Lifting the Bar in the Community

After the lift was installed the fight was not over. Linda to this day continues to struggle with inadequate training of staff and inappropriate exam tables used for Dave’s care. But that does not deter her. “Linda is a tremendous advocate who goes after the issue,” Said Nate Aalgaard, Executive Director of Freedom Resource Center.

“This journey isn’t completed but you have to just keep at it and grab a hold of it.” Linda said of her on going community advocacy.

In the past, Linda has also contacted Freedom Resource Center for information on enforcement of accessible parking. She has known about Freedom Resource Center for about six years and has routinely referred others to our services.

“She is one of those tenacious advocates who goes after an issue and does not readily give up. Linda is a great example of someone who is making the community better for all. I was very proud to present Linda Tobin, the 2015 Advocate of the Year.” Nate concluded.

Linda embodies the true essence of self-advocacy. She has gathered information, sometimes with the assistance of Freedom Resource Center, and has entered conversations armed with facts and figures to push for equality. In those sometimes tense and emotion filled moments of taking on barriers for those you love, she has shown grace and eloquence without completely losing her temper.

As the struggle continues for equality for all, Freedom Resource Center is happy to have a partner in our community like Linda Tobin.

Thank you, Linda, for all you have done in the Fargo-Moorhead.

A few years ago Dave Tobin sustained a high-level spinal cord injury. Like most spinal cord injuries, it would forever change how he gets around the community. Dave now uses a power wheelchair and needs to be transferred with the use of a lift to get in and out of his mobility device.

Dave does much of his medical care right here in the Fargo-Moorhead area. When Dave and Linda heard that Sanford was building a new clinic in Moorhead they were excited for the convenience a new facility, close to home, would provide. They expected they could now simply go to a clinic close to home rather than make a hospital visit where a lift was more readily available. They had one simple request, to have a lift installed at the new clinic so Dave could receive access to medical care in an equal manner to all other patients. They had been told that this was his only option for an overhead lift. So when the new clinic was announced Linda started asking about a ceiling lift. She sent Sanford information on ADA requirements; she made many, many calls.

Unfortunately, when the clinic opened in 2014 they were told the lift had been “phased out”. They were again told that their only option was to go to the hospital and use the one there, regardless of the medical issue or doctor. When the Emergency Room manager nixed this a day before their appointment, Linda took a stand and filed a complaint with the Civil Rights Division of the US Attorney in Minneapolis. That’s when Sanford finally installed a lift in their new Moorhead clinic.

“It is exhausting to take on a big business like that. It will wear you down.” Linda said upon receiving the 2015 Community Advocate of the Year at the Appreciation Luncheon. “Though it feels really good to be recognized, this award is for everybody.” She said.
FYI

Lisbon FIA

May 21st at the Lisbon Freedom Office
1:30 Painting flower pots.

Call to save your spot.
701-683-6850

Jamestown:
Schemes, Scams, & Flim-Flams

Presenter: Tonya Hetzler, Consumer Protection Office of Attorney General
May 15th
2:00pm to 3:00pm
James River Senior Center
419 5th St. NE Jamestown
701-252-4693 to RSVP

Fargo:
Preplanning Your Funeral

Adam Nordin, Wright Funeral Home
May 21st
1:30pm to 3:00pm
2701 9th Ave. S. Suite H

Call Cindy at 701-478-0459

North Dakota Legislative Wrap Up  By Tyler Axness

On April 30th the final gavel came down (maybe?) on the 64th North Dakota Legislative Session, ‘Sine Die’. I say maybe because the Legislature left town with one bill remaining to be acted on, meaning we might need a special session to complete our work. However, for 78 days Representatives, Senators, and state employees filled the halls and committee rooms of the North Dakota Capitol to set budgets and to create, alter, and repeal laws for the next two years.

I’m proud to have a seat in the North Dakota Senate. I want to publicly thank Nate Aalgaard, our Executive Director, for allowing me the opportunity and time away from Freedom Resource Center to serve the state I care so deeply about. I also want to thank our staff for adapting and having patience with me and in my absence. We also have had two outstanding interns, Mike Winge and Alex Cyusa, who have filled in and carried on the work while I was away who deserve praise.

Specifically when it comes to human services and assisting those in need, this legislative session inched forward but overall fell short. Yes, the budget for the Department of Human Services expanded but little was changed in how services are delivered. Many barriers still exist when accessing needed services. Fortunately one barrier that was lowered when it comes to Home and Community Based Services was the elimination of requiring individuals to be apply for Medicaid. This change will allow more individuals the ability to stay in their own home, receive care, and not enter a nursing facility.

