



For the Hope and the How

Connecting individuals with disabilities and their families with resources, support and information

Bridges

Spotlight on Community

- An interview with Emily Ladau



Coming in November



An Evening to Benefit
STARBRIDGE

See inside for details

Introducing:

Bridges

For the inaugural issue of our Starbridge quarterly newsletter, we present: *Bridges*. *Bridges* continues the legacy of *The Bridge*, connecting individuals with disabilities, their family members, and people who work with them, with resources, support, and information.

Through *Bridges* we look forward to discovering and sharing the many pathways and choices available to people in achieving lives of personal and professional fulfillment.

What's Inside...

This issue of *Bridges* highlights
"What I Want You To Know"

 **Save the Date!**
Celebration of Champions
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 **NYS Partners in Policymaking® begins a new session in August!**
Registration is now open.
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Welcome to Starbridge

New Organization, New Name,
Same Commitment to Quality Programs and Services

In May, the NYS Attorney General's office ratified the merger of The Advocacy Center and LDA Life and Learning Services. June 1 marked the first day of operations of Starbridge, as our combined organization will now be known.

"As Starbridge, our mission is to partner with people with disabilities, their families, and those who support them, to realize fulfilling possibilities in education, employment, health, and community living. Together we transform communities to include everyone," said Colin Garwood, Executive Director.

Since the beginning of the year we have consolidated main offices at 1650 South Avenue. In addition, staff at all levels began exploring collaborations between programs with the goal of providing more comprehensive support and services and resources to individuals with disabilities, their families, and the larger community.

Over the past twelve months, workgroups of staff and Board members from the legacy organizations participated in a thorough process to develop the agency's brand, name and logo, facilitated by The Ad Council of Rochester. The brand provided a guiding framework to move beyond the initial step of combining agencies and blending



Colin Garwood and Allyn Stelljes

the best elements of The Advocacy Center and LDA, while keeping an eye on the future.

Colin Garwood explains, "The name and tagline - Starbridge: For the Hope and the How - embody the idea that we offer both the optimism and vision to identify opportunities, as well as the tools and connections to help people get there.

"This merger strengthens our capacity to better deliver person-centered, integrated services that reach from school to work to community living to self-directed services. We will continue to keep an eye on the realities of today's care environment, ongoing government reform and tomorrow's needs."

Starbridge looks forward to inviting the community to an open house in the Fall.

Our primary contact number for Starbridge is 585-546-1700. We invite you to visit our website at www.starbridgeinc.org.



Is there an Advocate in the House?

End of the School Year Reflections



by Laura Arrington,
Parent Center
Coordinator

It's amazing how quickly the school year goes by. One day it's the start of school, and in a blink of an eye, it's the end of the school year. Ending the school year can be an emotional time for families. For some it's yet another transition to endure, and for others it can be an opportunity for change and improvement.

The end of the school year is a time to take a few minutes and reflect on how things went overall and to consider areas in need of improvement for future success. Without a framework to guide reflecting, the entire school year assessment can easily turn into either broad brush, negative views such as "the worst year ever" or vague, ineffective thoughts such as "not bad, I guess." Thoughtful reflection, on the other hand, can reveal information from the school year that can be used as a guide to better meet the needs of our children and to keep everyone focused when kids return to school in September. Thinking about *what works* matters most and can help prepare our kids for a successful school year.

Here are some questions to ask when reflecting on this school year and preparing for the next:

What went well this year? What learning strategies made a difference? What supports were in place that helped your child stay on track or excel?

If you could make one change for the upcoming school year, what would it be?

If this year's teacher could share something positive about your child, what would he or she say?

How was communication with school? What worked? What changes would you make?

Was there too much or too little homework?

What was your child's favorite thing about school?

What was challenging about school?

If your child could tell next year's teacher something about themselves, what would it be?

Record your observations and then share those with your child and your child's new teacher or team. Use this valuable exercise to save everybody time in getting to know your child and finding out what works.

As you prepare for the transition to next school year, think about how to prepare your child for the start of a new school year and try one of the following ideas:

Create a portfolio of your child
This can be a picture and few

sentences about your child with a list of things they like to do and how to support them if they are struggling. Give a copy to next year's teacher, classroom aide or bus driver. You may include some of your observations from your end-of-the-year reflection exercise.

