

Maryland's
Partners in Policymaking®

2020



Our Stories



Contents

About Partners in Policymaking	2	Jeni Murphy	20
This Year in Partners	3	Coni Nepomuceno	21
Program Sponsors and Coordinators	3	Laura Pawulak	22
Meet the 2020 Graduates	3	Susan Plitt	23
Dr. Lisa Ade	4	TjaMeika Purnell	24
Debbie Ade	5	Jeffrey Ratnofsky	25
Azeb Adere	6	Milicent “Milie” Santos	26
Meagan “Megg” Andrade	7	Shari Silverman	27
Robert Ballinger II	8	Whitney Smith	28
Carol Baltazar	9	Andrew “Andy” Stettner	29
Meeka Caldwell	10	Jeneva Stone	30
Lorna Carmichael	11	Robert “Rob” Stone	31
Carolyn Chen	12	Stacey Travers	32
Lauri Edwards	13	Daya Chaney Webb	33
Martha Goodman	14	Nicole West	34
Barry Johansson	15	James “Rico” Winston	35
Amani Kharma	16		
Chris Kidwell	17	Thank You Partners Presenters, Staff, MD Developmental Disabilities Council, & People on the Go of Maryland	36
Jennifer Kleiman	18		
Elaine Lloyd-Hudgins	19		



About Partners in Policymaking®

The Arc Maryland with Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council and People on the Go of Maryland are excited to acknowledge the 2020 graduating Class of Maryland Partners in Policymaking® (PIP). PIP is a program that prepares adults with intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD), parents, and family members of children and adults with I/DD to be effective advocates at the local, state, and federal levels.

Partners in Policymaking® was created in 1987 by the Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities upon their discovery that there was a need for a formal training process, covering best practices in advocacy on a variety of issues for people with I/DD.

This year-long program is currently available in over 30 states. After a 10-year hiatus of the program in Maryland, The Arc Maryland relaunched the program in 2018 with incredible financial and technical support from the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council, and in-kind support from People on the Go of Maryland.

Learn more about the national Partners program on the Minnesota Department of Administration 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.

This project was supported, in part by grant number CFDA 93.630, from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201. Grantees undertaking projects with government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official ACL policy.

This Year in Partners

The 2020 Partners class had 5 in-person sessions and 4 virtual sessions due to the global pandemic that impacted Maryland in March 2020. The class spanned from September 2019 to September 2020. Each session featured presentations, group and individual activities led by subject matter experts from across the state and nation, and group and individual work on capstone projects. This year's Partners sessions highlighted:

- The history of intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Understanding inclusive education and the elements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Elements of effective advocacy on local, state, and federal levels
- The Supporting Families Community of Practice and Charting the LifeCourse Framework
- Exploring various assistive technology options to enhance quality of life
- Exploring leadership skills necessary for effective advocacy
- Discussing Self-Direction and other service models funded by the Developmental Disabilities Administration
- Speaking with state legislators in Annapolis at Developmental Disabilities Day at the Legislature
- Meaningful day & customized employment best practices
- Lifelong learning



Program Sponsors and Coordinators



Meet the 2020 Graduates

32 Marylanders joined the global network of Partners graduates in the year of 2020. We are excited and eager to witness the advocacy in which they will be involved. They are joining the ranks of life-long agents of change in Maryland and beyond.

While reading through the yearbook, remember the names and stories of the 2020 Partners class. This will not be the last time you see their names or hear about their ongoing work with, and on behalf of, people with disabilities and their families.

The course challenged the 2020 Partners graduates with projects to enhance their skills as change-agents. Class members were tasked, as part of the Partners course requirements, to identify issues within their local communities and craft plans of action for positive change. You may read all about each graduate's final project on their individual yearbook pages.



Dr. Lisa Ade

Maryland Partners is an organization with a strong support for all people with different abilities. Being a participant in Partners advocacy training has empowered me with knowledge, boldness, opportunity, and skills to go out there and make a difference in advocating for individuals with disabilities in my community, as well as at the county, state and federal level. I say “The sky is not the limit.”

PROJECT

The title of my project, which was completed in partnership with a couple of classmates, is: Inclusion Awareness for Calvert County Public Schools: A Project of Maryland Partners in Policymaking Program. This project focuses on creating awareness of inclusion benefits for kids with disabilities in Calvert County Public Schools. We want to emphasize and promote the fact that separation, segregation, or institutionalization is not the option we seek for children with various disabilities. All kids belong in their neighborhood public schools, just like their non-disabled kids. Special education is not a place; it is a service, which can be delivered at the school where the kid with disability would have attended if he or she was not disabled. We are collaborating with representatives from the Calvert County Special Education Department, and other representatives from the public school sector.



I'm a mom of 3 wonderful kids. Among them is Debbie who has special needs. She is the center of the family. Everyone loves and cares about her. I'm also a healthcare provider as a profession. My knowledge and skills in the medical and healthcare fields have enabled me to take care of some of Debbie's medical needs. I'm also a loving wife of a wonderful husband who is also medical doctor and an all-round good guy. I love my family and I wouldn't trade them for anything. Most importantly, I'm an advocate for people with different abilities. My goal is to see that every child and every adult that has disability is a member and included in his or her community.

Debbie Aye

“

Partners is cool. I enjoyed the class and I made new friends. Partners training helped me to learn how to speak up for myself, and now I can tell someone what kind of job I want to do in my community. I can also help my friends to speak up for themselves. I can tell my friends about the cool things in about going to the same school with every kid in the neighborhood. I can tell my friends they can go to college just like me, too.

PROJECT

My mom, Ms. Laura, and I are doing a project to tell parents in my neighborhood that all kids should attend school together. This will help all the kids to have better friendships. We can do cool stuff together if we go to some schools together because we live together!



I'm a beautiful young lady. I do things a little differently from my friends because I'm special! LOL! I love to dance, and I'm a Cheerleader too. I won two gold medals at Disney in 2019 at the International Cheer Union Championship, Orlando, FL. I also play basketball, and soccer. My team has won many gold and silver medals during Special Olympics Summer Games. I went to my neighborhood primary, middle, and high school. I made lots of friends. I also went to college, just like my other friends. I graduated from George Mason University in 2018. I'm proud of my achievements!



Azeb Adere



The Partners program training and the support of professionals helped me to become the kind of advocate I wanted to be and offered me access to resources I hadn't known existed.

PROJECT

My project is to expand what I am currently doing for the Ethiopian Eritrean community by allowing their sons and daughters the opportunities required and desired to grow in skills, personal relationships, and inclusion in their community.



