

The Binnacle

Charting Your Own Course



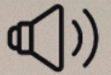
Stories

Tips & Hacks

Resources



The Binnacle is the case in which the ship's compass is kept. It allowed mariners to determine their direction even if clouds obscured their usual astronomical cues such as the North Star.



Dee's Desktop Publishing in collaboration with
Writer's Best Editing Services

IN THIS ISSUE		CONTRIBUTORS
Notes from the Publisher	3	Aldea LaParr Publisher/Writer
Two Hats	4	Nessie Siler Editor/Writer
Advocacy	6	Anna Cunningham Consultant/Writer
The Beauty of Spring	9	Rob Raber Audio
Tips and Hacks	10	Philip Woodward Writer
The Many Forms of Advocacy	11	Wesley Siler Comic
Ability Leadership Program	14	Wendy Orzel Poet/Writer
Share your Story	16	Michael McGilton Consultant/Writer
Youtube Finds	17	
Butterfly Club	18	
Stories to look back on	19	

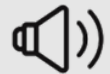
Interested in writing for us?

[VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO](#)
[SUMBIT](#)



Notes from the Publisher

Aldea LaParr



Welcome to YEAR SIX! I want to thank all those who have been with us for all six years AND our new readers! It has been a highlight of my life to be the publisher of this magazine! My life has been enriched by the people I have met on this journey.

This is the issue where you will explore self-advocacy. I would also invite any of you to submit your self-advocacy stories for us to publish. We also will like stories about anything that pertains to living with a disability. By sharing our stories we hope to encourage others to live their best lives.

We want others to feel comfortable to contact us and let us know what topics or activities that you would like us to cover. We also want anyone who wants to share their story to contact us!

[Contact Us Here](#)



Two Hats



By Aldea LaParr

Being a self advocate and a parent with a developmental disability was very challenging at times. When my children entered school, being a self-advocate took a whole different turn. It was no longer just advocating for me, but I was advocating for my children as well. All three boys had different needs when it came to their education.

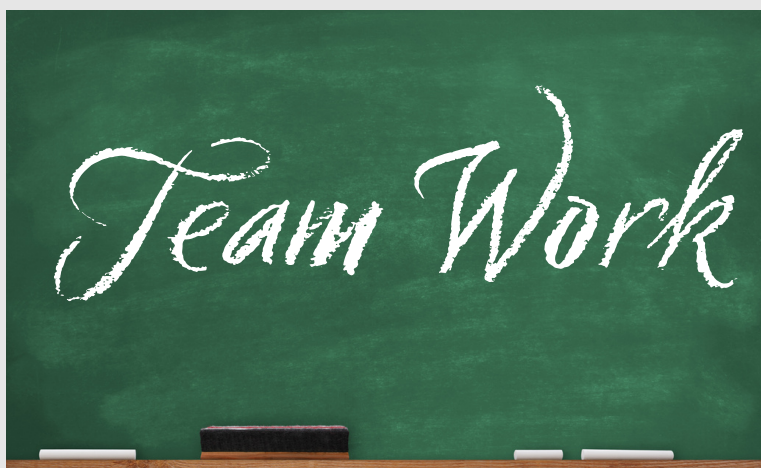
We were living in a small town in upstate New York. But the wonderful thing about a small town was the sense of community. As soon as my youngest one was old enough for the Head Start program, he was enrolled. I thought it was an opportunity for my son to experience socialization, and turned into a family-based Support Network. When the home-based instructor entered my home, our lives changed. I no longer felt alone with my parenting. Instructors became a part of my family. We could call on her whenever we need help. She actually became one of my best friends to this day.

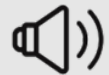
Within the next six years all three of my boys were in the Head Start program. Over those six years I realized that I was a good mom. The program looked at my family as a whole. My husband and I even attended activities for just the parents. Head Start became our circle of support. I believe all good parents can benefit from a circle of support.

