

Maryland

Partners in Policymaking®



Impact Report
2023



Maryland
**Partners in
Policymaking®**

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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Partners in Policymaking® is a year-long program that prepares adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), parents, and family members of children and adults with IDD to be effective local, state, and federal advocates. The program builds advocates to become “Partners” in the policymaking that protects their rights and enhances their lives.

The Partners in Policymaking® program was created 35 years ago by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities and has been offered nationally and internationally, resulting in more than 30,000 graduates worldwide. Currently, Partners in Policymaking® programs exist in 30 states across the nation.

Since 1996, close to 450 self-advocates and family members have graduated from the program. Partners in Policymaking® alumni members blanket the state, are involved with Commissions, serve on boards and workgroups, and are responsible for many of the positive changes we have seen over the years in our schools, workplaces, and community at large.

If you know of those in Maryland who could benefit from this transformational program and are dedicated to sparking change for people with IDD, please share this publication with them and direct them our way!

To learn more about the national Partners program visit the Minnesota Department of Administration: Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities website at www.MN.gov/MNDDC/PIPM/. To learn more about the Maryland Partners in Policymaking® program, go to www.TheArcMD.org/Partners/.

If you have any questions about Partners in Policymaking®, contact Coni Nepomuceno by email at CNepomuceno@TheArcMD.org or by phone at 410-571-9320.



PROGRAM PARTNERS



Maryland Developmental
Disabilities Council
EMPOWERMENT • OPPORTUNITY • INCLUSION



THE ARC MARYLAND works to create a world where children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have and enjoy equal rights and opportunities by adhering to five core values: people first, equity, community, self-determination, and diversity.

THE MARYLAND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL has been creating change to improve the lives of people with developmental disabilities since 1971. They focus on children, family, and adult issues. The Council is an independent state agency, led by people with developmental disabilities and family members of people with developmental disabilities.

PEOPLE ON THE GO MARYLAND is a group of advocates with intellectual and developmental challenges who use their voices to be heard and recognized. Their vision and values: To advocate, educate and legislate on behalf of individuals with disabilities, parents, caregivers, advocates and legislators about the importance of choice and the freedom it brings with the reward of independence.



IMPACT IN MARYLAND

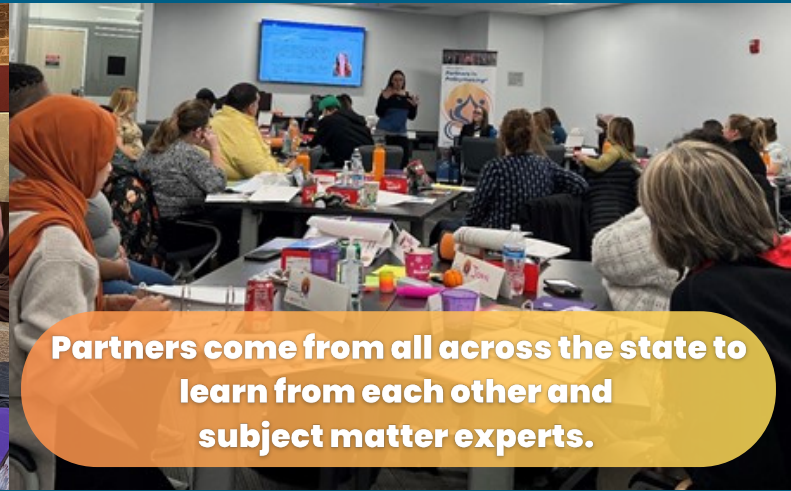


Partners in Policymaking® is a year-long course of instruction in the history of the disability rights movement, state and federal policy, inclusive education and lifelong learning, life planning, and media skills. During the course of the program, participants hear from subject matter expert presenters and facilitators from across the nation in many fields, including disability activists, community leaders, and local, state, and federal government officials whose work impacts the lives of people with IDD.

Participants form lifelong friendships with their fellow classmates, develop working relationships with established advocates and policymakers, and often become lifelong agents of change in their communities.



Close to 450 self-advocates and family members have graduated from the program in Maryland.



Partners come from all across the state to learn from each other and subject matter experts.



Interactive, immersive instruction on advocacy, policy, and the legislative process.



100% of Partners surveyed reported they increased their advocacy skills and abilities in the program.



Most Partners graduates go on to serve on local boards, commissions, and workgroups in Maryland



Join our growing community of life-long leaders of change!

