

Lifeworks Virtual Self-Advocacy Conference: My Community & My Rights

Monday, July 13, 2020

Tech Accessibility & Civic Engagement

A Conversation with The Arc Minnesota

Ashley: Thank you so much for joining us for our first ever Work/Life Self Advocacy Conference. This event was made possible by the co-sponsorship funds of the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. For more information, email us at worklifemn@lifeworks.org. We hope you enjoy!

Alli: I'm really excited today to be able to introduce our speakers, but for anyone else who is just joining us for the first time for this session, we're just really thankful that you're here, and we're really excited that this is Lifeworks first ever virtual self-advocacy conference, and although it was originally going to be in person we just really appreciate all the participants your patience and we appreciate the flexibility of our speakers here today. I do want to mention that this conference is made possible by the support of co-sponsorship funds from the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. And just for a quick layout for this session we're going to have about 30 to 45 minutes depending on what our presenters would like to do with their presentation and then that will be followed by a little bit of a breakout session with what could be question and answers, or we could just talk about what we learned and how these topics might show up in our lives. So again thank you all for being here today and with that I will do a quick introduction of our four presenters for this session.

Katie McDermott is from Saint Paul, Minnesota. Katie has been a part of self-advocacy for a long time, and it all started for her in 2006 with the Shooting Stars at Merrick Inc. The shooting stars helped Katie understand self-advocacy and showed her how to advocate for herself. After that experience, Katie has been very busy. Katie was an ACT Board Member, part of the SAM leadership circle a 2011 partner in policy graduate and Katie made a peer mentor position at Merrick Inc. When the self-advocate advisory committee started at The Arc MN, Katie was just a volunteer. But a few years later all of her hard work paid off because now she is the Advocate Associate at The Arc Minnesota and Katie leads the self-advocate advisory group. Self-advocacy is Katie's passion and it still is going strong Katie says that we set fire to the rain through the power of self-advocacy. A fun fact about Katie is that she has three cats named Charlie, Gizmo and Rosie, and she loves

being a cat mom. Next, we have Karli Harguth, who is from Winona, MN. Karli has been involved with self-advocacy for the past nine years. Karli is involved with the SAM Southeast Region and currently serves as Vice Chair. Karli is also involved in Winona's People First group and is on several group committees to help support and improve self-advocacy. A fun fact about Karli is that her best friend and companion is her dog named Lady Pugglesworth. Next, we have Dhanya Delehanty, who is the Self-Advocacy Coordinator at The Arc Minnesota. She is from Rochester, Minnesota and works in the southeast office of The Arc. Dhanya has been working at The Arc for a little over a year and before working at the Arc Minnesota, Dhanya worked in nursing homes and group homes and volunteered abroad. Dhanya received a bachelor's degree in 2018 from the University of Wisconsin Lacrosse, majoring in therapeutic recreation and minoring in psychology. Dhanya came to the Arc Minnesota to learn and advocate for people with different abilities. And finally, we have Angie Guenther, who is the project manager of the metro regional quality council which is a program within The Arc Minnesota. Angie has been with The Arc for almost two years. before coming to the Arc Minnesota, Angie had over four years of experience working with children and adults with various abilities in a number of different roles and settings. Angie has a master's degree in public health from the University of Minnesota and is passionate about equitable systems change. A fun fact about Angie is that she was a division one track athlete in college. And without further ado, I will kick it over to our four presenters.

Katie: Well hello everyone thank you for letting us join today. We are going to talk about connecting and advocating during this time of the COVID-19. I'll introduce myself, I am Katie McDermott I am an Advocate Associate at the Arc Minnesota and we are located in the St. Paul office.

Karli: My name is Karli Harguth, I'm a self-advocate of Winona, Minnesota.

Dhanya: My name is Dhanya Delehanty, I'm the Self-Advocacy Coordinator at the Arc Minnesota Southeast Region.

Angie: And I'm Angie Guenther, I'm the metro regional quality council project manager based out of the Arc Minnesota in St. Paul. In this presentation we will be talking about how The Arc Minnesota is connecting with people and how we are helping other people connect with each other, opportunities for you to connect with other self-advocates or people with disabilities, the importance of voting for you and your community, and things to know when voting so that you can be informed and empowered to vote.

