is based on the idea that policy decisions should be made by people with disabilities and their families in partnership with elected public officials and other policymakers.

SEVEN QUALITY STANDARDS

A quality Partners program that is in the best position to achieve the desired outcomes adheres to the following standards:

1 Commitment to Replicating the Model

The Partners program has proven to be effective and adaptable enough to be relevant in any location using it. The key to the model's success, however, is clear — in order for Partners graduates to be successful, the model must be fully implemented.

The Partners in Policymaking name is a registered trademark

In 1999, Partners in Policymaking® became an official registered trademark with the United States Patent and Trademark Office. By registering the training's name and approach, the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities is able to ensure that any leadership training program bearing the name "Partners in Policymaking" meets the core criteria of the Partners curriculum and meets the quality standards the Council has established.

with the United States Patent and Trademark Office. The trademark serves many functions, one of the most important being quality assurance.

2 Consistent Process, Approach and Outcomes

Partners is based on a core set of principles related to a consistent process, approach, and outcomes. These principles include:

- A focus on experiential learning.
- Diversity.
- Access to national experts.
- A focus on best practices.
- Leadership development.
- 128 hours of training across eight sessions.
- Adequate funding to assure a quality program.
- Evaluation of the sessions to determine the effectiveness of the program and longitudinal surveys to measure longer term results.
- A focus on working in the community rather than supporting an organizational concept.
- Focus on the ultimate outcomes of increased independence, productivity, self determination, and integration and inclusion.

3 Respect 10 Core Values about People with Disabilities

Ten core values provide the foundation upon which the Partners leadership training program is based and are interwoven into all aspects of the Partners program. These values (see page 65) were conceived in 1987 and continue to reflect best practices.

4 Coordinator Essential Duties

The most important duty of a Partners Coordinator is to model and create an inclusive and welcoming learning environment for all participants. In turn, participants will better understand how to replicate that same environment in their local communities.

The overall duties and responsibilities of a Partners Coordinator fall into eight areas:

- Recruitment and selection of participants.
- Program design (e.g., sessions include presentations and supplemental resources, discussion, participatory exercises and making sure that everyone participates in every aspect of the learning experience, homework assignments).
- Session processes (e.g., making sure meeting rooms are set up in a way that is conducive to learning, all equipment is in working order, supplies are available, sessions start and end on time, competencies are reinforced, and all other logistics).
- Speaker arrangements.
- Accessibility.
- Support to participants.
- Quality improvement.
- Relationships with funders.

5 National Speakers

Participant evaluations of the Partners experience consistently find that nationally recognized speakers not only offer broader perspectives and expertise on best practices and



The Minnesota Governor's Council on
Developmental Disabilities is a strong
proponent of accountability and
continuous improvement. In 1997, the
Council adopted the Malcolm Baldridge
Criteria for Performance Excellence
and related Quality Framework, and
embarked on a journey of continuous
improvement, organizational excellence,
and quality.

In 1999, the Council was the first government agency to receive an Achievement (Gold) Award from the Minnesota Council for Quality. A key factor was the significant investment and long-term commitment the Council had made to the Partners in Policymaking® program and its replication across the United States and internationally.

To learn more about the Council's quality efforts, check out their web site at http://mn.gov/mnddc/quality/index.html.

disability issues, but also are motivated and enthused, and inspire and energize participants. They are committed to the values and principles of the Partners program, understand what Partners is all about, and are able to communicate through adult learning methods.

National speakers can teach best practices, can speak directly about what's possible, and bring a perspective that goes beyond the status quo. In-state speakers can complement the national speakers, but cannot replace them.

6 Criteria for Selection of Partners Participants

Partners is committed to developing a diverse group of participants who are motivated to change the system and promote full inclusion of people with disabilities. Preference should be given to parents of young children with developmental disabilities and self-advocates. The selection process should consider gender balance, individuals from a broad range of socio and economic backgrounds, diverse cultures, represent a broad range of disabilities, and be eager to learn and open to new ways of thinking.

7 Competencies

Partners is not a casual networking event. It is a focused effort to develop participants' knowledge, skills, and abilities. Partners programs continue to get funding and attract participants because they deliver consistent results — graduates who have mastered the core competencies outlined in *Chapter 6*.

After taking the Partners in Policymaking class I feel like I am better equipped in regards to my son's lifelong learning, and his right to a free and appropriate education. Partners gave me the information to go to my county worker. It gave him access to services. The presenters helped me understand the ability and potential for employment for all people. Partners has helped me to help other parents understand these things and point them in the right direction for services.

-Parent

10
CORE VALUES

Partners in Policymaking® is based on the belief that people with disabilities have inherent worth and unique talents and abilities. These values should be evident in all Partners activities, presentations, and discussions.

People with disabilities are PEOPLE FIRST. They are not "the handicapped" or "the disabled." Using People First Language is a must – no labels! 2 People with disabilities need **REAL FRIENDSHIPS**, not just relationships with paid staff. People with disabilities are entitled to the full meaning of the First Amendment right to free speech. THE ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE, in whatever form, must be available to every person with a disability. 4 People with disabilities must be able to enjoy FULL MOBILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY that allows active participation in community life. 5 People with disabilities must be assured CONTINUITY in their lives through families and neighborhood connections. 6 People with disabilities must be treated with RESPECT AND DIGNITY. People with disabilities need to be IN POSITIONS TO **NEGOTIATE** to have their wants and needs met. 8 People with disabilities must be able to exercise CHOICE in all areas of their lives. 9 People with disabilities must be able to live in the HOMES of their choices with the supports they need. 10 People with disabilities must be able to enjoy the benefits of TRUE PRODUCTIVITY through employment and/ or contributions as members of their communities.



CHAPTER NINE

Tackling the Diversity Challenge

The development of local leadership among culturally diverse parents of children with developmental disabilities is extremely important to creating inclusive, multicultural communities. The participation of people of diverse cultures in Partners in Policymaking® has been an ongoing challenge since the program was first introduced.

The Council initiated its first formal Cultural Outreach Program in 1992 when it funded a parent education and training program in the African American community. The project was developed in response to questions about educational rights that had been raised by an African American community leader. She had reason to be concerned: Research indicated that African American children were over-represented in both the special education and the juvenile justice systems, but were under-served by existing family support programs.

The Council conducted a baseline survey and found that few parents in the racial and ethnic minority communities knew that their children with disabilities had specific rights to education and other services and supports.

A CLEAR NEED

The need was clear. However, many of these parents weren't ready to tackle systems change. They needed immediate, practical information so they could access services already available to them. The Council hoped that these parents would go on to become leaders in their communities and that at least some would eventually participate in Partners and work to change the system.

The result was a shorter training program that provided outreach services and personal support to minority parents, and introduced the topics and concepts of the Partners program, beginning leadership skills, resource information, and how to work and communicate effectively with educators, county workers and service providers.

The Cultural Outreach Programs are steps toward the Partners program. Today, an average of 10 to 20 parents of young children with disabilities meet for about 30 hours during a program year to gain new knowledge and basic advocacy skills.

PLANTING THE SEED FOR SYSTEM CHANGE

The Council's hope that these outreach efforts will encourage parents from racial and ethnic minority communities to participate in Partners in Policymaking has been realized. A number of Partners graduates are taking their training and leadership skills back to their communities, working to educate other parents, and strengthen their advocacy efforts to address public policy issues.

For example, Julie Kenney and several other Partners graduates founded IPSII, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing Independence, Productivity, Self Determination, Integration and Inclusion (IPSII) for people





with developmental disabilities and their families. One of the organization's key programs is "On Eagles Wings."

The Council's Cultural Outreach Programs are paying off. Over time, awareness of Partners in Policymaking has increased among minority populations and, with it, the number of participants from



diverse racial and ethnic minority backgrounds. Over the years, nearly 500 parents and self advocates have graduated from the Cultural Outreach Programs and, every year, two or three graduates from these programs apply to participate in Partners in Policymaking.



CHAPTER TEN

Partners Goes International

Segregation, bias and ignorance of disability issues are not confined to a single state, region or even country.

Fortunately, the core elements of the Partners in Policymaking® training model are universal. Between 1987 and 1997, Partners spread rapidly in the United States. Word of its success spread internationally as well.

CROSSING BORDERS

In 1994, Colleen Wieck, Executive Director of the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, was asked to participate in several workshops at a national conference being held in the United Kingdom. Representatives from the North West Training and Development Team attended the conference in search of new ways to support people with disabilities in their communities. After attending the conference and listening to Wieck describe Partners in Policymaking, the organizations decided to seek funding to import Partners to Great Britain.

Lynne Elwell, a parent activist from Manchester who had attended the conference, traveled to Minnesota to meet with the Partners in Policymaking team and learn how to replicate Partners in Policymaking in the U.K. Elwell, along with Chris

I am getting my voice heard a lot more. I'm getting into politics as well. It really inspired me to go out into the world. I'm not just speaking for myself, but other people with disabilities as well. It really inspired me to get everyone else to get their voices heard. I'm just happy with my life, the way it is going.

-Andrew Nightengale, Self Advocate Gathercole and Paul Taylor from the North West Training and Development Team, then adapted the Partners model for the United Kingdom.

In late 1996, the first Partners class outside of the United States got underway, led by Elwell.

EXPANSION CONTINUES

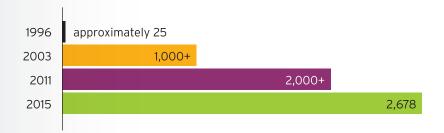
By 2015, there were more than 27,000 Partners graduates, including nearly 3,000 internationally. While

Partners in Policymaking programs

have been initiated in several countries outside of the United States, funding sources have varied and efforts to secure funding on an ongoing basis have been met with mixed results. Over time, programs have been offered in the following countries or regions:

- Australia
- The Netherlands
- New Zealand
- Portugal
- Republic of Ireland
- United Kingdom
 - London (London, Bristol, Wirral)
 - Scotland
 - Northern Ireland
 - And regional sites Manchester, East Midlands, Northeast (Durham County)

Partners in Policymaking Graduates Worldwide



Partners in Policymaking Worldwide Reach



72 73



CHAPTER ELEVEN

Continuing Education

Beyond the best practices presented and the leadership skills taught in the Partners in Policymaking® classroom program, the Council also offers advanced leadership training opportunities for graduates.

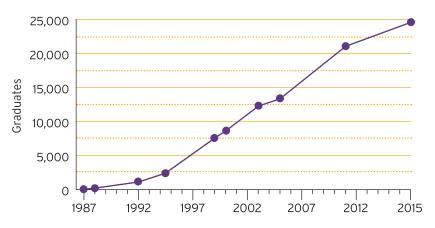
This advanced training has been made available in different ways. In addition to regular workshops, financial support in the form of stipends has been made available to cover registration fees for a college/university class on leadership or to attend a state or national conference held in Minnesota, regional meetings, and mini-grants.

The first national Summer Leadership Institute was held in 1992. Workshops were presented on a broad range of topics to update Partners graduates on policy issues, as well as provide skills training to strengthen and build on what was learned in the Partners program. The Institute also served as a networking opportunity, a chance to meet and talk with graduates from other parts of the country, share common interests, and exchange experiences about what was happening in their respective states. Since then, thousands of graduates have continued their education to refresh their skills and reenergize their commitment to changing the system.

Like Partners, the graduate workshops are offered at no

additional charge and reimbursement is available for mileage, child/respite care, and PCA services, as well as overnight accommodations if necessary.

Partners in Policymaking® Graduates in the United States 1987-2015



LEARNING FROM THE MASTERS

Over the years, Partners graduates have also participated in once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

In 2003, they met with Bengt Nirje, one of the most influential figures in the history of people with disabilities. Nirje introduced the concept of normalization and self determination to the world in the late 1960s.

In 2011, Partners graduates had the opportunity to attend a statewide Autism and Employment conference sponsored by the Autism Society of Minnesota in cooperation with Best Buy, Cargill, and 3M. Temple Grandin was the keynote speaker. As one Partners graduate noted, "I very much appreciated the opportunity to attend this event. It was my first time to be in Temple Grandin's audience — she is inspirational!"

Over the years, Partners graduates have continued their education, formally or informally, and applied their leadership skills to partner with their elected officials and other policymakers to build their advocacy skills and learn about some of the most important and compelling issues facing people with developmental disabilities today. Workshop topics have included:

- Self Determination and Funding Streams
- Ommunication Skills
- Non-Profit Boards
- Data Practices:

 Nogotiating the

 Government

 Information Maze
- The Americans
 with Disabilities Act:
 Have We Made
 Any Progress?
- Ø Grant Writing
- Networking and Media Relations
- Solf Employment

- Transition from School to Post School:

 Bost Practices
- Supporting Families
 to Have an Effective
 Voice in the
 Educational Process
- Skills for Negotiating Difficult Conversations
- Facilitation Skills and Negotiation Skills
- Civil Discourse,

 Restoring Order to

 Difficult Meetings
- Making Your Case"

 Refresher: How to

 Communicate Effectively

 with Elected Officials



CHAPTER TWELVE

A New Way of Learning

As technology has made it possible for people with disabilities to be more fully included in the life of the community, the Council is constantly looking for ways to incorporate technology into the Partners In Policymaking® program. Technology can be used to bring the core concepts of Partners to self advocates, young adults with developmental disabilities and younger parents who are immersed in a technology age but who also need to be educated about disability rights and best practices related to advocacy, employment, education, independent living, and self determination.

As Internet access spread, the Council recognized that e-learning had the potential to reach parents of young children with disabilities and people with disabilities who weren't able to participate in a traditional classroom experience.

PARTNERS GOES DIGITAL

In 2003, the Council launched *Partners in Making Your Case*, the first of five e-learning courses in the Partners In Policymaking online curriculum.

Each course is self-directed and focuses on the same key

concepts and competencies that are the foundation of the traditional classroom experience. The courses are available free of charge to anyone interested in expanding their knowledge and understanding of best practices in the field of developmental disabilities.

The *Partners in Making Your Case* online course was an immediate hit. One early visitor said, "I love the e-course. The graphics are so good! I have learned a lot already. The tips, the light bulbs, the tool kits, all of it is fabulous. Thank you."

Another commented, "This is a really cool, great product. Everything you think should be there is there and things I never would have thought of are also there. I love it!"

Over the next four years, four more online courses were added covering inclusive education; employment; history; and the important concepts of self determination, family support, community living and assistive technology. These courses were equally well received. In 2014, just over 1,000 visits were made to the online courses each month, with an average of 2,300 page views.