I am Ethiopian American and live in Maryland with my husband and two children, Addis (18), and Maya (15). My son Addis has autism. I have a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education with additional courses in Special Education, Family and Child Development, and Early Childhood Development from the University of Maryland, College Park. I have worked with children with special needs for over 15 years in both Maryland and Virginia. I have enjoyed working with this population of children both in the classroom and home setting with a high degree of success. After helping many parents with their children's Individual Education Plan (IEP) and placements, I felt I could make a bigger difference in the education of this special group of children by becoming an Educational Consultant. I am dedicated to giving a voice for special needs children so they have access and opportunity to quality education and positive life experiences. Also, I am the founding member of the board and the President for the Ethiopian Eritrean Special Needs Community, an organization to share information, provide support to one another, educate, and guide families raising children with special needs so they can become effective advocates with and for their children. I have a strong personal and professional interest in serving people on the autism spectrum and their families.



Meagan "Meggy" Andrade

“

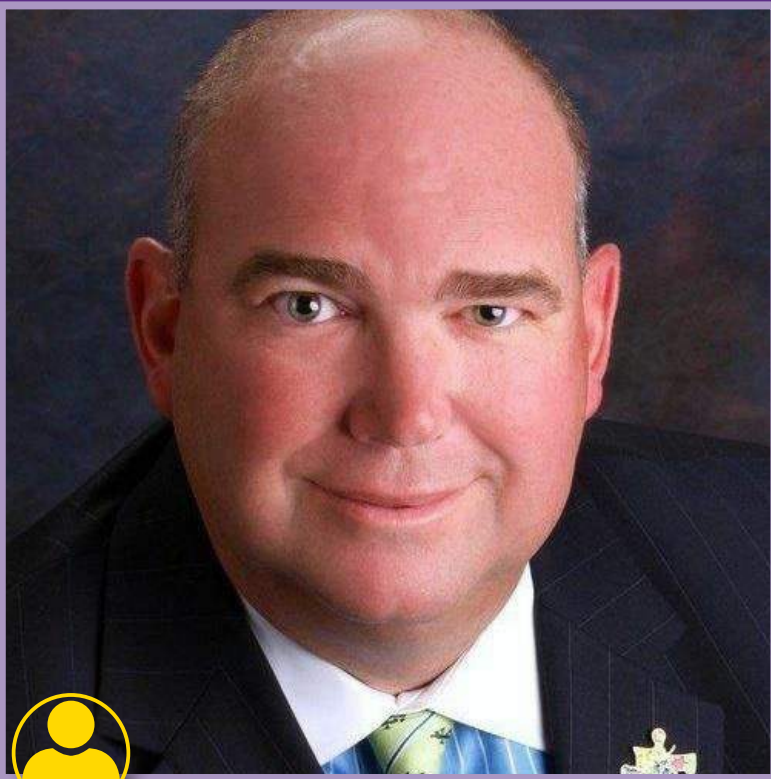
Partners has been a journey of self-discovery for me, among other things. Getting to know these awesome individuals in our class has reminded me of the importance of sharing my ideas. I feel reinvigorated and motivated to take action. I'm so thankful for my new friends and teachers as well as a huge thank you to The Arc Maryland for challenging and encouraging us and feeding us so well!



PROJECT

I am a job developer with The Arc Baltimore, a business owner, and a mom to five wonderful humans including three young adults diagnosed with developmental disabilities. My experience around people with developmental disabilities started in my childhood, but my heart for advocacy grew enormously in 2010 when my first son came to me with non-speaking autism. Over the past decade, I have lobbied on the state and federal level for insurance reform, access to medical treatment, and the equal rights of children in foster care and people with developmental disabilities. As a parent mentor with The Autism Community in Action (TACA) since 2011, I provide guidance and support through the autism journey. Much of my volunteer work has included supporting parents and students through the IEP process, teaching life skills workshops, helping families navigate their unique nutritional needs, and implementing alternative healing. I am most passionate about inclusion, equity, and dignity through all life stages. I truly love my time spent alongside others within this community.

My project is an investigation of inclusion and presuming the competence in all students. I will continue exploring schools that focus on inclusion and classrooms where age-appropriate content is standard. Empirical evidence supports teaching students with the assumption that they can learn even when communication barriers prevent them from affirming comprehension. Quality of life improves when people are respected as an adult versus being assigned an arbitrary “age-level of functioning.” We can teach with dignity when we change the environment versus trying to change the student. Teaching compliance, and waiting on non-speaking students and those needing behavioral support to prove what they know, is not only ineffective, it goes against the belief that people with developmental disabilities are whole, and capable of a range of emotions, frustrations, ambitions, preferences, and the right to autonomy.



Robert Ballinger II

The Partners in Policymaking program has given me a larger view of my life and others. I have enjoyed our discussions in class in addition to the knowledge and messages from our presenters. After each session, I would always wonder why this great information isn't available to everyone or if there could be a way to tell interested individuals about this needed information. I asked myself how I could spread a message that could help families with special needs. My answer was a podcast! Each series will feature one or more recurring host(s) to engage in a discussion about a particular topic or current event.

I am a father of a 23-year-old son with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and I have served as an advocate with him since his diagnosis at three. He has been partnering with the Howard County Public School System, navigating the Maryland Autism Waiver and the Maryland Home and Community Based Services Waiver. Also, I have been working to ensure service providers are meeting my son's needs. While my son attended elementary and middle school, I served on the Search Committee for the Howard County Public Schools System (HCPSS) Director of Special Education. Also, I've helped to pilot the Co-teaching Model in HCPSS designed to support students with developmental disabilities. As an advocate for special education, I often testified to the Howard County Board of Education on the needs of students with special needs in that capacity. I also assumed a leadership role as a Board Member of the Howard County Autism Society and our family remains active in this organization to date. Finally, I ran (unsuccessfully) for the Howard County Board of Education in 2005.

PROJECT

My Communication Plan is to invite organization representatives to my podcast to discuss topics of interest. Discussion and content within the podcast will range from carefully scripted material to totally "friend to friend" banter. My podcast series will also provide an associated website with links and show notes, guest biographies, transcripts, additional resources, commentary, and even a community forum, dedicated to discussing the show's content. The last idea I have for my podcast is that I want to create a relaxed environment, and record the podcast in outdoor restaurants and other public venues for a "happy hour" feel. Stay tuned for that to come.

Carol Baltazar

“

*If you want to go fast, go alone;
if you want to go far, go together.*

-African Proverb



I am a wife and mom of three awesome kids; Rey, Xach and Lexi. I am an Internal Medicine Physician and was appointed a member of the Maryland Behavioral Analyst Advisory Committee in 2019. My oldest child, Rey, has Autism Spectrum Disorder. I'm proud to say that he graduated high school with honors in 2019 and began college in the fall of 2019. He has faced challenges and knows that there will be more challenges to come. However, he knows that he can tackle the challenges with the coping skills and strategies that he has learned. College was a dream that has become a reality for him. I believe the challenges people with disabilities face are life-long and the protection of their rights need to be long term. I have always wanted to become involved, in some capacity, to be a voice for parents of children who are on the spectrum. I am always willing to share my knowledge with others who are raising children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I have shared my personal experiences as a guest on a local Maryland talk show to help bring more awareness in the Asian American Community where mental health is often a taboo topic. I'm honored to have the opportunity to be a part of this year's Partners in Policymaking class. I've met and learned from so many extraordinary advocates doing extraordinary work. I believe I have more knowledge and resources for the Partners in Policymaking class to help me serve as a better advocate for my own family as well as others.



