Do you have friends, family, or co-workers with disabilities or mobility impairments? Is your home accessible to them?

I purchased my home in 2000. At that time I was looking for a home in a good neighborhood, close to schools and parks, with other children for my two, soon to be three kids to play with. Budget dictated available options. Accessibility never entered the picture. After months of searching I finally found and purchased a one-and-half story home in a quiet neighborhood in North Fargo. I love a lot of things about my old house in spite of its constant need for repairs.

In 2005 I was hired as a disability rights advocate at Freedom Resource Center. Through this job I had the privilege of meeting Bobbi, who is now one of my best friends. For those of you who don’t know Bobbi, she is a paraplegic and a wheelchair user.

This presents a dilemma for me. I like to entertain by having friends come to my home. However, I have a best friend who is unable to access my home. I don’t have a ramp. She is unable to get into my bathroom (we would have to take both rear wheels off her chair to get it through the doorway), and she has difficulty getting around on the rest of the main floor of my home due to narrow doorways and hallways. None of these accessibility features were things I considered when I purchased my home. The cost of remodeling prohibits me from making my home accessible at this time. In essence, my home is not visitable by someone with a mobility impairment.

Visitability is the practice of incorporating basic accessibility features into all newly built construction of one to three unit family homes. These features include at least one zero-step entry, a minimum of one accessible bathroom on the main floor of the home, hallways with at least 36 inches of clearance, and doorways with at least 32 inches of clearance. These features would allow people with mobility impairments access to this construction. Supporters of this approach argue it is a sustainable and affordable way to make housing accessible to all. Supporters also argue building visitable homes is more cost effective than remodeling existing construction at a later date to make it accessible.

If you are looking to build a new home or remodel an existing one, stop and ask yourself, “What are the chances that I may someday be impacted by a mobility impairment? Do I have a friend or family member who needs my home to be accessible? What if I acquire a disability as a result of an accident or illness?”

Take time to explore the options and floor plans available for people.
Would You Like to Come to Dinner?
Continued from page 1


Freedom Resource Center is a disability rights organization. We have a commitment to change, to create opportunities for people with disabilities of all ages to be as productive and independent as possible. We want to see people with disabilities to living, working, and playing in the community just like their able bodied peers. Accessible housing is a key component to making that goal happen. For more information about renting an accessible apartment or building an accessible home, please give us a call.

After a long, cold, and snowy winter, spring has finally come. It is a time of the year for us to finally get outside and enjoy the warm weather. For many, this includes heading to your local and favorite restaurants for a quick meal that you can enjoy under the sun or the stars.

As you can see in the above photo, far too often this is not possible for people with physical disabilities. Outside tables and chairs with permanent benches make the tables inaccessible. An easy fix for this would be to simply leave one side of the table open. That simple fix would allow for everybody to be able to enjoy their meals outside.

Keep Kids with Disabilities Safe in School
By Scott Burlingame, Assistant Program Director

Freedom has been watching a couple of systemic issues that address basic safety issues in our school systems. The first is the Preventing Harmful Restraint & Seclusion in Schools Act (S.2860). It is a bill that will stop schools from restraining children, confining them in seclusion rooms, and using aversive interventions to harm them. This Act would require the Secretary of Education to issue regulations regarding “seclusion and restraint” practices for students in both public and private schools that receive federal funding. While numerous States already have some standards and regulations in place, this legislation would require States to meet minimum standards and offer an enforcement mechanism. It has passed the U.S. House, and now moves on to the U.S. Senate for consideration.

On another note, students with disabilities often are the victims of bullying. In light of the tragedy of Phoebe Prince, who committed suicide after being bullied, there is a renewed call for states to have strong anti-bullying laws. According to Bully Police USA, a watch-dog organization advocating for bullied children, both Minnesota and North Dakota could do significantly more to stop bullying in our schools. The Bully Police give Minnesota a C- because their law lacks coverage for emotional abuses and lacks a solid enforcement mechanism. North Dakota, on the other hand, gets an F as it does not have a statewide anti-bullying law.

