

A2I NEWSLETTER

Quarterly Newsletter from Access 2 Independence

A Lot Can Happen in a Year!

by Leah Zapf Donald, Executive Director

Happy fall to all of our friends around the Eastern Iowa Corridor and beyond! We couldn't be more excited about some of the changes coming to Access 2 Independence in the coming weeks and months. We have been working diligently to find new ways to serve the disability community and truly believe that we are positioning our organization to be an even better resource for our clients and our community.

One way we are doing that is by offering a new program beginning this month: Work Incentive Benefits Planning. We have joined the American Dream Employment Network (ADEN) to provide assistance to those seeking to move back into the workforce through Social Security's Ticket to Work Program. We feel that this program fits perfectly with our mission "to empower individuals with disabilities throughout the Eastern Iowa Corridor through education, advocacy, and peer support, so that they may achieve greater independence and integrated community participation". Please read on to learn about our involvement with ADEN and Ticket to Work and how you can access this resource.

Additionally, Access 2 Independence is continuing to seek ways to better our service to our community by improving our existing programs. Read on to learn about our Independent Living Specialist, Chanel "Nell" Prince's inspiring and heart-felt experience at the Peer Support Training last month in her reoccurring "A Moment with Nell" column. Check out the photos from our outreach tour last summer, visiting resource and wellness fairs around our eight county region to educate and promote our free services.

There's a lot to catch up on in this newsletter, and it couldn't be done without your support. We are extremely grateful to our community for supporting us: our donors, volunteers, board members, community partners and those who refer others to us for services and supports.

Thank you!



Caption: Access 2 Independence Logo

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Kiersten Onanga, ILS
Chanel Prince, ILS
Talor Gray, WIP
Ashley Burns, Intern

Board Members:

Troy Ward, Chair
Peggy Loveless, Vice Chair
Amanda Sharp, Treasurer
Amy Robasse, Voting Member
Scott Edwards, Voting Member

Access 2 Independence
will be closed on November 22,
December 24-January 1

Positive Peer Programs

Krafts with Kiersten

Krafts With Kiersten is a peer support group that is held every 2nd Tuesday of the month at Choices (mental health drop in center) in Washington, IA. Krafts with Kiersten brings individuals together to discuss various topics of concern. Together the group is able to help each other through life's challenges in a warm and safe environment. The best part is at the end, the individuals are able to take home a craft that they made with their own two hands that they can be proud of.

Contact:

Kiersten.onanga@access2independence.org for more information

Guided Journaling

Do you like writing, do you get inspired when you are able to see your thoughts translated and transformed onto paper? Do you often feel rejuvenated, or free after you are able to express yourself through the art and passion of writing? If you answered yes to any of those questions guess what?! A2I now offers a Peer Support Journaling Group. This group meets once a month at the Cedar Rapids Public Library. This group provides the freedom you want, and the support you need while fostering positive outlooks, healthy individual and peer relationships, and establishing holistic coping skills.

Contact: 319-499-8706 to reach Chanel for more information

Expressive Art Group

The Expressive Art Group seeks to provide a supportive, friendly, nurturing environment for people of all backgrounds and abilities to explore and discover creative self-expression through art. Expressive Art Group is open to people with any type of disability and a friend living in the Johnson County area. We welcome all artistic levels, even beginners. This group is free and supplies are included.

Contact: talor.gray@access2independence.org for more information

Second Saturday Social

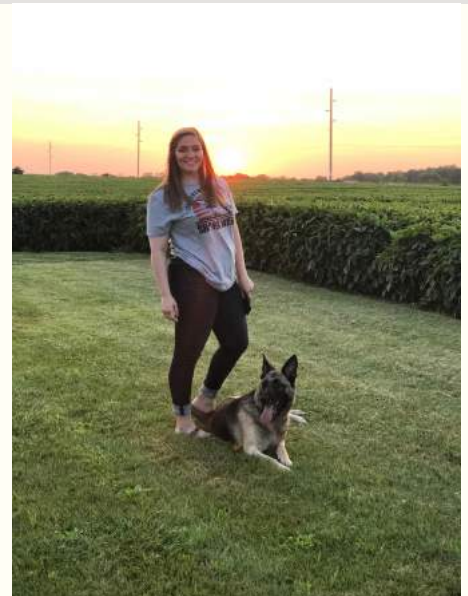
Second Saturday Social was formed to promote socialization opportunities for autistic young people. This group allows neuro-diverse young people to build friendships and interact in an inclusive space where peers can support each other. The group rotates to a new location every month. Participants can choose to engage in the monthly activity, chat with others or simply observe until they feel comfortable with the group.

Contact: ed@access2independence.org for more information

Intern Spotlight: Ashley Burns

by Ashley Burns, Intern

I'm Ashley and I am from Fort Leonard Wood Missouri, I'm in my senior year at Mount Mercy University getting my degree in Social Work. What inspired me to become a Social Worker is the capability of being able to change someone's life for the better. I want to be the person that someone will always remember through their life, that has always been there for them. My advice for future interns is to do the things that scare you, if talking in front of people scares you then go and do it. You are capable of a lot more than you think.



