

the Independent

A Publication of Freedom Resource
Center for Independent Living, Inc.

August-September 2012

Education – The Bridge to Opportunities

Allow me to introduce you to BryAnn Zeren, a young independent-minded woman who refused to let barriers stop her from pursuing a higher education. BryAnn endured a stroke when she was born, but that hasn't stopped her from living the life of her choice. Though her stroke happened at birth, it was not known until three months later when her family brought her to the doctor because of symptoms. BryAnn's symptoms include a weakness on the entire left side of her body and cerebral palsy.

BryAnn's ability to overcome personal barriers is a fabulous story. But, it is what she has chosen to do with her life that is the real story I want to share. It is a story of paying it forward through education in the hopes of teaching others.

"I'm a life-long learner as Cindy (Gabbert, Freedom IL Advocate) calls it," BryAnn explained. Zeren grew up in Nome, North Dakota before moving to Fargo to attend Minnesota State University Moorhead. "I'm double majoring in Art History and Anthropology," she said with a smile. "I want to continue schooling because through education, anything is possible."

The concept of education is a driving force for BryAnn. "Education opens doors for everyone," BryAnn explained. "Even though it was never said to me, I felt that because of my disability, people didn't think I would amount to much," she continued. "Learning as much as I can and giving back is my way of proving them wrong."

BryAnn gives her family credit for helping her get to where she is today. "My mom gives me all the credit, but she deserves so much more." Her family helped her overcome numerous

surgeries and adapt to assistive technology that helped stabilize her growth.

I became curious what she intended to do with a degree in Art History and Anthropology. "Once I finish my undergraduate studies, I hope to go on and earn my Masters and Doctoral degrees." She told me. "Right now, my summer has been busy working on my thesis." Zeren continued, "I'm working to show how different cultures around the world deal with dying and how art depicts it."



BryAnn Zeren

To finish her advanced degrees, BryAnn is looking towards attending NDSU when she completes her studies at MSUM. Zeren hopes to teach others when she has finished her education. "Through education, passions can become careers. I want to lead others down that path." BryAnn explained.

BryAnn came to Freedom Resource Center from a referral. Initially, she was seeking help for employment. "I was a nanny for 4 years. It was flexible, fun, and I really love kids." She stated, but the time had come for a change. "Cindy has provided great advice for employment, but I've learned so much more. I'm happy I found Freedom." BryAnn said with a smile.

It takes personal drive and some help along the way to live the life you want and reach your life goals. That is why Freedom Resource Center is here, to help people with disabilities live the life of their choice and to help people with disabilities have responsibility for their decisions. A solid education is the foundation to having an equal opportunity.

We need people like BryAnn in our communities who understand the value of learning. Her new motto, "A Life-long learner" is appropriate for someone who wishes to teach others. BryAnn has exemplified that having a disability is a natural part of life and should not stop you from living the life of your choice.

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From Where I Sit

By Nate Aalgaard,
Executive Director

I graduated from high school 35 years ago. If someone would have asked me at the time what I wanted to be when I grow up, I probably didn't have a good answer. I had signed up to go to college, but really wasn't very enthused about it. I lacked direction.

Then, everything changed. I was involved in a car accident a couple months after school was finished. I broke my neck and became paralyzed. The shock of it all was difficult to handle at first. Basically I was just lying there and couldn't even scratch my nose, much less think about a future career. But gradually I started to learn a little bit about how to function, and eventually after a long period of physical recovery I got up and about in a wheelchair. There, therapists started working with me on the skills that I would need in order to live and thrive in society.

That wasn't easy. I know there was a lot of struggling and frustration. It's funny, though, how you tend to forget much of that after so many years. One thing I do vividly remember is

that one of the doctors who were working with me came into my room one day and told me: "You know, Nate, when you go out there to look for a job you're going to have to be better educated and more prepared than the other candidates in order to get a chance." This was hard for me to hear, because I thought that I already had enough stacked against me the way it was. Come to find out it was true. It still is true for many people with disabilities attempting to find work. We are devalued as soon as we get through the door.