At Freedom we have advocated for students who have been restrained and secluded without the notification of a parent or without the proper safeguards being put in place by the student’s team. We have worked with students with disabilities who have been bullied to the point that they were scared to go to school. This should not ever happen in the year 2010 and we encourage all people who are concerned about these issues to call me at 701-478-0459 or 1-800-450-0459 or email me at scottb@freedomrc.org.
By Nate Aalgaard, Executive Director

Discrimination is in the eyes of the beholder

Our mission statement says that we are working toward equality and inclusion for people with disabilities. Sometimes discrimination is preventing people from equal opportunity to participate in different aspects of life, such as employment, access to goods and services, communication, and education. When we interview people for jobs, we often ask if they or someone close to them has ever experienced discrimination. Most of the time they answer that they have not. This surprises me, because I feel that I could legitimately say I am discriminated against every single day of my life. I tend to believe that most people have been discriminated against if they have a disability. They just don’t look at it that way.

Am I just some angry and bitter person, blaming everybody else for my problems? No way. I’m looking at it through a different lens. I look at it through the lens of a person who expects that if there are barriers to people with disabilities participating equally, and those barriers are easy to remove, they should be removed. I see no difference between a business that out-and-out declares that they have no intention of putting in accessible parking, or a ramp, or installing tables that are low enough for somebody in the wheelchair to use comfortably; than the business owner who simply ignores it and hopes the whole issue never comes up. It doesn’t matter if it’s an intentional act of exclusion, or a passive one. The effect is the same.

I don’t spend every day of my life being frustrated that every single business doesn’t suit my needs. I am lucky enough to live in a community that has many different choices of restaurants, stores, and other businesses. I simply choose the ones that I feel best meet my needs, including accessibility, and boycott the rest. I often refer to this “silent boycott” in which many people with disabilities participate. We don’t bother struggling with places that are more difficult. Neither do we make a big deal of it, because it just seems like more work than it will ever be worth.

On the other hand, if I lived in the small town where I went to high school, my options would be very limited. I understand the economic reality of small towns. Many of the people who grew up there are now gone. Populations are dwindling, revenue is shrinking, and a business owner is oftentimes struggling to keep the door open, much less make the door more accessible. I also know that people in small communities are resourceful. Would it be a problem to get a few people together on a Saturday and put a ramp on that two-step entry? Probably not.

One thing I have decided to do is to be part of a group of people who regularly go and visit businesses, speak with the management or owner about accessibility issues, and follow-up with written information. We have even filed a few complaints when we feel that the barriers would be easy to remove and are within the parameters of what would be considered “readily achievable.”

Here at Freedom, we are also in the business of recognizing people who do the right thing. We are working with other groups and individuals to provide proper recognition, as well as education on the rights and needs of people with disabilities. Plus, we want to help people with disabilities locate and utilize businesses that they will not have to struggle with.

According to the National Disability Institute, the estimated 50 million people living with a disability in the United States is an under-tapped market with an aggregate annual income of more than $1 trillion and $220 billion in discretionary spending power. Even in a recession, that’s a lot of money.

From Where I Sit

Be sure to become a fan of Freedom on Facebook and Twitter (freedomrc)
The Freedom Board of Directors is in the process of recruiting new members for next year. The annual election is in September, so if you are interested in serving, please let Nate Aalgaard, the Freedom Executive Director, know and he will send you an application. Terms are for three years, and the board meets about seven times per year. Members also serve on at least one committee.

Rent Assistance Opportunities:
Applicants will complete an application for a voucher that will allow the consumer to find a place to live and pay approximately 30% of income for rent. Waiting Lists may apply.

Fargo Housing and Redevelopment Authority
Website: www.fargohousing.org or 701-293-6262

Cass County Housing Authority
Phone: 701-282-3443
(also covers Richland County)

Jamestown/Stutsman County Housing Authority
Website: www.jamestownnd.com or 701-252-1098

Clay County Housing and Redevelopment
Website: www.housinglink.org or 218-233-8883

Becker County Housing and Redevelopment
Phone: 218-846-7330

Breckenridge Housing Redevelopment Authority
Phone: 218-643-6147

Fergus Falls/Ottertail County Housing and Redevelopment
Website: www.fergusfallshra.com or 218-739-3249

