

# the Independent

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

September 2013

## Cultivating Change

By Tyler Axness, Communication and Policy Coordinator

Fall is upon us. As the days become shorter and the air cooler, the area's farmers are anticipating the harvest from their planting earlier in the year. If you grew up in a rural community you may be aware this year will be potentially challenging on our farming neighbors. I sat down with one of those farmers, former Freedom Resource Center board member Brian Kihn, to talk about harvest and what his 12 years serving on the board has meant to him.

"I can see similarities in the practice of farming and living with a disability. You can prepare for what you think is the worst-case scenario and take preventive measures, but sometimes accidents just happen." Brian said. "Then there are also those times that nature just decides differently than what you anticipated, whether it is the weather on your crops or being born with a disability, and it is completely out of your control. The real important thing is how do you move forward and give back regardless."

Giving back is what Brian has done much of his life. Beyond serving 12 years on Freedom's board, Brian has been and continues to be a peer mentor to dozens around the community. He started peer mentoring those with spinal cord injuries at what is now Sanford Health after his doctor suggested it would be beneficial for his patients. "I have found in mentoring others through their challenges that I have been getting more than what I feel I'm giving." He stated. "Mentoring was really intimidating at first, but the more I've done it, the more it has shed a light on my own personal journey."

*"It is important to be a part of and not apart from the voice of the disability community. That's why I like being associated with Freedom Resource Center."*

Bobbi Mundt served as the Peer Mentoring Specialist at the time when Brian began volunteering as a mentor at Freedom. She said, "Brian has always taken peer mentoring very seriously. As a mentor, Brian tries to offer suggestions that may help without acting as a 'know-it-all' for people in need of help. He really shows his experience and lets the person decide for themselves how to move forward."

Nate Aalgaard, Freedom Resource Center's Executive Director, has known Brian since the early 90's when the two played Quad Rugby together with the North Dakota Wallbangers. The two were teammates for a few years, and Nate later became the team's coach. "I was probably the best coach Brian ever had," Nate joked. Brian later disputed that assumption. "That might be true in his eyes," Brian

fired back with a laugh, showing the great sense of humor noted by everyone who has met him.

"When I joined Freedom years later, I asked Brian to join our board of directors because we really needed new blood and a new voice for Independent Living philosophy." Nate said. "He is not one for fame, but Brian is very realistic, full of common sense, and has a genuine positive attitude that we needed at Freedom. That common sense and positive attitude has made Brian a major contributor in our fiscal matters and instrumental in our fundraising efforts." He concluded. During Brian's tenure, Freedom has grown in staffing to provide enhanced services to a great area in southeast North Dakota and west central Minnesota. Freedom Resource Center was also awarded The Fargo-Moorhead-West Fargo-Dilworth Chamber's 2012 Small Not-For-Profit of the Year.



Brian Kihn

Brian completed his last year on the board in 2013 but he maintains a good relationship with Freedom's staff and more importantly those he has peer mentored over the years. "It is important to be a part of and not apart from the voice of the disability community. That's why I like being associated with Freedom Resource Center," he said.

As he has planted seeds for harvest in the field, Brian has also planted the seeds for personal growth and community change in many of the people and places he has come in contact with over his lifetime. We are happy, honored, and proud to have worked with Brian for so many years and watch him impact so many people's lives in our community as a leader in the disability rights movement.

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# What is Peer Mentoring?

By Justin Kietzman



Justin Kietzman

One of Freedom Resource Center's core services is Peer Mentoring. People are often looking for someone to talk to about their struggles and are not sure where to turn. Many people are unaware of how this program works to help others become more independent. To illustrate this program, let's use the example of Suzy Q and John Doe.

Suzy Q has a big test coming up and

has no idea how to pass it. She has tried to do it plenty of times by herself, but can't figure out how. She then comes to Freedom and tells us what is going on. We tell her about the peer mentoring program and how mentors are able to provide different insight, techniques, and be there for her. She says she would like to do it and gets matched up with the mentor, John Doe (How original right?).

While meeting with John, they talk about the goal she has of passing this test. They figure out a plan in which they will get together and start working toward achieving it. John gives Suzy a different perspective she hasn't thought about, different study materials, and most of all an ear to listen and a voice to tell her she can do it. After a month and a half of studying for the test, Suzy goes into the testing place and passes with flying colors.

This is just one example of what the peer mentoring program is about. People come to the peer mentor program asking for assistance for a variety of things. It

could be anything from adapting to a new disability, learning how to get more creative in their art, to just needing someone to talk with about everyday life. The overall similarity everyone has in common is that they are all working toward the achievement of a goal that will help them live a better, more independent life.

In my opinion, the greatest thing about the peer mentor program is that all of the peer mentors are volunteers and are doing it because they truly care. One thing we talk about is that not one of us is good at everything, but we are all good at something. The peer mentor's strengths are showcased and they are only asked to do what they feel they are good at.

If you would like a peer mentor for assistance, would like to be a peer mentor, or want to hear more about the program, please call Freedom and ask for me, Justin Kietzman. I would be more than willing to assist in any way.

