**Introduction:** AN ADVOCATE IS MADE, NOT BORN

There was no single incident that led me to become an advocate, but rather a pattern that developed over time. The first thing was my daughter Stephanie’s seizure-like behavior that doctors claimed was colic but turned out to be reaction to medicine for kidney disease—discovered after I insisted something be done. Then we started dealing with systems. Although we had insurance and therapies were listed in the employee handbook and verified by phone, none of my daughter’s PT, OT, or speech was covered. We didn’t qualify for any help anywhere, even though we went $20,000 in debt and almost lost our home. It was in the middle of the insurance problems that I sent my first letter to Family Voices, telling how we didn’t qualify for SSI or other medical assistance. I began communicating with Family Voices regularly and became an advocate because I found myself constantly fighting for medical and educational services to which my daughter was legally entitled. I have been privileged to present testimony, write articles and serve on the board of Exceptional Parent magazine. Currently, I work in conjunction with Diana Autin who heads our F2F HIC in New Jersey. - Lauren Agoratus, New Jersey

**Resources:** None needed.

**Purpose:** Form connections among participants, create link between what they know and what they will be learning.

**Time:**  2 min

**Directions:**

1. Begin by saying, “There are people in this room who already know something about what it means to be a part of a decision-making group.”
2. Take 90 seconds to introduce yourself to the person on your right (or left) and share one fact you know about serving or being a part of a decision-making group.
3. After the 90 seconds are up, ask people to volunteer one fact they learned from the person they met.

**Modification:**

1. Have participants use the Chat Box to share one thing that they already know about decision-making groups.
2. Read aloud each contribution to all.