



Westchester Institute
for Human Development

<https://www.wihd.org>

Welcome!

Community Support Network Transition Institute 2022



HEAR OUR VOICES: LEADERSHIP AND SELF-ADVOCACY

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Leadership starts with identifying an unmet need.

We have to believe that what we need in our life is similar to what other people need.

In my case, I needed to get together with friends.

WHO AM I? Brendan Klein

I live my life with a diagnosis of IDD

I grew up in Pleasantville, NY

I have a college degree on Vocational Studies from Pace University

I work at WIHD as the Coordinator of Self-Advocacy and community engagement

I started a social group called TicTacGo 5 years ago.

MY SUPPORT TEAM: Who helps me be the best version of myself?



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I am passionate about helping people with disabilities find their tribe.

A group of people with common goals that can help them grow as individuals.

I believe in the power of community as a way to learn self-advocacy skills.

WHAT WAS MY STARTING POINT?

In 2016, I had graduated from college.

I found myself living independently but realized it was hard to connect with friends.

I knew people wanted to get together but it was hard to come up with concrete plans for outings.

I decided to do something about it!

I became the organizer! I sent out an email to my friends starting the TicTacGo group and the rest is history.

FINDING A HOME AT WIHD

- ❑ In 2019 I had built a Network of social groups
- ❑ I was looking for a home where I could grow my Network and expand into other areas of Self-Advocacy
- ❑ I met with Naomi Brickel and she understood my vision for the future
- ❑ At WIHD, I have been able to grow as an employee, expand my leadership skills and work with a supportive team.
- ❑ We have many plans for Hear Our Voices, we are continuing to grow and expand our services to self-advocates all over New York State
- ❑ As your self-advocates transition out of high school, connect them with us! We want to support them in their self-advocacy journey.



Our Hear our Voices
team at WIHD

HEAR OUR VOICES: *HOW DO WE SERVE SELF-ADVOCATES AT WIHD*



HEAR OUR VOICES: *Monthly meetings*

Hear Our
Voices
monthly
meetings

Mission

- Educate on relevant topics.
- Create a safe environment to ask questions.

Topics

- Selected by self-advocates.
- Highlight work by self-advocates.

Open discussion

- Introduction of a topic.
- Time available for questions and comments.

Self-advocacy

- We encourage our members to ask questions and participate.
- We respect their privacy.

HEAR OUR VOICES:

Monthly meetings - Our past topics

Hear Our
Voices
monthly
meetings

- Housing
- Self-direction
- Living Independently
- Finding jobs
- Volunteering
- Dating
- Hiring and working with Direct Service Professionals
- Getting involved in Advocacy

HEAR OUR VOICES:

Social Engagement Groups: How did it start?

Social
Engagement
Groups



Tic Tac GO

First email went to 15 people
6 people showed up



730 members participating in 11
different affinity groups.

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HEAR OUR VOICES: *Social Engagement Groups:*

Get WIHD It!

WIHD to GO

Hands up @ WIHD

Hear Our Voices

Independent Repair
Cafe

Tic Tac Go Green



730 members in
11 affinity groups

Guys on the Go

Girls on the Go

DSP Go get togethers

Panther Pals

HEAR OUR VOICES:

Social Engagement Groups: How do I make it work?

Social
Engagement
Groups



Focus on
group
interaction

Focus on group interaction

- My main mission is to help people interact with others.
- This influences the decisions I make about event planning and coordination.
- It also has an impact on my self-evaluation of events.



Build
community
relationships

Build community relationships

- Spend time in the communities where you want to host events.
- Introduce yourself, let people know what you are trying to build.
- Establish expectations with vendors.
- Continue to build relationships in communities/places that you think are a good fit for the group.



Create
experiences
from
beginning to
end

Create experiences from beginning to end

- Think about the whole experience: from beginning to end.
- Make sure people will be comfortable from beginning to end.
- Create rituals or memorable traditions within experiences.
- Keep things simple and manageable in time.
- When it comes to length of time, think about the common denominator.



Let people
decide what
they need
to be
comfortable

Let people decide what they need to be comfortable

- Be open and flexible when it comes to people bringing support staff and/or caregivers.
- Be friendly towards everyone that attends
- If you have parents attending, introduce yourself to them but don't feel pressured to include them in the activity.
- Build trust but do know that it takes time.