When it became time for my children to enter the public school system, that was a different story. So many kids and so few adults. My boys seemed to have just gotten lost in the system. When it was determined that one of my boys needed individualized educational services, I had become very frustrated with the opportunities for him. My first IEP meeting was actually a disaster. There were so many people sitting around this table. I actually felt overtaken. I was so upset with myself because I felt like I could not advocate for my child. How come I was such a good advocate for myself but I couldn't advocate for my child?

I decided to seek help. I contacted a local person who was a family advocate for meetings like my son's. She pointed out how I was trying to wear two hats at one time. I was a mom first. So I actually had her go with me to his IEP meetings as a family advocate.

When the school realized that I had somebody with me, who was trained in being a family advocate, meetings changed! I did not have to worry about so many things at one time. I focus on the school seeing my child as a loving child. While my parent advocate focused on the realities of what the school had to do for my son.





Self-advocacy refers to the ability to effectively communicate your needs, rights, and interests to make informed decisions about your own life. Below are key terms and concepts categorized by their role in the self-advocacy process.

Core Concepts

- **Self-Determination:** The right and process of making your own choices and managing your own life.
- **Dignity of Risk:** The idea that everyone has the right to make mistakes and take risks as an essential part of learning and human rights.
- **Self-Awareness:** Understanding your own strengths, weaknesses, disability, and personal values to better identify what you need.
- **Self-Efficacy:** The extent of your belief in your own ability to complete tasks and reach specific goals.
- **Disclosure:** The process of sharing information about a disability or personal need with others, such as an employer or teacher.

Communication Styles

- Assertive: Firm and purposeful communication that respects the rights of others while clearly stating your own needs.
- Aggressive: Communication that involves anger, bullying, or threats; often hinders getting needs met.
- Passive: Avoiding conflict or failing to express needs, which may lead to those needs being ignored.
- "I" Statements: A communication technique used to express feelings and needs from your own perspective (e.g., "I feel..." or "I need...") to foster respect.



Legal & Rights-Based Terms

- Accommodations: Adjustments or supports provided in school, work, or the community to ensure equal access and success.
- ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act): Federal legislation protecting the rights of people with disabilities and mandating reasonable accommodations.
- IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act): A law ensuring students with disabilities receive a "Free and Appropriate Public Education" (FAPE).

Supported Decision-Making: An alternative to guardianship where individuals make their own decisions with support from trusted friends or family.

Types of Advocacy

- **Individual Advocacy:** Speaking up for your own personal needs and rights.



- **Peer Advocacy:** When individuals with similar experiences support each other in advocating for mutual interests.

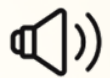


- **Systems Advocacy:** Efforts aimed at changing laws, policies, or practices that affect large groups of people.



