

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED



Resource Center
for Independent Living

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Options: Interstate Resource Center for Independent Living Volume XXVI, No. 1, Spring 2016



It has been some 30 years since a young dreamer heard about a service system made up of people with disabilities serving people with disabilities, a service system called Centers for Independent Living. Separating this dreamer from others, our founder Jay Johnson acted on this dream. He brought people together and helped them realize through his vision that it was their dream too. The dream became reality and served over 250,000 people through Options Interstate Resource Center for Independent Living's Programs of Information and Referral, Direct Service, and Community Education and Outreach. It reached across 26 counties of Northeastern North Dakota and Northwestern Minnesota.

During these 30 years many people gave of themselves to make Options better. The people we serve have kept us on a straight and narrow course by informing us of the obstacles they encounter in their everyday struggles to live in the communities of their choice.

Past and present Board Members have provided oversight and mitigated our potential risks by sharing their wisdom. And, of course staff - many still here

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*To Jay Johnson
With best wishes, Ronald Reagan*

Options founder Jay Johnson visits President Reagan in Grand Forks, October 1986.

and others who have left us - each leaving their mark on the services we provide.

All deserving of a collective "Thank You" for keeping us moving forward these past 30 years!

Minnesota Residents!

Options needs your Help Advocating for Funding!

A bill proposing funding for Centers for Independent Living was introduced in the Minnesota House of Representatives on March 10, 2016. This funding would continue Options services and hopefully increase our reach and resources to people who are not being served. Representatives and Senators

who serve your county need to hear from you to help them understand how Options has helped you be more independent.

The time to use your personal power is today!

When you contact someone in the Minnesota House of Representatives, refer to bill number **H.F. 2887**. In the Minnesota Senate, it is referred to as **S.F. 2646**.

Help your legislators make an informed decision by sharing your story!

How to Contact Your Minnesota Legislator

There are a few different ways to contact your legislator. But first, you'll need to find out who your Representative or Senator is! Call 888-234-1112 to find out who your legislator is in the House of Representatives, or 800-657-3550 for the Senate.

You can call, email or write a letter. Or, if you want to speak in person to your legislator, you'll want to call their office and make an appointment.

Tips on Making a Call

*Let them know you're a constituent. They will be more interested in what you have to say since they directly represent you.

*Share your expertise. Do you have a disability? How would Minnesota's funding of Options directly affect you? These sort of details will immediately establish your credibility.

*Be brief. Each legislator experiences a high volume of phone calls, so keep it straight to the point.

Tips on Writing an Email or Letter

Just as in a phone call, the same principles apply- letting them know you're a constituent, sharing your expertise and staying brief and to the point.

However, you will want to be formal when writing the email or letter. Visit www.house.mn or www.senate.mn for email addresses.

Be aware Sen. Stumpf does not accept emails without going through the Senate email form. See link at www.senate.mn/members/

For a letter to a legislator in the House of Representatives, start off like so:

Honorable (Full Name)
Minnesota House of Representatives
(Room #) State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155-1298

Begin your letter: Dear Rep. (Last Name):

A letter to a Minnesota Senator will follow the same format. Because of Capital renovation projects, legislators are located in two different buildings. See below on how to address a letter.

Honorable (Full Name)
Minnesota State Senate
(Room #) Minnesota Senate Building or Veterans Service Building
95 University Avenue West or 20 West 12th Street
St. Paul, MN 55155-1606

Begin your letter: Dear Sen (Last Name):

Whether you're calling, writing a letter or even visiting in person, there are many suggestions as to how to approach correctly.

Do:

- Do know your legislator's full name.
- Do use plain or personal stationary.
- Do use first class mail.
- Do be concise.
- Do be complete enough to give solid reasons and facts.
- Do be sincere.
- Do follow through. Let them know you're watching their record with interest.
- Do write a letter of appreciation whenever the legislator meets your approval.