## EYI

### What: Personal Statement Blocks

You may want to bring quotes, images, song lyrics that are inspirational and meaningful to you and anything else you want to place on your block

**When:** September 26th, 2013

**Time:** 1:00 to 3:00 pm

**Where:** Freedom Resource Center, Fargo  
Supplies will be provided.  
RSVP by calling 701-478-0459.

### Couponing 101 with Karla Thiele

@ the Frame Shop in Wahpeton  
Tuesday September 24th at 2:00  
Must pre-register by calling Joyce at 701-672-1648 or Wanda at 1-800-450-0459

### Join Freedom in Action in making caramel apples!

October 29, 2013  
10:00-11:00 am  
Conference Room #3 Lincoln Center,  
Fergus Falls  
*Materials will be provided: registration is appreciated so we have enough for everyone!!*  
218-998-1799

## What Others Are Saying About Us

"I wanted to get my independence and a lot of other things back. Freedom Resource Center has helped me out with a lot of different things. The people there have opened my eyes to a lot of things. I'm going to keep on going. If you need help, ask for the people at Freedom Resource Center."

– Cathy Ragan

"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 Fischer

"Joyce (Wahpeton staff) helped me to begin thinking positively, to stop lying to myself, and don't worry about the judgment of others."

–Jennifer Blom

"The staff at Freedom Resource Center are great. They welcomed me with a smile every time I came in. I felt I had another family at Freedom."

– David Henager

# From Where I Sit



Nate Aalgaard

By Nate Aalgaard

If you've watched the TV news in the past couple weeks, you know school is open again. Maybe school is different than when I was a kid.

I don't recall being very excited about it. I remember more reluctance. After the first year I knew all the kids, and was looking forward to seeing them again. However, many of my closest friends were my neighbors and I saw them all the time during the summer anyway.

Going to college was a different story altogether. I attended the University of North Dakota, because at that time it had the best services for students with disabilities in the area. There, I hardly knew anyone. Plus, I had my newly-acquired disability to deal with and that was pretty scary. What helped the most was that I got to live in a dorm with several other guys who had spinal cord injuries and used wheelchairs. Little did I know, I was involved in what we now call peer mentoring. Living with those guys and learning from them on a daily basis was a tremendous benefit to me.

Last week I was at UND prior to the first football game of the season. I had a bit of extra time, so I decided to stop by the Disability Services for Students office. While there, I found one of the staff was someone I knew from my time living in Grand Forks. I visited with her for a few

minutes about where we both were in our career and life. She told me that the philosophy of their office was completely different than when I went to school there in the late 70's and early 80's. She said at that time Disability Services was the be-all and end-all for students with disabilities. Now they mostly work on classroom accommodations.

I recall that many of the buildings on campus were not that accessible, if at all. And this was the college that the state of North Dakota put the majority of its resources into for students with disabilities. But the university had many services to help alleviate barriers, such as a van that brought us to class, and paid notetakers for us if we had difficulty writing. They assisted us with our registration, and with finding personal care attendants. They had a sports program, and even repaired our flat tires and did minor maintenance on our wheelchairs. If we needed to go to the Student Union, we stopped by the Disability Services office, which was right across the street. One of the staff would come and push up the steep loading ramp, which was the only way we could get in.

With many more schools offering better accessibility in their programs and facilities because of laws like the ADA, we have more choices of where to go for higher education. People with disabilities are more integrated, and thus there is not the same kind of need for specialized programs like the one I utilized.

I'm all for integration. It symbolizes progress in our fight to become equal

members of society. But I do think there is a certain value in peer relationships that may be lost if those of us with disabilities do not have the opportunity to get together and learn from each other in informal settings. That, much more than the formal disability services I received, is what I value most from my college experience.

Many of the people I met in college are still my best friends. Would that have happened if we had been fully integrated and went our separate ways to any college of our choosing? Maybe things would've been better for us if we had more options back then. The fact is, we will never know. My bottom line is this: People need to have acceptable choices about their education, as well as other aspects of their life. Integration is great, but so is the value of peer relationships.

## Open for business in Lisbon

Pam Foertsch is the newest Freedom employee and is staffing the Lisbon office. Funding for this expansion was provided by the 2013 North Dakota Legislature. Area residents can reach us at:

701 Main Avenue  
Lisbon, ND 58054  
Office: (701) 683-6850  
Cell: (701) 680-7441  
E-mail: pamf@freedomrc.org

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If you would like to be removed from our mailing list please call 1-800-450-0459.

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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.

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& click



## Deadline Extended!

The deadline for participating in the “Art of Freedom” event has been extended to October 1st! Freedom Resource Center is seeking artists with disabilities who express their freedom through art. We are asking for art of any form. And, no, you do not need to be a “professional.”

The event will be October 17th at the Dakota Medical Foundation in Fargo, ND from 5 pm to 8 pm. The event will showcase local artists and Freedom Resource Center.

If you are interested in presenting your art work, contact Freedom Resource Center at 800-450-0459.

## What’s Wrong With This Picture?



It is a bit hard to tell, but this restroom door is far too narrow. The ADA requires a 32 inch minimum clear opening space through the doorway. This one is barely wide enough to walk through, much less navigate in a wheelchair.