

On Target

Informing Indiana About Disability Issues

Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities

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Endurance got Kacie Weldy to the starting line

Kacie Weldy, guided by her service dog, Rei, crossed the finish line at the 500 Festival Mini-Marathon in Indianapolis May 8. Kacie not only accomplished the 13-mile trek, but overcame hurdles that challenged her civil rights before the race even began.

Kacie's up-hill course began in November 2009 when 500 Festival organizers told her that Mini-Marathon policy prohibited service animals due to safety concerns. Instead, they offered Kacie the option to use a human guide.

"If I only had visual impairments, a human guide would have been an appropriate accommodation," Kacie said. "The problem is that I also have hearing impairments. I wouldn't have been able to hear verbal cues from a human guide."

Luckily, Kacie was armed with her skills and peers from Partners in Policymaking, the Governor's Council's advocacy training program. Her peers rallied around her in support and, with their help, Kacie worked her way up the 500 Festival's chain of command to the vice president of operations. The Festival agreed to allow Rei to accompany Kacie, but under several conditions, including keeping a muzzle on Rei during the race and signing a liability and indemnification agreement, which wasn't required of other participants.

Kacie took action by doing her homework first. She researched case law involving disability issues to make sure she was prepared with a credible argument.

"The ADA law provides that any person who has use of a service animal be treated like any other participant. The proposed agreement sets unacceptable conditions on both me and my service dog," Kacie said in her response to the Festival. In particular, Kacie specified that, per the ADA, she was not required to sign any forms beyond those that are standard for all entrants.

When the Festival refused to eliminate the requirement for Kacie to sign the individualized liability waiver, Kacie reached out to Indiana Protection and Advocacy Services (IPAS). Her action paid off, as IPAS was able to negotiate with the Festival, which ultimately agreed to drop that requirement and others, including making Rei wear a muzzle.

In early April 2010, Kacie and Festival organizers reached an agreement, which required that Kacie provide Rei's shot record, prepare a written plan for cleaning up after Rei during the race, and start the race at the back of the participant field. Although Kacie would have preferred all stipulations be removed, she knew that some compromise was necessary to pave the way for future participants with disabilities.

After a six-month journey that came down to an hours-long race, Kacie's friends and peers, and their service dogs, cheered her on from the sidelines as she finally achieved her goal.

"This experience has taught me that it can be done, especially with a network of support," Kacie said. "If it wasn't for my Partners training and peers, I might have given up."

Arc of Indiana is building pathways to change

The Arc of Indiana recently launched a new initiative to help Indiana's programs and services for people with disabilities overcome current budget challenges. Called "Building Pathways to Empowerment," the initiative encourages reassessing Indiana's system of disability programs and services to make the system more efficient and effective in the strained economic environment.

Building Pathways focuses on redistributing government resources and helping families utilize resources in their communities. In his March 19 blog on The Arc of Indiana's website, John Dickerson, executive director, said "The Arc's position with the state, providers and families is that we must look at every way we can to find ways to save money."

According to Dickerson, Building Pathways to Empowerment is putting the disability community on the offense — reinventing the system to make programs and services more useful for people with disabilities, rather than playing defense against the economic crisis.

In an interview on the Arc of Indiana's online audio cast, Dickerson expressed the need for people with disabilities to actively work with their communities to utilize available resources.

To learn more and take part in this initiative, visit www.arcind.org.

A new way to think about employment

An Indianapolis-based organization takes an innovative approach to help individuals with disabilities find employment — on their own terms. Tangram, which also provides residential and behavioral supports, empowers people with disabilities to become entrepreneurs.

Michelle Porter, a two-time breast cancer survivor who also has cerebral palsy, started her own business selling stained-glass paintings that feature the breast cancer awareness ribbon. Michelle's art has been displayed at locations throughout the state, and she stays busy filling special orders for her paintings.

By looking at each individual's skills and desires, Tangram provides customized services to support people with disabilities in the pursuit of self-employment, as well as other life goals. Celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, the organization's unique vision is illustrated in its name.

"The term 'Tangram' refers to an ancient Chinese puzzle that can be put together to form an endless number of shapes. For us, it signifies the unlimited possibilities for people with disabilities," said Connie Dillman, president and CEO.

Visit www.thetangramway.org to learn more, or contact Steve Clossey, director of marketing, at (317) 968-9049 or sclossey@thetangramway.org.

New Indiana Institute grants aim to improve education

The Indiana Institute on Disability and Community at Indiana University has received three four-year grants, totaling \$11.6 million, from the Indiana Department of Education. The grants support three new statewide initiatives to enhance education for Hoosier students with disabilities.