Don't:

- Don't guess at the spelling of your legislator's name.
- Don't guess at the facts or base your message on rumors.
- Don't use postal cards for writing letters.
- Don't limit yourself to generalities.
- Don't be wordy.
- Don't leave out essential details.
- Don't use threats.
- Don't write letters of criticism or request only. **2**

Options Services Potentially Saves 2.08 Million

When you work in Human Services it is hard to measure the benefits of the services in dollar terms. Some would say the real value is not in dollars but intrinsic to the increased quality of life people experience as a result of the services. Many question the continued use of the measures that lean toward the intrinsic since they now seem less worthy compared to monetary value - especially during economic downturns. In response to that perception, Options analyzed its services to identify measures in dollar terms in addition to intrinsic value.

At Options we assess intrinsic value through a Consumer Satisfaction Survey and by evaluating the Goal Completion Rate of the people served. Last year

people we served rated quality of services at 89%. Completed goals as defined by the person receiving services was 91%.

Related to monetary value, the total potential savings experienced due to Options services was 2.08 million dollars with a cost to provide the services of 488 thousand dollars. The total budget for all of Options services during the period was 1.65 million.

To assess monetary value, we looked at services that could be measured by cost savings. The groups we identified as benefiting from the cost savings are governmental institutions and/or private funders, e.g. insurance companies.

Cost Savings

\$1,101,612	Estimated funding saved by Options helping 37 people move from institutional settings to home based care.
\$698,146	Estimated funding saved by Options helping 23 people establish home-based care instead of moving to an institutional setting.
\$169,000	Value of over 800 pieces of used equipment Options loaned or donated to people with disabilities. This saved people from purchasing new or used equipment out of pocket.
\$113,000	Savings in lower Medicare Part D premiums and co-pays for 312 people assisted by Options during Fall 2015 enrollment.

\$2,081,758

Total savings due to involvement by Options.

\$488,000

Cost for Options to provide the services.

How Assistive Technology Can Help You

Assistive technology (AT for short) has come a long way for individuals with disabilities. A long way, no doubt, since pirates have been walking around on wooden legs. When you hear the term, "assistive technology," what comes to mind? Perhaps it's anything electronic, such as hearing aids. Assistive technology is an umbrella term for any piece of equipment that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. At Options, we have many devices available to assist in you living independently- items such as bath benches, commodes, wheelchairs, walkers, canes, etc. are all available free of charge for a period of 3 months (90 days). We also have

recreational equipment such as an accessible fishing rod, hand-pedal bike, and even a sled for sled hockey.

There are many resources in both Minnesota and North Dakota ready to assist you. For starters, each state has an agency whose purpose is to connect individuals with AT no matter their age, needs, or disability. They can get you the equipment you need at low or no-cost. If it's an expensive item, they also have micro-loans (loans with a low interest rate). As an individual with a hearing impairment, I've been an AT user my whole life. I always take an interest in it, whether it's for my personal or professional life.

AT/Continued from Previous Page

Technology to help individuals with disabilities is fascinating. Cochlear ear implants allow people with deafness to hear again. Cameras have been installed inside eye sockets to allow people to see again. One area that has blown me away is 3D printing, which allows people to have devices at a fraction of the cost of items on the marketplace. For example, in the field of amputation, there are prosthetic arms and legs. Nonprofits such as Enabling the Future and The Open Hand Project can get you one anywhere from \$20 to \$150, a far cry from what prosthetic limbs normally cost, anywhere from \$5,000 to \$50,000!

One of the downsides of assistive technology, and equipment for people with disabilities in general is cost. Thankfully, funding options are out there. Funding resources may be based on age, disability, location, etc. ND IPAT has something called the Peddling for Possibilities Fund which covers equipment for people who don't qualify for other funding programs. While the Minnesota side doesn't have an identical program, MN Star does loan out equipment on a monthly basis, or if you need it longer, you can keep it free of charge until you no longer need it. If you're on Medicaid or Medicare, they may also assist with covering equipment so long as you can get a doctor's prescription.

As always, if you need any further assistance with assistive technology or would love to talk about what "AT" can do for you, don't hesitate to call me, Mike, at Options or by emailing mike@myoptions.info

Resources:

ND IPAT www.ndipat.org 1-800-895-4728

MN STAR www.mn.gov/star 1-800-234-1267

EQUIPALIFE www.equipalife.org 1-866-535-8239

E-NABLE www.enablingthefuture.org

OPEN HAND PROJECT www.openhandproject.org



A few examples of equipment in our offices include wheelchairs, toilet risers, bedrails, walkers and more.