In my case, education was the key to success. I got a bachelor's degree in business, but I ended up doing public relations at my first job. Luckily, there were on-the-job-training funds available through vocational rehabilitation, and I also got a chance to take some additional college classes to learn the art of journalism and public relations. I worked in that career for about 10 years. At that point in my life, I decided that I was not making enough money to pay all my bills and live the kind of lifestyle I needed. So I decided to go to graduate school and enhance my marketability. Again, there were training funds available for people who wanted to go into vocational rehabilitation counseling. This helped me get through school, and

along with my Social Security benefits and a school loan, I made it.

Then, as luck would have it, I got this job at Freedom Resource Center and I have been here for 16 years. Sometimes it's hard to believe it has really been that long. I wonder where I would be if not for the good education I received in high school and college. I can say with certainty that I would not be doing the job I have, or living in the house I built to suit my needs.

I'm thankful for the opportunities I had, and I realize that not everyone is so fortunate.

In this day and age it is popular to talk about cutting funding for programs because they are "wasteful or unnecessary." I'm here to say that I am a product of good public services like state university systems, vocational rehabilitation, on-the-job training, and Social Security. We need to invest in people with disabilities, so that we all have an equal choice of what we want to do in life, and the responsibility to make it happen.



Nate Aalgaard

To Know

You're invited to join us on
September 24th for
an open house!

- What: Annual Meeting
- When: Monday, September 24th
- Time:
 - Social begins at 5 pm
 - Board meeting begins at 6 pm
- Social begins at 5 pm
- Board meeting at 6 pm
- Where: Freedom Resource Center
- 2701 9th Ave. S. Suite H, Fargo, ND

New Hire

Justin Kietzman, Peer Mentoring Specialist

We are happy to introduce Justin Kietzman as our new Peer Mentoring Specialist. Originally from Edgeley, North Dakota, Kietzman moved to Fargo and earned his Bachelor of Social Work from Minnesota State University Moorhead. "Growing up in Edgeley showed me the importance of having positive relationships and how important it is to have a good support system around you." Kietzman said.

Kietzman brings with him four years of experience working with people living with disabilities as a direct support and vocational professional at Community Living Services. When asked what his goal is for his new position, Kietzman said, "I believe in bringing the best out

of others and being as helpful as I can in any situation. My goal for this position is to make sure people know they have a purpose, they are important, and are receiving the best possible services they deserve."

Outside of work, Justin enjoys spending time with friends, family, and his wife, Maria. He also enjoys living an active life.

Please join us in welcoming Justin to Freedom Resource Center.



Justin Kietzman

Personal Experience: Dealing with the Education System

By Tyler Axness

As August comes to a close and we turn the page to September, schools have begun welcoming students back to their halls. Education is a right in this country. The ability to gain knowledge should not be hindered because of a person's disability. With that in mind, I looked up in my office to find a picture of my older brother, Aaron-- full of smiles in his youth, and born with a severe genetic disability.

Aaron began his education in the 80's and I wanted to know what it was like for him and my family. To find out, I asked my mother (Diane) a series of questions.

Q) What was the biggest barrier, in your opinion, to making sure your child with a disability received an appropriate education?

A) Lack of services in a small school district was one of the biggest barriers. Because our school did not have a Pre-school Handicapped program, my son had to travel 30 miles to receive his school/service needs. In one school he attended, one thing I saw that was really troubling was they would segregate the children with special needs and have them sit at separate tables away from the children that were in regular classes. Our home school would later move

to a different Special Ed district.

The services, in the region, outside of school (Infant Development, Early HeadStart, Speech Therapy, etc.), were extremely helpful and provided wonderful support.

Q) What were you most surprised/disappointed about during this time?

