

On Target

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Fair Housing Month celebrates a Hoosier's road home

After nearly an eight-month fight for her fair housing rights, Andrea Murray moved into her very first apartment on Feb. 23 of this year. "You have a right to have a home you can live in and be productive in," said Andrea, a Governor's Council board member who uses a wheelchair.

April is Fair Housing Month — a time to celebrate the anniversary of the 1968 Fair Housing Act and a time to acknowledge the struggles people with disabilities, such as Andrea, face when searching for accessible, affordable housing.

In May 2007, Andrea obtained a bachelor's degree in communications and creative arts from Purdue University. She then set her sights on her next feat: finding her own apartment. A new complex being built in Valparaiso was scheduled to be complete that summer, so she was placed on a waiting list behind 19 other future residents and moved in with a friend during the interim.

Andrea gave notice that she'd need a walk-in shower with grab bars and indoor/outdoor carpeting — requests which are well within her rights.

Construction on the complex was delayed into early fall — which is when Andrea had expected to be settling into her new home. When the apartments were finally complete and the 19 other residents preceding her on the wait list were invited to move in, Andrea received bad news: her apartment still wasn't ready. She couldn't move in because her accommodations hadn't been made.

Andrea made several attempts to communicate with the leasing office about the unusual delays, and was given one excuse after another about why her apartment wasn't ready. However, nothing was offered in writing. Furthermore, the complex claimed a first-floor apartment cost more than an upstairs unit. This was obviously discriminatory, since there wasn't an elevator and Andrea couldn't get up to the second floor.

"They were hoping that I would back down," said Andrea.

Andrea's battle with the landlord caused her severe stress, which eventually made her ill and hospitalized her temporarily.

Armed with her advocacy training from the Council's Partners in Policymaking Academy, she called the Civil Rights Commission in January 2008 to file a complaint. The commission ordered the complex to make accommodations so that she could move into her apartment by the end of February.

Andrea was excited to be in her new apartment, but at move-in time, the indoor/outdoor carpeting had still not been installed. Now, after almost 10 months, more work is still needed to make the apartment fully accessible. The walk-in shower that the contractor installed, using her

friend's residence as a model because he had never done one before, still does not have grab bars. Unfortunately, another barrier makes it impossible for her to wheel onto the patio.

Accessibility has gotten better for Andrea, but affordability remains a problem. She pays a little less than \$500 a month in rent, and she only receives a little more than \$600 monthly from Social Security Income — her primary source for living.

When asked what her suggestions are for helping other people with disabilities who are treated unfairly in the housing market, Andrea says, "Call the Civil Rights Commission."

Within her apartment complex, Andrea has encouraged seniors and other people with disabilities to request walk-in showers. "Don't be afraid to speak up. I did, and I got what I needed," she said.

The Fair Housing Act (FHA), section VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, prohibits discrimination in the housing market on the basis of many characteristics, including race, sex, religion and disability. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) recently released new guidance to reinforce the "reasonable modifications" section of the FHA. This provision gives people with disabilities the right to seek "reasonable modifications" to their dwellings and to common areas if structural changes are needed for them to fully enjoy the premises.

The new guidance is designed to help housing providers and homeowners' associations better understand their obligations and help persons with disabilities better understand their rights.

"Persons with disabilities have a right to have the place they call home altered in a way that will enable them to fully enjoy it," said Kim Kendrick, HUD's Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity.

If you've experienced challenges and discrimination in your search for accessible housing, your rights are covered under the law. Contact the Civil Rights Commission by visiting www.in.gov/icrc or calling (800) 628-2909 (toll-free) or (800) 743-3333 (hearing impaired).

New cell phone helps those with visual impairments

Nokia's newest cell phone combines a state-of-the-art digital camera with a powerful personal data assistant and could provide almost unlimited print access to those who are blind, have visual impairments or reading difficulties.

Users hold the cell phone over the document they wish to read, snap a photograph with its camera and the phone then reads back to the user what the document says. The software in the phone, knfbReader Mobile or kReader Mobile, takes the text from the image captured by the camera and translates it into speech for the user.

The developer, Kurzweil Technologies, partnered with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) to get assistance funding the development and the production of the software. In addition, the NFB helped plan and design it, especially with respect to the user interface.