PROJECT

My project is about building a community. I created a Facebook group called "Autism Mom MD," established a web page, (www.AutismMomMD.com), and I am currently working on my Autism Mom MD podcast. What I've learned through Partners is that collectively we are all highly motivated. Individually, we don't have it all figured out, but there's always someone out there who is several steps further than you or is where you want to be. There is strength in vulnerability. That is the power of building a community of like-minded individuals. By sharing your story, you can have a positive impact on so many other people who feel like they are facing these challenges on their own. "Autism Mom MD" is about sharing our different expertise and rich experiences. The vision is to pave the way for empowerment, growth, and inclusion of people with autism so they can live out their best life possible.



Meeka Caldwell



I couldn't wait to start Partners in Policymaking. I wanted to learn as much as possible to become the best advocate for my child and other people with special needs.

PROJECT

I would love to form a community-based information pool so that new parents will have a step-by-step guide for their community on how to navigate the system. There are so many resources and help, but not a clear way to access them. It would be wonderful to be able to update these materials and hand them out to new parents at the hospitals to help guide them through the first steps in the journey once they receive a diagnosis for their child.



I am a wife, mother, and an advocate in the I/DD Community. My son, Anian, is 6 years old and is a student in a Prince Georges County School. I recently published my first children's book "A Friend Like Anian". After noticing there were no books that represented black children with Down syndrome, I decided to write my own to share with the community

Lorna Carmichael



“

Partners in Policy Making has challenged my assumptions, shattered preconceived notions, inspired new ideas, and renewed passion. Through Partners I learned how to build coalitions to accomplish exponentially more than I could alone. I will work together and build upon the many accomplishments of those Partners before me.

PROJECT

The title of my project is Remote Supports for Independent Living (RSIL)©. While the onset of COVID-19 has further necessitated the need for remote supports, RSIL is intended to address two concerns families have. The first concern is viable, independent living of the differently-abled individual (DAI) within the community. The second concern families have is the ability to provide the necessary supports to enable the DAI to live independently. RSIL provides around-the-clock supports (as needed) from a remote supervised location via live chat/video chat. Personal supports are provided to more than one differently-abled individual with team supervision, thus reducing the cost of such aids with suitability and stability concerns addressed. Participants will live independently in temporary residential dwellings equipped with the amenities of an apartment or home for a defined period (based on funding). A survey will be developed and interviews will be completed to assess the viability of independent living, utilizing RSIL, and the sufficiency of this mode of support.



As an electronics engineer by profession, I am passionate about promoting and advancing the use of technology to enable community integration and independent living. My husband King and I are proud parents of three children, one whom has special needs. While attending a family wedding, we rose as the bridal march began and turned to watch the bride walk down the aisle. My seventeen-year-old daughter asked “Mom, will that ever be me?” Heavy drops of tears spilled from my eyes like an unsteady hand delivering a cup full of water. I cried that day, not just because weddings are sentimentally beautiful, but my heart ached for my special needs daughter. I smiled, said a quick prayer and responded “yes baby, one day.” I used to call her my “forever seven,” but realized that this intellectually challenged young lady had hopes and dreams and desires just like her peers. At one time my daughter indicated she was going to live with me forever; she now confidently asserts “when I get my own place, I am going to get a dog.” My daughter’s goal in life is independence; she desires the life she has seen other family members live.

Carolyn Chen



The history of the oppression of people with disabilities in the country is solely missing from our education system.

My project was to conduct a listening session via Zoom video conference to discuss the experiences of education providers on specifically how they are receiving information, what services are needed, and what challenges have come about. I collected and distributed the information about parents of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities and how it is received in the local community.

Key questions for the Partners in Policymaking cohorts:

1. What has been the COVID-19 response from your Maryland County and/or school system?
2. What information do you as a parent or your child actually need in this crisis?
3. What is the best communication channel to keep you and your family updated?
4. Any best practices (what is working well?) that can be leveraged in other jurisdictions?

I am a second-generation Taiwanese-American living in Maryland by way of Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, and California. I fell into the world of developmental disabilities when I moved back to Montgomery County nine years ago to help my aging parents coordinate services for my older sister, Jennifer. An email from the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council enlightened me as to what it means to be a “sibling.” Soon after, I found myself organizing two state-wide conferences for siblings of people with developmental disabilities and become a way of life. I discovered that my sibling and family experiences were my competitive advantage in life—not a secret to keep isolated or an obstacle to overcome. I began to believe that community inclusion is vital in every aspect of daily life and society. It can take generations to see a change in attitudes. Siblings are in a unique position to be undercover advocates for inclusion.



Lauri Edwards

“

*My father said to me:
“If you don’t do it, who will?”*



I am a single mom to three children—Elena (9), Leah (7), and Gavin (6). Gavin has Down syndrome. From the moment Gavin was diagnosed with Down syndrome at 7 days old, I knew I was going to need to be his biggest and best advocate. I earned my Master’s Degree in Elementary Education from West Virginia University then spent 8 years as a kindergarten and first grade teacher.

As a teacher, I worked with several children with disabilities. I wanted to help families get what they needed and what was best for their child with a disability. When my son, Gavin, was born he had many health concerns and I decided to resign from teaching to care for him. I am currently on the Board of Directors for F.R.I.E.N.D.S (Family Resources Information Education Network for Down syndrome), which brings me great pride, joy, and happiness. One of the major events we plan other than our monthly events and Buddy Walk is the “Techniques for Success: Parent and Teacher Conference” held yearly in Maryland. It is my hope to use everything that I have learned in this class as well as my work on my project with the local police, to make Frederick County a safe, welcoming, understanding, and better community for all that live in here.



PROJECT

My project is to work with the Frederick County community outreach police officer as well as the Frederick police force to create and implement a flagging system for our children with intellectual and developmental disabilities with additional training and possibly some photo cards to be used with those who are autistic. My project idea came from working with the Montgomery County Police over the past three years at the “Techniques for Success” conference. After learning of all the systems and programs Montgomery County has in place, I began to wonder what Frederick County (the county in which I and my children live), I found out that the first responders (Fire Fighters and EMT’s) have more programs in place than the police do. I expect this project to be ongoing and to take a while, however I am committed. When the Community Outreach Officer emailed me and said they have no such programs, the more I thought about it and talked to people, the more I knew this had to be my project!

Martha Goodman



“

*It has been an invaluable experience to meet with family advocates from all over the state. The impression is deep, and I believe **the inspiration will be long-lasting**. Thank you.*

PROJECT

My project focuses on preparing families for the adult transition process, particularly through vocabulary development.

