

Independent Life

Spring/Summer 2007

DISABILITY *advocates*
OF KENT COUNTY

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Sherry Jousma-Out of the Tailspin

To hear Sherry Jousma talk, Disability Advocates of Kent County saved her life. Sherry's life changed dramatically when pieces of insulation blew into her eyes, permanently damaging them and leaving her legally blind. Sherry's life went into a tailspin as she became unable to work and faced serious health issues and she became extremely depressed.

Life took an upward turn when Sherry met Kyle and Charis Austin. The Austins are both blind, yet have full-time careers, lead full, active lives, and raised a son on their own. Charis, a board member at Disability Advocates referred Sherry to DAKC for assistance in pulling her life back together. Inspired by the Austins, Sherry received assistance from DAKC's Core Services Team, which taught her self-advocacy skills to navigate support systems like the Department of Human Services the Social Security Administration and the Friend of the Court. As urgent advocacy issues were resolved, Sherry wanted to "give back" to Disability Advocates by volunteering, and ultimately participating in the Student Nurse Intern Program. As a participant, Sherry receives assistance with health issues from the GVSU nursing students interning at Disability Advocates.

Sherry is very appreciative of the GVSU nurse intern who helped her navigate the medical system to address her health issues and find a better doctor. The student nurse helped her in other ways, even teaching her to use a fax machine that she had been given. "The biggest help I received from Disability Advocates, however" said Sherry "is the realization that I am still an independent adult who can lead a full life, travel about freely, and make my own decisions despite my disability."

Sherry says that she is interested to return to work someday and credits Disability Advocates of Kent County with helping her find the path to a full and active life.



"We exist to advocate, assist, educate and inform on independent living options for people with disabilities and to create a barrier-free society for all."

From the Director's Desk

Dear DAKC supporters and friends,

The 17th anniversary of the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act occurs on July 26th. Each year this gives a chance to celebrate (see page 6 for details) and a moment to pause to ask how much DAKC's efforts are impacting the lives of individuals with disabilities in addition to creating a barrier free community for all in Kent County.

As for our work with individuals, one person's story jumps out. Over the course of a year, DAKC's occupational therapist and certified occupational therapist work with many people of all ages to help them remain in their homes. This option is the most cost effective for families and preferred by the person with a disability. Ms. Harris is no exception. When asked whether she wanted to move to a nursing home, she replied, "I have a home." Recently, DAKC's OT visited Ms. Harris. Five years ago, the OT completed an assessment for Ms. Harris and provided equipment to help her remain in her home. This time, the assessment indicated she needed a ramp which is being built by our community partner, Home Repair Services. While this situation is replayed over 50 times a year in our community for people who need a ramp to stay at home, Ms. Harris is unique in that she is 102 years old!

As for DAKC's work on systems change efforts, there are many examples of progress. Please allow me to note only two.

The Signing of the Single Point of Entry Law— DAKC's Cyndy Viars and Clark Goodrich were present when Governor Granholm signed the bi-partisan Single Point of Entry Bill into law this past winter. This law provides for the creation of one-stop services to help people with disabilities access needed long term care supports and services. DAKC's Long Term Care Work Group worked on this issue for years and finally tasted legislative victory!

The Successful Passage of the Transit Millage—Once again, the voters of the six urban cities of Kent County voted overwhelmingly to expand The Rapid's services. On Tuesday, May 8th, 58% of the voters in East Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids, Grandville, Kentwood, Walker and Wyoming said "Yes" to further expanding The Rapid's services by approving the requested 1.12 mills to support The Rapid's operations.

Once again, Friends of Transit (<http://www.rapidyes.org/>) organized a solid campaign that brought together a wide array of supporters from every sector of our community. This support and endorsements came from the Greater Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce along with the Wyoming-Kentwood Chamber of Commerce, the Kent County Republican, Democratic and Green Parties, west Michigan environmental Action Council and the DAKC Board. Check out the Friends of Transit webpage for the full list (<http://www.rapidyes.org/endorsements.htm>).

