

# The LINK



A publication of Disability Network Southwest Michigan

## Annual ADA Anniversary Celebration

2021 marks the thirty-first anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Disability Network Southwest Michigan holds an annual event each July to celebrate this landmark legislation which granted rights and provided independence to so many people. This year, Disability Network's celebration will be a virtual, online celebration. Participation will be available through an internet video connection or by phone.

**Friday, July 23, 2021**

**11:45 AM – 1:30 PM**

This year's keynote speaker is Dessa Cosma. Dessa is the Executive Director of Detroit Disability Power which she founded in 2018 to grow the organizing power of the disability community and to continue bridging the gap between the disability community and larger social justice movements. She has particular interest in disability focused political work that is grounded in anti-racism and economic justice. You may also recognize Dessa as a former board member of Disability Network Southwest Michigan.

The event will be live at 11:45 AM, please join us then to settle in. The program will begin at Noon and run through 1:30 PM. In addition to our



keynote speaker, the program will include our annual awards ceremony, a tribute to our own fortieth anniversary and the kick off of our annual RAMP-A-THON campaign. (See details inside regarding RAMP-A-THON campaign.)

Participants must register for the event to receive the logon information. Visit [www.dnswm.org](http://www.dnswm.org) to register or contact Kristen (see below). All attendees will be entered in a drawing for one of four \$25 Amazon gift cards.

For all event details, please visit our website at [www.dnswm.org](http://www.dnswm.org). If you have any questions regarding this event, please contact Kristen: [pottsk@dnswm.org](mailto:pottsk@dnswm.org) or 269-345-1516 x119.



As we prepare for the retirement of our President & CEO after 20 years at the helm, Mary Fortney, IL Specialist at Disability Network, puts into words the impact Joel has made on the disability rights movement and the communities he has served in Michigan.



## The Pioneer

*(A story we shall tell our children for generations to come.)*

*By: Mary Fortney*

Long ago, before your sisters or brothers,  
The world was in a terrible way.  
A lack of dignity shown to others,  
Not allowing them to have their say.  
A bright, young man came to pave the road;  
To make right the wrongs that were being done.  
The seeds of justice to be sowed,  
This Pioneer knew that he was the one.

From early days the people saw,  
Institutions were isolating - a degrading mess.  
They denied basic freedoms, yet this was the law.  
The Pioneer showed them, it was time for progress.  
To this occasion, he suddenly rose,  
The story of rights for all, being heard.  
These places should forever close,  
The Pioneer stood strong - undeterred.

The end of the story is not even near,  
This Pioneer continued his path without rest.  
Fighting for Disability Rights without fear,  
And making our agency the very best.  
Not just one CIL but TWO, he drove to fame,  
His strength in budgets and work culture were sound.  
The communities served – were never the same,  
Other CILs requested his advice so profound.

Nearly 50 years of advocacy had come and passed,  
He'd made many paths, where there never were any.  
The Pioneer's legacy will forever last,  
For the people knew his accomplishments were many.  
Warrior-like in conviction, but never hateful,  
And fought so hard for our rights– a real trooper.  
And people far and wide are forever grateful,  
To the disability rights Pioneer, named Joel Cooper.

# COVID-19 Vaccine Assistance

We have received funding to provide COVID-19 vaccination assistance to people with disabilities who are having difficulty accessing a COVID-19 vaccination. We can help with things like arranging transportation, finding a location near you, and making appointments.

To request COVID-19 vaccine assistance, people can complete a form on our website, email us at [vaccines@dnswm.org](mailto:vaccines@dnswm.org), or call Lisa at (269) 345-1516 x111. A staff member will contact you to discuss your situation and provide resources and support to address your barriers to getting the vaccine.



## Youth Benefits Counseling

We have extended our Benefits Counseling program to include services for youth and young adults. As people transition from a school environment to a work environment, there are often questions about the impact of work earnings on Social Security disability benefits. Our Youth Benefits Counseling program is offered to young adults with disabilities, ages 14-26, to answer these questions. Individuals receive a clear, personalized report with information to empower them to make informed choices for their future. The goal is to help the young person toward financial success.

*“Benefits Planning helped me get a Student Income Exclusion so I can keep all of my SSI benefits and Medicaid while I’m working my after-school job.”*



To schedule an appointment for one of our certified Benefits Planners to meet with a student and their family, contact Allison: [leecea@dnswm.org](mailto:leecea@dnswm.org) or (269) 345-1516 x110.

## Enjoying the Great (Accessible) Outdoors!

Summer is here and there is no better time to get outside and enjoy the great state of Michigan! If you are a person with a mobility disability, it can be frustrating to explore new recreational areas if you don’t know what to expect. Fortunately, more parks and recreation areas are incorporating accessibility into their design.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provides information regarding accessibility for state parks and recreation facilities throughout Michigan for all sorts of recreational activities. (Go to [www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr), click on “Things To Do” and scroll down to “Accessibility.”) The DNR also provides a site called Recreation Search ([www.michigandnr.com/parksandtrails](http://www.michigandnr.com/parksandtrails)) where you can view a list of state recreation sites with icons representing the types of recreation and amenities available and if they are accessible. Keep in mind the facilities listed on these web sites are specifically state owned/operated, it is not intended to be a complete list of all recreation areas in the state. For a more local experience, try your city or county parks department or the local visitor’s bureau. This can be done online or by calling or visiting their offices.





