



A2I NEWSLETTER

Quarterly Newsletter from Access 2 Independence

Transition into 2019

By Leah Zapf Donald, ED

On November 30th, 2018 our country mourned the passing of former President George HW Bush. Many remember the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as the most prominent piece of legislation that the elder President Bush signed while in office. The ADA ushered in a new era of equal access for those who had endured segregation and isolation as a result of policies that didn't consider the basic rights of the disabled. On the day of the signing, President Bush remarked, "Today's legislation brings us closer to that day when no Americans will ever again be deprived of their basic guarantee of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." A new era of inclusion had begun.

Since then, Centers for Independent Living, like Access 2 Independent have worked to ensure the signing of the ADA was only the dawn of inclusive policies and practices not the pinnacle. Many subsequent pieces of legislation have continued this work. One is the Money Follows the Person (MFP) Program, which after providing transition funds and assistance to nearly 700 Iowans is ending this year. A federally funded program, MFP allowed people to transition from institutional settings to community settings by reducing the financial barrier. In this issue we include the story of one such person, Jenn, who was fortunate enough to qualify for the program prior to MFP's end in December. While Congress recently approved funding through March 31, 2019, as of this writing, there are many questions as to if MFP or a program like it will continue to provide access for so many who otherwise may not realize their goal of community living. Another piece of legislation seeks to provide pathways toward greater integration is the Disability Integration Act (DIA). Learn more about DIA in this issue.

Jenn's goal is one that was of many that were realized this year with the help of A2I staff and volunteers. This past year, A2I worked with clients to develop 80 goals for living more independently. Half of those goals have already been realized with the other half continuing into next year. It is our goal to reach even more individuals who experience barriers to their personal success. This is something we cannot do alone. A2I is a part of an open and generous community of supports for persons with disabilities. It is our privilege to work alongside these wonderful organizations. It is my personal privilege to work with our committed A2I staff and a dedicated board of directors. We are all deeply committed to the mission, and we work each day with a renewed dedication.

We thank you for your interest in Access 2 Independence, and invite you to join us in achieving our goal!



Caption: Access 2 Independence Logo

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Board Members:

Troy Ward, Chair

Peggy Loveless, Vice Chair

Amanda Sharp, Treasurer

Amy Robasse, Voting Member

Erin Kay, Voting Member





Staff Spotlight: Gerald Rath

By Leah Zapf Donald, ED

We are absolutely thrilled to introduce the newest member of our A2I team! Gerald Rath just moved to Iowa City after working nearly 20 years as a rehabilitation counselor. Originally from Minnesota, Gerald has a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from Minnesota State University. Gerald and his wife, Val enjoy eating seafood and getting outside and they are looking forward to exploring Lake McBride this fall if the weather cooperates. Gerald tells us that he likes to be active and is often busy keeping up with his energetic Shih Tzu, Asher.

Welcome to the team, Gerald!



Caption: Gerald Rath, ILS

A Moment with Nell

By Chanel Prince, ILS

Around this time of the year it is expected everyone walk around sporting their best smiles, and behave oh so, holly jolly! However for some, this same time of year can be so devastating or discouraging. Perhaps instead of being reminded of all the blessings or success you have in life, you are often too reminded of the people who are no longer around, or maybe you are looking at the calendar noticing you are in the twelfth month, and you still haven't even started on your New Year's Resolution.

Well my friend, I have come to encourage you, maybe even ignite a bit of hope in these last days of 2018.

No matter where you are today, start with just that.

No matter what you have done so far, or haven't done at all, you can begin today, at this moment.

The thing of it is, it really doesn't matter what didn't happened yesterday for yesterday is gone.

Don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow hasn't come.

Focus on today, for this is the day you have most control over, this very moment.

I once heard someone put it like this, "If you are going through what seems like Hell, why stop there?" You have to keep going. If you are in a place of which you don't want to be in, regardless of how you got there, whether it be by your own choices, or by the hand of another, why take up residence there?

Today is only 24 hours, all you have to do it make it through 24 hours.

When tomorrow comes, look back at yesterday and say,

"I made it through, now let's do it one more time!"

This has been another moment with Nell, as always Keep Love Alive!



The Year in Review

By Leah Zapf Donald, ED & Talor Gray, WIP

383 hours went into 157 community activities around the Eastern Iowa Corridor!

This year, A2I held 37 peer groups and enjoyed spending time with all 149 attendees!

