Moving Forward as an Advocate for Disability Rights

By Tyler Axness, Communication & Policy Coordinator

When you find an injustice taking place in your community, when you hear uninformed statements brought forth by someone in power, and when you see others suffering from the same plight in which you are in, what would you do? Would you sit and silently watch hoping that another person at another time will stand up and correct what is wrong? Or would you take it upon yourself to become an engaged voice for what is just, not only unto yourself, but for thousands of others in a similar situation?

Many people struggle with the tension within being complacent and sitting amongst the crowd hoping to not get noticed versus the urge to fight for truth, honesty, and fairness. Some overcome and choose the path of righteousness to advocate for the rights of all humans and set straight distorted information. Freedom Resource Center would like to highlight one individual who stood to be heard, Cindy Kille.

Following the failure of the North Dakota House of Representatives to pass a bill (SB 2331) which would have provided an income tax credit for businesses that hire people with disabilities and the misinformed comments by Rep. Headland (R-Montpelier), Cindy decided to set the record straight according to her life experience. In order to get her voice out into the community, Cindy wrote a letter to the editor responding to Rep. Headland's comments and expressed the struggle that people with disabilities have when it comes to employment.

I took a moment to sit down with Cindy to ask why she decided to write the letter and how she felt once she saw it published.

Q: Why did you want to write a letter to the editor?

Cindy: I wanted to be heard somehow and I felt like this was my opportunity. I kept wondering if Rep. Headland would have said what he did if he knew someone with a disability.

Q: How did you feel when you saw it published?

Cindy: I was nervous. I felt like this was a dream that I had done this.

Q: Did you receive any feedback?

Cindy: My family was very proud of me. They knew my letter was written from the heart. Also, at a conference in

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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.
Unemployment with a Disability

I would like to respond to Rep. Craig Headland's comments about a failed bill in the ND House (SB 2331) which would have provided businesses with tax credits for hiring people with disabilities. To paraphrase Rep. Headland, “people with disabilities who are employable already have jobs.” Being someone with a disability, I know this is simply not true.

I have had a lot of difficulty becoming employed throughout my life, including my marriage to a person with a disability. I was able to go back to school and get a Master’s of Science in Educational Technology from Minnesota State Community and Technical College. Even after receiving my degree, I still had difficulty becoming employed. I have tried many different things to become employed. Yet, because of my disability, my age, and my lack of experience, companies have been reluctant to hire me.

I know it is illegal to discriminate hiring someone because of a disability, but I am still afraid to mention I have one on my application or during the interview. This bill, when Rep. Headland voted against it, could have helped eliminate that extra and provided businesses an incentive to hire people with disabilities. We are just like everyone else, we want responsibility and we want the feeling of accomplishment that comes with a job that provides a livable wage. Rep. Headland, I am a person with a disability and I am employable. Your lack of understanding negatively effects those of us with disabilities.

Cindy Kle
Fargo, North Dakota

Freedom’s Annual Meeting will be held September 15th at the Ramada Plaza Suite in Fargo.

Check out our new website: www.freedomrc.org
A revolution in action does not come simply out of wish or want. The change in thought and behavior does not take hold over night. A revolutionary shift in perception may not take effect in one cataclysmic moment. Instead, revolutionary change is a prolonged, hard-fought journey that starts with a small act.

For those who watch television, you have probably seen the commercial in which a person witnesses a small act of kindness toward a stranger. In turn, the witness helps another stranger. This is a demonstration on how the small acts in life have grand outcomes if momentum builds in the same direction. In the commercial, what started as one act of kindness spawned several other actions multiplying the outcome of one simple act.

What we need now in order to progress into a secure tomorrow are small acts. The federal government is a statement on how to address a number of issues, many of which affect each of us including: health care, unemployment in a horrendous economy, and social safety programs. Much of the “sensational” coverage on these stories is about who is politically winning the fight and which party will benefit more. If the story isn’t about politicians and their political posturing, it is about the increasing dollar amount our country is in debt. Isn’t something missing in this coverage, like say, the effects these decisions will have on actual people?

Minnesota’s State Government is in dire straits as well. A disagreement between both parties on how to balance the state’s budget has the state in a government shutdown. By the time this article is published, we will know whether their “adult conversations” had any real impact or if those layoffs notices have turned into a full-fledged, real layoff. Again, the conversation is who will win if there is a shutdown, the Democratic Governor or the Republican-led Legislature? Missing from the coverage is whether people with disabilities will have the adequate state health care they rely on during this shutdown. You know—the people.

We need small acts of communication and protest to put a face and a story to the numbers our elected leaders seem to be more concerned about. Perhaps they don’t have the stories because they aren’t hearing them from us, the actual people affected by their actions. Let’s create the narrative to these arbitrary cuts being proposed at all levels of government. The small act of calling or writing your representative may be the catalyst that changes their vote or opens their mind to a different world view. We need to provide substance on what is working and what needs to work more efficiently. Representatives at all levels are in dire need of this right now.

Write a letter to your newspaper to create a public conversation on the impact social programs have on people with disabilities. This creates awareness for those who may have simply overlooked the very real implications a reduction in services will mean. In fact, it has the potential to cultivate an even larger outcry for action, which can build momentum in our favor. I encourage you to read my other article in this edition in which I interviewed Cindy Kile who undertook this challenge herself.

