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A growing voice for self-advocacy

Plymouth woman appointed to governor's advisory council on developmental disabilities

BY BRIAN ROSEMEYER
SUN SAILOR NEWSPAPERS

Plymouth resident Ashley Bailey has big goals. Bailey, 26, lives with Cerebral Palsy and takes every opportunity she can to be an advocate for her needs and the needs of the disabled community.

Bailey's advocacy voice grew stronger on June 4 when she was officially appointed to the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities as the Self-Advocate component of the 17-member group. She'll serve in the advisory position until Jan. 2, 2017.

The appointment comes around a year after Bailey completed Partners in Policymaking – a set of advocacy training courses for adults with developmental disabilities and parents of children with disabilities.

The issues facing the disabled population are lived first-hand by Bailey, and it's her drive to make those issues well heard in legislation and policymaking.

After graduating from Cooper High School in New Hope, Bailey enrolled at Southwest Minnesota State University and went on to graduate with a degree in social work from St. Cloud State University.

She said she's had a difficult time finding a job in social work, and that difficulty helped spur her interest in learning more about common problems within her population. Bailey works part-time at Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute with systems technology.

Ashley Bailey

She lives with her family, though she hopes to live on her own one day. Through her work on the Governor's Council, Bailey said she would like to create greater awareness and promote better independent living options for adults with developmental disabilities.

Bailey said the council will meet at least once every two months. She also sits on the Board of Directors with People Enhancing People, a Twin Cities-based Personal Care Attendant agency.

Bailey shared some of her goals and ambitions with the Sun Sailor.

Question: Why did you want to participate on the Governor's council?

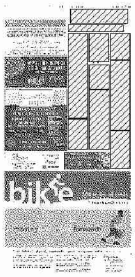
Ashley Bailey: I think going through the Partners in Partnership program really got me going, and I wanted to do more. I want to do more in the community, and really become more of an advocate. I think I can give a lot of knowledge to the council about what can change, and I want to be a part of that change.

Q: What are some issues you hope to bring up or discuss when the council meets?

Bailey: I hope to work a lot with housing issues and transportation issues.

I also want to raise bigger questions on changes in Personal Care Attendant policy because I think [policymakers] are still not where they want to be.

For example, in January, my PCA hours decreased from five hours a



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day to three hours a day. That's a loss of about 14 hours a week.

[When determining PCA hours] they're still not looking at us as people. They come to our house once a year for an hour to determine our needs. That's not seeing me as a whole person, and I don't think that's right. It limits the independence that people living with disabilities have.

The main reason I worry about it is that we have hopes and dreams. And a big dream, particularly for me, is owning a house and living independently. Limited access to a PCA is going to limit that opportunity.

Q: What do you hope to learn from your time on the council? And, what do you think you can bring to the table?

Bailey: I hope to learn more about the laws and be more involved in legislation and have them show me ways I can be a better advocate for myself and for the disabled community.

I've had a lot of experiences, so I can help show people what's out there and how we can move forward and been seen better in society as a whole.

I think with my background, I will bring a lot of arguments and ideas to the table that maybe aren't out there yet.

Q: What are some ideas you have?

Bailey: One of my biggest problems is finding an accessible apartment.

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In order to be in an accessible apartment, you're looking at $1,000 a month in rent. Work and living go hand in hand and I believe people with disabilities aren't given equal opportunity in the work force.

I think there needs to be housing out there where people with disabilities who want to work can work and have a place of their own.

For me, since I work, I don't qualify for income-based housing, and I don't think that's right. Sometimes I feel like I'm working hard and it's hurting me more that it's helping me.

Q: What's next for you?

Bailey: I hope to go further in politics and hopefully find a place where I can be happier and achieve some of my personal and professional goals. And I'd like to run for public office someday. Especially with the council, I think it could really help me.

Q: Any final thoughts?

Bailey: I'm just really excited to be appointed and I hope I can help people out.

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