

# THE Independent

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

SEPTEMBER 2024

## A Journey Through Time: Join us in Celebrating 35 Years

As we gear up for our 35th anniversary celebration, we continue to reflect on the incredible journey that has shaped Freedom Resource Center into the vital resource it is today for people with disabilities. Over the past few newsletters, we've shared how Freedom's early years were filled with challenges and triumphs as we worked to establish our foundation. Through it all, our steadfast goal to empower individuals toward greater independence has remained. We invite you to celebrate this milestone with us and continue following along as we share more highlights from our history that have brought us to where we are today.

In the early 2000s, we underwent a significant reorganization. By 2002, the management team had dwindled, leaving a small but determined group to carry the mission forward. Just as things were falling into place, we faced a major funding cut

from the state of Minnesota. With the help of dedicated advocates, we restored most of that funding, allowing us to continue our work without drastic cutbacks.

During this period, we moved our Moorhead office to a new location in Fargo, providing more space and better facilities to serve our community. This move symbolized our readiness to adapt and grow, even in the face of adversity.

As the years went on, we expanded our reach and impact. We played a significant role in Medicaid reform that started with the Workforce Investment Act, creating Medicaid buy-in programs. From this, we began Money Follows the Person (MFP), a program that was contracted with the North Dakota Centers for Independent Living and the state of ND. This allowed Freedom to provide nursing facility transition services. In 2010, we introduced group Independent Living (IL) skills classes—Job Smart, Money Smart, and Living Well with a Disability—which allowed our staff to better connect with consumers and offer valuable skills training with a peer-support component.

Freedom staff and volunteers continued to play a critical role in educating legislators about the importance of independent living services. This led to more successful funding efforts from Minnesota and North Dakota. By 2011, Freedom secured funding for two full-time staff in Jamestown and allowed the Fargo office to expand. Freedom then added one-to-two-person offices in Moorhead, Detroit Lakes, Fergus Falls and Wahpeton-Breckenridge. Despite the challenges of government funding uncertainties during the recession, we continued to grow.

In 2013,

we expanded our services again in North Dakota, opening a branch office in Lisbon. However, our journey wasn't without setbacks—funding cuts in Minnesota led to the closure of our Detroit Lakes office in 2015 and closure of our Moorhead office in 2018.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 brought new challenges. Our offices closed to the public, but we adapted to new ways of serving people, including virtual services—a practice that continues to this day. During the pandemic, Freedom received CARES Act funding, which enabled us to provide essential items for our consumers that we otherwise wouldn't have been able to assist with.

In March 2020, the loss of our Executive Director, Nate Aalgaard, who led Freedom for 25 years, marked a deeply profound and emotional moment for our organization. Nate's vision and dedication have laid the foundation for what Freedom stands for today. As we carry it forward, we honor his passion for inclusion and empowerment.

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### FYI

#### **35th Anniversary Celebration**

Thursday, Sept. 19 - 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM  
2701 9th Ave. S. Suite H, Fargo

#### **Freedom In Action**

#### **FARGO**

##### **Pumpkin Painting**

Tuesday, Oct. 29 - 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM

No cost to attend

Register by Tuesday, Oct. 22

Contact Katelyn or Sarah at 701-478-0459

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Our mission to provide services that increase independence for people with disabilities remains at the core of everything we do. In July 2020, following Nate's passing, Angie Bosch was appointed as our new Executive Director. Angie continues to lead Freedom Resource Center with the same passion for inclusion and empowerment, ensuring that our vision stays strong.

Later that year Freedom celebrated the landmark Olmstead Settlement Agreement in North Dakota, marking a significant step forward for people with disabilities and seniors. This agreement, between the Department of Justice and the State of North Dakota, aligns with our core values. The settlement enabled Freedom to grow, adding staff to meet the increasing needs of our community, and ensuring people can fully benefit from this positive change.

As we look back on 35 years, we're reminded that while we've accomplished much, there's still more work to be done. Our story is far from over, and we're excited to continue this journey with you.

**Join us September 19th at 1:30 for a ribbon cutting and ceremony, followed by a round or more of BINGO starting at 2:00PM, if you so choose (space is limited), visit with our staff, enjoy refreshments, and get entered into our giveaways just for stopping by!**

## Feds To Enforce Accessibility Standards For Medical Equipment

The U.S. Department of Justice is finalizing a new rule aimed at dramatically increasing the availability of medical examination tables, weight scales and other diagnostic equipment that's accessible to people with disabilities.

Federal officials said in late July that they would implement a regulation under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act adopting technical standards that must be met by certain hospitals and health care clinics. The announcement coincided with the 34th anniversary of the disability rights law.

"Thirty-four years after passage of the ADA, people with disabilities should not have to forgo needed medical care due to inaccessible medical diagnostic equipment," said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "This rule marks a significant milestone in our ongoing efforts to ensure that people with disabilities can get the medical treatment they need."

The rule was first proposed earlier this year in response to numerous complaints that the Justice Department said it received from people with disabilities who have been denied basic medical services because of a lack of accessible equipment.

The agency cited cases where individuals were only given a cursory physical exam because they could not be moved from their wheelchair to an exam table as well as people who have gone without dental exams, mammograms and other preventive care services.

The Justice Department said that Attorney General Merrick B.

