On the morning of August 15, 2011 Eldon Haugen knew something was wrong – terribly wrong. He woke up lying on the floor on his stomach, unable to move his right side. He got a hold of his phone and called his workplace. “I think I’ve had a stroke,” he said. “Pretty soon I could hear the sirens coming.”

Eldon, 63, suddenly found himself in a whole new world, that of being somebody with a very serious medical condition. He spent time in the hospital, and eventually moved to ManorCare nursing facility. That’s where he got in contact with Freedom Resource Center. Freedom assisted him with applying for benefit programs that he now needed, helped him get his finances straightened out, as well as with support in his fight to become independent. “When I met Eldon, he was determined to get out of the nursing home,” said Diane Siekaniec, Independent Living Advocate. “I told him that I worked my way out of here, and so could he.”

“It’s been a very enlightening experience, all of it. The support; it’s a great place.”

In February 2012 Eldon did leave the nursing facility, against medical advice. He wanted to go back to his Fargo home. He was still having a lot of difficulty getting around, doing everyday tasks. There were many barriers for someone barely able to walk. Plus it was a very icy winter. “I remember the first time he tried to get into my truck,” Diane said. “I wasn’t sure he was going to make it, but eventually he did.”

Three years later, Eldon is back to driving his van. He even takes a few road trips up to Norman County where some of his relatives live. Sometimes he brings a friend along with him. That friend is Dan Nelson. After Eldon got back home and got some of his strength and mobility back, he wanted to do something for others. He called Freedom and asked if there was anything he could do. He became a peer mentor, and was assigned to work with Dan. Now, they spend 8 to 12 hours per month working on goals, or just having fun.

They are both huge fans of wrestling, like the old-style stuff we used to watch on TV -- Vern Gagne, Jesse ‘The Body’ Ventura and those types of wrestlers. Eldon has a bunch of wrestling matches recorded, and he and Dan occasionally enjoy watching one together, or a live match on TV. “I’m pretty much up on everything wrestling,” Eldon said with a chuckle.

One of the issues Eldon struggled with after having his stroke was socialization. He was reluctant to go out in public, being uncomfortable with people staring at him. Gradually he has gotten used to being out more, starting with attending some monthly Freedom In Action events. One of his goals was to get out more. The other was to help somebody else. Eldon has done great work on both goals, and seems happy and content with his life at this point.

It wasn’t an easy journey though. Eldon still had ambitions to go back to work, although the business he was at had closed a couple of months after his stroke. He worked as a bookkeeper and parts manager at a machine shop. Previous career attempts at computer programming and insurance proved unfulfilling to him. He loved his career at the machine shop, where he worked for over 25 years.

He also loved music. “I come from a very musical family,” he said. Many family members play a number of instruments. Eldon was in a band for a few years, playing both guitar and piano. Never having formal lessons, the family passed down the gift of music from generation to generation. Still weak and tight on his right side, Eldon is not able to play instruments at this time, but has not totally given up that ambition. He is a big fan of Irish and Scottish dance music, and still owns several musical instruments.

Right now Eldon hopes to continue to get stronger. Once an avid weight lifter, he needs to get some of his weights out of his storage shed and into his house. He’d also like to get some type of leg-press machine. He eats lightly and avoids sweets.

Eldon has high praise for the mentoring program. “It’s great getting to know the person,” he said. “Freedom has helped me with my emotional needs. It’s been a very enlightening experience, all of it. The support; it’s a great place.”
New Art Opportunity

Freedom in Action is brought to you each month to liven things up, teach us a new skill and simply help us get involved with each other and our community. Through this program the attendees have been able to participate in a variety of events from Lefse making to Meditation. Starting Wednesday, March 11 an Art class will be offered from 7-8:30 pm at Freedom’s Fargo office. The class will be taught once a week for eight weeks by MSU-M art and special education student Elizabeth Lempona.

Diane Siekaniec, an Independent Living Advocate at Freedom Resource Center, is a strong advocate for choosing art as a form of social interaction. Talking with Diane helps people understand better the importance of Art in her life, but foremost in our daily lives, because in her own words, “Art is everywhere. You remove art from our societies and there’s nothing much left.”

This mindset is crucial to determine the profile of people who are encouraged to attend this art class. According to Diane, art is a way to meet new people, add excitement to your life, find out how disciplined you are, keep you focused on something new, expand your horizons, and challenge your creativeness. When asked if there were any health benefit to art, Diane immediately replied, “Art is healing. In a way it unifies the mind, the body, and the soul in one action to give birth to some of the finest pieces.”