I am the Coordinator of the Maryland Special Needs Advocacy Project at the Center for Jewish Education, a non-profit. In addition, I teach workshops on closed captioning YouTube videos and have organized volunteers to make videos accessible to the deaf and hard of hearing communities. I hope to be a lifelong student of American Sign Language (ASL). I have also volunteered for International Rescue Committee as an Educational Advocate. Together with my 16-year-old daughter, who has Down syndrome, I have promoted the Maryland Relay System and its speech to speech operators. I serve on the Special Education State Advisory Committee, and have presented at the National LDA Conference on issues related to private and parochial school students with disabilities. I have also participated in Parent Place's train-the-trainer workshops for "Guiding the Journey", a visioning process for adult transition. Most importantly, I am my daughter, Meira's, biggest fan and advocate.

Barry Johansson

“

Decisions are values in conflict.

PROJECT

I'm interested in creating an education nonprofit for Wicomico County Eastern Shore and possibly the Lower Eastern Shore. My team was set to have a kick off planning meeting in 2/3 weeks when the significance of the COVID-19 virus stopped everything. We did decide that with the economy in the tank, there would be little support for a new non-profit organization (NPO) and that it would be wise to hold a smaller zoom meeting with 3 to 4 people who had been in discussions about the new NPO. The thought is to see what a small group can do to help out in our community (which is very underserved for autism).



I am a LCSW-C (retired) and have a 10-year-old grandson with autism. I was the first Executive Director of Worcester County Youth and Family Counseling Services, Inc. for its first 20 years. I also stepped in as the part-time Acting Executive Director of the Wicomico Environmental Trust in post-retirement. Currently, I serve on the board of the Bay Area Center for Independent Living and the Special Education Advisory Committee. I'm very interested in expanding services to special needs families.



Amani Khanna



*Attending the Partners in Policy training not only motivated me, but also empowered me to focus on what we can control, rather than what we cannot. I also learned **small steps** turn into a mile.*

PROJECT

My project evolved when Jennifer A. Dorsey presented on the third session and told us about her “A World of Friends School”. Parents of young children with disabilities are more likely to have trouble finding childcare, less likely to secure a childcare spot, and are more likely to experience job disruptions. Based on those findings, I thought of opening childcare center with needed accommodation to kids with disabilities. As a mother to a child with special needs and a preschool educator, I believe it is important to remember that children with special needs are children first. They have the same needs as all children. In my childcare, they will have a place where they feel physically comfortable, loved, and secure, opportunities to play and learn from people who care about them, and activities that allow them to be successful. Children with special needs often are not so different from typically developing children.



I’m a mother of four kids. My third child is 11-years-old with RETT syndrome. I work in the public school as a Para educator. I also served on the SECAC Committee (Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee). I learned a lot attending the advocacy workshop offered through Parents’ Place of Maryland. I testified for one of the bills regarding child care for kids with special needs. I attend the DD (Developmental Disabilities) day every year and visit my delegates to advocate for people with disabilities.

Chris Kidwell

“

As a mathematics educator, I've always believed that 'Knowledge shared = Knowledge squared,' and that is certainly true of the Partners program. I've enjoyed the experience of collaborating and learning from others, and hopefully, I've been able to help my colleagues by sharing some of my knowledge with them. I encourage everyone to participate in this program.

PROJECT

I was inspired by practically every speaker, every topic, and my fellow Partners to respond to the various calls to action each time we gathered. For my project, I had to take all of these great inspirations and ideas and synthesize them in some way as well as pair them with my passions and strengths. I was struck by my fellow Partners and my own personal experiences that at times felt like there is an “us vs. them” mentality on the part of families and advocates “versus” schools, the government, and, specifically, teachers. Being both a teacher and a parent-advocate, I thought I could strengthen this damaged alliance so I created a seminar for teachers (and eventually service providers) underscoring the importance of effective communication, parental/advocate involvement, and proper inclusion techniques. Research shows that a parent's/advocate's attitude towards learning as well as their ability to provide support has a tremendous impact on student achievement. Educators and advocates are working towards that same goal of student achievement, but everyone needs a reminder at times that this is the case. It is the hope that this seminar, while promoting better practices, will lead to better outcomes for students with intellectual and developmental differences.



I am a lifelong resident of Maryland with my wife and my two sons in Harford County. I have always been interested in education and the crucial role that it plays in our society.

Upon entering Loyola University (college at the time), I started taking mathematics classes with an eye to teach the subject. After graduation, I became a high school mathematics teacher in Baltimore County. My years of teaching became my foundation of learning about, and beginning to serve, people with intellectual and developmental differences. I volunteered at places such as the MD School for the Blind in order to serve what I felt was a neglected and underserved population. All of this became very personal to me when my first son, Jonathan, was born with multiple disabilities and transitioned from my profession as a teacher to a stay-at-home dad. I am passionate about increasing awareness of the roadblocks that our society has put in place for people with disabilities and the professionals and loved ones on which they rely. To that end, I am a huge proponent of effective communication between schools, the government, caseworkers, community-based organizations, families, and self-advocates along with championing the civil rights of people with disabilities.



Jennifer Kleiman



I feel good about the sessions.



I am outgoing and a quick learner. I like being outside. I want to be able to get a job after I'm finished with the sessions. I learned a lot and want to advocate for direct support professionals' rate of pay.

PROJECT

I want to use what I learned to join a group and form my own advocacy group.

Elaine Lloyd-Hudgins

“

Meeting and talking with other Partners' parents as well as learning from the various Partners' presenters, provided me with a wealth of information and gave me a renewed sense of purpose on how to continue to best meet the needs of my newly-diagnosed young-adult autistic daughter.



PROJECT

My project is an article on the journey of the misdiagnosis of my 35-year-old daughter from “Mild Mental Retardation,” (diagnosed at three) to autism level one (diagnosed at age 34). It is my hope that this article will help other parents of “special needers” to continue to pursue all avenues for a correct diagnosis and related services.

With a BA and MA in Communications, I decided to fuel my love for reading and writing by going into the teaching profession. After teaching middle school and high school for 15+ years, I left teaching only to find out two months later I had Stage 1 breast cancer. I was very fortunate that the cancer was caught in time. I am a people-person, nature lover, and lifelong learner of all things that interest me. Born during the 80s, my daughter's initial diagnosis was the disheartening label of “Mild Mental Retardation” (MMR). I was relieved when MMR morphed into a more humane title of “Intellectual/ Developmental Disability (I/DD)”. Neither label ever felt exactly right. It was only after reviewing one of my daughter's old IEPs that I noticed the word “echolalia” a characteristic of autism. Finding the best services for my newly diagnosed autism level one daughter became paramount. As her advocate, I have taken her to attend numerous community functions, Arc workshops and conferences, support groups as well as transported her to Food Service training at the Workforce Technology Center for four months—all with the purpose of fostering her sense of growth and independence. Like me, my daughter loves sports, nature, reading, learning and occasionally gardening (by way of watering a plant or two)! Being my daughter's advocate has been a challenging, rewarding, and humbling experience. It is definitely a life-long journey for the both of us.