A budget increase for Centers for Independent Living was included in Governor Dalrymple’s budget. The increase would help Centers like Freedom Resource Center expand their services and better assist people to become more independent. The $500,000 budget increase passed the Senate and was later taken out by the House of Representatives. Unfortunately, the funding was not returned and the centers across the state will have a hold even budget for the next two years. This lack of a budget increase leaves large areas of the state unserved and many people without access to life skills towards independence.

A success that needs to be highlighted is the increase in services for individuals with traumatic brain injuries (TBI). What originally came to the House of Representatives with an approximate $3 million funding increase for TBI services, it left the House with $250,000. The Senate was able to add $300,000 for a resource coordinator. After many conference committee meetings, we were able to pass $375,000 to expand the back-to-work program and $50,000 for a coordinator in western North Dakota. According to the North Dakota Brain Injury Network, nearly 3,700 people suffer a traumatic brain injury each year in the state.

What I would consider our biggest failure in addressing the state’s needs is how far short we ended on behavioral health needs. During the previous interim, an independent consultant was hired to look at our state’s model of services for mental health and substance abuse. The report raised many red flags and talks of potential lawsuits. We had 80 days to correct our course, fund services, and expand access. What started as a $6 million investment in the Governor’s budget was cut to $2 million dollars. With long waits for services and a very high suicide rate, we must do better. Dedicated legislators in conjunction with stakeholder groups are committed to making improvements as we move forward.

Often times it was said we cannot afford to address these challenges. With the price of oil falling at the beginning of the session, we were faced with less revenue than anticipated. However, reserves are strong and investments in services like those of Freedom Resource Center can have long term savings. By helping individuals gain independence, overcome addiction, or understand appropriate behavior we can cut down on costs of nursing facilities and incarceration. For the life of me, I can’t understand how we can slash needed programs but turn around and cut the oil extraction tax by 23% to the tune of billions over the next ten years.
We just held our fourth Appreciation Luncheon, attended by 172 people. That was one of the largest groups to ever attend a Freedom event. Thanks to all who made it a great day. We had some very deserving award winners. The highlight for me was the short speeches by three people who have received services from Freedom; Barb Fear, Julie (JP) Possehl, and Laura Gerling. They were all sincere, articulate, and passionate about what they had been able to achieve.

So now we are on to our next event, an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) celebration on July 9 which will be held at the Fargodome. This is a big deal to me, and to all of the disability community. It marks the 25 year anniversary of the ADA being signed into law. It is, in effect, our civil rights day. The actual date of the law is July 26, but since that is a Sunday we decided it was better to hold the event on another day when more people might be free to attend.

Speaking of free, it will be. There will be a panel discussion from 3 to 4:30 pm with people who have a history or familiarity with the ADA. There will be games and activities from 4:30 to 7 pm, and food will be available around 5 pm. The Front Fenders will be playing from 7 to 10 pm. All events will take place in the main lobby and/or the east parking lot of the Fargodome, rain or shine, heat or wind (except a tornado.) So put it on your personal events calendar, and come out to help us celebrate!

The North Dakota Legislature just wrapped up its session. The Governor had recommended an increase of $500,000 per biennium for Centers for Independent Living. That amount made it through the Senate, but the House took it out. The final conference committee compromise bill left the additional funding out, so the Centers will receive the same amount of State funding again this time around. We will try again, because there are still many counties across the State where the all four of the core Independent Living services are not available.

Minnesota is still holding its legislative session. There, the Centers for Independent Living are hoping to receive an increase in funding to allow for growth into underserved areas. Freedom is only able to fully serve four of its assigned nine counties. It appears that there may be a difficult struggle ahead for budget bills, as the Governor, Senate, and House have quite different proposals for dealing with the surplus funds.

I had the opportunity to speak to the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council at their recent meeting. It was held at the Shooting Star Casino Conference Center in Mahnomen. My colleagues from Options in East Grand Forks were there. It was like old times, as many of the people I worked with there in the early 90’s are still there. It was fun to reminisce about the early days of both Options and Freedom. I am proud to be a part of Independent Living in this area for almost 30 years. Wow, that’s a long time.

I said I’d keep you updated on my medical situation. I am scheduled to have surgery on my neck later this month. That means I’ll be away from work for a few weeks, and will probably not be writing a column for the next issue of The Independent. But I will be back.
What’s Wrong With This Picture?

Look carefully above the words “Snap-on”. That round object is not a part of the picture, it is the push button to open the door that is off to the left/right of this picture. A clear space must be maintained in front of the button. Even with the area cleared, the button may be difficult to see. The button may appear to be another rock in the mural.

More from the FRC Appreciation Luncheon

Laura Gerling shared her experiences with Freedom Resource Center at our fourth Appreciation Luncheon. Thank you, Laura.