

Monthly tips and resources featured in **What's Next?** are created for young adults, their families, and supporters who are exploring options for life after high school in Indiana.

Self-Advocacy and Self-Advocates of Indiana

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As you move from high school to what's next, you are the one who will need to speak up for your rights. Throughout school, you've had an Individualized Education Program and teachers who know you have a disability and what accommodations you need. We also hope you have learned self-advocacy skills along the way. As an adult, it's up to you to speak up for what you need.

This is self-advocacy.

Self-advocacy has a long history in the U.S. For example, people who could not walk [crawled](#) up the capitol steps in Washington, D.C. in March of 1990, to

advocate for the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. This demonstration of the challenges people with disabilities face propelled the passage of the ADA legislation; Congress signed it into law in July of that same year.

What does that have to do with you?

Part of self-advocacy is knowing your rights under the law because when you know your rights, you can more easily advocate for them. You can find some disability rights resources at the end of this article.

Self-advocacy is also quite broad and can include many different things, such as:

- saying “no,”
- asking questions,
- making your own choices and decisions, or
- asking for accommodations on the job, in school, and in your community.

There are organizations that can help you advocate for yourself. One of these is the Self-Advocates of Indiana. [SAI](#) started 33 years ago when Darcus Nims and Betty Williams— two self-advocates with developmental disabilities—dismissed their service

Continued, page 2.

providers from a group discussion and led the discussion on their own. They wanted people to hear *their* voices and the voices of others with disabilities like theirs rather than the just voices of providers or parents.

Today, SAI has [over 40 chapters](#) across the state and is beginning to have chapters for high school students. It is a non-profit organization governed by a board and executive committee—all made up of people with developmental disabilities.

Nicki Hinkle, the current president of SAI, has a unique perspective as the niece of Nims, one of the co-founders. According to Hinkle, her aunt started SAI after she got out of high school because she was being forced to work in a sheltered workshop when she wanted to work in the community instead. Hinkle admired her aunt's advocacy and started attending board meetings right out of high school, over 16 years ago, and reached her dream of being SAI board president in November 2021.

"You can get a job in the community if you want, even if you have a disability," Hinkle says. Hinkle speaks to groups about self-advocacy and attends Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services Advisory Council meetings to advocate for community employment and benefits counseling for people with developmental disabilities.

As the SAI says, "all people with disabilities have the right to live, laugh, and have happiness in everything we do."

That's what self-advocacy is all about.

Resources

- [Self-Advocates of Indiana](#)
- [Indiana Disability Rights](#)
- [Self-Advocacy Online](#)
- [Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered \(SABE\)](#)
- [The Governor's Council for People with Disabilities](#)
- [Self-Determination Tools](#)
- [Information on the ADA](#)

What's Next? is a project of the Center on Community Living and Careers and the Indiana Department of Education.

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