

the Independent

A Publication of Freedom Resource
Center for Independent Living, Inc.

Winter 2010

Disability and Poverty

By Scott Burlingame
Assistant Program Director

Often times, throughout the history of the Independent Living movement, we have focused our efforts on creating an environment in which people with disability have a real opportunity to live life not in institutions, but rather in the community of their choosing. However, the issue of financial independence, living a life free of government assistance has not been addressed with the same commitment. Sadly today, significant numbers of people with disabilities are living in poverty, and many of the barriers they face in the path to independent living are not only barriers of disability, but also barriers of poverty.

According a poll taken by the National Council on Disability/Harris, people with disabilities are three times as likely to live in poverty as people without disabilities. According to the same poll, only 35 percent of people with disabilities reported being

employed full or part time, compared to 78 percent of those who do not have disabilities. This same survey shows that people with disabilities are less likely to visit a restaurant, to visit with friends or family, to obtain needed medical services, to graduate from High School, or to have access to transportation.

The first thing that we should do is expect real employment for all people with disabilities. We need to create a culture in which people with disabilities are expected to work in competitive, community based settings at the same rate as their non-disabled peers. There have recently been some significant improvements in this area. In Minnesota, the Employment First coalition has worked hard to re-define the employment expectations for people with disabilities. This effort has been repeated in dozens of states across the nation. At the same time, the APSE, a national organization with an exclusive focus on integrated employment and career advancement opportunities for individuals with disabilities, has issued a statement calling for phase out of sub-minimum wage by 2014.

Secondly, we must recognize and accept that many of the support programs that we have created in order to support people's basic needs, are creating a system in which people are afraid to work. While all support systems have a time and a place, we must expand work incentives and support programs to encourage people to find and keep employment. All support programs, including housing, food support, and financial aid, should encourage work, and not punish it.

Next, our schools and colleges must do a better job of preparing people with disabilities for employment. The accepted standard is that if a child with a disability has not worked by the time they are 20, there is only a 20% chance that they will ever work. Transition services should insure that by the time a student leaves high school, they have the necessary and practical skills they need in

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order to find a job that gives them the opportunity to find and sustain competitive employment throughout their lives.

In addition, we need to have Colleges and Technical Schools that are inviting and accommodating to the needs of students with disabilities. This will allow for students with disabilities of all ages to increase their knowledge and improve their personal economic earning power.

Finally, we must address the elephant in the room when it comes to people with disabilities who are living in poverty. One thing we talk about during our leadership class is that far too often People with Disabilities are content with accepting second class citizenship for themselves. This includes people who accept that they will live in poverty because they are disabled. In order to change this, people who are living in poverty must accept the fact that they must change some parts of their behavior and their expectations in order to move toward financial independence. This is extraordinarily difficult to do, and can only be done with lots of support.

I want to make something very clear. The answer to assisting people with disabilities out of poverty is neither to increase benefits to some number that brings them above the poverty level, or to take people off of benefits and ask them to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps.” Those two extremes are just too simple, and neither will work. The answer has to be to allow people to meet their most basic needs while creating, supporting and encouraging an environment in which people work towards financial independence. At Freedom, we are committed to doing just that by providing people with the advocacy, skills training, and peer mentoring they need as they work towards financial independence.

What's Wrong with this Picture?



Public accommodations (privately owned businesses) are required to remove barriers only when it is “readily achievable” to do so. “Readily achievable” means easily accomplishable and able to be carried out without much difficulty or expense. Determining if barrier removal is readily achievable is necessarily a case-by-case judgment. Factors to consider include:

The nature and cost of the action

The overall financial resources of the site or sites involved

If applicable, the overall financial resources of any parent corporation or entity; or other factors.

Contrary to popular belief, there is NO GRANDFATHER CLAUSE for older buildings.

From Where I Sit

By Nate Aalgaard, Executive Director

This issue of the Independent deals with poverty and disability. I count myself as fortunate to have a good job. I use the word fortunate, because I don't think it's all about effort, or natural ability. My life would be much different if I had not gone back to work. Sometimes there are circumstances that help you along the way, and that was the case for me.

One of the circumstances I encountered after my injury was a lack of money. I didn't have much in the first place, being a recent high school graduate. I had bought this car, which sucked away pretty much everything I earned. So after ending up in the hospital flat on my back I got on Social Security Disability Income (SSDI.) I think my starting monthly check was about \$179. Now, 32 years later, that might have doubled to somewhere around \$350. That won't get you very far.

Another factor was moving back home with my parents. Now, there's a lot to be said for having a supportive family. There's also a lot to be said for moving on and starting your own life away from them. An 18-year-old might not want to go to bed right after the news and weather were over. Staying up late enough to watch part of Johnny Carson was definitely out of the question. And an 18-year-old might have different ideas of where he should be on a Saturday night. You get the picture – the circumstance gave me some motivation to move on.

To my parents' credit, they were in favor, not because I was a bad kid or anything, but because they wanted me to be successful and productive. They strongly encouraged me to go to college and get a degree. I will admit, I was pretty reluctant – even scared.

