

# the Independent

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

August 2013

## Learning To Do It Yourself

By Tyler Axness, Communication and Policy Coordinator

Often times we find ourselves in need of guidance to better enrich who we are as individuals. Sometimes we seek out others who will simply do the work for us. Other times we look for the skills training to do it ourselves. Susan Fischer discovered these different approaches last year when she came to Freedom Resource Center looking to improve upon herself.

One of the many struggles facing people with disabilities is finding long-lasting competitive employment with a livable wage and benefits. It is a major barrier Freedom has identified and is determined to help individuals overcome so they can be more independent. Without a livable wage or benefits, how can a person afford housing, transportation, health care access, and life's essentials?

Unemployment frustrations led Susan through the doors of Freedom. Weeks of struggling with the unemployment system of Minnesota went by and Susan searched for answers. "I needed a little push, someone to provide me the tools I needed to make a change." She said. "I decided there is no more 'just getting by' in my life."

***"I was excited because at Freedom, I was learning what to do and how to do it instead of having it done for me."***

There are a handful of organizations readily available for people in need of assistance. Many times people don't know the differences between agencies. In the process of working on employment skills, Susan discovered what makes Freedom Resource Center unlike other organizations.

"I was getting help from other organizations, but I knew there had to be something out there I hadn't experienced, so I kept looking." She said. Susan began services at Freedom by learning budgeting skills through the program Money Smart. She learned the importance of keeping track of her budget and watching her spending habits. A couple weeks went by and Susan decided to seek another goal; employment.

"I've learned from Cindy the answer will always be 'No' if you don't ask," She said. "So I asked about employment skills because my goal was to work." Susan was asked to bring in her application materials including her cover letter and a few jobs she was interested in. Cindy Gabbert, Independent Living Advocate; worked with Susan on job seeking, finding employment leads, and interviewing skills.

"I was excited because at Freedom I was learning what to do and how to do it instead of having it done for me." Susan continued. "Unlike other experiences I had, I felt like I was becoming more independent by learning skills instead of just being another number."



Susan Fischer

A new class was beginning at Freedom called Working Well with a Disability and Susan eagerly signed up. Through this class and the continued discussions with Cindy she learned more about reasonable accommodations and how to ask for them. When the class completed, Susan decided to go on with her skills training in Living Well with a Disability and a new program Freedom has initiated called Self Sufficiency.

With new tools to use, Susan felt empowered. Employed at the Fargo Youth Commission, Susan recently earned a promotion to a supervisor position in the after school care program. She was also asked to serve on the Patient Advisory Council at the Family HealthCare clinic in downtown Fargo.

"I've felt like I've come a long way here at Freedom Resource Center because the staff and classes are great." Susan concluded. "I've learned new skills and how to become more independent. There are life struggles, but don't give up." We are happy to see Susan stop by our office periodically to continue using Freedom's numerous resources. We are happy to be a partner in her life goals.

## What's

- What is an Advocate at Freedom Resource Center
- Trivia Tidbits
- From Where I Sit
- What's Wrong With This Picture?

# INSIDE

# What is an Advocate at Freedom Resource Center?

By Andrea Nelson



Andrea Nelson

"So what do you do for work?" says the friendly dental hygienist as I am getting a cleaning last week. I know what I am supposed to say, but pause for a second wondering how much she wants to know. This could be a loaded question with a very

lengthy response. Since she is in the process of putting tools in my mouth I decide a very short and simple response is the best option. "I am a disability rights advocate at Freedom Resource Center", I said. We politely share a conversation about how long I have worked at Freedom and if I like my job. I mention a few more things about Freedom like; we work with

people at any age and disability assisting them in their advocacy needs. My cleaning gets over with and I get my free toothbrush and paste and she says to me; "So are you like an attorney then?" I smile and then go into more detail on what I do as an advocate at Freedom.

This situation is not unique to me or other advocates at Freedom. I have heard many times from family and friends that they know I work with people with disabilities and I do stuff that is similar to an attorney.

## As an advocate we help individuals find their voice

So what does an advocate at Freedom do? When I look up the definition of advocate online I find: The act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy; active support.\*\*\* That is a small part of what we do at Freedom. As an advocate we help individuals find their voice. Many people with disabilities have been told what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. So often people we have worked with have never had the opportunity to speak up for

themselves. This also means they might not have the skills to communicate their needs effectively. We provide information about resources, education, and skills training. Being an advocate for yourself is not always easy, but once you have effectively communicated your wants and needs it turns into a very powerful experience.

If I could sum it all up as an advocate I'd say I develop relationships with people, listen to their goals and needs, and talk with them about steps they want to take to reach their goals. I serve as a role model and support system while empowering and encouraging them to take responsibility for their own actions. I show them the importance of learning laws and policy. Sometimes being an advocate means being the one who points out the habits and traits that are not helping them reach their goals and letting the individual decide how to go from there.

*If you are not willing to learn, no one can help you. If you are determined to learn, no one can stop you.*

-Author Unknown.

\*\*\* Source: The Free Dictionary

## EYI

### Potato Days

**When:** Friday, Aug 23 & 24, 2013

**Description:** Lots of fun for the whole family in Barnesville. Parade, games, contests and don't forget...Mashed Potato Wrestling!

