

the Independent

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

January 2014

From Just Surviving to Complete Control



Jennifer Blom

It is truly incredible what difference two years can make in someone's life. From down and out in January of 2012 to up and moving forward in January of 2014, Jennifer Blom has transformed her life. With a new year upon us Freedom Resource Center wanted to introduce the new Jennifer, one full of drive and determination to live life the way she wants, independent and with her family.

"When I first met Jennifer back on that cold February day in 2011, I believed at the time I would basically be helping her find some resources in the community, assist her in understanding some paperwork, and our relationship would be done," Joyce Wolter, Freedom Resource Center's Independent Living Advocate in Wahpeton said. "That definitely was not the case."

Months of sharing good moments and bad moments, ups and downs, created a strong relationship between the two in Wahpeton-Breckenridge. "It is amazing to remember some of the hurdles that Jennifer has overcome." Joyce continued. "For many people it would have been much easier to say, 'I'm done, I give up, forget it,' but Jennifer never did. She found the strength to carry on."

"It is amazing to remember some of the hurdles that Jennifer has overcome."

Nearly three years after finding Freedom Resource Center, Jennifer has gone from just "surviving," as she used to say, to taking control of her life. She has also given back to so many others in her community in need of help. A frequent volunteer in Freedom's Wahpeton office, Jennifer has helped invite people to monthly Freedom in Action events along with helping organize the office. "Our relationship has evolved from her needing my assistance to me needing her assistance!" Joyce explained. "It is just fun to be there, help organize, and ask people to come out and get involved." Jennifer stated.

Beyond office volunteering, Jennifer has been a peer mentor to others in the area. "Mentoring is fun, but it is also

challenging." Jennifer continued. "You want to help each other succeed and that isn't always easy I've come to learn. Some have worked out well, others will work out over time if they keep trying."

Deciding to further her education for a potential career, Jennifer is working to earn her degree in Social Work. "I want to be like Joyce, an advocate for others, and I want to work in an environment like Freedom Resource Center and your model of helping others." Jennifer said. Joyce replied with a smile, "She often reminds me that she wants to literally fill my chair when I retire and I, for one, have no doubt that she could."



Jennifer at Planting Seeds event

Jennifer is beginning yet another journey in her life and moving closer to her children near the twin cities in Minnesota. Her goal is to be out there sometime in February. The journey won't be easy, but both Joyce and Jennifer are confident she'll make it work. "I've already transferred to online classes and look

Continued on page 2

What's

- From Where I Sit
- Keeping Independence
- What's Wrong With This Picture?

INSIDE

From Where I Sit

Continued from page 1

to join St. Cloud State University next fall to continue my degree in Social Work," she said.

"Since coming to Freedom, Jennifer has become a person looking for answers within herself and not from others. She is also finding programs that are there to assist people in moving forward." Said Joyce. "She has met a majority of her goals and the ones she hasn't she is still working on. I see nothing that is going to stop her."

From everyone at Freedom Resource Center, we wish Jennifer the very best in her journey moving forward. We are proud of the strength she found within herself to "survive" the hurdles she faced and overcome them determined to improve her and her family's life and to take control.

EYI

What: Peer Mentor Training

When: Thursday, February 6th

Time: 4:00 PM

Where: Fargo office

Meet new people and gain new knowledge about peer mentoring

What: Giving Hearts Day

When: Thursday, February 13th

Time: ALL DAY

Where: www.freedomrc.org and click "Donate" OR www.impactgiveback.org

Giving Hearts Day is a 24-hour online day of giving for area not-for-profits. Go online and donate to Freedom Resource Center and have your donation matched!

What: LARGE Snowflake Crafts (These are not your ordinary SNOWFLAKES!!!)

When: February 27

Time: 2:00 PM

Where: Wahpeton office

Come and have some fun and conversation and learn a new and fun inexpensive hobby that is relaxing.

All materials are supplied.

Must register by calling Joyce at 701-672-1648

To learn about upcoming events in your area call us at 1-800-450-0459!

by Nate Aalgaard, Executive Director

Why give?

We are helping people change their lives. Over the past several months we've given you examples every month in our newsletter of people who have made dramatic improvements. We've told you about Charles, who got to spend the last year of his life in his own apartment instead of a nursing facility. We've told you about Jennifer, who was barely able to function, looking at trying to get on Social Security just to survive. Now she is vibrant, active, and hopeful. We've told you about Bridget, who had a dream of owning her own home. That became reality because of our work with her. We've told you about people who are isolated and are now engaged with others in social activities that are helping them broaden their perspective of life. People are learning new skills to live more independently. The stories go on and on of how we are making a difference.

On February 13 Freedom will be participating in its third Giving Hearts Day. This is a 24-hour online fundraising blitz sponsored by Dakota Medical Foundation and the Impact Foundation. Selected nonprofit organizations from the region have an opportunity to receive matching dollars from the foundation on that day for any donation over \$10. The publicity from this event and the energy that is generated on that day focuses the community on all the good work that nonprofits do for various causes, including assisting people with disabilities to live more independently.