Moorhead Public Housing
Website: www.ci.moorhead.mn.us or 218-299-5458

Habitat for Humanity – Detroit Lakes
Phone: 218-844-5397

ND Homechoice
Phone: 701-281-8215

Moorhead Rehabilitation Loan
www.cityofmoorhead.com/housing/programs.asp
Or 877-833-6667

USDA Rural Development ND
Website: www.rurdev.usda.gov
Phone: 704-530-2044 (State Office Bismarck)
or 701-845-5150 (Valley City Field Office)

USDA Rural Development MN
Website: www.rurdev.usda.gov
Phone: 218-847-8910 (Detroit Lakes)
or 320-763-3191

MN Housing Finance Agency
Website: www.mnhousing.gov Or 651-296-7608

ND Housing Finance Agency
Website: www.ndhfa.state.nd.us or 701-239-7255

Home Ownership Assistance Agencies
The following are resources for those who own a home or wish to own a home.

Lake Agassiz Habitat for Humanity
Phone: 218-284-5253

Missouri Valley Habitat for Humanity
Website: www.mvalleyhabitat.org or 701-255-7566
What Does This Mean?

It means that this place meets accessibility standards. It can be placed on signs for parking, restrooms, or entire buildings. Sometimes it is a true indication of the accessibility of the place, sometimes it is not. At Freedom, we attempt to recognize businesses that meet minimum access standards as set by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). We have identified a few local businesses for being accessible and provided them with certificates and window stickers. We also work with Mayors Committees in the Fargo-Moorhead and Jamestown communities on their access awards. Some of the businesses are:

**Jamestown**
- Stutsman Harley Davidson
- Pizza Hut

**Moorhead**
- Moorhead Sports Center
- Perkins Restaurant and Bakery

**Fargo**
- Lone Star Steakhouse
- Buffalo Wings (42nd St)
- Ruby Tuesday (25th St)
- Urban Plains Center
- Silver Moon Supper Club

**West Fargo**
- Hooligans Bar and Grill

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**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 701-478-0459 or 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.

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Alternate formats available upon request.

Editorial Board: Nate Aalgaard, Scott Burlingame, Cyndi Collins, and Rikki Trageton

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**AT Item of the Month**

*By Tanya Stall, Independent Living Advocate*

This SENTRY “REALLY BIG CALCULATOR” makes it easy to hit those buttons.

This calculator is large in size in every way: large buttons and print is not only easier to hit with your fingers but easier to see with the large print and screen. Your tiny calculator may be the only thing keeping you from managing your own finances or doing your math homework! This model was bought from Bed Bath and Beyond (www.bedbathandbeyond.com) in Fargo, ND for only $9.99.
Federal

It was most likely the biggest political battle of a generation. On Tuesday, March 23rd, President Obama signed into law the Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care Act. Whereas this law continues to be very divisive, for people with disabilities, there are some improvements.

The law increases the ability of people with disabilities to get coverage by prohibiting private health insurance exclusions for pre-existing conditions, eliminating annual and lifetime caps in private insurance policies, restricting the consideration of health status in setting premiums, and expanding Medicaid to cover individuals with incomes up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level (approximately $29,000 per year for a family of four.)

It works to ensure better medical services to people with disabilities by improving training of physicians, dentists, and allied health professionals on how to treat persons with disabilities. It works to increase long term services and supports by increasing the federal share of Medicaid, known as the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (or FMAP), for home and community based services (HCBS) and during periods of economic downturn and by providing spousal impoverishment protections for HCBS Beneficiaries.

Finally, the law includes the Community Living Assistance Services and Supports (CLASS) Act, which will create a national long term insurance program to provide a cash benefit to eligible individuals and their families to meet their long term needs. This voluntary program will allow people more flexibility in purchasing the equipment and services they need to maintain independence.

Minnesota

As I am writing this, the House and Senate have agreed to a package of $312 million in budget cuts. Now is the time for people with disabilities, their friends and their families, to contact their elected officials and tell them not to balance the budget solely on the backs of people with disabilities.

We should all recognize that there will be cuts in Minnesota; however, I want to hear from people who have concerns. If you are worried about losing your home-and-community-based services, your health insurance, your dental care, or anything else that is being kicked around, Freedom would love to assist you in letting your legislators know about how it will affect you.