Dhanya: So as you know COVID hit Minnesota in March, and The Arc Minnesota offices have been closed since March 16th. When this happened we realized that people's needs were changing and that we were in this for the long haul. During this pandemic many self-advocates and people with disabilities were feeling isolated because they weren't

able to do activities they wanted to or see friends and family. We heard that people wanted to connect but we didn't know how or didn't have the opportunities. To help people who felt lonely and isolated, self-advocates developed a Self-Advocacy Page on the Arc Minnesota's website. This is shown on the slide here that you can click. This page is to provide resources for self-advocates to use. We wanted to give self-advocates a place where they can advocate for themselves and others, learn and educate themselves on topics, and connect with others. We will now dive into what each topic is about.

Katie: So the advocate page, yes even though we are at home, we are still advocating for ourselves. People can come to the advocate page to stay up to date with the events that is going on in the world right now. We have resources about what COVID-19 is and how we can stay safe during these times. We have a section for civil rights which includes educational resources around racism and police violence this section also includes a lot of great resources for voting because it's important to know your voting rights, how to vote and voting accessibility. On this page we have a list of self-advocacy conferences and our volunteer positions which people can participate in. There is an "I Need Help" tool that quickly and easily connects self-advocates to The Arc Minnesota staff who can answer questions and provide resources to help them navigate the service systems in life. Because I know it's hard during this COVID-19. We use the advocate page to help connect to legislators and share information with self-advocates about how to advocate for themselves. We are always looking for events and activities online that people may be interested in participating in or attending.

Angie: The learn page aims to help others educate themselves on different topics. Because of the pandemic, many of us have turned to Zoom to talk with co-workers, friends, and family. On our page we have a variety of instructions on how to use Zoom, depending on if you're using a computer, smartphone, tablet, or phone this has helped people become comfortable with Zoom and be able to use it well. We offered a Zoom 101 class for those who would like to learn and practice with others to get comfortable, and this is something we offered before this workshop. Some other activities on this page are virtual tours of the Great Wall of China, and Yellowstone National Park for people to visit through their computers or phones. We also have a list of activities people can do while they are staying at home and more. This section continues to grow, if you want to learn about something specific let us know. We want this website to reflect your wants and needs.

Karli: Self-advocacy webpage connect. The connect page helps connect self-advocates and people with disabilities to others. During COVID-19, many of us felt isolated because we weren't able to see our friends or family. The connect group came up with multiple ideas to help with that. We have Thursday Happy Hours every Thursday from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. We have happy hour with self-advocates and allies from around the state and outside of our state. We use this time to chat with one another, play games, and more.

The next fun activity we have is self-advocate YouTube videos. We have a YouTube cooking channel where self advocates and allies can make cooking videos of some of their favorite dishes. We also have videos for self-advocates to meet one another. This is where self-advocates can share talent about themselves or favorite activity. We also have options for self-advocates to write and post blogs. Self-advocates are welcome to post anything they would like, whether that's about themselves cooking, health activities, crafts or more. This is used for communicating between one another and to find people they can get to know. This page includes information on the self advocate networking Facebook group that self advocates and people with disabilities and allies are welcome to join. We are still adding to this page and are always looking for new blogs posts and videos to share feel free to send them to Dhanya, her email address is on the slide.

Angie: Many people in our society depend on technology for health, work, entertainment, communication, and more. Technology has opened up a lot of opportunities for people. Something we are seeing at The Arc is that technology is helping people connect and feel part of their community. It supports people to learn, grow, and get help at the touch of a button.

Katie: Technology helps us connect with others virtually. In person, one of the biggest barriers for people is not having transportation. We are seeing that technology is increasing transportation options. How does technology help, you ask? Well many people rely on staff, friends, or families for rides. With technology, people can access Uber, Lyft, and other ride share options. They can also use their device to look up the bus routes, roads, and more to be able to get from point A to point B. Another example of technologies connecting people is with our self-advocate advisory committee. We used to meet in person every month at The Arc, but since COVID 19 hit, we moved our meetings to be on Zoom. It has been a huge success connecting during these difficult times. Once it's safe to meet in person again, we will continue to use Zoom and technology in our meetings. This will help to increase accessibility for meetings for people who don't have transportation to get them to the office. We are all really excited about the new possibilities.

