

# *the* Independent

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

Fall 2009

## 20 Year Anniversary Edition

By Rikki Trageton  
*IL Advocate*

Celebrating an anniversary tends to make a person reflect back upon the past, examine the present, and look with anticipation to the future. As we look into Freedom's past as an organization we see that it started in 1986 with Bruce Kolding gathering together interested, excited individuals to work together to start a Center for Independent Living in Fargo Moorhead. The early years brought many trials and tribulations for staff and board alike with struggles to find funding, inconsistent staff and leadership, and services that at times were not focused. All expected growing pains of a new organization being run by individuals and board members who had disabilities but not a lot of experience running a Center for Independent Living.

Nate Aalgaard joined Freedom as Executive Director in 1996. Shortly thereafter, he arranged for a consultant to conduct a planning retreat called Future Search. It focused on acknowledging the issues from the past, as well as taking pride in accomplishments, and planning for major areas of emphasis for the future. Nearly all the board members, as well as staff and several community members, took part in the weekend-long event. This event helped Freedom begin to move in a more focused direction. We defined ourselves primarily as an advocacy organization, and that became the main focus of what we tried to accomplish.

Today staff at Freedom would like to believe that we have survived

most of those growing pains and emerged a stronger organization. Thanks to Nate's consistent leadership, and dedication to our true roots as a Center, we have a consistent message. We are a disability rights organization. Our mission is to work toward equality and inclusion for people with disabilities through programs of empowerment, community education, and systems change. As a staff we know the direction we are going as organization and we have a plan as to how we are going to get there 😊.

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## Oh How we have Grown!

### Then (1989)

### Now (2009)

Main Office Location	Moorhead	Fargo
Satellite Offices	0	3 Fergus opened in 1993 Jamestown opened in 1995 Detroit Lakes opened in 2008
# of Staff	2	12
Core Services	Advocacy, Peer mentoring, IL Skills Training, Information and Referral	Advocacy, Peer mentoring, IL Skills Training, Information and Referral
Counties Served	Cass, Clay	19 Counties in ND & MN
Annual Budget	\$63,000	\$845,000
Average Starting Wage for Staff	\$6/Hour	\$12.5-\$16.58/Hour

## ADA Activism Marks Beginning of Freedom's Advocacy

*By Nate Aalgaard  
Executive Director*

It must've been early in the year 1990, shortly after Freedom began its official operation in Moorhead. I remember coming to an event at Moorhead City Hall, in the council chambers, to advocate for Representative Arlen Stangland to support the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA.)

I was on the board of directors at Options Interstate Resource Center for Independent Living in East Grand Forks at the time. I think I probably even took a day off from work to join my colleagues, from both Options and Freedom, in holding this public meeting to talk to the US Representative from Minnesota District 7.

I don't remember exactly what was said, but our leaders pressed Representative Stangland to vote for the ADA when it came up. He expressed his concern about the small business community. It was a polite but direct discussion. We knew exactly what we wanted him to do. He was definitely not a big supporter at the time. In fact, he was probably opposed.

In the end, Stangland voted for the ADA, as did almost every member of Congress. I was fortunate enough to be present at the White House on July 26 of 1990 to witness the President signing this historic civil rights act.

We recently held a series of ADA celebration events in the

communities where we have a presence: Fargo, Jamestown, Fergus Falls, and Detroit Lakes. About 550 people attended, and we had wonderful collaborative support from various organizations.

We have indeed come a long way in these 19 to 20 years—both Freedom and the cause of disability rights. In a way our two anniversaries coincide, and will be forever linked by that meeting at Moorhead City Hall. I'm proud to say I was there.

# From Where I Sit

By Nate Aalgaard  
Executive Director

## My first week on the job



Thirteen and a half years can cloud your memory a bit, but here is a fictitious conversation that summarizes my first week

as Executive Director of Freedom Resource Center. First, a little background: I had been hired in the early part of February 1996. I was doing an internship at the time with the Division of Rehabilitation Services office in Mankato, Minnesota, where I had been attending graduate school. I also had major surgery about a month before, so was still somewhat recovering. Freedom's President, Toni Boelke (now McCarty), was insistent that I start my job as soon as possible. So, despite feeling a little winded and looking pale, I consented to start on February 26.

Having no place to live in Fargo Moorhead, I was staying with my parents near Shelly, Minnesota. On a good day, it was an hour to Fargo Moorhead. Not knowing the best route to the office, I know it took me considerably longer than that to get there the first day. There was a tremendous amount of snow that winter. I think there were approximately 8 to 10 foot drifts outside my parents' house. They had to shovel me out and

in most days for a couple months or so. Once I trudged my way up the snowy and sloped parking lot, up the steep sidewalk, and traversed the ramp in the entryway, I finally arrived at the office. The conversation may have gone something like this:

Me: Hi, I'm Nate. Who are you?

