

The reason I'm a part of this is FREEDOM.  
SELF DETERMINATION IS FREEDOM  
OUR FLAG STANDS FOR FREEDOM  
OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN GIVE PEOPLE FREEDOM  
IN ART THERE IS FREEDOM  
MY VAN IS NAMED FREEDOM  
IN DISCOVERY THERE IS FREEDOM AND RISK AND  
ADVENTURE

-Those are the words of Brian Habermehl who welcomed you tonight.

So, if this were a State of the Union address, I would be obliged to say, "The State of our Union is Strong," and, the state of our Arc IS strong.

But, today's strength doesn't come as much from those who will stand up for those without a voice, or from philanthropy, or from parents, friends and family, but, from the still-growing chorus of YOU our self-advocates. Now we know you have always had a voice. You have always had a message, but, we just did not know how to listen.

Today, indeed, we still learn every day, and are amazed by what we learn. One of our latest and greatest adventures, one that Brian referred to in his statement above, is our Discovery program that spends time with individuals carefully documenting who they are and documenting them as they engage in activities to discover their best for the purposes of employment. The temptation to interpret what we are observing is strong, but that interpretation usually doesn't consider your own unique strengths, because it becomes a measurement against a job description, or a sense of performance that is, at best idealized. This program, over-all is called Customized Employment, and, our adventure with it is just beginning.

This past year, our programs have grown in both scope and attendance, and, at long last, they have done so through the inspiration of our self-advocates and not through our sense of what they should be doing, or even what you may “need”. These are radical ideas that should have been our modus operandi for the past 5 decades of our existence... But, there is still far to go.

Tonight’s information that I’m going to share, comes from our staff who have worked tirelessly to add new offerings, oftentimes without new resources. Please stand or wave, if you are here, as I call you name: Cheryl Donlan, Brian Habermehl, Mark Reeves, Jennifer Tilley-Voegtle, Jerry Kotarski, Justin Smyre, our 6 AMPES coordinators: Lian Torres, Jackie Brehm, Linda Krause, Angela Long, and Elizabeth Lenig, represented tonight by John Shosh, who is also the director of Jack and the Bean Stalk. Linda Wenrich, who has moved on in advancement of her career had been the glue that held things together this past year. She remains with us attending events and working as an AMPES substitute. Thank you, Linda. And welcome, Tessa Moore, who just this past Monday started in the Administrative Assistant position. Cheryl and Jerry are not here tonight because they are in Selinsgrove presenting tonight at Selinsgrove Center as keynote speakers for their volunteer recognition banquet. There’s some of that leadership we were referring to...

So here are some highlights of our programs this past year:

- The Arc Self Advocates of the Susquehanna Valley Program Continues to be a program with its roots in the Principles of Self Determination, led by the voices of Self Advocates, for Self-Advocates of this Valley. Self-Advocates continue to fill venues for Cooking Classes, Dream Classes, Bridge classes, Wellness Events, Trips, and Community Service Projects.

- For ten years the Self-Advocate program has had monthly “on the road” programs at SUNCOM
- For eight years they’ve visited many other agencies and programs in the area as well
- For six years they’ve taken iPads out into the community to teach communication skills and are also in their sixth year of the Seeds of Freedom Raised bed gardens in Sunbury and Shamokin, having been primary caretakers of the gardens for four of those years. I was just at the Sunbury garden opening today.
- One on one visits that help self-advocates are in their 4<sup>th</sup> year with 23 visits now happening per week.
- The DREAM class (which stands for Discovering Resources to Explore and Achieve Your Mission) is in it’s 3<sup>rd</sup> year and has busted the seems of our current location. This class couples technology with teaching self-advocates about their rights and the Civil Rights movement.
- The Self-Advocates were planning leaders for The Arc’s BRIDGE to Work program and Brian Habermehl co-teaches this class with Cheryl Donlan. They have had...
  - 20 different participants
  - 4 new business partners
  - 2 participants helping at our fundraiser
  - And 4 participants returning to employment at Knoebels
  - Coming up, the group will be helping out at Emmanuel Homes with landscaping & activities
- This year for the first time, we had relationship and sexuality expert Sharon Potter teach our self-advocates about how to remain safe and find fulfillment as adults in romantic relationships.
- Thanks to the Degenstein Foundation, trips to New York City and the Baltimore Aquarium have been for no or low cost.

