What’s Wrong With This Picture?

Have you ever seen a delivery vehicle either parked in an accessible parking spot, blocking access to an accessible parking spot, or blocking a curb out? If you haven’t, you haven’t been around very much, because it happens all the time. We got a photo of this UPS truck blocking access to accessible parking. I decided to inquire whether or not they had a policy prohibiting this type of action. I also contacted the U.S. Postal Service and FedEx. While none of them could provide me with a policy prohibiting drivers from blocking access to accessible parking, they did express concern for my situation, and wanted me to give them specific information so they could address it.

Here’s my correspondence with UPS: (My initial question) What is the UPS policy on parking in or blocking parking spots that are reserved for persons with mobility impairments?

Dear Nate,

Thank you for contacting us about this matter. I would like to thank you for bringing this to our attention. We review all of our policies and procedures to ensure compliance with all applicable laws and regulations. Our goal is to provide a safe and accessible environment for all of our customers.

Michelle S.

Dear Michelle,

Thank you for your response. I have forwarded your concerns to the local package center for further investigation. You can expect a call by the end of the business day.

Tina C.

What’s Wrong With This Picture?

Charles Harris And His Journey To Independence

What life holds for us and the road we take through it is very uncertain. I don’t think I’ve met one person in my life who has ever been certain they’ll spend their later years in a nursing facility. If someone does talk about “going into the home” they’re usually joking about a period in their life way off in the distance. You know, “down the road.” But what if being placed in the home happens much sooner, say when you’re in your mid 50’s? That’s when Charles Harris found himself in the confines of a local nursing home thinking it would be impossible to get out.

Today, Charles lives in his own apartment. I wanted to find out how a middle-aged man was placed in a nursing home and how he successfully got out so I went to his apartment to have a visit. As I rode the elevator to his 9th floor apartment, questions began to enter my mind. My anticipation grew as I knocked on the door and a soft voice told me to come in. Everyone has a story to tell and I couldn’t wait to hear Charles’.

Bright colored drawings filled Charles’ apartment, accompanied with homemade woven hats. I took a seat and asked how he was doing. “I’m just here to be a part of the land of the living,” he quickly responded with a smile. 1.

Charles was born with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis (JRA), a disability that limits his range of motion throughout his body. Due to this disability, Charles’ hands are naturally closed and he struggles to hold his head steady. His thoughts went back to his colorings on the walls and the hats he had crocheted and determined he must have patience to complete such beautiful work.

Early in his life, Charles lived in Washington D.C. where he worked at the Department of Labor for over ten years. After 10 years, his disability began to take its toll and he had to stop working. He had to apply for Social Security, which he still receives. Because of his loss of income Charles looked at the Section 8 housing program and eventually was able to return to Minnesota.

Charles was a different man once he moved to Mandan that he began to struggle with personal challenges. After much deliberation, he was told to go to Topeka for treatment. After a full year there, Charles ended up living in a nursing home in Fargo. I asked what it was like in a nursing facility. “Once you know the ropes it was ok, I got along with the other residents, he said.” But there were difficulties. “Sometimes, aides would walk right by them. They also had rules about automatic chairs. I had to go through a lot of red tape to be able to use one.”

Due to arthritis in his hands, he needs the power wheelchair to get around.

A lifelong battle with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis has caused other disabling conditions for Charles. He has both legs amputated because of stasis ulcers that affect a person’s lower extremities. He believes that poor circulation to his legs was a result of his JRA.

The loss of his lower legs demanded the use of his power chair even more.

“I’m so grateful for Freedom and this whole program.”

The conversation turned to successfully removing himself from the nursing home and how Freedom helped facilitate this transition. Cindy Geibert, one of our Independence Living Advocates, approached the social workers at Charles’ facility to talk about the program. Money follows the Person (MFP). (The program is discussed in further detail on page 3 of this newsletter.) To summarize, MFP is a program that assist people out of a nursing facility and into their own home or apartment. Freedom Resource Center contracts with the North Dakota Department of Human Services to facilitate MFP transitions.

Cindy learned of Charles’ wishes to live in his own place through her conversations with the social workers. “I just wanted to know my options,” Charles had told the social workers. Together, Cindy and Charles began the conversation about moving to his own place. “The most difficult thing about this process was being in the right frame of mind. Decisions are mine, I’m responsible and I could not be controlled like in the nursing home. Charles said, “He also explained he was concerned about his physical safety if he was to live on his own without the immediate care he could rely on in the nursing facility." He pondered his options and decided he wanted to do it.

