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Rochester moms learn from Partners in Policymaking

Last fall, two Rochester residents began a journey of advocacy when they were selected to participate in Partners in Policymaking, a statewide leadership training program for both adults with disabilities and parents with children who have developmental disabilities.

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Seen & Heard

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Last fall, two Rochester residents began a journey of advocacy when they were selected to participate in Partners in Policymaking, a statewide leadership training program for both adults with disabilities and parents with children who have developmental disabilities. **Kayla Wilke**, mother to 12-year-old Amelia, and **Randi Beyerl**, mother to 2-year-old Simon, were set to graduate from the program this month.

Despite COVID-19 bringing in-person training to a close, the two have gained so much from Partners in Policymaking, a program that Beyerl described as “life-giving and life-changing.” Wilke said it was “a phenomenal, empowering experience.”

“Despite the challenges over the last couple of months, I continue to be so grateful for the skills I have learned, my new network of advocates and friends, and the energy for this work that comes with knowing I am not alone,” Beyerl said.

Through the program, participants gain knowledge not only for themselves, but also to benefit their communities. Wilke hopes to find ways to connect local families who are raising children with disabilities so they can support each other and share knowledge and resources. She's also eager to work toward “more affordable housing options in Rochester, since this is a critical issue facing individuals with disabilities.”

Beyerl’s hopes for the future of Rochester include “growing an active Special Education Advisory Council through Rochester Public Schools and exploring how day cares can be better supported to care for medically complex or developmentally disabled children.”

“Inclusion as the norm starting in early childhood is vital in raising a generation of inclusive citizens,” she added.

While the program may have come to an end for the year, both mothers have gained knowledge that will benefit their loved ones and our community in the coming years.

Beyerl summed up her thoughts by saying, “I better understand the power of my own family's story. One genuine interaction, letter, and social media post can be a powerful spark for building a relationship that leads to meaningful solutions for even the toughest challenges.”

Wilke said, “My biggest takeaway is that it really is within my power to influence policies that affect people who live with disabilities, and there are so many ways I can work to create a better life experience for both my daughter and others.”

Whether by choice or requirement, it appears face masks are here to stay for the foreseeable future. One Rochester resident has been busy making sure folks who need masks have access to them. The first 100 masks **Carol Post** made were given to first responders in Byron. Then she put a bin of masks at the end of her driveway with a “free” sign. The masks were well-received, and she quickly had to replenish the bin.

“So many people need them but don’t know where to get them,” she said.

Post’s next project: making masks for daughter-in-law **Dr. Katie Post**’s dental practice, Northwest Dental. Carol has made over 100 masks for emergency dental patients, with a goal of completing at least 400 masks. Not only do the masks provide necessary protection during a visit to the dentist, but the patient can continue to use it in other settings.

Post described herself as a “tomboy” during childhood, preferring to “hunt with the neighbors.” However, much to her grandmother’s delight, she eventually became a quilter, which she said “took over her heart.”

Although she's made more than 800 masks, she hasn't needed to purchase any fabric, nor does she anticipate doing so. Her sewing room was already stocked, and she told her husband, “There’s a reason I hoarded all of this fabric.” She has found most people prefer elastic to keep a mask in place, so she's purchased elastic and friends have donated some. However, Post is incredibly resourceful and has even used stretchy fabric from clothing she no longer wears and cut up pieces to create “elastic” bands for masks.

Sewing masks “gives me a purpose,” Post said of her “retirement job.”

Colleen Timimi is a Rochester freelance writer. Seen & Heard highlights local people with interesting stories. Send tips to life@postbulletin.com.