

What We Expect of Our Service System

We are self-advocates in Virginia. We met together at The Arc of Virginia's 2008 State Convention in Waynesboro. During our time together we talked about the dreams we have in life and our support needs. Many of us wanted to have someone to love in our life, even get married and have children. One of us even said that she wanted to skydive! We talked about what we could give each other or other people. We talked about what we expect of a service system and what needs to change about services in Virginia.

We also found out that people have to wait to receive services. People end up on wait lists. That isn't right! We also heard that some people live in institutions. We didn't think that was a good idea. We talked too about some people with nothing to do during the day. They just sit home and hang out. That is boring! Sometimes people go to day programs and there isn't much to do there either.

We saw that some of us are living where we want and have jobs. But too many self-advocates are on wait lists, not living where they want or don't have a good job. Most of all we want to be in charge of our own decisions and have a life like other people. In the future here are some things that we expect of the service system.

We expect that:

- The state will take the "R" word out of the name of the Department.
- Even at Arc meetings that we won't hear the R word being used.
- We will live in the community, like other people.
- We won't live in institutions.
- We will have something to do during the day...like a JOB that pays OK money.
- We will have a way to get around town.
- The service system will acknowledge the failure of stereotypes like ones that say that we are not capable of doing things or making our own decisions.
- We will have authority over the services we get.
- We will have authority over our own life... that is, power over our life.
- We will be part of any decision making in our life to help us stay safe and healthy.
- People won't tell us what to do.
- Our parents and others will listen to us and not tell us what to do like we are children. Sometimes parents don't listen well. We can make decisions! But we want to stay safe too.
- You will respect that we want to date like other people do, have boyfriends and girlfriends and maybe even get married.



We also talked about what we can do to make things better in Virginia. We think that we are stronger when we work together like a team. When we don't, our voice is too weak and we are not strong. When we come together and speak as one, we are stronger. We want to do that. We hope you will help us work together to stand up for our rights.