Jeni Murphy

Applying for partners, I wasn't sure what to expect. Anything new creates some anxiousness for me. When I arrived, I was welcomed with open arms and realized I am not alone.

PROJECT

Create "Without Limits Network" using social media and a new website.



I live on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and I have two daughters, Destiny (19) and Arielle (3). I have an Associates of Applied Science in Criminal Justice, and I am the founder of Simply Mom, a healthy parent/new parent postpartum depression support group. When I gave birth to my youngest, life was a lot different than it was with my older daughter. To this day, I still have postpartum depression. Most days, I practice mindfulness, yoga, and aromatherapy. This helps a lot with my mental health. I'm the Chair of a domestic violence awareness and support group, "Women4Women," serving most of Maryland. I serve as a Community Health Outreach Worker with AmeriCorps in Salisbury, MD. My site, Hope Inc., works with the underserved population and self-identifying homeless consumers sheltered and non-sheltered. Working with the consumers has humbled me even more. I am a mentor and tutor with Prisons2PHD, working with current and previously incarcerated individuals. I am a trained mediator, which has helped a lot with conflict resolution during previous school meetings for my daughter. I am a state lead for the nationwide Recovery Advocacy Project; working with individuals while ensuring their voice is heard. Previously, I worked at Carefirst Blue Cross/Blue Shield for 11 years, working in credentialing and then the preservice review department. Knowing a lot of the insurance "ins and outs" has helped, with not only care for myself, but also both of my children. I work with Maryland Coalition of Families as a Caregiver Advisor. Having previous protective services interactions has given me a platform to help other families and guide them through systems of care.

Coni Nepomuceno

“

Parents of kids with special needs don't have the power to make life "fair" to their kids, but they do have the power to make their life happy for them.

PROJECT

Parent to Parent Build-out



My name is Coni Nepomuceno, I am a proud mom of two wonderful kids, Kyan and Sienna. When my son was diagnosed with autism at age 3, I submerged myself into finding resources, therapies, workshops, and services to help him with the challenges due to his disability. I am a firm believer that early intervention in kids provides better results for the future. Therefore, I started my journey in to be the best advocate for my son and our family. My son's diagnoses helped us understand him better including the different areas that he required help, so it was essential for me to be his voice with his service providers and the educational team responsible for his academic success. Through that process, I came across other families who were going through the same challenges, and it felt rewarding to me to share any resources that I found to be helpful, and other families could benefit from, such as grants, therapies, books, and organizations. While doing that, I discovered my passion for advocacy and how rewarding it was being able to connect with other parents. I converted the grief of my son's diagnosis into triumph by helping other families to find their own voice. With the help of The Parents' Place of MD, I was able to advocate for my son by writing S.M.A.R.T. goals to include in his IEP, and was prepared for every IEP meeting, and was able to relocate my son into a more supported program with Montgomery County Public Schools without outside legal assistance or advocacy. My son today is 7 years old, and even though we continue to have our daily struggles, we have come a long way in this journey and we celebrate successes and milestones we would never thought possible. Empowerment is power, and another part of this triumph is being able to work for The Parents' Place of MD, a non-profit organization that helps educate parents to be the best advocate they could be for their kids. Our philosophy of "families helping families" reflects our commitment to support families of diverse backgrounds.



I am a wife to a loving husband, John, and a mom to two amazing teenagers - a daughter Katie, who is 17 and will graduate high school this year, and son Jake, who is 15 and has Prader-Willi Syndrome (PWS). Jake is a sweet-natured, loving young man with a huge heart and a wonderful sense of humor and endears himself to everyone he meets. I have learned so much about myself and the world around me because of him; he has been my best teacher. After charting the course of Jake's journey, I wanted to help others through our struggles to navigate through their own journey with a little more ease and a lot less roadblocks. We found and secured a phenomenal residential school in Brewster, MA on Cape Cod that is world-renowned for its expertise in PWS. He is happy, thriving, and enjoying his independence and ability to try new activities. I have enjoyed a 20-year career as a Labor and Delivery Nurse, but am now a school health nurse and the nurse on our county's Mobile Crisis Team, helping those in my community struggling with substance-use disorders. I have also found a love for volunteering weekly for the last 10 years at a local crisis pregnancy center, helping women and children in need.

Laura Pawulat

*Listening to my fellow classmates' and the wonderful speakers' stories of advocacy, empowerment and resilience has truly inspired me on this journey. Partners in Policymaking class has opened new doors for me and has given me the courage to speak up for those who don't have a voice or may not know how to use that voice effectively to advocate for themselves. Formal advocacy, outside of championing for my son, has been an uncharted territory for me, but I'm honored to say that since starting Partners I have been **asked to be the parent advocate on my county's Local Care Team, connecting local families to programs and resources to secure the support they need for their loved one(s).***

PROJECT

The title of my project (which was completed in partnership with a couple of my classmates) is Inclusion Awareness for Calvert County Public Schools. This project focuses on creating awareness of inclusion benefits for kids with disabilities in Calvert County Public Schools. We want to emphasize and promote the fact that separation, segregation, or institutionalization is not the option we seek for children with various disabilities. We are collaborating with representatives from the Calvert County Special Education Department, and other representatives from the public school sector.

“ Susan Platt

When I applied, I was intrigued by the “Partners in Policymaking” title. I believe you are never too old to learn or get out of your comfort zone. This experience has been rewarding in listening to people who have been there, done that. *Sometimes you don't need to reinvent the wheel, you just need to keep it rolling in the right direction.*

It has been an extraordinary year and while neither program went as expected, that too was a great learning experience. To be continued...

PROJECT

After hearing about the Voluntary Flagging for 911 that is being run in Howard County, I really gravitated towards making this happen in Baltimore. In talking to other 2020 Partners, Milie Santos & Rico Winston, we joined forces to follow the path to make this happen in both city & county. We gave our project the title: “Building Bridges to Close the Divide between 1st Responders & Individuals with Uniquely Individual Intellectual & Physical Challenges.” This communication could change the situation from proactive to reactive, which could change the whole encounter entirely. We plan to get the county and city on board as this was a perfect time to see how useful voluntary flagging would be.



I was born and raised in and around Baltimore, where I have lived until just recently. I have been married to a wonderful man for 28 years with blended family. I have a grandson diagnosed with ADHD-hyperactive, on the spectrum-autism- former diagnosis Asperger's, mood and depression disorder. My granddaughter was diagnosed with ADHD-inactive, PTSD and anxiety disorder. Their lives will be different but are the inspiration to keep advocating. I have been going to DD Day for many years and have learned so much about my voice and how it can impact what our representatives know about their constituents and the area that they represent. I am not too far away from retirement so I will have more time to spend on the things I love - MY FAMILY and doing what I can to support them in their future.



Tjameika Purnell

I was thrilled to learn of my acceptance into this Partners in Policymaking cohort and it has not been disappointing. The lessons learned through inspirational sessions, knowledgeable speakers, and engaging classmates have been invaluable. What a profound opportunity!



