

Texas Advocates Speak Out For Independence,
Freedom and Self-Determination
A paper written by the 200-2001 Texas Advocates Leadership Academy

We are “Texas Advocates.” We are a group of self-advocates—people with disabilities—who are working hard for “self-determination.” Our mission is to fight to stop unfair treatment and advocate for more and better services and supports for people with disabilities to be included in their communities.

Like any other person, each of us wants to be in control of our own life. The services and supports we receive should help us to do that.

What follows are answers to questions that we asked ourselves about “self-determination.” This is our voice about speaking up for ourselves and others for independence.

1. What does self-determination mean?

- Controlling my own life so I can make decisions and put my goals into action, even if others don’t think that I can.
- Getting and keeping a job with the supports I need so that I can have my own place if I want and live more independently.
- Using public transportation in my community to get around town.
- Getting supports so I can find and keep a job.
- Picking where I live and being as independent as possible.
- Being my own self, getting a job, getting married and having kids.
- Even when people give me advice, I have final say over all decisions that concern me.

2. What kinds of things help you to control your own life?

- Having my own money, choosing how to spend it, and paying my own bills.
- Controlling what services and supports I receive.
- Planning for my own future so I can get the supports I need.
- Having a real job and earning a paycheck.
- Making my own decisions for myself.
- Having the supports I need to learn to be more independent.
- Having money to do what I want to do with my free time.
- Being part of a support group like family, church, other self-advocates and friends.

3. What gets in the way of controlling your own life?

- Some people have a bad attitude because they don’t understand.
- My friends and parents try to put words in my mouth about what I say and the decisions I make.
- My parents have guardianship and don’t want to let go.
- My family doesn’t want me to work because I can lose government benefits like SSI and Medicaid.
- My work schedule can change daily. I lose money, can’t buy clothes or go places.

- In some places, transportation is not available. If we have transportation, it lacks quality. We have to do everything between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.
- I don't get to control my own money because it goes directly to the service providers.
- My disabilities can make it hard for me to do things for myself.

4. What can Self-Advocates do to overcome those barriers?

- Write or call our representatives and staff at MH/MR centers to voice opinions.
- Talk to the media (newspaper, radio stations, television) to explain about the barriers we face.
- Go out there and look for a job to prove to our parents and others that we can do it.
- Have better communication with staff, family and others.
- Use a PASS Plan or the Ticket To Work program to get a job without losing benefits.
- Stay determined to prove myself, learn new job skills, get a job, and plan ahead for transportation.
- Get needed therapies, like physical therapy, to set and reach goals.
- Find someone to teach me to read.
- Be my own guardian.
- Understand how to balance eligibility for SSI benefits and Medicaid with work.
- Ask people to change things so we can be in control of our own lives.

5. What can parents or others do to overcome those barriers?

- They could explain about the services and supports that we need to be independent.
- They can come to our planning meetings.
- Family members can help us be more independent, guiding us but not controlling us.
- Let us make up our own minds.
- Advocate along with me by writing letters to local senators, representatives and news media to promote community support and services.
- Family and others can help me figure things out about how to pay for the things I need.
- Have classes at college to learn how to be more independent.