THE ONLINE COURSES

There are five Partners in Policymaking online courses, each includes exams to test new knowledge and exercises that apply the concepts to real life situations and give reviewers the opportunity to acquire some practical skills. The courses are

- Partners in Making Your Case
- Partners in Employment
- Partners in Education
- Partners in Time
- Partners in Living

Partners in Policymaking®

ONLINE CURRICULUM

Partners in Making Your Case

This three-hour course is designed to help people with disabilities and their families create positive change through advocacy. The course helps learners understand the legislative process, the essential elements of good advocacy, identify and research personal issues, then advocate for systems change both as individuals and as part of larger community efforts. It also includes a series of interactive exercises that allow learners to put what has been learned into practice.

Partners in Making Your Case is also available in Spanish and American Sign Language.

Partners in Employment

This six-hour course is designed to help people with developmental disabilities find meaningful jobs and plan a career. In this course, learners explore ways to present their strengths, skills, and interests; discover ways to network and identify potential employers; prepare for an interview; and understand the hiring process. It also includes information on ways that people with autism and other developmental disabilities can find competitive, meaningful employment in the emerging "digital economy."

Partners in Employment is also available in Spanish and as an EZ Read version.

Partners in Education

This three-hour course is designed to help parents of children with developmental disabilities understand and maximize the special education system. The course focuses on a child's right to a free, appropriate public education and the laws that protect those rights. It also presents practical ways for parents to ensure that their children benefit from an inclusive education. The course reviews IDEA 2004 and includes current thinking on educational reform and the importance of teaching children to use digital technology to improve educational outcomes and better prepare children for future employment.

Partners in Education is also available in Spanish.

Partners in Time

This eight-hour course introduces people with developmental disabilities, their parents, family members and friends, educators and service providers to the history of society's treatment of people with disabilities. This exploration begins in ancient times and continues through the present. It focuses on the way that people with disabilities lived, learned and worked throughout history and growth of the Disability Rights Movement. Learners also meet some of the individuals and groups whose efforts resulted in new ways of thinking about people with disabilities and their civil rights.

Partners in Time is also available in Spanish.

Partners in Living

This seven-hour course is designed to help people with developmental disabilities, their parents, family members and friends, educators and service providers understand the important concepts of self-determination, family support, community living and assistive technology. Through the course, learners explore these four important elements and understand how they can be used to help someone with disabilities create a meaningful life that is independent, inclusive, productive, self-determined and integrated.

These online, interactive courses incorporate opportunities to apply what is being learned, explore best practices, and access tools, practical tips and resources.

In addition, learners are introduced to Partners graduates who share their personal experiences with the educational system, advocacy, self-determination, etc.

In 2007, the online courses were awarded a "Best of the Web Digital Government Achievement Award" in the Government-to-Citizen category from the Center for Digital Government. The Award is a national program that recognizes outstanding agency and department web sites and applications that enhance information interactions, transactions and/or services.

EXPANDING PARTNERS' REACH

The online courses also offer a way to introduce Partners to audiences that might not be able to access these important concepts due to language barriers or reading skills.

In 2011, the Council began translating the online courses into Spanish to reach members of the Latino community who were also participating in the classroom Partners program.

A Spanish version of *Making Your Case* was released in 2012, followed by Spanish versions of *Partners in Education, Partners in Employment*, and *Partners in Time*.

With the Council's support, the Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans created a customized version of *Making Your Case* in American Sign Language.

In addition, Partners in Employment EZ Read was released in 2011. This online course uses simpler language and relies on icons to help the reviewer understand the basic concepts and facilitate the learning process.

PARTNERS GOES TO COLLEGE!

By 2008, the courses had been incorporated into the special education and social services curriculums of more than 12 colleges and universities across the United States, helping to spread awareness of important concepts, such as self determination and educational rights, to students who may eventually become policymakers.

These aren't the only graduates using the online curriculum to understand important concepts. Many Partners graduates also are turning to the courses to refresh their skills, update their learning, explore resources and access practical tools.

Partners faculty are encouraged to integrate the online courses into their classroom training experience by using interactive activities as group exercises or requiring participants to complete all or part of a course as homework. This blended learning approach can strengthen and enhance the classroom learning experience, and help to keep concepts fresh and participants engaged between the Partners weekend sessions. The courses also can be used to help participants keep pace with their classmates if they miss all or part of a weekend session.

In addition, many direct care workers are able to complete the online courses to meet certification requirements.



Partners introduced me to advocating for my daughter and knowing how to get laws passed and knowing who to look for at the Capitol. I had been to the Capitol as a kid but didn't know how to talk to legislators. Partners taught me how to talk to policymakers and who to talk to. Since then, we have been involved in welfare rights. It has helped me be more articulate and understand the ins and outs on how to bring change about.

-Angella Khan, Parent

I am more
assertive and
now I have
gotten a little
more confident
and I say what
needs to be done.

-Terri Scott, Self Advocate



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Partners Goes Mobile

The 21st century Digital Age is reflected in today's Partners in Policymaking® program.

The advent of smartphones and tablets has created new ways to access and exchange information. These tools have also greatly enhanced everyone's ability to be involved in the policymaking process, and to respond quickly and easily as public policy issues are discussed and debated. Thanks to expanded Internet access, information, photos and videos can be accessed virtually anywhere — including policymakers' offices.

"TELLING YOUR STORY"

Compelling, personal stories are a crucial element of the Partners in Policymaking approach to advocacy, system change and increasing awareness of disability issues. The Council introduced "Telling Your Story," a mobile "app" for the iPad in July 2012 to help self advocates, family members and others compose and practice their personal stories prior to meeting with elected public officials and other policymakers.

The free app guides users through the story telling process, from introductions to identifying an issue and the best methods

for presenting a relevant and compelling personal story. After entering the text of their story, an audio recording feature allows the user to rehearse their story, then play it back. Users can also include a photo to personalize their story.

New versions of the app were released in 2013, making it available for iPhones, iPod Touch and Kindle Fire. Android versions for phone and tablets were released in 2014. In the first three years, "Telling Your Story" has been downloaded nearly 2,000 times.

SPREADING THE WORD

Word of the app has spread quickly.

During the 2013 Minnesota Legislative Session, the "Telling Your Story" app was introduced and promoted at weekly First Tuesday advocacy events at the State Capitol. Self advocates and parents used the app to create their personal stories, learn how to introduce themselves, talk about an issue that is particularly important to them — such as parental fees, education and safe schools, employment, transportation, housing, rate increases and budget reductions, and then send those messages directly to their elected officials; photos can also be included.

In 2014, The Arc Minnesota continued to market "Telling Your Story" and promoted its use as an effective communication tool at First Tuesdays at the Capitol. The Public Policy page on their web site included a link to the app, as well as tips for using it, and articles about the app appeared regularly in The Arc's Public Policy Updates. The "Telling Your Story" app was again promoted during the 2014 Legislative Session reaching over 5,500 individuals via Public Policy Updates, a Capitol Focus blog, and Facebook.

The "Telling Your Story" app is highlighted on the Partners

in Policymaking website with links to all versions, and has been incorporated into the *Partners in Making Your Case* online course.

The "Telling Your Story" app received a State Government Innovation Award in 2014 from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs and the Bush Foundation. This award recognizes the innovative work of Minnesota state agencies.

The biffest impact of Partners was on my ability to advocate at the national and state levels. Partners fave me confidence and knowledge.

- Debra Niedfeldt, Parent

The app was also a finalist for a Minnesota High Tech Association Tekne Award in 2012. Tekne Awards recognize and honor businesses that play a significant role in discovering new technologies that educate, improve lifestyles, and impact the lives of Minnesotans as well as globally



88 89



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Junior Partners

Creativity and flexibility have been hallmarks of Partners in Policymaking® since it was introduced in 1987. Since then, several programs have found innovative ways to use the Partners approach to reach specific audiences or respond to challenges in delivering the leadership training

Junior Partners in Policymaking

The Delaware Developmental Disabilities Council and the Center for Disabilities Studies at the University of Delaware introduced Junior Partners in Policymaking in 2005.

The week-long residential program helps young adults, aged 15 to 22, with and without disabilities to become involved in disability advocacy at the local, state and national levels.

The Junior Partners program is a multi-dimensional learning experience that educates young adults with disabilities about issues that are affecting their lives now, and issues that may surface in the future. During the training, Junior Partners participate in a variety of hands-on activities and self exploration related to self determination and disability advocacy that focus on goal setting, person centered planning, and advocacy-related networking. The program helps them to develop a greater understanding of what self determination means, how they can be leaders in their

Thanks to Partners, I have been able to advocate for my daughter in circumstances when she can't. I have been trying to support and teach her to advocate for herself. I am there as a back-up when she can't. I am trying to get her to get her own voice.

-Shannon Ehlers, Parent

communities, and how they can influence public policies that affect everyone.

Partners en español

In 1995, the New York State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council launched a Partners project in New York City that was specifically targeted to the Hispanic community.

Selected Partners materials were translated into Spanish and delivered to participants at five training sessions. The sessions were co-sponsored by an organization with a long history of working with culturally diverse populations.

The New York Council also adapted the Partners curriculum specifically for parents of children enrolled in early intervention programs sponsored by the Department of Health and parent members of Local Early Intervention Coordinating Councils.

Distance Learning

The New York Council modified the Partners program to create an interactive, distance learning option. Participants complete a series of training sessions, primarily through web-based instruction, during the course of a year. They are also expected to complete assignments between sessions and must commit to a major project during the year following the training. Projects can include internships, serving on boards, organizing letter writing campaigns, or organizing special receptions or town meetings for public officials. Upon graduation, they join a Partners Graduates group and are eligible

for follow-up activities and advanced leadership training.

Modifications for Specific Audiences

In the United Kingdom, Partners in Policymaking is used as an umbrella name for several leadership training courses, all based on the Partners program, but designed and modified for specific audiences including adults with disabilities, parents and caregivers of children with disabilities, as well as professionals and other service providers working in education, health and leisure. The training courses were created to help participants understand how the health and social care system works, how to organize meetings, and how to present questions without getting frustrated. All courses aim to help find solutions to issues of common concern that will help to improve people's lives and give them the confidence to work in a cooperative manner so their loved ones have choice and control over their lives.

The Partners in Policymaking program taught me a lot because before [Partners] people would not listen to me when I tried to fight for my daughter and her needs. The program has helped me to know how to be a good advocate for my daughter and get her the things she needs. I had a meeting with the IEP team, and told them that she has the right to a translator. I fought for a whole year and she is now going to have help from a person with sign language.

So far, I have become an advocate for my daughter and many others too. I have advocated for other kids in the community. I don't stop. I keep knocking on doors until someone listens to me. Before I would cry about it and say that no one cares for me and my daughter. Now I feel more confident.

-Xochil Flores, Parent



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Legacy Continues

Over the past 27 years, more than 27,000 adults with disabilities and parents of young children with developmental disabilities have graduated from the Partners in Policymaking® program in the United States and internationally.

Each graduate has used the skills learned during the training to improve their own lives, as well as to realize the role and responsibility each has to address the critical disability issues that can make a difference in the lives of all individuals with developmental disabilities and their families and make their communities better places for all people with disabilities to live, work and learn.

Some of their advocacy efforts have taken them to the highest level of government. For example, Anovia Craven and Teriana Cox, Partners graduates from Washington, D.C., were invited to the White House for the signing of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA). Cox had the opportunity to be on the dais while President Obama signed the bill into law.

Others have become much more aware of the concept of inclusion, particularly as it applies to education, and equal rights in employment and housing at the state and local level. Partners graduates in Minnesota have successfully run for public office, serving in the state legislature as well as on school boards. In

Wisconsin, they have used the power of their personal stories to prevent the state legislature from passing "special needs vouchers," a vehicle for allowing special education services to be provided in segregated, isolated environments. In Louisiana, Partners graduates successfully advocated to assure that the use of restraint and seclusion for students with disabilities was strictly regulated.

Graduates also have been inspired and encouraged to change careers, continue their education, and pursue advanced degrees in law and education; or started their own organizations in an effort to promote inclusion, integration and self determination.

Countless boards, commissions, committees, councils and task forces have benefitted from the knowledge, skills, life experiences, expertise, and insights that Partners graduates bring to both public and private organizations and businesses. Contacts and networks have been established, strengthened, and expanded.

Children with disabilities are being educated in inclusive school environments. Young adults with disabilities are continuing their education beyond high school and earning degrees in a broad range of fields. They are directly employed, earning at least minimum wage with benefits, and working alongside their

co-workers without disabilities.

Who could have predicted such an outcome when that first class of 35 self advocates and parents gathered in 1987 to launch the Partners in Policymaking leadership training program?



In 2014 alone,
Partners graduates
served on the boards and
commissions of hundreds of
federal, state and local agencies
and nonprofit organizations
across the United States,
including:

- United States
 Department of
 Transportation
 Secretary's
 Leadership Round
 Table
- Developmental Disabilities Councils
- The Arc (National and State)
- University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities
- Council for Persons with Disabilities (SCPD)
- Special Education
 Advisory Committees
 or Councils
- Protection & Advocacy Agencies
- Disability Rights
 Councils

- Managed Care
 Consumer and Family
 Advisory Councils
- Centers for Independent Living Boards
- Commissions on Children and Youth
- Pardons and Parole Board
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
- Community Children's Council
- Traumatic Brain Injury Association
- Spina Bifida Association
- United Cerebral Palsy
- Learning Disabilities Association (LDA)
- Autism Awareness Training Committee

- Family Care Councils
- National Williams
 Association
- Family Autism
 Network
- Local School Boards
- Roundtable for Leaders in Exceptional Education
- Exceptional Student Education groups
- Local and County Transit Boards
- County Supervisor of Elections
- Local Developmental Disabilities
 Committees
- Regional Transportation Authorities
- County Care Advisory Committee

APPENDIX A IMPACT OF PARTNERS IN POLICYMAKING®

In 2014, MarketResponse International conducted a survey of Minnesota Partners in Policymaking graduates to learn how the Partners program has impacted their lives, as well as their level of inclusion in the community as a result of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Following are the personal stories and testimonials of graduates about the impact of the Partners program. Some graduates who responded to the survey asked to remain anonymous. We have honored their request by identifying them simply as a "Self Advocate" or "Parent."

I did go to college for a while but [it] didn't work out. I did keep the right though. I think Partners was a great thing to take. I learned a lot.

