

Who's in Charge?

Taking Charge Advocacy and Leadership Course

By ELIZABETH HEPP

PAUL wanted to learn to speak up for himself better and he wanted to pick his own roommate to live with; he gained the courage to get other people to listen to him and decided what he really wanted to do was to live by himself. Sallie wants to finish college and get a job helping other people with disabilities; she got support to apply for a scholarship so she could continue her schooling. Andy wanted to spend more time out of his house and meet people; and his circle helped him find a karaoke bar and a pool hall near his home where he could hang out and use two of his favorite skills – singing and playing pool.

Paul and Sallie and Andy (not their real names) all participated this past winter and spring in a course called "**Taking Charge!**" - a five session course that taught advocacy and leadership skills to young adults with disabilities and their circles of friends and family. Each participant – all of whom were in their 20s – worked on developing life goals and action plans to meet those goals. They practiced during sessions and between sessions taking some action

steps and "taking charge" of their plans.

Taking Charge! was developed and conducted by PEAK Parent Center's Colorado Person-Centered Planning Initiative under a grant from the Colorado Developmental Disabilities Council (CDDC). It was modeled after a previous course supported by the CDDC called Partners in Leadership which taught leadership skills to adults with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities. **Taking Charge!** was specifically designed for young adults who are still in that transition period between "school" and "life". Each participant came with their own individual goals most of which focused on choosing where they wanted to live, expanding their social connections, finding meaningful ways to contribute through employment or other community activities and, in general, participating in the ordinary life of their communities.

At each weekend session of **Taking Charge!** a featured speaker presented information on a particular topic, such as Choosing Where You Want to Live or Developing Your Personal

Profile. There was time at each session for each circle to work on individual action plans and also for exchange and work between and among the circles. Everybody made new friends and gathered new ideas and resources from each other.

Many of the participants have aspirations to advocate for others besides themselves. William wants to be a public speaker. Kim wants to assist others in developing their life plans. Paul wants to influence elected officials and policy makers. With **Taking Charge!** as a catalyst and with the support of their circles that have been expanded and strengthened through this training, these young people have a good start on that journey.

Taking Charge! has been funded for another year. The sessions will begin in January, 2009 and will take place one weekend a month for five months. Applications are encouraged from young adults between the ages of 21 and 30 from across the state. Course expenses covered by the project include tuition, materials, overnight accommodations and Saturday meals. Travel assistance may be available. Applications are due December 5, 2008.

Please contact us for more information
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