

the Independent

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

December 2014

The Impact That Changed Everything



Stephanie Rivers

Life can unexpectedly change for anyone. The loss of a loved one, a downsize of a company, or prolonged illness are just a few examples of what people may encounter that change the way they live. For Stephanie Rivers life changed after a car accident in 1989. This is her story on the road to independence.

"I was in a car accident in 1989 when a young person pulled out in front of me on the highway and I t-boned their car." Stephanie recalled. She had not suffered an injury that was visible from the accident, but she noticed something was different. The invisible injury she sustained would impact her work, family, and daily living. "I wasn't really given a diagnosis of anything until 1994 and even then it wasn't very clear. But I knew something was different."

After the accident, Stephanie began having difficulty

doing the daily tasks she completed before. Her attention span and short term memory seemed to have shifted. Relationships changed, employment became difficult, and unfortunately there were no answers. "I was trying to live my life the best I could," she said. "I tried work, school, and other things, but they were just too tough."

Eventually anxiety and depression from her unexplained changes took its toll and Stephanie checked in to a local care facility for help. During this time Stephanie learned about Freedom Resource Center in Wahpeton. First referred for employment, Stephanie began to learn more about her disability and where to turn for additional questions and help.

"I know that if you have questions, you go to Freedom Resource Center. I'm glad to find the help I deserve"

In 2012, Stephanie checked back in for care. With new leadership and new programs available at a local facility, Stephanie discovered she sustained a brain injury from her car accident in 1989. Referred to a therapy center from the care facility, Stephanie heard information that would change her world view. "Progressive Therapy in West Fargo listed all of the symptoms of a traumatic

brain injury and I was shocked. It was me they described." Stephanie continued. "Prior to that I thought I was going crazy."

Following the discovery of her brain injury, Stephanie has begun to regain independence and a new perspective on life. "It's hard but I'm getting there. It is challenging to learn to become independent. But, I know that if you have questions, you go to Joyce and Freedom Resource Center." Stephanie told us. "I'm glad to find the help I deserve."

"Before Freedom Resource Center and her diagnosis, Steph was just getting by with her traumatic brain injury," Joyce Wolter, Independent Living Advocate explained. "Since the beginning it is unbelievable the strides I've seen her make."

"The most difficult thing is people don't understand what I do and what I need to do." Stephanie explained. She described that people don't get why she utilizes special eyewear to prevent her instability or ear plugs to drown out loud noises. Stephanie keeps a journal and calendar, referred to as her "bible", with her at all times to write things down. All are adjustments she's had to make due to a brain injury.

Participating in Freedom Resource Center's programs has benefited Stephanie. She was very helpful in organizing a brain injury support group in the Wahpeton-Breckenridge area. She's also assisted in the peer mentor program and attends Freedom In Action periodically.

Recently with the help of Freedom Resource Center Stephanie purchased a new home in Breckenridge. September of 2014 was when the paper work was finalized. She expressed excitement of being able to host family for the holidays.

Life changes for all of us but it's how we adapt to those changes that makes us stronger. "You can't go back to who you were before the accident," Stephanie stated. "You start life as of now. I love the person who I am now. I want to make my life, my life."

Freedom Resource Center looks forward to continuing to partner with Stephanie as she creates her life as of now. To learn more about traumatic brain injuries please contact Freedom Resource Center at 800-450-0459.

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INSIDE

North Dakota Legislative Preview

January 6th, 2015, will mark the first day of the 64th North Dakota legislative session. For approximately 80 days, legislators from across the 47 legislative districts will gather in Bismarck and set a course for the next two years. From roads and bridges, to taxes and education, this session will prove to be historic. While the needs all over the state are great, we must make certain people with disabilities are represented and that we continue to remove barriers to independence.

Looking at the legislative recommendations presented from the interim committees, along with Governor Dalrymple's budget proposal, we begin to get a feel for this session's priorities. It is clear access to behavioral health services will be the largest topic covered in the realm of human services. During

the interim, the period between legislative sessions, the North Dakota Legislature hired Schulte Consulting to report on the status of behavioral health in the state. The report came back with startling revelations and described access to behavioral health and substance abuse services as being in a state of crisis.



North Dakota Capitol in Bismarck, ND

services and providers. Legislation has been put forward to establish a TBI registry to help lawmakers get a better understanding how many people are in need of TBI services. Also, the Legislature will look at creating a TBI flex fund program.

Home and Community Based Services will be looked at as well. After reviewing a Community of Cares presentation, legislators proposed a bill that would help establish other volunteer based services to help people live in the community. In hopes of increasing access to HCBS the Legislature will look at opening up eligibility requirements such as not requiring an individual to apply for services under the state's medical assistance program as a condition of eligibility.

Among other service shifts to be looked at in the months ahead is the transfer of social service funding from the counties to the state. The state mandates certain services to be provided by county social services. Currently, those state mandates are not funded by the state but are paid for mostly by local property taxes. This will prove to be a lively debate and the Legislature needs to ensure a balanced approach to ensure services are not regionalized in the state's hub cities.

Of course, these are but a few of the subjects legislators will look to address. Already the number of bills introduced looks to be on the rise from previous sessions. All of that means legislators will need to be guided by advocates, consumers, families, and businesses as to what is needed in North Dakota to continue and improve the quality of life for those who call this great state home.

