A New Approach to Independence

The underlying goal of Freedom Resource Center is helping people with any type of disability, at any age, become as independent as possible. To reach this ideal of independence and equality for everyone regardless of ability takes hard work and many different paths. Moving forward, Freedom Resource Center has created a new path toward independence for people with disabilities in our area by offering new and exciting skills training courses that teach individuals to take control and responsibility in their lives.

The course is titled Living Well. It provides four unique series developed directly from Freedom Resource Center’s staff and focuses on the unique needs of the people in our service area. Binders and materials will be provided for each course to dedicated participants. We want to partner with individuals who have disabilities with a common goal of self-sufficiency. Each training within the series breaks down into a core theme of greater independence, but are not needed to be taken in any specific order.

Living Well 101 focuses on Independence. This course assists individuals to increase confidence in making their life’s decisions and improve on problem solving. With growth in these core skills, participants will rely less on others and become more independent. We acknowledge the foundation to independence is being able to overcome the challenges we face personally and work to resolve those problems, no matter how big or small, with less dependency on others.

Living Well 102 brings the participants closer to self-sufficiency. This training is for those dedicated individuals looking to reduce dependency on financial assistance. Mental health, hidden rules of class, communication skills and financial management are revealed and discussed throughout this ten-week class. With a greater understanding of financial management individuals will rely less on assistance.

Vocation is the goal of Living Well 103. Participants will have the knowledge and skills to pursue and eventually secure entry level employment. Learn the skills to pay the bills through meaningful and competitive employment. At the completion of this eight-week course, dedicated participants will have a path forward to self-sustaining employment and greater financial independence.

Rounding out the new curriculum established from Freedom Resource Center is Living Well 104, focused on working with our life and ourselves. We dive into ourselves and identify patterns and habits that may be interfering with our ability to become more independent and potential barriers to success in achieving our vocational goals. Dedicated participants will gain self-awareness to identify and work on a process of confronting and working through the difficulties that confront ourselves on a day-to-day basis.

Independence isn’t always easily gained. It can be a struggle but by learning the skills to success in these new courses offered at Freedom Resource Center we are confident individuals will improve their lives. We all strive for success. Sometimes that success is achieved through figuring out and creating our own paths. If you are struggling with the path forward, we encourage you to contact us and learn more about these new and exciting courses toward independence.

What’s

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by Nate Aalgaard, Executive Director

How warm is it where you are?

Any way you look at it, this has been a very cold and long winter already. It seems to be the constant topic of conversation. Even though the weather forecasters will tell us we have not set many records, we all know it has been tough.

In some ways, everyday life can be compared to the weather. Sometimes it is cold and harsh, and sometimes it is warm and inviting. I recently went to a funeral in a small town. On the way home, I told the person I was with that it felt very much like my home. You can feel the warmth the people had for each other. One gentleman who is a member of the congregation took it upon himself to make sure the elevator worked for me, and cleared the path so I could get to the restroom. He made me feel welcome in his church.

A few months ago I wrote about my deer hunting experience. I felt like an extremely valued customer – and the best part was that it was all free. The volunteers from Twist of Fate had worked months in getting ready for us. They raised funds, scouted the best places for us to hunt, built a cook shack, and set up camp. All volunteers were organized and ready to meet us when we got there. They even gave us several gifts, which was over and above anything we could expect.

We also know what it’s like to not be welcome. We’ve gotten bad customer service, where the people we are dealing with seem to think we are bothering them by wanting to purchase something. We’ve been through rude treatment over the phone, or a dose of bad attitude with government services. It can feel cold and harsh, much like the north wind in February sucking the life out of you.

Our Civil and Human Rights task force went to a restaurant a while back and were made to feel like second-class citizens. The place was fairly full, but the people working there genuinely seemed not to care that we wanted to patronize them. They had a very limited number of tables that were low enough for someone in a wheelchair, and were unwilling to talk about the possibility of accommodating our needs. This, on top of the struggles we all had with finding parking, and dealing with snow and ice, made for an unpleasant experience.

When people come through the door of one of our offices, we want them to feel welcome. People deserve our respect, our attention, and to feel like there is some hope. Maybe it took a lot of energy, both physical and emotional, for them to make the step to come to us. Life can be hard, and when you have been frustrated numerous times you probably don’t feel like trying one more organization. The attempt to get help could be a one-time experiment. If the response they get is not positive, they are likely to turn away and never come back.