Visit a new school or classroom

See if the school is open over the summer and if you and your child can visit the new classroom or building. Take pictures and talk about the new classroom or school building.

Communication with staff and teachers

After school starts, email your child's teachers and ask if they have any questions on your son's or daughter's IEP or 504 plan. Let them know the best way to contact you if they have any questions and ask them what is the best way they can be contacted.

Don't forget to say "Thank you" and celebrate success

Don't forget to acknowledge a great aide, teacher or bus driver. These are the people that can help our children be successful! Take a moment and celebrate everything that did work well this year.

Nominate someone today for a
Community Award!
Deadline for submission is August 28, 2015.
See page 4 for details.

An interview with

Emily Ladau

Spotlight
on
Community

Emily is a writer, disability rights advocate, and owner of Social Justice Media Services. She is a Spring 2015 graduate of NYS Partners in Policymaking® program. See Emily's blog, Words I Wheel By, www.wordslwheelby.com.

You have tutored students with cognitive and linguistic disabilities. What did this experience teach you?

I'm going to come right out and admit that I used to believe I was much more sensitive to the disability experience than I actually was. I was naive and thought that because I'm physically disabled and have friends with disabilities, I just "got" the whole of disability. It was only after some time working with students with different disabilities than mine that I realized no one can ever truly 100% understand the experience of another person. We can relate and we can connect on deep, powerful levels, but each of us is only ourselves. And when we realize this - that we are here not to presume we know best what anyone else's life is like, but rather to accept that everyone's experience is unique, then we can provide the love and support we all need to thrive.

Can you provide a positive, respectful depiction in popular culture of a person with a disability?

I strongly prefer reality over fictional accounts of disability most of the time. So, I'm a huge fan of the television show, *The Little Couple*, on TLC. I find it to be one of the most down-to-earth, accurate representations of disability experience currently in

the media. It combines education about living as little people almost seamlessly with a typical reality show entertainment aspect.

Who are your role models?

Without question, my personal role models are my mom and dad. Their love, dedication, and willingness to always be supportive are values that I forever carry with me. I could go on and on about why my parents mean so much to me, but would like to share tributes I've written to them instead: Father's Day tribute, Mother's Day tribute. In the professional realm, I am in awe of Arianna Huffington. She is the embodiment of what I aspire to be like throughout my career. Her belief in self-care and balance before money and power is something I constantly work to remember.

What is the key to self-respect?

I've always believed there is no one right road to self-respect, but part of it is being a source of love and acceptance to everyone whose paths we cross. The other, most important part is to consciously redirect the negative feelings we internalize. As a woman with a disability, I have to work daily to remember to love myself and push past the stigma of disability that is perpetuated by society. But in regard to negative body-image, low self-esteem, or a general lack of self-respect - that's a pretty common experience, I think. And we can move beyond it by building one another up, and remembering not to tear ourselves down. Is all of this cliché? Absolutely. It's also

necessary. *Learning to Love My Whole Self*

Is there any other career that you have explored in addition to writing?

Well, I suppose you could count my brief stint in acting, when I appeared on multiple episodes of *Sesame Street* when I was 10 years old.

In all seriousness, though, writing has always been the basis of my career, and to be honest, I've never given it a second thought. In the past year, I've brought my work together into one cohesive business, Social Justice Media Services. I write, I do public speaking, and I manage communications and social media for disability-related organizations.

Emily, is there anything else you want us to know?

What I want most in the world for people to know is that I do not perceive myself as being separate from my disability. I do not consider it negative or shameful to refer to myself as disabled, because to me, that would be letting stigma win. Disability is part of my identity, down to my very core, both figuratively and literally, since my disability is genetic and my mother has it as well. And it does not make me less of a person when I consciously call myself a "disabled woman" instead of a "woman with a disability." Ultimately, the language we choose to use to identify ourselves is a deeply personal choice, and the key is to respect and accept everyone for who they are.

Starbridge Workshops, Conferences & Special Events



An Evening to Benefit Starbridge

Save the Date!

Saturday, November 14, 2015
7 - 11 p.m. at Locust Hill Country Club

Join us for a festive and inspiring evening!