Dear Options,

My mother had a stroke and is recuperating in a nursing home. She would like to transition back to her rural community but her care team is concerned about the accessibility of her house and the availability of support services. What are her options?

Dear Reader:

North Dakota

There are various funding sources for in-home services and supports that can be accessed by contacting your local Social Service office. Many people qualify for services through the county but some may not be eligible because of income and/or asset levels.

Services can include personal care (bathing, dressing, etc.), homemaker service (cleaning, laundry, etc.), Emergency Response system (life alert), Environmental Modifications (ramps, walk-in shower, etc.), Respite care, or Adult Day Care.

Your mother may also be eligible for Money Follows the Person (MFP) program that can assist with coordination and help pay for accessibility and other needs.

If you need assistance with navigating the service system or have questions regarding what your family member or friend may be eligible for please feel free to contact Options.

Minnesota

Contact your County Social Service office to determine if your mother is eligible for a Waiver program to help fund the resources needed to move home. This program can help pay for ramps, home modifications etc.

Transition dollars are also available for up to \$3,000 for persons in Nursing Facilities that have lost their home and furnishings. The money may be used for deposits, hook-up fees, essential furniture, and window coverings. Maximum per transition is \$3,000 and only 1 transition in a 3 year period.

All are accessible through county social services. You can find more information at www.dhs.state.mn.us (search cadia waiver, elderly waiver or transition services.)

There are a variety of funding options for accessibility needs. Contact Options at **218-773-6100** or **800-726-3692** for more information.

21st Call for Annual Dear Hunt Applications

Options and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is pleased to announce that applications for the 21th Annual Accessible Deer Hunt for people with disabilities to be held at Rydell National Wildlife Refuge are ready to be released. The dates of the hunt will be October 13, 14, and 15, 2016. The MinDak Border Chapter of the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association underwrites the hunt. This year's hunt will be open for buck or doe.

Rydell National Game Refuge, located south of Mentor, Minnesota, offers hunters with disabilities a unique experience by providing the opportunity to hunt in one of the most accessible wildlife refuges in the Nation. Rydell has miles of paved trails in addition to hard-packed trails. It is large enough to accommodate up to 20 hunters, having enough land so that risks associated with deer hunting are minimized. The refuge has all terrain vehicles with accessible trailers to transport hunters to and from stand locations as well as a limited number of accessible hunting platforms available.

Hunters are responsible for travel to and from the refuge, their sleeping accommodations while at the hunt, purchasing their license, and providing for their personal needs such as warm clothes, guns, ammo, attendants, etc. Hunt organizers will assist hunters with getting from the refuge headquarters to and from their hunting site, providing volunteers to assist with the handling of

the animal after it is shot (if requested), and meals. Meals will consist of a noon meal prior to hunting and an evening meal once the hunter has come back from hunting. If more applications are received than spots available applicants will be selected based on severity of disability, ability to hunt in other locations other than the Rydell hunt, hunting experience as a person with a disability, hunting experience at Rydell Refuge. If all is equal a random drawing will take place.

Anyone interested in applying for this year's hunt may contact Options for a hunting application packet by calling 800-726-3692. Applications must be postmarked by Sept. 16, 2016. For the persons chosen and interested, the Refuge will be open for scouting and choosing a blind location on Sept 25, 2016. Questions can be directed to Randy at 800-726-3692.



Dear Options,

Last month I got a service animal and this month I received an eviction notice from my landlord because of their "no pets" policy. What are my rights?

Dear Reader:

For properties covered by the Federal Fair Housing Act or the Minnesota or North Dakota Humans Rights Acts, the landlord is typically required to provide a reasonable accommodation to the "no pets" policy to allow the person the right to have the service animal with them in their apartment.

Landlords are also not allowed to charge a higher rate of rent or a "pet" deposit for service animals. You may need to provide documentation from a health care professional. Documentation should not provide diagnostic information but rather that the person has a disability and a need for a service animal.

The Fair Housing Act and ND and MN Human Rights Act typically cover 4-plexes (non-owner occupied) or larger multifamily housing units.

