

# THE PATH AHEAD

VOLUME 12, ISSUE 1  
SPRING 2020

## IN THIS ISSUE:

- 2 Creating Change: Why Advocacy Matters
- 4 In Their Words: Why We Advocate
- 6 Tips for Successful Advocacy
- 7 TMG's Shanna Jensen Appointed to DHS Long-Term Care Advisory Council
- 7 Upcoming Events



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Let's clear the path ahead.

**WISCONSIN'S TOP-RATED  
IRIS CONSULTANT AGENCY**

# CREATING CHANGE: WHY ADVOCACY MATTERS

We all deserve the chance to be heard, to have others know that we are capable, and that we know what's best for ourselves. We deserve to have our needs met and to live a self-determined life full of inclusion. Unfortunately, these things don't always come easy.

Throughout history, many people with disabilities have had to fight hard for their rights and their choice to live in inclusive communities. These self-advocates have helped pass important laws, like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which states that everyone has a right to reasonable accommodations and access to public spaces. Advocates have also fought against legislation that would have taken away their choice, such as when the IRIS program was in danger of being replaced.

“Almost every big, important, good thing that has happened in the disability field has happened because self-advocates and their allies have pushed hard to get it,” says Lynn Breedlove, former Executive Director of Disability Rights Wisconsin. “People didn't give up. They stayed with it and they succeeded.”

For over 30 years, Lynn, who also serves as co-chair of Wisconsin's Long-Term Care Coalition, has seen how self-advocates have played a major role in bringing about progress for disability rights. By daring to use their voices, self-advocates have broken down barriers and have increased inclusion. It's important work that effects all of us.

Some people might believe that in order to be a self-advocate, you have to spend a lot of time doing advocacy work, or that you need special skills and training. However, Lynn believes that anyone can be a self-advocate.

“I think there are a lot of people who feel like, ‘Oh, I'm really busy. I don't



*A group of self-advocates at the Wisconsin State Capital during a past Disability Advocacy Day. This year's Disability Advocacy Day is March 24th, 2020. Photo Courtesy of WI BPDD.*



have any space to put on an advocacy hat.’ I think that’s not true,” says Lynn. “There are a lot of advocacy actions you can take that aren’t that hard.”

One of the easiest and fastest ways to advocate is to simply email or call your elected officials – at the local, state or national level – to let them know what issues are on your mind. You don’t need to know a lot about government or different policies – simply let your elected official know what matters to you and how they can help change things.

When you email or call your elected official, have bullet points ready for the issues you’d like to talk with them about. It can be hard to ask others for the things that are important to you, such as better transportation options or more employment opportunities. As a self-advocate, you’ll need to let your elected officials know why these topics matter to you, how they affect your life and what you’d like them to do to make things better.

Lynn says that not a lot of people take the time to voice their needs. So, by advocating for yourself, you’re speaking up for many people with disabilities. For people who might be worried that their elected officials won’t want to hear from them, Lynn says that self-advocates are often

pleasantly surprised to learn that elected officials are happy to meet in person to learn about the issues and how they can help. In fact, your opinions on how to improve the lives of people with disabilities could have a big impact on the things your elected officials do.

“Assume that your legislator is a blank slate on disability issues,” says Lynn. “What do you want to write on that slate?”

Besides getting in touch with your state or federal elected officials, Lynn also suggests learning about local councils and committees involved in housing and transportation, and Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) boards. You can find out when these different local groups are holding meetings that are open to public comment, so that you can share your thoughts to help them develop better policies and services for people with disabilities.

Finally, remember that you don’t have to advocate alone – you can always ask your family, friends and other self-advocates to join you on your advocacy journey. And no matter what you’re doing to advocate, remember you’re making a difference in trying to create a more inclusive community where everyone’s voice can be heard!

# IN THEIR WORDS: WHY WE ADVOCATE

Find out why being a self-advocate is important to some of the people who choose TMG. **Thank you to everyone who shared their stories with us!**



**Hayley Waalen**  
*Somerset*

**Advocacy:** Getting Back Her Right to Vote

Hayley knows that everyone's vote matters. However, when her mom Traci filled out guardianship papers for Hayley, Traci accidentally checked the box that took away Hayley's right to vote. Not about to let an error on a form stand in their way, Hayley and her mom went to court to get Hayley's right to vote back. Traci says Hayley was a great self-advocate.

