



Connections

NEWSLETTER • WINTER 2024

Empowerment Through Self-Advocacy

Client Council Creates Leadership Opportunities and Lasting Friendships

“When Client Council first began in the late ‘90’s, I got involved right away,” said Matt Starr, who served as Jubilee’s first Client Council President and remains active in the council. “It was a great opportunity to be involved in decisions at Jubilee, and we’ve had a lot of fun over the years too!”

Nearly 30 years ago, Jubilee created the Client Council so that more people supported by Jubilee could provide input to the Board of Directors. Now, the Client Council President is a Director on Jubilee’s Board with full voting rights and contributes to decisions that impact the Jubilee community.

The relationship goes both ways, with Jubilee bringing issues to the Client Council for their feedback. In recent years, the Client Council provided guidance on the language Jubilee uses to ensure that each person is treated with respect and dignity. During the pandemic, the Council played a key role in helping people stay connected, coming up with the idea for a weeklong virtual festival.

Elections are held every two years and involve intense campaigning, including speeches and platforms from each candidate. Client Council is supported by Jubilee’s Community Engagement Department, which is fully funded by donors like you.



**Elaine Carney (right)
waits with Carolyn
Durojaiye for
Client Council
election results.**

Newly elected President Elaine Carney campaigned and won on a platform of independent living and transportation. “I want to help more people learn how to use public transportation, and I’m going to advocate for Jubilee to purchase more vehicles to help people get around town,” said Elaine.

It’s certainly not all work and no play for Jubilee’s Client Council. Elected positions recently expanded to include the new Activity Planning Committee, which gives more people a voice in planning Jubilee’s social events.

Paula Snyder Belousek helped found Client Council for Jubilee in 1996. Reflecting on the growth of the council, she said “it really pleases me to know that Client Council has evolved and grown. **I love that the people Jubilee serves are taking ownership of shaping their lives.**” ●



Katie O'Connell speaks from lived experience when advocating for disability rights.

MEET Katie O'Connell

Disability Advocate and Client Council Vice President

I'm 28 years old, and I just joined Jubilee last Fall. Right away I thought that I want to make friends here, and I want to help people speak up for themselves just like I do. I'm really involved with advocacy. I go to Annapolis often to talk about how having a disability affects my life and to ask lawmakers to support the disability community.

When the opportunity came up to run for Client Council vice president, I went for it! I was a bit of an outsider at first since I'm new to Jubilee. But then people got to know me as I gave my election speeches. I shared that growing up I was bullied for who I am. **I want to change things so nobody is bullied for being different.**

I'm excited to meet more people at Jubilee and to be involved through Client Council. I moved into my new house in September. I get along really well with my housemates Susan and Mary. We went to see the Christmas light display at the Mormon Temple together this winter and it was a lot of fun. The people who help me from Jubilee are very supportive. They help me out with daily tasks like taking my medications and healthy meals so that I can be independent.

I'm always on the go! I work hard at the library on the cleaning crew, and I have a great boss. Of course, I also advocate at the library for everyone on my team.

I call myself a Daddy's girl, but it feels good to stand on my own too. I wanted a job, and to make my own way in life. With Jubilee's help, I'm living on my own. **With my advocacy work and now Jubilee's Client Council I am making a difference for people like me.** ●

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You Can Be an Advocate for People with Disabilities Too!

Did you know Jubilee employs 350 direct support professionals to help people successfully live independently? **You can help keep our workforce stable by asking your elected officials to increase funding for Maryland's Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA).**

Ask your state lawmaker for a 3% increase to DDA's budget so Jubilee can raise salaries for our dedicated support staff to keep up with the cost of living. Pay raises help Jubilee attract and retain top employees so we can help more people with disabilities live their best lives! ●



A group from Jubilee advocates for the disability community at the Maryland State House.



Use the QR code or visit: jubileemd.org to learn how you can advocate for people with disabilities.

New Year, New Look for Jubilee! Enjoy the fresh new look of our *Connections* newsletter, featuring our updated logo. You'll see it featured on our website, e-newsletter, and more in the months ahead.