

# A2I NEWSLETTER

Quarterly Newsletter from Access 2 Independence

## A New Year's Message

by Leah Zapf Donald, Executive Director

As we kick-off 2018 I'd like to extend best wishes for a happy and healthy New Year to all of our friends. 2017 was a fantastic year for us and we are immensely proud of all we accomplished. Assisting individuals in pursuit of goals toward independence is one of our core services and we renew our dedication to this in 2018. Last year our 3 fantastic Independent Living Specialists and 5 awesome interns provided 773 distinct services to individuals with disabilities working toward an independent living goal. We are privileged to be able to assist individuals and witness their progress. Whether those goals include obtaining housing, learning a new skill, or finding needed services, we are always excited to see individuals increase their confidence. As an organization, we are looking forward to another great year as we move forward with our mission to empower individuals with disabilities throughout the Eastern Iowa Corridor.

One of the many ways that Access 2 Independence works to empower individuals is to support their employment goals. We know that many disabled individuals experience barriers to employment. The U.S. Department of Labor reported that only 17.9 percent of Americans with disabilities were employed in 2016. This is a daunting statistic. We are glad that many wonderful initiatives are underway both nationally and locally to advance the employment opportunities for people with all types of disabilities. Obtaining and keeping a job is helpful to individuals in maintaining their independence and fully engaging with their community. While Access 2 Independence has since its inception supported consumers with their employment goals, we have just begun in the last year to build a dedicated employment program by contracting with the Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services in Johnson County as a Community Rehabilitation Provider. This is an exciting endeavor for us and we look forward to ramping up in 2018 working to removing the barriers to employment experienced by many people in our community. This work fits seamlessly with our core philosophies and mission. Inclusion in the workplace and access to employment is an expectation and we are poised to step up and make a difference for the individuals we serve. Thank you for your interest in Access 2 Independence and your generous support. We're eager to see all we can accomplish together in 2018!



Caption: Access 2 Independence Logo

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#### Staff:

Leah Zapf Donald, Executive Director  
 Kiersten Onanga, ILS  
 Donald Mitchell, ILS  
 Talor Gray, ILS  
 Meghan Stroback, Intern

#### Volunteers:

Evan Kress  
 Ron Carlson  
 Rylie Figurski

#### Board Members:

Peggy Loveless, Interim Board Chair  
 Gary Fabian, Vice Chair & Treasurer  
 Troy Ward, Voting Member  
 Amy Robasse, Voting Member  
 Jaia Rosenfels, Voting Member



## Board Member Spotlight: Troy Ward, LMHC

by Leah Zapf Donald, Executive Director

Troy Ward of Solon joined the Access 2 Independence Board of Director in November of 2016. When he's not busy working at REM Iowa as their Mental Health Specialist Troy can be found cheering on the Hawks, tinkering with his motorcycles or hanging out with his wonderful wife, Emily, and their two dogs Ace and Honey.

We've learned that we can always count on Troy not just for his expertise, but for a smile and a kind word. We're glad to have Troy on the board!



## Medicaid Managed Care Forum Recap

by Leah Zapf Donald, Executive Director

On November 13th, the Johnson County Task Force on Aging presented their annual Managed Care Forum. Access 2 Independence is proud to have been a part of this event. This year's theme was "Impact of Medicaid Managed Care on Iowans - Their Stories". We heard from Medicaid members, families, providers and advocates. The message was powerful and provided valuable personal insights into the experiences of real Iowans during this changeover from state managed Medicaid to privately managed Medicaid.



Access 2 Independence has a new face in the office! Ron Carlson is currently volunteering at both our Iowa City and Cedar Rapids offices through an Iowa Worker's Compensation program. Ron is a skilled carpenter and describes himself as an easygoing guy. In his spare time, Ron enjoys working on wood projects such as building baby cradles, picnic tables, and bread boxes. Once Ron is healed up again, he plans to work on a baby cradle for his new grandkid!



When asked about his time volunteering here at A2I, Ron says that he enjoys talking and working with the staff and is happy he can help out while he is recovering. "A very nice position and something you would enjoy doing" is what Ron would tell someone thinking about volunteering for A2I. In 2018, Ron has two New Year's Resolutions: He will keep a closer eye on his health, and he wants to build a house for his wife, himself, and their three adorable dogs. Thank you for your hard work Ron, and we hope you have a wonderful 2018!