A special thank you to Mr. Peter Wege who provided a substantial portion of the financial support for the campaign. In addition, he paid for the original artwork by local artist, Mark Heckman, which featured Sally Fields as the Flying Nun touting the "mass appeal" of transit and inviting all to make transit "a habit. Finally, thanks to the many volunteers who worked so long and hard to get out the vote and educate the wider community on the many benefits of transit. DAKC was a veritable bee hive of activity in the days leading up to the vote! Our hard work paid off.



Dave Bulkowski
Executive Director

Systems Change Works On All Levels

People are gaining greater housing choices by taking a systems change approach and working together are making a difference on all levels. A group of residents from Mt. Mercy has organized and is working with the Grand Rapids Housing Commission to make Mt. Mercy a more accessible and better place to live. Members of the Housing Advisory Committee are telling the State Legislature that they need to fund the Michigan Housing and Community Development Fund. On May 2, sixteen people from Grand Rapids bussed

to Lansing to attend a rally in front of the Capital to support the Fund. 8 A leadership team of consumers from Disability Advocates has met with most of our State Representatives one on one (see related article). And we're making a difference on a case by case basis. On April 19, over seventy people attended a home ownership seminar sponsored by DAKC at Christ Community Church. By taking "a nothing about us without us" approach, slowly we're creating a barrier free society for all.

Michigan Lawmakers-Can They Deal? by Frank Lynn

Politicians in Lansing may not be able to deal with Michigan's budget problems but Disability Advocates can. Consumers from Disability Advocates were busy all winter meeting with their elected representatives discussing their priorities for the state budget. The effort began on February 20 when DAKC hosted a tax policy forum at LaGrave Christian Reform Church. Over 50 people attended to hear Tom Clay of the Citizen's Research Council of Michigan and Lou Glazer of Michigan Future, Inc. outline Michigan's budget problems and a new agenda for Michigan. Armed with what they had learned, participants began to meet with Senators and Representatives to discuss ways to address the State budget's structural deficit.



Meetings were held at DAKC to outline the group's agenda. A brief synopsis of activities and programs at Disability Advocates was presented followed by a segment on tax policy suggestions. This introduction was followed by a series of presentations on core funding, long-term care, mental health parity, transportation and housing. Some of the people that helped with these presentations included Robyn Saylor, Clark Goodrich, Paula Thompson, Karen DeLoof, Daryl Domke, Duane DeRoche and Doug Koster. Each official was then given the opportunity to present their priorities. The discussions were productive and enlightening. All of the meetings ended with a commitment to working together to move toward Michigan's future economic success. The group plans to continue developing strategies to work with decision makers to create a barrier free society for all.

"Invest in Ability"

Coming October 29, 2007

Go to www.dakc.us
for more details.

Meet DAKC's New Staff and Interns

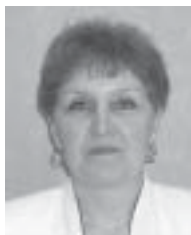
Sarah Jaworowicz
Access Coordinator

I live in Walker, Michigan with my two children. I have 3 cats, one dog and four snakes. I have 19 years experience with my son who has multiple disabilities. I worked as a home health aide for seven years prior to accepting the position as Access Coordinator for DAKC.



Helen Herzog
Disability Program Navigator

Helen is from the Grand Rapids area and is a graduate of Davenport University, with advanced certification as a paralegal and certified court reporter. Helen joined the DAKC Business Services Team in May and is currently working as a Disability Program Navigator located at Michigan Works!



Christine Keener
Grand Valley State University Intern

Christine is a Masters in Social Work intern from GVSU and will graduate in April 2008. She received her Bachelors Degree in Psychology in December 2003. She works at Ionia County Community Mental Health as a Support Coordinator/Case Manger for adults with a severe and persistent mental illness and/or developmental disability. When she graduates with her MSW degree, she would like to work for a social service agency in an administrative role. She is excited to be an intern at DAKC to learn more about the organization and obtain the skills necessary to work in administration in the future.