Ginny Ryan, Emcee and 13WHAM-TV news anchor, will help us honor individuals and organizations making a difference in the lives of individuals with disabilities. Our second Celebration of Champions as partners, and our first Celebration as Starbridge, will be a night to remember - great food, music and welcome company. Enjoy the evening's festivities including:



- Hearty hors d'oeuvres and decadent desserts
- Complimentary glass of wine and non-alcoholic beverages
- Bidding on exciting Silent Auction items for yourself or to give away as holiday gifts
- Wine Pull featuring many expensive wines valued at up to \$100
- Photo Booth to capture your fun with family and friends

For more information or to make your reservation, [Click here](#) or call (585) 224-7248, or email us at events@starbridgeinc.org.

Sponsorship opportunities are available. Proceeds will support children and young adults who are striving for success in school and employment.

Community Awards: *Nominate someone today!*

Our annual Community Awards honor individuals and organizations that are creating positive change in the lives of individuals with disabilities. Award categories are Community Impact, Education, Founders, Self Advocacy and Youth. Award recipients are invited as guests to our Celebration and are presented with an engraved award.

For more information or to nominate someone for an award, use this link to download a Nomination Form and follow the instructions provided.

Deadline for submission is August 28, 2015.

Call (585) 224-7248 or email us at rwright@starbridgeinc.org for more information.

Save the Dates!

THE INSIDE SCOOP

How to meet children's complex medical needs in their home, school, and community, will be offered this fall on Wednesdays,

September 30,
October 7,
and October 14.

Check our [website calendar](#) for details to follow in coming months.

Wayne County Workshops in August!

Proactive Advocacy

August 05, 2015

Pre-registration required by 8/3/15

Functional Behavioral Assessments and Positive Behavioral Interventions

August 12, 2015

Pre-registration required by 8/10/15

Both sessions 10 am - 12 noon
Wayne County Public Health
1519 Nye Road, Suite 200,
Lyons, NY 14489

To register, call Wayne County Public Health at 315-946-5749 or 1-800-724-1170. Please [click here](#) for further information.

Receive a paper copy of *Bridges*

If you would like to receive a paper copy of the newsletter, please contact Maria Schaertel at (585) 224-7371 or mschaertel@starbridgeinc.org.

Remember to provide your name, mailing address, and phone number.



Starbridge Workshops, Conferences & Special Events

RTI, 504, IEP: What's it All About? A webinar July 22, 2015, 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm

When a child qualifies for special education services, federal law requires the development of a document called an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Some students may not qualify for an IEP, but may receive accommodations and modifications from a 504 Plan or may receive support through Response to Intervention (RTI). This webinar will explain the process for receiving supports and services through general and/or special education.

REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED BY JULY 20, 2015. To register, email: registration@starbridgeinc.org, Phone 585-224-7399 or Register here.

Presented by Starbridge and Wayne County Public Health



The ADA Legacy Bus

is making a stop in Rochester, NY on **Saturday, July 11th**, in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Legacy Tour exhibits will be on view at the following locations along with special activities to complement the tour.

Visit The Strong Museum, 1 Manhattan Square Drive, Rochester, NY 14607, from 11 am to 3 pm, for fun, educational activities highlighting the ADA, disability rights, sports and culture.



Save the Date for our Fall Conference!

Stress! Why the Brains of Students with LD/ADHD Are at Risk & What You Can Do About It.

Featuring Jerome J. Schultz, Ph.D.,
Clinical Neuropsychologist,
Author and Speaker

**Friday, November 6, 2015
8:00 am - 3:30 pm**

Burgundy Basin Inn, Pittsford, NY 14534



Please stop by the



information table at
**The Strong Museum from
11:00 am to 3:00 pm.**

Center for Disability Rights will host a celebration and cookout at 497 State Street, Rochester, NY 14608, from 5 pm to 8 pm.

All events are free and open to the public.



present:

Thinking Across the Spectrum a conference for professionals and families

Featuring keynote speaker
Temple Grandin, Speaker & Author



Friday, September 18, 2015
Crosswinds Wesleyan Church,
3360 Middle-Cheshire Road, Canandaigua, NY

Registration must be submitted by 8/14/15. Please note the cost of this conference is \$100 for parents, \$150 for professionals.

For more information contact Katie McGowen of Happiness House at (315) 789-6828 or kmcgowen@happinesshouse.org.



