The Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) took its yearly out-state meeting to North West Minnesota. They held a public forum at the Shooting Star Casino in Mahnomen on Thursday, May 9. Participating in the meeting were governor-appointed members of the Council, along with staff from the White Earth Vocational Rehabilitation program, Options Interstate Resource Center for Independent Living, and Freedom Resource Center.

Representatives from the Centers for Independent Living were asked what they need in order to do their jobs better. The answer is simple – more funding. In Freedom’s case, it is assigned 11 counties in Minnesota and 10 in North Dakota. For many of these counties, the Center is only able to provide information over the phone, unless the people want to drive to the nearest office.

The Independent Living portion of the program began by Randy Sorensen, Executive Director of Options. He talked about the history of people with disabilities protesting to get their civil rights. He showed a video of people in wheelchairs blocking doorways, crawling up the stairs of the U.S. Capitol, and being arrested for civil disobedience. He also mentioned unique programs that Options provides such as an accessible deer hunt, and working on outdoor recreation access.

Past, Present, and Future of Independent Living Discussed in Mahnomen

The Independent Living program has been a vital part of the spectrum of services for people with disabilities in the U.S. since the late 60’s. Centers have helped thousands of people leave nursing facilities to return to the home of their choice in their communities. Centers have also been at the forefront of fighting for laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The morning session began with a welcome by SILC Chairperson Anita Olson, followed by a ceremony and blessing by Lew Murray, White Earth’s Spiritual Leader. Judge David DeGrote then gave an insightful presentation on the history of the White Earth tribe.

The Independent Living portion of the program began by Randy Sorensen, Executive Director of Options. He talked about the history of people with disabilities protesting to get their civil rights. He showed a video of people in wheelchairs blocking doorways, crawling up the stairs of the U.S. Capitol, and being arrested for civil disobedience. He also mentioned unique programs that Options provides such as an accessible deer hunt, and working on outdoor recreation access.

Jerry Christiansen of Freedom talked about various services he provides, including the installation of temporary ramps, home evaluations, and community accessibility. Marie Fouquette of Freedom talked about youth transition services and the classes

continued on page 2
From Where I Sit

Housing: the last frontier. That’s the way I characterize it. If you think about it, we have laws that regulate things like transportation, public buildings, stores and restaurants, but nothing to guarantee our equal access to single-family or twin homes. I found it interesting that the 2019 FM Homebuilders Association parade of homes just started. The news release for it said that one of the emphasis areas was housing for people 55 and older. I’m still coming to grips with being a member of that club, but that’s another story.

There are 76 homes featured in this year’s show. It covers all of the Fargo Moorhead Metropolitan area, so there are a lot of places and a lot of different types of homes to choose from. I thought I would go through the list and see how many of those homes actually looked like they were low barrier, meaning no steps, wider doors, and more open space inside. I found six, which I believe is quite a few more than I would have found 23 years ago when I first moved to this area. So, progress is being made, although very slowly.

In my neighborhood of South Moorhead, mine is the only house I’ve seen that I could get into using my wheelchair. Every other one has steps, sometimes many of them. They are also mostly of the split-level variety. That is, in my experience, the absolute worst design for accessibility. When I used to do information and referral, I would sometimes get calls from people where a family member had sustained some sort of injury, and had to start using a wheelchair for mobility. They would ask if there was some program to help pay for modifications to make their house more accessible. Many seemed surprised that there wasn’t. I would tell them their best option might be to find a different place to live.

It’s sad when people have been in the house for many years, accumulated a lot of personal possessions, developed relationships with their neighbors, created good memories with their family; and are forced out because their house is not accessible.

One remedy would be a concept called Visitability. This doesn’t require the house to be 100 percent accessible. It just has to have one entryway with no steps. It also needs wider doors, and a bathroom on the main level you can get into using a wheelchair. Studies have shown that it really doesn’t cost more to build a Visitable house. In the long run, this concept would allow people to live in the home and neighborhood of their choice longer. It would allow us to visit our neighbors, like most people are able to do. It might even help people be more happy and content.

