



## Stay in the Know

Spring is almost here. We at Access 2 Independence are busy providing services to the community. We have plenty of news to share with you as we continue to grow. We have received some thoughtful donations from the community. Here are some of things that are happening at A2I.



Picture above is of Ashley, who delivered the donation to our office. She is standing behind the various hygiene items that were donated. She is a white women with shoulder length blonde hair and wearing glasses.

## Peak Construction Donation

We received a wonderful donation from Peak Construction. They delivered a supply of hygiene and bathroom products that we can give to any of our consumers that need it. The items ranged from shower products to toiletries. We are thankful that Peak Construction donated these items to our organization.

If you want to donate anything to A2I, please let us know. Anything helps our consumers.

Update: Peak Construction also donated 51 bags of laundry pods to our office. These bags will be given to any consumers in our community that need these pods.

## A2I consumer's success story

Following high school graduation, a supported employment consumer was referred by IVRS in order to receive vocational supports. This individual was already employed part-time at Hy-Vee, however wanted to explore volunteer opportunities in their area of interest that fit well with their current work schedule. With a passion for animals and experience working with dogs, this individual worked with Access 2 Independence's Employment Specialist Katrina to explore volunteer opportunities in their community that pertained to

their interest and provided a new experience for them. After completing the application process and training as a dog volunteer, this individual became a dog volunteer at the IC Animal Shelter. Their time and experience was much needed and appreciated by not only staff, but also the dogs at the shelter. This individual explained that it was wonderful building a rapport with the dogs and helping them adjust to the temporary environment. The best part was watching them get adopted and leave the shelter with their new owners.

After a very successful volunteer experience, this job candidate decided they would like to explore job opportunities. They continued to work on Job Development Services with Katrina. This individual found themselves working in a very unexpected position. They are now employed full-time at an elementary school assisting in the classroom.

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## Consumer Satisfaction Survey

We recently completed our Consumer Satisfaction Survey for 2023. We received overall positive responses from the consumers that took part in the survey. Our A2I intern, Aubree Klink worked hard on reaching out and conducting our survey. She used multiple methods of communication to reach out to our consumers. Our organization is thankful for the hard work that Aubree did in working on this survey.

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## The Charitable donation of Mary G. Gortner Trust

We want to thank the Mary G. Gortner Charitable Trust for awarding a \$1,000 grant to Access 2 Independence! The funds from this grant will help us provide financial assistance to our consumers that are in need of it.



Picture above is of Ben Grauer, our newest member of the board. He is a white male with short wavy brown hair and a mustache. He is wearing a blue t-shirt.

## Meet our newest Board Member, Ben Grauer!

I am very excited to have been invited to join A2I's board as we enter a new year. I am an Iowa native and have been living in Iowa City with my fiancé and small dog since the fall of 2019. Supporting individuals with disabilities is very important to me and I can't wait to contribute to the great work that is being done to ensure that there are adequate community based resources to allow people to live fulfilling, happy lives, like we all are entitled to. As someone who acquired a disability later in life (a cervical spinal cord injury at age 20, in 2009), I was able to largely live without having to become engaged in causes or advocacy that would benefit anyone other than myself. In doing so, I robbed myself of the value of a deep connection to the disabled community and benefited from the hard work that had been done by others before me, while not being an active participant. One of the programs I benefited from was vocational rehabilitation. IVRS helped pay for some of the tuition and other expenses from my undergrad and graduate degrees from the University of Iowa. In May of 2023 I graduated with a Master of Health Administration and started working at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics



Center for Disabilities and Development in August. Specifically, on the Iowa Blueprint for Change, which is a project to increase access to competitive integrated employment for lowans with disabilities. I am looking forward to using my lived and professional experience to help the team at A2I provide the best services to their clients.

## Admin Assistant SOAR certified

Our Administrative Assistant, Joey Wesselink, will now have a new service he can provide to the people in our community. He is now SOAR certified after several months taking their adult curriculum course. He can now assist people with disabilities on applying for SSI or/and SSDI. We are excited and proud for Joey completing the SOAR training!

The SOAR program or SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery is designed to increase access to SSI/SSDI for anyone that is eligible person with a disability who are or at risk of becoming homeless. If you would like more information about SOAR, check out the link [here](#).



Picture above is of Joey Wesselink, our Administrative Assistant. He is a white male with blonde hair and a beard. He is wearing a dark blue polo shirt and black glasses.