Pictured above:
Ashley Burns, Intern

Info & Updates

Access 2 Independence's staff travel often while covering 8 counties in the Eastern Iowa Corridor, but we enjoy every minute of getting to know the people we meet along the way. This summer we attended multiple county fairs, local celebrations, and health oriented conferences. We were in and out of the office a lot, but fully enjoyed our outreach tour to let people know about our ever growing services.



Upcoming Events

October

- 2nd:** Expressive Arts Group @ 4:30PM @ Uptown Bill's, Iowa City
- 8th:** Second District Congressional Forum @ 2PM @ Coralville Public Library, Coralville
- 9th:** Krafts with Kiersten @ 11AM @ Choices, 114 W 2nd St, Washington
- 13th:** Saturday Social for Autistic Teens & 20s @ 4PM-6PM @ Fall Nature Walk at Harvest Preserve, Iowa City
- 20th:** A2I @ Roll & Read, Marengo
- 26th:** Expressive Art Group @ 3PM @ RPlace, Iowa City
- 27th:** Tabling @ 8AM-1PM @ Iowa Seizure Smart Conference @ Parkview Church, Iowa City

November

- 6th:** Expressive Arts Group @ 4:30PM @ Uptown Bill's, Iowa City
- 10th:** Saturday Social for Autistic Teens & 20s @ 4PM-5:30PM @ North Liberty Recreational Center, North Liberty
- 12th:** Johnson County Task Force on Aging Forum @ 2PM @ Coralville Public Library, Coralville
- 13th:** Krafts with Kiersten @ 11AM @ Choices, 114 W 2nd St, Washington
- 15th:** Disaster Preparedness Training @ 1PM - 3PM @ Cedar Rapids Public Library, Whippie Auditorium, Cedar Rapids
- 23rd:** Access 2 Independence CLOSED
- 24th:** Expressive Art Group @ 3PM @ RPlace, Iowa City

December

- 4th:** Expressive Art Group @ 4:30PM @ Uptown Bill's, Iowa City
- 8th:** Saturday Social for Autistic Teens & 20s @ 4PM-5:30PM @ To Be Determined
- 11th:** Krafts with Kiersten @ 11AM @ Choices, 114 W 2nd St, Washington
- 24th-January 1st:** Access 2 Independence CLOSED

Join our email list for updates on these events and more

- A) Iowa Senate Minority Leader, Senator Janet Peterson, addressing the Older Iowan's Legislature
- B) Leon and Lucas, working hard on computer training
- C) Kiersten & Chanel at the Cedar County Wellness Fair
- D) Leah with a group of Second Saturday Social attendees
- E) Leah tabling at the Linn County ADA Celebration
- F) Talor and Kiersten with Oregon State Senator Jeff Merkley, the keynote speaker at the Johnson County ADA Celebration
- G) Chanel with her peer support training colleagues

A Moment with Nell

by Chanel Prince, ILS

I had the most exciting and enlightening experience this quarter while attending the Iowa Peer Support Training Program!



By Fritz Ahlstedt

I had the pleasure of completing this training which has equipped me to further support those who are recovering from mental health, trauma, and or past addiction related diagnosis. While attending training, I was reminded that we all struggle with something, all of us. My story is different than yours, and yours is different than mine. Our stories shouldn't be a competition; as to who's story or life was the worse. If we can grasp the idea that whatever a person is going through that "thing" is the worse for them. I believe we can then come to the greater understanding that our unique pieces and qualities support each other, and it is then we can truly start the process of healing and living a whole life.

There are times in our recovery that we focus so much on reaching the "greater" goal, but what if we stopped to celebrate the "small" victories. Yay! I woke up this morning and I brushed my teeth after practically crawling to the bathroom. That my friend is worth celebrating. So what if you return to your bed for the rest of the day. I think your furry friend will appreciate you having a minty mouth as you go in for a kiss :)

We all have a vital role to play, and whatever it is for you that day, make it the greatest thing you've done. I pledge today, that I will stand in the gap for you so you can crossover the bridge! When you don't have any hope, I will hold it for you.
Together we will!

This has been a moment with Nell, until next time, be free and keep love alive.

Halloween Tips & Tricks

by Leah Zapf Donald, ED

With Halloween just around the corner, we'd like to share some ways to support the kids in your neighborhood and community who may be unable to or uncomfortable participating in the trick-or-treating festivities.

Alternative Snacks: Some kids aren't able to eat the sugary treats handed out door to door due to food allergies or sensitivities. For this reason we love the Teal Pumpkin Project created by the folks at Food Allergy Research & Education. A teal pumpkin signals that non-food treats are available to trick-or-treaters. What a great idea! Check out foodallergy.org for more information!



A Few Tips to Create a More Inclusive Halloween:

- While it's fun to decorate, remember to keep your walkways accessible for trick-or-treaters on wheels!
- Kiddos who don't respond to comments may not have verbal language. Be kind!
- Don't scare kids who you aren't sure will enjoy the surprise!

Alternative Ways to Celebrate: If you have a child who doesn't want to trick or treat, that's okay too!