One of the three grants will help the Indiana Institute, in collaboration with other organizations, create culturally responsive positive behavior supports (PBS) programs in several schools to improve learning achievement, dropout rates, parental involvement and placement of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Culturally responsive PBS is an approach used in education that strives to increase positive learning outcomes by reducing negative behaviors, while eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in disciplining students.

With the second grant, the Indiana Institute will work with the State of Indiana to establish a new project focused on effective assessment and instruction. Among many functions, this program will serve as a resource for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and schools to support decisions about state testing and the use of the resulting data.

The third grant will establish a new program within the Indiana Institute's Center on Community Living and Careers that is dedicated to improving secondary transition-focused education services and outcomes for students with disabilities. The initiative will use professional development activities to improve family involvement, career education, life-skills instruction, work-based learning and interagency collaboration.

To learn more, visit the Indiana Institute's website at www.iidc.indiana.edu.

AmeriCorps volunteer program offers wealth of opportunities

Lise Cox was an independent, career-driven mother and wife who worked in the financial industry. She would have never guessed that today she'd be working for a company

providing services for people with visual impairments, or that she herself would have a visual impairment. But when Lise was diagnosed with a degenerative retinal disease, the banking world became harder to navigate.

Ten years after her diagnosis, Lise resigned from her position in finance and stayed home to raise her young son. As her confidence became victim to her disability, she grew more and more isolated from society. When Lise and her husband — whom she'd grown dependant on due to her disability — divorced, she felt lost. Moreover, her desire to transition from stay-at-home mom into a working professional was growing stronger.

Not sure she'd find employment opportunities outside the financial industry, Lise turned to a volunteer position that would be life-changing.

"It was like some sort of miracle," Lise said. "I did some Internet research and came across Bosma Enterprises, a company I'd never heard of, but happened to be about three miles from my house and is in the services industry for people with visual impairments."

Through Bosma, Lise became involved with AmeriCorps — a volunteer program that's part of the Corporation for National and Community Service. Bosma had just started participating in a sub-program of AmeriCorps called VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America). Bosma asked Lise to be a volunteer for Bosma through the VISTA program.

"The VISTA program was amazing," Lise said. "I was given meaningful jobs to do at Bosma, which helped me rebuild my confidence and ultimately helped me transition into new employment." After completing her one-year VISTA volunteer role, Lise was hired as a full-time employee for Bosma.

"Being a VISTA volunteer gave me the opportunity to work alongside people without disabilities, as well as meet people who were experiencing similar disabilities as me," Lise said.

AmeriCorps is a national initiative made up of: AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA and AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps).

In Indiana, the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) oversees AmeriCorps programs in the state, recruiting, selecting and supervising AmeriCorps volunteer participants.

OFBCI encourages people with disabilities to participate in AmeriCorps. Through an initiative called "Indiana Disability Inclusion Outreach," AmeriCorps enables people with disabilities to participate in significant community service in a variety of areas, including education, the environment, public safety and homeland security.

"Everyone in this life has a right to participate," Lise said. "We need to find ways to engage all individuals, regardless of their skill levels."

Lise's experience as an AmeriCorps volunteer ignited her passion for community service and desire to get others involved. She speaks to organizations and groups across the nation encouraging inclusion of people with disabilities in community service programs and other areas of society. She also started and supervises a Bosma corporate-wide volunteer program that gives employees at all levels in the organization — of which more

than half have visual impairments — the opportunity to engage in worthwhile community service.

To learn more about Indiana's AmeriCorps programs, visit the OFBCI website at www.in.gov/ofbci or call (317) 233-4273. Visit www.americorps.gov to learn more about the national program.

Submit Community Spirit Award nominations by Aug. 20

The Governor's Council for People with Disabilities is accepting nominations for the annual Community Spirit Awards. The awards program recognizes individuals with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities, and organizations for outstanding disability advocacy efforts.

Community Spirit Awards recognize individuals and groups in two categories. The Distinguished Leadership category honors both a person with a disability and a parent of a child with a disability for exceptional advocacy efforts. Winners are selected for their advocacy achievements and the impact of their efforts on the community.

The second category, Disability Awareness Campaign, recognizes one individual and one group or organization for an exemplary Disability Awareness Month activity, event or campaign. Winners are selected for using the Governor's Council's awareness materials to implement an original and engaging campaign.

If you know a group or individual who would be an appropriate award candidate, please submit a nomination by Friday, Aug. 20. Self nominations are also accepted. Award winners receive a scholarship to attend the 2010 Conference for People with Disabilities. Find nomination guidelines and information at www.in.gov/gpcpd/2339.htm, or call (317) 232-7770.

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