I'm a busy mom of three teenage girls, one of whom has a rare, complex genetic anomaly, autism, ADHD, epilepsy, and other developmental, intellectual, and physical disabilities. For the past ten years, I've been employed as a Parent Navigator at Children's National Hospital in Washington, DC. I provide peer-to-peer support and mentorship to families caring for children with medical complexity and other special healthcare needs. Twelve years ago, I began local and statewide advocacy with the Parents' Place of Maryland. I've completed their LEADers, Health LEADers, and Special Education Volunteer Parent Educator Advocacy courses. I'm a member of The Arc of Prince George's County, actively involved in the Prince George's County SECAC, and the Special Needs Ministry of First Baptist Church of Glenarden. I'm a conference presenter on topics related to the care of special needs patients and their families and currently assisting adolescent patients transitioning into adult healthcare.

PROJECT

My project focuses on healthcare transition for high school students receiving special educational and related services. The goal is to provide guidance for students and their families to effectively implement the healthcare transition into the annual IEP meeting process. The Transition Readiness Assessment tool from Got Transition is used as a model for my project. Students, families, teachers, school healthcare providers, and other IEP team members can incorporate the concepts of discovering, tracking, preparing, planning, and transferring care into the document. The emphasis is on multi-model content delivery. Teams will begin discussions as an IEP module within Transition goal discussions. Checklists, assessments, facilitated conversations, written or verbal presentations, portfolio documentation, and other options are viable means to communicate and demonstrate progress.

Jeffrey
Ratnofsky

“

I like learning.

sport health



I am Jeffrey Ratnofsky and I am interested in helping making other people's lives better. I live in Rockville, MD and joined Partners to learn about ways to help others. I'm observant and like to go places with my Direct Support Professional (DSP), Michael. I want to go where I want and do what I want.

PROJECT

I contacted the police department on my project to spend time with me and my DSP. This would help police officers understand how to work with people who have special needs.



Milicent "Milie" Santos



*I joined Maryland Partners in Policymaking so I can learn more about ways to advocate for the people I support & for my 2 boys. However, I learned more than I bargained for! **I met people from diverse backgrounds who are in the same boat as I am, so it doesn't feel like I am alone in the fight anymore.** It made me feel like I belong despite being in the minority. It has also opened my eyes on how issues are related to the world of I/DD. This has even kicked up my advocacy skills a few notches (I was made a team leader for this year's DD Day, which meant a lot to me that they trusted me to lead a group!). You can't put a price on the things that I have learned here...they are all priceless! It is not just a class; it is a combination of fellowship, camaraderie, networking, leadership, belonging, & most of all family! It is like having another family! I love being here!*



My name is Milie Santos & I am a parent of 2 wonderful young adult men with Autism Spectrum Disorder. We all came from The Philippines & have been living in the United States for almost 15 years now. My undergraduate degree has nothing to do with Human Services (Communication Arts with a Major in Mass Communication) ...this is why I am trying to learn everything that I can in this field. Seeing them thrive & prosper in this world have given me lots of reasons to be thankful for & give back to my community by working with people with I/DD. I have been with The Arc Baltimore for 9 years now (Employment Division) advocating for all people with I/DD. I am planning on staying with them for as long as they would have me. I will continue to attend programs like these because it isn't just educational, it is eye-opening & very relevant to all of us.

PROJECT

My project is being done in collaboration with **Rico Winston & Susan Plitt**. We are planning on creating a 911 flagging system for both Baltimore County & Baltimore City. We were inspired when we heard it during one of the presentations. When a person calls from a flagged number or home address, it would be a big help to the First Responders to know that someone in that particular house is a person with disability who relies on their medical equipment.

Shari Silverman

“

*I have learned so much from the Partners in Policymaking class. I have learned the legislative process so I can help fight to make changes for the better for all people with disabilities. I feel empowered by my knowledge from the classes and feel that the other people in the class have all helped each other learn from each others' experiences. We are now better educated and empowered to become leaders in our community, state, and country. The future looks brighter now, and I feel that **anyone who takes this class has the potential to learn how to navigate the systems, break through the status quo, and educate and advocate for something that is ultimately better for all people with disabilities.***

PROJECT

For my class project, I helped create **Victory Homes of Maryland, LLC**. Together with other parents, we have started planning our first home that will provide a sustainable independent apartment living for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities as well as autism spectrum disorder. It is a private-pay option that will give parents piece-of-mind, knowing their child is in a great place now and into the future.



I am married to a very caring and supportive man that has been a great step-father to Sam, my incredibly fantastic 19-year-old son who has autism, 2 chromosome disorders, non-verbal learning disability, and a severe math disability. My son's life since birth had been a journey and challenge to find out why Sam was different than the "NORM." I had to educate myself and I educated others on every opportunity I had about the various conditions that I have had to learn about because of Sam. I am the type of person that has done as much research, learning, and understanding as I could do to learn all I can about the challenges we faced through classes, workshops, navigating special education, & transition planning. I have worked with numerous county representatives so I could understand the process from the other side (not as a parent). As my son has now reached the age of adulthood, I would like to help him prepare for transition to being an adult who is living the best independent life he can. I am now switching gears to help plan for a solution for my family and other families for housing options offering independent living. For an adult child, this includes lifelong support and placement that will be assured to be in place even when we are no longer able to care for our adult children. We want to build a family and a community, one person at a time!



Hello! I'm from the Eastern Shore of Maryland in a small town named Fruitland. I'm the mother of two young men, Kaleb (13) and Elijah (11). I'm a business owner (customizing and fabrication), in-formal peer support, advocate, Advisory Board Member for Wrap Around Maryland, and Caregiver Advisor for Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF). My drive for advocating comes from being the mother of my two extraordinary gentlemen. Kaleb is diagnosed with ASD, Anxiety and ADHD. Elijah is a trauma survivor and diagnosed with Separation Anxiety and ADHD. Mothering these two have empowered me to examine the local school system, laws in our area, and abroad that apply to the disabled to make sure my children and others like them have an equal opportunity to learn. Additionally, all should be included in the thought processes of federal, state and local law making, events, funding, etc. Being in this year's class of Partners in Policymaking has added many tools to my advocacy tool box and has given me another platform, to step out of my comfort zone to share our stories and allow others a glimpse into my life and through our lens!

Whitney Smith



Being in this year's class of Partners of Policymaking has added many tools to my advocacy tool box and has given me another platform to step out of my comfort zone to share our stories and allow others a glimpse into my life and through our lens! I've met amazing individuals taking part and facilitating this program that I know will be life-long allies and friends. I'm thankful for the opportunity to be a Partner and thankful for the new members of my "tribe" who have shown me that the squeaky wheels do indeed get the oil!

