

Advocate for The Arc Minnesota; Andrew's Sister



My name is Beth Honecker, and I am an advocate with The Arc Minnesota Southeast Region. I am also a sibling of a man with developmental disabilities. Andrew is a young man in his early 40s. Being an advocate for The Arc has helped me to better understand Andrew, to better understand my parents point of view on things, and to help me better understand what it is like being a sibling of a person with a disability.

My role as a sibling is a relatively small one. My relationship with Andrew is similar to that of anyone with an older brother. We pick on each other, we talk on the phone, we go out for dinner once in a while. he

spends the night at my house -- all kinds of little things that most siblings do.

My role as an advocate is a little different. I have learned to look at the situation in a different way. I never used to question much of anything about his life and just assumed everything was great. He had a nice house, two housemates, good staff... what more was there? WELL, there was WAY more to his life than that!! Now I question things like, "I wonder if Andrew is happy? I wonder if Andrew can choose what he wants for dinner? I wonder if Andrew can choose his own activities at night or on weekends? I wonder if Andrew likes his house?" Andrew went through a review of his services with his family, friends, and other supporters, just so some of those questions could be answered.

Being an advocate for families means that my role can be as small as just giving the family information over the phone to something much larger like going to a court hearing. Some families want us involved from the beginning, and some families prefer to have us involved just when they feel an advocate is needed. Either way is fine. The goal of advocacy is to enable people to develop their maximum potential in the least restrictive environment and the most normal setting that is possible for them, and we as advocates will do what we can to make that happen.