Ruqaiyah Rogers
Grand Valley State University Intern

Ruqaiyah Rogers is a graduate student in the dual program for social work and public administration. She is from Muskegon, MI, the oldest of seven children and moved to Grand Rapids last July while attending GVSU full-time and working through Catholic Social Services in Muskegon, MI as a parent mentor and person-centered planning facilitator. As an intern, she'll be working with the 0 to 26 program.



Ruqaiyah graduated from Michigan State University and earned a Bachelors of Arts in journalism and teacher education. She taught with Muskegon Public School for four years in their alternative education program and credits this experience as the stepping stone for pursuing a career in social work and public/human service administration. Once Ruqaiyah graduates she plans to work in the field of social work with a focus on public policy and community planning for children and families.

Gabrielle Belbot
Cooley Law School Student Extern

Gabrielle is attending Cooley Law School, and will graduate in September. She has two teenage sons and two adult daughters, and one grandson expected to arrive in September. She started as a volunteer in 2005 and is now an intern. Gabrielle says her goal in life is to walk softly upon this Earth and make it a better place to live, for those she leaves behind.



Trina Edmondson
Davenport Legal Advocate

Trina is currently working with DAKC's Business Services Team. She will be graduating from Davenport University(DU) in December with her Bachelor's degree in Science as a paralegal. She enjoys volunteering at DAKC because she is able to use the skills she has learned from DU.

DD Council News by Rob Lewakowski

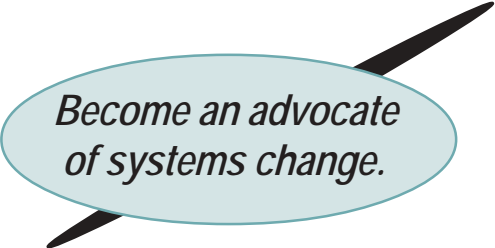
As a member of the Michigan Developmental Disability Council, (DD Council) each council member is asked to participate in one of five workgroups as well as one of four committees. The five workgroups are Transportation, Housing, Education, Health, and Family Support. The four committees consist of Public Policy, Executive, Multicultural, and the Program Committee. In the last newsletter, we provided information on the Transportation Workgroup and the Public Policy committee. This month the Housing Workgroup and the Executive Committee will be highlighted.

The Housing Workgroup is made up of representatives from state and local housing authorities, disability advocacy organizations, and consumers. The task of the Housing Workgroup is to advocate for increased availability of housing choices that are both affordable and accessible for people with disabilities. The workgroup identifies barriers and will recommend how the DD Council can work to improve housing

options for people with disabilities statewide. The workgroup meets the second Thursday of the month. The goal of the Executive Committee is to direct the policies of the DD Council. The Executive Committee acts on behalf of the Council between meetings. All actions of the Executive Committee are reported to the Council at the next meeting. The Council, by way of vote, can rescind or alter said action. It is the responsibility of the Executive Committee to implement the Five Year Strategic Plan.

The Five Year Strategic Plan is the document that defines the current needs of people with a developmental disability and how to address these issues.

The Executive Committee meets monthly on the fourth Tuesday of the month. Both the Workgroup and Committee meetings are open to all consumers. Contact Rob Lewakowski at (616)949-1100, ext. 226 to find out how you can become an advocate of systems change.

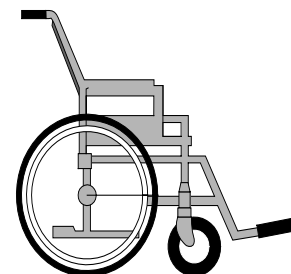


Become an advocate of systems change.

Equipment Loan Closet

Did you know that DAKC has an adaptive equipment loan closet? If you have equipment such as tub seats, raised toilet seats, manual wheelchairs, commodes, grab bars or even a lift chair, in working condition, that you no longer need and would like to donate, DAKC will take it. Equipment donated is thoroughly cleaned and then issued to those who need it. In return, DAKC will send you a letter acknowledging your donation. If you are in need of

equipment and have no funding to cover the cost, DAKC may be able to provide the equipment, if it is available through the loan closet. A professional evaluation is required in order to utilize equipment from DAKC's loan closet. DAKC can provide the evaluation if one is needed. For more information about equipment donations or available equipment contact Renee Thompson at renee.t@dakc.us or (616) 949-1100 ext. 236.