PARTNERS HIGHLIGHTS



Angela & Nelson Cropper

CLASS OF 2022

Angela Cropper is the mother of two sons. She participated in the class with her oldest son, Nelson.

It was Angela's calling to be a nurse and to work in the role of Patient Safety. Angela's Capstone Project was focused on the safety of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), and assisting her son and fellow Partner, Nelson, with his chief safety

concern: food insecurity. The main concept of Angela's personal safety project was to assist IDD service organizations to create an atmosphere of transparency when it is alleged and reported that a person with IDD has had their personal safety breached.

Nelson is a self-advocate with disabilities. He is a teacher's assistant at Harford Hills Elementary, where he supports two kindergarten educators. Nelson works with small groups and individual students on basic math and reading fundamentals: counting and math problems, identifying letters and their sounds, and rhyming words. In addition, Nelson assists the students in the lunchroom. In his work, Nelson always shows kindness and compassion.

Nelson recently received The Arc Baltimore County's 2023 Outstanding Employee Award.

Nelson's Capstone Project was to help others who are struggling. He has made quite an impact so far! Nelson has been working with elementary school students since graduating from Partners. Nelson has also worked toward addressing food insecurity by volunteering with the Maryland Food Bank. There, he supports people who are food-insecure by packaging and preparing meals.

While Nelson has gone far in achieving his goals, he is more than willing to expand his work and outreach to other areas to get the job done and help the most people!



Adrian Forsythe Korzeniewicz

CLASS OF 2022



Adrian is a person with Down syndrome. He has faced unique challenges that made him the person he is today. Early in life, Adrian noticed opportunities that his brother, Gabriel, had as a person without a disability that Adrian had to fight for every day. While it would have been easy to be negative about this, Adrian chose to pave his own path. Adrian has fond memories of time with his brother and friends growing up.

In these friendships, there were no barriers or differences- where “the disability world and the non-disability world come together.” Adrian wants others to experience the same. He believes that when people with disabilities combine these two worlds, they can truly thrive.

Adrian has been acting since he was 8 years old. As a member of an inclusive theater company at Imagination Stage and Artstream, Adrian witnessed the benefits of inclusion. His time as an actor inspired him and gave him confidence to advocate for himself and other people with disabilities.

Adrian attended George Mason University's LIFE (Living Into Future Environments) program, where he took classes in theater and women's studies, and performed in theater productions. Adrian also worked as a congressional intern for two semesters. He has extensive experience promoting inclusion for people with disabilities and previously worked for the National Down Syndrome Society as a lobbyist. Adrian is currently on the Board of Directors of The Arc Maryland, and works as a Peer Advocate for Terps Exceed, a post-secondary program at the University of Maryland (UMD). In the position, he helps incoming students become acclimated to the school and opportunities to get involved with other UMD students. Outside of Terps Exceed, Adrian leads a weekly hangout for middle and high school students to practice their advocacy.





Josh Delclos

CLASS OF 2022

Josh Delclos is the president of People First, a self-advocacy group located in Harford and Cecil Counties, and supported by both The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region and The Empowering Partners initiative.

Josh is a strong advocate, focusing on civil rights and inclusion. He serves as a board member of The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region, where he has also

received supports for seven years. Outside of his advocacy, Josh enjoys playing video games, reading, and horseback riding.

Josh attended courses at the Community College of Baltimore County Essex Campus, where he particularly enjoyed English class. He lives in Baldwin, Maryland, with his family.

Josh recently was awarded The Arc Maryland's Stanley S. Sidle/William Ohge, Jr. Memorial Citizenship Award at their 2023 Annual Statewide Convention.

For his Partners in Policymaking Capstone Project, Josh developed a plan to expand the People First self-advocacy group in his community. The group's meetings are currently held on the first Thursday of every month. Group members practice speaking with their state legislators and learn other advocacy skills. During the 2023 Legislative Session, People First group members wrote letters to their legislators, asking them to support bills that were important to people with differing abilities. One bill, in particular, stood out to the group and incited their collective will to act. The "Estates and Trusts: Supported Decision Making" bill passed with overwhelming advocate support, and created an option for people to exercise if they need help making decisions but do not need guardians.





Dee Sapp

CLASS OF 2022

Dee Sapp is a wife and mother of three children, ages 22, 20, and 16. She has over 15 years of nonprofit administrative, front-line fundraising, program management, and managerial experience and has served on several boards at local and state levels; most of which support and advocate for people with disabilities. Dee is the founder and Executive Director of Accessibility Bridge Corporation, a 501(c)3 organization whose mission is to

promote inclusion and create access for children and adults with disabilities in all areas of their communities.