Spend The Day At The Refuge



Accessible Trail

Rydell National Wildlife Refuge has invited Options to identify people with disabilities interested in spending a day at their Refuge to provide input about the Refuge's accessibility. The date is June 14, 2016, from 10:00 AM to, the latest, 3:00 PM. We have a grill at our

disposal so will get some dogs and chips for a picnic. Rydell is located south of Mentor, Minnesota at the east end of Maple Lake. People interested in participating please contact Randy at Options by email randy@myoptions.info or phone 800-726-3692.

People with disabilities are given a significant role in the implementation and oversight of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA recommends when designing programs and making decisions about physical accessibility that persons with disabilities be consulted to insure that the decisions

made result in maximum usability. This is one of the reasons the Refuge wants your assistance.

The day's agenda will involve a brief history of the Refuge, an orientation of your role delineated by the ADA, and tours of the grounds with descriptions of the most common programs presented to the public.

Participants will be asked to evaluate information presented and physical facilities they experience. There you will be asked to provide input on how to make the Refuge more inclusive - all from your own perspective. Information from the day will be included in a planning tool that can be used to enhance the public's experiences at the Refuge. You will not be required to take notes or write your comments down unless it is your preferred way to communicate- just present your comments as you make observations. There are no wrong answers.

When you RSVP with Randy, you will be asked a few short questions related to age and type of disability. We want to include as many perspectives from people of various ages and disability experiences as possible. If you have any dietary restrictions or require any accommodations please inform Randy at the time you contact him. We can take accommodation requests until two weeks prior to the event, end of work day, May 31, 2016.

Dear Options,

My son is a junior in high school and has an individual education plan (IEP). We have had a good relationship with his teachers but we are not in agreement with the transition plan in his IEP. What do we do to support his plan to continue his education in college?

Dear Reader:

A transition plan targets the student's goals involving employment and/or post- secondary education. It needs to identify barriers in areas of independent living, community services, social and recreational access.

The student needs to be the one who facilitates the IEP meeting. This helps build self-advocacy and disability awareness needed when entering the workforce or post- secondary education.

The student should have assistance in developing a 504 plan to take with him and use as a tool when requesting accommodations in all areas of life.

The 504 section of the Rehab Act is a civil rights law that allows people with limitations to get necessary accommodations and prevent discrimination based on disability, race, gender, etc.

A 504 education plan is a plan that lists reasonable accommodations anyone can provide. For example, if you need a note taker for lectures while attending college, student support services would be required to provide a note taker under 504. If you need adjustments to your break schedule at work, under 504 and ADA your employer would be required to provide the reasonable accommodation.

A 504 plan helps the individual identify the barriers and develop the means to work with or around those limitations. It is best to establish the 504 plan before leaving high school to assist with the transition into the community of their choice.

The IEP requires someone who specializes in the disability or limitation, e.g. emotional behavioral specialist, and must be related to the student's education goal. Goals written in a 504 plan are written in a way that anyone can provide the accommodation. For example, a staff person in the cafeteria can provide assistance such as carrying a tray to the person's table or an employer providing a document in Word for a person with low vision who has specialized software to read documents. A 504 plan is not education or work focused. It is often more of a courtesy than a formal accommodation. The point is for the person facing a barrier to receive the assistance necessary to meet their school, work and community goals.

2016 Options Training Sessions

Emergency Preparedness: Are you intimidated by the idea of creating an emergency preparedness plan? It is easier than you think! You will be thankful if you ever need to use it.

Fair Housing Act: Learn what the Fair Housing Act means to you. We also cover Landlord and Tenant issues.

Transition: Are you a high school student with a disability planning the next step of your life after high school? This is a great opportunity for students, parents and supporters to learn the “tricks of the trade” for a successful transition.

If accommodations are necessary, such as a sign language interpreter, contact us at least two weeks ahead of time at 800-726-392 or mike@myoptions.info.

