

# the Independent

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

December 2013

## Freedom In Action

The feeling of togetherness and finding a place to belong is one of the driving forces in our social wellbeing as individuals. We find ourselves forming groups of like-minded people, start leagues around competitive hobbies, and make routine dinner plans with our closest group of friends to get out share a laugh and avoid the feeling of loneliness. It is commonly said those who are actively participating in their communities and regularly socializing with their neighbors lead healthier, more fulfilled lives.

Unfortunately, many people with disabilities struggle to become engaged in their community and participate in social gatherings. Many people cite years of isolation, which started in a segregated class room in grade school and has accompanied them throughout their lives in housing and employment as to the reason they have social anxiety. This cycle of isolation, segregation, and loneliness expressed by many of our consumers is the reason Freedom Resource Center began hosting Freedom In Action.

Freedom In Action (FIA) is a monthly event held at each of our offices and offers people with disabilities and without disabilities an opportunity to gather in their community at social settings to learn a new skill, discover a new hobby, or simply get out of the house and meet new people. The goal of FIA is to break down the barriers of segregation and isolation, and to unleash the freedom of individuals through interaction, skills learning, and engaging activities.

"Freedom in Action is exactly what it says, we do something to bring people together who would not normally step out of their comfort zones." Said Diane Siekaniec, Independent Living Advocate. "I would like the people that come to learn to trust each

other enough to develop some friendships and know that they can rely on each other for support through rough times." She continued. "Having a group of individuals like this helps people feel the value of being a participating member of the community."

The benefit of FIA reaches beyond what participants may realize. "When I have the opportunity to step back and observe interactions that people are having when they attend Freedom In Action events, I am encouraged by the growth that I see them making in their confidence level, their skill level and that they are having fun while they are attending." Cindy Gabbert, Independent Living Advocate pointed out. "Some people have even begun to form their own gatherings outside of the FIA settings which is really encouraging to see."

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*Blanket Making in Jamestown*



*Apple Pie Making in Fargo*



*Self Defense Course in Detroit Lakes*



*Planting Seeds in Wahpeton*

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# INSIDE

# Experience Freedom In Action

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By Caroline Congdon

FIA events vary greatly as planned activities are generated based on interest from attendees. Most events have had a hands-on aspect such as self-defense classes, baking, or planting; yet not all events have a physical aspect. Trips to concerts, plays, and museums are not uncommon when it comes to FIA.

Upcoming FIA events can be found on the Independent Newsletter monthly editions on Page 2 under "FYI" or by calling your local Freedom Resource Center office. If you are interested in participating in a FIA event, or have a unique idea for future events, we encourage you to get involved. As always, we welcome any disability at any age. Friends and family are welcome too.

## FYI

**What:** Journal Making  
**Presenter:** Carol Kapaun Ratchenski  
**When:** January 24th, 2014  
**Time:** 2:00pm to 4:00pm  
**Where:** Freedom Resource Center,  
2701 9th Ave. S. Fargo ND  
**\*\*RSVP by January 17th by calling  
701-478-0459\*\***

**What:** Self Defense Class  
**Where:** Jamestown, ND  
**\*\*For more information contact Andrea at  
701-252-4693\*\***

**What:** Price Matching and  
Comparison Shopping  
**Where:** 315 11th Street North,  
Wahpeton, ND  
**When:** To Be Determined  
**\*\*For more information contact Joyce at  
701-672-1648\*\***

**To learn about upcoming events in your  
area call us at 1-800-450-0459!**

As a blind person, one of the things I struggle most with personally is socializing with people, especially in a large group where I really don't know anyone. The fact that I can't make physical eye contact with people seems to sometimes make people feel uncomfortable, and when I attempt to join people in conversation, I often feel that I'm intruding. For that reason, since I moved here to Fargo a little over five years ago, I've kept my social circle small, and haven't had a lot of exposure to places around the area.

I've known about Freedom for several years, but it wasn't until early 2013 that I started getting involved. My advocate told me about the Freedom in Action events that take place each month, and I decided to give them a try. The first one I attended was book making. We were given paper, and they provided all sorts of different materials so that we could create our book covers. Everyone had a lot of fun, and we all got to go home with something tangible from the event.

Since then, I've participated in many of the other FIA events, including apple pie making, personal statement blocks, and more. These events have given me the opportunity to get out, spend time with others, and learn some new skills.

Through the Peer Mentoring program, I've helped form a crochet/knitting group, which is something I've wanted to be a part of since I moved up here. I find crafts to be very relaxing, and having the opportunity to join with others to share ideas, skills, and to see people who know nothing about the craft learn and gain confidence just makes it even better.

