

**NEWS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 25, 2024

**DISABILITY RIGHTS NEW JERSEY LAUNCHES ASPYIR, AN INNOVATIVE, INTERACTIVE SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL TO EMPOWER YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES**

TRENTON, NJ – Disability Rights New Jersey, the state’s designated Protection and Advocacy system (P&A) for people with disabilities, launches “ASPYIR Transition Planning Tool,” a no-cost, self-assessment resource for students with disabilities, ages 13 to 21. ASPYIR empowers youth to take the lead in planning their futures by defining their interests, needs, and goals in preparation for adulthood.

ASPYIR stands for: Accessing Strategies to Prepare Youth for Independence and Responsibility. The planning tool is easy to use. Once students complete the self-assessment, ASPYIR generates a document identifying the student’s goals related to education, employment, and independent living that can be used to chart their pathway to accomplishing those goals.

By utilizing ASPYIR, students gain a resource essential to becoming an active participant at their Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, job interviews, and more. ASPYIR puts the power in their hands to be able to talk about the important aspects related to life as young adults.

Answering a need in the community, ASPYIR was developed by Disability Rights New Jersey Staff Attorney, Regina Ann Smith, based on a model created by Disability Rights Center of Kansas. “Individual student voice is crucial to the transition planning process, yet many students are rarely included at the table,” said Smith, a special education teacher turned attorney with the nonprofit’s Youth Practice Group.

Smith continued. “Working directly with students, we found they are often asked broad or abstract questions about the future and have seen first-hand how discouraged they were to process and share their goals with the rest of their team. Disability Rights New Jersey was inspired by the work of other P&As around the nation and wanted to equip New Jersey students with a tool to enhance their participation in planning for their future.”

The federal special education law known as [The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) (IDEA) ensures that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living. ASPYIR centers on these three crucial areas of development for youth.

In New Jersey, there are approximately 103,493 students between the ages of 13 and 21 who are entitled to special education services, including IEPs and 504 plans, in the 2023-2024 school year, based on data provided by the New Jersey Office of Special Education.

Students with disabilities are entitled to a transition plan the year they turn 14 and may begin creating their plan at age 13. The transition plan must be in place by age 16, when transition services are set to begin. Through our experience, we often see students are unaware of transition planning services or their IEPs lack clarity around objectives for their future. The lack of planning leaves students unprepared and lacking necessary skills and supports to thrive in adulthood.

“Transition is frequently overlooked when preparing students for graduation and beyond. ASPYIR aims to put a spotlight on the issue,” says Jessica Lax, Disability Rights New Jersey’s Youth Practice Group Advocate. “Students with disabilities must be equipped with the essential tools needed to graduate and start young adult life. They must be given the opportunity to be in charge of crafting their own futures—understanding the importance of where their education can take them, and how they are able to best help themselves, while seeking support as needed. ASPYIR allows students to take the lead.”

Although ASPYIR was initially conceived to help students with disabilities advocate for themselves at their IEP meetings, the planning tool can benefit all students, regardless of their abilities, to identify their strengths and needs. ASPYIR can be an integral part of the transition planning process as students move into young adulthood and make choices about the direction of their lives.

Students can complete the ASPYIR Transition Planning Tool at: <https://disabilityrightsnj.org/aspvir>

Disability Rights New Jersey’s Youth Practice Group Advocate is available to assist students with ASPYIR, as well as discuss their results. Call our main intake line at (800) 922-7233, email [intakeunit@disabilityrightsnj.org](mailto:intakeunit@disabilityrightsnj.org), or complete the online intake form on our website at <https://disabilityrightsnj.org/get-in-touch/get-help/intake-form/> to learn more.

###

*About Disability Rights New Jersey: As New Jersey’s designated Protection and Advocacy system for people with disabilities, under federal law, Disability Rights New Jersey promotes self-determination, independence, and inclusion into all facets of community life. Disability Rights New Jersey advances the human, civil, and legal rights of people with disabilities through a wide array of advocacy services for individuals, their families, and other stakeholders. Accordingly, Disability Rights New Jersey also has statutory authority to pursue legal, administrative, and other appropriate remedies to ensure the protection of people with disabilities and adherence to the law.*

FB: [@disabilityrightsnewjersey](#) | IG: [@disabilityrightsnj](#) | X: [@advocateDRNJ](#)

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

**Dana Caro**, Director of Communications and Individual Giving  
Disability Rights New Jersey  
210 S. Broad St, 3rd Floor, Trenton, NJ 08608  
[dcaro@disabilityrightsnj.org](mailto:dcaro@disabilityrightsnj.org)  
vm: 609.984.1880