- Self-Advocates now comprise a third of our staff with Justin Smyre as webmaster, Jerry Kotarski as our community outreach coordinator, and Brian as mentioned before. Soon, we will add others to our staff as we first look to fill positions among our self-advocate leaders and community members.
- More self-advocates attended more social events than ever before, with an average of 30% more attendees at each event. That is almost crazy growth for one year, and it's a trend.
- We added a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction course this April, which concludes in July. So far, response has been positive, with over 50 people taking part.
- The Fall Fashion Show had 12 models and 65 people in attendance

As we look toward the future, we will need to expand our main location by thousands of square feet to accommodate not only the growing attendance, but the growing skills of our self-advocates that need outlets in creating their own businesses in areas such as catering and pet care, as well home care and landscaping.

We will branch out into our other counties in ways we have never done before through the community waiver and other opportunities at the Pennsylvania Office of Developmental Programs. This process will likely take us the better part of next year.

Next month, we will hold our first JUMP START sessions for families with children ages pre-school to 8. The dates are May 16th and 23rd from 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm at Zion Lutheran in Sunbury and will include socialization, play, sensory activities.

We will hold a WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT EVENT:

- September 21 at Packer House

- It will include Reiki, aromatherapy, health information, continental breakfast, hot lunch, art therapy, speakers, and door prizes
- The event has received \$1,125 in sponsorships so far
- There will be a planning meeting with self-advocates on April 24 at 4:00 pm in the conference room at our offices

There will be a WOMEN'S CHRISTMAS TEA:

- Either in late November or early December which will include music and games
- This is a chance for the ladies to experience a refined event and still feel comfortable

At SUMMER STEP AND SUMMER CAMP this year:

- We'll be returning to our roots with an overnight camp to include three days and two nights at Central Oak Heights in West Milton
- This summer there will be Day Trips instead of Monday night STEP. Suggestions have included the Lewisburg pool which is wheelchair accessible, another pontoon boat ride, and visits to: Owens Family Farm, Ashburn's Animals, Penne Noll's farm and a Barn Dance, Pioneer Tunnel Coal Mine, a tour of Middleswarth Potato Chips facility, and, who could forget, Knoebel's?!

Our Social Recreation program is also moving along swiftly! We are adding lots of new events. The feedback from you, our self-advocates, has been tremendous and has really helped in the planning of future trips and events. Again, our events are self-advocate driven.

Our goal with social recreation is to continue to produce quality events that offer you new opportunities that are interesting, fun, and in alignment with living a full life. We seek more feedback from self-

advocates to make sure that they feel they are doing the things they want to do with their free time. Our newsletter asks folks to contact me personally each month. Please do not be afraid to answer when you are asked questions like, “what kinds of experiences would you like to have?” “Where do you want to go and what would you like to see?”. Growth of social recreation is dependent upon those answers.

Another goal we have is to increase activities that allow self-advocates to interact with the community and general population. Self-advocates are contributing members of society and we’d like to try to include more activities that involve community action such as environmental clean-up, donating time, doing activities that are for the greater good and create higher self-esteem and allow a person to feel that they can make a difference in the community that they are a part of. It will also allow the community at large to see that you are a very important piece of our society and have a lot to contribute.

In addition we’d like to do activities that reach a younger crowd. Our children in schools will be our future members, so we need activities that draw older teens and people in their 20’s.

So, please, invite your friends, families and co-workers to our events.

In conclusion, even though we know that we will need greater resources to accomplish these things, we know that what we do is important, and that what we *need* will come with work and time.

Thank you for being our supporters, our members and our ambassadors in the community. Without you, there would be no Arc of the Susquehanna Valley.

I’d like to introduce our Vice President, Jannet Tebar again, who will adjourn tonight’s meeting.

Have a wonderful night everyone! I hope you enjoyed yourselves!