-Kristina Tollefson, Self Advocate

Partners taught me to go and tell other people how bills go into laws. I am able to express my thoughts with everybody. I can tell other people what I think is right and what is wrong, and I can tell others that voting is very important, because it can tell Americans who we want for President.

-Julie Seys, Self Advocate

The training helped me connect with officials in different communities.

-Mary Ann Padua, Self Advocate

About 2-3 years ago, I was in Partners in Policymaking and they had senators that would come up and legislators who would come in and talk to the class. It was very interesting and informative.

-Carla Chura, Self Advocate

I graduated from the Partners program in 1988 or so when I was 28 years old. I had just graduated from college in 1987 and had started working for Honeywell as a Mechanical Engineer and got involved with the Partners program that summer of 1987.

The program opened my eyes to all the non-profit programs in Minnesota where I could find resources and a network that I could use to better live my life and to better improve my independent living situation.

Previous to that I was living in subsidized housing for eight years while I went to college. I became more independent and graduated from the Partners program. A group of people I met in the program started the "Diversability" media cable TV program in order to get the information out there to [people with and without disabilities] about all the non-profit organizations in Minnesota that people could turn to for services and help in their venture to improve their lives. I was also around during the march on our Capitol to get the Americans with Disabilities Act started.

Our Diversability program was a monthly Cable TV show that ran for four years and was a wonderful leadership experience for me. It also created the network of people and organizations I know today. I am now Executive Director for the Midwest Region Wheelchair Sports (MRWS) group and have been involved with Wheelchair Sports since 1980 in the Twin Cities. I was married to my wife Teresa in 1997 at the age of 37 and adopted her two children, and in 2001 we had two natural born children. The experiences I had during my time with Partners taught me to look beyond what I thought I couldn't do, and gave me the education and resources to succeed in life, pursue ultimate and meaningful goals, and gave me the network of people in my life today.

I am now a Principal Reliability Engineer with British Areospace Engineering (BAE) Inc. and have a home in Greenfield, Minnesota. Our younger children are now 13.

-Kurt Greniger, Self Advocate

The greatest impact that this program has had on my life is the ability to expand the use of my current resources to not only have a voice for myself, but also for others with disabilities. The journey in the employment field has been difficult and that journey really reached emotional highs and lows as the stories and thoughts were shared with the people who were part of my graduating class. I am a single parent, a person with a disability, and an advocate for those who choose to embrace their lives as people with

disabilities. In this world that seeks to

The person I was planning to adopt at the time [that I attended Partners] has pretty much become a self advocate. We were in the process of adopting him and he is now 20 years old. It has been that long. It has taught me how and where to go, and I am strongly considering him being a self

-Joyce Barclay, Parent

advocate...he is not quite

there, but he's almost there.

have conformity, it is not always easy.

Asking for accommodations or even embracing who I am as a leader in an employment community, can appear to make the word "disability" a judgment.

The wealth of information I learned in Partners has given me the courage to be myself, even when there is strong opposition to that fact. The classwork and discussions really brought my awareness and resources to a heightened level. It taught me the most creative ways to bridge advocacy and everyday life together and for that I am grateful.

There is a lot more work to be done. Implementation of the Olmstead Plan and the Governor's Executive Order may help many dreams to come into fruition for leaders with disabilities in Minnesota. The many

different facets of disabilities and

communities need a strong voice like Partners in Policymaking. These voices speak volumes to those trying to support their families in a society that still has trouble embracing difference and allowing access to assistive technology, accommodations, employment opportunities and learning.

-Alison Canty, Parent

Partners helped me advocate for my son who has a disability to be able to keep him in his education. He has multiple disorders and he was denied education in many different ways. We were able to get him to stay in school and be educated. While I was doing that for him, I was working in nursing homes. Sometimes the school would call me and tell me I had to get there right away and leave my job.

I later learned that the school was supposed to modify my son's education, and I was able to make my case and ask them as a team to modify my son's education. I learned through Partners that I don't have to leave my job, and they don't need to call [me at] my job. I learned that they were supposed to deal with the situation on their own so I didn't have to leave my job. I learned that they needed to modify his IEP to include where he needed to be directed or have some time out of the classroom. He didn't need to be taken out of school, and I didn't need to leave work and they didn't need to send letters to my job. I also learned that they broke my privacy because calling my job is not part of educating my son and it made me look bad at my work. Partners taught me that I am the person at the steering wheel.

-Ada Rene Townsend, Parent

I'm a Veteran with disabilities and policymaking on the state level is something I have been involved in. My grandson also has disabilities. I learned that during the IEP for my grandson I can make more informed choices when it comes to that. I would have never been able to do those things without the knowledge that the program provided or the courage it gave me.

-Patricia Wilson, Self Advocate

The biggest impact was learning about IEPs and 504s. The schools don't tell parents that they have power over those and [parents] don't know that they can use them to help get the child what they need, how to fill out the forms, who they can use as their own advocate, and that they don't have to listen to everything the school tells them. They don't know what their rights are.

In my family, it impacts a lot of people because my whole family has had a bone disease throughout generations, and everyone comes to me for knowledge as far as what they can do for advocacy. I wish more people could go to the training or that it would come to them in rural areas.

-Karen Kimbrough, Parent

After graduating, I went to some conferences. From there, I became a member of the Developmental Disabilities Council for six years. At the same time, I represented the DD Council on the State Independent Living Council (SILC). After six years, I was appointed to the SILC and also represented SILC on the DEED Council.

During the period of time I was serving on the DD Council, I also worked for the federal government, reading grants for developmental disabilities in Washington, D.C. I also went to two different states with the Federal Team, rating the activities of the Developmental Disabilities Councils in those states. All of the states apply for grant money and I think there were multiple times that I rated grant applications.

Over this period of time, I advocated for children with IEPs in six different school districts in Minnesota. Through all my activities, I am now working part-time.

-Ann Zick, Self Advocate

The experience did open the door for me. The majority of the conversations had to do with other people's children with disabilities, which did not pertain to me. Contact information, as to who to contact and programs that can potentially be out there, were introduced to me.

-Jessica Abson, Self Advocate

Partners helped me to stay my own guardian. My family was planning on getting involved and I was able to be my own guardian and not have my sister or anybody involved.

-Lori Bahn, Self Advocate

Partners has impacted my life a great deal. I know it has helped [my] self-advocacy a lot.

-Linda Obright, Self Advocate

Partners in Policymaking was a very good program, I learned a lot in nine months, and it has been kind of hard to get back to helping people with disabilities because I am working nights now. My husband and I started a People First group in our area. Partners was a very good program.

-Kelly Miller, Self Advocate

Partners has given me the confidence and direction for where I want to go and what I want to do as an advocate for myself and others [that] I advocate on behalf of.

-Nichole Villavicencio, Self Advocate

the tools to advocate formyself. I've gotten more involved in the political process. I ran for Cit Council in 2012 and am going to be running again in 2016. I would not have done those things if it were not for the program.

-Jeremy Wyttenback, Self Advocate

I did Partners my senior year in high school. I didn't know how it would impact me. It has taken a few years, but it really helped me when I ended up leaving a position/contract. I was in an Americorps program and they told me I was not allowed to leave; they tried to persuade me and I said "no." I don't think I would be able to do that without Partners.

-Kelsey Weitzel, Self Advocate

Partners helped me with advocating, helps me organize my thoughts. The ADA and Partners in Policymaking have guided me on the right track.

-Robert Nisbet, Self Advocate

I'm a Girl Scout leader for a troop and my daughters both have disabilities. There is nothing in the Girl Scouts that would help people like my daughters. Because of the Partners program, I have become an advocate for girls with disabilities. Right now, there are no programs for girls with special needs in the Girl Scouts and that is what I am now working on. I was elected to be a delegate, and I am learning the whole process on how to bring up something like this for debate.

-Marie Pank, Parent and Self Advocate

Partners taught me how to deal with housing

for people with disabilities. I have been able to get out of the group homes and I now live independently with support in the community.

-Allie O'Muircheartaigh, Self Advocate

I like being with people. It was fun and I enjoyed it. I enjoyed meeting new people that were in Partners in Policymaking with us.

-Self Advocate

Partners impacted my life because I had the opportunity to go through the class. We need to make more people aware of disabilities because if we don't our whole society will go up in flames.

-Bryan Klaes, Self Advocate

Partners helped me become a self advocate. I have advocated for others but it allowed me to advocate for myself. I've been involved with the Minnesota State Council on Disability and have been able to reach out to Minnesota lawmakers after I had the training. It has given me the knowledge to do that.

-Rev. Dave Sams, Self Advocate

I was serving on the Council when I went through Partners in Policymaking and I really learned a lot of new things because I was so familiar with the online courses. After going through the 8-month training process, I wound up being a strong advocate for the program.

-Roberta Blomster, Self Advocate

Partners in Policymaking has helped me to be a better person. I went through the Olmstead [Academy] by Advocating Change Together. It helped me to change how I am and how to be a better advocate for myself and others. Other people who have been through the Olmstead Academy and Partners in Policymaking have made a lot of other people better advocates for themselves.

-Rosemary Hanson, Self Advocate

Because of Partners, I'm part of the Wright County Health and Human Services board and the Functional Industries Advisory Board. That is all due to the program and what I was taught.

-Jeremy Tyler, Self Advocate

It has been excellent. It has made me an advocate and I now reach out to a lot of people. Partners has taught me how to use resources for myself and others.

-Mark Eggen, Self Advocate

I am more assertive. I am good at talking to people now. Usually they can't understand me and now I have gotten a little more confident and I say what needs to be done.

-Terri Scott, Self Advocate

I got to be a part of an internship at the Capitol. I got to work alongside the state Senators and got to sit in on legislative sessions and Senate hearings because of the Partners program and the self-advocacy that I learned from the program. We have done a lot of work with special education and the Olmstead Plan.

-Robbie Reedy, Self Advocate

It helped me get a job in the community. The people like what I do. I work in the Jewelry department and people like me because I help people get their stuff and jewelry. It helped me become an advocate for myself.

-Raquel Jensen, Self Advocate

I learned what I could do for myself and to speak up for myself. It helps me get more experience.

-Kelly Lee, Self Advocate

I learned a lot about the history of the way people with disabilities were treated in the past and found out what topics I could talk to politicians about. I spoke to a lawmaker about affordable housing.

-Christopher Eckman, Self Advocate

I learned how people with disabilities can act in the community.

-Abby Pearson, Self Advocate

I am getting my voice heard a lot more. I'm getting into politics as well. It really inspired me to go out into the world. I'm not just speaking for myself, but other people with disabilities as well. It really inspired me to get everyone else to get their voices heard. I'm just happy with my life, the way it is going.

-Andrew Nightengale, Self Advocate

I got to learn the history of disabilities in the world and laws concerning it. Legislators and different people came in and taught us a lot of valuable things.

-Heidi Myhre, Self Advocate

I found out that I do have a voice, [even if I am] not a very good speaker. I talked with people from Carver County. My complaint was not having buses for younger people. They verbally transmitted written information. I was able to get the knowledge of what to say and write things down that make sense.

-Penny Hendrickson, Parent

Since graduating from the Partners program, I got an elevator in a school that wasn't ever there. They tried saying they couldn't afford it for several years but I kept working on school staff until they did it for the next school year.

Then I got parking spaces put in [front of] an elementary school because the only accessible parking spot they had was in the alley leading to a door that was always locked at the school.

I have left my name and number at the hospital and clinic, in the schools and at the organizations in the area that work with [people with disabilities] telling them to call me if they ever needed any help in anything to do with their family members with disabilities. I have received numerous calls and also been asked to be on many committees.

-Susan, Parent

It gave me more vision and broader insight and I got more contacts to help the people with disabilities that I work with.

-Kate Onyeneho, Parent

Partners introduced me to advocating for my daughter and knowing how to get laws passed and knowing who to look for at the Capitol. I had been to the Capitol as a kid but didn't know how to talk to legislators. Partners taught me how to talk to policymakers and who to talk to. Since then, we have been involved in welfare rights. It has helped me be more articulate and understand the ins and outs on how to bring change about.

Now I am with the SEIU and we are working to get more benefits for home care workers. It just shows me how you can have power within yourself. There have been an increasing number of people with disabilities, and there is not enough funding for everyone with disabilities. [Partners] taught me how to go to the source and get that funding.

-Angella Khan, Parent

It has been such a long time that I don't remember everything. Partners made us a little stronger for our children and other children with disabilities. It helped us understand what's there for us, where we can turn for help and guidance.

-Leah Sletten, Parent

My experience with Partners in Policymaking has empowered and equipped me to go deeper into the world of non-disabilities and empower others to understand and include everyone.

-Pattianne Casselton Demaray, Parent

When I started the program, my daughter was three and was thought to have autism. The school district is very small with old policies and she was not allowed to be included in a regular classroom. They wanted her to start attending special education at 3. I was hesitant about it and wanted to get a handle on things first. [I believed going to school with] kids without disabilities would be the way. I didn't feel that segregation would be the best environment/ example because society is not segregated. I faced lots of resistance. I started the ball rolling and the school included kids with disabilities a year afterwards. She was able to

develop, is working and has been able to move on.

-Susan Jagodzinski, Parent

I made connections through Partners in Policymaking that got me my current job as a Paralegal at a law firm.

-Emilie Breit, Parent

The biggest thing for me, as a parent, is learning how to treat everyone equally. It opened up a lot of doors, supports and services.

-Karla Hemman, Parent

Partners was instrumental when one of my sons was being abused in school. I was able to advocate for him. The state eventually came in and found problems. When the report came out, two weeks later the principal resigned. They always sent the head of the department of special education to his IEP meetings. Her response was "that makes sense" and that sometimes I was going beyond what the school was required to do. However, my request never went beyond what he needed.

-Joel (David) Callaway, Parent

It has really helped me with the [legislative] process - county, state and federal laws. It has helped with inclusion (IEP).

-Joanna Harris, Parent

When my son was deemed disabled, I didn't know what I could do. The program was very encouraging, supportive, and taught me where to go for support emotionally and for resources as to how I can help my son and myself.

-Fardosa Ibrahim, Parent

I have twin boys that are on the autism spectrum. Partners taught me to be a better advocate. It helped me reach out to find resources. It has taught me where to go when I need help. It also taught me to be a better advocate.

-Kathryn Jacobson, Parent

I guess I used to just advocate for myself and my daughter. After Partners in Policymaking, I advocate for a lot of other people. I'm also much more active in state politics.

-Thomas Furman, Parent

I am on the school board because of Partners. I would never have done that if it were not for the program. I do a legislative "coffee time" on behalf of the school board as well.

