Home ownership has always been a part of the American Dream. It is a place to call your own. The spot where after a long day of hard work you can kick your feet up, relax, and watch your favorite sports team or program. It is shelter from the storm and sometimes an escape from outside responsibilities. It is the biggest investment and perhaps the biggest asset a person can have.

Yet for many people with disabilities, home ownership simply remains a dream. It is a dream that many give up on and never make reality. There remain too many barriers for this purchase that many view as “making it.” Low wage jobs, little to no credit history, and accessibility are just a handful of the many barriers that keep owning a home out of reach for many people looking to have an equal shot at the American Dream. Those barriers didn’t stop Bridget Gronwold in her pursuit for a place to call home.

Bridget sought to break the barriers to home ownership. She wanted help moving out of her apartment and to purchase her first house. Like many others, Bridget didn’t know where to start. Through her community connections and good friends, she heard about Freedom Resource Center.

Helping people with disabilities find resources and information is the heart of what our organization does. We’ve helped many others find the means and services to achieve their dream and move into the home of their choice. One of those success stories turns out to be a very good friend of Bridget’s.

“I was tired of renting and wanted a home of my own. I wouldn’t have known about these programs if it wasn’t for Freedom Resource Center.” Bridget commented. She quickly worked on starting the application process.

Working at a local fast food chain restaurant since 1996 and four seasons at the local race track, Bridget deserved options and the opportunity to make her own choice on where she wanted to call home. The paperwork was filed with the help of Rebecca and all they could do after was be patient. After some time went by, Bridget found out she would be approved for a low interest loan from the USDA.

After searching for the perfect home, she found the one she wanted. “It was gutted out and remodeled. Nothing else compared to this place.” Bridget said. With her loan approved on a Friday, Bridget began house shopping on that Saturday. “I was so excited to buy this house, I couldn’t wait to move in.” She stated.

In describing how she has decorated her home, Bridget was full of smiles. Her description is one full of color and accents. “I was lucky enough to be invited to her house warming party where I got to meet Bridget’s family and friends. It was a real treat to be a part of their excitement for Bridget,” Rebecca said. “Her house is very nice and well put together.” A sports fanatic, the lower level is baseball themed. “The Twins are my team!” she said enthusiastically. “I was a catcher in softball for about 15 years so I decided baseball was the sport to pick.” She concluded.

Reaching a personal goal of buying your first home can be difficult. Bridget knew her goal and stuck to it. “Bridget is a real go-getter; it is fun

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to see her achieve her goals from start to finish.” Rebecca said. “It is hard not to smile when you’re around her. Her energy and enthusiasm for family and community involvement is something to really admire.”

As she continues to make her house her home, Bridget looks to the next step with Freedom Resource Center. She is looking toward her goal of retirement. “I’d eventually like to work part time with kids, dogs, or with sports.” She said.

Bridget has been a homeowner since August of 2013. She continues to make improvements to her home and reaching toward greater independence. She dreamed of homeownership and with a little guidance from Freedom Resource Center, she has achieved one aspect of that great American Dream. We look forward seeing Bridget’s future successes.

**FYI**

**What:** Grateful Gathering  
Lunch will be provided  
**When:** December 19, 2013  
**Time:** 12:00 to 3:00pm  
**Where:** Boy Scouts of America Building in Fargo. Call 701-478-0459 We will be sending cards to those who help us in the community, so be thinking of who you would like to thank.

**What:** Make your New Year’s resolution  
The who, what, when, where, why of setting a goal you will actually meet!  
**When:** December 30, 2013  
**Time:** 10:00 to 11:00 am  
**Where:** Conference Room #3 Lincoln Center, Fergus Falls Registration is appreciated. Healthy refreshments will be provided. 218-998-1799

**What:** We decorate the Thankful tree  
**When:** November 26, 2013  
**Time:** 10:00 to 11:00 am  
**Where:** Conference Room #3 Lincoln Center, Fergus Falls Registration is appreciated so we have enough for everyone!! 218-998-1799

### Why Visitability Matters

Below are scenarios many of us may overlook when it comes to our homes. A lot of the time we are unaware of these basic barriers to accessibility. These scenarios, though made up, do happen and illustrate why it is important to consider how to make your home visitable for those with mobility impairments. Take a moment to read the four examples and think about what you can do to improve accessibility in your home.