“With Freedom, I’ve realized there are so many programs and services I can utilize in the community,” he said. “I’m so grateful for Freedom and this whole program. MFP. Without it, I think I would have just stayed in the home. I don’t think I could have made the transition without you guys.”

We are approaching one year of Charles’ successful transition to Independent Living. Through the assistance of Freedom, Charles has bridged over obstacles and utilized programs to ensure his independence. Two prosthetic legs await the start of rehabilitation in Charles’ closet. “Next time you see me, I hope to be up walking around,” he told me as our conversation drew to a close. In July, Charles will celebrate his 59th birthday, a birthday he can celebrate wherever he wants because of his returned independence.
By Nate Aagaard, Executive Director

In my 34-plus years of living with a disability, I have come to the unmistakable conclusion that your environment makes all the difference in how easy it is to live. I remember back to having to be carried up the steps of my parents’ home before we got a ramp built. We didn’t have a shower I could use, and I was pretty much dependent on other people even inside the house. Everywhere I lived had to be retrofit, sometimes with a fair amount of difficulty. Even at that, things were never completely accessible.

Three years ago my wife Paula and I embarked on the project of building a new home. The main obstacle was ease-of-use, both for her and for me. There were many decisions to be made, all the way from garage, to the bathroom, to storage, to some extras that added to our quality-of-life. Here are a few lessons I learned along the way.

One consideration before we even purchased the lot was how much upkeep on the yard and sidewalks we wanted to put up with. The answer: not very much. So what we did is buy a lot on a cul-de-sac with one fairly straight sidewalk across the front. The lot was not very big, so moving is lots of an issue. Our old house

From Where I Sit

We made sure that there was adequate turning radius in the hallway leading into the kitchen. This did make the house slightly bigger, including the cost. One thing that really surprised me is how much extra levered handles were instead of doorknobs. The 21 doors in our house ended up costing an extra $650 to put levers on. We have 3 feet wide doors in almost the house, which cost very little more than 32 inch door.

My bathroom has a roll-in shower. We looked at prefabricated units, but they were quite a bit more expensive and you end up with about a one-inch lip on the front edge, which is difficult to get a shower chair across. My shower area is sloped, with ceramic tile on the floor and walls. I also had the cabinetry mounted on stainless steel legs, so that if the floor gets wet the cabinetry won’t lock up water.

One nice feature I found for the front door and to the garage was spring loaded door. These have just enough tension to pull the door most of the way shut, so that I can reach the door handle once it is get through and close the door completely. Otherwise, I have to put a string or extra handle on the door, which can look very unattractive.

I am very fortunate to be able to build a new home. Many people struggle with environmental barriers in their housing, and do not have access to accessible resources. However, preplanning can make all the difference between a user-friendly home, and one that continues to present barriers to independence.

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The North Dakota Money follows the person Program

Money Follows the Person (MFP) is a program funded by the federal government to help people in nursing facilities move to the home of their choice. In May 15, 2007, the mandate authorizing the $5.9 million fund, Gov. John Hoeven said, “It is crucial that we have a strong army of long-term care advocates for our leaders to get under the tent and help ensure that we do all we can to help the individual needs and preferences of seniors and people with disabilities.”

In the same news release, Department of Human Services Executive Director Carol K. Olson said, “While many people who qualify for nursing care facility care at home and receive services in our communities, we need to continue strengthening North Dakota’s role in our nation’s nursing infrastructure particularly in rural areas. This grant will increase the Medicaid program’s ability to support home and community-based services.

Most people want to remain in their own homes rather than go to a nursing facility. Due to disabling conditions and limited resources, many people are forced to seek residence within nursing facilities. It is the goal and the purpose – MFP – to empower individuals to remain in their homes while receiving the assistance they need to live comfortably wherever they wish. Despite programs like MFP, barriers still exist. Additionally, nursing home beds in North Dakota have been mandated by law, but those same services are not mandated in a person’s home.”

North Dakota is “the state that’s leading the way for the disability community,” says North Dakota’s Executive Director.

“Toward this improvement, Freedom and the other three Centers for Independent Living (CILs) in the state have contracted with the North Dakota Department of Human Services to help transition people back into the community through the program. The contract enabled Freedom to hire Jim Holman and Raenea Vedder as Transition Planning Coordinators (TPC).”

To help Freedom, Freedom and the other three Centers for Independent Living (CILs) in the state have contracted with the North Dakota Department of Human Services to help transition people back into the community through this program. The contract enabled Freedom to hire Jim Holman and Raenea Vedder as Transition Planning Coordinators (TPC).

Information

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

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Alternate formats available upon request.