

the Independent

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A Place to Call Home

By Tyler Axness

It's that feeling you get after a stressful eight hours in the office. Or that feeling after being on a trip for over a week. It's the feeling of relief, of warmth on a cold day, the feeling that there really is no place like home.

Unfortunately, not everyone gets to experience this embracing feeling. People living with disabilities struggle to find a home that is affordable and, more importantly, accessible. Yet sometimes, people facing these barriers refuse to take "No" for an answer. Sometimes the dream of homeownership is so vivid people will seek out all avenues to make that dream a reality. That was the case for Angelo Fantauzzi.

**"Freedom gave me the ability to find things
I never would have found."**

After struggling to find a bank that would approve him for a home loan, Angelo was about to give up on his dream. "I thought about going into assisted living. I felt the apartment I was living in at the time was unsafe and I knew I needed to move. But, I couldn't get a loan for a home," Angelo told us during an interview.

Frustrated, Angelo turned to friends for advice. "One friend told me to give Freedom Resource Center a try so I figured I'd give it one last shot." According to Angelo, right away Rebecca helped him get started with the USDA loan process. "I had no idea what resources were available," he acknowledged.

A few months after working with Freedom, Angelo became a first-time homeowner. "I realized, you don't know much about a house and being a homeowner until you move in!" he told us with a smile. Angelo continued to work with Rebecca to find other local resources to make his home more accessible.

The first obstacle was getting Angelo into his new home. To do so, Freedom provided him a temporary ramp through our Ramp Program

until a permanent ramp was able to be constructed. Construction of his permanent ramp was funded by Otter Tail County.

With the ramp constructed outside, we asked him what else he needed for his home. There is still much work to be done to get his home fully accessible. "The biggest challenge I have now is getting my basement to be accessible. That takes money. My laundry is in the basement. Since I can't get down there I have to rely on my Personal Care Attendant (PCA) to wash my clothes. I want to be able to do my own laundry. Relying on someone else to do something as basic as washing your clothes takes away some of my independence," he said.



Angelo Fantauzzi

Angelo explained to us some of the barriers he's continuing to face. "I'm grateful for the work the county has done, but we can do more. They (Otter Tail County) seem to think if I have one floor that's accessible its ok- to me it's not ok" he continued, "I think there is a lot of money being wasted that doesn't need to be. I've found cheaper accommodations, some that would have saved the county a lot of money if they would have allowed it. For example, my family could have helped construct the ramp, saving a lot of money." He also said there was equipment he found online that was much cheaper than what the county had recommended.

The frustration can be understood when it comes to your independence. Yet, Angelo explained he is positive the county workers are just doing their job as required by law. He expressed that lawmakers should look at his situation and realize there is the potential to save the county and state money if they simply adjusted their requirements.

Angelo has been a homeowner for about 10 months now. He lives there with his PCA and 7-month-old golden lab named Mystery. Just like any homeowner, he realizes the amount of effort it takes to turn a house into a home. Angelo's story highlights the added barriers to homeownership for people with disabilities. With a strong personal drive, and the resources provided by Freedom Resource Center, Angelo achieved one of his dreams – being a homeowner. It was obvious in our conversation Angelo was happy he didn't give up and go into assisted living, but kept fighting to remain independent. Freedom gave him the choice of where to call home and the opportunity to reach his goal. Angelo made it happen!

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INSIDE

From Where I Sit

By Nate Aalgaard,
Executive Director

May was a big month for Freedom Resource Center. On May 17th, The Chamber of Fargo, Moorhead, and West Fargo awarded us the Small Nonprofit of the Year. On May 22nd, we held our first appreciation luncheon and gave out several awards to some very deserving people. For me, both events caused some nervousness. One of the things that I worried most about was what to do if our name was called at the Chamber banquet and I had to go from I had to go up front and give a speech. It sure didn't help that I left my notes back in the office. I told one of my coworkers this, and she gave me the thumbs-up and said, "That's good luck." Maybe it was.

This award is a special honor, and I accept it on behalf of all the people who have put in time and effort to make this a great organization. I also feel that it adds responsibility for us to continue to grow and improve and build on what we have accomplished. I take this responsibility very seriously, as I know that everybody who pays taxes is in some way invested in Freedom Resource Center.

Our appreciation luncheon was also a tremendous success. We had over 160 people there. We all felt it was a great turnout being our first-ever event of this nature. We had good reviews from people who attended, and sincere thanks from those who received recognition. We had a few more awards this year, including accessibility, which was given to the Fargo Holiday Inn; employer of the year, Service Foods of Fergus Falls; and a couple of extra advocacy awards, because that was a category in which we felt so many people have done outstanding work.

We have been talking a lot at our workplace lately about positive energy. Just like negative energy, it is infectious. There are many things in our daily lives that can hold us down and make us feel negative. There are health issues, money problems, relationship issues. We are all reading a book called *The Energy Bus* by Jon Gordon. It is a fable about a guy whose car breaks down and he is having to ride a city bus for two weeks. His personal and professional lives were both a mess. On the

bus he meets the driver and several other people who turn his negativity around as he becomes a productive, happy person. We're using this book as a discussion starter to help us improve our personal and professional energy.



Nate Aalgaard

I'm also trying to use some positive energy in my latest venture. I decided after several years of thinking about it to join a summer pool league. Much like the events Freedom had during May, there were some nerves. I had to keep telling myself that I would do fine, meet some nice people, and that I would have fun. Guess what? It has all come true. I also tell myself on certain critical shots that the ball will go in the pocket. That one still needs some work. But I am determined to stick with it and to continue improving, and most of all have fun.

