Access 2 Independence has some sad, yet exciting changes happening this spring. For the last 3 years A2I has been under the leadership of Leah Zapf Donald. During this time, Leah has supported A2I staff in new adventures that has helped the agency blossom and allow us to serve a larger part of the community. One of Leah's more well-known projects is the 2nd Saturday Social that brings Autistic teens and young adults together for fun activities and peer support. Leah will truly be missed at the A2I office, but we all wish her the best of luck on your new endeavors.

Starting in April, we would like to welcome Sarah Martinez to our team. Previously, Sarah served as a vocational rehabilitation counselor with Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, focusing on student transition services. With 3 cats and 1 dog, it's easy to say that Sarah is an animal lover; if you get the chance, ask her about her precious pup named Duke! Sarah enjoys traveling and the outdoors, and especially likes trips to Hawaii. In her spare time, she enjoys crocheting and finding her "inner child" by coloring. We think she will fit in just fine with all of us here at A2I!

Sarah will be taking Leah's place as our new Executive Director and will be leading the next chapter of A2I. Sarah has many new ideas and will be helping A2I continue to grow. She would like to see A2I continue to advocate for our community, while growing employment and high school transition services. The A2I staff look forward to this new adventure with Sarah.
Introducing VisAbility: A Creative Advocacy Program

by Talor Gray, WIP

What is the VisAbility program?

VisAbility is a Photovoice-inspired program designed to empower and enable Iowa City residents with disabilities to advocate for social change through photography and community discussions. Participants learn how to take photographs around their community that represent their views regarding social justice topics; in this case, the topic would be the disability experience in and around Iowa City. Throughout the time people are taking photographs and after the photographs are developed, A2I plans to hold both peer and community discussion events to empower participants and bring additional importance to their photographic work. We hope to coordinate a traveling exhibit of the photographs around Iowa City and hold exhibit opening celebrations at each location for community discussion sessions. From the discussions, we plan to develop Iowa City policy recommendations to continue creating a more equitable community for all abilities!

Would you or someone you know be interested in participating in this program? Are you looking for a creative volunteer opportunity in Iowa City? If so, please plan to attend one of the informational sessions to find out more details:

What?
VisAbility Program Information Sessions

Where?
The Environmental Education Center
2401 Scott Boulevard,
Iowa City, IA 52240

When?
July 18, 2019 @ 6:00pm - 7:00pm
July 25, 2019 @ 6:00pm - 7:00pm

Additional information session dates may be added as we get closer to Summer.

For questions or additional information, please email info@access2independence.org or call the A2I main office at 319-338-3870.

Thank you to the Iowa City Human Rights Commission and the Social Justice & Racial Equity Grant for program funding.

Intern Spotlight: Brittany Winch

by Brittany Winch, Intern

Hey!

I am a practicum student at The University of Iowa, graduating with a BSW and BA in Psychology in May. I am very pleased with my experience at A2I and have enjoyed working with a knowledgeable and inviting team that has provided me with many learning opportunities thus far. Beyond school, I work as a Direct Support Professional for adults with intellectual disabilities and mental illnesses. I absolutely love my job and the connections I’ve made. Other interests of mine include making art, as I am a portrait artist, and simply being out and about within the community.
Access 2 Independence has been busy these past months with peer groups, meeting with community partners, and offering training opportunities.

In January, we participated in Big Grove for Good and had a wonderful turnout to support A2I! Thank you to Big Grove in Iowa City for hosting this event! Second Saturday Social met in February for card games, March for canvas painting, and April for a magic show. Join us in May for Mini Golf! A2I is looking to grow our volunteer program, so if you know of anyone who is interested, send them our way! We have a lot of fun and can offer a great nonprofit volunteer experience!
A Moment with Nell

by Chanel Prince, ILS

We made it!

We have survived the treacherous obligation of adjusting our biological make-up to what seems to be the quickest sixty minute difference in which we must endure every year. So, a little over a month ago, we were told to spring forward. Our clocks did, but have we mentally? What are some things we should have left behind to be buried with the winter? Is it lack of confidence, what about poor time management?

Whatever it is, it’s time for us to spring forward and embrace this new season of life, possibilities, growth, understanding, and mindset. Most people aren’t the happiest during winter, we call it the winter blues. But could it be that winter is just as important and needed as the spring? Let’s break it down and look at it in a different perspective.