Many of us have been through difficult times. We know what it feels like to struggle, and one of the main reasons we work at Freedom is we want to help other people overcome those obstacles. This business is unique. It is made up of people with disabilities helping each other to live more independently. After all, we are all living in this harsh cold environment together, and we need to make the best of it.
The Ongoing Debate about Service Animals

In the month of February, Freedom Resource Center hosted two community education events to discuss service animals. The information sessions were in direct response to the rising number of calls we take regarding service animals. In Fargo nearly twenty people including people with disabilities, apartment managers, business owners, and other agency staff attended our session at the Dakota Medical Foundation building. Eleven joined our session in Detroit Lakes with many of the same questions and concerns revolving around allowing a service animal in a housing unit. We felt it was appropriate to include the below information for people who were unable to attend either of those sessions or attended and wanted further clarification on service animals allowed in housing units.

An assistance animal is not a pet. It is an animal that works, provides assistance, or performs tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability, or provides emotional support that alleviates one or more identified symptoms or effects of a person’s disability. Assistance animals perform many disability-related functions, including but not limited to, guiding individuals who are blind or have low vision, alerting individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to sounds, providing protection or rescue assistance, pulling a wheelchair, fetching items, alerting persons to impending seizures, or providing emotional support to persons with disabilities who have a disability-related need for such support. For purposes of reasonable accommodation requests, neither the Fair Housing Act nor Section 504 requires a service animal to be individually trained or certified.

Persons with disabilities may request a reasonable accommodation for any assistance animal, including an emotional support animal, under both the Fair Housing Act and Section 504. In situations where the ADA and the Fair Housing Act/Section 504 apply simultaneously (e.g., a public housing agency, sales or leasing offices, or housing associated with a university or other place of education), housing providers must meet their obligations under both the reasonable accommodation standard of the Fair Housing Act/Section 504 and the service animal provisions of the ADA.

Housing providers are to evaluate a request for a reasonable accommodation to possess an assistance animal in a dwelling using the general principles applicable to all reasonable accommodation requests. After receiving such a request, the housing provider must consider the following: (1) Does the person seeking to use and live with the animal have a disability — i.e., a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities? (2) Does the person making the request have a disability-related need for an assistance animal? In other words, does the animal work, provide assistance, perform tasks or services for the benefit of a person with a disability, or provide emotional support that alleviates one or more of the identified symptoms or effects of a person’s existing disability?

If the answer to question (1) or (2) is “no,” then the Fair Housing Act and Section 504 do not require a modification to a provider’s “no pets” policy, and the reasonable accommodation request may be denied.

Where the answers to questions (1) and (2) are “yes,” the Fair Housing Act and Section 504 require the housing provider to modify or provide an exception to a “no pets” rule or policy to permit a person with a disability to live with and use an assistance animal(s) in all areas of the premises where persons are normally allowed to go, unless doing so would impose an undue financial and administrative burden or would fundamentally alter the nature of the housing provider’s services.

The request may also be denied if: (1) the specific assistance animal in question poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others that cannot be reduced or eliminated by another reasonable accommodation, or (2) the specific assistance animal in question would cause substantial physical damage to the property of others that cannot be reduced or eliminated by another reasonable accommodation. Breed, size, and weight limitations may not be applied to an assistance animal.

A housing provider may not deny a reasonable accommodation request because he or she is uncertain whether or not the person seeking the accommodation has a disability or a disability related need for an assistance animal. Housing providers may ask individuals who have disabilities that are not readily apparent or known to the provider to submit reliable documentation of a disability and their disability-related need for an assistance animal. If the disability is readily apparent or known but the disability-related need for the assistance animal is not, the housing provider may ask the individual to provide documentation of the disability related need for an assistance animal.

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Thanks for giving with your heart

As Freedom Resource Center enters its 25th year of serving people with disabilities in southeast North Dakota and west-central Minnesota, we begin the year humbled at the outpouring of support we received during our third year of participation in Giving Hearts Day. This will allow us to provide our quality services to help people with disabilities live more independently.

About 19 percent of the American population lives with some type of a disability. That translates to approximately 19,000 people in Fargo alone. The individuals we serve desire an equal opportunity in our communities. They are our family members, our neighbors and our friends.

We appreciate the support given to our organization from our donors, as well as the Dakota Medical Foundation and Impact Foundation. Giving Hearts Day has been a great benefit to our organization and the people we serve.

Nate Aalgaard

What’s Wrong With This Picture?

Sometimes there are no words needed to describe what is wrong with this picture.