Tuesday, April 5	Fair Housing Act	Cavalier	7:00pm	Pembina Cty Courthouse
Monday, May 16	Emergency Preparedness	Thief River Falls	6:30pm	Regional Northwest Library
Tuesday, July 19	Emergency Preparedness	Roseau	6:30pm	Roseau Public Library
Thursday, Aug 18	Emergency Preparedness	Cavalier	6:30pm	Law Enforcement Center
Tuesday, Sept 13	Transition	Roseau	6:30pm	Roseau Public Library
Monday, Sept 19	Transition	Devils Lake	4:00pm	Public Library

Disability/Frailness Does Not Have to Stop Traveling

Any person with a disability will tell you that information is key when planning any sort of outing. You not only have to find out all you can about the physical layout of the place, but also all the in-between stuff. In addition you have to be precise to insure that you bring all you need while gone and if you need something know to get it- especially if you are out of state or country. If you have read our articles we have written about “Optionsoutdoors” (www.optionsoutdoors.org), you know how important “first person with a disability information” is prior to visiting a new place.

This is why I got excited when reading an article in New Mobility magazine entitled “A touch of Nature: Accessing our National Parks.” (A great magazine by the way. Look for it on the net.) The article made me aware of a company that specializes in worldwide travel and travel tips for people with disabilities, www.wheelchairtraveling.com. The information this website runs the gamut from information about traditional trips to unique adventure trips for people with disabilities. Most of the information is first person from people with disabilities who share the ins and outs of visiting various locations throughout the United States and the World.

Ashley Lyn Olson, Founder, CEO & Chief Editor, has done a great job at laying out the website that is divided into nine main topical areas including: Top Destinations, Ashley’s Picks, Cruise Lines,

Adventure, Leisure, Parks/Outdoors, Tours, Family Fun, and Tips/Tourism News. The site also contains links to local and national businesses that make the lives of people with disabilities easier. The information on this site does a great job informing its reader of the possibility to travel and expand your horizons as a person with a disability. I invite you to take a look and dream about the adventures at hand.



St. Thomas US Virgin Islands

High Plains Fair Housing Center

High Plains Fair Housing Center, based in Grand Forks, is an organization dedicated to eliminating housing discrimination and ensuring equal housing opportunities for all. The Center assists people who believe they have experienced discrimination while attempting to rent or purchase housing by conducting preliminary investigations of potential housing discrimination. High Plains also provides community education to promote fair housing.



The mission of High Plains Fair Housing Center is to strengthen communities and to ensure equal access to fair housing in the region through training, education, enforcement, and advocacy. The vision of High Plains Fair Housing Center recognizes the importance of “home” as a component of the American dream. We envision a country free of housing discrimination where each individual, group, and community enjoys equal housing opportunity and access in a bias-free and open housing market. We envision a country where integrated neighborhoods are the norm, and where private and public sectors collaborate to guarantee civil rights, in an open and barrier-free community committed to healing the history of discrimination in America.

If you feel that you have experienced housing discrimination please contact our complaint line at 701-203-1077, 866-380-2738. For more information about Fair Housing check out our website at www.highplainsfhc.org or email michelle@highplainsfhc.org

Frequently Asked Questions

What does “fair housing” mean?

A: “Fair housing” means that housing-related transactions must be free of discrimination. Fair housing laws provide the right to choose where you want to live.

Q: Which types of housing-related activities are covered by fair housing law?

A: Nearly all rentals, sales, financing, and insurance transactions relating to housing are covered by fair housing laws.

Q: What kinds of discrimination are prohibited by fair housing laws?

A: Discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, the presence of children in the household, or disability are all illegal under federal law. North Dakota fair housing laws also forbid discrimination based on marital status or receipt of public assistance.

If you feel that you have experienced housing discrimination please contact our complaint line at 701-203-1077, 866-380-2738. For more information about Fair Housing check out our website at www.highplainsfhc.org or email michelle@highplainsfhc.org

Dear Options,

What is the Renters and Owners Property Tax Refund?

Dear Reader:

Both Minnesota and North Dakota offer refunds to people who rent their living space. The amount of your refund depends on how much rent you paid, your income, and income deductions.

North Dakota Eligibility

Low income renters who have a permanent and total disability or are age 65 or older. The amount of refund is based upon rent paid and income of the renter. The renters household income must not exceed \$42,000. Medical expenses are deductible from the household income amount.