# Are You Eligible for These Tax Filing Programs?

by Talor Gray, ILS

The 2018 tax season begins Monday, January 29 and extends until Tuesday, April 17th, and if you have questions about how to file your taxes, there are a few programs that you may want to know about.

The IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program and Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) program are supported by various local businesses throughout Iowa. Knowledgeable volunteers are prepared to provide free tax preparation for people who qualify. People who may qualify include low-to-moderate income households, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and English as a Second Language (ESL) persons. Call 1-866-968-7842 to see if you are eligible.

For adults 50 years and older, the AARP Foundation Tax-Aide is another option for free tax preparation. Call 1-888-687-227 to see if you qualify.

Additionally, the Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic through Iowa Legal Aid is available for qualifying low-income Iowans who have tax questions and problems. Call 1-800-532-1275 to see if you qualify.

Don't forget to ask what documents you need to bring with you to your appointment!



## Recent Events



Picture A: A Crafts with Kiersten Halloween Mask  
 Picture B: Ron and two of his dogs, Molly and Capri  
 Picture C: Sujit setting up his camera for "Hello It's Us"  
 Picture D: Rylie and Keelie working on a Turkey Craft  
 Picture E: Don, Talor, Kiersten, and Leah being interviewed for "Hello It's Us"  
 Picture F: Kiersten, Talor, Megan, Leah, and Don sending you a Happy Thanksgiving Message  
 Picture G: Uptown Bill's Expressive Arts Gingerbread House project

## Autism Social Groups for Adults and Teens

by Leah Zapf Donald, Executive Director

Access 2 Independence is excited to announce upcoming events for individuals who are on the autism spectrum. We're partnering with the Iowa City Autism Community to expand the existing social group for adults 18+ with Autism, while exploring community interest in a teen focused social group by holding two stakeholder meetings in February. Attend any of the listed events to share your thoughts on what programs you would like to see in your community.

**Stakeholder Input Meetings**  
for parents, educators, students, professionals, advocates:

**Wednesday, Feb. 7, 2018**

5:30pm - 6:30pm

Coralville Library

1401 5th St., Coralville

**Saturday, Feb. 10, 2018**

10:00am - 11:00am

Cedar Rapids Ecumenical  
Center

601 2nd Ave SE, Cedar Rapids



**Social Group Event Planning**  
for Adults 18+ with Autism,  
ADHD, and/or other  
neurological conditions.

**Tuesday, Jan. 23rd, 2018**

6:00pm - 7:00pm

Uptown Bills

730 S. Dubuque St., Iowa City

Help us decide what events the group will enjoy this year!



## Artist Spotlight: Dorothy Ruiz

by Kiersten Onanga, ILS

Dorothy Ruiz, known by her friends as Sue, has been painting off and on since 2006. Sue pulls inspiration from her favorite painter, Jerry Yarnell, throughout her painting process which involves painting the whole canvas to start, mixing colors next, and then mapping out canvas with shapes to set up her painterly scene. With her artistic eye for lighting, she then adds the details that will pull you in for a closer look.

Out of all of her art endeavors, Sue enjoys painting the most because the process is relaxing and she ends up with her own unique creation. Acrylics are Sue's paint of choice because they give her the freedom to paint over anything she wants to change. Don't change a thing about what you do Sue!



**Rain Delay**  
by  
**Sue Ruiz**

Canvas and acrylic paint

This work was inspired by Sue's favorite painter, Jerry Yarnell. Their stylistic choices are different but they share a similar theme. She painted this piece six years ago. Can you find the 2 deer and a bird?



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## Apply to be an A2I Board Member

Access 2 Independence of the Eastern Iowa Corridor is looking for a few talented and conscientious volunteer board members to lead and strengthen our programs for individuals with disabilities, both visible and invisible. We are a Center for Independent Living and our services aim to promote the self determination of people with disabilities.

We're especially looking for folks who have experience working with youth, as we look to grow our youth transition programs. In keeping with the Independent Living Philosophy, we encourage interest from persons who have personal experience with a significant disability, either visible or invisible.

If you live in either Johnson, Linn, Jones, Cedar, Henry, Iowa, Benton, or Washington Counties, can contribute your time, thoughtfulness, and leadership one evening a month, and are interested in exploring this opportunity, call our office at 319-338-3870 or email Leah Zapf Donald at [ed@access2independence.org](mailto:ed@access2independence.org) to find out whether this volunteer opportunity is right for you.



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