Ty Kersting, Holly Sabinash, and Trevor Berg are getting ready to leave high school. They are all in Mrs. Botz’ Transition class in Valley City. All three seem confident and ready to go. In addition to services from Valley City Schools, they have been working with Beth Dewald from Freedom Resource Center. They were gracious enough to agree to an interview, so we could report about this important service that is available to high school-age students with disabilities.

Beth is an Independent Living Advocate for Freedom in the Jamestown office. She also provides services in Barnes County. Once a week when Beth is in the classroom, they start the day with introductions. The eight students in the class answer basic questions about themselves such as, “What is your favorite movie, favorite holiday, or favorite food?” Developing social skills will be important to them as they go through the rest of their lives. So will other things, like learning how to get along in the workplace. She uses curriculum such as Money Smart and Skills to Pay the Bills to help bring the lessons to the students.

Holly, 20, says she enjoys the Job Smart videos. The main character, Whiney Walter, gives funny and over-the-top examples of how not to act at work. Through humor, he points out how important it is to get along with everyone and how to handle interpersonal problems. Students learn some of the unwritten rules of work such as how to dress and how to deal with people who might annoy you. (Sounds like something we all could use some help with at times.) Holly is currently working at The Popcorn Factory for...
From Where I Sit

Today, Feb. 26, is the 23rd anniversary of my first day of work at Freedom Resource Center. It seems like a very long time ago. A lot has happened over the years. I was living in Mankato at the time I got the job offer from Freedom. I was working on an internship with Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation. I was also recovering from surgery, so I wasn’t 100% healthy.

However, the powers that be insisted I start my job as soon as possible. Apparently, they were in some urgency to get a director in place, as there had been a gap for a few months. So, we (I was married at the time) hastily packed up some things and moved up to my parents’ house, which was about an hour away from the office in Fargo.

I remember pulling up to the office on NP Avenue, and wondering where the best place to park was. Everything was covered with snow and there was a significant slope to the parking lot. I pushed a manual chair back then, so it was sort of a challenge. I trudged my way up to the door. Luckily, I found a power door opener there. And it worked! I went in, only to be confronted with a fairly long ramp. By the time I got to the elevator I was pretty tired.

When I got up to the office I was greeted warmly by the few employees who were there. After introductions, we set about trying to figure out what we were going to do. There were a couple of fairly large boxes filled with paper in my office. I figured the first thing I should do was go through them and see what I would find. I really didn’t have any idea what direction I was going to take this place. I guess I figured it’d wing it as long as I could.

In going through those boxes, I quickly realized that Freedom was broke. There was just over 800 dollars in the bank. One grant was several thousand dollars overspent, and the employees had gone a couple times without getting paid on payday. This should have made me quit right then, but I didn’t. Gradually, we solved each problem and kept the place going.

I learned some valuable lessons in the first few years of my job. I found out there are certain people you can rely on, and some you can’t. I found out that you need to ask for help, and accept it graciously. I also found out that sometimes you need to be tough, and do the hard thing. I’ve mellowed in my age, but hopefully I’m a wiser and more effective leader. It’s been a great ride so far.

Disclaimer

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 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.

Freedom Resource Center receives about 44 percent of its funding from the Federal Government. Approximately cost of this publication is $.21 per piece, of which 44 percent or $.09 is Federal funds; and 56 percent or $.12 is non-Federal funds. Alternate formats available upon request.

Continued from page 1

Colorado Jack’s, sealing and packaging the product. She likes it there.

TY, age 21, mentioned learning money management skills. This will be important as he manages his own apartment, which is a new experience for him. He needs to prioritize his bills, particularly rent and phone service. Originally from Oakes, he moved to Valley City to finish up with school and get a job. He works with Community Options. He is interested in doing some cooking or baking in a restaurant. He’s made good friends through Special Olympics and enjoys basketball and movies.

Trevor, 20, works at Sheyenne Care Center as a Dietary Aid. He likes making real money. He is currently working on budgeting for his bills. He is finding out it is important to prioritize for things like rent; and save up for things that aren’t quite as urgent. He is the technology expert of the bunch. He has even helped design a website. Another benefit to the Transition program for Trevor has been developing confidence and speaking in front of other people.

Holly said, “It’s an honor to have Beth in the class.” Beth will also be teaching them about disaster preparedness for people with disabilities, one of her areas of expertise having worked for the Red Cross.

According to Mrs. Botz, one of the best parts about having Freedom involved is for the students to realize there are other resources available to them in the community. When they are done with school, those will be valuable as they continue on their journey of independence. Freedom is there to help anyone of any age with information, skills training, advocacy, and mentoring – whatever they wish.

Mrs. Botz says that she jokes around with the students and threatens to flunk them. Of course, they are way too savvy to believe it. She said, “I am looking forward to seeing them out in the community.”
Moving on with Life

Dylan Riehm is moving forward with his life. After graduating from high school in 2017, he has his sights set on a job and getting his own place. In the process, Dylan has had to learn to live with the after-effects of a stroke. It affected the right side of his body, and also sometimes makes it difficult to concentrate.

Despite the challenges he has faced, Dylan has been a role model and example for others. He was awarded the 2018 Youth Advocate of the Year by Freedom Resource Center. Dylan helps people speak up for themselves to get what they need.

And now, he’s using his voice to try and find the ideal job. He likes to be with people and interact with them. He asks questions and is very interested in getting to know people. The type of work isn’t as important as having interaction with others on a regular basis.

Dylan, 20, is exploring various opportunities in his hometown of Fergus Falls. He is working with Vocational Rehabilitation, Productive Alternatives, and county social services to get what he needs in order to be successful. He had a two-week tryout at the Y, where he did some cleaning. He also would like to try working at a service business like a bowling alley. He wants to make sure that what he gets will fit his schedule and be satisfying.

His interaction with Freedom started in 2015 as a high school student. He has gone through various classes such as Skills to Pay the Bills; and Transition 101, Let’s Get Real. These classes are intended to help the student understand the world of work and be prepared when the time comes to go out and look for a job.

Dylan is also exploring the possibility of becoming a peer mentor. He wants to help people move forward with life, just like he has. He was all set to take a trip to the Capitol in St. Paul with a group of people from Freedom, but a snowstorm intervened. Instead, he got together with others and wrote letters to his elected representatives. He is doing what he can to help promote Freedom Resource Center.

“Freedom has helped me a lot in the last two years. I like Freedom. I think it’s awesome,” he said.

Home Access Surveys Offered by Freedom

Jerry Christiansen has been with Freedom for about 3 1/2 years. He coordinates the loaner ramp program. Freedom loans ramps to individuals at no charge for up to 90 days. This allows enough time for a temporary disability to heal so the ramp is not needed. If a person has a permanent disability, this provides time for long-term solutions to be found. Jerry also works with individuals to survey their home and discuss options to make their home work better for them. Usually Jerry meets in the home with the individual and/or care providers. He listens to learn what is causing difficulty and ideas they have. This opens the door for more discussion and usually more options to consider. Ultimately, the person who lives in the home decides what would work best for them.
What’s Wrong With This Picture?

It is time to think spring with warm weather and green grass. The tree branch hanging over the sidewalk is a hazard for people with low vision or who are blind. Objects that hang above a circulation path must be at least 80” above the surface unless a cane detectable device is below the object. Part of our spring/summer work needs to include trimming branches and removing other protruding objects. Yes, this branch was trimmed last summer.