-Jacki Girtz, Parent

I was on the school district Special Education Advisory Council for 10 years. I was co-chair. Since 2011, I've been on the Hennepin County Children's Mental Health Collaborative. We help coordinate and improve children's mental health throughout the county. Those are just my hobbies. I work as a marriage and family therapist and I provide in-home parenting education for families who are involved in the child protection process.

I learned a lot about advocacy from Partners in Policymaking.

I use these skills with my clients. Partners has helped me access better services for my son. I have nothing but good things to say. As someone with a Master's degree, I would say Partners in Policymaking is one of the best educational experiences I've had.

-Ben Twogood, Parent

My boys are young. The information that I got about their rights to education in the least restrictive environment allowed me to advocate for them to be in an inclusive classroom.

-Maria Tripeny, Parent

I have three children with disabilities and they all passed. By taking Partners, [I could] help them with their education and their IEPs. Also, it helped us to find the right [government] program so that they could stay home with us. We provided the services until they passed away.

Partners gave me the strength and ability to go on. It gave me resources. To this day, I continue to help parents whenever I can. In our community, no one had the right information or know-how to find the programs that were out there.

-Peg Davis, Parent

I took Partners to learn more about advocating for my three children. They had just been diagnosed and the way the doctor explained things, the prognosis was not good. They always give you the worse case scenario. They even told us that it might be best to disrupt the adoption. My husband and I knew that was not an option, so we began to educate ourselves and Partners in Policymaking was an [integral] part of that process.

-Monica Mooney, Parent

It prepared me when my daughter became disabled. It gave me the information to file for what I needed. I was on The Arc [Minnesota] board until three years ago and I'm still active on their Public Policy Committee, and I chaired the Position Statement Task Force.

-Pam Gonnella, Parent

It has taught me to be an advocate for my child, especially within the school system. The training made me realize a need for overall change within state and county [government], which led me to be selected by Governor Dayton [to serve on the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities].

-Kevin Dawson, Parent

Partners showed me how I am impacted by the laws that provide for my son and the services that are out there, and how to take advantage of them. It gave me the confidence to advocate for his needs. When people know that I am a Partners in Policymaking grad, they listen to me. It gives me credibility. I also know the resources to go to that can assist me in advocating for my son and others. I better understand what motivates decisions that are made behind the scenes and am better able to work within the constructs.

-Heather Duvall, Parent

The timing of Partners was really good for me. I had a young son in the early years of education. [When he] got into the education system, it was like running into a brick wall. There was no willingness to take his disabilities into consideration. We were kept out of most decision making.

Partners helped me turn that around because it taught me to communicate effectively with the educators we were dealing with. It taught us what our rights were, what our son's rights were, that what we were asking [was] legitimate and shouldn't have been discounted. We were able to build a team of people that were advocates for Richard and, as a result of that, he had a very positive experience.

-Mary Martin, Parent

After graduating from Partners, I went on to advocacy on The Arc of Minnesota Board of Directors. I actually was President for four years as well as Governmental Affairs Chair. Then I went on to the Board of the Directors for The Arc United States. I spent eight years in leadership on the board and in public policy.

My daughter Jenna became a Partners graduate and is living life how she chooses. She has her own apartment and she works and is involved in choir. She is rejoining Advocating Change Together.

Together, Jenna and I have influenced local, state and national [disability policy issues]. We have testified in the U.S. Senate and have done considerable media, and testified in the House and Senate in Minnesota. So, I think that Jenna's story has been told throughout the land, but the most important thing is that she is independent and leading the life that she wants.

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-Cindy Johnson, Parent

The main thing is that I realized how many programs are out there for my daughter that she was not participating in and that she could use. But, I also realized the shortcomings of the programs that are out there. I also realized that inclusion is one of the toughest issues that the disability community faces every day.

-Jeff Pearson, Parent

Partners has given me a wealth of information, not only information about advocacy but also about disabilities in

general. I think it is important for people to understand the history and the steps that have been taken to make improvements, although we are nowhere near full inclusion and integration.

-Linda Brickley, Parent

I have two young adult sons with developmental disabilities. When they were in elementary school, I was confronted with the low expectations almost everyone had for them. I expected them to thrive like every other child. So what if they moved forward in their own way and at their own pace? I believed they could learn and have friends and live in our community if I could get the schools, the doctors, even the churches to not pre-judge them but get to know them and see the strengths I was seeing. I went through Partners in Policymaking and found out I was not alone!

Using the skills I learned in Partners in Policymaking, I taught many educators about my sons' strengths through which we taught them the general curriculum. I also taught them at home using their strengths.

Because my sons taught me many, many lessons about inclusion, independence and the dignity of risk, I published a book [called *How Big is the Fly? Asking the Right Questions*] that highlighted just a few of the journeys they continue on. Partners taught me all lives are important and EVERYONE has a talent to share and teach others!

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-Bonnie Jean Smith, Parent

[Partners] gives you the power and the tools to advocate and to make a change and a difference, not only for your child, but others as well.

-Tena Green, Parent

My son has a hearing impairment and was just going into grade school at the time [I attended] Partners. We were able to get him into a classroom that made changes to accommodate his disabilities and I was able to keep him off an ADHD medication. It made a huge impact to keep him in a normal setting and he has done very well.

-Mary Loreno, Parent

Initially, I learned a lot, because it took us through the history of how people with disabilities have been treated. We have come a long way, but the most important impact is how it taught me to be an advocate for my daughter. Even my daughter is advocating for herself and going down to the Capitol. I think when you have knowledge, you feel like you have the power to make a difference.

-Mary Kay Carlsen, Parent

We were able to [obtain] services for our daughter through the school district and the school had to provide physical therapy for her. I happen to be an early childhood teacher, so I know what is available for children. I have been able to advocate for them on their behalf because I have been through that process.

-Cindy Rogers, Parent

I graduated from Partners in Policymaking in 2001. I have been representing children with disabilities. I became a professional disability advocate after I graduated. I worked for PACER and represented The Arc Minnesota at the State Capitol and the Autism Society of Minnesota.

-Kim Kang, Parent

I enjoyed it. My daughter was going to Bagley where they had the multineeds room. I took her out and thought her life was more important. After a couple years, she wanted to go back to school, but she started having seizures and stayed home.

-Jacky Engebertson, Parent

Prior to my participation with the Partners in Policymaking course, I was not a very good advocate for my son, or others in the community, yet I was always frustrated with outcomes that were not beneficial for our son. His IEP was weak at best, he wasn't included in community events, etc. Taking this course first of all gave me a voice – to name it and claim it and not be embarrassed by his disabilities. I now look at inclusion as a way of life for our immediate family and everyone I come in contact with.

I am currently chairing the Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) for the Robbinsdale Area School district. We have energized and grown our group, becoming a positive force within the community, making certain that all students are included and achieving their goals. Our school district has recently adopted a technology plan. It is the goal of SEAC to see that, with greater uses of technology in the classroom, all students will be included in day-to-day activities, just working at their own pace with their teacher.

I have also been networking with Patrick Schwarz, international presenter, on what it means to have inclusion and success in the classroom. I am hoping to bring him to our local district to start working with the school administration on improving their understanding of inclusion. Educating the local public on the abilities of all students has become my [mission].

I am also working within our faith community as they are in the process of developing an inclusion ministry. I am fast becoming their subject matter expert. I don't always have all the answers but I have networked in the community, with PACER, the Mental Health Collaborative, and others. In doing so, I have become a voice in the community [others can] connect with in search of answers. My efforts are not very policy-focused, yet are making a real difference in changing the practice and attitudes of others when it comes to disabilities.

-Leesa Avila, Parent

I am no longer content to let decisions be made for my children by people who are 'experts.' I know now that I am the expert when it comes to my children who have disabilities. When I feel that there is something happening, in school or with county programs, that are limiting or adversely affecting my children, I let that entity know. I know how to research the topic, and reach out to policymakers on all levels that can help on our behalf. I reach out to other people who may be impacted by the policy/rule that I am researching to see if they too are having issues.

We gain power with our numbers, by making calls and writing letters until someone listens to us. I have the knowledge, skills, and perseverance to do this since graduating from Partners in Policymaking.

In our county recently, the financial department starting denying mileage reimbursements for my children who have disabilities to go to most of their doctor visits outside of the local service area. Our local service area only includes a small rural hospital with family practice physicians and a critical access hospital. My children's medical needs are so complex that they need to be treated in a Medical Home system under the care of a pediatrician who helps coordinate their specialists, medications, therapies, and medical equipment. The financial department didn't deem it necessary for them to have to be seen by their pediatrician and have [repeatedly] denied mileage reimbursements. I contacted the county without getting a return call. I contacted County Commissioners who promised to look in to it, but sided with the financial department. I got a letter from the financial department that she was doing her job fairly and that I should not contact the County Commissioners again. I got two other parents who are having the same issues to write letters and work on it from their angles.

-Jill Gebeck, Parent

It's hard to know what I would have done without it. It gave me more confidence. We sued Disneyworld because they would not provide us with interpreters. They were not following the ADA and we were successful. And, because of that, I wrote an article and we got in contact with other people that had similar problems.

-Barbara Boelter, Parent

Partners in Policymaking hooked me up with PACER. PACER helped me with my son when he was growing up and then they hired me for an advocate in southwestern Minnesota. Partners in Policymaking also hooked me up with other parents and resources.

-Marge Mann, Parent

Partners helped when I was getting our daughter put into a school that was more suited to her, and her growing up and her needs. It has gotten her out on her own, she has gotten an apartment, and it taught us how to get [the supports] she needed. She has been living in her apartment for ten years now.

-Barb Rousslang, Parent

My son had a stroke when he was one year old. We were told that his prognosis wasn't good. Through Partners, I learned more about advocacy. My son is 41 years old now and he has gone on to learn advocacy [skills] and has become an advocate for others.

Some of the students I work with who are going into special ed come to me to ask about advocacy in higher education for adults that are in college. Part of advocacy is teaching people that you are not alone, and it was something that I learned from having a child that had high needs. [This is especially important for families that have] become split because of someone with disabilities.

-Judy Olson, Parent

Partners has helped me in dealing with a lot of people that work in social services and taught me to be more forceful in speaking up and getting what my son needs. A lot of people don't have to deal with a young child with disabilities, and the connections with other moms and dads makes you realize you're not alone, because it can be lonely at times. It was one of the best things about the training.

-Monica Halloran, Parent

Before I went to the program, I was shy and didn't know how to ask if there was something my boy needed. The program taught me how to ask for things that he needed, especially in his school. Every time I see people with special needs, I feel that they are family. I am more sensitive to them.

-Delia Rodriguez, Parent

The program made me feel more empowered and encouraged me to encourage my daughter. She has created a Powerpoint [presentation] that she now presents at her annual meetings. I am on the Human Rights Commission for the city. My daughter goes on the radio and is in a play. I think she has had a really big impact. She participated in being an advocate for people who have died at the state hospitals and had no gravestone. I think it has really taught me how to be an advocate and taught my daughter how to have a voice.

-Laurie Austvold, Parent

Partners made me aware of the variety of services available. My son got a better education because I was able to articulate what I wanted for him. When he was in middle school, I pushed to get him in a special ed school because in the local school, he didn't feel like he fit in. Learning in a setting where other kids made the same goofy sounds as he did was a big factor. I wish I could go through [Partners] again, because when I first went through it my son was young. I don't think I got the full political impact that I think I would now. I used to be very quiet.

-Pam Isaacson, Parent

It helped me see my son, who was a child at the time I attended Partners, as a potential self advocate, rather than someone for whom I would be advocating all his life.

-Parent

I went through the program thirteen years ago. When I went to IEP meetings and people were telling me what to do, I was able to know what is best for my daughter. I think it is just fabulous how Partners empowers parents to know what is best, and is getting the word out a little more that we have rights. I fought to get computers in the classroom and now it's a normal thing.

Darleen Lindgren, Parent

The Partners in Policymaking program taught me a lot because before [Partners] people would not listen to me when I tried to fight for my daughter and her needs. The program has helped me to know how to be a good advocate for my daughter and get her the things she needs. I had a meeting with the IEP team, and told them that she has the right to a translator. I fought for a whole year and she is now going to have help from a person with sign language.

So far, I have become an advocate for my daughter and many others too. I have advocated for other kids in the community. I don't stop. I keep knocking on doors until someone listens to me. Before I would cry about it and say that no one cares for me and my daughter. Now I feel more confident.

-Xochil Flores, Parent

Multiple times throughout my career, I was working with children in the school district and would deal with school leaders that were unwilling to accommodate children with disabilities. Sometimes it was just reminding teachers that there were children with disabilities in the classroom, and I would advocate to have certain things changed for them.

Partners broadened my daughter's scope of understanding. She had never met anyone else that had autism, and she met a young man that wrote books about it and has kept up a relationship with him. It has been good for her to connect with someone that has the same traits.

-Jonathon Ebacher, Parent

When our son was alive he had very severe disabilities. I did a lot of letter writing to Congress to not cut funding for PCA programs. We always lived in fear that we would lose funding and not be able to keep our son at home. It was only when the TEFRA program was passed that Jason was released from the hospital and able to go home. We even got a nice letter from Paul Wellstone that we have framed now and also one from Jesse Ventura. We got one from Billy Graham.

Also because of the letter writing, I got to meet some pretty high up people like the head of foster care. We now

have adopted five children with some sort of disability. The Partners program

came at a really good time for us when

we needed help.

-Patricia Hoeffling, Parent

Partners broadened my horizons about how many disabilities are out there. There are so many different kinds of disabilities and ways we can help.

-Donovan Sargent, Parent

The biffest impact of Partners was on my ability to advocate at the national and state levels. Partners fave me confidence and knowledge.

-Debra Niedfeldt, Parent

Partners gave me better tools to help me support my son. We started a Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) in the school district so parents and teachers can collaborate and be on the same page.

-Parent

Partners made me more knowledgeable about my son's rights within the school system. It made me more aware of support agencies in Minnesota.

-Jackie Ghylin, Parent

It certainly empowered us and let us know what to ask for.

-Parent

Thanks to Partners, I have been able to advocate for my daughter in circumstances when she can't. I have been trying to support and teach her to advocate for herself. I am there as a back-up when she can't. I am trying to get her to get her own voice.

-Shannon Ehlers, Parent

It was a phenomenal program. Partners came at a good time in our life. It gave me insight in how to deal with my daughter and her inclusion in school. Our daughter was actually the first in her school to graduate in inclusion with her class. It made us more aware. A couple of times we went to the Capitol to support a bill. The Partners program prepared us for what expect.