To Know

Celebrate the 22nd Anniversary Americans with Disabilities Act

Where: Gooseberry Park,
Moorhead, MN

***NOTE:** Location change!*

When: July 26th, 2012

Time: 5:00pm to 7:00pm

FREE PICNIC, GAMES,
& PRIZES!

ChamberChoice Award



Chamber Choice Award

On May 17th Freedom Resource Center was awarded the 2012 ChamberChoice Award for "Small Not-For-Profit of the Year." We'd like to thank The Chamber of Fargo-Moorhead-West Fargo and the anonymous person who nominated our organization!



Staff & Board accepting the Chamber Choice Award

Accessible Apartments & Service Animals

A warm and safe place to live and sleep is a basic need for everyone. For some, this ends up being a temporary shelter; but for most of those who come to Freedom Resource Center for services, it is an apartment. We frequently get calls from individuals living with a disability saying the apartment they just looked at, or they are renting, is not accessible or they are having problems renting because they have service animals. The answer to both of these issues comes from the Fair Housing Act.

Apartment Accessibility

All of the ground floor apartments in an apartment building built after March 13, 1991 (with four or more units) must include certain basic accessibility features.

- 1) There needs to be at least one building entrance on an accessible route, unless it is impractical because of the terrain.
- 2) Public and common areas must be readily accessible to and usable by people with disabilities.
- 3) All doors designed to allow passage into and within all premises must be sufficiently wide enough to allow passage by persons using a wheelchair.
- 4) There must be an accessible route into and through the apartment units.

- 5) Light switches, electrical outlets, thermostats, and other environmental control must be in accessible locations.
- 6) All apartment units must contain reinforcements in the bathroom walls to allow later installation of grab bars around the toilet, tub, shower stall and shower seat.
- 7) The kitchen and bathrooms must be wide enough so that a person using a wheelchair can maneuver in the kitchen and bathroom.

Each of these requirements have standards that are documented in the Fair Housing Design Manual, so if you have questions or concerns regarding your accessibility needs, don't hesitate to contact Freedom Resource Center.

Service Animals

The Fair Housing Act, as well as Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects the right of people living with a disability to keep emotional support animals, even when the landlord's policy explicitly prohibits pets. Emotional support animals are considered "service animals" and not "pets." In fact, you could consider service animals to be more like assistive aids such as wheelchairs. The law will generally require the landlord to make an exception to its "no pet" policy so

that a tenant with a disability can fully use and enjoy your apartment. A tenant will be required to have a letter of prescription from an appropriate professional, such as a therapist or physician, and the tenant need to meet the definition of a person with a disability. No additional fees, deposits, or increased rent can be accessed for a documented and approved service animal.

To learn more about your rights, responsibilities, as well as additional information and procedures regarding service animals, contact Freedom Resource Center.



Educational Advocate of the Year, Kalyn Botz of Valley City, ND, accepting her award.

Ending Homelessness

Housing and safety are human rights. Those who are homeless are more likely to die of exposure, common illnesses and violence. On December 21st which is the first day of winter and the longest night of the year the Fargo-Moorhead Coalition for Homeless Persons holds Homeless Persons' Memorial Day. It is done to remember those who have died due to homelessness.

In response to the deaths of those experiencing homelessness and the number of homeless persons in the area, the Fargo-Moorhead Coalition for Homeless Persons



A large crowd attended our first annual Appreciation Luncheon on May 22nd at the Venue at the Hub. It was a fun event with awards and recognition.

was formed. The Coalition became a forum for discussion about the particular circumstances related to working with those experiencing poverty and homelessness. The purpose of the Coalition was to coordinate and improve service delivery to FM homeless persons.

Today the Coalition holds several events to train service providers and to assist those who are homeless. Project Community Connect's objective is to bring the Fargo-Moorhead Community together to create and promote tangible solutions that prevent and remedy homelessness for our neighbors.

The FM Homeless Coalition also offers trainings on homelessness. One is Homelessness 101; which covers the basic elements of homelessness: who, what and why people become homeless; definitions, service mandates, the history and complexity of homelessness; as well as solutions that work to prevent, reduce and end homelessness.

Here is a list of programs that FMCHP offers: Homelessness 101, Wilder Research & Point in Time Studies, Monitoring & Working on plans to end homelessness, Community Education, Project Community Connect, Taxi Ride Program, Centralized

Screening and referral pilot, successful outcomes for tenants and landlords (SOFTAL), Advocacy & Ombudsmanship.

Some facts on the homeless:

- More than 17% of Americans live in poverty. Only 11% in other industrialized nations live in poverty.
- The US is number one for incarceration in the world. Crimes are equal between the upper and lower income levels, but those in poverty are incarcerated more.
- Between 2.3 and 3.5 MILLION Americans experience homelessness each year.
- Men, women, families, children, youth and veterans are all homeless.
- The number one cause of homelessness is lack of affordable housing.
- Those most vulnerable to becoming homeless are those with addictions, mental illness, domestic violence, medical conditions, and lack of education or job skills.

Information

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.

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.

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

*“Helping Bridge Your
Path to Independence”*

What’s Wrong With This Picture?



The aisle is cluttered with pallets of soil and other garden equipment making it difficult for someone using a chair or a walker to get through. Though we all enjoy this time of year in the upper Midwest, it is important to be mindful of people who use mobility devices!