Through the different classes, events, and other programs that Freedom offers, over this past year I've gotten out more, gotten to know some new people, learned some new things that benefit me, and had some great new experiences. Most of all though, for me, this has all happened in a way that's helped to make me feel comfortable, and given me a bit more confidence in group settings. I look forward to the activities, classes, and volunteer opportunities that I've had, and I'm very glad that I've been able to be a part of it.



Caroline Congdon and Charlene Ota are assisted by Justin Kietzman as they make personal statement blocks



Caroline with 5K Medal

# From Where I Sit

by Nate Aalgaard, Executive Director

I am writing this article from bed. No, it's not that I'm lazy. I've been restricted to spending most of my time in bed for the last month. A common affliction for those of us who use wheelchairs has finally caught up with me – pressure sores. The only surefire way to get rid of them is to stay off of them, so that's what I've done. I know it hasn't been that long compared to what other people have had to deal with, but I will tell you it has been a challenge.

As with most things I have had to get used to. I first approached it with the idea that I'm going to figure out how to make things work. I don't want to be a victim of circumstance. I want to be a problem solver, and that starts with my own problems. So for the first few days, it was me making up my mind that I was going to be tough and resilient. Before I left the clinic the day I was diagnosed, I started the process of getting the new wheelchair cushion and a tilt mechanism put on my chair. These would help relieve the pressure in the future, so that I hopefully won't have to deal with this problem again.

I set up a schedule with my personal care attendants to get out of bed three times a day, instead of the usual one. I started a conversation with Angie and our executive committee about getting an upgrade in my technology so I could work better from home. My family was a great help by bringing over food and spending time with me during my convalescence.

As the days stretched on into weeks, there were times when it got difficult to keep my spirits up. Of course, the fact that it's really cold outside and gets dark early didn't help. A guy gets used to taking naps and not being very ambitious. Despite our best efforts, there were technology problems that prevented me from getting work done. It was hard to stay in touch with the office without being able to see anyone. I have a greater appreciation for those board members who have not been able to make it to meetings, and have to participate by phone.

Thanksgiving was interesting. Our family was scheduled to go to my sister's, which was about a 2 1/2 hour drive. There was some talk about having the event at my house, but I said that people needed to go to my sister's. So I decided that with the limited amount of time I had to sit up each day, I would go to the community Thanksgiving dinner at Trinity Lutheran in Moorhead. I went by myself, and sat with a table of six other people. No one was very talkative. Everybody just dug in, and left soon after finishing their meal. The service was great, and the food was good. It was nice to be able to share it with other people, even though they were complete strangers. The whole experience gave me a great appreciation for my family, and also for all the volunteers who took time out of their holiday to serve us.

So now I'm getting close to being healed up. It's hard to be patient, but I'm hanging in there. Yesterday I decided that I needed to change my



Nate Aalgaard

attitude and be more optimistic. I got myself cleaned up even though I wasn't going anywhere. I decided to put on a shirt that was not black. I decided that I was going to have a good day. And you know what, I did. This, despite the fact that I think I'm catching a cold. Maybe I've been lying around in my dusty house too much.

This has definitely been a learning experience. I've learned how hard it is to stay positive when you have a long-term health issue. I've learned the value of family and friends, and the generous people in our community. I've learned how much I appreciate having something useful to do every day. I'm thankful for the opportunities that I have to work and engage in meaningful social relationships. I will not take them for granted.

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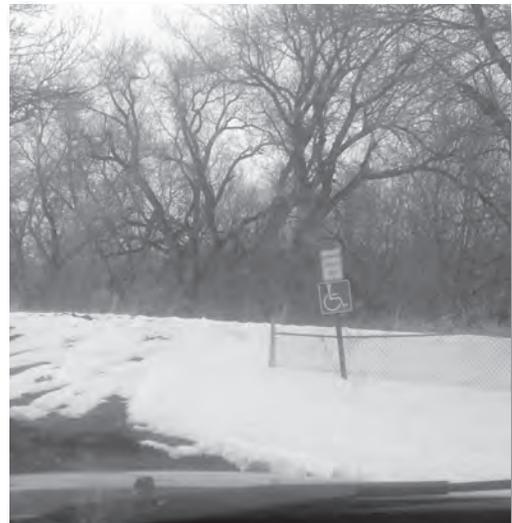


From all of us at Freedom Resource Center

Merry Christmas  
and Happy New  
Year!



## What's Wrong With This Picture?



As winter approaches, it is important to remember and keep parking spots clear of snow and ice. The parking spot shown is covered in snow and difficult to maneuver for someone in a wheelchair or using a walker.