I was physically very dependent on my family for all my personal care issues. I didn't really know anybody in Grand Forks, which was where UND, the most accessible college in the region, was located. I didn't have a driver's license, couldn't take care of a lot of my basic needs, and was probably insecure about myself because of my recent disability. But I went, and I'm glad I did.

So after spending five years getting that degree, I went out to find my first big job. It wasn't easy. I think I've written before about the interview with Kmart, where the guy told me that they expect their management personnel to help unload trucks. Obviously, he and I both knew that wasn't going to happen. In those days employers didn't have to make any kind of accommodations for people with disabilities. Remember now, this was over 25 years ago. I interviewed with a few other companies around the same time. For one reason or another I didn't get any job offers.

I remember one meeting with my vocational counselor during my job search. He told me I should move to the Twin Cities and start looking for a job there, because there were so many more possibilities. I thought, "Here we go again, moving to someplace where I don't know anybody." I decided that I didn't want to live there, and continued my search in the immediate Grand Forks area. It got sort of discouraging. After a while you just start going through the motions and not expecting anything positive to happen.

But after looking for a job off and on for about a year, I finally got one. It was in something I didn't have any training in, but it was a job. It was with a nonprofit doing public relations, which was quite



Nate Aalgaard

unrelated to my business degree. They'd been able to get some funding from vocational rehabilitation for on-the-job training, so I went for it. I found out I liked it, so you never know where your career will take you.

It wasn't easy getting that first job, and it certainly hasn't always been easy continuing to work. I've spent a lot of time and money dealing with medical equipment, aches and pains, and accommodations in order to do a quality job. I've been fortunate to have a supportive wife and family, a great board of directors here at Freedom reasonably good health, and the skills and interest in this type of work. It has definitely been worth the effort.

**Be sure to
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of Freedom
on Facebook
and Twitter
(freedomrc)**

Employment Resources

Job Service North Dakota

Website: www.jobsnd.com

Address: 1350 32nd St S
Fargo, ND 58103

Phone Number: 239-7300

TTY: 1-800-366-6888

Description: Job Service will assist consumers in creating a personal profile, build and store a resume, save job searches, apply for jobs online, use the Virtual Recruiter to look for jobs while online and access current labor market information. They also assist consumers in applying for unemployment insurance.

WIA Program (Workforce Investment Act)

Website: www.jobsnd.com

Address: 1350 32nd St. S
Fargo, ND 58103

Description: WIA is a program designed for at-risk students and adults with disabilities needing extra training on specific employment-related skills. WIA can also assist with job placement.

Work Incentives and Planning Assistance-ND

Website: www.minotrehabservices.com

Phone Number: 1-800-258-8132
or 701-478-9122

Description: Rehab Services, Inc. (RSI) operates a grant project funded by the Social Security Administration to provide Benefit Planning Assistance and Outreach Services to individuals receiving SSI and SSDI. The purpose of the program is to give beneficiaries accurate information regarding their benefits and how working may impact

the benefits they receive. RSI provides this service to beneficiaries across the state of North Dakota.

Work Incentives Connection-MN

Website: www.mnworkincentives.com

Phone Number: 651-632-5113
or Toll-free 1-800-976-6728

Description: The Minnesota Work Incentives Connection can teach you the effect work will have on your government benefits, uncovering new choices and opportunities for you to be more in charge of your life. The Connection serves people with all types of disabilities and those who assist them in going to work. Services are available everywhere in Minnesota and most are free of charge.

The Minnesota WorkForce Center

Website: www.positivelyminnesota.com

Phone Number: 888-GET-JOBS
(888-438-5627) to locate a Minnesota WorkForce Center near you

Description: WorkForce Centers help job seekers find employment, help businesses find workers, and help anyone at any stage explore and plan careers. Minnesota has a system of nearly 50 WorkForce Centers statewide. Each offers a knowledgeable staff to guide you in your employment search. They also provide essential tools to make your job search a success. Most services are free to charge.

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AT Item of the Month



The Handy Switch is just that, it's handy. This device uses a wireless switch to control the lighting in your house. No more fumbling across a dark room to turn on the lights. You can control your lighting 60 feet away. It's also great for individuals with limited fine motor skills and who cannot turn a light switch. To check out this AT item of the month, contact Freedom at (701) 478-9459 you can also check out the Handy Switch online at www.seenontv.com.

Employment Resources

Vocational Rehabilitation-ND

Website: www.nd.gov/dhs/rcs/about/contact.html

Jamestown Address:

520 Third Street NW
PO Box 2055
Jamestown, ND 58402-2055

Phone Number: 701-253-6388
or Toll-free 800-639-6292

Fargo Address:

2624 Ninth Avenue SW
Fargo, ND 58103-2350

Phone Number: 701-298-4459
or Toll-free: 888-342-4900

TTY: 701-298-4450

Description: The primary mission is to assist North Dakotans with disabilities to improve their employment opportunities and to assist North Dakota businesses in finding solutions to their disability-related issues. Through this "dual client" approach, we assist individuals with permanent injuries, illness, or impairments to achieve competitive employment and increased independence. We also assist business owners and employers through full service business consultation on a variety of business and disability-related areas.