**“Hayley smiled and sat tall. She explained to the judge how excited she was to vote, and that she understood the voting process. The judge told her he was thrilled to give Haley back her right to vote!”**



**Jason Endres**  
*Eau Claire*

**Advocacy:** Eau Claire Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC)

Board; President of People First Wisconsin; Partners in Policymaking; Independent Living Council; Rehabilitation Council; Governor's Taskforce on Caregiving

Jason believes in the good that advocacy work brings. Over the years, he's given his time and talents to advocating with others, and asking his local, state and federal representatives to listen to his concerns. What keeps him going is knowing his advocacy will make the world a better place.

**“I advocate for a better future for people with disabilities. My hope is people with disabilities won't have the same struggles as we do today.”**



**Rosie Bartel**  
*Chilton*

**Advocacy:** Global Patient & Family Advisory Board of the Beryl Institute; UW

School of Medicine Infectious Disease Patient Coordinator; Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) Ambassador; National Quality Forum (NQF) Patient-Reported Outcomes Committee, TMG Citizen Advisory Council; and many more!

Rosie turned her past experiences into a life dedicated to advocacy. After having her right leg amputated because of an uncontrolled infection, Rosie began advocating to protect patients from infectious diseases. Rosie knows there's power in numbers, and believes that by working together we can make big changes.

**“Advocates need to think outside the box when it comes to solving challenges. They can help other advocates do that.”**



**Marie Massart**  
*Sturgeon Bay*

**Advocacy:**  
Partners in  
Policymaking;

WI Youth Leadership Forum;  
President of People First  
Wisconsin; TMG Citizen  
Advisory Council

Marie began as a self-advocate during high school when she asked the school to install an accessible door. Since then, Marie has been a leader in various advocacy organizations, including being President of People First Wisconsin. She also advocates for herself every day by self-directing with IRIS. Marie believes everyone deserves to be heard.

**“It’s ok to put yourself out there or to find someone who can support you all the way. If you don’t, who will?”**



**Pam Devuyt**  
*Kenosha*

**Advocacy:**  
Kenosha County  
ADRC Board;

Kenosha Transit Commission;  
President of Kenosha Area  
Services Disability Group;  
Partners in Policymaking;  
Campaign Volunteer for  
Political Candidates

Pam stays active by attending advocacy meetings, and by calling and visiting the mayor and the governor about the issues that matter to her. Pam is dedicated to fighting for issues that affect us all, like transportation, education and accessibility.

**“My advocacy is important to me because it allows me to keep my independence, and lets others keep their independence as well.”**



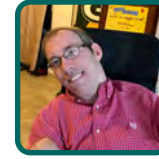
**Antrice Brown**  
*Milwaukee*

**Advocacy:**  
Milwaukee Task  
Force; State

Rehabilitation Commission;  
ADAPT: Free Our People

Antrice is a highly active advocate who uses her fighting spirit to promote disability rights. Antrice has marched and spoken at protests, and writes letters to her legislators. She believes in the power of advocacy, and encourages others to join in.

**“Be true to your advocacy,” says Antrice. “Be serious and have a passion for it. Understand it’s a tedious, slow-progressing fight. You need to be patient and not give up. It is a worthy cause.”**



**Ramsey Lee**  
*Hudson*

**Advocacy:**  
Governor’s  
Committee

for People with Disabilities;  
Wisconsin Rehabilitation  
Council; St. Croix County  
Disability Alliance

Ramsey is a voice for change. He shares his experiences and opinions with policymakers to improve the lives of people with disabilities. Ramsey knows there are a lot of ways to fight for disability rights, and he encourages all of us to let our advocacy light shine.