North Dakota

North Dakota has a primary election on June 8th. Traditionally, very few people vote in this election, as it lacks the publicity of a congressional or presidential election. However, in addition to the party primaries that will be on the ballot, very important offices like City and County Council or Commissioners and School Board members will be on the ballot.

These offices make very important decisions that relate to the lives of people with disabilities. Want a new curb cut in town, or that long-awaited accessible playground? It is your local elected officials who make that decision. Want your school to provide the free and appropriate education to students with disabilities? Do you want your school to hire quality special education professionals? Your school board makes that decision.

Be sure to vote and let your voice be heard on these very important issues. If you have any questions about voting or the upcoming election, please let me know.

Voting in North Dakota

North Dakota is the only state that does not have voter registration. In order to vote in North Dakota, you must be:

• A U.S. citizen.
• At least 18 years old on the day of an election.
• A legal North Dakota resident.
• A resident in the precinct for 30 days preceding the election.

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Access to the Gym

By Cyndi Collins, Advocate

Much has changed in the world of fitness in the last 10 years. With gyms popping up all over, fitness options are increasing each year. As a certified Group Fitness Instructor, I have spent a lot of my time in a variety of gyms, and have continued updating my skills and repertoire to keep up with every changing demand.

Some things still stay the same, particularly the layout of the centers. Whether this is due to economy or some other driving force, gyms seem to be getting increasingly smaller and are still packing in as much equipment as possible. This makes the space inaccessible to people with disabilities trying to reach their wellness goals.

According to the ADA, fitness centers fall under Title III, meaning these facilities -whether it is public or private- must comply with basic nondiscrimination requirements; prohibit exclusion, segregation and unequal treatment. Centers must also comply with architectural standards; remove barriers in existing buildings and alter and/or modify policies, practices and procedures to all people with disabilities unless it causes undue burden on the business.

One of the biggest complaints from members with disabilities is that the entire center isn’t accessible. Equipment is too close together, making it difficult to access, disabled or not. A standard spacing of equipment should be at least 36 inches apart. Other complaints have been: inaccessible restrooms, lockers too high or too low, lack of accessible parking, and access to equipment on all levels of the gym. The law states if the center offers different activities and equipment on different levels, each level must be accessible unless it causes undue burden on the business.

There are a few cheap and easy ways to decrease the barriers inside a gym. With cardio equipment and weight lifting machines, use a label maker or contact your local Services for the Blind to have labels printed in Braille or larger print. Provide machines with speech output commands. Lower equipment so individuals can transfer onto it; and make it reachable. Provide training to your staff in regards to people with disabilities. Some limited assistance getting set up on machines may be appropriate.

Alternative wellness and specific exercise classes have been offered at some fitness centers, and that makes those classes exclusive and not inclusive. There is a lack of training in regards to making classes inclusive and many don’t take the time to learn how to modify aerobics classes to meet the needs of all participants. According to the American Journal, 36 percent of people with disabilities engage in leisure physical activity compared to 56 percent for non-disabled people. Modifying classes may seem difficult, but that’s not necessarily true. Most people with disabilities can participate in basic-to-maximal strength training, endurance and competition training, and active recovery. It’s important to take the time to get to know all participants in the class to learn everyone’s limitations, develop modified routines and/or purchase adaptive equipment for each class.
The Mission of Freedom Resource Center for Independent Living is to work toward equality and inclusion for people with disabilities through programs of empowerment, community education and systems change.

We envision a society where ALL individuals are valued, respected and have equal opportunity, access, responsibility, and freedom of choice in all aspects of life.

Freedom Offers Independent Living Skills Trainings

Becoming JobSmart™
This humorous program will allow you to laugh as you learn the skills you need to meet your employment goals. JobSmart introduces a new practical approach to learning and re-learning basic job skills for people with disabilities.

The Living Well with a Disability Program
Living Well is an eight-week workshop using goal setting and problem solving as the framework for developing healthy lifestyles for People with Disabilities. Living Well starts participants down a path that can lead to them living a fuller, independent life.

Money Smart
If you have little financial savvy or just want to improve your money management skills, Money Smart can help! This four-part series will help you learn the skills of budgeting, keeping your money safe, taking out loans, and using credit cards.

We can also customize our skills training to meet your needs. Just call any of our local offices or 1-800-450-0459 to find out more.