

How to Start a Self-Advocate Leadership Network Chapter



By James Steed
A proud member of
The Idaho Self-Advocate Leadership Network
With support from
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Idaho Council on Developmental Disabilities

The Idaho Self-Advocate Leadership Network, Inc.



Your Statewide Self-Advocacy Organization
Run BY and FOR people with Developmental Disabilities

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A Letter from James Steed, a Founding Member...

When I started the Chapter in Pocatello, I had just found out what **self-determination** and self-advocacy was all about. Self-determination for people with developmental disabilities, at its core, is a civil rights issue.

... is when people have choice, control, and take responsibility for their choices.

...is speaking up for yourself in whatever way works for you.

Self-advocacy is the tool to gain self-determination. This is how I have come to think about self-determination and self-advocacy.

In 2005 I went to a self-advocacy and leadership development training sponsored by the Idaho Council on Developmental Disabilities and something clicked! What can I say, I am a late bloomer.

It was at this time I realized that most of my friends with developmental disabilities were treated like cattle. They had no voice, and really no choice. They had been treated as a way to make money, not as the beautiful, independent spirits they are.

They had no idea what self-determination was and had no clue about how to be a **self-advocate**. I didn't either until the training I attended. I did not know I had rights, a voice, that my opinion mattered, and was an afterthought to people most of my life. In school we weren't taught about how to be self-determined in a self-contained classroom.

We were taught living skills, but the most important living skill was never taught and that was self-advocacy.

We may have missed learning these things in school, but by creating a **self-advocacy chapter** we can learn self-advocacy skills together, be active citizens in our hometowns, and have a lot of fun.

A group of self-advocates meeting together to learn about self-advocacy, be active in your town, and have fun!

Mission Statement

“To advance equality through growth, education, and advocacy by providing opportunities so individual with disabilities may achieve their greatest unique potential”.

We Learn and Teach Others:

- To learn to speak up for ourselves in whatever way works for us
- To take a stand on issues
- To respect ourselves and others
- To lead our own lives
- To be proud of being people with disabilities
- To lead in our towns and in our state
- To run our own meetings
- To be an active citizen in our town by giving back
- To organize state and local events
- To make change to laws and rules that help us lead full lives
- To understand the meaning of ***Nothing About Us, Without Us***
- To learn our rights and responsibilities
- To help solve problems for people in our town
- To learn work as a team
- To have fun!

Chapter 1

Welcome to The Idaho Self-Advocate Leadership Network

What is The Idaho Self-Advocate Leadership Network.....6
What is a self-advocate?7
History of the Self-Advocacy Movement.....7
How The Idaho Self-Advocate Leadership Network Works.....8

Chapter 2

How to Start a Self-Advocate Leadership Network Chapter

Roles and Responsibilities of Chapter Members.....9
Self-Advocate Leadership Network Chapters.....9
How to Get Your Chapter Started.....10
Important Things to Talk About and Decide for Your Group.....11
Meeting Ideas.....13
Support for a Chapter.....15
Chapter Elections for Officers.....16
Nominations of an Officer Position.....18
Chapter Name and Officer Contact.....20

Chapter 1:

Welcome to The Idaho Self-Advocate Leadership Network

What is The Idaho Self-Advocate Leadership Network?

The Idaho Self-Advocate Leadership Network (SALN) was started in 2003 as a project of the Idaho Council on Developmental Disabilities. The project worked statewide to teach teams of adults with developmental disabilities about self-advocacy, self-determination, and public speaking skills.

Seven education teams made up of adults with developmental disabilities were created statewide that provided self-advocacy education to students, adults, parents, service providers, teachers, community organizations, state legislators, and other policymakers.

SALN members live all over the state and are working in their home towns to help other people with developmental disabilities learn about self-advocacy. The SALN is a non-profit organization run by and for people with developmental disabilities.

The goal of SALN is to help people with disabilities be a leader in their own life and be more active members of their hometown and their state.

The SALN has many ways for people to lead. Since 2003, SALN members have:

- Written rules (by-laws) for how SALN will work together
- Held elections for state officers
- Held positions on Boards, Councils, Commissions, and Task Forces throughout the state
- Given testimony on local, state, and national issues
- Made over 100 presentations statewide and nationally
- Created SALN Chapters throughout Idaho

What is a Self-Advocate?

