
2026 Press Release- The Arc New York 2026 Self-Advocate of the Year Award

For Immediate Release by Paula Bernstein

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The Arc New York 2026 Self-Advocate of the Year Award, David Gardner from the Arc Allegany-Steuben

ALBANY- Self-advocacy is at the heart of The Arc's mission to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in making their own choices and creating meaningful lives in their communities.

David Gardner of The Arc Allegany-Steuben has been named the recipient of The Arc New York 2026 Self-Advocate of the Year Award, recognizing his leadership, advocacy, determination, and commitment to empowering others with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

David was nominated for the award by Kristen Babbitt, who has served as his advocacy advisor through The Arc Allegany-Steuben's Incredible Voice self-advocacy group for the past two and a half years.

The Self-Advocate of the Year Award honors people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) who not only benefit from The Arc New York's services but also actively help shape those services and improve outcomes for others. The award recognizes people who demonstrate leadership, advocacy, self-determination, and a commitment to helping their peers find their voices and advocate for themselves.

David embodies all of these qualities. He previously served as president of Incredible Angels and as president of the Self-Advocacy Association of New York State (SANYS) Board. Through his own journey, David has worked hard to achieve his goals, build his confidence, find his voice, and speak up for himself and others. He continues to encourage those around him to believe in themselves, advocate for what they want and need, and pursue their own goals.

"David has always been a determined self-advocate for himself and advocate for others, without much recognition, nor did he ask for it," Kristen said. "For the last two and a half

years I have been fortunate enough to be David's advocacy advisor in our self-advocacy group, Incredible Voice. I have seen him grow his confidence and speak up even more. He deserved to finally be recognized as the strong, confident, and amazing advocate he is. I, all the members of Incredible Voice, and The Arc Allegany-Steuben are proud of him."

David was both surprised and deeply touched by the recognition.
"I was honored and very surprised," David said.

The award celebration became an especially meaningful moment for David and those who have supported him throughout his journey. After watching a dedication video celebrating David and his accomplishments, David, Kristen, and Anna, David's staff member of more than 20 years, were near tears. For David, the video was a powerful reminder of just how many people care about him and believe in all that he is capable of achieving.

That moment captured what makes David's advocacy so meaningful. His journey is not only about the goals he has accomplished for himself, but also about the confidence he has gained along the way and the encouragement he provides to others.

The Arc Allegany-Steuben is incredibly proud of David and this well-deserved recognition of his leadership, advocacy, and commitment to helping others find their voices.