The Beauty of Spring

© 2026 Wendy P Orzel



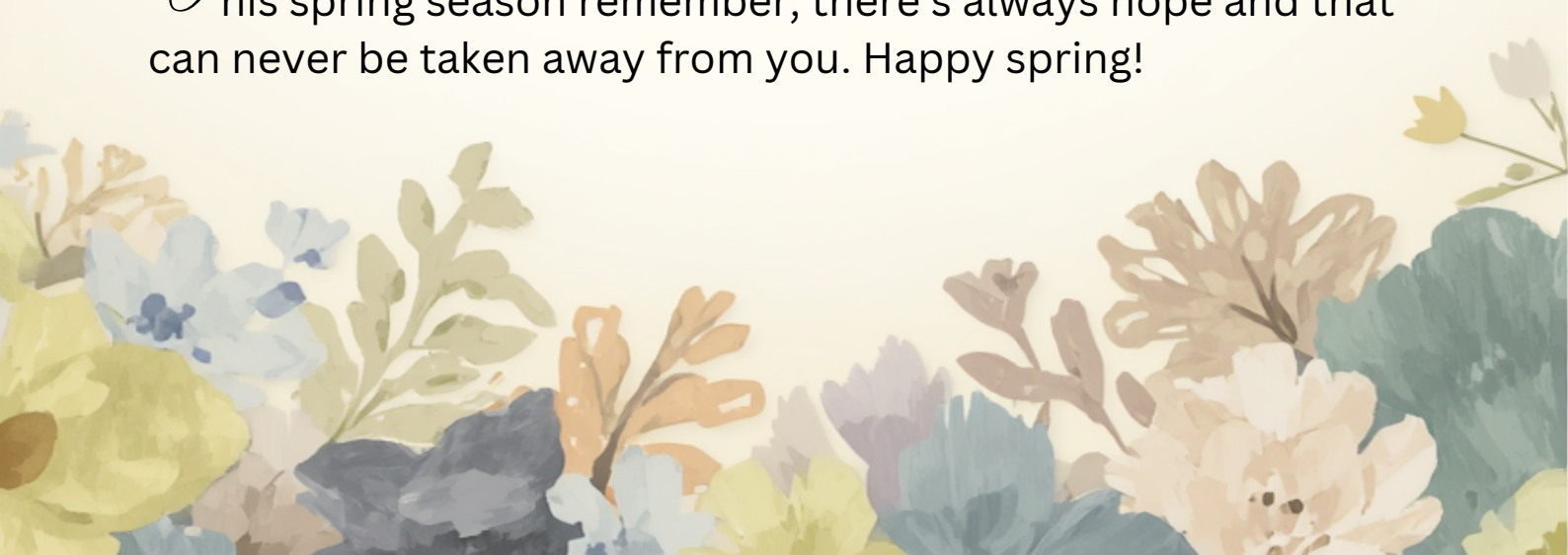
*A*s faith, rebirth and new growth begins one would get a sense of wonder in the beauty of spring.

*W*hen you hear the sounds of nature such as rain, thunder and the wind blowing the dark clouds, begin to fade away.

*E*ventually you see a rainbow appear as the sun peeks through the sky.

*Y*ou hear the birds chirping, see the grass with hues of green, the flowers blooming along the backdrop of the blue skies and the yellow ribbon wrapped around the trees take a minute to stop and reflect on what life has to offer.

*T*his spring season remember, there's always hope and that can never be taken away from you. Happy spring!



Tips & Hacks



This automatic jar opener is a game changer.

amazon

Bigger spoons are so convenient for those of us with mobility issues.



amazon



This tumbler is wonderful for someone who needs a straw but also needs it to be spill proof with hot beverages.

amazon

The Many Forms of Advocacy

By Philip Woodward



Growing up as a Hard of Hearing person means that I had to advocate for myself. It wasn't always easy. I missed announcements. For example, in 6th grade, I missed the announcement during chapel (morning assembly time) about when picture day was and showed up at school without the jacket and tie that I was supposed to wear that day. Fortunately, my father was able to drop those items off for me. So, I started to ask my teachers and classmates what the announcement was if I knew that I missed something.