Walk & Roll 2007



Will there be a three peat?



This past March proved to be another successful year for Walk & Roll. Sponsors, relay teams and contributors raised \$42,000 for the Business Services Program. West Catholic took home the Jim Gardiner trophy for the second year in a row!

A special thank you to our lead sponsor, Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital. Andy Rent from 100.5 The River entertained the crowd as the emcee. Thank you to all the relay team participants, volunteers and sponsors who made the event fun and exciting.

*Mark your calendar for **Saturday, March 15, 2008** for Walk & Roll's 10 year anniversary!*

ADA Picnic in the Park



*Wednesday, July 25
11:30am-1:30pm*

*MacKay/Jaycee Park
2531 Kalamazoo SE*

*For details (616)949-1100, ext. 255
or go to www.dakc.us*



Volunteers with Wheels Needed

DAKC is looking for volunteers who can pick up and deliver equipment. Persons interested must have a vehicle such as a van or pickup truck and be able to lift heavy items, such as a lift chair. If you are interested, contact Lisa Weber at (616) 949-1100 ext. or lisa.w@dakc.us



Zero to 26 Program

Most families with children who have developmental disabilities (DD) and others disabilities do not know their rights and responsibilities to understand community systems and resources as their children with disabilities are raised to live as independently as possible in the community.

Disability Advocates has determined that the best way to meet the resource needs of these families is to create a program called, 0-26 Program. The 0-26 Program proposes to:

1. Work with families and advance self-advocacy skills by providing factually accurate information in a timely manner;
2. Teach families to self-advocate;
3. Employ social workers with expert knowledge of the medical, the mental health and, the intermediate school district systems;
4. Establish, nurture, and maintain collaborative relationships with these systems.

Find out how you can help fund the 0-26 Program, by contacting Jocelyn Dettloff at (616)949-1100, ext. 237 or jocelyn.d@dakc.us.



COFFEE BREAK WITHOUT THE KIDS is an off shoot of the 0-26 Program family tree and is one of DAKC's newest work groups. Families who have children with developmental disabilities (DD) and others disabilities meet to learn their rights and responsibilities when navigating community systems while the children with disabilities are raised to live as independently as possible in the community. The group meets once a month. To learn more about **COFFEE BREAK WITHOUT THE KIDS**, contact Tina at tina.t@dakc.us, or call her at (616)949-1100, ext. 233.

For more information go to www.dakc.us



Midwest Indoor Regional Team Championships

July 27, 28 and 29
Champion Health & Fitness
515 N. Main

Rockford, MI 49341



Contact grwsa.com for more information

Low-Interest Loans Available To People with Disabilities



For information
(616) 949-1100 x236
renee.t@dakc.us

Correspondence

Disability Advocates of Kent County welcomes your comments, suggestions, and questions about its newsletter, *Independent Life*. Letters to the Editor and all other correspondence can be directed to: Editor, *Independent Life*, 3600 Camelot Drive SE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49546 or e-mail cindy.w@dakc.us

Disclaimer

Independent Life is designed to inform people with disabilities and other interested parties of disability related issues and other matters deemed relevant to persons with disabilities. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of Disability Advocates of Kent County.

Display and Sponsorship Information

For information on display in or sponsorship of in *Independent Life*, contact Disability Advocates of Kent County at (616) 949-1100, Extension 222.

Story Submission Information

Disability Advocates of Kent County welcomes the submission of materials for publication in its newsletter, *Independent Life*. Materials submitted for publication cannot be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Submission of such materials does not imply acceptance for publication, and *Independent Life* reserves the right to edit all materials chosen for publication. *Independent Life* cannot accept responsibility for unsolicited materials.

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Our Mission-

"We exist to advocate, assist, educate and inform on independent living options for people with disabilities and to create a barrier-free society for all."



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