-Luann Panning, Parent

[Partners helped me work] with her IEP team through grade school to graduation.

-Victoria Walsh, Parent

I have become a more effective advocate for my child and I am helping to teach others to also be effective advocates. I have also become a better advocate for my mother who just had her fourth major surgery in a year.

-Carmen Gretton, Parent I don't think that there is just one story. I use what I learned in Partners everyday in my life. I use it as an advocate for my children and in my job. I work for a community support program with people who have developmental issues. In my job, I started a political advocacy program. We participate "on the hill." I referred a coworker to Partners in Policymaking and she graduated last year. I'm trying to teach our member clients to be self advocates in the community.

-Maggie Griffitt, Parent

I was in the first year and we lobbied in Washington D.C. I changed my political affiliation from Republican to Democrat and that was a big thing. Hastings gave up a room for research for kids with disabilities. Partners has affected every aspect of every living situation she was in and helped me to advocate better for her. It was a very big thing for us. I went to a meeting not too long ago and nobody could believe there was someone from Year One there. I learned you can set out to do something that may have seemed too difficult to do.

-Parent

I have two sons who have disabilities. By the time I went to Partners in Policymaking, I had started out on our local [ARC]. That's where I first learned about advocacy. I had heard a lot of good things about the Partners program. It wasn't necessarily that I learned a lot but it was helpful. The Partners program had excellent instructors. I visited a Foundation and I got to hear from some really important movers and shakers that I would have never had the chance to hear otherwise. It was a good collaboration of support.

-Lee Ann Erickson, Parent

Partners helped us to be aware of the resources that are available, like how to qualify for SSI and how to advocate for students with their Individual Education Programs (IEPs) at school. At school, if a [parent] knows the resources, they are able to inform the teachers and help teachers and other parents utilize them.

-Diane Sukalski, Parent

It taught me how to advocate for my daughter and it empowered me to get the resources she needed. She is now in school in regular classes. She gets to be with her peers, and she is not looked at differently because of her disabilities. Partners showed us that she has an equal chance to succeed. I was able to know how to speak for my daughter and how we can talk to the school. She is [really] blossoming. It was an awesome experience and, when she gets old enough, I would like her to go through the program, so she can know where to look for resources to help her. Partners in Policymaking was awesome.

-Hallie Hayes, Parent

Partners has helped us to navigate the education system and get the needs of our son met. It opened our eyes to the possibilities of the life our son can live. I don't think he would be in the same place if it were not for us going through the program.

-Kris Schulze, Parent

I did [Partners] because we have a son [with autism]. We learned how to find services and how to advocate for him. I went into disability services myself, and worked in a group home and as a professional guardian.

-Richard Roy, Parent

Since my graduation, I have been selected to serve on many state committees. I've testified at legislative committees at the state level for increased funding for state disability services.

-Melissa Winger, Parent

My son is now 32 years old, and has Down Syndrome. It was really important that our son remain in our home school district. By participating in the Partners program, I learned how to facilitate discussions on what we wanted for our son. There was a speaker that taught us that you can influence the people you sit by, so I would always go sit by the Superintendent. Sometimes the meetings with the school district were very emotional and, while trying to integrate my son into the classroom, we often butted heads with teachers. But many realized that they could do more than they thought and realized they had more to offer.

Eric's thirteen years at school were very good and the kids accepted him and he would go to sporting events. Even into high school, when the gap was getting pretty wide in some subjects, the integration specialist came and helped him and the teachers.

We also had sessions about meeting with legislators and how to get your message across, so that was very important. It was also fun to get together with other parents with kids with disabilities. The camaraderie was fun. I think Partners in Policymaking was a good thing. I think I was in [Class 2]. I am just thankful that my son is healthy and happy and very independent.

-Lorie Zoeller, Parent

Partners gave us access to support within the community. It promoted inclusion within the educational system. It's one of the best programs that the government offers and is one of the best uses of tax dollars I have seen in two decades.

-Susan Freeberg, Parent

Partners helped me tremendously in navigating the school system. I learned how to advocate to keep him in the classroom as much as possible. I learned my rights and led his IEP meeting rather than being a passive participant. It has helped me be a resource for other parents, especially for IEP meetings. It also led me to sit on the board of our local Arc chapter.

-Shelly Venenga, Parent

It helped me connect with and understand what resources are available to us.

-Lisa Emmert, Parent

My advocacy for my son's education has greatly improved. I learned that I had the right to decide what was best for him when it came to his education. He was able to get into a mainstream classroom for some parts of his education.

-Barb Tooze, Parent

I gained a lot of confidence in my ability to advocate for change for people with disabilities. I attended public forums to support legislation that was about to be acted on.

-Leah Corcoran, Parent

I think the group pulls together resources and [allows participants] to make connections. After being in the class, I e-mailed Partners and they gave me great ideas to start the process for developing resources at the county level, like provider services.

-Michelle Albeck, Parent

Our son had severe disabilities and cried in school all day. We tried him in a regular classroom in fourth grade in his local school. We met with the school administration and they had lots of arguments regarding why he should not go there. I was able to advocate for him and they said they would be willing to try it with a classroom assistant and a willing teacher. It worked and he was in regular classes the rest of his life. He passed away in 1995.

-Lynne Frigaard, Parent

I wish I had known about the program when my child was very young because I would have placed my child into regular classes when he was younger. I am starting a new policy and advisory panel for the state of Minnesota. The program has given me a voice. My husband has also graduated from the Partners program.

-Leslie Sieleni, Parent

I was able to practice speaking at the class. I learned ways to gather my thoughts before speaking so I am ready to talk to my self-advocacy group, legislators and others and make my point understood. I joined ACT and

am currently serving as a Board member. I have gone to the Capitol with support from support people.

-David Belcourt, Self Advocate

Partners has made me become a much better self advocate as far as health issues, work issues and housing issues. It has really opened up things for my health in terms of getting certain treatments that were going to be the best for me.

-Self Advocate

I got a degree in human services after I went to the training. I work with people that have mental disabilities. Many of them are homeless and have criminal backgrounds. I find that when I go and lobby at the Legislature, I want to empower people with disabilities to become independent – that is my mantra. Partners gave me the opportunity to become a person with a voice. I also have been to Washington to spread my mantra. I think it's important to learn to be diplomatic with

legislators that share your passion to get them to pass a bill. There are some legislators that feel they are throwing money down a sinkhole. I have found I have been able to convince them that they are getting a bang for their buck. I can speak very eloquently about that and have been very successful at getting those who voted "no" to vote "yes."

Mental illness does not equate to incompetency or irresponsibility. Those that believe that make those that have mental illness feel like outcasts in society. That's why I love my job. I find people that want to work, and motivated people that want to change and help them find a job. I am so proud of them.

-Lisa Borucki-Vukelic, Parent

Partners has allowed me to speak up for myself and become a better advocate for myself, as well as helped me to know my rights.

-Self Advocate

that happened to my life. It changed me and my life completely. It empowered me, it uplifted me, it taught me so many things that I cannot even list all those things. Actually, it transformed me into a confident, insistent, proud mother and fierce advocate for people with disabilities. The Partners weekend became my oasis, retreat, life lesson, training, adventure and enlightenment all rolled into one.

When my daughter was born and had problems after a few months, we went from place to place. We did not have any specific name or diagnosis

I found out about Partners when my daughter with profound disabilities

was almost 12 years old. I think that Partners was one of the best things

When my daughter was born and had problems after a few months, we went from place to place. We did not have any specific name or diagnosis for her problem. There was no hope. Doctors told us she would not amount to anything. We were told to put her in the institution and forget about her and that she wouldn't live past one year. We did not heed that advice. We brought her home and started to explore how we could help her. We tried the newest therapies, newest available treatments.

But when I joined Partners, my whole world changed. I began to look at her in a different perspective. I used to value her life but I was still selling her short. I did not recognize her full potential. I thought she couldn't understand many of the things but once I realized how she can enjoy life, we took her to Florida to Disneyworld. Even her teacher thought we were brave.

But once we set on our trip, my daughter pleasantly surprised us. Not only did she enjoy the entire trip but she was so happy. She behaved appropriately. It was an eye opener for us. We realized her potential. We started taking her horseback riding, swimming, many places. She bloomed into a beautiful flower. Even though she needs help with all daily life activities, her understanding has increased. She is no longer just a passive, non-responsive girl anymore. She is a vibrant, smiling, full of life girl. If I had not done Partners, I wouldn't be the person who I am today. I am serving on many committees, councils and boards.

-Rijuta Pathre, Parent

Mostly it was a bunch of policymaking information that we needed.

-Self Advocate

The biggest impact Partners had on me was being able to see where I could help the child in my care have the best advantages, so that she had every opportunity to progress or excel. Any parent or childcare provider [for children with disabilities] should take Partners.

-Laurie Thompson, Self Advocate

Without this advocacy training, I would not be able to help [my son] as much as I can now.

-Jill Pearson, Parent

Partners did a lot for my life. I learned about how I could help people and stand up for myself. Nowadays, people don't stand up for themselves and then they can be taken advantage of.

-Self Advocate

I am a special ed teacher and I have seen people grow because of my advocacy. I have spoken in support of a few laws to get them changed to benefit people with disabilities. I was going to be let go from work and I was able to advocate for myself to help keep my own job.

-Parent

I was born with cerebral palsy and I have severe dyslexia. Despite these challenges I graduated with a bachelor's [degree] in social work and then attended Partners in Policymaking. After attending the program, I got a job as a childcare provider for the YMCA. At the time, I felt like Partners in Policymaking was part of that success because I gained confidence and self-acceptance through the program.

After a while I went on to attend graduate school at the University of Minnesota and received a Masters of Social Work in 2010. I am still not gainfully employed and not sure how to get to that step. However, I have my social work license (LGSW) and I volunteer at a disability organization where I recommend Partners in Policymaking to many people. I'm at a stage in my life where I almost feel like I wish I could retake the course.

-Self Advocate

I make my own decisions. If I want to move, I can move; and if I want to go out of town, I can go out of town.

-Self Advocate

I have always been an advocate for myself and kids. Partners in Policymaking gave me more information to become a better advocate. I now serve as Co-Chair of the Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) for the St. Paul Public Schools, and I don't think I would have done that if it weren't for the Partners program. I think it encouraged me to do it. It gave me the opportunity to see I could do more than just attend a meeting.

-Lynn Shellenberger, Parent

I did a few workshops in my community and worked in my school district in special education. I participated equally with the teachers at my son's IEP meetings.

-Parent

I feel like I made a change in the school system. I took charge of a meeting. If I had an issue, I knew how to call my forces and bring up the issue. I came prepared and knew how to dress and sit at the table. I knew how to stand up to authority. All of the kids

benefited. I wish I had known about Partners in Policymaking earlier.

-Parent

I have been a long-time advocate for people who have physical and emotional disabilities. Partners in Policymaking has enhanced my abilities to be a better advocate.

-Self Advocate

It has helped me to deal with my disabilities.

-Self Advocate

Partners made me a much better advocate for my children and for my students when I was a teacher. It made me a better leader for rights for people with disabilities.

I got to meet adults and children and parents with disabilities. I learned to advocate for myself. I went by myself.

-Self Advocate

I got to travel and advocate to help people with disabilities in Washington, D.C, Baltimore and Philadelphia. Partners also has helped me to lobby on a couple of bills and bring positions for other policy groups to the legislature.

-Self Advocate

It was a great experience and I learned a lot. I can advocate for my daughter better because of Partners.

-Parent

I learned a lot about the way people with disabilities were treated and the laws. It was an intense experience. I have been disabled since I was 16 and have been around people who also have disabilities. Some people that I met there I still stay in contact with today. I also continue to keep up with what is happening in the legislature, and I contact my own legislators concerning bills.

-Self Advocate

Partners has helped me to not be afraid of speaking up, with letter writing, and [working with] school officials. These things have been very helpful. I have recommended several people to apply for Partners and they have been accepted.

-Parent

I have been an ongoing advocate for my son at his school and am in the process of implementing a transition program for children [with disabilities] ages 18-21. I am a member of the Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) for the school district.

-Parent

I think Partners made me more aware of what was available for students with autism. It also gave us the ability to get our daughter involved in the community and advance her to college. Also, Partners taught us how to work with schools. I think that Partners in Policymaking gave me the information I needed to advocate for her.

-Parent

My daughter is on the high school swim team. She has Down Syndrome. Participating in Partners helped us advocate for her with county and other professionals, as well as the schools.

-Parent

I feel like I have more power [since graduating from Partners]. I have more confidence in making decisions and holding people accountable when it comes to my child's IEP at school. I have the confidence to speak my mind and stand up for what is right. I have taken over leadership roles in two different groups in the community and state. I realize I am a voice of reason and I should share it.

-Parent

We've been able to advocate and persist through a couple iterations of the IEP process, until we are comfortable.

-Parent

Partners educated me on the different laws and made me more comfortable talking with legislators.

-Parent

It encouraged me to contact legislators. I contacted them several times.

My son was young when I attended Partners. It helped me with issues in school, educational issues and medical issues. If I knew that he wasn't receiving the services he needed, then I knew what avenue to take to get those resources.

-Parent

I was an employment counselor with a BA. [My experience with Partners] encouraged me to take [more] classes. I worked as a rehabilitation counselor for 15 years for the state of Minnesota.

-Parent

Partners made it a lot easier when my son was in school. My son was the first one to be integrated fully into the class. We opened the door to others. Now everyone is in the classroom and not sitting in special ed anymore.

-Parent

After taking the Partners in Policymaking class I feel like I am better equipped in regards to my son's lifelong learning, and his right to a free and appropriate education. Partners gave me the information to go to my county worker. It gave him access to services. The presenters helped me understand the ability and potential for employment for all people. Partners has helped me to help other parents understand these things and point them in the right direction for services.

To be able to access free and appropriate education is a policy that is afforded to all people regardless of their disability. When I talk to other families, I tell them about access to services, access to education, access to employment, access to housing, access to county services that they might qualify for and how to become advocates for their own children.

-Parent

About five years ago, my husband's walking became pretty bad and I had to be on the doctors to fill out the papers to get him a power wheelchair. The lady from the store said the doctor hadn't filled out the paperwork. We went down to his office and told him to get it done. He filled them out wrong and went on vacation. Finally we got the wheelchair in September, I [didn't] like to be on them all the time but I had to be.

