

THE

Independent

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

FEBRUARY 2017

FYI

Jamestown

Beginning Weaving Class

Thursday, February 16, 2017

1:30 – 3:30pm

James River Senior Center

Call Beth at 701-252-4693 to register

Moorhead

Freedom In Action: Photo Coaster

Tuesday, February 21, 2017

1:30-3:30 pm

Call Tiffany to register by February 15

Location to be announced

Wahpeton

Mask Making: Unmasking Brain

Injury

March 9, 2017

2:00 – 3:30 pm

Optimist Shelter, Wahpeton

To register call Joyce at 701-672-1648 or

Pam at 701-683-6850

Fergus Falls

Freedom In Action: Paint Stick

HOME sign

Friday, March 24, 2017

2:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Freedom Resource Center

Conference Room #3 - 125 West

Lincoln Ave

Call Tanya at 218-998-1799 to register.

Space is limited

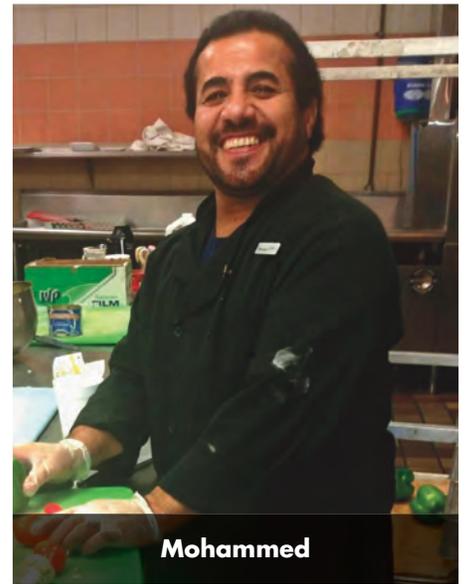
Pursuit of the American Dream

In 1994 Mohammed moved to Fargo from Saudi Arabia. Originally from Iraq, Mohammed, 47, left his home country after the gulf war. There, he worked as a machinist and mechanic. When he got to Fargo he attempted to go to school, but was unsuccessful. For several years he worked as a machinist and a cook at several Fargo restaurants, which he greatly enjoyed. "I love to cook," he said.

Periodically Mohammed's back would lock up on him, rendering him unable to move. One problem he had with the hospital, in 1994, was communication. "Even though they had an interpreter who spoke Arabic, he was a different dialect than me," Mohammed said. "So what I said he did not say the same thing to the doctors."

After five or six trips to the emergency room for injections to ease the pain, a doctor finally prescribed an MRI. He's had four surgeries since then to correct the problem. He went to Minneapolis for two months of therapy. When he got out a family from Moorhead let him stay with them for two years. He spent 16 months using a wheelchair.

Mohammed first contacted Cindy Gabbert at Freedom in 2014 to work



on becoming a US citizen. As part of that, he wanted to be tested for a possible learning disability, as this was making it difficult to study for the test. Meanwhile, he and Cindy also worked on a housing application and Supplemental Security Income, as he was at that time unable to work due to the back injury. He went to the Adult Learning Center for help with English.

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The main goal, though, remained to become a US citizen. "When I first met Mohammed he was highly motivated to become a citizen," Cindy said. He worked very hard to prepare for the examination." Together, Mohammed and Cindy worked on getting a medical exemption for the reading and writing portion of the test. This was not because Mohammed didn't know English. His verbal skills are quite good. His learning disability impaired his ability to learn to read and write.

Mohammed took the citizenship test in May 2015. It consisted of 100 questions, of which the computer selected 10 for him to answer. Of the 10, he had to answer at least six correctly in order to pass. He and Cindy worked on some learning and memorization techniques to help him be successful. He passed the test with ease. He even wanted to keep going, but the tester said he had passed and that was not necessary.

So, almost too excited for words, Mohammed became a US citizen at an official ceremony at the Avalon in Fargo on September 13, 2016. Cindy attended the event to celebrate the big day with him. "She's fantastic. She did a great job," he said.

His determination and drive is apparent. He had to work through a serious back injury, lack of English proficiency, and a learning disability on his path to independence and eventually US citizenship. Now his goal is to remain independent in his own home and get back to at least part time employment.

But before he can pursue his next goals, Mohammed must travel back to Iraq to take care of some legal business for his family, as his parents have both passed away. He is not sure how long that will take, as government services can be quite slow and unpredictable. He is currently making sure he has everything in place to go on the trip. For Mohammed, his adventure, in his home country, America, continues.

From Where I Sit

My last couple of articles may have been a bit negative, but that is life sometimes. We all have issues. The main thing isn't what you are going through, it's what you decide to do about it. That's what we try to do in Independent Living-improve our situation. So this year there was an effort from the disability community to celebrate one of the leaders of our movement.

January 23 was Ed Roberts' Day. Often called the father of the Independent Living movement, Roberts was a pioneer in the disability rights movement in the 1960's. He did it all after he got polio at age 14. Paralyzed from the neck down, Ed had to fight for the right to go to college. He had to live in a hospital because there were no accessible dorm rooms. Nowadays we expect access to higher education. That's called progress.