How do I make it happen? Call the Office of State Tax Commissioner at **877-328-7088** for more information. Refund applications must be submitted by June 1st, 2016.

Minnesota Eligibility

Your total household income was \$58,060 or less (2014 example). Deductions to the household income amount include number of dependents, the renter having a disability or over age 65 or contributing to a qualified retirement plan. Also, you need to have paid rent in a building which was taxed by the State.

How do I make it happen? Your landlord must give you a Certificate of Rent Paid (CRP) by January 31. Next, complete the 2015 Minnesota Property Tax Refund Return (Form M-1PR) and submit it according to the instructions. You can get the form at your local library, visit www.revenue.state.mn.us or call **800-657-3676**.

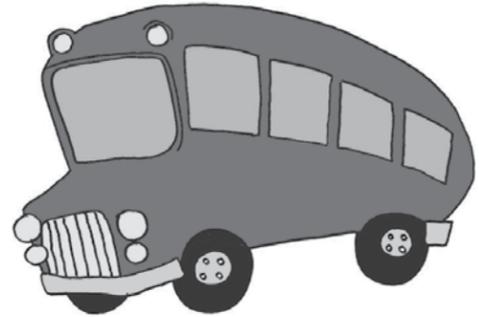
The Property Tax Refund is for people who own their home with similar eligibility requirements as the renters property tax refund in North Dakota and Minnesota. The contact information is the same for both programs.

Transportation

The ND Transit Information Line (NDTIL) provides “one-call” connections to public, private, and volunteer transportation services across North Dakota. The public is encouraged to dial the NDTIL for transportation information, referral, trip planning, and scheduling services.

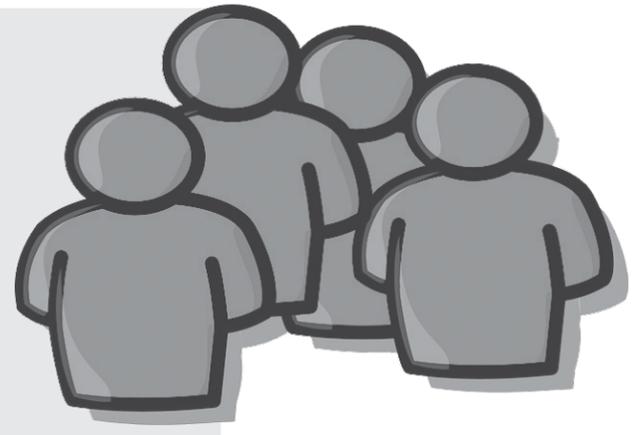
Call **800-920-9595** Monday through Friday between 8:00 am and 3:00 pm to reach a representative in the Cities Area Transit dispatch Office. Callers will reach a voice message system on weekends, holidays, or after hours.

The NDTIL serves to simplify the trip planning process by providing a central source of information and direct connections to community transportation resources, thus improving transit access and mobility throughout North Dakota.



Focus Groups

Options staff will be hosting focus groups throughout our service area. We want to hear the life experiences and ideas from people with disabilities as it relates to community access. Contact Options if you would like a focus group in your community.



Dear Options,

My electricity went out for a couple of hours during the last storm and I realized I wasn't prepared for it. How do I become better prepared?

Dear Reader:

A good start is to create an emergency preparedness plan and have an emergency kit ready if you need to leave on short notice or shelter in place. The emergency plan does not need to be complicated. Call Options for worksheets to help you through the planning process or visit the following web sites:

- www.disability.state.mn.us and search Emergency Preparedness Guide.
- www.mn.gov and search for Feeling Safe Being Safe brochure.
- www.ndcpd.org/health and click on the Emergency Preparedness tab.

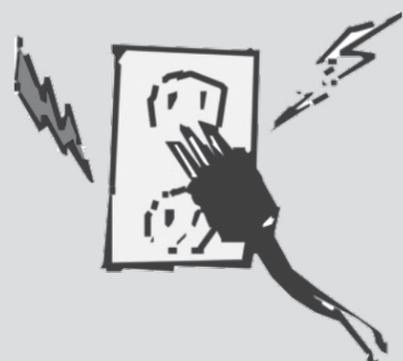
Most importantly, write down the names of people in your support network and list their contact information so it is ready when you need it. Make sure these people know they are considered an emergency contact for you. Also, make sure one of your contacts is from out of town.