-Parent

Partners instilled confidence that we could handle the situation within the family with the support systems that are in place, such as school-based physical therapies, IEPs, and knowing that the medical professionals were knowledgeable about disabilities.

-Parent

Partners in Policymaking has given me the information, tools, and courage to take a firm stand to advocate for my daughter and the lifestyle she deserves to have and live. Before taking the training, I felt at a loss most of the time about what was right for me to expect of others so I could help my daughter to have the opportunities tha every typical child has.

Partners in Policymaking has given me the strength to stand up and advocate for my child's rights as an equal person in society, and it has made me more aware of the laws and rights of all people. This has helped me to become more involved and I am now a member of our local Special Education Advisory Council for my school district.

-Parent

I learned more ways to help my daughter, such as how she could be more included in school.

Shortly after I graduated from Partners, the school superintendent switched my son's program so he would stay at the elementary school instead of going to the middle school. I said it was illegal and they were going to bring it up to the board. My son did end up going to the middle school and they magically had a perfect room. It wasn't going to cost the school district anything.

-Parent

Our son has autism. I used the Partners experience to get on the school board. I was on a cooperative school board and I got each school to [include children with disabilities]. I think there has been a lot of progress in the schools. I ran for County Commissioner, but then I got disillusioned. But for the three years I was there, we made a lot of progress. I used my Partners experience to get on the inside and work from the inside out to dictate policies.

-Parent

I was already in leadership positions when I took Partners, but I think it definitely made me willing to step up and take a leadership role in this process. Understanding the history of disability and looking at what it what it was like and seeing the pictures of what it was like in the facilities gave me a whole different perspective. I don't ever want to go back to that. I would never want to see my son in an institution like that. If people don't see the history, people could get complacent and things could slide back to the way they were.

Partners helped me understand that disability rights are the same as other civil rights and how they are related. Partners also helps you realize things like how much people have fought to have the right to vote, and how it is important to fight for the right to get children with disabilities the right to have the same access to public schools.

-Parent

Our son's disability was very severe. He had no way to speak for himself. I knew that he had something to contribute to the world and he couldn't do it without someone speaking on his behalf and that person was me. Since 1995, I have been working with families with disabilities. Since I retired, I have been involved with the Windmill Project. I am on the board of directors. It is a small nonprofit organization trying to survive. It included young children and then expanded to serve parents whose children were

in school and then expanded

to include adults with disabilities.

It was important to help people with disabilities to find their voice. If they need to be heard and they can't speak, they still deserve to be heard by others like myself. For this society to be successful, it's not how much money we make or what we sell. It's about human dignity and worth. People have to discover that dignity and worth. It doesn't

-Parent

My son is school age. [Partners showed me] how to work with the school system.

matter what the disability is.

-Parent

Partners taught me how to testify in front of House and Senate meetings pertaining to special education and other issues important to persons with disabilities. In addition, Partners taught me how to advocate for my son with autistic differences. Because of these advocacy skills, I was able obtain the necessary services he needed to be accepted at school. He graduated from high school in a full inclusion education program. He graduated with a 3.5 grade point average and graduated from college and is now successfully employed in the community.

-Parent

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I have a daughter who was diagnosed with severe developmental delays when she was two years old. After that, we found that she was deaf. Partners helped me find resources for my daughter in school and in the community.

-Parent

My daughter was 12 when I attended Partners. They gave preference to parents with young children, so I felt grateful. I think if the program had been available when my daughter was younger, I wouldn't have had the energy to do it. The program gave me a sense of hope, helped me understand how things were in Minnesota and how the laws have changed things for people in institutions. I was able to use the skills I learned to be an advocate for my daughter.

In my professional life, I was a parole officer, so my advocacy spread countywide and I was able to use the training in my professional life. I also did training for probation officers on the laws that allow kids with special needs to get the most from what is available to make their life less restrictive.

I took on some cases that were considered criminal because of someone's behavior and I was able to get these cases turned into a social service case. In the past, there have been cases where people with disabilities were put into jail when they shouldn't have been. It's a ripple effect, and I think it all started with Partners in Policymaking. The training helped me develop a skill set. It gave me the sense that I could have an impact.

-Parent

My daughter is the one with disabilities. She is now 25 and has graduated from the Partners program herself. It is something that gives people a lot of hope. I think Partners showed there is a team, that it isn't just SSI or the government. Partners definitely fills a need. I really enjoyed it and the people I met. I would like to come back as a speaker. My daughter has a beautiful voice and she sang at her Partners graduation.

-Parent

Partners made me more aware of the laws for people with disabilities. I got on the local school board because of the program.

-Parent

Partners has helped me professionally to become an advocate for parents and children with disabilities. I was able to find the correct resources for parents to use.

-Parent

I was able to advocate for my daughter to go to college. It also helped me with her mental illness and I was able to advocate for that. That is a very underserved population and I would like the Governor to work on that.

-Parent

Partners helped me to be a better advocate and plan for my son's future. From kindergarten through transition, I advocated for him. I enrolled him in a charter school. I think I did a good job advocating for him. I enrolled him in high school and it didn't work out. I enrolled him in the 916 Program with the help of a case manager. I was looking for the thing that was the best for him instead of what the district said. We bought a townhouse to ensure his stability. When my son was 20, he moved into the townhouse and attends [a day program]. He is there now and lives in the townhouse with a service provider.

-Parent

I took the class because my son has ADD. I learned from the program that the school district wasn't following the procedures for a child with ADD. They did not give me any options. He did graduate but the school didn't follow any of his plans. I used this knowledge to help other kids.

-Parent

Partners reaffirmed what I already knew.

I learned how to advocate more effectively for my son with his PCA.

-Parent

Partners taught me to be an ongoing advocate for my son. He is now an adult and is working with the legislature.

-Parent

The information I gained from the Partners in Policymaking training has given me the confidence to be a no-nonsense advocate for our adopted son. It does indeed take a village to properly support a person with disabilities but not everyone in our world understands that...I appreciate having learned the importance of forming an interdisciplinary team.

-Parent

I learned to speak out in an IEP session and not let them get away with it. I also learned to teach my kids to advocate for themselves.

-Parent and Self Advocate

Partners taught me how to be an advocate [for my son] and about his educational rights. School inclusion greatly improved and communication with teachers and staff was a lot better.

-Parent

Partners gave me knowledge of what's happening out there so I was able to become a better advocate for my son.

-Parent

Partners has impacted my life because I am not afraid to advocate for myself or my kids and I know how to advocate for them. Before, it was like "tiger mama." I've learned a lot about how to advocate and how to handle people that are not willing to grant my kids their rights. We chose a charter school for our kids and the public school that we had them in told us that our son would never pass the Reading or Writing Test in 5th Grade. They knew he would pass the Math test. We decided to change schools and our children were totally included.

-Parent

Partners taught me to advocate for my daughter. When we had her IEP meetings, I was more knowledgeable about what I could ask for. I was able to secure services for my daughter that I might not have known about. She was probably the first one at the school to always have a paraprofessional with her. As a result, my daughter was able to attend mainstream classes at least part of the day.

APPENDIX B IMPACT OF OF THE ADA

In 2014, MarketResponse International conducted a survey of Minnesota Partners in Policymaking® graduates to learn how the Partners program has impacted their lives, as well as their level of inclusion in the community as a result of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Following are the personal stories and testimonials of graduates related to the impact of the ADA. Some graduates who responded to the survey asked to remain anonymous. We have honored their request by identifying them simply as a "Self Advocate" or "Parent."

I graduated from the Minneapolis Drafting School after I moved to the Twin Cities from Grand Rapids, Minnesota. Subsidized housing for people with disabilities was just being made available and I was able to get school tuition help from Minnesota Rehab programs at the time. After I graduated from Drafting School, I had numerous interviews for jobs and two out of every three locations did not have accessible entrances. After I received my Mechanical Engineering degree and was able to interview at numerous job locations throughout the cities, every location was accessible to me.

When I accepted my first engineering job at Honeywell, I was asked if I would join a Honeywell Corporate Access group in order to make all facilities for Honeywell accessible by the year 2000. Corporations were listening and used the ADA to hire people with disabilities and their talents to diversify their employee populations and improve their physical facilities for accessibility to seek talented prospects for their companies.

-Kurt Greniger, Self Advocate

The ADA has taught me to stand up for who I want to be, and tell people my likes and dislikes. I can tell people that it has made a big difference in the American way of life. They fixed all the public transportation in my community.

-Julie Seys, Self Advocate

I am working at
Opportunity Partners and
I work with people with
disabilities Monday thru
Friday. I work 9 am to 3:10
and I get home at 3:40. I
talk to the people on the
Metro Mobility van. I don't

think of them as [people with disabilities] but as my friends.

-Carla Chura, Self Advocate

Metro Mobility is a transportation system that allows me to independently go out into the community. This is important to me because I strive for independence and to be able to do what I want or need to do. It is not perfect, but it is a great system that allows people with disabilities to have independent lives!

-Ashley Bailey, Self Advocate

bility van. I don't

I believe the ADA has helped me with my housing, my job, my medical care and my life all around. Sometimes I come up [against] a whole lot of roadblocks. I am asking them to give me the services that I know I am due. I just want services I know I qualify for and I know they want to say "no" but they can also say "yes." I have had to fight for my housing. I do not like it when people try to take advantage of me and they have tried to put me out of my home. I appreciate the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. I learned a whole lot of stuff from the Council about human rights. The ADA has helped me in my life and I shared this with people. I have had to use it many times, and it has done a lot of good.

-Ada Rene Townsend, Self Advocate

I believe [the ADA] has helped me to be able to become a graduate of the University of Minnesota through programs available through Disability Services. They provided a voice activation [program] that read both textbooks and documents. It also introduced me to other programs, such as Learning Ally, a prerecording of various types of literature. I was also allowed the option to receive extended time for testing and exams. I was also allowed to have a note taker during the tests or exams.

-Jessica Abson, Self Advocate

I know that in many of the places that I go, I see that the ADA has done something there. Even the smallest things make a difference, like having accessible doors in different apartments. I could fill out something and have someone come in and fix the apartment. I am now currently living in accessible housing. Before, someone was able to come in and make some minor changes that I would need and that was through the ADA.

-Mary May, Self Advocate

I have a brain injury and I think a lot more people understand about that. The ADA is assisting people with brain injuries and opening people's eyes and educating people that we are in the community.

-Allie O'Muircheartaigh, Self Advocate

I wound up getting the chance to work at the Social Security office in St Paul as an unpaid intern. I was working 20 hours a week beginning September 16, 2013. I started as four-month summer help for a front clerk development position on June 16, 2014, and then it was the last week of September 2014 when I started my one-year summer help extension. I've made a lot of new friends during this time and people are retiring and getting fired and transferring from one office to another. I hope to get fully hired because I am a perfect pick. I work with people with and without disabilities.

-Roberta Blomster, Self Advocate

I went through the Olmstead Academy and it changed my life. I graduated with 21 people with disabilities and our mentors. It helped me to see the good [aspects] of the ADA. It helped me to see the bigger picture and to be a better advocate for people with disabilities. It has also helped me [learn how] to get what I want, which is to be included in the community like everyone else, to be with all my friends and boyfriend and others and to not feel secluded. Regardless if you have a mental or physical disability, we all need to be included.

-Rosemary Hanson, Self Advocate

Without the law, a lot of the institutions where they used to send people with disabilities would still be around. People with disabilities are able to live with other people in the community.

-Jeremy Tyler, Self Advocate

I believe that the community has been awakened and they listen to people's requests and they understand how to be compliant. In front of my house, I never had a curb cut. I asked the city of Minneapolis to do that so I could easily get to my house. They agreed and put one in front of my house.

-Mark Eggen, Self Advocate

I recently went on a trip to Florida and needed help getting from one gate to another at the airport. I was able to reach my gate on time because they had carts available to take me to the next gate. I don't think I would have had the chance to go on the trip if it was not for the ADA because accessibility would not have been what it is.

-Robbie Reedy, Self Advocate

[The biggest impact the ADA has had on me are] all of the things that are accessible to me out in the community.

-Raquel Jensen, Self Advocate

My experience with the ADA is that I believe they are doing whatever it takes to take care of people with disabilities. The ADA is making an impact on humanity. I am really amazed with what they are doing.

-Andrew Nightengale, Self Advocate

If you think back to when the ADA was not in place, people with disabilities did not have the opportunities they have in society today. My son is seven and his education is important. But I think the level of effort toward kids with disabilities could be better. People get frustrated and give up sometimes.

-Ticiea Fletcher, Self Advocate

The ADA has created

easier access. My

mother had knee

aware of how many

doors and curbs were

made for wheelchairs.

-Ben Twogood, Parent

The ADA has allowed me to put [my daughter] in advocacy programs right away. She was in a regular program for the most part, except for times when she had to go to speech therapy. Other than that, she was included in the regular curriculum. They would design specific educational programs for her at each grade level. It was a very enriching experience.

-Angella Khan, Parent

[The ADA helped] me to understand the rights that people with disabilities have in their communities. It also helps me to better inform parents and other people with disabilities to understand their rights in the community, the workplace and living conditions.

-Leah Sletten, Parent

I travel extensively with my son who uses a wheelchair. I think we take for granted how accessible things are in the United States since the ADA was implemented. However, I think there are improvements that can be made

because what is deemed to be accessible often is not.

-Heather Duvall, Parent

In 2010, I came to the United States and I didn't know any information. The ADA has helped us to understand where to go and who to talk to if I need something.

-Fardosa Ibrahim, Parent

My boys' options for future employment have exploded. They have an opportunity to be a part of the larger community.

-Maria Tripeny, Parent

I believe [the ADA] has helped me out with transportation, especially to get to work, since 1997.

-Linda Obright, Self Advocate.

Within the city I used to live in, I was a part of encouraging [accessibility for people with disabilities.] I advocated for citywide accessible sidewalks and they did it.

-Kevin Dawson, Parent

One story I recall is that the salon wasn't accessible when my daughter went to get her nails done. Another instance is when people take an accessible parking place when they shouldn't. My daughter knows that is not OK and I helped her file a complaint with the Human Rights Commission. That would not have happened before the ADA. Because she is a Partners graduate herself and follows my footsteps, she speaks up and advocates for herself.

-Cindy Johnson, Parent

The ADA has given me optimism that [my son's] quality of life will be better as he gets older.

-Linda Brickley, Parent

My son was fully included in elementary, middle and high school. I think that he would have been isolated in a special ed room without the ADA.

