

About Self Advocacy

- **What is Self-Advocacy?** Self-Advocacy is the concept of speaking up for your own goals, rights, wants, and needs. It means making your own choices and also taking responsibility for the consequences of your actions.
- **What is the Self-Advocacy Movement?** The Self-Advocacy movement is the civil rights movement for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. It has been active in the United States since the 1980s. Self-Advocacy groups work together to make a more inclusive society for people with disabilities. The concept of “nothing about us without us” is at the heart of this movement.

About DDA’s Advocacy Specialists

- **What is an “Advocacy Specialist?”** DDA has an Advocacy Specialist in each of their four Regional Offices. Each Advocacy Specialist is someone who has their own intellectual or developmental disability. They each have lived-experiences using the same services that DDA waiver participants, and other people with disabilities use, such as Social Security, DORS, and paratransit. This gives them an “insider knowledge” of how to navigate services that someone without disabilities may not have.
- **Who are the Advocacy Specialists allowed to help?** The Advocacy Specialists can help people who are applying for DDA services, people already receiving DDA services, and their families.
- **What do the Advocacy Specialists do?**
 - The Advocacy Specialists work with people in services, families, Coordinators of Community Services, and provider agencies.
 - Advocacy Specialists can help explain what services are available and help troubleshoot problems.
 - Advocacy Specialists are also available to present to community groups on topics such as Transitioning Youth, mental health, and assistive technology.

- **If I reach out to an Advocacy Specialist does money come out of my annual budget?** No. Help from an Advocacy Specialist is FREE and will not affect your annual budget.
- **If I ask an Advocacy Specialist to help me will they tell other people what we talk about?**
 - No, not unless you want them to.
 - The things that may be discussed will not be shared outside of the Advocacy Specialist Unit unless you mention harm to yourself or others.
 - Advocacy Specialists must have permission from the individual or their legal guardian in order to discuss any specific information about your services with someone outside of the DDA system.
- **How do the Advocacy Specialists help individuals learn to advocate for themselves?** Advocacy Specialists can provide individuals with the necessary resources and education to self-advocate. The self-advocacy process can be long and not always easily taught, but at the end of the day you are responsible for your own decisions and life goals. Advocacy Specialists can also refer you to groups like People-on-the-GO Maryland and the WRAP Outreach Project that offer basic self-advocacy training.
- **What is the PCP process and how does it relate to Self-Advocacy?** Your Person-Centered Plan (PCP) is the document that lists what community services DDA is paying for. It also lists your goals and the things that are important for helping you to live your best life. It is called a Person-Centered Plan because it contains what you decide you need in order to live your best life in the community, not what your parents, siblings, case manager, or support workers think that you need. Your Coordinator of Community Services (CCS) will work with you to update your PCP every year at your annual plan meeting. Your Regional Advocacy Specialist is available to help you plan for your planning meeting. They could even join you at your annual planning meeting if you would like them to help you speak up for yourself during the meeting.
- **What is Community Integration and why is it important to Self-Advocacy?** Community Integration means being able to live in a house or apartment and being able to come and go as you choose. It means being able to participate in all aspects of your community, such as work, volunteer, faith-based, and recreational activities with other people with and without disabilities. DDA believes that ALL people with disabilities can be given the right supports to live in the community, no matter what their disability is. We believe that no one is too disabled to live in the community. If you are having trouble connecting with part of your community, your Regional Advocacy Specialist can help you to work around your issue.

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How to Contact an Advocacy Specialist

- You can call or email your Regional Advocacy Specialist.
- Email is the fastest and best mode of communication to reach Advocacy Specialists.
- Please be aware that each Advocacy Specialist works part-time, so response may take 2-3 business days.

DDA Region	Counties Served	Advocacy Specialist
Western Maryland	Allegany, Carroll, Frederick, Garrett, Washington	Jessica Stine 240-313-4225 jessica.stine@maryland.gov
Southern Maryland	Montgomery, Prince George's, Charles, Calvert, St. Mary's	Nicole LeBlanc 301-362-5141 nicole.leblanc@maryland.gov
Eastern Shore	Cecil, Kent, Queen Anne's Talbot, Caroline, Dorchester, Wicomico, Somerset, Worcester	Cody Drinkwater 410-572-5949 cody.drinkwater@maryland.gov
Central Maryland	Harford, Baltimore, Howard, Anne Arundel, Baltimore City	Cheryl Gottlieb 410-234-8210 cheryl.gottlieb@maryland.gov

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