Information below accredited to the Epilepsy Foundation (www.epilepsy.com)

Mask decoration party: Have a Halloween party at your home and let children decorate masks with as many fanciful items as you can find. Children are creative if you supply them with paper, glue, curly macaroni, feathers, buttons, stickers, ribbons, and crayons.

Family Film Party: Create a party around a theme and rent movies that your children will enjoy. If it is Casper the Friendly Ghost, let the children turn your family room into a haunted house. Find props and costumes that will give the evening a special flair.

Gifts for a Neighbor-in-Need Party: Just as people have toy collections at Christmas, you can create the spirit at Halloween and bring other families treats – the sick or the elderly always welcome thoughtfulness. The children can collect toys, gifts, or even Halloween candy in advance. Then that afternoon, have them celebrate "treating" by putting together baskets and decorations for a neighbor in need of a cheerful, friendly face.

NEW: Work Incentive Planning Services

by Leah Zapf Donald, ED

We are pleased to announce that Access 2 Independence is now a member of the American Dream Employment Network (ADEN). ADEN is the first national administrative Employment Network providing face-to-face services to individuals receiving Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits under the Ticket to Work program. For individuals receiving SSA disability benefits, the return to gainful employment can be complicated and challenging. The SSA recognizes the challenges that beneficiaries face in returning to work and, as a result, are able to offer supports through the Ticket to Work program to individuals who have the goal of achieving financial self-sufficiency. If you are receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits and are between the ages of 18-64 and looking for employment, Ticket to Work can be one of many work incentives to help get individuals with disabilities into the workforce. As a new Member of ADEN, we at Access 2 Independence want to invite all of our current clients who are receiving Social Security disability benefits to explore assigning your Ticket to Work.



New Services

Career Counseling

Job Search Supports

Social Security Work Incentives Advisement

Employment Supports

Financial Management Resources

Connection to Employers

Assigning your Ticket to ADEN is voluntary and there is no fee to assign your Ticket with ADEN. You will continue to receive any of our other services, but as an ADEN Member, we can explore with you how the Ticket program can further expand the resources available to you to support you in your current job, assist you in finding a job and help you advance in your career. We can also assist you in understanding how best to leverage your current financial situation, and future planning for a more secure financial future. Our Work Incentive Practitioner, Talor Gray, can work with you to discover if you have a Ticket available, and will also discuss with you further about the Ticket program to see if you are interested in receiving these supports - the choice is completely yours. Learn more today by scheduling a time to meet with Talor.

To read and hear about success stories of people on disability benefits improving their financial situation, visit www.choosework.net.

10 Steps to Becoming a Successful Self-Advocate

by Talor Gray, WIP

1. Believe in yourself: "I am a unique and valuable person. I have the right to advocate for myself, protect my rights and insist that others treat me well."

Assess your self-esteem and appreciate how far you have come in your journey. Support yourself in your current self-care endeavors and work towards improving your well-being through reasonable goal development.

2. Decide what you want or what needs to change in your life: "What is it that I need and want for myself?"

Make a list of these things and decide what goals are most important to you.

3. Get the Facts: "When I speak up for myself, I need to know what I'm talking about."

Talk with people you know who have been in similar situations, discuss your concerns with a professional who knows about the issues you need help with, and spend some time at your local library or online reading through reputable websites.

4. Plan your strategy: "What do I think is the best strategy for getting what I want or for achieving my goal, and what steps would I need to take?"

Set up an action plan to meet your goal and be sure to include a timeline.

5. Gather support: "Who can I go to when I need someone to listen, give advice and feedback, and be with me at difficult times?"

Make a list of the people in your life you can go to when you need support, and learn about new opportunities as well, such as a local support group or advocacy agency. Also, keep in mind that the very best friend may let you down from time to time. No one is perfect and everyone gets overwhelmed once in a while, so try to forget the incident and be there for your support system too when they need help.

6. Target your efforts: "Who do I need to deal with to get action on this matter?"

It may take a few, sometimes more than a few, tries to reach the right person that can help you. Keep trying until you find the right person because you deserve to be heard. Remember to treat the person who is helping you in a respectful way; this will make working together much easier and the process go much faster.

7. Ask for what you want: "I will need to plan ahead and decide how I am going to ask for what I want."

Practice what you want to say and set up an appointment with the person you need to talk to about your concerns. If you decide to write a letter, try to keep it short and concise, preferably limit yourself to one page. Use the phone to set up appointments, gather and provide information, and track progress; be sure to keep a record of all communication.

8. Assert yourself calmly: "In the process of advocating for myself, I will keep calm because this increases my effectiveness. In the process of advocating for myself, I am committed to speaking out and also respecting the rights of others and listening to what they have to say."

9. Be firm and persistent: "I will be firm and persistent. I will stick with it until I get what I need for myself"

10. Debrief: "After the appointment, I will contact my support system to meet and talk over what happened."

This helps reduce stress and helps you stay positive and feeling well. Make sure to write down what your next steps are and keep on being an awesome self-advocate!

This is a summary of a SAMHSA publication: "Speaking Out for Yourself - A Self-Help Guide"

To read this material in its entirety, visit: <https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA-3719/SMA-3719.pdf>



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