Michigan Partners for Freedom 4th Annual Local Leader Summit

At this year’s Michigan Partners for Freedom 4th Local Leader Summit, the discussion was focused on the nitty-gritty of individual budgeting within self-determination arrangements in Michigan. Eleven Local Leaders from seven different communities participated along with Local Coaches, Regional Coaches and MPF’s Grant Manager, Cheryl Trommater, from the Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council.

The event kicked off with MPF joining The Arc Michigan at its 60th anniversary dinner and was followed by a lively discussion about self-advocacy facilitated by Wayne MPF Local Leader and People First language expert, Ray Schuholz. Local Leaders and other self-advocates from across Michigan attending The Arc Michigan conference gathered to share personal success stories and highlight their community connections and participation.

On the second day of the summit the new MPF Local Leaders paired with more seasoned, experienced MPF Leaders. The veteran Local Leaders helped the “newbies” to create their own PowerPoint -- “Self-Determination in My Community”. This useful, individual presentation is one of the many MPF tools each Local Leader has to present. They also have two DVDs, brochures, newsletters and their personal experiences of arranging supports based on the principles of Self-Determination.

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Pictured to the right:
- Eleven MPF Local Leaders
- Four Personal Assistants
- Three Local Coordinators
- Three Regional Coordinators
- Two guests from Self-Determination Peers Project
- One MDDC Grants Manager
“Enough is Enough”

Attending the Michigan Partners for Freedom (MPF) Summit for the first time was quite exciting for Rachel DeMaagd from Grand Rapids. In her 30 years, this was only her second hotel stay; the first visit was for her 19th birthday and was a result of a behavior program which rewarded Rachel for attending a sheltered workshop. “I did not like the workshop. I wasn’t being challenged. I tried to run away almost every day. I always wished I had other choices.” In order to partake in her first hotel stay, Rachel had to earn points awarded by her group home staff - who, by the way, was Rachel’s only guest at her birthday “celebration”. Placement in this residential setting was not Rachel’s choice, either.

Ms. DeMaagd’s second hotel stay was a whole other world! This time, as a MPF Local Leader, Rachel fully participated in the MPF Summit and led group discussions (see photo). Here, as a part of The Arc Grand Rapids delegation, Rachel was respected by her peers and colleagues as the bright, independent leader she is. No behavior points led her to The Arc Michigan 60th Annual Conference at the Mt. Pleasant Soaring Eagle Resort in June.

After living in six different group homes over 11 years and not spending her days productively, Rachel finally concluded “enough is enough!!” Last winter she led her Person Centered Planning meeting and says “All we talked about was Self-Determination. In the Spring I began choosing my schedule and I hired my very own staff. Actually soon, it looks like I’ll be moving to my own home!”

With help from Hope Network, she runs “Rachel’s Little Coffee Shop” and says self-employment has “challenged me and changed me. I found confidence in myself. I found my voice because I was no longer afraid to speak out.”

In July she served on the Michigan Academy on Self-Determination Faculty in Midland. Speaking out about her life motivated others to exclaim “If Rachel can have so much success in her life, so can I!” Rachel says the secret to her success, “I would show people what I could do so I could challenge others by never giving up! When they told me I couldn’t do something, I showed them wrong.”

Thankfully Kent County advocates from the Arc and Grand Rapids service providers listened to Rachel’s voice and confirmed her freedom, authority, and responsibility by supporting her life, her way. Now, Rachel is expanding her business skills to include teaching and making presentations about Self-Determination.

You can email Rachel at rachelscoffee@yahoo.com
Michigan Partners for Freedom Trains New Leaders

In May, Community Living Services (CLS) held training for Local Leaders for Michigan Partners for Freedom on ways to promote Self-Determination in Wayne and Oakland Counties and across the state. The first part of the training was a discussion about the concept of Self-Determination and what it means. Self-Determination is about having a good quality of life that includes relationships, friends and family, and reliable support, recreation, using community resources, and good health care.

The rest of the training focused on ways of promoting SD as a way to organize supports and services. Attendees were encouraged to tell their personal stories and do presentations for student groups, community mental health agencies, local school districts and advocacy and community organizations as examples.

The participants from Wayne County CLS (and a couple from CLS/Oakland) were also encouraged to meet with policymakers and community leaders to discuss and promote Self-Determination as a freeing method of supporting people with disabilities in Michigan.

On behalf of everyone at Community Living Services, we thank Michigan Partners for Freedom for their ongoing collaboration and assistance in our mutual efforts to promote Self-Determination and increased FREEDOM FOR ALL.

Commissioner Lewis Says Separate is Not Equal

In the Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD) July 2011 Update to friends and colleagues, Commissioner Sharon Lewis writes about the full inclusion of people with disabilities in everyday life is not an option or “choice”.