Dhanya: Unfortunately, technology can be hard to get. Technology costs money, whether it's a phone, tablet, Internet, or TV, not everyone has money or access to buy these things. Because technology isn't accessible to everyone, those who do not have it may not be able to connect with their friends family or community. This lack of meaningful engagement can lead to more feelings of isolation and sadness. As we have talked about, we use technology to communicate, for transportation, to learn, to educate ourselves, and more. Not having access to technology can be really difficult for people. Paying for technology out of pocket can be difficult because it can get very expensive. Even if someone is able to buy a computer, they may need it to be a touch computer or a larger screen which costs more. There are some ways people can get help paying for

technology. This can be done through waivers or grants. For example, the Arc Minnesota had a grant available for people to apply for technology up to one thousand dollars. The application was shut down within 24 hours because they had so many applicants. This shows that technology is hard to get and is in high demand. Karli will share an example of how her waiver helped her get technology.

Karli: I got funding for technology for a life alert button through my CADI waiver. With the pendant I feel safer and more comfortable to live independently and have help come with just the push of a button if I needed to contact 9-1-1 and couldn't get to a phone. They stay on the line with you until help would arrive and make sure you stay calm and that you are assured help is on the way.

Katie: All right so the next thing we are going to talk about is voting, which is very important. We're going to take the second half of our presentation to talk about voting. Our self-advocacy page has many fantastic resources to teach people about voting. We hope you leave today empowered and confident to vote and advocate for yourself. We have included all of this information in your booklet so you have it after the presentation. If you have any questions about voting after this presentation, you can contact the Arc Minnesota and we will gladly help you.

Angie: Before we get started, we wanted to wish everyone a happy National Disability Voter Registration Week (that's a mouthful)! Every year the REV UP campaign coordinates National Disability Voter Registration Week to increase the political power of people with disabilities. They do this by sharing resources and getting people registered to vote. With an estimated 35 million people with disabilities eligible to vote in 2020, you have incredible power and we want to make sure that you are informed to vote and use this power in ways that work for you.

Karli: Voting is important, and voting is one of the ways you can advocate for yourself and your community. It is an election year in our country. This year you will be able to vote for many different government leaders such as the President, U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, state Senator, state Representative and judges. By voting you are telling the government who you want for a leader. You have the option to pick a leader who has similar views to you and who will work for legislation that supports your wants and needs. Your vote is important. The government works for you. By voting you can tell the government what you want to do. Your vote can make a difference in your life and the lives of your family, friends, and community members. There are important dates this year to keep in mind the primary election is coming up quickly it is August 11th and the general election is November 3rd. Time is moving fast so make sure you are taking steps to prepare to vote in ways that work for you.

Katie: Voting is easy! If you want to vote in person, you have to find out where your polling

place is. You have an assigned polling place based on where you live. There are helpful resources online that can help you find your polling place, like this Minnesota Secretary of State website. They have a polling place finder. A picture of this is on the screen. All you have to do is type in your zip code or look up voting places in your county. Karli: You will need to register before you can vote. You can register early online or on paper. To register you will need your Minnesota driver's license or Minnesota identification card number or the last four numbers of your social security number. You can also register when you vote, if you register when you vote you will need proof of residence. There are different options that you can bring for proof of residence. You can find a list of options on the Minnesota Secretary of State website.

Dhanya: Not only is voting place accessibility important, but it's the law. Federal and state laws require all polling places be accessible and usable by older adults and voters with disabilities. There are specific accessibility requirements that ensure the parking lots, curbs, ramps, and entryways are cleared and accessible for people. All handrails, ramps, doorways, and parking lots must meet accessibility standards that are in the state building code. If your voting place is inaccessible or if you have a barrier when voting you can file a complaint under the ADA or Help America Vote Act (HAVA) at the link on the slide and you can get help from the Minnesota Disability Law Center.

Angie: You have many voting rights. It's important to know them. As a voter in Minnesota you have the right to take time off of work to vote without losing pay, personal leave, or vacation time. You have the right to vote if you're in line before 8 pm. You have the right to register to vote on Election Day, but as we talked about earlier you'll need to show proof of residence. You also have the right to tell the election judge who you are verbally, and you have the right to ask someone else to sign for you if you cannot sign your name. You can also ask anyone for help during any part of voting, but you can't get help from anyone in your place of employment or union. You have the right to vote if you are under guardianship unless a judge has taken away your right to vote. You have the right to vote without anyone trying to control who you vote for or what you vote for. You can bring your children with you when you vote, and you can vote after you finish all parts of your felony conviction sentence (this includes probation, parole or supervised release). And as we talked about earlier, you can file a complaint about voting if your polling place isn't accessible or if you have any challenges when voting. There are a few different ways to vote, this is especially important during the time of COVID-19. Knowing your voting options can help you advocate for yourself while staying safe. You can vote in person on Election Day, but you can also vote absentee. Absentee voting is for someone who does not vote on Election Day. There are two ways you can vote absentee. The first is to vote absentee early by mail and the second is to vote absentee early in person. To vote absentee you will need to apply for an absentee ballot. You can apply for the ballot online or on paper. After you apply you will get your absentee ballot. When you fill out your ballot with your vote you must have a witness. Once you've filled out your absentee ballot you can