Another planning strategy is to contact your local electric company to see if they have a list of addresses for people who rely on electricity for safety or medical conditions. They will be able to take this into consideration when prioritizing power line work.

If you are a North Dakota resident with a disability or have significant health issues, you can give your information to the ND Special Needs Registry. Emergency responders will have access to this database in case of an emergency.

You can register online at www.nd.gov/ndsnr/ or call **2-1-1 or 701-235-7335**.

We haven't found a Minnesota state registry within Options service area but having a contact list of neighbors, friends and family to check on you would be very effective.



Integration and Inclusion is the Goal of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The latest case to help improve inclusion for people with disabilities in their communities is Land v. Brown in Oregon. Paula Lane was the lead plaintiff in a class action lawsuit against the state of Oregon. It calls for integrated jobs in the community and not in segregated sheltered workshops consisting of only or mostly employees with disabilities. In 2010 to 2011 Ms. Lane worked on a packaging line in a segregated sheltered workshop making an average of 66 cents per hour.

The settlement now calls for people with disabilities in Oregon to have the opportunity to work alongside workers without disabilities and to receive at least minimum wage. This is consistent with the original ADA requirements from the 1991 regulations. "Integration is fundamental to

the purposes of the Americans with Disabilities Act... It would be a violation of this provision to require persons with disabilities to eat in the back room of a government cafeteria."

Not so long ago children and adults with disabilities were forced to live in institutions like the North Dakota Institution for the Feeble Minded in Grafton, ND or the Fergus Falls State Hospital for the Insane in Fergus Falls, MN. Some of these institutions have been closed or downsized and the former residents given the right to live in their communities, in their own homes or apartments with assistance as needed.

Some youth with disabilities were told they could not go to their community K -12 school or attend college because they were deaf or used a wheelchair.

Schools didn't want to, or have to, provide sign language interpreters or make the schools accessible. The ADA requires schools to accommodate students with disabilities by building ramps, providing interpreters, and ensuring newly constructed buildings are accessible.

The ADA, Individuals with Education Act (IDEA), Fair Housing Act (FHA) and their respective court decisions such as the Olmstead Decision champion the idea that people with disabilities have the right to live, attend school, work, recreate, use public transportation and be part of their town. This promotes an inclusive community.

Quoted sections are from the CFR 22 Part 35 Section 35.130.



Swap Shop

Check out www.myoptions.info for the newest additions to our equipment swap shop. Items for sale by owner include hospital beds, power scooters and wheelchairs, standing lifts, accessible vans and more.

Dear Options,

"I was recently diagnosed with bipolar disorder and I don't feel like my family and friends understand me...is there anyone out there who knows what I have been going through?"

Dear Reader:

You're not alone. Many people with disabilities often feel alone and when others don't completely understand; it can be even more traumatic.

At Options, through our Peer Visiting Program, we put people in touch with others who have the same or similar disability. Options keeps a list of persons with disabilities who are interested in being Peer Visitors (Volunteers) and who go through a short training on policies, such as confidentiality.

Generally, these are individuals who have lived with their disability for some time and have helpful information to share with others. We also have Support Groups throughout our service area that give people a chance to meet others.

Medicare ALERT for People Who Enter a Skilled Nursing Facility After a Hospital Stay

Options recently received phone calls from people who found out Medicare part A wouldn't pay for their stay in a skilled nursing facility after transitioning there from a hospital. The reason was their hospital stay was coded as "observation" instead of "inpatient" by the hospital.

Background

Medicare is federal health care coverage for people who receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Social Security Retirement. A Medicare card is red, white and blue. This is different from a Medicaid card (or Medical Assistance) which is health coverage for people based on income and overseen by each State.

