

FEATURE STORY:

ICAN Self-Advocacy Program

ICAN Self-Advocacy Program, Inclusion Saskatchewan

Inclusion Saskatchewan's ICAN (Individual and Collective Advocacy Network) Self-advocacy program is a provincial advocacy program where individuals with intellectual disabilities come together to develop leadership skills, talk about their lives, challenge barriers in their communities and improve awareness of disability issues. The program helps participants build confidence in their ability to advocate and speak for themselves, know their rights and responsibilities, and problem solve.

“ICAN provides self-advocates the tools to be able to make choices and decisions that affect their lives both individually and as part of the group,” shared Michele Fitzpatrick, Inclusion Consultant and ICAN Program Coordinator. **“This program is important because it helps individuals who experience intellectual disabilities find their own voice and shape the future of a more inclusive society.”**

Individuals with intellectual disabilities learn what it means to be a leader in their community. Training is provided through regional workshops. In November, self-advocates met at an ICAN Workshop in Saskatoon and focused on effective communication with a speech language pathologist. Individuals also participated in a large group PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope) planning process facilitated by the Saskatchewan Alternatives Institute, discussing what issues they want to work on and advocate for in the future.

Self-advocates work for the inclusion of all people in the community. By acquiring knowledge and skills, they are able to understand their rights and practice how to make decisions. They speak up and advocate for not only themselves but for others in the community. Self-advocates take part in public speaking and advocacy opportunities once a month during Inclusion SK Inclusion Tours, and on committees such as the Disability Income Support Coalition and the Inclusion SK Board of Directors.

“In October, members of the ICAN team shared their stories on the stage of our Inclusion Breakfast, in front of over 400 leaders of Saskatoon’s business community,” highlighted Fitzpatrick. **“By sharing their experience as people living with a disability, they are raising public awareness and ensuring that decision-makers are taking their experiences seriously as policies are formed that affect the lives of people who have disabilities.”**

Self-advocates are a dynamic group of individuals who love to learn skills to empower themselves and others. **“At the ICAN Workshops, they enjoy sharing their thoughts and experiences as well as practicing active listening,”** Fitzpatrick expressed. **“They have a deep understanding and appreciation of the power of being heard. These workshops become an opportunity for self-advocates to connect. They have formed great friendships and a strong network, and are very proud of the work that they do, speaking up in the community about their experience and promoting inclusion.”**



“ICAN gives me a sense of purpose, that myself and fellow advocates feel supported and heard. ICAN has allowed me to build my social network with people that share the same values and experiences.”

- Aiden, Self-advocate