1. **You decide you’d like to host the holidays this year in your new home. You invite your family months in advance and everyone agrees to bring something for dinner. You live in a bi-level home with a narrow entrance. Grandpa has shown signs of aging and now needs a walker due to his severe arthritis. Unable to maneuver the steps to get to the dining room, your grandparents decide they will be unable to join the rest of the family for the holiday dinner.**

2. **You’re fit and active, exercising regularly. Part of your routine is jogging up the steps to the entrance of your home. Recently you and friends decide to go hiking. During the trip you slip, fall, and become paralyzed from the waist down. You now utilize a wheelchair for mobility. Because every entrance to your home has steps, you are forced to stay in the hospital until a permanent ramp is installed.**

3. **Your 8 year old son is having a sleepover for the other boys in his class. The boys are buzzing about the upcoming sleepover all week. Everyone is invited including the boy who uses a wheelchair. Unfortunately because of the steps going to both entrances of the house, the boy who uses a wheelchair is unable to join the rest of his friends at the sleepover.**

4. **Grandma is coming to town and recently began using a walker. She’s excited to spend a couple of days at your house seeing her great grand kids. She arrives and easily gets in your house because you have one entrance without steps. After hours of catching up over coffee, your grandma tries to use the bathroom. Unfortunately, the only bathroom on the main floor is also the smallest in the house making it unusable for your grandma. Without access to a bathroom, your grandma ends up needing to stay the next couple of days at the hotel across town.**

For more information on visitability go to Concrete Change at www.concretechange.org.
From Where I Sit

by Nate Aalgaard, Executive Director

“Be careful, or you’ll break your neck.” Have you ever used this term? Maybe your mother said it to you in order to get you to stop jumping on the bed, climbing trees, or doing wheelies with your motorcycle. But have you ever stopped to think what this really means? In our subconscious, is there an inherent fear of becoming paralyzed? In essence: is it viewed as a fate worse than death?

The Forum of Fargo – Moorhead came out with a story on November 5 regarding a 32-year-old Indiana man who was paralyzed after falling from a tree while deer hunting. Tim Bowers broke his neck at the cervical 3, 4 and 5 level, causing paralysis to basically his entire body below his neck. What makes this story unusual is that even while in acute care at the hospital, he was allowed to make the decision to end treatment, effectively ending his life. The doctors, at the request of his family, brought him out of a coma in order to ask him what he wanted to do. Usually, it’s family members who make this decision for a terminally ill person.

The article goes on to say that medical ethicists say it’s rare for someone to decide on the spot to be removed from life support, especially so soon after an injury. But standard practice is to grant more autonomy to patients. In this case, apparently Bowers’ brain function was not affected by his injury. It was not clear by reading the story whether or not he would be using a ventilator for his long-term respiration.

The article says that Bowers’ sister, Jenny Schulz, said throughout the five-hour process after her brother’s breathing tube was removed he never wavered in his decision. At one point he reportedly said, “I’m ready. I’m ready.” He died due to the absence of the most basic of life’s necessities—air.

I believe that many people have an intense fear of being paralyzed. It is to them, indeed, a fate worse than death. But how do we know until we are directly affected? The fact is there have been studies asking people with spinal cord injuries, even very severe ones like those that happened to Tim Bowers, how they feel about their quality of life. Most would rate it good to very good, even though they are limited physically in what they were able to do.

So for this person, immediately after a shocking and severe injury, to make such a serious decision is premature. He may have regained some function, even being able to breathe on his own. Who knows, he may have even enjoyed his life no matter what his physical circumstances turned out to be. The sad fact is no one will ever know.

There is a national organization in this country that became very well known at the time that Terri Schiavo’s husband was attempting to cut off her life support. Their name is Not Dead Yet. For years they have been fighting the stigma of people with disabilities’ lives being seen as worth less than people without disabilities. They term euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide as the ultimate form of discrimination.

This past summer, Diane Coleman, the organization’s president, spoke about the issue of futility treatment. That is the standard by which the medical community deems whether or not continued treatment should be provided. She and her organization believe that there is an inherent bias; and thus less likelihood that treatment will be provided to people who are older, disabled, or terminally ill.

My personal opinion about the story of Tim Bowers is that this decision was made in haste and with bias against people with disabilities. I believe that had he continued with his recovery process, even if he remained paralyzed to the point of needing a ventilator, he would have likely found his quality of life to be acceptable, maybe even good. This decision caused much anguish for his family and friends, and could have been avoided. We continue to fight negative stereotypes and stigma no matter what our disability. The story of Tim Bowers is a perfect example.

Nate Aalgaard

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As winter approaches, it is important to remember and keep all paths clear of snow and ice. The path shown is covered in snow and difficult to maneuver for someone in a wheelchair or using a walker.