

Nationally recognized advocacy and leadership training accepting applications for 2014-2015 session

Often described as a life-changing experience, Partners in Policy-making program is now welcoming applications for its nine-month leadership training program. Individuals with disabilities and parents of young children with developmental disabilities will be trained at no cost in monthly sessions, starting this fall. Over the course of eight sessions, they will learn how to become knowledgeable, confident and effective advocates for themselves, their children and others with disabilities.

This groundbreaking program was developed by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities more than 25 years ago. "Graduates report that they gained a greater understanding of disability law and policies and increased their self confidence in advocating for their needs. Many have become leaders in their own communities as they speak up for people with disabilities," said Colleen Wieck, Executive Director of the Governor's Council. The program is now offered in almost every state and in many foreign countries.

The eight sessions cover the history of the disability and self-advocacy movements, inclusive education, supported living, and avenues to influence county, state and federal legislative processes. To make it easier to participate, the two-day meetings are all held on weekends, from September to May.

There is no cost to individuals selected for the Partners program, adults with disabilities and parents of young children with developmental disabilities, since it is covered by a federal grant to the Minnesota Governor's Council. Child care, respite allowances, and overnight accommodations are also provided for those who have to travel from outside the metro area to attend. In addition, mileage and meals are also covered by the grant. All eight sessions will be held at the Minneapolis Airport Marriott in Bloomington.

Limited to 40 participants, all of whom must be Minnesota residents, class members are selected by a panel of Partners graduates and representatives of the Governor's Council. The first session for the 2014-2015 program year is scheduled for the weekend of September 26-27, 2014. Presenters include local experts and nationally recognized leaders in school inclusion, community organizing, governmental processes and disability issues. Applications are due by July 11, 2014.

"This program is based on the belief that system changes are best brought about through the efforts of those most affected by them, and we seek to arm these individuals with the tools needed to be successful in the public policy arena," said Wieck.



Those selected to participate in the program must attend all meetings and complete homework assignments between the sessions.

For further information or to receive an application form, interested individuals can go to the web page. Carol Schoeneck of Partners may also be emailed to cschoeneck@mngts.org.

The Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities introduced the Partners in Policymaking program in 1987. Since then, over 800 Minnesotans have completed the program and over 16,000 have participated in Partners programs offered worldwide.