

## Transcription of 26 at 6: Allocation Process – Chapter Four – Show #19

The United Way of Southwest Michigan “26 at 6” – news talk at 94.9 WSJM. Anna Murphy for United Way of Southwest Michigan with Hank Bostic of Disability Network of Southwest Michigan.

[Start transcription]

**UW:** Welcome back to our show this evening. We are joined by Hank Bostic from Disability Network Southwest Michigan. And our topic this evening is the United Way allocation process, Welcome Hank, how are you?

**HB:** I’m good. How are you this evening?

**UW:** Good. Nice to have you here.

**HB:** Thank you.

**UW:** We’re going to talk a little bit about our allocation process for United Way, but first I want to get to know who you are. I want our listeners to get to know who you are. So I always like to ask, “Where’d you come from? What’s your path that got you to what you’re doing today?”

**HB:** Well, I’m from southern West Virginia. I’ve been in Michigan for five years; worked for Disability Network the whole time I’ve been here. The reason I’m here in Michigan is that I started in 2000 volunteering for a camp for kids with traumatic brain injury and I’ve done that for the past 18 years. It’s one week each summer. I met a young lady there and we’ve been friends all that time and after 13 years of being friends we decided to get married.

**UW:** Oh, my gosh.

**HB:** I moved here, started a new job, and got married the same weekend. And enjoy it here in Michigan.

**UW:** What a . . . I’m just beaming . . . What a great story that is! Where is the camp? So it’s in Michigan?

**HB:** It is. It’s in Mayville Michigan, over in the thumb area.

**UW:** Okay. Alright, and gosh, I’m just speechless on that story. How special that is. Let’s talk a little bit about what Disability Network is?

**HB:** Disability Network (Southwest Michigan) is the Center for Independent Living for Southwest Michigan. There are other Disability Networks across the state. We cover eight counties. We have an office in St. Joseph which is the office for Berrien & Cass counties, and then we have an office in Kalamazoo for our other six counties. Disability Network is the first stop for people with disabilities and their families in Southwest Michigan. We want people to know they can come there for information on anything that has to do with a disability. We can either be a resource for them or we can refer them out to somebody else for services.

We believe that disability is best understood by people who experience disability, so 51% of our board members and staff members state that they have a disability of some kind. Our goal is to help foster a community where people with disabilities are able to participate fully in everyday life and with equal opportunity and self-determination. Our mission is to educate and connect people with disabilities to resources while advocating for social change. So that’s a little about the agency itself.

Some of the services we provide are Advocacy & Education, so we have a disability rights advocate onsite; we have the education department, they go out and do trainings in the communities and they

are open to anybody in the community. We have the Information & Referral department that, again, connect people to community resources. We have a “Ramp Up” program which helps people with accessibility into their homes by building ramps, and that is done by volunteers. So there are a lot of groups, usually churches right now, that get together and build a ramp for someone, and it’s funded by volunteers from the community as well. We have the Independent Living Services where we assist people with applying for benefits sometimes; we can assist with learning what transportation is available to someone; just anything that helps with independent living. We also have Social Security Planning, which is what I deal a lot with. We have transition services for youth and adults and we have peer support groups.

We have a Brain Injury Support Group in Kalamazoo, and another support group in Berrien called “The Devine Divas” and this is a support group open to women with developmental disabilities. This group meets the second Friday of each month from 11:00 to 1:30 at Riverview Park Christian Church; and anyone interested can call our St. Joseph office and find out more information on that.

**UW:** So I want to step back for just a second. So, now what is your role at Disability Network?

**HB:** I’m a Program Manager for Independent Living, I do the Veterans Service Coordination, and I’m one of three Social Security work incentives counselors. My primary area that I cover for benefits planning is Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties.

**UW:** Okay. We’re going to continue our conversation, but if you are just tuning in, you’re listening to United Way of Southwest Michigan’s 26 at 6 and we are talking with Hank Bostic from Disability Network Southwest Michigan. United Way is partnering with Disability Network of Southwest Michigan on funding the Social Security Planning piece. Talk a little bit about what that is.

**HB:** Benefits Planning is a way that we assist people that are on Social Security Disability or SSI and other benefits if they are interested in going to work or maybe they are already working; they can even be part-time. We let people know what work incentives are available to them. We provide it in a way that is easily understood. We meet with people face-to-face; we sit down and discuss it and give examples of how work incentives will assist them. Things we look at are, like I said, Social Security Disability, SSI, Medicare, Medicaid, food assistance, housing, and Medicare savings program. So we ask them a lot of questions so that we understand what benefits they are receiving; and we look into things that may give them other work incentives that otherwise we wouldn’t know about; kind of just getting the background on them.

**UW:** Sure.

**HB:** Social Security’s policies are pretty hard to understand, but we do a lot of training on that and stay up to date – we are constantly in training. We want to make sure people get the correct information. Anybody who is on a disability program has the opportunity to go back to work. And we want to make sure they understand exactly how benefits would be effected and, again, in most cases, everyone’s going to come out ahead by working.

**UW:** Is there an age associated with the folks that you see? For instance does the person have to be 55 with a disability? Or what’s an age range?

**HB:** Anywhere from 16, or even 14, if they are on SSI no matter what age you are, if you work there will be some change.

**UW:** Oh, okay.

**HB:** So we could meet with someone who is, you know, younger. And for students, there's an excellent work incentive called the Student Earned Income Exclusion that a lot of people don't know about. A student can earn over \$1,700 a month and still get their full SSI benefit.

**UW:** And that's a student enrolled in . . . .

**HB:** A student enrolled in school.

**UW:** And that can be high school or college?

**HB:** High school, college, trade school . . . and then in the summers between semesters, they count that as still being a full-time student if they are going back the next semester.

**UW:** Oh, how interesting.

**HB:** They might have to get a schedule from a school or a note from a school saying they're going to be back and are enrolled for the next semester.

**UW:** Disability Network is new to the United Way family, if you will, the process. Why was it important for the agency to become a funded partner with United Way?

**HB:** We value the information we receive from United Way. You're very connected with everyone in the community, and we're kind of new to this part of the state. We've been here for about nine years, but still have a lot of learning to do on what's available and we're able to get that information through you. And of course, we did get some funding to help us with our Benefits Planning. As a nonprofit, we do need the funding in order to have people here to provide the service.

**UW:** You've shared an enormous amount of information. Some new things that I've learned. Your last thought, as we wrap up this segment: why is this work so important to you?

**HB:** This work is important to me because I was on disability for years and I used the same work incentives I tell other people about to help me go back to work. So I know the work incentives protect your benefits as well as help you to move forward in your life. And for teenagers, you know, I like to be able to tell them that they **can** work.

**UW:** So you are your own story, and I appreciate you.

**HB:** I am.

**UW:** On behalf of United Way of Southwest Michigan, I'd like to thank Hank Bostic from Disability Network Southwest Michigan, and all of our guests this evening who joined us to talk about the United Way allocation process. United Way fights for the health, education, and financial stability of every person in Southwest Michigan. Thank for joining the fight.

**VOICE OVER:** The United Way of Southwest Michigan "26 at 6" – news-talk at 94.9 WSJM

[End]