

# THE Independent

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

MARCH 2026

## FYI

### SAVE THE DATE:

- Appreciation Luncheon - Thursday, May 7, 2026
- Freedom Resource Fair - Tuesday, September 29, 2026

*\*Reasonable accommodations can be requested up to two weeks prior to Freedom events.*

*\*All events are free to attend unless a cost is noted.*

### FARGO

To register for Fargo events, call Katelyn or Sarah at 701.478.0459. All Fargo events will be held at 2701 9th Avenue South Suite H, Fargo.

#### FREEDOM IN ACTION

##### Safety in the Home as you Age

Tuesday, Apr. 21 - 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM  
Register by Tuesday, April 14.

##### Planting and Gardening Tips

Tuesday, May 19 - 1:30 PM - 2:30 PM  
Register by Tuesday, May 12.

#### YOUNG ADULT GATHERINGS (AGES 16-25)

##### Gardening

Tuesday, Apr. 14 - 10:00 AM - 11:30 AM  
Register by Tuesday, April 7

##### Jewelry Making

Tuesday, May 26 - 10:00 AM - 11:30 AM  
Register by Tuesday, April 19

### FERGUS FALLS

To register for Fergus Falls events, call Joyce or Leigh at 218.998.1799. All Fergus Falls events will be held at 125 West Lincoln #1, Fergus Falls.

#### FREEDOM IN ACTION

##### Intro to Watercolor Technique

Tuesdays, Apr. 21 & 28 - 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM  
Costs \$5 to attend; must attend both classes  
Register by April 14

##### Service Animals / Companion Animals - What's the Difference?

Wednesday, May 20 - 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM  
No Registration Necessary - Call the office with questions for the presenter by May 18.

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## A LEGACY OF ACCESSIBILITY: THE NATE AALGAARD AWARD



Traveling by air has long been a source of freedom, even exhilaration, for travelers looking forward to a carefully planned trip to a destination of choice. Historically, this experience has been difficult to access by a significant segment of the population. For travelers with certain disabilities, it has been completely unattainable because travel environments have been designed and created by, and for, able-bodied travelers. Fargo's Hector International Airport launched a plan to change that narrative by bringing diverse voices to the table when preparing for structural changes to their facility. That's why, at our 2024 Appreciation Luncheon, we were proud to recognize the Hector International Airport with our Accessibility Award honoring their commitment to reimagining what inclusive travel can look like in our community.

This year, we are also proud to carry forward an important legacy by renaming this recognition the **Nate Aalgaard Accessibility Award**, in honor of our former

executive director, whose vision and advocacy helped lay the groundwork for partnerships like this. As you continue reading, you will see what's possible when accessibility is approached with intention, collaboration, and the voices of those with lived experience leading the way.

Executive Director and Municipal Airport Authority ADA Coordinator, Shawn Dobberstein, sat down to talk with Freedom Resource Center (FRC) about this important effort. When asked how his partnership with Freedom began, he reflected on a time when the

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## WHAT'S INSIDE

- » Extended School Year (ESY) Vs. Summer School
- » Beyond the Job Title
- » Giving Hearts Day Thank You



## JAMESTOWN

To register for Jamestown events, call Ashley at 701.252.4693. All Jamestown events will be held at 300 2nd Avenue NE, Suite 207, Jamestown.

### FREEDOM IN ACTION

#### April FIA Spring Flowers

Tuesday, Apr. 21 - 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM  
Register by Friday, April 17

#### Advanced Planning

Tuesday, May 19 - 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM  
Register by Friday, May 15

### INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS CLASSES

#### Decluttering and Organizing

Tuesdays, Apr. 21 to May 26 - 10:00 AM - 11:30 AM  
Register by Friday, April 17

### YOUNG ADULT GATHERING (AGES 16-25)

Tuesday, Apr. 7 - 1:30 PM - 2:30 PM  
Register by Friday, April 3

Tuesday, May 5 - 1:30 PM - 2:30 PM  
Register by Friday, May 1

Tuesday, Jun. 2 - 1:30 PM - 2:30 PM  
Register by Friday, May 29

## VALLEY CITY

To register for Valley City events, call Ashley at 701.252.4693. All Valley City events will be held at The Vault - 223 Central Avenue, Valley City.

### INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS CLASSES

#### Decluttering and Organizing

Thursdays, Apr. 23 to Jun. 4 - 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM  
No class May 7 - Register by Friday, April 17

### YOUNG ADULT GATHERING (AGES 16-25)

Tuesday, Apr. 7 - 4:30 PM - 6:00 PM  
Register by Friday, April 3

Tuesday, May 5 - 4:30 PM - 6:00 PM  
Register by Friday, May 1

Tuesday, Jun. 2 - 4:30 PM - 6:00 PM  
Register by Friday, May 29

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airport was preparing for a civil rights audit related to the Americans with Disabilities Act in the early 2000's. In preparation for the audit, the airport connected with long-time FRC executive director, Nate Aalgaard, who led the organization and shared notable expertise on accessibility throughout the community until his passing in 2020. That early connection prompted a visit to the airport to review important accessibility features, including, but not limited to, evaluation of door pressures, accessibility of counter heights, and the necessary signage and "maneuverability" of restrooms. As a result, Delta Airlines modified the height of their counters, and the airport was better prepared for their federal inspection.

