

the Independent

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Becoming Part of the Community

By Mike Winge

After living in Hawaii for 13 ½ years, Charlene Ota decided that she wanted to come home. Originally from Galesburg, North Dakota, she missed the seasons and her family in this area. So last April, Charlene, 66, and her husband Milton, 60, made the move.

Everyone wants to be a part of something. Charlene and Milton are no different. Even before they moved to Fargo, they were networking with people in the FM area in preparation of arriving here. They joined Bluebird Gardens CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) while they still lived in Hawaii so they would have fresh vegetables for their first summer in their new home. They also contacted our local para-transit system to inquire if there was reasonable accommodation for their transportation needs.

Charlene and Milton are blind, but are a very capable couple. They both wanted to live somewhere that would enhance their quality of life. Thanks to the help of Charlene's cousin who owns a building company, Paula Rae Homes and Gardens, they designed and built their current home in advance, so that when they arrived they could move right in. Charlene also made contact in advance with Freedom. "I knew about Freedom Resource Center from their website," she said.

While living in Hawaii, Charlene worked for a local Center for Independent Living. Charlene and Milton attended last summer's ADA celebration at Gooseberry Park, and have been involved in numerous activities at the Center, including making lefse in December. "We had a nice Thanksgiving potluck that we came here for too," Charlene said. "It was good fellowship, lots of people came and we had a really good time. That was really fun too."

When asked how their time in Fargo has been since moving from Hawaii, Charlene replied, "I think we have made a lot of progress. Orientating to the community and becoming familiar with Fargo was the most challenging. I would like to use the bus more and get to know the city better."

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Charlene & Milton Ota

Charlene has a very close friend that has been with her for five years now. His name is Irish, a well-trained seeing-eye dog. She applied for a service dog while she still lived in Hawaii and through the process traveled to Australia where she trained with Irish for two weeks before bringing him home. Having Irish around has greatly increased her independence and overall quality of life.

She spoke highly of her time here with Freedom, especially her peer mentor Deanna Bakken. Deanna showed Charlene around West Acres during the first few months of being her peer mentor. "In the winter I wanted to be able to walk more, so I wanted to get more acquainted with the mall. She would meet me at the mall, and show me how to get around. We went with Irish and got him acquainted with it. That worked out really well," Charlene said. "Deanna and I would meet once or twice a week. I know how to get around the mall now, so I can go back there myself. She's become a good friend; it was good camaraderie. It's interesting when you have two people with totally different disabilities working together to understand each other."

Charlene spends much of her time transcribing books into Braille using computer software and an embosser. "If anyone needs something put in Braille, I can do that," she said. As part of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), one of the things they want to do is promote Braille literacy. The plan is to first create awareness of NFB-Newsline and to get services up and running here in North Dakota, one of only seven states without it. Milton is currently still operating the program in Hawaii and is setting goals to make it accessible for North Dakota residents. They would like to first see who is out there who would appreciate the service.

Upon hearing their story, there is no doubt that Charlene and Milton are truly becoming part of the Fargo Moorhead community. We welcome them to the area, and to Freedom Resource Center.

Freedom In Action Events

Fargo

While meeting new people, the events in Fargo have brought together a variety of individuals participating in many activities. Groups of people have come together to learn what they can do to prepare for an emergency, and how to plan meals while cooking on a budget. The Thanksgiving meal that we shared was just like a family gathering. Lefse making topped off 2012.



To Know

Upcoming events

Wahpeton - Valentine event Feb. 12 from 3-4:30 at the Wahpeton office. Seating limited to 10; pre- registration recommended. Call 701-672-1648.

Jamestown - We will be making valentines Feb. 12 at 10:30. Thursday, Jan 24 at 1:30 pm we will make fleece blankets. We will be donating blankets to the Salvation Army and encourage you to donate the blanket you make as well. If you choose to keep your blanket there will be a \$10 fee for supplies. Call 701-252-4693.

Detroit Lakes - Self Defense for People with Disabilities Jan 31, 1-3 pm. Call 218-844-5880.

Fargo - Tour Fercho YMCA January 31 at 1:30 pm. Meet at the main entrance. Healthy Snack provided. Information about Open Door Scholarship. Call 701-478-0459.

Wahpeton

At FIA in Wahpeton we have a consumer committee that meets to help plan some of our activities. We have learned about the ADA, local history, how to cook on a budget, container gardening, and how to save money with coupons. At our recent activity we held a potluck with turkey and all the trimmings.



Detroit Lakes

We are looking for interested persons who would like to meet new people and do something new at the same time. We have started with activities already such as making Taco Soup with the Extension Office, a Thanksgiving Potluck, and Making Christmas Cards. More to come!

Fergus Falls

Make sure to check out the Freedom newsletter and Facebook page for upcoming events in the Fergus Falls area! We have already had fun with activities such as a Thanksgiving Potluck, Making Christmas Cards, and making Floral Arrangements at a local business!

