

Year-end celebration for Self-Advocacy Academy

Self-Advocates and their community gather to mark the first year of the Self-Advocacy Academy

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA, USA, December 6, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- "This class taught me how to make the right choices," says Aaron, a participant in the first year of the [Self-Advocacy Academy](#).

“

Everyone is smart, being together makes us smarter than we usually are. This class made me feel a little smarter learning this stuff. We got smarter together as a group.”

Sophie

Aaron will be among dozens of participants who gather Dec. 14 to celebrate the first year of the Academy. In this first year, people with developmental and intellectual disabilities learned how to register and vote, improve their housing and strengthen relationships that make a big difference in their home and work lives.

“The level of interest and enthusiasm this first year has proven that there is great demand in this community for

self-advocacy skills,” says Mary Kay Kennedy, executive director of the ACT Center for Disability Leadership, the 40-plus-year-old disability rights organization that launched the academy in January 2022 with four courses. The roster has grown to eight courses, which will conclude this week. Nine courses are starting in January (see calendar and course listing attached).

Indicators of the impact of the Academy shows up in participant’s lives. “This class helped me speak up for myself,” says Dre. Laura says, “This class helped me get out of my passive shell.” And Marisa says, “One thing I’m going to take away from this class is learning about personal power like standing up for ourselves and asking for what we want, that’s being assertive.”

As the number of courses has grown throughout the year, the number of facilitators and support staff involved has also grown and broadened the impact of the Academy. “Overall, it is very useful to get people out of our familiar setting (Day Program) and into a community space, because everyone speaks a bit differently when they are in a new space” says support staff member John.

Sophie might sum it up best: “Everyone is smart, being together makes us smarter than we usually are. This class made me feel a little smarter learning this stuff. We got smarter together as a group.”

Enrollment is now open for the January trimester. Contact Adam Ruff at ruff@selfadvocacy.org or (651) 641-0297.

Learn more on the ACT Center website <https://www.selfadvocacy.org/self-advocacy-academy/>

Additional contact: Mary Kay Kennedy, Executive Director, Advocating Change Together/ACT Center for Disability Leadership kennedy@selfadvocacy.org (651) 641-0297.

BACKGROUND: St. Paul-based Advocating Change Together/ACT Center for Disability Leadership launched its Self-Advocacy Academy in January 2022. The 40+-year-old disability rights organization is currently registering participants for eight courses that run from September into December.

The Academy is an ongoing program organized in three trimesters a year. Each trimester course consists of 13 two-hour weekly sessions. Courses are a mix of in person and distance learning formats.

Classes are facilitated by trained leaders and self-advocate co-leaders. Online classes are limited to eight students and in-person classes to 12. All participants have individual meetings with leaders between sessions to ensure that the program is meeting the needs of everyone.

The Self-Advocacy Academy has been approved by the Minnesota Department of Human Services for funding by Medicaid through the state's waived services. That means persons with disabilities who qualify for waived service funds may use them to support their participation in the Academy.

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