Vocational Rehabilitation-MN

Website: www.positivileyminnesota.com/Jobseeker/People_with_Disabilities/

Phone Number: 1-888-438-5627

Description: With the right kind of training, preparation and workplace accommodations, people with disabilities can have rewarding careers. If you have a disability that makes it hard for you to get and keep a job, you may be eligible for a variety

of counseling, training, job skills and job placement services.

Services vary according to individual needs. We work with you to determine which are most appropriate for you. Then you and your counselor develop a plan to help you reach your goals. Vocational Rehabilitation Services unit can help you prepare for, find and keep a job, and live as independently as possible.

Job Placement Agencies

There are multiple job placement agencies in the area. Placement agencies can provide either temporary or a permanent solution to your job search, placing individuals in jobs matching their abilities. Most agencies interview and test candidates for the purpose of achieving suitable job placements where there is a good match between management needs and employee qualifications.

Jobsmart & Moneysmart

Website: www.freedomrc.org

Phone Number: 701-478-0459 or V/TTY 1-800-450-0459

Description: Freedom Resource Center teaches a variety of independent living skill training to people with disabilities. Jobsmart, is a interactive based curriculum that provides the consumer with the soft skills needed to either gain or maintain employment. Moneysmart, is an interactive based curriculum that teaches banking basics from opening and maintaining a bank account or purchasing your own home. Each curriculum can be taught in group or one-on-one settings.

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

Legislative Update

By Scott Burlingame
Assistant Program Director

Federal

As I write this, the US Senate is in the final stages of negotiations of the first major health care reform in US history. Health Care reform has been the number one priority in Washington since at least July, and hours and hours of work by people both in support of and against different parts of the bill have come down to this.

Because this is still a changing bill, it is hard to adequately gauge how it will affect people with disabilities; however, it does appear that it will end the unfair discrimination against people with disabilities by insurance companies. This will make it more practical for people with a history of health problems to purchase needed insurance.

For up to day impact of Health Care reform and its effects on people with disabilities, visit our blog at www.areavoices.com/freedom.

North Dakota

Freedom staff attended the Department of Human Services Stakeholder Meetings in Fargo and Jamestown. We relayed that people have reported to us, that when they attempted to access mental health services from the Human Service Center, they were told that no new referrals for case management services were being accepted. As a result of this, we have seen an increase in the number of people attempting to access our services as an alternative to case management services.

We have also seen an increasing number of people who report that they were removed from Mental Health Case Management for non-compliance issues. This seems to be happening as a result of the shortage of case management services, however, we feel this non-compliance, often a manifestation of one's diagnosis, and the very reason they need case management services.

Minnesota

On October 13th, Freedom was able to host the Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (MN-CCD) for a town hall forum on the effects of the Minnesota budget deficit and associated budget cuts on people with disabilities. Over 30 concerned citizens attended, as well as Rep. Paul Marquart. We were again reminded that the budget will not be balanced without cuts; however, it is the duty and responsibility of all of us to work to ensure that the budget is not balanced unfairly on the backs of people with disabilities.

**Minnesota
Legislative
Session Begins
Thursday, Feb. 4, 2010**

Freedom Celebrates 20 Years



David Shove
2009 Advocate
of the Year



Emma Kotzer
Youth Advocate
of the Year



Cindy Kile
Volunteer
of the Year

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New Staff



Tanya Stoll

Tanya is an Independent Living Advocate in the Fergus Falls office. Her duties include assisting consumers to set goals, develop strategies and make progress towards their goals. She also advocates for consumers and provides independent living skill assessment and training. Tanya is married with two young girls. She is a graduate of Minnesota State University Moorhead with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology. In her spare time she enjoys spending time with her girls, going horseback riding and shopping.

Terryl Christensen

Terryl is an Information Specialist in the Fargo office. Her duties include providing information and referral assistance on a walk-in, telephone, mail, and email basis. She also assesses and screens consumers for participation in Freedom Resource Center and community services. Terryl is married and has two cats. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Minnesota State University Moorhead in Communications with an emphasis in Public Relations. She enjoys reading, exercising and spending time with friends and family in her spare time.



Jenny Snyder

Jenny is a Resource Specialist in the Fargo office. Her duties include assessing and screening consumers for participation in Freedom Resource Center and community services, providing information and referral services to walk-in, telephone and email inquiries. Jenny also maintains the mailing list with multiple search options and maintains the records and forms. Jenny has a Bachelor of Science degree in Social Work from Minnesota State University Moorhead and is in the process of applying to graduate school for Social Work. She enjoys scrapbooking, hunting, fishing, being outdoors, shopping, and spending time with family and friends.

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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.

New Freedom Resource Center in Wahpeton, North Dakota

Freedom Resource Center would like to introduce a new satellite office in Wahpeton, ND. Thanks to state funding from both Minnesota and North Dakota, which allowed us to open this office and better serve our consumers in the Wahpeton and Breckenridge area. Please join us for an open house on January 14th from 2-4 p.m. at Westwood Office Park, 315 N 11th St. Suite G Wahpeton, ND 58075 or call Joyce at the office: 701-672-1648, cell phone: 701-640-7418 or V/TTY: 800-450-0459.