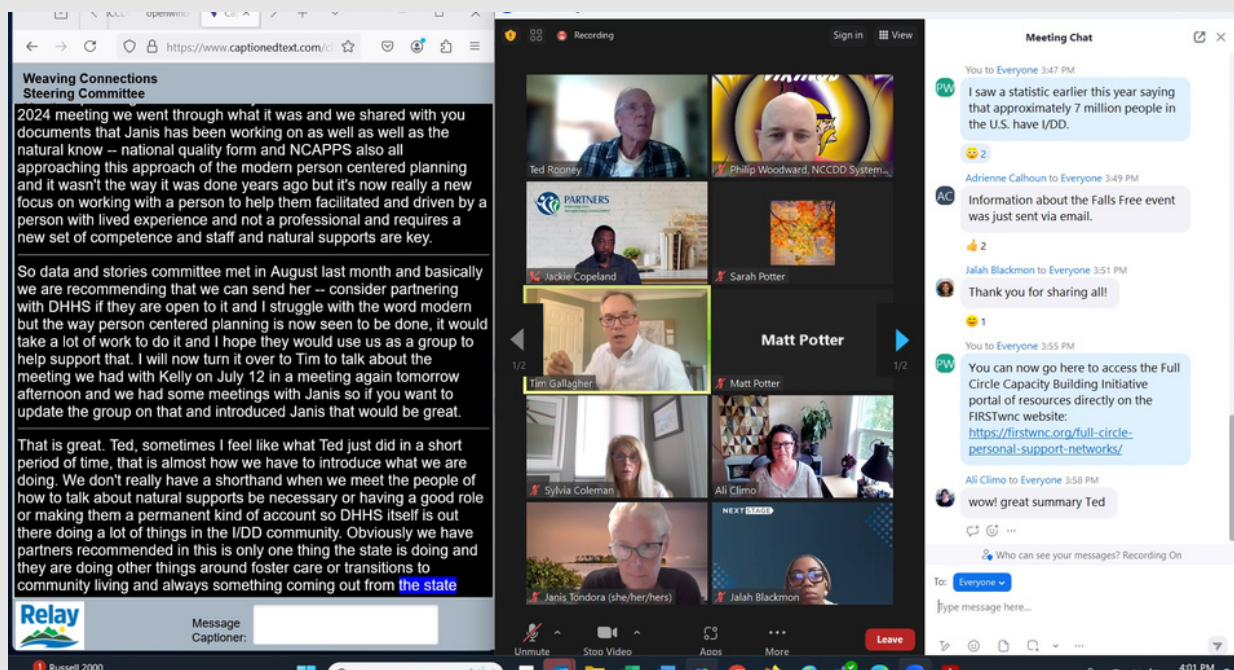
But learning about technology that exists truly made me a better self-advocate. During high school, I took an American Sign Language (ASL) class, and I also learned about the special telephones available for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people. When I got accepted into the College of William & Mary, I was able to request a teletypewriter (TTY) phone in my dorm room, a visual fire alarm, a flashing door knocker, and peer note-takers in my classes. I met with my professors before each class started at the beginning of each semester to introduce myself, tell them that I am Hard of Hearing, and indicate that I would need to sit where I could hear them and be able to read my classmates' lips. It wasn't always easy, but I thrived at William & Mary because people were accepting of my hearing loss and were willing to accommodate me.

During my professional career, I have used American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters for in-person meetings and Relay Conference Captioning for virtual meetings. Scheduling these accommodations requires a bit of time. I have had co-workers in the past who have suddenly decided one afternoon to schedule a group meeting the next morning, and I have had to explain to them that an ASL interpreter or a captioner might not be available on such short notice. I have helped my co-workers and professional colleagues better understand the best practice to provide at least 48 hours' notice for scheduling a meeting to allow time to request and secure these accommodations.



Philip presents with Pat Keul at the North Carolina Division of Career Development and Transition Conference in April 2017 with American Sign Language interpreters visible to the left of the presentation screen to help him understand the questions and comments from the audience.

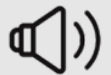
I have also had to advocate for better access when a certain accommodation might not work. For example, there was a period of time between 2020 and 2025 when Relay Conference captioners could not successfully join Microsoft Teams meetings, so I would ask the host to use the Zoom platform if possible, and I even met with the engineers at Microsoft to discuss and work through the issues. Guess what?! Microsoft helped all of us figure out what the problem was and resolved it, so today my captioners have no trouble at all joining a Microsoft Teams meeting to provide captioning. Advocacy really does work! But you cannot stay quiet. You must speak up and tell other people such as meeting hosts what you need to participate equally. Otherwise, people without disabilities might never be aware of the lack of accessibility that could be happening. I like to patiently advocate for myself and educate others about how accessibility can benefit everyone participating in these meetings. For example, the presence of a captioner often helps everyone speak more clearly and spell out acronyms for everyone's benefit. Then we will share a good laugh when a captioning blooper occurs!



