

# THE Independent

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

JUNE 2026

## FYI

All Freedom Offices will be closed Friday, July 3 for Independence Day.

### SAVE THE DATE:

• 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 otherwise noted.*

### FARGO

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

#### FREEDOM IN ACTION

##### Couponing and Community Resource Information

Tuesday, June 16 - 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM

Contact Sarah to RSVP by Tuesday, June 9.

##### Art and Lunch at the Park

Tuesday, July 14 - 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Urban Plains Park - 3020 51st St. South

\$5 fee to attend; please pay in advance.

Contact Katelyn to RSVP by Tuesday, July 7

### FERGUS FALLS

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

#### FREEDOM IN ACTION

##### Listening Session

Tuesday, June 16 - 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

RSVP by Thursday, June 11 - Lunch Provided

##### ADA Anniversary Celebration

Tuesday, July 21 - 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM

RSVP by Tuesday, July 14

### BINGO

Wednesday, August 12 - 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM

RSVP by Wednesday, August 5

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## FINDING A WAY FORWARD

For a long time, Robert felt like he was fighting an uphill battle with nowhere to turn. As bills piled up and the search for accessible housing became more urgent, every door he knocked on seemed to lead to another dead end. Programs told him he didn't meet the "right" qualifications for help, leaving him discouraged and overwhelmed while trying to hold his family together through the uncertainty.

Then, in one of the hardest moments of his life, Robert connected with Freedom Resource Center and for the first time in a long time, someone listened.

"I was ready to give up," Robert shared. "Freedom Resource Center was the only place where I didn't feel judged. They accepted me."

At the time, Robert and his family were facing the very real possibility of homelessness. Beyond the stress of housing instability, he was also trying to navigate the daily challenges that came with his disabilities while maintaining independence for himself and his family. His goal was finding housing that fit his needs and gain access to the adaptive equipment necessary for him to remain independent.

Together with staff, he was able to identify the barriers standing in his way and create a plan of action to move forward.

"Sometimes without help, you can begin to spiral if you don't know where to start," he said. "Freedom helped me walk through some big problems."

One of the moments that stands out most to Robert was learning that his family had been accepted into a new apartment. With support from Freedom Resource Center, they were able to quickly locate housing, prepare for the move, and

transition into a place that better met his accessibility needs.

"When the head of household is beginning to fall apart because of disabilities, the rest of the family feels it too," Robert explained. "Through working with Freedom, I've become more grounded and stable."

But for Robert, the support went beyond housing assistance. He says the encouragement, follow-up, and one-on-one support from staff made a lasting impact on his life. Whether it was helping connect him to resources, listening during difficult moments, or helping him problem-solve through challenges, he says Freedom Resource Center helped restore a sense of hope.

"People with disabilities need to know that it's okay to ask for help," Robert shared. "It took me a long time to swallow my pride and do that. Freedom meets you where you're at."

Today, Robert continues to support Freedom Resource Center because of the relationships he has built and the empowerment he gained through the process. He believes others who are struggling should know they are not alone.

"I believe in this program because it's done so much for me," he said. "There are a lot of hurting people out there who

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feel like nobody is there to help. Even if someone can't solve everything, just being pointed in the right direction can change your life."

As Robert continues moving forward, he is now interested in learning more about advocacy and hopes his story encourages others to not give up, ask for help when needed, and keep pushing through barriers toward independence.

## APPRECIATION LUNCHEON THANK-YOUs

### THANK YOU TO OUR EVENT PARTNERS

- Tellwell
- Office Experts
- Ashley Furniture
- The McNamee Family

### THANK YOU TO OUR RAFFLE PARTNERS

- Applebee's
- Ashley Furniture
- Beds By Design
- Birchwood Therapeutic
- Bobcat
- Brides by Julie
- Butcher Block Meats
- Costco
- Cuddl Duds
- Delta Hotel
- DoubleTree by Hilton
- Duane's House of Pizza
- Endure Thermal Spa
- Flowers, Etc.
- Flying J Travel Plaza
- Grateful Touch LLC
- Gretchen Dobervich
- Indian Palace
- JWW Sports Cards & Gaming
- Lax Haircare
- Lisbon Bissell Golf Club
- Lisbon Smiles
- Marco
- Paradox Comics-N-Cards
- Pizza Ranch
- Scheels
- Skalicky's
- Skate City
- Skill Cutz Barbershop & Salon
- Sky Zone
- Starbucks
- Steep Me Tea Apothecary
- Subway
- Suite Shots
- Target
- The Bronc Bar & Grill
- The Cattleman's Club
- The Dinner Detective
- The Full Monte
- The Plant Supply
- The Rustic Hanger Boutique
- The Spirit Shop
- Trollwood Performing Arts
- Unglued
- VTC
- Welton's Tire Service
- Wilkin Drink & Eatery
- Xcalibur Entertainment

### JAMESTOWN

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

#### FREEDOM IN ACTION

##### Painting Party

Tuesday, June 16 - 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM  
RSVP by Friday, June 12

##### Tile Coasters

Tuesday, July 21 - 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM  
RSVP by Friday, July 17

#### INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS CLASSES

##### Money Smart

Tuesdays, June 9 to September 8 - 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM  
RSVP by Friday, June 5

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

Tuesday, Jun. 2 - 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM  
RSVP by Friday, May 29

Tuesday, July 7 - 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM  
RSVP by Thursday, July 2

### VALLEY CITY

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

#### INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS CLASSES

##### Money Smart

Thursdays, June 11 to September 17 - 2:30 PM - 3:30 PM  
\*No class July 30. RSVP by Friday, June 5.