The SALN believes that the word self-advocate means any person who speaks up for themselves to voice their thoughts and ideas. Self-advocates speak up in spoken words, with sign language, communication boards, through body language, and behavior.

History of Self-Advocacy

In Sweden in the 1960's, a group of people with mental retardation wrote a paper listing their requests for improvements in their services. Their paper was spread throughout other countries, where the idea of people with the label of "mental retardation" speaking for themselves spread.

The self-advocacy movement, sometimes called the People First Movement, is a civil rights movement of and for people with developmental disabilities. People wanted to be treated with respect and to have equal rights like any other citizen. It is led by men and women who have been labeled with an intellectual disability, physical disability, or long list of other labels.

In 1973, a group of professionals organized a conference in Canada that was advertised as "The First Convention for the Mentally Handicapped in North America."

A group of five Oregonians with and without disabilities attended the conference and began to dream together about what they could do for self-advocacy in the U.S. These five people wanted to build an organization led by people with developmental disabilities and have a conference for people with disabilities.



Their organization adopted the name **PEOPLE FIRST**, and held its first conference in October 1974.

In the 1980's People First groups were beginning to form local chapters and state organizations across the United States.

In 1991, Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE), the National Self-Advocacy organization is created.

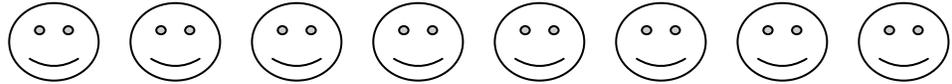
How The Idaho Self-Advocate Leadership Network Works

One Person



The individual self-advocate is the most important part of The Idaho Self-Advocate Leadership Network.

Local Chapters



A group of self-advocates meeting together to learn self-advocacy skills and put them into action to better the lives of people living in their hometown and for all of Idaho.

State Board Meetings



Where leaders from all over the state meet to share ideas, information, and use their self-advocacy skills to help the state organization get better at helping more Idahoans learn about self-advocacy and be a part of The Idaho Self-Advocate Leadership Network.

Chapter 2:

How to Start a Self-Advocate Leadership Network Chapter

Roles and Responsibilities of Chapter Members

- All chapter members are people with developmental disabilities
- Support people are not voting members
- All members should believe in the mission of the SALN
- All members share leadership for the chapter
- All members are equal in the chapter
- All members will contribute in whatever way works for them
- All members will feel respected and heard

SALN Chapters...

- Are grassroots local groups that help give chances to lead, be an active part of your town, and have fun.
- Are different from one town to the next. There is not one way to start a chapter.
- Agree to the mission and By-laws of the SALN.
- Work as a chapter in their own town on the SALN Mission.
- Elect at least 4 chapter officers and send their names, offices held, and contact information to the state SALN Board.
- Agree to keep minutes of chapter meetings and send copies to the state SALN Board.
- Support and learn from each other.
- Can do more together than one person can do alone.
- Are open to all Idaho citizens who have been labeled with a developmental disability. No person shall be denied membership because of race, religious belief, color, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, economic status, or disability.

How to Get Your Chapter Started

A Chapter is a group of friends that have fun together, support each other, and learn together.

These are things your group may want to talk about and do when putting a chapter together:

Imagine your Chapter Meeting Together

- Do people feel safe?
- Do people trust each other?
- Do people share their joys and fears?
- Do people feel supported?
- Do people feel like someone cares if they are there or not?

How to Find Members...Mingle, Mingle, Mingle....

- Invite people with disabilities to meet for coffee or a soda. Be a friend. Plan to meet each week. Talk and **Listen**.
- Talk about what is happening in your life and ask them what is happening in their life. **Listen**.
- Talk about your dreams and goals, ask them about their dreams and goals. **Listen**.
- Talk about how and what things could be better in your lives and for people in your town. Could you work on this together?
- **Listen**.
- Talk about your families and other friends.
- Invite others to coffee or soda. Grow your group!

- Meet with service providers and talk with them about what you want and how they may help you spread the word to people with developmental disabilities they may know.

