

SABE CONFERENCE DRAWS 1,200 AND RAVE REVIEWS

Indianapolis and Indiana put their best foot forward in hosting the largest gathering of self-advocates in the country at the SABE 2008 National Conference – a conference organized, directed, and presented by people with developmental and other disabilities.

One of the major items of discussion at the town hall meeting was abolishing the use of the "R" word. It was enlightening to hear just how painful that word is to self advocates. The discussion made clear that it is something that The Arc and those in positions of influence must address. Betty Williams, who did a tremendous job in helping to organize the conference, took that message back to the MR/DD Commission. A motion was passed by the commission to change the name to the Developmental Disability Commission.

Throughout the conference, keynote speakers provided inspiration, humor and leadership about the issues that are affecting people with disabilities across the country. We were fortunate to have a delegation from Canada with us to share progress they were making in addressing conditions in their institutions.

Both campaigns for President were invited to attend and address the conference. Senator Barack Obama sent the Director of Disability Voters, Kareem Dale, who not only presented but then stayed to talk with people late into the evening. Dale also showed a video message from Presidential Candidate Obama. He reported this was the most responsive group he has spoken to. The campaign of Senator McCain did not respond to the offer to send a representative.

The stories are legion of people who left the conference with new friends, new information and new energy for self advocacy. It also left an impact on those Hoosiers who were there to volunteer and help. I cannot tell you how many people told me they were touched by the event, both self advocates and volunteers, by what they learned. We will be a stronger state for self advocacy because of this effort.

The Arc of Indiana was proud to sponsor the conference, and gives special thanks to other sponsors: Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, Governor's Planning Council on Persons with Disabilities, Eli Lilly Foundation, Indiana Protection and Advocacy Commission, IPMG, INARF, Indiana Institute on Disability and Community and Liberty Health Care,

This effort could never have been contemplated without the support and active involvement of the board and local chapters of Self Advocates of Indiana (SAI). Members of the SAI Board served on key committees and carried out critical functions for much of the conference. I am only sorry that Darcus Nims and Elbert Johns were not there in person but know that their spirit and guidance was with us all throughout the week.

Special thanks to the Red Cross, whose presence throughout the conference assured that all medical emergencies and issues were promptly addressed.

We cannot thank the Marriott Indianapolis enough. They embraced the SABE conference unlike any other hotel I have ever worked with. From the General Manager Scott Blalock to countless staff, they worked to ensure the success of the event. From meals to hospitality to housekeeping they trained and implemented a plan to address the unique situations presented by SABE and did an outstanding job. Thank you Marriott you did Indiana proud.

Lastly, thanks go out to all the volunteers who worked throughout the conference. Your efforts and work are appreciated by The Arc, SABE, SAI, and all those who came away from Indianapolis with information, knowledge, and great memories.