What I Want You to Know

Just A Girl like You

By Shameka Andrews

This is to the girl on the bus that asked all the questions.
 Don't you wish you were normal?
 How do you make it through? And the answer is I'm just a girl like you.
 I go to school, I go to work, sometimes I can be a real jerk.
 I like to watch movies, I like to buy CDs,
 sometimes I like to buy two or three.
 I like to sing, I like to dance,
 I wish I could fit in size 8 pants,
 but I can't, I'm just a girl like you



Shameka Andrews is a disability consultant/advocate and motivational speaker who provides workshops in the areas of self-advocacy, disability empowerment, disability awareness and wellness. Shameka is a past winner of Ms Wheelchair NY, an empowerment and advocacy program for women who use wheelchairs. She is a graduate of the NYS Partners in Policymaking® program.

Dance is
fun!



"I like to dance with friends." - Ella B., 12-year-old dancer

"My teacher Miss Caitlyn is nice and I like to tap."
 - Claire M., 10-year-old dancer

We shopped around the Rochester area for quite some time looking for a dance class that was a good match for both of our daughters. We needed a studio where the instructors are caring, encouraging, accepting, creative, enthusiastic and are able to teach dancers with different learning styles. We found all of that and more at Ashford Ballet Company! We have been with them for 5 years and each year we get to watch our daughters grow into more skilled and confident dancers. -Carrie B., dance parent since 2009

At Ashford, we believe that every child is a dancer. All of our classes are fully inclusive! We also offer a smaller class setting designed for students who may need a little bit more 1:1 instruction, time, or space for creativity to discover new ways to express themselves. Activity songs and games will be layered in with classical ballet to ensure that everyone is excelling and having fun. -Miss Caitlyn, NYS Certified Teacher

Learn more about Ashford Ballet Company.

I Want People to Know

A mother lovingly puts into words what her child expresses through non-verbal communication. It reminds us, "Just because I don't speak, it doesn't mean I have nothing to say."

My wheelchair doesn't define me,
 My lack of speech doesn't define me,
 My total dependency on others doesn't define me,
 For, when I smile, everyone knows that THIS is me!...

I am just a happy guy who happens to be in a wheelchair, who tries to make the very best of every day, and who teaches everyone around me to appreciate everything they have in their lives...through my SMILE (which DOES define ME) and melts the hearts of those around me!

A Pet Can Transform a Home

By Norann Shiner

My son, Adam, wants you to know: “I don’t always need or want something ‘special.’ Sometimes, all I need is what brings joy to anybody, like...a dog.” Adam shares an agency-run, community home with five other people in the Rochester area.

This all started about eight months ago when the house had somebody come over with a therapy dog.

One of Adam’s housemates, John, typically doesn’t interact much with anybody in the house. We invite him to interact, but don’t want to push him beyond his comfort level.

One day John came out of his room for dinner, saw the Golden Retriever, immediately went over to him, got on the floor, and started petting him, hugging him, and cooing to him. He put dinner aside to play with the dog. We were all amazed at this because John doesn’t normally demonstrate that kind of interest in anybody. So then we had the therapy dog come back again, and the same thing happened. This time, we all took out our cameras and phones and recorded this whole event. Everybody in the house, Adam included, took part in this whole wonderful interaction. So we sent this information to the head of the agency and a bunch of other people to let them know the positive impact this had on everyone, especially John. Everybody was blown away.

The residential supervisor came in and saw the value of getting a family pet. She found a family whose Golden Retriever was five years old and needed a more active environment to live. Their dog, Diesel, had grown up with

an active family whose kids were grown and gone from home. The owner brought Diesel over to see the home. Over a period of a couple of months, Diesel came for visits, and then he began spending nights too. He actually slept in John’s room.

It was evident that this was going to work. The family could come and visit any time, and they were pleased with Diesel’s new home. Diesel was happier too, with all the attention he received.

We brainstormed about how this was going to work. We needed a fence, for example. Should it be an invisible fence or a regular fence? Who was going to oversee bathing and be responsible for vet trips? All those little details had to be worked out. The guys decided they wanted to be more responsible for Diesel. Once the fence was in, they had a party welcoming Diesel to the family.