Jamestown

Freedom in Action in Jamestown is full of giving back to our community! Our events have included ringing bells for the Salvation Army, donating blankets that we made, and learning new skills. This summer we are planning more activities outdoors. We are always looking for more people to attend our events. Please call our office for more details.



From Where I Sit

By Nate Aalgaard,
Executive Director

How does this sound for a New Year's resolution? My plan is to gain 10 pounds, hibernate at home after work and on weekends until the weather hits 60°, and have the TV on the entire time. That sounds like a very doable and workable plan doesn't it?

I will admit that on some mornings when I turn on the TV and see the weather forecast I feel like just staying home. I could sit around and drink coffee, read the paper, check out my favorite sports teams on the Internet and look out the window at all the poor suckers braving the cold. But I don't. I wash up, put on my work clothes, eat breakfast, and get out there.

So why do I do that? I'm pretty sure that after a couple of weeks off I would be bored. I need a purpose in life, and this is a good one. I get to come to Freedom and get paid to work for equality and inclusion for people with disabilities.

Speaking of getting out there; it's legislative season in both Minnesota and North Dakota. We at Freedom are proud of our coworker, Tyler Axness, for getting elected to the North Dakota legislature. He is serving as the Senator from

District 16 in Fargo/West Fargo. While he is on temporary leave, I will need to do more public policy work. Part of that will mean going to the Capitols in Bismarck and St. Paul to educate legislators on the needs of people with disabilities.

In North Dakota, the Centers for Independent Living are working for an increase in funding. Gov. Dalrymple is recommending an additional \$800,000 per biennium. In Minnesota, we are still trying to dig ourselves out of the hole that has been created by budget cuts since 2009. Other big issues include bullying legislation in Minnesota, Employment First legislation in North Dakota, and enhancements to home and community-based services in both states. Also, the lack of accessible transportation continues to come up as a major issue for people in rural areas.

Aside from legislative activity, the other big event happening in the near future is Giving Hearts Day. This is the second year Freedom is participating in this one-day online giving event, sponsored by Dakota Medical Foundation. This is a great opportunity for people to have their donation matched. Contributions go to programs like Freedom In Action, and our Independent Living skills classes. Both of these programs

are held in all of our five office locations. As we work to diversify our funding sources, Giving Hearts Day is an excellent way of both letting people know what we do, and enhancing the programming that we are able to offer to people with disabilities in our area.



Nate Aalgaard

Winters in this area can be challenging. Many times it is difficult to get out and do the things we like to do. However, I feel it is important for those of us who feel strongly about disability rights to do our part to be involved in our communities and work for the change we know needs to occur. This could be something like helping to volunteer for an activity, going to a legislative forum or meeting, or sending an email to one of your elected representatives. We continue to look for people willing to be peer mentors, especially in our branch office locations. If you would like to get involved in any Freedom activities, please give us a call at any of our office locations.

What's Wrong With This Picture?



Where do we start with this one? First of all, the word "handicap" is inappropriate here in a couple of different ways. Many people with disabilities resent being referred to as "handicapped." If the sign is referring to parking for people with mobility impairments, the word handicap is also inappropriate. The correct term is "accessible parking." Also, this is not a regulation parking sign--wrong wording, no fee indicator, too low to the ground.

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.

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**“Helping Bridge Your
Path to Independence”**



Giving Hearts Day

Hosted By: impactgiveback.org
24 Hour Online Fundraising Event
2.14.13

Freedom is once again participating in the one-day fundraising blitz, Giving Hearts Day. We greatly appreciate the support from all who contributed last year.

Q: What is Giving Hearts Day?

A: Giving Hearts Day (GHD) is a 24-hour online fundraising event created by Dakota Medical Foundation (DMF) and Impact Foundation that will be held February 14, 2013. The purpose of GHD is helping nonprofits build greater capacity for their organizations through fundraising.

Q: Why is it so important to donate on Giving Hearts Day?

A: Contributions of \$10 or more will be matched by DMF. While donations are greatly appreciated at any time, they are only matched on Giving Hearts Day.

Q: How do I donate?

A: Contributions can be made online

at impactgiveback.org under the Freedom Resource Center tab.

Q: What are the donations going toward?

A: To assist consumers of Freedom Resource Center live more independently. Specific programs include Freedom In Action and Independent Living skills classes.

Q: If I don't have a computer, how can I donate?

A: Call our Fargo office at 1-800-450-0459 and we will assist you in making an online donation.

Q: Why is Freedom Resource Center part of Giving Hearts Day?

A: The Freedom board of directors realize that the organization needs

to diversify its funding base. This event is a great way to increase public awareness, as well as secure matching funds.

Q: How can I be sure my donation is going to a good cause?

A: All participants in Giving Hearts Day have been vetted by DMF and Impact and must qualify yearly in order to participate.