40 Independent Livings Goals were achieved this year! 80 new goals were set and 100 goals are in progress!

4 Staff, 6 Board Members, 2 Interns, and 3 Volunteers made it possible to provide 1091 services this year!

Here at A2I, we enjoy serving all of our 8 counties: Benton, Cedar, Henry, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn & Washington!



Home for the Holidays: A Transition Story

By Kiersten Onanga, ILS

I would like you all to meet Jennifer (Jenn). I met Jenn two and a half years ago when she called Access 2 Independence looking for help. Jenn wanted to get out of a nursing facility, but she did not feel that she was being taken seriously.

Jenn lived in the community until four years ago when she opted to move into a nursing facility in order to be with her spouse who was placed there for medical reasons. Because of her disability, there was not an issue for her to get into the facility. Jenn understood that this would not be a permanent move for her, and when her spouse recovered they would both be able to leave the facility and move back into the community. Tragically, shortly after Jenn moved to the facility her spouse passed away. Jenn knew that she did not want to stay in the facility if her spouse was not with her.

From then on her goal was to move back to her hometown, Iowa City. Jenn told her story and desire to leave the facility to everyone she met; however, most people brushed her desires off and treated them as if they were impossible. Jenn did not care if others thought what she always dreamed of was impossible, with persistence she continued to tell everyone who would listen, she wanted out of the facility.

Two years after Jenn entered the facility she came across Access 2 Independence's contact information. After speaking with an Independent Living Specialist, that is when things changed and took a turn for the better! I met with Jenn and listened to what she had to say. I could hear the sound of defeat in her voice as she explained the journey she had taken in life that ultimately landed her in the nursing facility. After she met me, it seemed that she had a renewed sense of hope. Finally there were actions being put toward her goal of ultimately living back in the community of her choice.



This journey was not at all easy or fast paced. Jenn had a long ride ahead, filled with many emotional ups and downs. The first step was figuring out how she was going to get the funding source to help with her needs in the community. This took a lot of time filling out paperwork, which came with a wait time that was nearly unbearable. We waited, more time had passed, and after that time passed by, we waited even more.

During this period, it was crucial that Jenn had a team that supported her and worked towards helping her achieve her goal. We began building this team with Jenn's case manager who was a great support and amazing to work with. Together we connected Jenn with our Local Long Term Care Ombudsman, the next member of Jenn's support team who truly advocated for Jenn in a way that only an Ombudsman could. With the Ombudsman's help and dedication, doors began to open for Jenn which were previously shut due to the communication barriers between the different entities, which had left Jenn

stuck in limbo for months. These key players were crucial in the process of moving Jenn's transition forward.

I would love to paint a rosy picture of the process that Jenn went through, but sadly I am unable to do so. Jenn was on an emotional roller-coaster herself, having good news one day and bad news the next. During this time it is very important to remember Jenn was living in a place where she was unhappy, all the while playing a waiting game to hear any news about the transition process.



Home for the Holidays: A Transition Story Continued... By Kiersten Onanga, ILS



Fortunately, Jenn qualified for Money Follows The Person (MFP), and was approved with only two months to spare before the end of the program(update: this January 2019, MFP funding was extended for an additional 3 months. New legislation is necessary to continue the program beyond 2019). Through MFP, a new case manager was assigned to Jenn and promptly joined the support team. The MFP case manager was able to coordinate all the things that Jenn was going to need once out of the nursing facility, including medical equipment that was necessary in order for Jenn to live in the community. From here things moved so quickly that within 2 months of her approval of MFP, Jenn was making plans to move out of the facility and into her own home. The dedication of Jenn's support team was truly inspiring and shows that with hard work, determination, and team work, dreams do come true. I am happy to say that on October 31st ,2018 Jenn was able to move into her new home. On the day she arrived, she said it best when she stated:

“I am home”

On that very first night, Jenn was able to pass out candy to children that were out trick - or - treating; something she has not been able to do for 4 years. She also was able to celebrate and help cook for the Thanksgiving meal. Since she has moved home, Jenn has been able to do the things that she missed most about living in the community. She has gone out to eat at restaurants, went to the mall, and has gotten her hair cut at a salon, something most of us take for granted. Jenn is able to pick and plan her meals that she wants to eat. She is able to go to the store and purchase things that she wants and she is able to do things that she finds enjoyable. One of the most important aspects of Jenn's transition into the community is the opportunity for her to choose her own destiny and the relationships she has built to support her in this journey.