The new software can read anything from the dollar amount on money to words on a computer screen. But the technology doesn't come cheap. The specific Nokia phone model costs approximately \$500 and the software is \$1,595. As their Web site points out, the software costs

about the same as many flat screen televisions today, yet has the power to revolutionize a person's life.

For more information, visit www.knfbreader.com.

If you're interested in this new technology for work-related purposes, contact the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration's (FSSA) Vocational Rehabilitation Office to inquire about funding assistance. Visit www.in.gov/fssa for your local office's contact information or call (800) 545-7763 (toll-free).

Six winners announced in annual ATTITUDE essay contest

For 13 years, the United Cerebral Palsy Association (UCP) of Greater Indiana, Inc. and the Governor's Council have sponsored the ATTITUDE essay contest for Indiana students as a way to increase awareness and encourage positive attitudes about people with disabilities. On March 7, six Indiana elementary and middle school students were chosen as winners out of more than 300 entries.

Third and fourth grade winners:

- Isabella Griffin, first place,
Kennedy Primary Academy, South Bend
- Naomi Clark, second place,
Kennedy Primary Academy, South Bend

Fifth and sixth grade winners:

- Joseph Kokojan, first place,
Grantline Elementary, New Albany
- Jacob Hoffman, second place,
Sand Creek Elementary, Fishers

Seventh and eighth grade winners:

- Brooks Rodibaugh, first place,
Rensselaer Central Middle School, Rensselaer
- Paige Romer, second place,
Kendallville Middle School, Kendallville

"In addition to their sensitivity and writing skills, each of these authors has something in common — each child recognizes that one person, one gesture of kindness or acceptance, one moment of really listening to a person with a disability can make a world of difference," says Donna Roberts, UCP's executive director.

First-place winner Kokojan wrote about his own disabilities, tourette syndrome and dyslexia, in "My Attitude." He talked about adjusting to his disabilities and how sometimes his teachers and peers don't understand why he reads a little slower or "tics" every now and then. "Good people won't judge me by my disabilities. Instead they will see me as I truly am," he said.

In her essay titled "Attitude Can Change the World," Griffin said: "You take us one step closer to a better world when you display a good attitude toward someone with a disability." And in her essay, "The Rollercoaster of Life," Rodibaugh tells a story of someone she knows who had a

lawn-mowing accident and now uses a wheelchair. "She can do most things a regular person can, but in a different way," she said.

First-place winners each received a \$150 reward and second-place winners received \$75 each. All contest finalists were also given a certificate for their accomplishment and an ATTITUDE bear from UCP. All students who entered the contest received a certificate for their participation.

Legislative session ends

With property tax reform the Indiana General Assembly's top priority during this year's short legislative session, many policy issues took a back seat. However, a number of bills particularly relevant to people with disabilities made their way to Governor Daniels' desk and were signed into law.

- House Bill 1288, Certification for Behavior Analysts. Anyone who claims to be a certified behavior analyst is now required to be certified by the national Behavior Analyst Certification Board.
- House Bill 1171, Autism Training for EMS Personnel. Certified emergency medical services (EMS) personnel are now required to successfully complete an autism education and training course.
- Senate Bill 171, Crimes Against Persons with a Disability. This bill was introduced to classify an offense against a person with a disability as an aggravating circumstance for sentencing purposes. Although this bill died for other reasons, the Arc of Indiana found a bill going to conference committee, SB 258, which could incorporate the SB 171 language.
- House Bill 1266, Eligibility Criteria for Priority Medicaid Waivers. The law requires the Office of Medicaid Policy and Planning to seek an amendment to the developmental disabilities waiver that would set priorities for providing services.
- House Bill 1318, Funding for Spinal Cord and Brain Injury Fund and Law Enforcement Continuing Education Program Court Fee. This law requires a 30-cent fee to be collected for the registration of certain vehicles and then deposited in the spinal cord and brain injury fund.
- HB 1140, Coverage for Prosthetic Devices. This law prohibits a lifetime limitation of coverage for medically necessary orthotic or prosthetic devices under a state employee health benefit plan, a policy of accident and sickness insurance and health maintenance organization contract.

The House and Senate also reached agreement on property tax reform. HB 1001 placed caps on property tax bills and also includes language inserted by the Arc of Indiana to provide community developmental disability centers with the opportunity to receive money outside the local government tax levy.

For more information, visit the Indiana General Assembly Web site at www.in.gov/legislative.