Winter serves a purpose; these three months, perhaps five if you’re living in Iowa, are set aside for the purification of the air, and to get rid of bacteria. Winter also serves as a time for rest: the trees rest, even bears rest, and for us, we usually are less busy during that time, unless you’re my Gram who ditches winter all together, grabs her pup Benji, and relaxes on the beaches of tropical grounds, I mean sands. My point is, allow winter to do what it was designed to do; kill things off, and provide rejuvenation. Therefore, as we gear up for spring let us spring forward to all the newness of life given to us!

This has been a moment with Nell, till’ next time,

Keep Love Alive!

Gardening with Gerald

by Gerald Rath, ILS

During high school, I became involved with the FFA – Future Farmers of America. I then obtained my first college degree in Horticulture. Working with plants is also known to be very therapeutic in many ways.

According to the calendar, the current temperatures, and the sights and sounds of robins and other migratory birds, spring is officially here. Of course, being in Iowa, anything can happen with a late snowfall – but let’s focus on positivity.

Spring is my favorite season, albeit for allergies. Spring is a time for refreshing, renewal and positivity that all things are possible with the right attitude and commitment to make it happen.

One of my favorite reasons for the season is that it is easier to access the outdoors, and become more active – which for me also involves cleaning up the yard, especially planting areas and doing some grooming and re-creating of the landscape by planting flowers, etc. I have had a passion for planting and growing plants since I was a little boy. While I grew up living in town, I came from a family background of farming.

Did you know?

The Farmer’s Almanac says:

“To get the longest vase life, cut tulip stems diagonally, then wrap the upper two-thirds of the flowers in a funnel of newspaper and stand them in cool water for an hour or two. Then, recut the stems and the tulips will last at least a week.”
Access 2 Independence has a history of providing educational and training services to community agencies and businesses throughout our 8 county region of Johnson, Linn, Washington, Henry, Iowa, Cedar, Jones, and Benton. Our staff enjoy meeting with community members and groups to discuss disability related topics to provide a more in depth understanding of the disability movement history and culture, as well as how the American’s with Disabilities Act and other disability legislation impacts our communities. Additionally, staff are always happy to present on the Independent Living services A2I provides our communities, or work with you to tailor a presentation to your needs. Below you will find a few examples of trainings/education that staff can provided:

**Disability Sensitivity Training**
This training is geared towards groups and agencies of all kinds, including city, county, non-profit, and for-profit agencies. There are currently 4 sections to this training including topics on language, disability culture, accommodations, and service/emotional support animals. With all 4 sections, the training is 3 hours in length with a 10 minute break in the middle.

**Introduction to Peer Support**
This program is designed with both agency staff and consumers in mind with an emphasis on introducing peer support, while cautioning against gossip. At around 30 minutes, this interactive presentation provides an opportunity for people to talk with A2I staff about their peer support experience.

**Reaching My Own Greatness**
A Self-Determination Curriculum by People First of Washington, this program is designed for school-aged youth to learn how to become self-advocates. A2I is happy to talk with classrooms and groups about this program, and can tailor the program to the needs of the class.

**The Independent Living Philosophy**
Interested in learning about disability rights history and culture? If so, then A2I would be happy to present on the Independent Living Philosophy and the timeline for disability civil rights. Join A2I on a journey through the past to recognize the challenges and achievements that have brought us to today.

**Service and Emotional Support Animals: What’s the difference?**
With recent controversy surrounding various support animals, A2I has received multiple requests to present on Service and Emotional Support Animals. Our staff can demystify the legal jargon and provide a solid foundation on the different support animal types and how to tell the difference, as well as what questions you legally can and cannot ask an owner of one of these animals. While the legislation protecting these animals can be confusing, it is important for us all to understand in order to prevent any unintentional misunderstandings.

If you or your agency would like additional information about possible training or educational services, feel free to give us a call at 319-338-3870 or email at info@access2independence.org

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**Seeking Art Supplies**
Access 2 Independence is currently seeking art and craft supply donations. We facilitate multiple artistic peer groups monthly and are always thankful for community support. Your donations help keep our programs engaging and enjoyable to our 8 Eastern Iowa Corridor counties.

If you would like to donate, please contact us at 319-338-3870, or visit our donate page on the website for more information about ways to donate.