People who qualify for Medicare are required to be hospitalized for medically necessary inpatient hospital care for at least 3 straight days before Medicare will cover post-hospital care in a skilled nursing facility. A hospital stay under "observation status" for a couple of days does NOT count toward the 3-day stay requirement because they are considered outpatient days. **Patients don't always know or understand they are in observation status because it is often the same care provided to inpatients.**

Included in the current draft of the *Improving Access to Medicare Coverage Act of 2015* (H.R. 1571):

"Older Americans and people with disabilities who are hospitalized but do not meet the 3-day inpatient hospital stay requirement simply because they were placed in "outpatient observation status" for some or all of their hospital stay (even when their total actual stay exceeds 3 days in the hospital) can face a significant and unexpected financial burden, which can amount to thousands of dollars, for skilled nursing care. Among beneficiaries [people who have Medicare] who received care in a skilled nursing facility that Medicare did not cover, the average out-of-pocket charges were more than \$10,000, according to the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services."

Call to Action

The good news is Congress and the Department of Health and Human Services are aware of this problem and there is a bill in congress to try to fix it. They propose to have "observation" days count toward the mandatory 3 day stay prior to admittance to a skilled nursing facility paid for by Medicare.

The bad news is it is not a done deal and advocacy is needed to pass the bill in congress. Until then, **make sure you understand if your stay in the hospital is "observation" or inpatient status, especially if the next step might be a skilled nursing facility.**

Dear Options,

What is the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program?

Dear Reader:

This is a federal program for low income households. Each state administers the program according to their guidelines. Applications are accepted October through May 31 of each heating season. Both homeowners and renters may participate in this program.

North Dakota

Contact your local county social service office for an application. More information is available by contacting the ND Department of Human Services at **800-755-2716** and www.nd.gov/dhs (click financial services).

Eligibility: Based on adjusted income of all persons in the home. There are deductions for allowable expenses such as child care and medical expenses.

Services: May include heating funds, weatherization, furnace and chimney cleaning, emergency assistance, cooling devices, and energy cost reduction devices.

Minnesota

Find your county EAP provider at www.mn.gov/commerce/energy/consumers/Heating-Assistance or call the MN Department of Commerce at **800-657-3710**.

Eligibility: Based on household size, income, fuel type and energy usage.

Services: May include payment of energy bills, help with utility disconnections or necessary fuel deliveries, education, advocacy and repair or replacement of malfunctioning heating systems.



**Resource Center
for Independent Living**

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If you would like to receive Options notices and publications by email, please go to www.myoptions.info and submit your request under the CONTACT tab.

If accommodations are necessary to read this newsletter, such as audio format, braille, please contact us at **218-773-6100 or 800-726-3692** or email us at mike@myoptions.info

The production of this newsletter is funded at about 43% under a grant from the Department of Education. The contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

Options is a non-profit organization committed to assisting individuals with disabilities to live independently in the communities of their choice and to eliminate barriers of attitude, architecture and communication from the environment.

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Just Call Options!

If you have a question and need an answer feel free to “just call Options.” If you are a person who has worked directly with one of our outreach staff, you may think the person you worked with is the only staff at Options who can provide you assistance, but this is not the case. Options has staff in their main office available to assist you with your day-to-day questions. Just call the toll free number to access them.

I know many people comment they call Options' Outpost office and have difficulty accessing the staff there. Please remember staff in our outreach offices are constantly on the go. When Options envisioned the outreach offices, it was to provide a location other than the staff person's home where they could do their paper work and if necessary meet with a person in privacy. As staff have become increasingly busy assisting people one-on-one, they have had less time to commit to other duties.

I am asking for your help. Please call the main office for questions unrelated to the direct services you are receiving.

In our main office we have a staff person whose job it is to get the information you need in a timely

manner: this is Mike our Information and Referral Specialist. If you have a question regarding civil rights or accessibility issues ask for Corey. He is very knowledgeable about various disability related civil rights legislation as well as the accessibility codes and accommodations that can be made for you. Paula is our Advocate and can assist you with strategies on how you can make change in your community. Don't worry if you don't know who to ask for. Our representative answering the phone will make sure you get to just the right person.

Give the main office a try the next time you lift up the phone to call your local office. Our toll-free number is 1-800-726-3692. If you'd like, give me a call and tell me your thoughts. My name is Randy Sorensen and I'm the Executive Director. Thanks for your help.