A) Our home school's lack of understanding to a child with special needs. There was an ignorance to his situation. The teachers had a misconception to my child's disability, which he had no control over. It was extremely upsetting when I found out that they held a meeting, without my knowledge, and decided they should restrict his activities on the playground due to their lack of understanding. Even though my son had an advocate in the school and was receiving services through the Special Ed District, the teachers seemed to find it difficult to meet his needs. I can say that the students had no difficulty with him in school.

Q) What did you do to overcome these barriers?

A) I went to the school to discuss his situation and make them aware that their lack of understanding was restricting his education. I attended teachers' conferences and IEP meetings regularly, but problems persisted and eventually we had to move him to a different school with a very well-respected Special Education Program. Although he had to travel 30 miles, the teachers were very knowledgeable and dedicated to students with disabilities and students/classmates were very accepting.

Q) If you can give a parent of a child living with a disability advice when it comes to getting an appropriate education, what would it be?

A) Never give up! Fight to do whatever you can to make sure your child's needs are met. Don't let anyone tell you there's nothing that can be done.

Once the initial barriers were overcome, my brother went on to graduate high school and attended college. Today, he lives independently in Fargo in his own apartment, works over 30 hours a week, and is a regular at many of the town's sporting events.

Freedom Holds Picnics to Celebrate the ADA



Crowd turns out to play games in Wahpeton



Nate being interviewed by WDAY

Information

In an attempt to reduce the cost of mailings, please send your email address to freedom@freedomrc.org

If you would like to be removed from our mailing list please call 1-800-450-0459.

Freedom Resource Center and/or its Board of Directors do not necessarily endorse or support any of the views expressed within the personal testimonies contained in this newsletter, unless approval is specifically mentioned.

Funding for this publication was provided by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), Rehabilitation Services from the state's general fund, the State of North Dakota and the Federal Department of Education. However, the contents of this publication do not necessarily represent the policy of the funders and you should not assume endorsement by any government entity.

Alternate formats available upon request.

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Fargo, ND 58103

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

*“Helping Bridge Your
Path to Independence”*

ADA is YOUR Business

Join Freedom and the Wahpeton Mayor’s Committee to learn how the ADA can improve your business!

- What: ADA Seminar
- Where: Wahpeton Eagles Club
- When: Tuesday, October 16th

Call Joyce at 701-672-1648 or Joy at 218-731-5218 for questions and to register

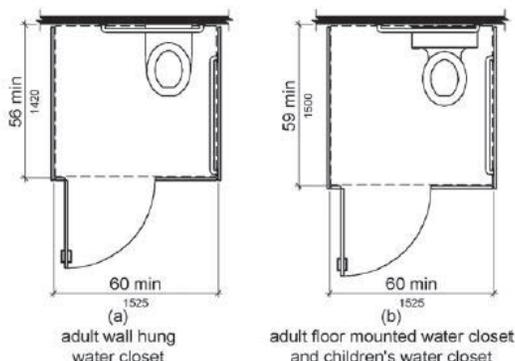
What’s Wrong With This Picture?



Size. Wheelchair accessible compartments shall be 60 inches wide minimum measured perpendicular to the side wall, and 56 inches deep minimum for wall hung water closets (toilets) and 59 inches deep minimum for floor mounted water closets measured perpendicular to the rear wall. Wheelchair accessible compartments for children’s use shall be 60 inches wide minimum measured perpendicular to the side wall, and 59 inches deep minimum for wall hung and floor mounted water closets measured perpendicular to the rear wall.

Advisory: Size. The minimum space required in toilet compartments is provided so that a person using a wheelchair can maneuver into position at the water closet. **Doors.** The door shall be self-closing. A door pull complying with **404.2.7** shall be placed on both sides of the door near the latch. Toilet compartment doors shall not swing into the minimum required compartment area.

Advisory 404.2.7 Door and Gate Hardware. Door hardware that can be operated with a closed fist or a loose grip accommodates the greatest range of users. Hardware that requires simultaneous hand and finger movements require greater dexterity and coordination, and is not recommended.



← **Wheelchair accessible toilet stalls
(2010 ADA Standards)**