Developmental Disability Agencies
 Independent Living Centers
 Day programs
 Sheltered workshops
 Certified Family Home providers
 Care Managers at Medicaid
 Medicaid nurses

- Meet with service organizations and talk with them about what you want and how they can help

Civitan's
 Knights of Columbus
 Kiwanis
 Rotary Club

Moose Lodge
 The Elk's
 The Eagles Club
 The Lions Club

Important Things to Talk About and Decide for Your Group

1. Location for meetings

Try to find a space that is safe, accessible, quiet, private, low or no cost, with enough room.

2. Food

Do you want to have food at your meetings?

Will having food at the meetings cause any problems for members?

How will the food be paid for?

Will people have time to eat at the meeting?

Should we eat before, during, or after the meeting?

3. Day

Which day is available for the space?

What works best for most people?

Weekday, evening, or weekend?

4. Time

Morning, afternoon, or night?

Do people have other things going on at the time you want to meet?

Do people have rides at that time?

How often do you want to meet?

How long should your meetings be?

5. Transportation

Are people able to get rides?

Is there a bus?

Is the meeting place on the bus line?

Can people carpool?

Can someone get help paying for gas to pick up members?

6. Membership

Who can be a member?

Where can we find members?

How do we get members involved?

7. Dues

Can people pay state dues?

What volunteer activities could members do that match their talent with a need for the organization?

8. Support

Do we need Chapter support?

What do we want them to do?

Do we know a person or people who would be a good fit?

Meeting Ideas

These are some ideas I used when starting the Pocatello Chapter. Do what is right for your town and at the speed that works for your group. Some groups want to spend more time talking about what it means to be a self-advocate, and just spend time together before becoming a chapter. Do what feels right with the members of your group.

1st Meeting Ideas

- Present SALN's presentation "Self-Advocacy 101"
- Talk about the presentation
- Explain what The Idaho Self-Advocate Leadership Network is
- Explain what a Chapter is
- Ask if people want to be a part of this
- Have snacks
- Ask when they would like to meet again and set a date

2nd Meeting Ideas

...is a list of things the group will talk about at the meeting.

- Create an **agenda**, use pictures, symbols, and plain words
- Explain what an agenda is used for and why it is important
- Have a snack
- Review a section of SALN By-Laws
- Explain leadership roles in the chapter

3rd Meeting Ideas

- Talk about ways to serve the community
- Review a section of SALN By-Laws
- Review leadership roles again
- Take nominations for offices
- Write speeches for elections, make it fun!

4th Meeting Ideas

- Candidate speeches and elections
- Celebrate new leaders! Tell the other chapters so they can celebrate with you
- Review some of the SALN By-Laws

5th Meeting Ideas

- Talk about local issues and plan for working on something together.
- It is not just about being included in your town, but being A part of and giving back to your town.
- Think about what your chapter may do to make your town better for everyone.
- Think about how everyone will **share the leadership** of the chapter.
- Remember that a chapter is not only a group of people who get together, but also a place for people to learn and practice being a leader.
- Think about what places help people in your town.

...is where everyone shares their talents and takes responsibility for leading the group.

Salvation Army
St. Vincent's de Paul
Soup kitchens
Homeless shelters, etc.
Domestic violence shelters
Animal shelters

- Minutes taken by Secretary with support if needed.
- Forget all the disability labels. Anyone with the right supports can be a leader.

Support for a Chapter

A support person gives support to chapter members. This means they may:

- Listen to the members without interrupting and does not take control of the group.
- Helps the group problem solve, but does not solve problems.
- Allows the members to come to their own answers.
- Not push their ideas on the chapter.
- Help to make sure all members are being heard.

It is likely when people start coming to your self-advocacy meetings there will be service providers attending with self-advocates. Some service providers think when people with developmental disabilities learn how to be self-advocates, they will no longer need service providers. When people learn they have choice and control over their own lives that may take away some control from service providers.

We still need support to live the lives we want. The role of support in our lives may change as we learn how to speak up for ourselves, make choices for ourselves, and take responsibility for our choices. This is a change in the way things have always been done.

It should be clear to support staff when they come to self-advocacy meetings, that they are not there to speak for, participate in, or to add their opinions to the self-advocacy meetings.