Ed founded the Berkeley Center for Independent Living, the first independent living service and advocacy program run by and for people with disabilities. Today, Centers for Independent Living exist in every state in our nation, supporting people to live independently in the community of their choice. Even though he had a very significant disability, Ed traveled all over the country promoting disability rights. He also made a trip to Russia in 1992. Ed Roberts passed away on March 14, 1995, but leaves a lasting legacy of disability advocacy. I am able to do my job here at Freedom because of him.

I was talking with a friend the other day about what I wanted to do after high school (almost 40 years ago.) I honestly had no idea. I didn't have any concept of disability, other than the limited exposure I had with it as an able-bodied kid. A neighbor had Downs Syndrome. My Grandpa hired a guy with polio to fix his car once in a while. We often visited my other set of grandparents, who worked at a nursing facility. My brother and I ran up and down the big ramp they had, which we thought was fun. I had little personal contact with the nursing home residents or any other people with disabilities.

A car wreck in 1977 changed all that. Like Ed Roberts, I found myself suddenly in the world of disability. There were lots of tough times, but eventually I became immersed in this thing called Independent Living. Because of that I've been places and done things I never would have had the opportunity to do otherwise. I don't think I was somehow predestined to be paralyzed and do this job. But, like Ed Roberts, I have tried to use what talents and ability I have to live out what I believe in. For that opportunity I am very grateful.



Nate Aalgaard,
Executive Director

Informed Choice in Employment Project



Abbey Krogstad,
Integrated Employment Specialist



Tom Thompson,
Integrated Employment Specialist

Abbey Krogstad and Tom Thompson, Integrated Employment Specialists with Freedom Resource Center, do their fair share of traveling around west central Minnesota. In their short time of informing people of the changes that have taken place with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), they have met many great people.

One person is Lori, who is currently working in a sheltered workshop for subminimum wage. They went to her place of employment and gave a short PowerPoint presentation on the Informed Choice project. After giving the presentation, one of Freedom's Integrated Employment Specialists sat down with her and completed the interview process.

During the interview, Lori said she would like to work within the community, but feels she still wants help from staff. The next step in the process is to meet with her team and identify resources to help fulfil her desire to work out in the community and pursue her dream of working in an office.

Freedom Resource Center's Integrated Employment Specialists will help Lori self-advocate to her team for what she wants. The goal is to inform people of their options and let them know what is possible. Lori is a prime example that once you voice what you would like to do, people are there to help you along the way. The staff at Freedom are excited to see what the future holds for Lori and everyone involved in this process.

WIOA was signed into law on July 22, 2014. It replaced the Workforce Investment Act and amended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In updating vocational rehabilitation services under the Rehabilitation Act, WIOA seeks to address a number of employment challenges facing people with disabilities. The majority of people with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) have been either unemployed or underemployed despite their ability and desire to work in the community. Many have been placed in "prevocational" programs and "disability-only" workshops where they are paid below minimum wage and have had little expectation of moving into integrated employment.

According to the 2013 American Community Survey (ACS), the estimated employment rate of working-age (16 years and older) people with disabilities in the United States was 22.5 percent; far less than the estimated

65.4 percent employment rate for working age people without disabilities. The ACS also indicated that median annual earnings of working age people with disabilities was \$20,885, while that of their non-disabled counterparts was \$30,928.

According to the National Report on Employment Services and Outcomes, in Fiscal Year 2010, approximately 20 percent of people receiving day services from an I/DD state agency did so in an integrated setting while the remainder participated in facility-based and non-work settings. On average, people with I/DD who have exited a vocational rehabilitation (VR) program worked 23.5 hours per week and earned \$200 per week in 2010. This is far less than their peers with other disabilities (who worked approximately 31 hours and earned \$400 per week) and those without disabilities (who earned approximately \$600 per week) during the same time period.

WIOA reauthorizes the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) through FY 2020. In addition to reauthorizing WIA, WIOA includes amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which significantly impact people with disabilities. As amended over the years, the Rehabilitation Act authorizes grants for vocational rehabilitation programs, supported employment, independent living, and client assistance. Further, the Rehabilitation Act authorizes research activities, the work of the National Council on Disability, as well as a variety of provisions focused on rights, advocacy and protections for individuals with disabilities. If you would like further information, call one of our Integrated Employment Specialists.

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What’s Wrong With This Picture?

What is Wrong? There should be a grab bar on the back wall. The counter is too close to the toilet. A wheelchair user cannot back in alongside for transferring. The flush handle is in the corner, not on the open side of the toilet. The toilet paper dispenser is not 7 – 9 inches in front of the bowl. It looks to be slightly behind the front of the bowl, and it looks like the toilet paper is gone. Emergency! What is that white device on the side wall, near the corner with the blue line coming down from it? Is that an emergency pull cord? If it is, a person would have difficulty reaching it when it is behind the toilet, near the corner.