Following the report, a number of legislative bills were put forward to remove barriers including increased funding to expand substance abuse treatment services, mental health training for teachers and child care providers, establishment of a mental health network to connect individuals with needed services, and incentives to expand the mental health workforce. Along with the aforementioned proposals the legislature will look at expanding coverage to cover the cost of services. The Governor also included more than \$6 million dollars to expand services to existing state programs. As interested readers, the progress on these bills will be important to watch.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) services will also be debated. Currently we find a disconnect between individuals needing

EYI

Cooking 101

Class by NDSU Extension Services
When: Every other Wednesday beginning January 7
Time: 10:30am to 12:00pm
Where: 1010 2nd Ave. S. Fargo, ND
Class is limited to 10 people. Call Cindy at 701-478-045 by January 5 to RSVP

Nourishing Boomers and Beyond

Nourish your muscles
When: January 15
Time: 1:00pm to 3:00pm
Where: Community Room, Wahpeton
Free class to all and will continue through August. Call Joyce at 701-672-1648.

Giving Hearts Day

When: February 12
Time: All Day
Where: www.impactgiveback.org
Have your online donation to Freedom Resource Center multiplied to have a greater impact for people with disabilities.

From Where I Sit



*Nate Aalgaard,
Executive Director*

This is the season of darkness. Ever since about June 21, we amount of daylight we experience has been going down. Today, on the first day of winter, we get about 8 ½ hours of daylight here in the Fargo area. It seems like ever since

around the first of November, you can tell each and every day that it is getting darker. But now it should start to turn around. Even that's enough to give people hope that spring and summer will once again bless us with warmth and light.

Winter, like many forms of disability, can be an isolated experience. It's hard to work up the ambition to go out at night when it's dark, and cold, and windy. It's easy to just wrap up in a blanket with a hot beverage and watch TV. However, isolation can be debilitating to one's mental status. I find myself in this mode at times, especially at this time of year.

When I go out to talk about issues facing

people with disabilities, I often say that we share one important thing in common – isolation. People with physical disabilities tend to be isolated by architectural or transportation barriers. There is not one single house in my neighborhood that I could get into, because they all have stairs. I'm not able to visit my neighbors, except when the weather is nice enough to be outside.

People who are blind, hard of hearing, or deaf are isolated by communication barriers. I know people who will not go to public events simply because they cannot hear what's going on. Maybe the venue does not have proper amplification equipment, too much background noise, or it is just not conducive to one-on-one communication. I've been at many meetings with someone who is blind and the people running it start passing out papers for everyone to read. Needless to say this is not equal access, and should not happen in this day and age. Unfortunately, it does all too often.

People with other types of disabilities may be isolated by stigma and discrimination. They are seen as "different" and are therefore shunned or ignored by other members of society. People don't know how to react when someone doesn't behave exactly as they think you should. People with other types of disabilities face isolation because of issues like depression, which simply

do not allow them to get up and interact with the public as they wish they could.

One other factor that cuts across disability lines is poverty. I've written several times about the need for more employment for people with disabilities. This is a very difficult and long-standing problem. Unemployment and poverty rates are extremely high and there are a number of factors that are to blame. They go from discrimination, the lack of transportation, poor health, housing problems, fear of losing benefits, to unequal opportunity to get a good education worked to develop work skills. The lack of money limits opportunities to go out and enjoy movies, concerts, restaurants, and all sorts of other social activities.

An important thing to remember at this time of year is that there are many of us in the same boat. We struggle with isolation, bad weather, and frustration. We can reach out to each other for support, a listening ear, and someone to spend time with who understands. That's what I love about my job – we're all working for the same thing and support each other through the process.

So as each day gets a little bit lighter, let's focus on the bright side. We have a lot to be thankful for, including each other. Just think, in three short months we will have a whole 12 hours of daylight!

New App



How often have you been traveling through unfamiliar places and wondered where the nearest bathroom is located? There is an APP for that! Wheelmate can be accessed via a smart phone or a computer. The below is a map of part of Fargo. The flags with "WC" indicate a water closet is available. The flag with the "2" indicates that two sites are close to each other. By zooming in, the flag labeled 2 will separate into separate locations.

Clicking on one of the WC flags will bring up a dialog box with more information about the location as shown below.



Anyone can add a site. Clicking on the 'add a new location' button will drop a blue pin on the screen. Move the blue pin to the correct location, notice how the address changes as the blue pin is moved. Click the 'Add Location' button in the dialog box to stick the location, or Click the blue 'X' in the top, right corner of

the dialog box to cancel the location. Be sure the pin is located correctly before adding the location, I haven't figured out how to move the flag once it is placed.



Clicking on the words 'toilet', 'parking', 'free' and 'pay' allows you to tell if one has to pay to park and/or use the bathroom. The default is free for both parking and bathroom. At this point, type in the name of the location and click on 'Add Location' to change the blue pin to a flag.

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.

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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.

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

*“Helping people with disabilities live
more independently for 25 years”*

Go to www.freedomrc.org
& click



Giving Hearts Day
impactgiveback.org
February 12, 2015

What's Wrong With This Picture?



Hint: This is in Fergus Falls.

If you think that all the stripes and the curb need to be blue, or the van aisle is supposed to be 11' wide with a 5' access aisle, then you are applying North Dakota rules in Minnesota. ADA does NOT specify the International Symbol of Accessibility (ISA) must be used on the pavement nor the color of the stripes. ADA prefers 11' wide van parking with 5' access aisle, but ADA accepts 8' parking with 8' access aisle. Minnesota specifies that ALL access aisles will be 8' wide. That means that all accessible parking spaces in Minnesota are van accessible unless the vertical clearance is less than 98".

Is anything wrong? Yes. The bottom of the signs should be 60" above the ground and there is no curb cut. A person using a wheelchair can access the building because the entire corner of the sidewalk to the right of the parking spaces is sloped to pavement level.