Ever since then, it’s been interesting to see the transformation in the house. One night, I got a phone call from the house, urging me to come right away. “Something’s up with Adam.” The staff was alarmed that my son, Adam, who never leaves his wheelchair at the house, got out of his chair, and was on the floor with Diesel. Diesel had his head on Adam and Adam was playing with him. “He got out of his wheelchair by himself!” They didn’t know that Adam has a Golden at our home and that’s what he’s always done.

Diesel is part of the family. It’s amazing because he listens to everybody. There’s not just one person who gives him direction.



He knows to listen to everybody. He knows where to go out, how to ask to go out. All the guys take turns feeding him.

Diesel has helped everybody look beyond themselves. For example, Adam has always been the center of attention in our family. He had to be. And especially after he was diagnosed with cancer, our lives revolved around him. In his mind, he always comes first, and that mindset continued in his new home. All of a sudden, he has a dog in his own home. Now, he has to think about Diesel before himself. It’s a total flip. The guys say, “Who’s got Diesel? Who’s fed Diesel? Where is he?” They are all thinking more outside of themselves and their needs, and concentrating on another family member.

The bond between the housemates is getting stronger too. Adam is interacting more with John. The guys go up to John’s room and ask if he wants to feed Diesel, for example. They want to give John the choice of doing that. They will say to each other, “Has anyone let Diesel out?” The other night, one housemate called to another, “Hey, let’s let Diesel out. We’ll throw a ball around for him in the backyard.” Typical conversation. To walk in

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A Pet Can Transform a Home

continued from page 7

that house, you'd never know it was a group home. It's just their home with their dog.



Diesel has also created more interaction with neighbors. In fact, last night, the guys all went to a neighborhood meeting and talked about Diesel. I see the neighbors over more. When the guys take the dog for a walk, the neighbors stop to pet Diesel and chat.

Diesel is so sensitive to individual needs. He knows if Adam is holding his leash, he cannot pull on the wheelchair. But he treats me very differently. He is more gentle with Adam. He is the most gentle, most well-behaved dog I have ever seen.

It's just been an amazing transformation in the house. And Diesel is happy, too.

Norann Shiner is a Family Advocate and Trainer at Starbridge.

Please note: To respect the privacy of Adam's housemates, the name of the agency supervising the home has been withheld, and the housemate's name was changed.



Words I Wheel By, www.wordswheelby.com
blog by Emily Ladau

Self-Advocacy Association of New York State
<http://sanys.org/>

Friends Helping Friends
<http://www.starbridgeinc.org/how-we-can-help/community-transformation/friends-helping-friends>

Partners in Policymaking®
<http://nysspip.org>

Ms. Wheelchair New York
<http://mswheelchairnewyork.weebly.com/>

The Inspiration Project is a volunteer collaboration between the University of Rochester and CP Rochester, a nonprofit organization that supports individuals with special needs. During the spring of 2015, a group of writing students from the University of Rochester met weekly with writers from CP Rochester. Through extensive one-on-one conversations, the UR students and CP Rochester adults have produced the works assembled in *Dignity: Creative expressions from the inspiration project*, Spring 2015, Volume 5.

Greg's Life Story (selections)

by Greg Junious In Collaboration with Kwanza Warren

This is how my story will begin. When I was a little boy, I was really sick. I didn't have a lot of energy in my body. I was really bad off. I almost died. My mom and I had the same sickness. The doctors had to put blood back into my system. I don't remember the whole official story, but I almost wasn't able to live.

* * *

My mom passed away and my dad left my life. I have been through many surgeries. I have moved around from group home to group home my whole life.

* * *

One of my other uncles is coming back into my life a lot more and wants to be a support system for me. He is going to do everything he can to make sure I get all of the services I need. My family is everything and help with getting me through tough times. It is hard because if I ever got a woman, I don't know how she would perceive me because I am in a wheelchair. It is rare to see women that date disabled men.

* * *

I am starting a new job called LDA (Learning Disabilities Assistance) program: it's a job training program. One day I hope to get a job that pays a lot of money. I am going through the process to gain approval to live in a supportive apartment. A staff member will come in once a month to help me with goals, so I will no longer be living in a group home. I am also getting a community staff that will allow me to get out more and explore the city. They will take me out and help me with my social skills, cooking skills, and finances. I met with one of the managers. She explained all that they can do for me. They can help with paying bills, and more important, independent stuff. They can help me get a learner's permit. They will help me when I get my own apartment. That is beautiful for me. I think so.