PROJECT

Create "Without Limits Network" using social media and a new website. The "Without Limits Network" is a mentoring, leadership, and point of entry network for Transitional Age Youth (14-24) on the Eastern Shore of Maryland with any disability. The youth and their family/caregivers will be paired with an adult and their family/caregivers who have successfully transitioned. Our hope is to make the process of transitioning easier by providing peer support through the entire process. While in waiting for pairings, we hope to have adults from our immediate community and abroad with varying levels of independence who have transitioned, come speak to our youth to inspire and show them the spectrum of success they can also achieve.

Andrew "Andy" Stettner

“

Partners has introduced me to an awe-inspiring group of disability advocates and self-advocates. The program has exceeded my greatest expectations as an introduction to critical issues facing the disabled community and a source of lifelong friends and comrades.



Andrew with Talia and Howard County Executive Calvin Ball at the Robinson Nature Friendly Sensory Sunday opening day, September 2019



I have been a social justice advocate and policy analyst for the past 20 years, specializing in poverty and employment issues. I currently work for The Century Foundation (TCF), a progressive policy think-tank in Washington, DC. At TCF, I have published groundbreaking research on policy responses to unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic that has been widely cited in major media outlets including the New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal and National Public Radio. Born in Detroit, I now live in Columbia, Maryland and am the father of three kids: Eli, Noah and Talia. Inspired by the incredible support provided to Talia by the organization, I have joined the Board of Directors of the Howard County Autism Society where I have been asked to co-lead a new Advocacy and Resources Committee and where I serve as a member of the Education committee.

PROJECT

I am taking my experience at Partners in starting the Advocacy and Resources Committee at HCAS. It will ensure that Howard County's autism community can take stands on critical issues at the state and county level. My role will be to organize advocacy, and to provide policy analysis of the latest issues. The Advocacy and Resources committee fills a hole in Howard County advocacy as it focuses beyond education issues. It represents the evolution of HCAS from an organization founded by parents and the experience of autistic youth, to an organization advocating on the full life of autistic community. My planned projects includes policing advocacy, DDA budget advocacy, and housing advocacy.



I am an author and advocate from Bethesda, Maryland. I am a member of and Blog Manager for Little Lobbyists, a family-led group that advocates for children and young adults with complex medical needs and disabilities. I also volunteer for the Rare Action Network, the volunteer arm of the National Organization of Rare Disorders, as well as the Montgomery County Work Group on Developmental Disabilities. My son, Rob (who has a rare disease), and I speak regularly on behalf of Little Lobbyists. I am the published author of *Monster* (Phoenicia Publishing, 2016), a meditation on caregiving, disability & medicine. My writing has appeared in numerous literary journals and my opinion pieces have appeared in *The Washington Post*, the Little Lobbyists' blog, and AmericaBlog.com. My author site: jenevastone.com.

Jeneva Stone



Partners has given me an education that I couldn't have gotten in the classroom on disability rights and advocacy. I've learned so much and have met so many good people! I now have another advocacy family moving forward—Partners is for life!

PROJECT

I'm trying to change the way home nursing is allocated in Maryland, which is a big task and long-term project. I'd like to ensure that transitioning youth who require skilled nursing care in Maryland have the same access to the community as their disabled peers. Right now, the Developmental Disabilities Administration and the Division of Nursing Service do not provide 24/7 care for medically complex young adults with disabilities in their communities. I've been meeting with my state legislators and educating them about this issue, which has included briefing papers and a flow chart. I've also been honored to testify before various committees in the Maryland Assembly and have been working with other advocates and groups to pass legislation that expands community integration in any way possible.

Robert "Rob" Stone

“

I've learned how to be a better advocate, and I've learned more about my rights as a person with disabilities. I've met a lot of new people, and it's been fun



PROJECT

I watched the movie “Crip Camp” on Netflix and it inspired me to keep advocating for people with disabilities. I signed up for Virtual Crip Camp, which runs all summer by Zoom. I plan to document my participation in Virtual Crip Camp in a few ways: my mom will help me record my responses to each session, and we will work together to make a final reflection at the end of the summer, which will take the form of a short paper/interview, a brief PowerPoint on my main take-aways, and a short video and/or photo montage of what I've learned.

I am a recent graduate of Walt Whitman High School, where I worked on community living skills, augmentative communication, and participated in the Best Buddies Club. During my transition planning, I identified the following life goals: to be an advocate for health care and people with disabilities, to be a writer, and to be an artist. As a result, I became a member of Little Lobbyists, a family-led organization that advocates for children and young adults with complex medical needs and disabilities. I often can be seen in the halls of the U.S. Congress and at the General Assembly in Annapolis. I read from my poems at literary events in the Washington, D.C. area and I'm living my best life.



Stacey Travers

*I am grateful to have had the opportunity to participate in the Partners in Policymaking program. It was such a rewarding experience. Participating in the program equipped me with more skills and confidence to continue on this journey. I gained insights and inspirations from many of the outstanding presenters, staff and other attendees. One of my favorite quotes from the class **“It is not that our children are unable to communicate; it is our goal to learn how they communicate.”***



I am a mother of three daughters, two of which are adults on the autism spectrum. While on this autism journey for over 20 years, I discovered one of my callings - to help those who may not have the resources to help themselves. A wise person once told me “God gives special children to special kinds of people to take care of them” I shared this same message with others in the same position. Because of this calling, I began a support group at my place of employment consisting of family members who have loved ones with autism or other different abilities. The group meets to support, network, encourage and share our joys, triumphs and challenges and provide resources to one another. The group also has organized numerous staff-wide events since its inception to help educate and spread awareness about autism. I believe networking with other families can be very encouraging and empowering.

PROJECT

I am inspired to start a hands-on, interactive training program and resource guide addressing topics beyond the high school years. I often hear from parents that they would like to see/access more resources for transitioned adults. The one stop guide would cover topics on the “what is and how to” regarding guardianship, trusts, wills, financial accounts, housing, HIPPA laws and healthcare, etc. Besides the educational component of the program, it would also focus on the spiritual needs of the parent/caregiver. A respite program that would exercise our faith. If we take care of ourselves, we would have the motivation to meet the needs of our loved ones.

Daya Chaney Webb

“

Partners in Policymaking is an informative, strengthening, collaborative, and overall has been a warm place to gather with like-minded people who understand where I'm coming from, what I'd like to accomplish as an advocate, and future pathways ahead. I am a stronger advocate because of this program.

PROJECT

For my project, I have accepted a volunteer leadership role in directing and organizing legislative initiatives in MD and nationally for The Alliance Against Seclusion & Restraint. Leading in strategy and relationship building with policymakers, we've grown support and interest in introducing a new piece of legislation with more provisions with several legislators. For Federal policy, we are actively moving to support the reintroduction of The Keeping All Students Safe Act (KASSA) and aiming to work with Members of Congress like Sen. Chris Murphy and Rep. Ayanna Pressley; setting meetings and discussing with staff. During this project, I've assisted other parents in local level advocacy and I'm currently designing an advocacy guide to publish as a resource. I've researched and written articles, assisted in organizational set-up, and produced a start-up guide for nonprofit filing. I'll be working on this project until better laws are passed that protect kids with disabilities from restraint and seclusion in the school house.



