

# The Arc of South Carolina and Self-Advocacy



## Our Mission



The mission of The Arc of South Carolina is to promote and protect the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively support their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes.



We serve over 2000 individuals with disabilities statewide, working to put services and supports in place for each individual, based on his or her wants and needs.



[Case Management](#): Ensuring that individuals with intellectual and development disabilities have the support and services they need to be fully engaged in their communities.

[Best Buddies Program](#): Pairing people with disabilities in one-on-one friendships with college students to explore life through socialization and new-found friendships.

[Supported Decision-Making](#): Increasing awareness of alternatives to guardianship that allow individuals with disabilities to retain control of their lives.

[Wings for All](#): This is a rehearsal program that gives families and aviation professionals the confidence to take to the skies with ease by practicing the airport experience without leaving the ground.

[Walk This Way!](#): Getting people out, meeting friends, and staying active in the community.

[The Elephant in the Room](#): Helping parents have effective and age-appropriate conversations about healthy relationships, appropriate behavior, love, dating, and safety.

[ALERT Program](#): This is our Autism Law & Emergency Response Training program that helps First Responders better serve people with autism in an emergency situation.



[Policy & Advocacy](#): For nearly 70 years, The Arc has been fighting for the civil rights and inclusion of people with disabilities and their families, playing a leading role in major victories in civil rights, community living, education, income security, and other important issues. We've fought to close institutions and make life in the community possible, opened the school doors for students to be included in the classroom alongside their peers without disabilities, and have advocated for affordable health care access, and much more. We teach people to advocate for services and supports in South Carolina. Advocacy is vital in helping to improve and sustain the quality of life for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

[Volunteering](#): We are involved in community service projects that get people with disabilities volunteering right alongside people without disabilities to tackle issues like food insecurity, homelessness, and more.

[Statewide Disability Resource Directory](#): We have compiled a comprehensive, searchable database of available resources, information and opportunities for individuals with disabilities in South Carolina. Our goal is to empower and assist those who have disabilities, their families, caregivers and other professionals by providing data about resources available in our state so that informed decisions can be made to help promote and maintain independence.



[Disability Advocacy Day](#): Every year, several hundred people from across our state meet on the North Grounds of the South Carolina State House on the first Wednesday of March to represent and advocate for the more than 500,000 people with lifelong disabilities and their families in our state. Disability Advocacy Day is an event focused on connecting disability advocates with their legislators to talk about the policy issues and concerns that impact people with disabilities. Our goal is to educate policymakers about how state government services and policies can be improved, expanded, or strengthened. We believe it's important for the policymakers of South Carolina to hear the voices of people with disabilities and their families throughout this event. Disability Advocacy Day also provides an opportunity for advocates, self-advocates, caregivers and family members to learn about the legislative process and how to get involved in disability advocacy efforts. These efforts are spearheaded by The South Carolina Partnership of Disability Organizations and you can visit them online at [scpdo.org](http://scpdo.org).

# The Importance of Self-Advocacy

[Author and Self-Advocate, Cliff Poetz](#) once said, "People with developmental disabilities have a right to advocate for themselves. Some people might be afraid to be "self-advocates" and feel they are doing something wrong. When you advocate for yourself, you are standing up for your basic human rights. You are not doing anything wrong by expressing your wants and needs. If there were no self-advocates, we would not be where we are today."

One way to advocate for yourself is through government policy. By advocating for yourself in this way, you can tell your story and share your concerns which can help lawmakers and policymakers make the changes needed to support people with disabilities better. Self-advocates can get involved by going to county board meetings or by sharing concerns at hearings. Everyone should get to know their state representative and their state senator. Research candidates, their policies, and the decisions they have made in the past. This relationship is very important. If there is a problem, self-advocates can contact them to improve a policy or make suggestions and adjustments. Write a letter or email them, call them on the phone, visit them at their office, or invite them to visit places in your community. Building this relationship gives policymakers a chance to get to know the communities they serve and helps them learn how to better support people with disabilities."

# A Few Challenges that Individuals with disabilities face in South Carolina

- \*There is a lack of public transportation options in rural areas and many locations are not on public transportation routes.
- \*Access to Home & Community-Based Services (HCBS) is the bridge to being able to live in the community instead of an institution.
- \*There is a huge need for increased respite services in our state. Families deserve a break from caregiving!
- \*There almost 17,000 people with intellectual and/or related disabilities waiting for services in our state.
- \*There are almost 200 people with disabilities who have been approved for residential placement, but are waiting because no beds are available.
- \*There are over 2,400 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities living with a caregiver over the age of 65. Many will be seeking residential services soon. Where will they go?
- \*The turnover rate for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) is over 40%!
- \*There is a gap of over \$4000 per student to meet the needs of children with disabilities in our public schools.
- \*More affordable housing options are needed for people with disabilities.
- \*Our state has the 6<sup>th</sup> highest unemployment rate for those living with a disability. We need jobs!

Visit [www.arcsc.org/factsheets](http://www.arcsc.org/factsheets) to learn more!

## What Solutions Do You Need?



# Who are Your Legislators?

[www.scstatehouse.gov/legislatorssearch.php](http://www.scstatehouse.gov/legislatorssearch.php)

## Find Your Legislators

This application allows you to find your Senators and Representatives for both the S.C. State Legislature and U.S. Congress who are *currently serving*.

To use the search, first enter your address information into the form provided below. Next click the button labeled 'Find Legislators' to submit the search.

Address:

City:

Zip:

Find Legislators

Clear

# Advocacy and Storytelling

## Sharing Your Story Makes a Difference



Every individual in the special needs community has a unique story to tell- whether a parent, sibling, professional, extended family member or supporter. Storytelling has always been a big part of society, dating back tens of thousands of years, to pass history and culture from one generation to the next.

Ever listened to someone talk about life and thought, 'I thought I was the only one who's gone through that'? Every story shared is a chance to make someone feel less alone, and help educate and inform those who are unaware of the challenges faced by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their families and caregivers.

In many cases, storytelling is necessary to help give lawmakers an accurate picture of the reality of intellectual and developmental disabilities. It allows them to truly understand the challenges you and your family face so they can see how their decisions have a direct impact on people's lives.

When you share your story with your legislators, it helps them remember that when policy decisions are being made about people who have intellectual and developmental disabilities, it's affecting the lives of real people.

Your story can help forge relationships with elected officials so that when decisions about health care policy cross their desks, they think of you, their constituent. By helping your legislator see what life looks like where you stand, you can help improve the conditions for everyone who has a disability, their families, and caregivers.



## Questions & Issues to Consider When Telling Your Story

People with disabilities and their families want access to a life in the community, no matter the level of supports necessary to make that happen. But when they try to find what they need, too often the system leaves them waiting.

Why do home and community-based services (HCBS) matter to YOU? How have they impacted you or your family? How do they support you to live in the community? If you are on a waiting list for services, how long has it been and how does that impact your daily life?

What are some of the biggest issues or challenges facing your family right now? What supports do you depend on for health, financial stability, or inclusion in the community?

What do you want your elected officials to know about how they can help address the issues or problems affecting your life? **What solutions do you need?**