* * *

I hope that in reading this story, you got to know the real me and my real personality. Having a good support system and doing things that I enjoy have helped me overcome my hardships. It is important to stay positive. As long as you have people that care about and respect you, things can always get better.

The Art of Writing

by Ann Kurz



“A picture is worth a thousand words.”

“A word is worth a thousand pictures.”

I like that play on words.

I like to play with words. You can tweak words until people get the true picture. Words are fluid.

But you can’t tweak pictures. Pictures are static.

Words leave room for imagination.

Pictures are snap judgments.

And words provide poetic justice

Words can answer any “what if” questions. What if all people were accepted equally?

What if I could encourage inclusion for all?

What if I didn’t have cerebral palsy - what would my life be like?

What if I did have cerebral palsy - what would my life be like?

What if I were on *Dancing with the Stars*? What would I do with my walker? Am I like my great-grandma Browne who loved to dance and probably would have been a dancer if she could have afforded such trivial pursuits?

What if I am like my grandma Teresa who loved to teach and if she’d had the chance, would have taught me how to be the change I want to see in the world?

Did you know I taught myself to write? To put pen to paper, to connect the dots, to form letters, to spell words, to compose sentences...to give myself a voice. Why I taught myself to write isn’t important - except to say that my teachers and therapists didn’t think I could.

To say “you can’t” is a sentence. The facts and figures between the capital letter of the diagnosis and the period at the end of the assessments imprison students, trapping them somewhere between can’t and won’t.

Nobody taught me to write, either. Compose-write, I mean. Once I’d learned to handwrite, the ideas just flowed naturally from my soul, through my brain, down my arm, into the pen, where the ink gave birth to their visual life on paper.

Nobody taught me to care either. I mean, to care about the problems that seem so external from my daily existence--the silencing, the marginalization, the invisibility, the injustice...

So this is poetic justice.

Ink bleeding from the pen in thin threads streaming in swirls and twirls and whirls across the paper, my lifeline for my voice to ring out strong and clear.

The little black letters chasing the cursor across the blank white page, fingers darting across the keyboard, punctuating the silence with their message, transcribing my ideas into actions.

Written words have power,

Written words are empowering.

Written words woven together wrap around me like a security blanket. They ward off the cold misunderstandings that my spoken words cannot. They comfort my innermost being by lending clarity to my mumbled voice and credence to my character. I rely on written words to insure that people understand my feelings, my beliefs, me.

And through your written words I can understand.

And that is our poetic justice.



Friends Helping Friends Wants You to Know:

We believe all individuals have value, talents and gifts. We will not be defined by a label or the limitations of disability. We believe that with determination, we can achieve anything we put our minds to. We invite anyone who shares our dreams and goals to join us in our efforts.

Members from FHF share some thoughts:

Donnell Evans serves on the Fundraising Committee of Friends Helping Friends and describes his personal goals. One day, I want to go back to school and finish my degree in Communication/Media Arts. I want to finish school, get a good job, and maybe sometime get married.

Michelle Gordon, past President of the group and recently visiting from California, shared some background on the history of FHF. I've been a part of FHF since it first started in 1999. It was first founded by Bernie Jackson. I was President and then past president of the group and was part of it when we received the award for Self-Advocacy Group of the Year. We had a car wash and a plant sale. FHF helped build up my self-advocacy background skills. I would recommend if anyone would like to join FHF, and has the opportunity to, go ahead and join because it's a good self-advocacy group to be a part of. I would say, 'Join in!'

Morgan Knibbs, the Fundraising Committee chair, describes her involvement with FHF. I love

being a part of FHF because we help each other. We do lots of fundraising and we have gone out and taught about self-advocacy and how others can be self-advocates.

We have also, as a group, discussed goals that we would like to work on. We've done some skits, and it really helped all of us with working on our goals and being real about what's going on in our lives. I think it's really cool that we help each other because, you know, everybody needs somebody in this world and I'm glad that I'm part of a self-advocacy group such as this one.

I want to spread the news about being a self-advocate and to say 'it's OK to ask for help and it's OK to speak your mind in an appropriate manner. And it's really up to you what you want your life to be. You have a decision to make and no one else can make it for you.'