I am a mom of two teenage sons (one with autism). I live in Maryland and have been an education advocate in Baltimore County since 2013 serving as Chair of the Northeast Area Education Advisory Council and member of the Central, providing guidance on topics like special education needs in the county, organizing through grassroots initiatives and coalition building with strong partnerships. Among other state level legislative initiatives, I have lobbied with grassroots organizations for the Hybrid School Board Bill in Annapolis, and it passed in 2014! Also, I'm active in federal legislative advocacy for health care, education and overall civil rights for children with complex medical needs and disabilities. When I'm not meeting with policy makers to protect people with disabilities and creating strategy for change, I love live music, cooking, and traveling to anywhere on water.



Nicole West



*My experience with Partners has been amazing! This journey has embarked some many emotions, learning opportunities and connections with like-minded people coming together for a common goal. It's empowering and encouraging. **The energy and passion pushes me to learn everything I can to advocate effectively and make a difference in the community** for people with intellectual, developmental, and other disabilities.*



I'm a wife and a stay-at-home mom currently living in Prince George's County with a blended family. I have three older bonus children and one 9-year-old daughter, McKenzie, with multiple disabilities. I have a degree in Accounting from the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore and have worked in the health care industry for many years. McKenzie, my "munchkin" as I call her, was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy, MTHFR (a rare genetic disorder), seizures and autism. I am her biggest cheerleader, supporter and advocate as a parent. I see her struggles daily but she continues to laugh, smile and keep pushing. We are navigating through this thing called life together and I'm passionate about making sure she and others with different abilities get the proper services, resources, activities and inclusion opportunities that's needed for them to live a productive life in the community.

PROJECT

I thought about numerous topics for a project that I would be interested in for Partners. One just kept circling back around so I decided to do my project about MTHFR: its diagnosis, treatment, test screening, and effects on pregnancy. MTHFR (Methylene tetrahydrofolate Reductase) is the rate-limiting enzyme in the methyl cycle and it is encoded by the MTHFR gene. This enzyme plays a role in processing amino acids, which are the building blocks of proteins. It's a complex genetic mutation, which over 40% of the people have. Genetic testing can be done. If diagnosed early and treatment starts right away, infants who are affected can have a much better developmental outcome.

James "Rico" Winston

“

It was an exciting moment when I was notified that I had been accepted as a participant in the 2020 Partners in Policymaking program. The knowledge I have gained has been a tremendous asset, which could be compared to a “sea full of knowledge”, which I now have added to my “Super Advocate Tool Box”. I cannot say enough about the amazing men and women who are my fellow Partners. I have learned so much from each of you. I have gained much wisdom, insight, and friendship. I would like to send my thanks and love to each and every one. CONGRATULATIONS to the graduating Class of 2020 PARTNERS IN POLICYMAKING!! Together, we will make the world 🌍 a much warmer, kinder and loving place of acceptance for all individuals that have very unique life altering challenges, obstacles & difficulties.



I am the proud father of an amazing little Superhero, my son Israel. Israel has a diagnosis on the autism spectrum. As a single parent, our “Journey of Love” has been filled with mountain tops, peak highs, and valley lows, but filled with more love than anything. The single most empowering thing I did for my son is to love him unconditionally and accept him just as he is. Israel is perfectly formed and made as an amazing individual created by God. Israel and I have started a nonprofit organization, The Israel Winston Family Empowerment Corp., to help all individuals with life-altering unique development and physical challenges, as well as their families to walk beside them as they navigate the “Battlefield of Autism & Life Altering Challenges “. Israel currently is being groomed and obtaining the skills and knowledge so he can effectively continue his journey in self advocacy and advocating for others. Israel says quite frequently, “We are Super Heroes Papí and it our responsibility to change the world 🌍, God gave us that job!”.

PROJECT

Working with fellow partners and friends, **Millie Santos and Susan Pitt**, we are working together on the implementation of establishing 911 Flagging programs in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. We also, are focused on creating an Officer’s Sensitivity Training Program for Law Enforcement Agencies in these areas. This will give Law Enforcement Officers the knowledge to identify individuals that may not respond to commands, or become agitated by an encounter due to having unique challenges, such as autism. In Baltimore City, we are working towards starting a Student & Officer Relationship & Familiarity Program, to help students with learning challenges to be prepared for an encounter with a Law Enforcement Officer.

Thank You to the Partners in Policymaking® Presenters!

Donné Allen, Parent to Parent Program Coordinator, SEEC

Joseph Anatasio, Shared Support Maryland, Inc.

Elizabeth Benevides, Associate Director of Outreach, The Hussman Institute

Mary Anne Kane Breschi, Director of Family Supports, Developmental Disabilities Administration

Ken Capone, Public Policy Director, People on the Go Maryland

Guy Caruso Ph.D., FAAIDD, Western Coordinator for the Institute on Disabilities at Temple University

Amanda Cheong, Founder, AT Discount Sales and Services

Samantha Davis, Shared Support Maryland, Inc.

Jennifer Dorsey, Owner/Director, World of Friends School

Mai Hall, Parent Educator, Parent's Place of Maryland

Laura Hatcher, Vice President, Little Lobbyists

Rebecca Hutchcraft, Program Specialist, The Arc Washington County

Nicole Jorwic, Senior Director, Public Policy, The Arc U.S.

Karen Lee, Executive Director, Supporting Employment Equality and Community (SEEC)

Rachel London, Executive Director, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

Jennifer Lynn, Executive Director of Upcounty Community Resources, Inc.

Lori Markland, Executive Director, Maryland Department of Disabilities – Technology Assistance Program

Christian Miele, Deputy Secretary, Maryland Department of Disabilities

Brian Miller, Director of Grants & Information Management, The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

Na Toya Mitchell, Statewide Coordinator of Self-Directed Services, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration

Eva Queen, Founder and Executive Director of Community Advocates 4 You, Inc. (CA4Y)

Carol Quirk, Chief Executive Officer, Maryland Coalition for Exclusive Education

Cathy Raggio, Former Secretary, Maryland Department of Disabilities

Rylin Rodgers, Director of Public Policy, Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)

Patricia Sastoque, Director of Programs, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration

Patti Saylor, Founder, Health Link LLC

Karyn Stenzler, Certified Benefits Counselor, Full Circle Employment Solutions

Jamie Stoner, The Arc Baltimore

Justin Valenti, Office Automation Clerk, National Institute of Health

Tim Wiens, Executive Director, Maryland Inclusive Housing Corporation

Thank You to Our Partners Staff at The Arc Maryland

Arylon Brooks, Luc Chausse, Sharon Dols, Ande Kolp, Kathy Swanson

Thank you to the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council for funding and supporting this important opportunity.

Thank you to People on the Go of Maryland for all of your programmatic support.