# RAMP-A-THON supports our Ramp Up program

Disability Network's annual RAMP-A-THON kicks off at our ADA celebration on July 23. RAMP-A-THON raises money to provide ramps for people with mobility disabilities in our service area. Ramps allow everyone equal opportunity to be part of their community.

**This year, our Ramp Up program needs your financial support more than ever.** Due to the rising cost of lumber and other building materials, the average cost of a ramp has increased nearly 70%. Please help us create "Accessibility for All" with your RAMP-A-THON donation.

**Make a RAMP-A-THON donation of \$5 or more on or before July 23 to receive a RAMP-A-THON T-shirt!**

Make a donation online at [www.dnswm.org](http://www.dnswm.org) or drop a check in the mail to: RAMP-A-THON / Disability Network, 517 E. Crosstown Parkway, Kalamazoo, MI 49001

## Special thanks to our RAMP-A-THON corporate sponsors:

- Allied Mechanical Services
- AVID, an Employee Resource Group of Whirlpool Corporation
- Charles River Laboratories
- Integrity Back & Brain
- Kalsec
- Senior Services of Southwest Michigan
- Paragon Ophthalmology



## Your RAMP-A-THON dollars at work: Meet Bonnie

For years, Bonnie worked as a Certified Nursing Assistant caring for people who were healing after an illness or injury. Bonnie loved helping others but eventually, arthritis in her knees forced her to quit working and start using a walker for mobility. At the time, Bonnie was able to navigate the 4 steps on her home but as her disability progressed, she was no longer able to get up or down the steps on her own. She was trapped—unable to access the community for shopping or doctor's appointments. Not only was community access a concern, but Bonnie and her daughter-in-law, who was also living in the home and is a wheelchair user, were concerned about what would happen if there was an emergency and they couldn't get out of the house. Bonnie reached out to Disability Network Southwest Michigan for help.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ramp Up program was at a standstill for nearly the entire building season in early 2020—once we were in the clear to build again, we couldn't access lumber. After months of waiting, a ramp was built on Bonnie's home. Bonnie and her daughter-in-law can now access the community whenever they want and they have peace of mind that they can exit their home in the case of an emergency. Bonnie is also enjoying being able to get to the picnic table in her side yard to have lunch with her grandkids when they visit.



# Community Education Programing

We continue to offer our Community Education programming online. Participants can join using a computer or call in on a phone. Register for the events you want to participate in and you will be sent the needed information to connect to the event. To register for any of these events, visit our website or contact Miranda: [grunwellm@dnswm.org](mailto:grunwellm@dnswm.org) or (269) 345-1516 x120.

## July is focused on the ADA . . .

### Webinar: [Rise Up!: Disability History, Resistance & Pride](#)

Many of us in the disability community are unaware of the depth of our culture and history and feel shame and stigma instead of pride around our disability identities. Family, friends and human service professionals also have a lack of knowledge of disability history and struggle to find ways to support our journey to disability pride. Let's change that!

- Thursday, July 22 at 10:00 – 11:30 AM

### Webinar: [What is the ADA?](#)

What's all the fuss about the Americans with Disabilities Act?! This year we are presenting this webinar on the date of the 31st anniversary of the signing of the ADA. In this interactive webinar you will learn about the disability rights advocacy that led to the passing of the ADA, the five titles of the ADA and what they cover, and why the ADA is called "the civil rights law for people with disabilities."

- Monday, July 26, 12:00 – 1:00 PM

## Coming in August & September . . .

Look for details on our website for these events as they get closer.

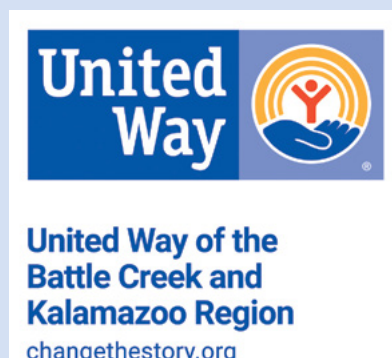
- Webinar: [Disability Language & Etiquette](#)
- Webinar: [Ableism 101 & Ableism 102](#)
- Webinar: [Disability Pride](#)

### COMING SOON:

## 21-Day Equity Challenge: Disability Justice

We have been invited to partner with United Way of the Battle Creek and Kalamazoo Region to develop a 21-Day Challenge focused on Disability Justice. The Challenge, which will run through the month of October, is designed to raise your awareness, increase your understanding and shift your perspective about disability in our culture.

Mark your calendars and watch for more information on this exciting learning opportunity.



# About Disability Network Southwest Michigan

## Office Locations:

- Kalamazoo: 517 E. Crosstown Pkwy., Kalamazoo, MI 49001, phone: (269) 345-1516
- St. Joseph: 2900 Lakeview Avenue., St. Joseph, MI 49085, phone: (269) 985-0111

For the accessibility and well-being of our employees and visitors, Disability Network Southwest Michigan is a fragrance-free office. Please do not wear perfume, cologne or other scented products when visiting.

## Our Publications:

**The LINK** is our quarterly newsletter, available in print or emailed in electronic format and is available in alternative format upon request.

**Disability Digest** is a monthly e-publication focused on the Disability Rights Movement and upcoming Disability Network happenings. Available in electronic format only.

You can sign up online for our publications at [www.dnswm.org](http://www.dnswm.org); or contact Dale at [abbott@dnswm.org](mailto:abbott@dnswm.org) or (269) 345-1516 x123. Current and past issues of our publications are available on our website at [www.dnswm.org](http://www.dnswm.org).

This newsletter is available in alternative format upon request.



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