A couple of years ago Freedom decided that we needed to diversify our revenue. Budget cuts at the state and federal level were jeopardizing our programs. Also, government funding comes with restrictions and limits as to what we are able to do. The fact is, we are only able to adequately serve about half of our 19-county catchment



Nate Aalgaard

area. People in the other counties have to wait. They do not get the benefit of the type of services that Freedom can provide.

Fundraising has allowed us to enhance our programming to include events such as Freedom In Action and independent living skills classes. We have told you stories about the impact these activities have on the people we serve. Their world is opened up, friendships are being made, and skills are developed. Last month we featured some photos and stories from our past events. Caroline Congdon wrote a very nice article about her experiences with the program. Our staff tell me other stories of people who rarely left their house, but now participate eagerly in our events.

We don't know what the future will bring as far as the Independent Living program nationally, or in the states of Minnesota or North Dakota. We do know that we can control our own destiny with the help of our generous contributors. There are many great organizations and wonderful programs throughout our various communities. I hope that you will also consider Freedom Resource Center this February 13 as a cause worthy of your support.

The article below was featured in the January 2012 issue of *The Independent*.

Keeping Independence

Tyler Axness

Communication and Policy Coordinator

Watching Jennifer march into our Wahpeton office on September 29th, it is hard to believe only months ago I witnessed this same woman barely make it across the hall to discuss the difficulties of Social Security. In fact, I had no idea it was the same woman until Joyce, our staff in Wahpeton, reminded me I had previously met Jennifer.

Shocked at how different Jennifer's appearance had become and how much healthier she looked, I needed to hear her story so we sat down and had a conversation.

"On October 8th, 2010, a fall spiraled my life out of control."

Jen had begun suffering from unexplained pain. "I was struggling with unbelievable pain all over my body." She replied when I asked what she had been dealing with. "On October 8th, 2010, a fall spiraled my life out of control." The fall amplified the pain Jen had been suffering from before. Following her fall, Jen went to the doctor with pain spread across her entire body. With few answers, she was prescribed pain medication. It turns out; the prescription would change her life in an unexpected way. "I began transitioning from working to a person who was doped up all the time." Previously, Jen had worked in the caregiver field. She didn't want to be on the receiving end of that care. "The pain meds kept me in a state where I didn't care about anything."

The pain Jen had been going through was unbearable to the point that she kept returning to the doctor hoping to find relief. Unfortunately, relief came in the form of stronger narcotics. With the inability to move without pain and her exploding medical bills Jen began spiraling into depression. Yet, as Jen will tell you hope wasn't far off. That hope came in the form of Freedom Resource Center.

"I was referred to Joyce at Freedom from a person at *Hope Unit*. Joyce was going to help me find resources to get through pain management and navigate my way through the Social Security process along with many other systems." With her condition going downhill fast, Jen was facing threats of being forced into a nursing facility by her doctor. "A nursing home would have killed me," she said, "I wasn't going to let someone tell me to give up and die." Jen's personal belief was that going into a nursing home was, "a sign of giving up."

Fighting to stay out of a nursing home, Joyce became Jen's lifeline. "Joyce helped me to begin thinking positively, to stop lying to myself, and don't worry about the judgment of others. Positive thinking helped because if I focused on how many times things have gone wrong, I'd never leave my house." With the help of Freedom Resource Center, Jen was able to avoid going into a nursing facility.

However, the underlying problem remained heavy use of narcotics. Joyce helped Jen get an appointment for a second opinion. Unfortunately, because of the high dosage of pain killers, Jen went into detoxification before that second opinion. While in detox, "I had Joyce's words in my head, 'don't worry about



Jennifer Blom

the judgment of others' and it helped me through." The doctors told her it would take six months to a year until the narcotics are out of her system.

Since being released from detox, Jen has begun seeing the other doctor with the help of Joyce. Her mobility has improved as well, "I'm able to get up and down the stairs on my own. I want to become more physically active but, of course, I need to start slow." The added mobility has led Jen to work with Vocational Rehabilitation to find employment opportunities in the Wahpeton area. She also intends to begin Freedom Resource Center's class known as *Living Well with a Disability*.

"If I gave up, I would be sitting in a nursing home. I allowed one doctor to keep giving me stronger medication without questioning it. You have to be your own advocate even if it is tough." Jen's story is one of personal perseverance and determination to stay independent. Here at Freedom Resource Center, we strive to help everyone remain as independent as possible and hope to share many more success stories in the years ahead.

Disclaimer

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 about 33% from 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.



NON PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
FARGO, ND
PERMIT NO. 1159

2701 9th Ave. S, Suite H
Fargo, ND 58103

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

*“Equal Choice,
Equal Responsibility”*

Go to www.freedomrc.org
& click



**Please Consider
a Donation to
Freedom Resource Center**



Giving Hearts Day
Hosted By: impactgiveback.org
24 Hour Online Fundraising Event
2.13.14

**What’s Wrong With
This Picture?**



The universal symbol for accessibility is missing from this parking sign. The sign shows the spot is reserved but does not say who it is reserved for.