This screenshot shows Philip participating in a Weaving Connections Steering Committee meeting in September 2024 with Relay Conference Captioning scrolling across a separate internet panel next to the Zoom meeting.



Hannah Shumaker



"People often ask me what makes ALP-NC so special. I know my own life path changed when I went through the first ALP-NC cohort nearly six years ago - but the truth is, each cohort since has been just as impactful in its own way.

Each cohort is unique. Each Leader brings their own lived experience, perspective, and story. ALP-NC is grounded in the understanding that disability is not just about a person—it's about the interaction between a person and their environment.

We start from the belief that every Leader's lived experience matters. In ALP, lived experience is a form of expertise. We honor that expertise by creating space for people to share their stories—about barriers, advocacy, community, goals, hopes, and dreams. When that happens, everyone learns and begins to see new possibilities. People learn from and with each other, not just from the curriculum, in a process grounded in dignity and respect for every individual.

The ALP-NC process also centers mutual access. This means we work together to create a space where everyone can participate in ways that work for them and for the group as a whole. Access is not a checklist or a one-time task—it's something we build together over time by listening, adapting, and showing up for each other. This reflects a commitment to interdependence, where we rely on each other instead of expecting there to be "one right way" to be or participate.

When we center lived experience and build access together, everyone benefits. The group becomes stronger, more creative, and more connected. Leadership expands to include many different styles and strengths, and more people are able to show up fully and contribute. That's what makes ALP-NC not just inclusive, but a space where real growth and meaningful change can happen.



It's More Than a Hashtag...

Share Your Advocacy Story!

Why I Advocate:

I believe in creating a more inclusive and accessible world for everyone.

My Journey:

From facing challenges as a person with a disability, to speaking out for change, I've learned the power of my voice.

My Impact:

Working to improve accessibility, influencing policy, and fighting for equal rights.

My Message:

Your voice matters. Speak up, be heard, and make a difference!

[#AdvocateForChange](#) [#AccessForAll](#) [#DisabilityRights](#)

Always looking for new contributors no matter how long or how short, we welcome everybody's story. Please consider submitting your advocacy story.

Use this link to share your story!



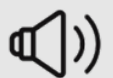
Finds



[Click here if the YouTube video does not start.](#)

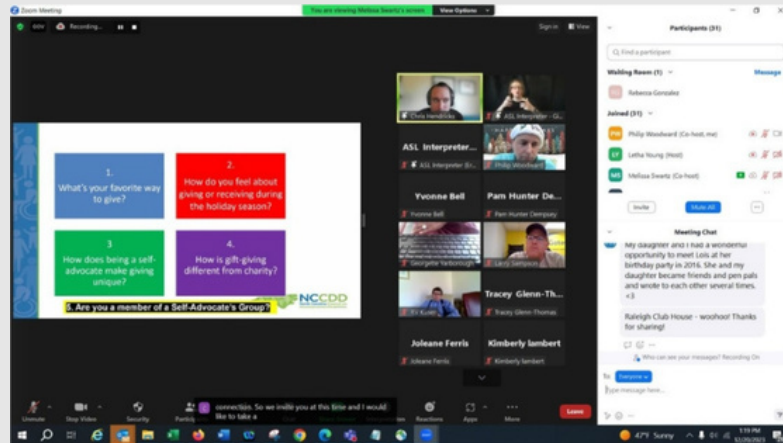


Encouraging messages of love and support to share.
DO YOU HAVE A MESSAGE? Please share with us!



Stories

to look back on



Making Connections from Anywhere around the Globe
Issue: Spring 2025

[CLICK HERE](#)



Self Advocacy at Work
Issue: Summer 2022

[CLICK HERE](#)





A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR
SPONSORS AND SUPPORTERS!

**Sign up to receive notices about new
issues! [here](#)**