The Beginning of Advocacy | CPD

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The Legislative Coalition for People with Disabilities hosts a reception during the Utah General Session for disability advocates.

Advocacy is already a part of your life. If you speak up for your child at school, a neighbor or a friend in need, you have already begun to build the skills needed to advocate for people with disabilities.

There are four basic steps to becoming involved in the legislative advocacy process: Choosing and learning about the issues, identifying decision-makers, understanding the legislative process and your role in it, and communicating your views.

First you have to identify the issues of concern that you want to influence. Education, employment, housing, transportation, or something else?

Is the issue between you and another person, or is it a community or state agency issue? Will it take legislation to make a difference? The legislature is the hardest place to make a change. At what level can you solve your issue?

Now that you’ve decided what to advocate for, you need to tell your own story to policymakers. They have never before experienced what your needs are. While you don’t need to know everything, you need to be able to answer the question, “why?” You can learn more about your issue by contacting existing advocacy groups or service providers, or conducting research by reading newspapers or searching the internet.

To identify decision-makers, call your local county clerk’s office and ask for the names and contact information of legislators that represent people in your area. Utah residents may access this information at http://le.utah.gov.

On Friday: Understanding the legislative process.