Lewis says it is a fundamental civil and human right and that “Separate is not equal. Sheltered workshops and segregated environments do not protect and empower individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Rather, they are a failure of our imaginations to provide better integrated opportunities. Group homes built on the grounds of former institutions are not community living, and living situations that segregate individuals with disabilities do not constitute a home in a real and meaningful sense. They do not allow for community participation and contribution, regardless of the quality of the care provided.”

**NO QUALITY WITHOUT EQUALITY!**
I Believe That Self-Determination Means “Life is Good!”

I believe Self-Determination helps special people strive for and achieve challenges each day and for each of those challenges there are several different obstacles that arise and for each obstacle those special individuals hit those challenges head on until they are achieved.

Self-Determination is a term used by several professionals who work with person’s served. Those professionals who represent people with disabilities help them to choose where they want to live or who they want to live with.

First, as for myself, I am one of those persons served who is able to make these choices. I love this because I live in my own home with my precious little boy. My little boy who I refer to is an 11-year-old Lhasa Apso named Newton. “Fig Bar” as I call him, loves the house because of the nice fenced in back yard that he can run and play in.

Second, I participate in Special Olympics which raises my self-esteem and enables me to stay active and fit. Thanks to my Provider for finding this Olympics program, it makes it more possible for me to be with my friends as well.

Third, I fully participate in family functions. I love being around my family as they enjoy being with me. As for my family, they support me in the things I like to do and some of the decisions I make.

Finally, Self-Determination enables me to focus on advocacy work and to have input into staff personnel. With the advocacy work, it enables me to go to different events such as attending different conferences and talking with parents about Self-Determination or talking with other groups about abolishing the “r” word. Advocacy also enables me to meet with lawmakers about what Self-Determination means to me or going to the state rallies to express my opinions to our state Senators and to our state’s House of Representatives or the Governor about the budget cuts.

Self-Determination is for people who strive to achieve their goals each day. Knowing what Self-Determination is and how I can use it in my life gives me a better quality of life.

I have a special saying my sister Cathy and I love to say, “Life is good, I like what I do and I do what I like.” So if our government does any more budget cutting, my life could be greatly affected. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, parents, professionals and persons served, Self-Determination means to me “Life is Good!”

By Janey Vermuelen
Wayne County MPF Local Leader

“Knowing what Self-Determination is and how I can use it in my life gives me a better quality of life.”

Janey Vermuelen with fellow Local Leader Andre Robinson and U.S. Representative John Conyers
Allies in Self-Advocacy

Three MPF Local Leaders were members of the Michigan State Team “Allies in Self-Advocacy Summit” sponsored by the Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD) in Columbus, Ohio on April 28-29, 2011. Here is a picture of the Commissioner of ADD, Sharon Lewis, with the Michigan State Team at the Summit.

Pictured:
(Back row) Dan Vivian, Elmer Cerano, Angela Martin, Charlyss Brandon, Vendella Collins, Micah Fialka-Feldman (Oakland County Local Leader);

(Front row) Andre Robinson (Wayne County Local Leader), Sarah Townsend, Sharon Lewis (Administration on Developmental Disabilities Commissioner), Sheryl Kuenzer (Manistee-Benzie Local Leader)

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Then the group broke out into smaller groups and worked diligently to identify strategies of how a MPF Local Leader could assist others to develop a more individualized budget. Each small group discussed a series of scenarios before developing a list of strategies.

According to the Summit evaluations, 94% of the respondents were “highly satisfied” with the Summit and 88% “strongly agree” with the statement that the Summit information will be useful to them in the future. One participant said “I learned more about budgeting and that there is still so much work to be done to promote Self-Determination to CMH systems”.

To date there are several Local Leaders who are ready, willing, and able to address local Community Mental Health agencies, school boards and students (especially those in transition), policymakers, conferences, community organizations and whoever else is interested in learning how Self-Determination works and how it can work for others. Please visit www.mifreedom.com to see who is close to you!
Michigan Partners for Freedom is a grassroots coalition of people with disabilities, family members, advocates, organizations and other allies working together to build statewide demand for self-determination.

Welcome to new Local Coordinators Marie Eagle (Allegan), Tiffany Devon and Christy Courtney (Wayne), and Ron Irvine (Kent County). Joining soon is Diana Evans for St. Joseph County. THANK YOU for your support of Self-Determination and assisting MPF Local Leaders.

United in Self-Advocacy at The Arc Michigan 2011 Annual Conference

Ray Schuholz, Wayne County Local Leader and People First Language expert facilitated a discussion “United Through Self-Advocacy”. Local Leaders shared their personal stories of self-advocacy and how they effectively advocate for themselves and others.