-Stephen Kelash, Parent

My son uses technology for communication. It keeps him safe while he is out in the community.

-Bonnie Jean Smith, Parent

I often travel to Boston with a family member who [uses] a motorized wheelchair. During one of our visits, we stopped at a subway station that was under construction. When we realized there wasn't an elevator to get us to street level, there was panic and fear for the person with disabilities. I then sought out the Port Authority. This individual first apologized for the state of the station, then waited until the next train came. He personally took the train out of service while we re-boarded. We then were taken on a short ride and dropped off on the other side of the track where there was an elevator. This subway station was having elevators installed during the time of our visit.

This was truly the ADA in action. Needless to say, on our next visit to Boston a few months later, the station was done. Our family member was surprised when we were able to get to our final destination with ease. I realized that although the City of Boston is extremely old, it was undertaking important changes to keep up with public need.

-Leesa Avila, Parent

When we were down inside of a mine, they had recently put in an elevator so my brother [who has disabilities] was able to go down into the mine. They have curb cuts so wheelchairs can go up them and I believe that there are more accessible parking spaces available for people now. At the Universities, I think they are doing a better job of making the facilities more accessible for people. Also, the staff is more accommodating so my daughter was able to have changes made to make things easier for her.

-Cindy Rogers, Parent

My daughter has a disability and uses a wheelchair. She can access community recreation centers and libraries and the schools are accessible. They are all ADA-driven things.

-Kim Kang, Parent

Our local theatre has caption glasses. I still think [the effects of the ADA] are quite limited. You have to pick and choose where you go because not every place that you go is accessible. I think there needs to be more education about the ADA. Lunderstand that from a small business standpoint it is expensive but some people still don't comply. Like when my daughter goes to the doctor, they don't always provide interpreters and they expect me to do that. But if I have to interpret everything for her, it is difficult for me to listen and communicate with the doctor.

-Barbara Boelter, Parent

My son was the first child with his level of disability [in our local school] at the time, and he was able to stay in his school with his big brother. It made my life a lot easier instead of having to drive thirty miles to another school. I'm sure it didn't make it easier for the teachers, but it really helped us.

At my work, they are changing the bathrooms to make them more accessible. I think at first people complained about having to change things because it was the law. But now it has had a trickledown effect. People think more about accommodating people with disabilities. [Society] is more accepting.

-Monica Halloran, Parent

Years ago, children with disabilities had to stay home from school and they would send someone to the child's home. Now the school has to have them included. Even in public places like restaurants, they have special chairs for the kids with disabilities. It seems that the kids are able to be included in public places more than they were before.

-Delia Rodriguez Reyes, Parent

with her and let

-Barb Rousslang, Parent

The ADA is the reason for all the programs my daughter has.

-Robert Martinsen, Parent

I don't think I have ever visited a place that was not accessible, so he is able to go almost anywhere in a wheelchair. I can remember going to stores when he was young and having to hold the door everywhere. Now, you don't even need to push a button in many places. Years ago, the city built a nice park but the entrance to the park had

In my daughter's case, I can say I feel that before the ADA, I tried to get my daughter included in things at school but it didn't work. Now I feel she is included. Now they know she has disabilities and whatever activities I want [her to participate in], they include my daughter with the other kids.

-Xochil Flores, Parent

no curb cut, so my mom called the city. They were nice about it and they put in a curb cut. All the bikers loved it because they could ride their bikes up it, so [the ADA] benefits everybody.

-Pam Isaacson, Parent

I was one of the people responsible for getting people out of state hospitals and into homes because there was such a small amount of housing available for people coming out of [state] hospitals. There was less of that after the ADA because it was publicly understood. More frequently, people were even coming to the hospitals and introducing themselves. Because people with disabilities are becoming more accepted, I think there have been a lot of improvements in society with people with disabilities being looked at as peers rather then segregating them.

-Jonathon Ebacher, Parent

My son is in a [regular] classroom with his peers. Honestly, I think this helps everyone. They love him and get to see not just his disability but his strengths also. We are in the process of getting him a service dog to help him, which he can now bring to school and other places, including hotels. This is going to help us in so many ways.

-Carmen Gretton, Parent

My son is able to be an active member of the community by attending accessible public spaces like zoos and parks, and go on family vacations.

-Jackie Ghylin, Parent

Our daughter has Down Syndrome. Through all of her education, social services and community programs, she has been given opportunities to experience different jobs in the community. On her graduation from high school, [thanks to] her community exposures, someone came to her and offered her a job. She had [participated in] a school program where they had job sampling. The General Manager [at a local hotel] interacted with the students from her class and he decided that our daughter would be a good fit for breakfast hostess.

They have trained her to do the entire job. She helps cook the food, bring it out, interacts with the guests and does the cleanup. They also have allowed her to personalize the job. She makes her own greeting cards and adds candy to them to pass out to the guests. That gives her a positive reason to interact with the guests. She also makes her own aprons at home to wear to work. It's so heartwarming.

We do have people in the community looking for people with disabilities to work. When it came to her job interview, it was [primarily] about how they could make our daughter comfortable in the job. They wanted to make it fit and work for her. She is going on her third year of working there.

-Diane Sukalski, Parent

When I twisted my knee and went to the doctor, I would not have been able to step out from my car and onto the curb if it weren't for the curb cuts. I was able to access the building. The curb cuts really helped. Another place where I think the ADA has had a lot of impact are churches. They are not required to comply with the ADA but a lot of them do. The ADA makes people aware of the things that need to happen. I think we have made a lot of progress.

-Lee Ann Erickson, Parent

Without the ADA, my daughter would have been placed in a [segregated] classroom. It wouldn't have been a good situation. Because of the ADA, she was able to learn in a regular classroom and she was able to see kids that could walk normally. It influenced her to try harder. She has gotten involved in so many more activities. [Inclusion makes] people rethink how they see kids with disabilities. The ADA forced people to come up with ideas, to think outside the box and come up with activities. It is awesome for my daughter to see that no one is perfect, even if they look that way on the outside.

-Hallie Hayes, Parent

I think we feel more comfortable than we used to. It's changing. People with disabilities are able to be out there more and more.

-Parent

All new construction is now accessible because of the ADA. Even little things [are better], like restaurants with high tables also have to [have low ones for] people who use wheelchairs.

-Richard Roy, Parent

I am in involved in community theatre and plays. The community theatre is willing to accommodate [my needs]. I am also taking college classes that are for people with and without disabilities. It's a mix. It's the same with community theatre.

-Self Advocate

For me, the biggest impact of the ADA is awareness. In general, people are more aware and accepting of all the changes. Inclusion has become more commonplace, regardless of someone's abilities. Accessibility has been huge. It has improved in our area especially in the last 10 years.

-Shelly Venenga, Parent

The businesses that my daughter likes to go to are accessible. They might not have been if not for the ADA.

-Leah Corcoran, Parent

After the law was passed, the group that owns the building that I work in had to make the restroom stalls larger to be accessible for people with disabilities.

-Lynne Frigaard, Parent

We take our daughter to many places. Finding [an accessible] hotel used to be really difficult. Now there are choices. Restaurants have cut out entrances and ramps and there are elevators in most places. So, moving around in the community is easy. Transportation for a person who uses a

wheelchair is not very difficult. In the hotels, managers are ready to provide a microwave or refrigerator free of charge if it is for the person with disability.

-Rijuta Pathre, Parent

I have learning disabilities and ADHD. [The ADA has] opened doors in the educational process to get books that are more accessible and acceptable in schools. They now accept recordings for the blind at [my] community college. A lot of other schools do not have that.

-Lynn Shellenberger, Parent

My son has a brain injury and was able to participate in general education instead of a secluded environment. That wouldn't have been the case 20 years ago.

-Lisa Emmert, Parent

Transportation has improved greatly. Also, getting the accommodations that an individual needs for school or work is sometimes easier. The language of reasonable accommodations is definitely more common now. There are some things about the ADA that frustrate me because sometimes it is hard to be seen as an individual and needing different accommodations than someone else. But, overall, it has improved my life greatly. I think computers and the web still need work.

-Self Advocate

Advances in public transportation have made an obvious impact on accessibility.

My daughter was working at a salon here until new owners took over. Everybody knows her. They don't look at her as a disability and everybody accepts her.

-Parent

When I first acquired my disability, I may not have been able to finish my high school. I had a family member who was an attorney who was aware of the ADA. She contacted the school to make sure that they would provide me with everything they were required to so that I could be included and finish high school.

-Self Advocate

Before the ADA, I would have never had the educational experiences that I had. I would have been segregated into special education programs and I would not have had the college opportunities I have had.

-Self Advocate

I was catching a flight and when I got to the airport, I got hold of the disability person at the airport and she got me an aisle chair so I could actually get on the flight. That is because of the ADA.

And, because of the ADA, the park and recreation areas are much improved and accessible.

-Self Advocate

When [my son] graduated from college and was interviewed for a job, everyone knew about his disability and no one said anything about it. He was hired and was not discriminated against because of his disability. In his latest job review, he was given a raise.

-Parent

I think it helps people to be more involved in the community. People are out working. They have job coaches and there are also centers where people can hang out during the day. I work and I go to a day program. They provide activities and outings and goals. Some friends are living independently.

-Self Advocate

In my small town, they have done curb cuts and that has been great. The playgrounds have accessible play equipment for my daughter and stores have accessible facilities for us.

-Parent

Because of the [ADA], training programs that are available to special ed graduates are focused on getting them real jobs.

-Parent

[Without the ADA,] my child would be in a separate area at school and not in the classroom with his peers.

-Parent

[The ADA is] considered a Civil Rights Act. It enables voting and that is huge.

-Parent

[I was] able to keep my job because of the ADA. I called in sick because of my disabilities and was able to advocate on my [own] behalf to keep my job.

-Self Advocate

A lot of programs are available that weren't before. Government [facilities] and retail stores have become more accessible. Even getting services has improved. My son had a setback and needed to use a wheelchair. We were able to get one. The social workers in the past seemed like they were afraid to okay any services that were needed for someone with disabilities. Now they are more open to helping.

-Parent

The doors are opening. We are making progress but it takes time and perseverance.

-Parent

I think there is more awareness overall. There are more nonprofit groups that are advocating on our behalf because of the ADA.

My daughter [had] support services so she could be in [regular] classes. She has a DD waiver so she has funding to support her in a regular community setting. All those things have happened because of the ADA, but these same things do not happen in Illinois. We couldn't move to Illinois because my daughter would not get the same level of inclusion because of her disabilities.

-Parent

It used to be that any child with disabilities would be institutionalized. Now, children are given the opportunity to live in their family home or a group home and can work and be a part of society.

-Parent

[My son] can go to public school. The after-school program [added] an extra person so my son could participate. He went to the YMCA camp and they assigned a one-on-one aide. Awareness of the ADA makes people aware that they can't turn anyone away.

-Parent

Before the ADA and inclusion, two of my kids would have had to go to a separate school. We might not have been able to get them into an inclusive environment. I went to school with kids with disabilities. I graduated in 1974. I was in a Catholic school and my pastor believed that if you could get your kids to a certain point, they belong with everyone else. A lot of families with children with disabilities lived in our neighborhood because of our pastor. He would allow the children to be in the [parish] school. Unfortunately, the [public school alternative] was special ed, 100 percent. When I got to ninth grade and went to the public school, I wondered where the kids with disabilities were. They were kept totally in the special ed classrooms. They had lunch with us and that was it. —Parent

My child is more included in high school because of [the ADA]. He is able to get around and accommodations are being made.

-Parent

My daughter [does not have physical disabilities] so public places were always accessible. But I noticed that people in wheelchairs are better able to access public facilities, such as stadiums. There are seats for them. I think that is something that has changed. [Requiring] accessibility has made people more aware that everybody should be included.

-Parent

My son had a psychotic episode, couldn't finish college, and got into trouble with his financial aid. The school wanted their money because he dropped out. He was hospitalized and we had all kinds of documentation. I spent about a year working with the [school's] financial aid office and the disability office. The disability office at the school was supportive. The next year, it happened to another student and it was easily rectified, so they learned. Having the ADA does validate people's rights.

-Parent

I have been living in my place that I'm at for 12 years. I voted at the place where I live.

-Kristina Tollefson, Self Advocate

People have to be reminded from time to time that discrimination on any basis, including [discriminating against] people with disabilities, is wrong. The ADA does that. But I have to add my own advocacy efforts to that legislation for it to be truly effective.

-David Culver, Self Advocate

After I had brain surgery, I was able to go back to college and get a second degree.

-Ann Zick, Self Advocate

[There is more tolerance for] those that have visible disabilities, but for those that have hidden disabilities there is less tolerance. People are not stuffed in their homes as much anymore, but there is still too much bullying. Some people feel that people with disabilities should not be included in schools. The grown-ups want them in separate classes, but it seems the children don't mind. The ADA has helped get people to be included in public schools. The children get it, but the adults still don't.

Because of the ADA, I am able to live in housing that is adjusted to my income. I got a waiver for housing and to remodel and put a ramp on the front of my house. I am able to live in a real home with my family.

-Nichole Villavicencio, Self Advocate -Karen Kimbrough, Self Advocate

They made the sidewalks accessible for wheelchairs or for pushing a stroller. You can get from street to street. It is easier than jumping the curb. In [my city], they are making the bathrooms bigger at the restaurant to accommodate more people with disabilities.

-Kelly Miller, Self Advocate

Restaurants are very accessible and easy to work with for seating.

-Jeremy Wyttenback, Self Advocate

The ADA has affected how the Veterans Administration [serves vets] and helps vets in their battle with working with the VA.

-Patricia Wilson, Self Advocate

I'm a glass half-empty type of person so I always see there is room for improvement, like in the Girl Scouts.

-Marie Pank, Self Advocate

Because of the ADA, I can get around to doctor and dentist offices. It also helps me to live a regular lifestyle.

-Bryan Klaes, Self Advocate

Through my involvement with accessibility surveys, I have been able to do outreach. That's because of the ADA. People have called me to ask what they need to do to make their facility more accessible to people with disabilities.

-Rev. Dave Sams, Self Advocate

I can get out in the community and use public transportation. I can go to the Capitol and other facilities and they are accessible. Metro Mobility and the city buses are really accessible.

-Heidi Myhre, Self Advocate

In my personal experience, [the ADA has made] playgrounds more accessible. We have to follow legislation when we design anything. We design with all of the children in mind. We need to follow the ADA so that we make sure things are accessible for wheelchairs. We have put in some special swings so that all children can swing.