Approximately two decades have passed and that early partnership paved the way for additional opportunities to collaborate. As airport leaders worked with the architectural design team to form a vision for the massive renovation and expansion project taking shape, they recognized the immense value of gathering input from the disability community to ensure people of all abilities have meaningful opportunities to travel. Shawn described the airport as a "welcome mat" for our community, emphasizing the importance of making the gateway to our cities accessible and inviting to all travelers. FRC went to work and assembled a team of individuals with unique abilities and disabilities to meet with airport leaders and the design team at different intervals throughout the design process to review plans and offer recommendations. Shawn emphasized this team was "instrumental in changing the way we think about design." The conversations were rich and filled with ideas, and thoughtful questions. There was critical dialogue about the size of the proposed restrooms and the importance of having adequate space for individuals using the facilities, while also accommodating care attendants. The team showed resolve in going beyond existing minimum standards by identifying steps that could be taken to construct a beautiful, inclusive, and functional space for people as they begin and end their travel adventure. Shawn notes he routinely advises businesses, including healthcare facilities, schools and universities to connect with FRC and the disability community during the early phases of a project to invite feedback. People with disabilities provide a vital perspective that fosters access and increases usability to the broadest range of consumers when creating and renovating new spaces.

While the airport provides a new service animal relief area (indoor) as specified in the Air Carriers Access Act, it also provides amenities intended to provide greater access to individuals with invisible disabilities and those who experience apprehension when flying. Early dialogue about accessibility raised awareness about not only sensory sensitivities, but the impact of dementia and mental health diagnoses on daily functioning. Two new additions to the airport include a sensory room that offers soft furniture and the ability to adjust the color of the lighting in a quiet space, and an immersive reality room that transports unsuspecting occupants to numerous destinations at the press of a button. One can simply swipe the wall to move forward on their chosen journey without leaving the room. It's hard to imagine anything more relaxing than walking amidst native grasslands where virtual butterflies are fluttering beside you.

The airport is finalizing additional features that include a mapping app to assist those who are blind, or have low vision, with airport navigation by giving them information on their location and guiding them to various points within the airport. In recent years, the airport also adopted the Sunflower Program which allows individuals to self-identify as someone who may need additional support when traveling by wearing a sunflower pin, bracelet or lanyard so staff can reach out to them, directly, to help identify their needs.

Shawn indicates the airport is "proud to have a partner like Freedom so persons with disabilities have a voice." Freedom is also proud to have been a partner in this process, and extremely grateful to the team of individuals with and without disabilities who committed their time to advancing airport accessibility for years to come.

We invite you to join us on **May 7, 2026**, for our **Appreciation Luncheon** at the **Avalon in Fargo at 12:00PM** as we celebrate partners who are helping create a more accessible and inclusive world.

# EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR (ESY) VS. SUMMER SCHOOL - WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

As the school year comes to a close, many families hear about *summer school* and *Extended School Year (ESY)*. While they may sound similar, they serve very different purposes.

Extended School Year (ESY) is a special education service tied directly to a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). It is designed for students with disabilities who may need continued support during school breaks to prevent regression, or the loss of important skills. ESY focuses on maintaining skills already learned or supporting emerging skills close to mastery. In some cases, it may also include services such as occupational, physical, or speech therapy. In both North Dakota and Minnesota, eligibility for ESY is determined annually by the IEP team based on individual need. ESY is provided at no cost to families under Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

Summer school, is typically a general education program offered by school districts and is often open to a broader

group of students. These programs may focus on helping students catch up on coursework, strengthen skills, or provide enrichment opportunities. It is not tied to an IEP and eligibility is determined by the school district. In some cases, there may be a cost associated with participation.

If you're unsure whether your child may qualify for ESY, summer school, or both, reaching out to our advocates can help you better understand your options and next steps.

Sources:

*Bismarck Public Schools. Extended School Year Services. Bismarck, ND.*

*Northfield Public Schools. Special Education Services. Northfield, MN.*

*Minnesota Administrative Rules, Rule 3525.0755, Extended School Year for Students with Disabilities.*

## BEYOND THE JOB TITLE - SARAH W.



**What is your role at Freedom Resource Center?**

Independent Living Advocate

**What does a typical week look like for you?**

This is a hard question to answer. Every day is different from helping someone make a phone call to assisting them with knowing what are and how to protect

their rights. We do outreach in the community, classes, and plan events. This is one of the reasons I am so grateful for this position because it truly makes me feel like my ADHD is a superpower helping me be successful in this position.

**Are you a person with a disability?**

Yes, I am hard of hearing and have ADHD.

**How does your disability empower you at work?**

They are my superpowers. I look at it as my ADHD is my desire to learn and research. I love reading and retaining information. Once I go down the rabbit hole, I am so excited to share my knowledge. Me being hard of hearing, I choose not to wear hearing aids. I feel it helps me communicate better. I have to look at people when they talk, pay attention to non-verbal cues and actions.

**What would you like people to know about Freedom Resource Center?**

I love working here and am happy to come to work. My heart is full. I have no words for the love and support my second family has shown my boys and me. I see every one of my coworkers for exactly how wonderful they are. Each of them brings something special to our team. I am blessed and thankful to be in this space in this position every day.



Help someone.

# THANK YOU!

**Thank you to everyone who supported Freedom Resource Center for Giving Hearts Day 2026; because of YOU we raised \$16,408!**

**Your support helps us continue our mission and life-changing services that increase independence for people with disabilities, creating a world where independence and inclusion are possible for everyone.**

**We are so grateful for all of you. Thank you for believing in our mission and standing (or pieing) with us this year!**



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FREEDOM RESOURCE CENTER'S  
**APPRECIATION  
LUNCHEON**  
AWARDS EVENT

**THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2026  
AVALON EVENT CENTER  
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM**

Doors open at 11:00AM | In-person Raffle Baskets

Purchase tickets at [www.freedomrc.org](http://www.freedomrc.org) or by calling Machaela at 800-450-0459

**LOCATIONS:** ND Fargo • Jamestown • Lisbon • Wahpeton | MN Fergus Falls