Jenn has been able to finish the year in her new home and she will be starting 2019 there as well. Two and a half years ago, when I started working with Jenn, I could not have imagined the journey we would have taken to make this happen. I am truly grateful that I was given the opportunity to be a member of the support team that was able to help Jenn on her journey making it Home for the Holidays.



Keep an Eye on DIA this Legislative Session!

What is the Disability Integration Act (DIA)?

“The Disability Integration Act (DIA) is a civil rights, bipartisan and bicameral legislation, introduced by Senators Charles Schumer, Minority Leader (D-NY) and Cory Gardner (R-CO) in the Senate and Representative Jim Sensenbrenner (R-WI) in the House, to address the fundamental issue that people who need Long Term Services and Supports (LTSS) are forced into institutions and losing their basic civil rights. The legislation (S.117, H.R.555) builds on the 25 years of work that ADAPT has done to end the institutional bias and provide seniors and people with disabilities home and community-based services (HCBS) as an alternative to institutionalization. It is the next step in our national advocacy after securing the Community First Choice (CFC) option. “

Visit this link to read more about DIA: <http://www.disabilityintegrationact.org/>



Board Member Spotlight: Erin Kay



By Erin Kay, Board Member

Tell us a little about why you wanted to be on the board:

I wanted to be on this board because I believe in helping people with disabilities since I have Cerebral Palsy and consider myself a person with a disability. "Disabled," is not a bad word. I consider myself a proud disabled person. I am not ashamed of my identity or my disabled community. We all want to see disabled people thrive in the community through employment, advocacy, and support. I believe Access 2 Independence embodies these ideas. I would love to see more inclusion from mainstream media with PWDs (people with disabilities) in mind. PWDs need to have their voices be recognized in society. Access 2 Independence continues to help PWDs find their voice. Thank you for all you do for our community!

What is your job?

National Alliance on Mental Illness of Johnson County Walk Manager

Share anything you'd like about your family or pets:

I've been with my husband for 8 years and we were married in Iowa City last year at the historical Ned Aston Home. Jeremy (my husband) is a Respiratory Therapist for Mercy Hospital in Iowa City. We love to watch old cheesy 80's movies & play trivia in local Iowa City bars. We have two "millennial children," named Annie (a cute Boston Terrier puppy) and Ginger (A Balinese cat).

Do you have any special hobbies?:

I enjoying writing. I am currently working on Wattpad Young Adult novel based in disabilities fiction called, "The Homecoming Queen," I also write/vlog for The Mighty, a writing platform for people with disabilities where our voices and stories can be heard in a big way.

Upcoming Events

January

- 8th:** Krafts with Kiersten @ 11AM @ Choices, 114 W 2nd St, Washington
- 12th:** Saturday Social for Autistic Teens & 20s @ TBD
- 15th:** Big Grove for Good Night with A2I @ 5PM-8PM @ Big Grove, Iowa City
- 25th:** Advocacy Workshop @ 3PM @ RPlace, Iowa City
- 29th:** Kirkwood IC Health & Wellness Fair Tabling @ 10AM-2PM @ 1816 Lower Muscatine Rd, Kirkwood Iowa City Campus

February

- 5th:** Expressive Arts Group @ 4:30PM @ Uptown Bill's, Iowa City
- 9th:** Saturday Social for Autistic Teens & 20s @ 3PM @ Access 2 Independence for Chips Dips & Dos, Iowa City Office
- 12th:** Krafts with Kiersten @ 11AM @ Choices, 114 W 2nd St, Washington
- 15th:** Monthly Adventure with Kiersten @ 1PM-2PM @ Coral Ridge Senior Apartments, Coralville
- 22nd:** Advocacy Workshop @ 3PM @ RPlace, Iowa City

March

- 5th:** Expressive Art Group @ 4:30PM @ Uptown Bill's, Iowa City
- 9th:** Saturday Social for Autistic Teens & 20s @ 3PM @ Renee's Ceramic Cafe, 4172 Alyssa Ct, Suite B, Iowa City, IA 52240
- 12th:** Krafts with Kiersten @ 11AM @ Choices, 114 W 2nd St, Washington
- 21st:** Monthly Adventure with Kiersten @ 1PM-2PM @ Coral Ridge Senior Apartments, Coralville
- 22nd:** Advocacy Workshop @ 3PM @ RPlace, Iowa City



Pictured above:
Ned, Annie, and Erin Kay



Pictured above:
Ashley and Talor with Uptown Bill's Expressive Art Group



Pictured above:
Top row: Kiersten, Ashley, Talor, Leah
Bottom row: Chanel, Gerald



Pictured above:
A2I Volunteer Leon