One by one, staff introduce themselves to me and explain what they do. In going to what would be my office, I notice numerous boxes filled with papers.

Me: What's all this stuff?

Response: Well, after the previous director left, we just put everything in boxes for you to go through when you got here.

Me: How long has he been gone?

Response: Three months.

Me: How's the financial situation?

Response: Well, we have had a little trouble making payroll, but it's better now.

Me: How much money do we have?

Response: We ended last year with \$869.04 in the bank.

Me: \$869, that's it?

Response: And four cents.

Me: Why do we have so much extra office space here?

Response: We rent it out to a marketing company.

Me: So do we make any money on that?

Response: No, we're actually renting it out for less than we're paying.

Me: (Indistinguishable mumbling sounds.)

Me: How is the Center doing service-wise?

Response: Well, we're doing a lot of outreach. We have a staff going to Wahpeton, Valley City, and Jamestown.

Me: Why?

Response: Because we were told we should do outreach.

Me: But you only have three Independent Living service staff. Are you fully serving Fargo Moorhead?

Response: No.

Me: (More mumbling sounds.)

It's a good thing I didn't know better, or I would never have taken this job. I think we've done all right for ourselves. The budget that just concluded on June 30 was for about \$850,000, compared to around \$265,000 in 1995. We now have about \$200,000 in reserves, and fully staffed offices in Jamestown, Fergus Falls and Fargo Moorhead, and have a staff present at the Workforce Center in Detroit Lakes two days a week. We will open an office in Wahpeton this fall. The budget for the coming year will be considerably larger, because of additional funding from the State of North Dakota and the Federal government. And we don't sublease space to anyone. Sometimes ignorance is a blessing.

# CELEBRATING 20 YEARS!



December 1991 Board meeting (L to R) Lonnie Beach, Dennis Onderick, unidentified, Pat Beatty, Robert Puyear, Don Bingaman, Michelle Berndt, Dave Lucken, Myles Erickson



Freedom's founding Father, Bruce Kolding



Freedom Resource Center's original office, located on Center Ave. in Moorhead



In 1993, Disability Rights Advocates from across North Dakota rally at the Capital in Bismarck to oppose the Governor's proposed budget cuts.



2001 Freedom moves to its current location. Pictured are Nate Aalgaard, Barb Hanson, Fargo Mayor Bruce Furness, and Deanna Bakken.



2003 Advocate rally in St. Paul at the Capitol office of Rep. Paul Marquart to fight the elimination of state funding for Centers for Independent Living.



2007 Nate Aalgaard presents to Sen. Byron Dorgan at the Waking the Sleeping Giant Forum.



2008 Grand Opening of Freedom's remodeled Fergus Falls Office

## In Memory

*Freedom would like to honor our staff and Board members who have died during our twenty years. While we did our best to complete this list, we apologize for any omissions.*

*Bruce Kolding - Founder  
 Bryce Arneson- Board Member 1996  
 Pat Beatty- Board Member 1989-92 and 1995-1998  
 Christine "Chick" Kastrinos- Board Member 2001-2007  
 Robert VanBeek- Staff 1996-2001  
 Deane Feland-Board Member 2001-2006  
 Jerry Exner- Board Member 1989-1991  
 Pat Konewko-Board Member 1990  
 Jean Cameron-Shupienis-Board Member 1992-1996  
 Grace Tveiten Board Member 1989-1991*

## Freedom Holds Healthcare Round Tables

By Scott Burlingame, Assistant Program Director

Few issues in modern history have proven as controversial or as polarizing for Americans as healthcare reform. Healthcare affects each of us, and perhaps more so for those of us with disabilities. At Freedom Resource Center, we support the availability of appropriate and affordable healthcare for all citizens, regardless of their income, age, or condition. But we wanted to hear from people throughout our service area and find out what their concerns were. So during July we held community roundtable discussions in Fargo, Jamestown, Wahpeton, and Fergus Falls.

All together 16 people attended our events. We had intense discussions at each of these meetings. We also held a roundtable for staff members to pick their minds, both as professionals and as people with disabilities, at the July Staff meeting.