send it back by mail or turn it in to your local elections office. If you are worried about voting in person on election day, voting by mail is your safest option but you need to make sure that you are taking these steps early so you have enough time to get what you need. During this time we've gotten a lot of questions about voting online. Unfortunately, the voting process is a little behind the times, in that way there are no options for voting online. If you are concerned about being exposed to COVID-19 when you vote, again the safest way to vote is by mailing in your absentee ballot.

Katie: We have talked about ballots a lot in this presentation. Ballots are a sheet of paper where you mark your vote and get your voice heard. Ballots list all the candidates or subjects that you are voting on. Ballots also have a write-in option where you can write in a candidate if they are not listed. You can see an example on this ballot on this slide. If you cannot fill out a ballot yourself there are a few different options to help you vote. You can have someone help you or you can use a ballot marking machine. A ballot marking machine is for people who do not use a pen to vote. At most polling place they have ballot marking machines. Ballot marking machines can help you in a few different ways: they can help you vote by touch screen, they can read a ballot to you through headphones while you vote, they can allow you to turn the screen off for privacy, they can warn you if you make a mistake, and they can print out your choice on the ballot. Ballot marketing marking machines keep your vote private.

Karli: You can get help voting at all stages of the voting process. There are many ways you can get help when you vote: get help from family friends or neighbors, you can bring anyone you want to help you vote, but they cannot be from your employer or union. They can help you with any part of voting, they can even help you in the voting booth. You can get help from election judges. You can ask an election judge for help with any part of voting. If you need help marking your ballot, two election judges from different parties will help you. You can vote from your car – this is called curbside voting. You can have a ballot brought to you in your car if you have a hard time getting into the polling place. Two election judges from different parties will help you. The election judges will bring the ballot to you in your car. When you have filled out your ballot, the election judges will put your ballot in the ballot box. People who help you vote cannot tell you who to vote for and cannot tell anyone who you voted for. Your vote stays private. Katie and I will briefly share one of our voting experiences. One of my voting experiences is that I did the written ballot. I filled in the circles, however I did have the text read to me through a set of headphones. A part of my disability is not understanding some things without having them read to me, so with the headset I did have help but I was still able to vote independently.

Katie: One of my voting experiences when I went to the voting place and stood in line to fill out a ballot, it took a while for me to think about who I wanted to vote for because I had watched the news and I learned about the candidates. With my disability it takes me

a while to process things. But since I did do my research ahead of time, I was able to vote for someone with the similar views. My voice was heard because I was able to vote.

Angie: All right we know we went over a lot of information today, and a lot of information quickly. You may not have gotten your questions answered. REV UP Minnesota is putting on a virtual town hall with Secretary of State Steve Simon this Thursday from 10 to 11:30 a.m. They will be discussing voter engagement topics for people with disabilities, and all are welcome. You can find more on the Arc Minnesota social media or their website and of course the link is below on this slide. All right any other questions, comments, thoughts that you guys want to share? We're going to wrap up a little early so everyone can get a nice break before your next session, but any other thoughts?

Question: I came on late, but so does everybody understand how to get an absentee ballot or to vote by mail or online, did you cover that before I came on board?

Angie: Yes that was in our presentation, and it it's also in the resources that we provided in our handbook. There is no online voting in itself, however that's where you can go to apply for an absentee ballot and you need to make sure that you go on early to apply so you have time for them to mail it out to you and to fill it out and to mail it back. So make sure you guys are, if you're planning on voting absentee, you start that process even today would be good to start that process. And then the link to the Secretary of State website is on our materials as well, and you can Google it, too.

Dhanya: Well thank you everyone for joining us and listening to us. Thank you, thank you, thank you! We'll pass it back over to the Lifeworks staff, then.