-Susan Jagodzinski, Parent

A lot people are advocating for themselves and understand their rights because of the ADA.

-Kate Onyeneho, Self Advocate

Whenever I have a problem with any places, I always mention the ADA.
When I talk to officials about a problem relating to people with disabilities, I always mention the ADA and it seems like they start to listen then.

-Susan Webb, Parent

I feel there are more people with disabilities that have jobs now. I have a job with people with disabilities and people without disabilities. We have a positive impact on each other.

-Christopher Eckman, Self Advocate

[The ADA makes it easier to] take my cousin who uses an electric wheelchair on social and shopping trips.

-Pattianne Casselton Demaray, Parent

My daughter is afforded accommodations in her school and the school is very supportive of what she needs.

I think they could do more with the workforce and the living situation.

-Jina Worth, Parent

-Emilie Breit, Parent

My child has cerebral palsy so accessible parking has been a blessing for us. My child is 10 and is included in a normal school.

-Karla Hemmann, Parent

I think that people are more aware because the law is out there and they are more open to the needs of people with disabilities.

-Joel (David) Callaway, Parent

[My daughter is] ninety percent included in her education, successfully.

-Joanna Harris, Parent

It's given us more opportunities for education. I think that the ADA allowed me to return to school and complete my master's degree. It gives me ammunition to advocate for students at the local schools.

-Thomas Furman, Parent

The ADA was another tool that we used to demonstrate our son's rights. It helped to give some teeth to the discussions that we had with educators. The ADA is more than just an educational right, it is a broad-based law that impacted all avenues of his life, not just in the classroom.

-Mary Martin, Parent

One of the city parks didn't have swings for a person with a disability. I went to a City Council meeting and requested a swing at that park and I got more than I asked for. They actually put one in at all three parks in [town]. No hassle. I wasn't expecting a response like that.

-Jill Gebeck, Parent

I believe [the ADA] has brought more awareness to people. Their lives would not have otherwise been touched by people with disabilities.

-Monica Mooney, Parent

I see accessible doors are all over where they were not before and there are ramps and physically accessible public buildings and spaces.

-Pam Gonnella, Parent

When we hire people with disabilities, we think about how we can accommodate a person's abilities and disabilities.

-Jeff Pearson, Parent

Marshall is where Southwest Minnesota State University is located so we have a lot more accessibility than other towns.

-Marge Mann, Parent

They do very specific training with people with disabilities on how to use the bus in order to get people to ride the regular bus and not just a bus for people with disabilities. I definitely see wider sidewalks and more

accessible curbs. If there are issues, more physical barriers are taken away. New construction is automatically accessible for people with disabilities now, where it wasn't in the past.

-Beth Sueker, Parent

When my kids were younger, we went to the community [concert hall] and they didn't have any spots for people who use wheelchairs. If they had a spot, there was only one, not three, so our family of five couldn't sit together. We went back recently and they have changed that and can accommodate more wheelchairs.

-Peg Davis, Parent

My daughter has had some part-time jobs and there was a place where she worked that really went out of the way to accommodate her. You don't find that everywhere.

-Mary Kay Carlsen, Parent

The schools are getting better but they still need to improve.

-Tena Green, Parent

When my son was in school in the 1980s, there wasn't much being done and I was an advocate for him. We had the district have someone ride on the bus with him as a role model to give him better social abilities. We also got him into sports programs and he became a good runner. When my daughter was in a car accident and broke her neck, I went to the school because she had the right to be able to leave classes early. She needed a special van and I had to advocate for that because, of course, the school didn't want to pay for that but we were able to get her special transportation.

-Judy Olson, Parent

I don't see a lot of people with disabilities working in our community. Accessibility is there... I think there is a need to have more social workers supporting people in their homes and there is a need for more transportation.

I make a personal effort to get [my daughter] to vote and I don't see the effort from others to get people with disabilities to a voting place. It is certainly accessible but I don't see a lot of people with disabilities voting.

-Laurie Austvold, Parent

The [ADA provides] access to technology [like the recording pen] for people with visual impairments.

–Debra Niedfeldt, Parent

When [my daughter] was young and in school, the ADA made a huge impact. Now that she is an adult, there are not a lot of services for young adults with autism.

-Darleen Lindgren, Parent

The sidewalks have been improved for motorized wheelchairs and [there are] handicap accessible doors. Now you can drive after you have had a seizure.

-Donovan Sargent, Parent

One of my sons is able to work. It is supervised employment. The ADA is probably better then the agency.

-Patricia Hoeffling, Parent

I think [the ADA] has opened doors to my daughters.

-Shannon Ehlers, Parent

I have many friends who participate pretty fully in the community. Some friends who use wheelchairs complain that they are not able to attend an event because it's just not accessible.

-Maggie Griffitt, Parent

My daughter uses a wheelchair. After [the ADA] went through, people were made more aware and people did their best to make things accessible.

-Luann Panning, Parent

[Improved] physical access, primarily restaurants, airports, that kind of thing.

-Susan Freeberg, Parent

Modifications at swimming pools, like putting in a lift chair that swings into the water.

-Lorie Zoeller, Parent

My daughter is able to participate in the community. Access to libraries, state parks, walking paths, curb cuts and most restaurants and shopping malls has changed for the better.

-Victoria Walsh, Parent

When my child was in Kindergarten, we had a hard time with inclusion. When it came to his class participation, he was put into different groups. He can now be included in regular class groups but some work still needs to be done. When it comes to job seeking, I see that employers are not hiring people with my child's disability even though he has a wonderful skill set.

-Jill Pearson, Parent

In general, the community has more opportunities for people to go to parks and restaurants and move around in the community then they could before the ADA.

-Melissa Winger, Parent

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The level of inclusion of people with autism in American society has greatly improved because of the ADA. People understand where people with disabilities are coming from.

-Barb Tooze, Parent

There have been a lot of improvements with elevators and buildings. We have no public transportation where we are because we live in the country so we don't have a lot of the accessibility that the Metro area has. We have no curb cuts in our community and few ramps to get into buildings.

-Michelle Albeck, Parent

We have come a long way. If we did not have the ADA, we would have a lot more work to do. People are opening their eyes because of the law.

-Leslie Sieleni, Parent

I am able to go to lots of places that I like to go to. I live in a nice neighborhood.

-David Belcourt, Self Advocate

I'm a strong advocate for power doors in my local community. I have been instrumental in getting 25 to 30 of them [installed]. Many more businesses and churches still need to get power doors or make their businesses [accessible].

-Self Advocate

I'm on a Community Center Board. We recently converted it to make it accessible for people with disabilities. That was a direct result of the known requirements of the ADA.

-Parent

I think we have a lot of places that are inaccessible but that has greatly improved because the ADA.

-Parent

I believe there have been attempts to make public places and other places accessible because of the ADA. But, accessible does not necessarily mean convenient, or easy, or truly accessible for a person with a disability. My example would be Williams Arena at the University of Minnesota. They do have an accessible door but you have to go to the back of the building in order to enter. People aren't able to use the same entry. It's an attempt, a step forward.

-Parent

I think the general public or the people I talk to have more awareness that [accessibility] is the right thing to do. I think some would say it's an expense or it would be nice to do but do not they realize that a person with disabilities [has] civil rights.

-Parent

I have been in theatres.

-Self Advocate

A local dance company now holds a dance class for people with all levels of abilities.

-Parent

My son can attend a very well organized day program. It's a work site where they adapt things to his level and make it interesting. The town where we lived had a poor day program. We had to move him to another town in order to find a good day program.

-Parent

I would say in a smaller community people have to be more knowledgeable about making things accessible.

There are more people with disabilities in the community so it is more accepted when my son is out with us. It seems people are more familiar with people with disabilities. I think people used to hide their family members [with disabilities] or put them in an institution.

There is an airline that partners with the autism program that lets the kids come out and experience an airplane before they fly so they know what to expect. It is a perfect example of transportation being accommodating.

-Parent

[My son] was able to attend a regular school with an aide. I think that made a big difference, rather than being shoved into a room. I guess I am very thankful we are in Minnesota where we aren't going backwards as they are in other states.

-Parent

We have a lot of opportunities to participate in sports in the regular community.

-Parent

When I challenged the school based on the ADA, they stepped up. When I challenged them that my daughter could sing, they let her do it. She did and got a standing ovation.

-Parent

I see access like curb cuts. I still see parking lots that aren't accessible because it is discretionary. For example, we live close to a gas station and there is a [designated] spot with a curb cut but there is a pole in the middle of it. In order to go around it, you would fall off the curb. I don't think that there is enough guidance to give business owners' complete understanding and to show them how necessary it really is.

-Parent

The thing that has really improved is transportation. Buses have lifts for wheelchairs and grocery carts. The bus drivers help with the wheelchairs and get them strapped in. It's so efficient.

-Self Advocate

The ADA still has many challenges around employment. The accommodations can be difficult to administer. Many people find themselves unemployed due to asking for help under ADA.

-Alison Canty, Self Advocate

[The ADA] has affected me in the way it requires people with mental health disabilities to be treated.

-Mary Ann Padua, Self Advocate

There are still some places and people who are rather close-minded and not very inclusive.

-Terri Scott, Self Advocate

I have two types of cancer and have needed more and more help. I have called disability hotlines and was able to get phone numbers to gain more resources.

-Penny Hendrickson, Parent

My boys both work in [inclusive] work environments. They are getting regular interaction with people with and without disabilities. That is a good thing.

-Kathryn Jacobson, Parent

My son has autism and I believe that people are less understanding of that then they would be if he had a physical disability.

-Jacki Girtz, Parent

I work with people that have mental illness and I think it has become much more acceptable to have facilities for people that are in recovery from mental illness.

-Mary Loreno, Parent

[Inclusion] really depends on the people. It doesn't necessarily have anything to do with the ADA. You could have a segregated situation [in one place] and go five blocks down the street and they're fully inclusive.

-Parent

My son uses a power wheelchair and there are a lot of places he still cannot go, like buildings and national parks. More elevators and curb cuts are needed for us. There are a lot of unknowns coming up for our son's future because of things like education, employment and [physical access].

-Kris Schulze, Parent

Busing is almost impossible if you live in the suburbs and [is difficult] even in the city. You have to have a physical disability in order to ride Metro Mobility. You have to rely on someone else [because] there is no service to link you to the accessible bus lines and trains. You cannot even get on a housing list because they are all closed. There is some help with finding jobs but they don't take into consideration what your strengths are.

-Parent

My son was affected by ultraviolet lighting. It was hard to find areas of inclusion for him [because] a lot of places have ultraviolet lighting.

-Parent

Other people still don't understand when my daughter goes into public places.

-Parent

[I am] much more aware of what's out there. There are places of business [without] curb cuts and no way of foing into a building.

-Parent

[The level of inclusion in my son's] new school is putting special education in question because of the level of participation with the rest of the [student] population.

-Parent

I would say the ADA has made some people able to apply for and get jobs that are suitable to them. There are agencies that will help people with disabilities to do that.

-Parent

[My son] is paid for his work but I am not convinced that he enjoys the experience. He is not yet working out in the community. His social contacts are limited; he does not have a circle of friends other than caregivers, and turnover is frequent. His group home only has one vehicle for three residents.

-Parent

I work as a social worker and [the ADA] affects our clients' lives and how they do business everyday.

-Parent

The ADA was designed to set [people with disabilities] free, but it didn't do that. If anything, it restricted us more. Employers have to follow the law to the letter...and spend money. It costs more as an employer. There's lots of hesitance. A lot of people that came into [our independent living center] did not receive help. There was no action...because the people with disabilities were afraid to speak up for their rights.

-Robert Nisbet, Self Advocate

1986 1987 1988 1989 1990 **KEY DATES** Colleen Wieck and Ed A New Way of Thinking is Senate version 100 people have The first of three National published; 6,000 are copies Skarnulis attend Senate of the Americans graduated from the Academies is held to Partners in hearings on Medicaid Reform: disseminated in three months. with Disabilities program: Partners introduce Partners to Policymaking Partners in Policymaking Act (ADA) is is operating in five other states. Partners in Policymaking National concept begins taking shape. introduced. states. debuts. ADA is signed into law. International 1999 1996 1995 1994 1992 1991 Disability rights laws based on the ADA are passed in Luxembourg, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, Sweden and several Central and South American countries. Partners in Policymaking® is a registered trademark Partners programs **Partners** More than 4.000 First National Summer Leadership with the United States Patent and Trademark Office. can be found in programs can be self-advocates and Institute offers Partners 41 states, the U.S. found in 30 states parents have graduated graduates training on current U.S. Supreme Court issues the landmark Virgin Islands and and programs from Partners in the issues, additional leadership skills, Olmstead v. L.C. ruling requiring states to ensure that United States. and networking opportunities. the United Kingdom. were pending in persons with disabilities receive services in the most 13 others. Institutes were also offered in integrated setting appropriate to their needs. 1993, 1994, 1997 and 1998.

Graduate workshops in Minnesota offer advanced leadership training on topics not covered in the classroom program. Over the next 15 years more than 750 graduates attend.

2001

2002

Partners in Policymaking celebrates 15 years. Approximately 10,000 parents and self-advocates have graduated from Partners.

Partners expands to The Netherlands.

2003

Partners in Making Your Case online course is introduced.

ed.

Partners expands
to New Zealand.

Partners in Education and Partners in Time online courses are introduced.

2005

There are nearly 15,000 Partners graduates worldwide.

2006

Partners in Living is introduced, completing the Partners in Policymaking online curriculum

2010

Online courses undergo substantial revisions.

2008

12 U.S. colleges and universities incorporate Partners in Policymaking online courses into special education and human services degree programs.

Partners celebrates its 20th anniversary with more than 15,000 graduates worldwide.

2004

Partners in

Employment online course

debuts.

Partners online courses win 2007 Best of the Web Digital Government Achievement Award from the Center for Digital Government.

2007

United Nations' Disability Rights Treaty signed by 82 countries.

2011

EZ Read version of *Partners in Employment* is introduced and *Partners in Making Your Case* is translated into
American Sign Language.

2012

Partners in Policymaking celebrates 25th anniversary with more than 21,000 Partners graduates in the United States and 2,000 Partners graduates internationally.

Telling Your Story" app based on Partners in *Making Your Case* is introduced.

2012-2013

Spanish versions of Making Your Case, Partners in Education, Partners in Employment and Partners in Time are released.

2015

More than 27,000, selfadvocates and parents have graduated from Partners in Policymaking worldwide since 1987.

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