The Following is a summary of the most common concerns, in order, that were raised by the participants in our discussions:

**Health Care Costs:** Out of the 16 responses, 11 reported not going to the doctor when they should have. The only exceptions to this were 3 people who had a fully covered employee plan, and one person who is on ND-Medicaid. At the Healthcare Roundtable in Hillsboro I attended, only two of the 25 people who attended reported not going to the doctor when they needed one. (Note: A majority of the people attending the event in Hillsboro were medical field professionals)

It is important to note that people reported both failing to go to the doctor because of the fear of the cost, and also reported having problems paying for their portion of the cost even when they were able to acquire health insurance. A common trend among all groups was concern over the excess cost of health insurance as well as the

mounting costs associated with co-pays and deductibles. This includes the cost-sharing part of prescription drug plans

**Health Care Access:** Nine of the 16 people attending reported going without Health Insurance at least once during their life. A majority reported that if they were not able to get health insurance through an employer-sponsored plan or a government program, that they would not be able to purchase health insurance as a result of a pre-existing condition.

In addition, many people reported facing barriers while attempting to receive needed health care. This was primarily a result of building and equipment accessibility issues for those with physical disabilities, and lack of knowledge/funding for the special cares needed for those with developmental disabilities. In particular, those with special needs have significant problems accessing dental care in the communities where they live.

**Preventative Care:** Across all the communities, people reported a frustration with the lack of preventative care within our system. Among the issues raised was the lack of access to tests and screening for disease on a regular basis. In general, people felt that our health insurance industry system pays out only when needs are at the highest.

**Nursing Home Issues:** Two of the 16 people reported having to live in a nursing home, because they could not access their needed services in the community. Both of these individuals are people under the age of 40, who were employed at the time of placement.

If anybody would like to meet with me about these or any of your issues regarding Healthcare Reform, please call me at 701-478-0459 or email me at [scottb@freedomrc.org](mailto:scottb@freedomrc.org).

## Information

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 701-478-0459 or 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.

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Alternate formats available upon request.

Editorial Board: Nate Aalgaard, Scott Burlingame, Cyndi Collins, and Rikki Trageton

## Freedom Celebrates the Americans With Disabilities Act

By Rikki Trageton, IL Advocate

On July 26<sup>th</sup> 1990, on the south lawn of the White House, surrounded by disability advocates and supporting members of Congress, President George H.W. Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act. The goal of the ADA was to break down barriers faced by people with disabilities in employment, transportation, public services, public accommodations, and telecommunications. This was landmark Civil Rights Legislation for people with disabilities.

In July 2009, Freedom Resource Center hosted ADA Celebrations in four communities in our service area. On July 23<sup>rd</sup> the ADA was celebrated in Fargo at Lindenwood Park. An estimated 200 people attended, marched in support of the ADA, shared a picnic, had a chance to try out an accessible bike, and visited with old friends and made new friends. Mayor Keith Coalwell of Dilworth and Mayor Dennis Walaker of Fargo joined our celebration. On that same evening, about 175 people gathered at the Buffalo Museum in Jamestown to share a picnic and stories of how the ADA has positively impacted their lives. Jamestown residents were also joined by their Mayor, Clarice Liechty who spoke to attendees.

On July 28<sup>th</sup> over 130 Fergus Falls residents celebrated with brief presentations by Freedom Resource Center Executive Director Nate Aalgaard and Independent Living Advocate Joyce Wolter, a march around Grotto Park, and a picnic. Representative Bud Norness and his wife Joyce were also in attendance.

Our final celebration took place on July 30<sup>th</sup> when 45 people gathered in the rain in Detroit Lakes. Our Detroit Lakes celebration took place in the parking lot of the Workforce Center, where Freedom has an office. Attendees shared a picnic and learned about how the ADA has a positive impact on their lives.

Freedom Resource Center would like to thank the following sponsors in all of the host communities for their support:

The Arc of Cass County  
Trans Em  
REM Central Lakes  
Productive Alternatives  
The Jamestown Mayor's  
Partnership  
Walmart  
Sysco Foods  
Hornbacher's  
Sunmart  
Cashwise  
Fergus Falls McDonald's  
Rural MN CEP



Jamestown



Detroit Lakes



Fergus Falls



Fargo



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**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

The Mission of Freedom Resource Center for Independent Living is to work toward equality and inclusion for people with disabilities through programs of empowerment, community education and systems change.

We envision a society where ALL individuals are valued, respected and have equal opportunity, access, responsibility, and freedom of choice in all aspects of life.

## Freedom Resource Center's 20th Anniversary Dinner and Celebration

**September 24th, 2009**

**Ramada Plaza Suites  
Crystal Ballroom  
Fargo, ND**

**5:00 Social Hour  
5:00 Board Meeting  
6:00 Dinner  
7:00 Awards/Staff and Board Recognition  
7:30 Speaker: Chad Hymas  
8:30 Drawings**

**A \$10 Ticket buys your Meal, the chance to Win Prizes and to hear a Nationally Known Motivational Speaker!**

To purchase tickets or for more information call Rikki  
(701)478-0459 V/TTY or 1-800-450-0459