Problem
solve
conflicts
promptly

Problem solve conflicts promptly

- Pay attention to people's body language, do they seem to be engaging in the activity?
- Act early if you notice someone uncomfortable.
- Encourage them to advocate for what they need
- Be empathetic but get both sides of the story
- Rely on your listening skills



Listen and
act on
feedback

Listen and act on feedback

- Check in with people about activities
- Follow your gut instincts when making changes
- Remember your main purpose
- Stay connected to your community partners
- Make changes in events as you see fit





Have fun while making an impact!

When people trust you, they will take more chances.

Create a culture where people feel encouraged to try a new activity, to step out of their comfort zone, to look silly, to laugh together.

Everyone benefits from being part of a community!



Mariela Adams
madams@wihd.org

My road to Disability awareness and self-advocacy started with my son.

I am a LEND graduate from WIHD with a business background.

I work alongside Brendan and Claire.

HEAR OUR VOICES: *HOW DO WE SERVE SELF-ADVOCATES AT WIHD*



HEAR OUR VOICES: *Speaker's Network*

Speaker's
Network

□ Mission:

- Build a network of self-advocate speakers that are ready and prepared to share their story.
 - Offer self-advocates the opportunity to receive one on one coaching to enhance their capacity to speak in public effectively.
 - Follow the self-advocates lead when it comes to topics and audiences that they would like to speak to. Find out what they are passionate about.
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HEAR OUR VOICES:

Speaker's Network: The methodology

Speaker's
Network

Discovery process

- Listening to the individual's journey.
- What is important to them?
- Where do they want to make an impact?

Creation process

- Creation of a professional presentation.
- Collaborative interaction to achieve the right messaging.
- Timing is flexible.

Coaching

- One on one sessions to practice the presentation.
- Identify barriers and how to lessen these barriers.
- Individualized coaching

HEAR OUR VOICES:

Speaker's Network: Our speakers

Speaker's
Network

- ❑ Living Independently: learning to access and manage adult services.
- ❑ Employment barriers.
- ❑ Lessons for medical providers working with individuals with disabilities.
- ❑ A self-advocate journey in the medical setting.
- ❑ Achieving life goals: A story of resilience and perseverance.
- ❑ Beauty from Within: Living my life with Sturgy Weber syndrome.
- ❑ How to transform volunteering experience into job skills.
- ❑ Creating a more socially inclusive high school experience for neurodivergent students.

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HEAR OUR VOICES:

Speaker's Network: How to reach us?

Speaker's
Network

- We are looking for more speakers
- All backgrounds, disabilities and verbal abilities
- If you know someone that wants to share their story, please reach out to me at madams@wihd.org

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HEAR OUR VOICES:

Community Involvement and Education

Community
Involvement
and
Education

- We want to find opportunities for our self-advocates to present.
- We collaborate with many areas within WIHD to find opportunities.
- We want to set our presenters for success: we look at audience, accessibility and support available.
- We want to build brand recognition for our speakers.
- We want to build awareness for the need to pay our speakers for their time.

HEAR OUR VOICES:

Community Involvement and Education

Community
Involvement
and
Education

Past events

- New York Medical College class of incoming medical students
- Sarah Lawrence college of Genetics
- Touro college of Dentistry
- LEND program
- Self-Advocacy New York State (SANYS)
- Yonkers School District
- Phelps Medical Hospital – Incoming class of family practice doctors
- WIHD Conference
- OPWDD panel discussion

HEAR OUR VOICES: Our path forward

- ❑ More self-advocate speakers.
- ❑ Increased diversity of speakers.

- ❑ More community partnership.
- ❑ Build brand recognition.
- ❑ Consistent payment to our speakers.



- ❑ Build leadership within the group.
- ❑ Development of a leadership training for members.

- ❑ Train more speakers
- ❑ Recruit a more diverse network of self-advocate speakers.

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HEAR OUR VOICES: Working together

- ❑ Students transitioning out of high school need to find a community that embraces them.
- ❑ We want to tell our story and let people know we have something unique to offer.
- ❑ We are available to speak at school districts and organizations.
- ❑ Our network of speakers is ready to share their story and connect with others

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THANK YOU!

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