Steven Blum, Secretary of FHF, describes how self-advocacy has shaped him. One of my passions in life is to make some kind of a big difference in the world of advocacy. When I first became a part of the advocacy world, it

was more of a growth experience. I'm more than proud of myself to get involved in it, thanks to a good friend of mine, Zev Zicari (also a member of FHF). And I just basically want to say that I have learned a lot through the years because of advocacy and it teaches me in numerous ways: it makes me feel more mature, helps me become more involved in stuff, and to make that difference I always wanted to make in the world.

Maggie Arnold makes an extra effort to participate in Friends Helping Friends. Maggie travels from Canandaigua to Rochester, up to a 45-minute drive, to attend monthly meetings. I have made many friends in FHF, and we have a lot that we like to do together. And I will make a movie someday with Zev Zicari.

Sumer Miller, with fellow member Maggie Arnold, also makes the long drive from Canandaigua to attend monthly meetings. Sumer describes a concept she learned in Partners in Policymaking® that she values. I took away from Partners' People First Language. I think everyone should hear about People First Language because it is so important. Words can hurt.

When someone is introducing me, I prefer them not to mention my disability as one of the first things they tell about me. I want them to mention other things that define me as who I am and not my disability.

After I was done with that program I learned to be a better self-advocate for myself and for others. I am currently a member of Friends Helping Friends because I want to continue to help others. I always say, "Nothing about me without me!"

"...it's OK to ask for help and it's OK to speak your mind in an appropriate manner."

Marilyn Stata, Maggie Arnold, and **Sumer Miller** are all NYS Partners in Policymaking® graduates, completing the program together in 2005. Marilyn is now President of Friends Helping Friends.

Friends Helping Friends is a self-advocacy group of individuals who speak and act on behalf of their rights. The group provides support to individuals in developing confidence and independence.

Friends Helping Friends meets the third Wednesday of each month at 1650 South Avenue, Suite 200, Rochester, NY 14620, from 5:00 pm-7:00 pm. For further information, please call (585) 224-7212, email ebarto@starbridgeinc.org or visit the website, www.starbridgeinc.org

New Partners Join Graduate Network

Fall Session Registration Now Open

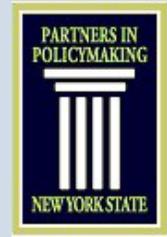
The Spring 2015 class of Partners in Policymaking® is celebrating graduation. As a culminating activity, 33 graduates delivered testimony about a disability-related subject. 18 Partners presented at testimony/graduation sessions in Rochester, Ithaca, and New York City. 15 participants provided video submissions of themselves delivering testimony. Videos will be available at the NYS Partners YouTube Channel

During the course, participants gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence to make changes in policy, perception, and treatment of individuals with disabilities. The class participated in a series of interactive modules and webinars, with one statewide and one regional in-person meeting. Participants develop skills with technology and on-line communication tools for advocacy. Every class includes self-advocates and individuals from diverse backgrounds.

The course ended with an introduction to the opportunities that exist within the larger state-wide NYS Partners network. New and exciting changes involving the sharing of information, resources, and collaboration will be unveiled with the opening of the latest version of the Graduate website.

Congratulations to all 33 graduates!

Want to become a NYS Partner? Fill out an online application. Go to www.nyspip.org and click on I want to apply. The next course runs from September to December 2015. Applications will be accepted until August 2015.



Rochester Graduates

NYC Graduates



Ithaca Graduates





Starbridge

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From the Editor:



I hope you have enjoyed the first issue of *Bridges*. As editor, I have the pleasure of sharing with you the knowledge, ideas, and experiences of parents, family members, self-advocates, community members, and professionals.

I am a parent of a young adult with a disability. From diagnosis at birth to his recent employment, we have grown together. I will occasionally share my family's journey with you. I invite you to share yours as well. Together we can ease a sometimes challenging journey and nurture dreams into reality.

Please contact me by email: mschaertel@starbridgeinc.org, phone: (585) 224-7371 or mail: Maria Schaertel, Starbridge, 1650 South Avenue, Suite 200, Rochester, NY 14620.

Have a wonderful summer, and mark your calendar for our Celebration of Champions, slated for November 14!

Maria Schaertel



Starbridge: For the Hope and the How

We offer both the optimism and vision to identify opportunities, as well as the tools and connections to help people get there.

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