**“Everyone has a unique gift to give society. If you’re passionate about something, then go for it!”**



## TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY

**Ready to start your self-advocacy journey? Lynn Breedlove, former Executive Director of Disability Rights Wisconsin, shares these tips to help you be a strong advocate!**

- **Be Bold:** Don't be afraid to politely ask for what you really want. Things will only change if you let people know what you need.
- **Share the Key Points of Your Story:** When you get the opportunity to tell your story, you may only have a couple of minutes to share why your issue matters. So, make your time count! In as few words as possible, tell what issues are important to you and how they affect your life. Finally, tell what you hope will be done about these issues, and how these changes would make your life better.
- **Build Relationships with Your Representatives:** The more you contact your elected officials – whether by email or phone – the more they get to know you and you get to know them. This will make them more likely to remember you and be willing to support your ideas.

**We don't always get what we want on the first try, and change takes time.  
So, don't give up – that's how progress is made!**



## HOW CAN I GET MORE INVOLVED?

Are you looking for advocacy resources? We've made a list of fantastic organizations that can connect you with other self-advocates and provide you with great resources. To find these website links, visit [tmgwisconsin.com/advocacy](https://tmgwisconsin.com/advocacy). Good luck with your advocacy efforts!



## TMG'S SHANNA JENSEN APPOINTED TO DHS LONG-TERM CARE ADVISORY COUNCIL

TMG is proud to announce that Shanna Jensen, President of TMG, was appointed to a three-year term on the Wisconsin Department of Health Services Long-Term Care Advisory Council (LTCAC). The mission of the LTCAC is to advise the Department on long-term care issues, such as:

- Better understanding the needs of people using long-term care.
- Improving the overall quality of services.
- Finding ways to address the shortage of direct care workers.
- Keeping people who have long-term care needs safe and healthy in their communities.



As a representative of TMG, Shanna will be a voice for the people who choose self-direction in IRIS and those who support them.

“I’m excited and honored to join this impressive group of advocates, providers and other stakeholders. Together, we can look for opportunities to have positive influence on the issues that impact many of Wisconsin’s citizens.”

To learn more about the LTCAC, visit [wcltc.wisconsin.gov](http://wcltc.wisconsin.gov).



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **Autism Society of Wisconsin Conference**

*April 11-13, 2020* | Kalahari Resort  
Wisconsin Dells, WI

### **Circles of Life Conference**

*May 7-8, 2020* | Wilderness Resort  
Wisconsin Dells, WI

### **Wisconsin Alzheimer's Association Conference**

*May 3-5, 2020* | Kalahari Resort  
Wisconsin Dells, WI

### **Wisconsin Employment First Conference**

*May 19, 2020* | Kalahari Resort  
Wisconsin Dells, WI

### **Wisconsin Summer Inclusion Institute**

*July 27-29, 2020* | Westwood  
Conference Center  
Wausau, WI



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visit: [tmgwisconsin.com](http://tmgwisconsin.com) or [facebook.com/TMGWisconsin](https://facebook.com/TMGWisconsin).  
Or call our toll-free number: **(844) 864-8987**.

\*Wisconsin Department of Health Services Options Scorecard  
data for IRIS Consultant Agencies, July 2019



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- **AARP Wisconsin** is a national organization for people aged 50 years and older, which provides **state and national advocacy** on issues such as Social Security, Medicare, and other topics that affect those who are aging.
- **The Arc Wisconsin** works to protect the rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and fights for their full inclusion and participation in their communities.
- **Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW)** advocates for people with disabilities so that they have the services they need, are protected from abuse, are included in their communities, and don't face discrimination. They also have a free **Advocacy Tool Kit** on their website for self-advocates.
- **Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging (GWAAR)** helps people who are aging and their loved ones learn how to advocate for themselves, understand elder law, find resources in their communities and more.
- **People First Wisconsin**, which has chapters across the state, brings people with disabilities together to advocate for issues that matter to them.
- **WI Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD)** provides resources and advocacy for people with developmental disabilities. They also provide leadership training for self-advocates with their **Partners in Policymaking** program.
- **WI Disability Vote Coalition: Voting** is an important tool for self-advocates. The Disability Vote Coalition can give you all the information you need to vote. Learn how to register to vote, when and where to vote, what your rights are, how to get accessible accommodations, how you can work as a poll worker, and more.