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

Tuesday, June 2 - 4:30 PM - 6:00 PM  
RSVP by Friday, May 29

Tuesday, July 7 - 4:30 PM - 6:00 PM  
RSVP by Thursday, July 2

### WAHPETON

To register for Wahpeton events, call Raegan at 701.672.1648.

#### FREEDOM IN ACTION

##### Arts & Crafts

Tuesday, June 2 - 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM  
Optimist Shelter - 85 RJ Hughes Drive  
RSVP by Tuesday, May 26

### DISCLAIMER

In an attempt to reduce the cost of mailings, please send your email address to [freedom@freedomrc.org](mailto: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.

# 2026 AWARD RECIPIENTS

Our 2026 Appreciation Luncheon was a wonderful celebration of the individuals, organizations, and businesses making a difference in the lives of people with disabilities.

We are so grateful to everyone who attended, supported, sponsored, and donated to help make this event possible. Because of you, we are able to continue empowering individuals to live more independently and stay connected to their communities.

It was an honor to recognize this year's award recipients and celebrate the impact happening every day across our community.



**EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR**  
HOPE LEARNING CENTER



**DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD**

**RYAN THORSON**



**YOUTH ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR**

**EMILIE LANG**



**ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR**

**GISELLE ISHIMWE**



**LARRY CHIAL LEADERSHIP AWARD**

**SADIE JO DOWNS**



**NATE AALGAARD ACCESSIBILITY AWARD**

**AMBER BACKEN**



**10 YEARS OF SERVICE**

**IRINA SCHANILEC**

## MEET OUR BOARD MEMBER - BRAD RENSLOW



### What interested you in joining the board at Freedom Resource Center for Independent Living?

When I met Jen Erickson and she explained to me some of the objectives at Freedom Resource Center, I felt I could contribute and make some positive changes. Jen asked me if I would be interested in joining the board and I said yes right away.

### Can you share a little about your background or experiences that you bring to this role?

I have served on other boards, volunteered for many events, helped raise funds for many organizations, worked with MS Bike runs, I have even taken people who are blind bowling. Being involved with so many different groups I feel pretty confident to be able to make a difference.

### What are you most looking forward to as a member of the board?

I want to learn the organization's greatest needs and what we can do together to make the right decisions and changes. I look forward to this new role and so far, I have been impressed with the commitment to increasing independence for people with disabilities.



2701 9th Ave. S, Suite H  
Fargo, ND 58103

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Permit #1159



ITS BACK!

# FREEDOM RESOURCE FAIR



Tuesday, September 29, 2026  
11:30 AM – 2:00 PM

- Free Admission to the Public
- Jazzy's Food Truck Available On-Site
- Accepting Registrations for Vendor Spots

Veterans Memorial Arena  
1201 7th Ave E, West Fargo, ND

For questions or more information, please call Machaela at 701-478-0459 or 800-450-0459.

# A TRIBUTE TO NATE AALGAARD

For a long time, we've talked about how to honor Nate Aalgaard in a way that felt right. This year, we chose to rename the Accessibility Award in his honor to the **Nate Aalgaard Accessibility Award**. Along with that, we created a plaque to have hung at each of our Freedom offices and gifted one to his family. It reads:



*Some people spend their lives making the world bigger for others. Nate was one of those people.*

*For twenty-four years, he led Freedom Resource Center, working alongside the people he believed in. In that time, he helped thousands find their way to more independent lives. Sometimes that looked like a ramp built, a right defended, or a door finally opened.*

*But more often, it looked like Nate being the first person in the room to quietly say, you can do this. And he was usually right. What people remember most isn't just what he did, though the impact is everywhere. It's how he did it. With humility. With patience. With a perfectly timed dry joke. And with an unwavering belief that every person who walked through these doors mattered, fully, completely, exactly as they were.*

*He didn't just believe in people. He brought out the best in them, often before they could see it themselves.*

*He loved his family. He loved a good glass of wine on the patio. He loved winning at trivia and pretending he wasn't trying. He loved this place. He loved the people here. And he believed deeply in the work we're still carrying forward.*

*You can feel him here, in the way we welcome people, in the work we do, and in every life that changes.*

*We carry that forward.*

*We carry him forward.*

**Nate Aalgaard: July 17, 1959 - March 31, 2020**

Nate's impact didn't end in 2020. It's still part of who we are every day, in the way we do this work. This is just one small way to recognize that and to make sure his presence, and what he built here, continues to be seen and felt.

*"I do not consider my disability a tragedy, nor do I consider my life one bit less full and meaningful."*

NATE AALGAARD



Some people spend their lives making the world bigger for others. Nate Aalgaard was one of those people.

For twenty-four years, he led Freedom Resource Center, working alongside the people he believed in. In that time, he helped thousands find their way to more independent lives. Sometimes that looked like a ramp built, a right defended, or a door finally opened.

But more often, it looked like Nate being the first person in the room to quietly say, you can do this. And he was usually right. What people remember most isn't just what he did, though the impact is everywhere. It's how he did it. With humility. With patience. With a perfectly timed dry joke. And with an unwavering belief that every person who walked through these doors mattered, fully, completely, exactly as they were.

He didn't just believe in people. He brought out the best in them, often before they could see it themselves.

He loved his family. He loved a good glass of wine on the patio. He loved winning at trivia and pretending he wasn't trying. He loved this place. He loved the people here. And he believed deeply in the work we're still carrying forward.

You can feel him here, in the way we welcome people, in the work we do, and in every life that changes.

We carry that forward.  
We carry him forward.

**Nate Aalgaard**

JULY 17, 1959 - MARCH 31, 2020

IN MEMORY OF NATE AALGAARD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FREEDOM RESOURCE CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING, 1994 TO 2020.