Dee is currently the Chairperson at The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council, a Co-Chair for the Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee (SECAC) in Charles County, graduate of the Southern MD LEADers program, an accessibility editor for the Maryland State Arts Council, and a newly appointed Board Member of the Down Syndrome Sports Association of America.

Dee's 20-year-old son has autism and an intellectual disability. He's a 2020 Paralympian, competitive swimmer, and college student whom Dee encourages to advocate for himself in all spaces that he wants to be included; athletically, socially, and academically. Dee strongly believes that ALL people should have the opportunities to learn, engage, and advance in inclusive environments. She aspires to be part of a national systems transformation and propagate consciousness about inclusive practices so that all facets of community life – school, work, and social activities – welcome people with developmental disabilities.

Dee's Capstone Project involved working with stakeholders in her county and at the state level to establish rules and regulations that create barrier-free access to interscholastic and intercollegiate sports for people with cognitive disabilities. She believes that it is through sports that people with cognitive disabilities can gain essential social skills and begin to establish their independence. Through sports, people learn how to effectively communicate as well as learn the value of teamwork and respect for others. Throughout her son's years of athletic pursuits, she witnessed barriers to his and others' access and participation.

There are rules and eligibility requirements that are exclusionary in nature, without readily-accessible and clearly defined exemption criteria to supports the inclusion of people with cognitive disabilities. This leaves decisions open to "discretion," creates a space for discrimination, and lets the desire to "win" overshadow the need for inclusion.

After graduating from Partners, Dee and her son broke through the barriers they had encountered and gained access that was a long-time coming!





Dennis Weeden

CLASS OF 2023

Growing up in a family of eight children, Dennis learned early on how to advocate for himself. His parents advocated for his right to attend school and ensured he had the support needed to be successful! This showed Dennis that advocacy is never-ending. As he grew into an adult, he began to understand the benefits of self-advocacy. As an individual with an intellectual and developmental disability, Dennis had to learn to navigate not only life but also adult services.

In a short amount of time, Dennis went from being in high school with friends, to becoming an adult who was transitioning to a different service model.

Dennis was excited to join People On The Go Southern Maryland, where he learned to advocate for his wants and needs. The experience has been life-altering. Dennis had the opportunity to travel with other self-advocates to the State Capitol to meet with Senators, as well as meet with county commissioners to talk about the needs of other individuals in his community.

Dennis's Capstone project is to improve recruitment efforts for his self-advocacy group, People On The Go Southern Maryland. He is also working part-time and speaking at schools with families, and fairs where he mentors others.



Lauren Shillinger

CLASS OF 2023



After graduating from Elon University with a degree in Corporate Communications, Lauren had a 12-year career in the electronic healthcare industry. When her daughter Brynleigh was born, she became a stay-at-home mom. Brynleigh was diagnosed at 9 1/2 months with Tuberous Sclerosis Complex (TSC) and epilepsy. Even with her electronic healthcare background, Lauren had never heard the diagnosis of TSC. Since her

daughter's diagnosis, the family quickly connected with the TSC Alliance and National Epilepsy Foundation to begin volunteering, advocating, and fundraising for TSC and Epilepsy.

In 2017, Lauren became the Chair of the TSC Alliance Community Chapter in Maryland and began serving on the TSC Alliance committees for Government Relations and Community Outreach. She participates annually in the march on Capitol Hill to secure federal funding for the TSCRCP and Epilepsy Hill Days, planned and implemented the first and second TSC MD Day of Advocacy and Awareness in Annapolis, and she advocated for three years for Brynleigh's Act, to pass life-saving legislation through the Maryland General Assembly. At the end of the MGA session in 2022, SB0299 passed unanimously in the Senate and House. On April 12, 2022, the bill was signed into law by Governor Hogan, making Maryland the 15th Seizure Safe Schools state! Lauren has also served as the Walk Chair for the National Step Forward to Cure TSC Walk and various other fundraising events through the years. Lauren is currently a member of the Epilepsy Policy Advisory Committee for the National Epilepsy Foundation. She is completely dedicated to making a difference in not only Brynleigh's life, but all who are affected by TSC and Epilepsy!

Lauren served as a parent advocate on the committee to review, suggest edits, and add resources to the draft and final versions of the seizure guidelines for the Maryland Department of Health, School Nurses, and Board of Education Health Department as the Maryland school systems prepare to implement Brynleigh's Act in the 2023/2024 school year.