My point is this; it doesn’t take an almighty superhero to create a climate for change. It begins with one voice and one act in hopes of inspiring others to follow suit. One voice becoming a collection of voices with a shared goal. It’s been called grassroots before, and it’s exactly what we need in this time of great uncertainty.

New Employee

Racene Verulud is Freedom Resource Center’s new Nursing Home Transition Coordinator in the Fargo office. Her position will include transitioning people from a nursing facility into a setting in their own community with services still provided through the program of Money follows the People. When asked about her goals for the position Race said, “I truly want the integration of all individuals back into their communities with home and community based services.”

Originally from Osseo, Minnesota, Racene went on to attend the University of North Dakota where she received her Bachelor of Social Work and later became a Licensed Social Worker. She brings excellent experience to her position at Freedom. Racene’s previous work includes the Director of Sales, Marketing and Social Work for Golden Living Center and the Manager of Social Services and Personal Care for Essentia Health St. Mary’s in Detroit Lakes.

During down time, Racene enjoys the beautiful lakes country while spending time with friends and family.

Freedom Resource Center is thrilled to introduce Racene. Please join us in welcoming her to our organization.
Summertime Fun
By Terry Christensen

Summer is here and we all are thinking of warm weather plans and activities. If you enjoy sports, here are a few ideas and resources to help you plan some summer fun.

Play ball (snag a fly ball). Wear your glove and sit in the aisle. Sitting in an aisle seat makes for easier catching of fly balls.

For those of you who enjoy adaptive baseball the Foothills Park & Recreation has a nice website describing the first accessible baseball diamond in the state of Colorado. And the site Dedicated2Hall.org gives information about rules & regulations for various sports including baseball.

Hook a Fish: Go for the small fry. They are easier to catch and very exciting which makes your fishing trip more likely to be successful. Talk to the locals. The locals know the fishing reports and have great suggestions for local fishing holes you may wish to try. Use the right bait and watch your bobber.

For fishing there are many adaptive fishing rods available. www.accessiblefishing.org is a great resource for accessible fishing rod ideas. Some of the rods use a sip and puff technique to cast and retrieve. Or they also can be controlled by a joystick or mounted on a wheelchair.

Ride a bike: A bicycle-store professional should be able to determine an appropriate-size bike frame for you using your inseam as a guide. The most popular types of accessible bikes include:

- Recumbent bicycles
- Handcycles
- Mountain bikes

- E-bikes

E-bikes
At Cycle Electric International Consulting Group’s “Electric Bikes,” you’ll find an overview of the electric bike, including everything from power-driven two-wheelers to “personal activity vehicles.” These are elaborate bicycles that include not only a motor, so you can rest your legs in between pedaling, but a high back seat and optional fold-down armrests, so you can relax the rest of your body as well. There are numerous other e-bike manufacturers and dealers out there, so definitely compare features and prices.

Handcycles
Visit bike-on.com for a quick but thorough overview of new and used handcycles, including descriptions and photographs of everything from the Top End XLT jr (a handcycle for children) to the Quikie Supor Spirit 470, an aerodynamically designed adult handcycle. Another helpful place is Family Village, which includes a comprehensive handcycle link list.

Mountain bikes
Handcycles are typically front-wheel drive, but One-Off Handcycles offers a rear-wheel driven model, which gives extra traction for climbing steep grades. A low-to-the-ground, three-wheeled bike, One-Off’s 24-speed handcycle can go almost anywhere a typical mountain bike can go. It offers a very tight nine-foot turning radius to boot.

Golfing
Get yourself out on the greens! The National Alliance for Accessible Golfing or www.accessgolf.org is a great place to get your accessible golfing information. It provides information on the rules and regulations of accessible golfing as well as accessible equipment.

3 quick tips for golfing:

- Alignment is the most important thing in golf. You will use golf alignment techniques each and every time you address the ball. So, always look for ways to “zero” your alignment. This is why you address the golf ball the same way each time.
- Chipping is much like putting but it requires left- or right-flight in the air—and is used to get over something. Remember, your chip to get over things, like a sand trap, water, or rough.
- Golf putting is a feeling process. What are you feeling? The touch of the putter on the ball. That touch must be solid to truly feel it. All of your efforts should be toward honing this feeling. Practice hitting the ball solid!

Taken from www.TipsForGolfing.com

Peer Mentor Spotlight
By Bobbi Munro
This issue’s Peer Mentor Spotlight is on Michelle Zentz. She lost her eyesight 19 years ago due to diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma. Michelle has Type 1 Diabetes with receiving several transplants including a kidney in 1990, pancreas in 1997 and another kidney in 2005.

Because Michelle lived in Arkansas at the time of the loss of her eyesight, she received training in activities of daily living from the Lions World Services for the Blind. They provided basic orientation, cane travel, comp for cars and some cooking.

Michelle also took medical transcription classes after becoming accredited to transcribe eye appointments.

Michelle has been a North Dakota Association of the Blind (NDAB) board member for many years and is the current president. Each year, NDAB sponsors a camp for individuals with loss of eyesight during the summer, as well as a family adjustment seminar each October. More information is available at the NDAB, visit their website at www.ndab.org. In North Dakota, people who have impairments related to eyesight may contact ND State Services for the Blind/School for the Blind. They can provide advice or center-based services. One of Michelle’s favorite services to access in North Dakota is the Talking Book service. Minnesota residents may contact State Services for the Blind to inquire about services.

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