



Photo by Layla Farmer

**Adonis Brown heads the  
Advocacy Leadership  
Committee for the NC  
Council for Developmental  
Disabilities.**

# Can-Do Attitude

*Challenges faced  
head-on at conference  
on self-determination*

BY LAYLA FARMER  
THE CHRONICLE

More than 300 people from across the country and around the world flocked to the Twin City to take part in the International Conference on Self-Determination, held May 3-5 at the M.C. Benton Convention Center.

The annual conference, now in its second year, is put on by the Michigan-based Center for Self-Determination. The decade-old organization describes itself as "the primary clearinghouse, training and technical assistance source on Self-Determination in the United States and other countries."

"We're trying to break new ground, reconceptualizing the use of public dollars for people with disabilities," explained Tom Nerney, executive director of the Center for Self-Determination. "We're very committed to moving supports into the communities where people live."

Self-Determination, in a nutshell, is giving individuals with physical or mental disabilities and those who are aging, control over their own destinies. The Center advocates for the transference of public funding from an institutional-

See **Conference** on A12



Photos by Layla Farmer

Conference participants (Back row, from left, Robert Denton, Ray Schuholtz with (front row, from left) Kim Rosario and David Taylor.

## Conference

from page A1

ized system that favors interdependence to an individualized approach that fosters independence by addressing each person's unique strengths and interests.

"The purpose of public funding has to change," stated Nerney. "It is a means to an end — the end is crafting a meaningful life."

Nerney believes that the potential of individuals with disabilities to contribute to society and become productive citizens is often not realized because the system does not encourage individual and personal growth among those who depend upon it.

"The problem with human services is not that we have low expectations for people with disabilities, but often that we have no expectations at all," Nerney said. "This applies equally across all disabilities and aging."

Ray Schuloltz was exercising self-determination before he was even old enough to

fully understand the concept. Institutionalized as a child, Schuloltz fought his way out of the institution and into a mainstream, independent lifestyle.

"(Being institutionalized) is no way to live," he related. "I felt like I was in prison."

Even after he was released from the institution into foster care, Schuloltz says the effects of his experiences stayed with him.

"It took me a long time to trust people again," he said. "People carry that with them all their lives. I try to use it as a tool ... to teach people not to let (institutionalization) happen to other people."

Kim Rosario says his quality of life sky rocketed after he hired a support coordinator who could help him with his medical needs while still allowing him to live his life as he pleased.

Rosario, who suffers from a congenital muscle disorder, said previous healthcare workers tried to pigeonhole him because he was disabled, rather than recognizing his unique talents and interests.

"Before, my advisors were playing it safe, keeping me in a

shell," said Rosario, who performs as a comedian, and enjoys skateboarding and graphic design. "Self-determination works because this is not me doing data entry," he said, flashing an image of himself grinning behind a drum set on the screen.

Durham resident Adonis Brown frequently advocates for self-determination directives on the state level. Brown, who chairs the Advocacy Leadership Committee for the NC Council for Developmental Disabilities, said the conference strengthened his resolve to keep pushing for change.

"It's refreshing and it inspires you to keep doing what you're doing," he remarked. "Because you know that you're on the right track."

Hearing stories like that of Rosario and Schuloltz was uplifting, Brown added.

"It was wonderful to listen to those guys' life stories ... to look at where they came from to where they are now," he commented. "You can see the brightness of the future ahead of them, and that's all anyone wants — to have a future."

For more information on the Center for Self Determination, visit [www.self-determination.com](http://www.self-determination.com)



Nerney