It is helpful to have 1-2 people who support your chapter. Look to your friends, neighbors, teachers, even your family members. The key to good support is their **belief in the power of self-advocacy**.

Chapter Elections for Officers

To help your chapter meetings run smoothly, it is a good idea to elect officers to help run your meetings. It is also a great way to learn about leadership and teamwork.

Roles and Responsibilities of Chapter Officers

What are Officers?

Officers are members who have been elected by the chapter. Officers work together with the members to help the chapter reach its' goals.

Officers should:

- Believe in the Mission of SALN
- Set a good example
- Share leadership among all chapter members
- Ask for help when they need it
- Be respectful and polite to all members
- Know that every member has something to share with the chapter
- Let other officers know when they cannot come to a meeting or event
- Work together with officers and members to run the meetings, plan and do events.

Chapter Officers

President

The President shall:

- Act as head officer of the chapter.
- Preside over all chapter meetings.
- Make sure all the functions of the local chapter of The SALN are done.
- Vote only in case of a tie between chapter members.
- Function as the official contact for the chapter.
- Fulfill all other duties as deemed necessary by the chapter.

Vice-President

The Vice-President shall:

- Carry out the duties of the President if the President is unable for any reason, whether temporary or permanent, until the chapter membership can elect a new President.

Secretary

The Secretary shall:

- Record the minutes of all meetings of the chapter meetings for The SALN.
- Send copies of the minutes out to all chapter members and the State SALN Board.

Treasurer

The Treasurer shall:

- Keep track of the money for the SALN Chapter.
- Give reports to chapter members and at the officer's meeting.
- Keep a record of all members.

Sergeant-At-Arms (each chapter may choose to have this position or not)

The Sergeant-at-Arms shall:

- Help keep the meeting in order. If members are too noisy, the Sergeant-At-Arms will call for order. Keep track of time spent on agenda items and tells speakers when they are going over the scheduled time.
- Helps members in between meetings by sending reminders or calling members to make sure members are completing chapter tasks.

Historian (each chapter may choose to have this position or not)

The Historian shall:

- Keep a historical record of the activities of the SALN chapter
- Share the SALN mission statement with Chapter members
- Have members sign a poster with the SALN mission statement

Nominations of an Officer Position Means

1. You or another member feels you have the skills needed for an office.
2. Nominations should not be a popularity contest. The best person for the job is what is best for your Chapter.
3. You are willing to learn and want to meet the responsibilities of this position.
4. If you accept the nomination you will need to give a short speech on why you would be the best person for the office, how you will do your job, and what skills you have to bring to the chapter and the office.

Taking Nominations

Before you have the officers of the group someone will need to be elected as the election official. This person should not be running for one of the offices. Once someone has filled this position you may:

1. Open nominations for officers by saying, "Nominations are now open for President".
2. Members nominate who they want or a person may nominate themselves by saying, "I nominate (name of person) for President."
3. Another member seconds the nomination. If no one seconds the nomination, the person is not nominated. A person nominated cannot second their nomination.
4. The people who are nominated for President tell the members of the group that they will or will not accept the nomination.
5. Nominations are closed by a member saying "I move the nominations shall be closed." Another member seconds the motion.
6. Once the nominations for President are closed, repeat the steps above to nominate the officers for your chapter.

7. After all the nominations have been made for all chapter officers, the group may decide if nominees will make speeches to run for their offices and set a date for chapter elections.
8. At the elections if the group decides to do speeches, voting happens after the speeches.
9. Celebrate your new Chapter officers!

A Final Note....

Being a self-advocate is the first step on the path of being an important part of your community. Self-advocacy is understanding how great a gift you are not only to yourself, but also to your hometown.

My wish is that you are able to use this book as a guide to start your own SALN Chapter and help other self-advocates see their gifts and share them with others.

-James Steed

Please make a copy and mail this form to:

The Idaho Self-Advocate Leadership Network
775 Yellowstone Road #158
Pocatello, ID 83201



1. **Chapter Name:** _____
Please remember that Idaho Self-Advocate Leadership Network needs to be part of your name

2. List names and contact information of the officers you have elected.

President: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Address: _____

Vice-President: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Address: _____

Secretary: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Address: _____

Treasurer: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Address: _____

Sergeant-At-Arms: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Address: _____