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. Approximate 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

that she has been teaching in area schools. David Espinoza from Options talked about their used equipment program. They loaned out over 600 pieces of durable medical equipment last year. If the person needs the equipment long-term, they may keep it at no charge. Cory Birchholz from Options talked about how the number—one thing they do when people come for services is to simply listen. Cory also works with accessibility services, as well as fair housing issues.

The afternoon session began with Nate Aalgaard talking about his experience with Independent Living and how it could have helped him overcome several barriers after his initial spinal cord injury. He emphasized the importance of bringing up new leaders in the movement, as those who have been involved for many years (including himself) will soon be retiring. The Minnesota SILC is very interested in developing young people as leaders in the movement. They are open to suggestions from anyone who would like to provide input.

The afternoon concluded with a panel discussion with White Earth Vocational Rehabilitation Director Gloria Lafriniere, and Co-Director/ Counselor Marvin Tibbetts; and Options staff, discussing their collaborative relationship in assisting people within the reservation to become more independent and employed. It is a unique relationship, not found in very many locations across the country. This, they said, was a testament to the many locations across the country.
Meet Our Staff

Irina Bidivanu

2019 will mark Irina’s third year at Freedom. Irina joined Freedom Resource Center in 2016 as a Resource Specialist in our Fargo office. She continues in that position, while she is pursuing special training from the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems for their certification program. Irina will maintain her role as first point of contact for consumers and members of the community for our organization. Irina participates in community collaborations, mainly focused on ending homelessness and increasing employment opportunities in our surrounding service area. She assists our consumers by providing suitable information and referrals when requested. In between serving our consumers, Irina also contributes to Freedom Resource Center’s event planning, and many administrative duties, from yearly projects, to day-to-day operations.

Beth Dewald

Beth joined Freedom Resource Center in August 2014 as an Independent Living Advocate in our Jamestown ND office.

“As an advocate, the youngest person I have worked with is the family of a child who had a difficult birth. I was able to help the family of the newborn connect with resources to work on early development for the child. The oldest person I have advocated with is a woman who was 104 years old and needed assistance to find resources to help her stay safely in her home, Beth said. “I also assist individuals who have been living in long term care and could move into their own home.”

As part of her job, Beth is very involved in community groups such as the Mayor’s Committee on Persons with Disabilities, and those that work on housing and homelessness issues. She is also able to do training on disaster preparedness for people with disabilities. Beth, her husband Roger, and dog Minnie enjoy camping and together volunteer for an animal rescue, transporting and fostering abused dogs.

North Dakota Legislative Activity

Keith Bjornson and Jerry Christiansen worked with Rep. Josh Boschee during the past two ND legislative sessions to get legislation passed to improve access to accessible parking in ND. Two years ago, a bill was passed that allows a person with accessible parking privileges to park diagonally in two standard parking spaces if no accessible parking spaces are available. This year they worked to make it easier for law enforcement personnel to ticket people illegally parked in accessible parking spaces. Law enforcement told us that people were able to get out of paying the fee if the accessible parking space was not properly marked. The bill that was passed will go into effect August 1, 2019. Accessible parking can be enforced if two of the following are present: 1) blue stripes on the ground, 2) a sign with the international symbol of accessibility and 3) the ‘$100 Fee’ sign.
What’s Wrong With This Picture?

The chairs inside the door are a nice place to sit and greet people as they arrive. What is that square on the wall between the chairs? That is the button to operate the power door. If you look above the push-bar on the open door, you can see two more buttons in the vestibule. The furniture in front of the buttons makes using the power doors very difficult. While the ADA does not require power doors (some local entities do), the ADA requires clear floor space at operable parts, such as the buttons to operate the doors.

Save the Date

Celebrating 30 Years of Freedom

Where: Avalon Events Center
When: Tuesday, September 17, 2019
5:00 pm - 10:00 pm

TICKETS: $50

FEATURING: DUELING PIANOS