**For more information:** 800.525.4901 or go to [www.potatodays.com](http://www.potatodays.com)

### Streets Alive

**When:** Sunday, Aug 25, 2013

**Description:** Turn off your engines. Turn on your hearts! Join our annual event to spark human movement! Three miles of downtown Fargo and Moorhead streets shut down to motorized traffic so you can walk, run, bike, skate, dance --and eat or meet with healthy vendors.

**For more information:** [www.fmstreetsalive.org](http://www.fmstreetsalive.org)

### Island Park Show

**When:** Saturday, August 24, 10 am – 5 pm; Sunday, August 25, Noon to 5 pm.

**Description:** Bring your friends and indulge yourself! Spend a day at Island Park [302 7th St S, Fargo] shopping in the shade! Find unique items, enjoy excellent food and listen to great music.

**For more information:** 701.241.8160 or go to [www.fargoparks.com](http://www.fargoparks.com)

## Trivia Tidbits

1. Under the Fair Housing Act, if you or someone associated with you have a physical or mental disability, have a record of such a disability, or are regarded as having such a disability your association or landlord may not:

- Refuse to let you make reasonable modifications to your dwelling or common use areas, at your expense, if necessary for the disabled person to use the housing.
- Refuse you the right to violate rules and regulations of the building (i.e. no smoking) just because you have a disability and should be treated differently.
- Refuse to make reasonable accommodations in rules, policies, practices or services if necessary for

the person with a disability to use the housing.

- Refuse to let you violate the length of your lease agreement (i.e. move out early) without any penalties because you have a disability.

2. If your business was built or altered in the past 20 years in compliance with the 1991 ADA standards you do not need to make further modifications to comply with the 2010 ADA Standards.

T or F?

3) I am required to disclose my disability to a future employer during an interview.

T or F?

ANSWERS: (1) a and c. (2) False. Businesses are still required to perform "readily achievable barrier removal." (3) False.

# From Where I Sit



## Looking for Champions in Advocacy

Nate Aalgaard

In last month's article, I talked about the unfulfilled promise of the ADA. After the fact, I felt that I might have been a little bit too negative. But upon further reflection, I believe that my statements were accurate then, and now. Sometimes it feels like I'm shouting into the wind when trying to be an advocate. I'm putting forth a lot of effort, but nobody is noticing. You'd think that after all this time you wouldn't have to worry about common accessibility barriers. But I can go pretty much anywhere and find problems, and I'm just idealistic enough to expect better.

Lately my partners in advocacy have been Keith and Sherry Bjornson. Keith had some health issues a couple years ago, but is now feeling better and is able to get out in the community. He has gone with me to provide ADA training, has joined me on the Joel Heitkamp radio show talking about accessibility, and regularly goes out in the community and points out barriers when he comes across them. As a member of the Fargo Human Relations Commission, he's trying to influence policies at the city level.

I know there are other people out there like me who are frustrated. While Keith and I were on the radio an email came in from Cathy Obregon, who works for CSD as an interpreter. She corrected Joel on some language he was using to describe people with disabilities. She also pointed out that communication services post-ADA

should have gotten a D- grade instead of the rosy C that I assigned to it. Earlier, she told me a story about a guy she knows not being afforded an interpreter during a critical situation. "I just couldn't let it go," she said. For her, interpreting is not just a job, it's a passion. She wants to ensure people who use American Sign Language have equal opportunity when it comes to communication.

I know there are a lot of obstacles to being an advocate. It's hard work, and you don't often see results. In small towns, you could get ostracized for being a "troublemaker." When you only have so many people to interact with, that can be a tremendous burden. A lot of times it's easier

press on. My small country church, with maybe 20 people attending on any given Sunday, found the resources to make their bathrooms accessible. They still have an issue with access up to the sanctuary area, but that's far more expensive and difficult. I've never pushed that issue, because of the expense and the declining population in my rural community. But they are conscious of the barriers and are doing what they can with the resources available. This type of thing has happened in many organizations, and that should not go without notice.

I know there are people out there every day trying to make the world a better place for those of us with disabilities. If you are one of those people, or know somebody



On July 24, Keith Bjornson and Nate Aalgaard sat down with Joel Heitkamp on KFGO to talk about the ADA and what we need to do moving forward for people with disabilities.

to just put up with it for fear of risking the few relationships that you do have. Maybe you have physical problems that don't allow you to get out and about or have the energy you need. I can understand that to some extent. I've had times in my life when physical issues have prevented me from doing what I want to do.

I still believe that even though we don't see immediate results we must

who is making a difference, please let me know. Those stories inspire me. Another thing we can do is publish the stories in our newsletter or website. We also give annual awards and recognize people who have gone out and done good work in the field of advocacy. Now is the time to toot your own horn and brag a little bit. Let us all know what you are doing out there.

## 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.

Funding for this publication was provided by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), Rehabilitation Services from the state's general fund, the State of North Dakota, and about 33% from the Federal Department of Education. However, the contents of this publication do not necessarily represent the policy of the funders and you should not assume endorsement by any government entity.

Alternate formats available upon request.



NON PROFIT ORG  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
FARGO, ND  
PERMIT NO. 1159

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

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

*“Equal Choice,  
Equal Responsibility”*

Go to [www.freedomrc.org](http://www.freedomrc.org)  
& click



## What’s Wrong With This Picture?



Property management truck blocking path of travel and accessible parking spot. There is a “No Parking Tow” sign. There is no proper accessible parking signage.