For her Capstone project, Lauren worked with the National Epilepsy Foundation, local physicians, and other local organizations to provide a seizure safe schools parent/caregiver and community webinar in August 2023 in preparation for the 2023-24 school year. The webinar provided information about Brynleigh's Act and how it is being implemented in schools. Participants learned about seizure action plans, talked about seizure rescue medications, and enjoyed a Q&A with other stakeholders.





Razaz Eltom

CLASS OF 2023

Razaz, originally from Sudan, embarked on a journey across various cities in the United States with her husband. After seven years of exploration, they established their roots in Maryland, a state they now proudly call home. Razaz is not only a devoted wife, but also a loving mother to two wonderful little boys. Her eldest, Yaseen, is almost six and has autism. Yaseen was diagnosed at age two, which became a defining moment in Razaz's life, sparking her

passion for advocating for individuals with neurodiversity.

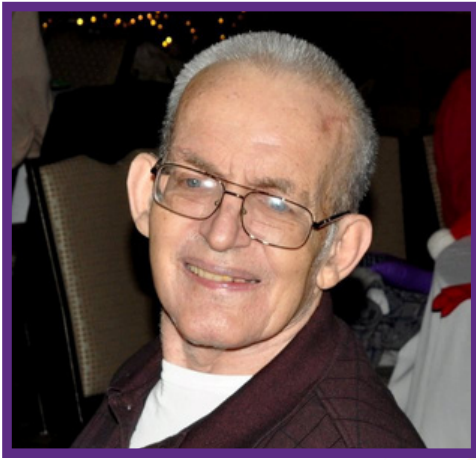
As a dedicated and compassionate mother, Razaz holds a profound commitment to raising awareness and fostering inclusivity. In 2022, she achieved the prestigious honors status upon successfully completing her MBA from the University of Missouri. Her academic accomplishments are paralleled by her active involvement as an advocate for vulnerable and marginalized groups.

With a robust background in business and entrepreneurship, Razaz brings a distinctive perspective and skill set to her endeavors. Driven by her unwavering determination to make a positive impact, she consistently seeks opportunities to effect meaningful change.

Serving as a program coordinator at the American Muslim Senior Society, Razaz remains actively engaged in collaborating with fellow community members to advance and uplift our community to new heights.

Razaz spent the past two years advocating for her son to remain in his current private school, as only two private schools in Montgomery County offer a program that fits Yaseen's needs. Private schools in Maryland reserve the right to deny kids with disabilities admission. This propelled Razaz's dream to start a truly inclusive Waldorf school that does not exclude children with disabilities, her Partners Capstone project. The Waldorf nature-based learning environment proved to help kids with autism and ADHD to thrive. Razaz is in the process of acquiring the necessary licensing to start home-based childcare.





Richard Lee Lowry

CLASS OF 2023

Richard began receiving services from The Arc Howard County when he was 32. Above all, he loves having the freedom to make his own choices in all aspects of life.

Prior to his services with The Arc Howard County, Richard was a resident of the Rosewood Center, an institution for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Richard has a unique perspective, as many Marylanders with IDD have not lived previously in an institution.

During his transition to services, Richard went from “eating a hamburger every day” at Rosewood to learning to choose and cook his meals. Once out of the institution, Richard found a full-time job and was one of the first people with a developmental disability at The Arc of Howard County to purchase his own home. Richard has received many awards for his advocacy. He currently serves on the Board of Directors for The Arc Howard County.

Today, at age 71, Richard receives residential support and assistance, living with roommates and a live-in caregiver. He is enjoying all that life has to offer and is happy that he has achieved a full, meaningful life.

For his Capstone project, Richard is writing about his experience in the Rosewood Center, and about the support he has received from The Arc Howard County in the time since. His experience transitioning from an institution to a life in the community needs to be heard by all and serves as a reminder that all people have a right to live, learn, work, and play in the community.





PARTNERS IN POLICYMAKING® GRADUATION

On Tuesday, August 15, 2023, we celebrated the outstanding achievements of the 27 graduates of Maryland's 2022-23 Partners in Policymaking® program. We cannot wait to see what the future has in store for these Partners!




Once a Partner, always a Partner!











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Thank you to to our Partners Staff

**Luc Chausse
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Sharon Dols
Ande Kolp
Coni Nepomuceno**



**Thank you to People On the Go Maryland for all of your
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