What are the requirements to take this class? This will be a beginning drawing class and will cover all aspects of drawing and materials. Sketchpads will be provided. You will need to bring your own pencils. Later in the class you will be using colored pencils, chalk pastels and charcoal. A one-time $10 fee covers all eight classes. Diane finished by stressing that passion and discipline are the backbone of a good artist and asks you beloved readers, consumers, community members, donors: “Do you have what it takes?”

What’s Wrong With This Picture?

Upcoming Freedom In Action
Lisbon: Cooking with NDSU Extension
Feb 12; March 5, 12 & 19
Courthouse meeting room

Wahpeton: Nourish your Heart
Cooking with NDSU extension
February 19, 1-3 pm
Law Enforcement Center Community Room
Register with Rhonda at the Extension Service
701-672-7793

Fargo: Owl Handwarmer project
Feb 26, 1:30-3:30 pm
2701 9th Ave. S., Suite H, Fargo

Detroit Lakes: Bingo
Feb 27, 2:00-3:00 pm
Freedom office *Space is limited.
Pre-register at 218-844-5880

Jamestown: Journaling
Feb. 27 & March 20, 1:30-3:30 pm
Atonement Lutheran Church

OPEN HOUSE
Freedom Moorhead office
Feb. 26, 2-4 pm
1132 28th Ave. S., Suite 105A

SAVE THE DATE!
Freedom Appreciation Luncheon
May 5, Ramada Plaza & Suites, Fargo

Door is not accessible.

Why bother having an Accessible Parking Space when the door is not accessible? An ambulatory individual may be able to use the door and would be happy to have a parking space near the door. If space does not exist to build a ramp the business can make other accommodations. Posting their phone number in the window or installing a button to push for service (or both) could be a reasonable accommodation to allow access to the goods offered.
A few weeks ago the pastor at our church, Rev. Aaron Suomala Folsom, started his sermon by saying that he had been thinking about his identity recently. He said that society tends to identify us in three ways: first, by what kind of job we have; second, by how many things we possess; and third, by what people say about us. I thought these statements were particularly thought-provoking, as so many people seem to be in a mad scramble to satisfy their longing for money, bigger houses or toys, or perfecting their image.

We had a similar discussion at our staff meeting last week. We talk about how we can build rapport with the people who come to us for services. One of the pitfalls of building this rapport is that it sometimes does not take on the standard nature of social interaction. It’s not a good idea to start a conversation with someone who does not work by asking what type of job they have.

Many of the people we work with have had tough times. They most likely do not have a job. They probably don’t have much money. There is no large comfortable home, or nice new car, or fun vacation to a warm climate in the winter. These people are struggling just to survive and make ends meet. Some have no health insurance, or even a place to live.

So when people come to us we need to be cognizant of these issues, and respect them simply for being our fellow citizens and neighbors. We need to acknowledge their value whether they have a job or not. Many times, our staff will ask about what type of activities they enjoy doing, or how they spend their day. We often try to share a bit about ourselves, because many of us who have disabilities have been through difficult times too. Sometimes we just listen.

At Freedom, we do believe in the value of employment. However, that is not possible for everyone. Many issues come into play, such as physical health, other responsibilities, transportation barriers, educational issues, or outright discrimination. We also believe that everyone has value and can contribute to society. Many are volunteers with various nonprofit organizations. The feature story in this month’s newsletter is about mentoring. We have some 50 people who have gone through training, background checks, and have signed up to give freely of their time to help someone else.

Others help with special events. One volunteer was busy handing out postcards to let people know that Giving Hearts Day was coming up on February 12. Others assist with special events, and some just invite other people to come along with them so that they can experience the type of services that Freedom has to offer. Everyone, no matter their ability, can give someone encouragement. Many of our programs are done in groups, so that we can be more social with each other, and reduce the crushing burden of isolation.

Over the years hundreds of people have assisted Freedom in accomplishing its mission: To provide services that increase independence for people with disabilities. All of it has had a part in creating a successful organization. So next time you run into somebody, think about identity. Think about a person’s worth for things other than job status, possessions, or image.
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

“Helping people with disabilities live more independently for 25 years”

Go to www.freedomrc.org & click Donate with impact

Thanks for remembering us on Giving Hearts Day!

Front: Wanda, Mark, Tawnya, Nate, Alex  Back: Diane, Joyce, Pam, Jim, Cindy, Tanya, Angie, Nathan, Beth LaDonna, Jerry