Accessibility options are standard on Windows Vista

Microsoft Windows Vista, the newest version of Windows, includes standard accessibility features to help people with disabilities use computers to their fullest advantage.

Vista has an “Ease of Access Center” located in the control panel that provides a central location for all accessibility settings. It includes a quick questionnaire that provides a custom list of recommended accessibility settings based on the user’s eyesight, dexterity, hearing, speech and reasoning tasks. Users can retake the questionnaire as often as needed to easily adjust the accessibility settings.

The new Ease of Access Center replaces the Accessibility Wizard and Utilities Manager that appeared in previous versions of Windows, and is particularly beneficial to people with visual difficulties, hearing loss, pain in their hands or arms, or reasoning and cognitive issues.

For additional assistance with making the most of Microsoft’s standardized features, the Assistive Technology Center at Easter Seals Crossroads offers quarterly educational opportunities to the community. Easter Seals also offers evaluations to help people determine what type of adaptive technology best meets their needs, computer training courses and 24-hour technical support.

“From what I have seen, people are looking for specific accessibility features,” said Carol Girt, instructor for the quarterly educational opportunities at Easter Seals Crossroads. “However, many are often amazed to see all of the other options in the Ease of Access Center.”

For more information about Microsoft Vista, visit www.microsoft.com/vista. For information about the Assistive Technology Center at Easter Seals Crossroads, visit www.eastersealstech.com or call (888) 466-1314 (toll-free).

Tax rebates also available to low-income Hoosiers

In an effort to avoid recession, the United States Congress passed the economic stimulus plan in February, a bill that will put \$168 million back in the hands of Americans.

Beginning in May, U.S. citizens with a valid Social Security Number who filed a 2007 tax return could receive a rebate from the IRS for \$300 to \$600 for individuals, or \$600 to \$1,200 for married couples that filed a joint tax return. To be eligible for the full refund, individuals must show earnings less than \$75,000 and married couples must show earnings less than \$150,000.

Approximately 130 million households will receive rebates, including households with little or no tax liability. Millions of retirees, veterans with disabilities and low-wage earners — including those with disabilities — who normally do not file a tax return are eligible if they file one for 2007.

To qualify for the minimum \$300 rebate, individuals must report at least \$3,000 in any combination of qualifying income from:

- Retirement, disability or survivors’ benefits from the Social Security Administration;
- Disability compensation, disability pension or survivors’ benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs; and/or
- Tier 1 benefits from Railroad Retirement, certain combat pay and earned income from wages, salaries, tips or net earnings from self-employment.

For more information, visit www.irs.gov or call toll-free (800) 829-1040, (800) 829-4059 (hearing impaired).

Of Note

IN*SOURCE launches online community

The Indiana Resource Center for Families with Special Needs (IN*SOURCE) recently launched an online interactive community at myinsource.org. The community is free to anyone who's interested. By creating an account, members can share their experiences, questions and concerns in discussion forums on a variety of topics, including autism, learning disabilities and special education issues.

Video series on accessible sidewalks

Launched by the U.S. Access Board, Accessible Sidewalks is a four-part video series developed to show how sidewalks are designed with people with disabilities in mind. The series illustrates accessible design for people with mobility impairments, such as those who use wheelchairs, and pedestrians who have vision impairments. The videos are now available online at www.access-board.gov with open-caption and descriptive audio.

National ADA symposium

From May 12–14, the National ADA Symposium — the most comprehensive event on the Americans with Disabilities Act — will take place in St. Louis, Mo., with presentations by key representatives from the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Access Board and the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission. The symposium offers ADA training and updates to attendees, a variety of topical sessions and social activities for networking. Visit www.adasymposium.org to learn more.

Save the date for Conference 2008

Mark your calendars for the 2008 Conference for People with Disabilities. This year's conference will take place Tuesday, Dec. 2, and Wednesday, Dec. 3, at the Hyatt Regency hotel in downtown Indianapolis. Look for more information in future issues of "On Target."

Submit evaluations

If you hosted or participated in a Disability Awareness Month activity in March, please submit your evaluation form to Borshoff by April 18. 47 S. Pennsylvania St., Suite 500, Indianapolis, Indiana 46204 or (317) 631-6499 (fax).

On Target is a monthly publication of the Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities. We welcome your suggestions for newsletter content and ideas concerning the actions of the Council. on target is made available in accessible formats upon request.