# Paper Blizzard

By Joyce Wolter, IL Advocate, Fergus Falls

Does your child have an IEP (individual education plan)? If so, do you know where it is? If it's in the pile on your desk, could you find it easily? If you are like many busy parents, the answer to these questions may be "no." It is not unusual for parents to look at an IEP once at the meeting and then place it on a flat surface to never be seen again. If you have many papers on your desk or in your mail slot it's metaphorically known as the "paper blizzard." Knowing where to find the IEP and related paperwork is more important than many parents realize. For example, your child comes home from school and notifies you of something they need, and you are certain it was in their IEP.

Having the IEP readily available will assist you in advocating for your child timely and effectively. The IEP is a 'blueprint' for the services and goals your child needs and qualifies for. How to get a handle on the "Paper Blizzard" can be simplified with a 3-ring binder. To use this method, you simply place the current IEP and related paperwork in the binder starting with this year. When you get more IEP related paperwork you place that on top of the old paperwork. Doing so will create a chronological order of receipt and help you find IEPs easily. It is right at your fingertips and takes less than three minutes to file the IEP away.

Garland signed the final rule, but the agency did not officially release it, saying instead that the rule and a fact sheet will be made available for review soon.

The rule falls under Title II of the ADA, which requires state and local government services, programs and activities to be accessible to people with disabilities. As a result, the new requirements will apply to public hospitals, health clinics and other entities that state and local governments contract with to provide health care services.

With the proposal, federal officials sought to adopt accessibility standards created in 2017 by the U.S. Access Board for exam tables, chairs used for eye and dental exams, weight scales, mammography equipment, x-ray machines and other diagnostic tools.

The proposal included a prohibition on covered health care providers denying services to patients with disabilities because of a lack of accessible equipment and it said that people with disabilities could not be required to bring someone to help them with an exam. In addition, the plan stipulated that covered entities only buy accessible medical equipment going forward until an adequate number are acquired.

The proposal also included a requirement that all providers who use exam tables, weight scales or both have at least one accessible version of the equipment within two years. And, staff would be required to operate accessible medical equipment and assist patients with transfers and positioning.

*Excerpts from Disability Scoop by Michelle Diamant*

## What's Wrong with this Picture?

By Jen Erickson, IL Advocate, Accessibility Specialist



ADA accessibility standards require door thresholds to be a maximum of ½ inch in height and they must be beveled if exceeding ¼ inch. The threshold height in this image exceeds the allowable height and is not beveled for a smooth and accessible transition. It creates a tripping hazard for individuals of all abilities, and may have a greater, adverse impact on those with limited mobility, impaired imbalance, low vision and persons using wheelchairs.

## Freedom Staff Attend National Conference



Freedom Resource Center had the opportunity to send six staff members to Washington D.C. to attend the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) July 22-25. NCIL's mission is to advance the disability led independent living movement to expand the capacity of independent living.

**Pictured from left to right:** Cindy Gabbert, Sarah Weisser, Tricia McNamee, Leigh Lake, Joyce Wolter and Katelyn Vilmo.

### Disclaimer

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## North Dakota Polling Site Surveys

In partnership with the North Dakota Protection and Advocacy Project, Freedom Resource Center along with three additional North Dakota Centers for Independent Living are conducting assessments of polling sites that are public owned. Jennifer Erickson, Independent Living Advocate and Accessibility Specialist comments, "Selecting and adapting existing poll sites to ensure accessibility is vital to ensure persons of all abilities can participate in the election process. Individuals with disabilities are the best spokespersons for identifying voting access barriers because what may seem inconsequential to some voters can pose a significant challenge to others when exercising their fundamental right to vote."

## Polling Place Accessibility

Federal and state laws require that all polling places be accessible and usable by elderly voters or voters with disabilities. Minimum requirements for accessibility include:

- At least one set of doors must have a minimum width of 32 inches if the doors must be used to enter or leave the polling place.
- Any curb adjacent to the main entrance to a polling place must have curb cuts or temporary ramps. Where the main entrance is not the accessible entrance, any curb adjacent to the accessible entrance must also have curb cuts or temporary ramps.
- Where the main entrance is not the accessible entrance, a sign shall be posted at the main entrance giving directions to the accessible entrance.
- At least one set of stairs must have a temporary handrail and ramp if stairs must be used to enter or leave the polling place.
- No barrier in the polling place may impede the path of persons with disabilities to the voting booth.
- At least one parking space for persons with disabilities, which may be temporarily so designated by the municipality for the day of the election, must be available near the accessible entrance.
- The doorway, handrails, ramps, and handicapped parking must conform to the standards specified in the state building code for accessibility by persons with disabilities.

A local official can only choose polling places that meet these standards, unless no available place within a precinct is accessible or can be made accessible.

*Credit to Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State*



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*"The premier leader of disability rights  
in the region for more than 35 years."*

**FREEDOM RESOURCE CENTER**  
Celebrates 35 Years!

**1:30PM Ceremony + Ribbon Cutting**  
**2:00PM - 3:00PM BINGO**  
**Thursday, September 19, 2024**

Freedom Resource Center  
2701 9th Ave S, Suite H | Fargo, ND

*Giveaways*

Join us for a fun-filled celebration of Freedom Resource Center's 35th anniversary! Enjoy refreshments, enter exciting giveaways, play a round of bingo, or simply come by to visit with our amazing staff!



*Let's Celebrate*

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