

The LINK



A publication of Disability Network Southwest Michigan

Winter is Here . . . Time to Shovel Out!

For people with mobility disabilities, cleared sidewalks make the difference between living a full, independent life or becoming a shut-in, isolated from their community.

Taking Responsibility

The ADA requires that public agencies maintain their walkways in an accessible condition which includes reasonable snow removal efforts. Most businesses realize they are responsible for clearing their sidewalks, although timeliness varies greatly from business to business. In residential areas, most jurisdictions require homeowners or landlords to keep their sidewalks cleared.

Unfortunately, many businesses and homeowners draw the line where the sidewalk ends and the street begins—the area between their sidewalk and the street gets confusing. Snow plows on the street continually push snow into sidewalk ramps, which often results in an otherwise cleared sidewalk leading to an impassable street crossing. Although this issue is not directly addressed in ADA regulations, the property owner should consider this part of their sidewalk and maintain a clear pathway.

It should be noted that maintaining accessibility on a sidewalk means clearing the full width of the sidewalk so that a wheelchair or scooter can pass. It also means removing ice, as well as snow, for safe passage.

If you are aware of property owners who are negligent about keeping their sidewalks cleared, consider contacting them directly to remind them of their responsibility. If they continue to be remiss in clearing their walks, you can contact your municipal

Public Service department to report the problem. Unfortunately, in many jurisdictions there is little enforcement other than sending a notice to the offender, so appealing to their sense of responsibility may be the most effective approach.

Assistance for Elderly or People With Disabilities

Another barrier to cleared sidewalks in winter is that some people are not physically able to clear their own walks and may not have the financial means

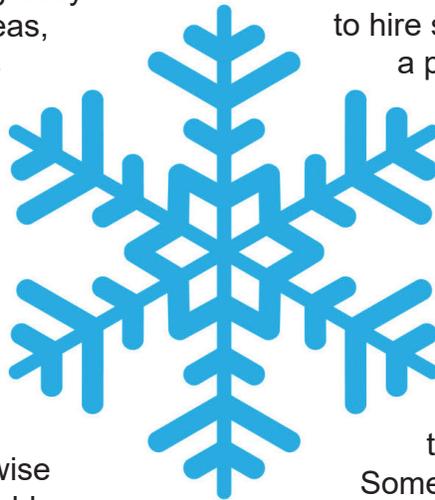
to hire someone to do it for them. If you are a person who is unable to maintain your

sidewalk in the winter, whether it's a public sidewalk or basic access to your house, you may need to look for local resources to assist you. The best place to start is with good neighbors! If you have a relationship with a neighbor perhaps you can offer to bake them some goodies or make a pot of soup in return for their assistance with your sidewalks.

Sometimes neighborhood associations and local churches can help connect you to resources as well.

And While You're At It . . .

Be mindful of access to public services on your street. If you live on a street with fire hydrants, take a look down the street—where is the nearest hydrant and is it clear of snow? Whether it's on your property or not, it will benefit you as well as your neighbors to be sure the hydrant is easily located and accessible in case of emergency. Also, if there is a bus stop on your street, take an extra couple of minutes to clear an area for people to wait for the bus so they don't have to stand in the street. The bottom line is, we all have to take responsibility for safe access in our communities.



LUNCH & LEARN

Rise Up!

Disability Resistance, History & 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!



Join us for a free lunch with discussion and activities that promote knowledge of disability history and support the journey to disability pride. Everyone is welcome! We are offering this workshop in both St. Joseph and Kalamazoo.

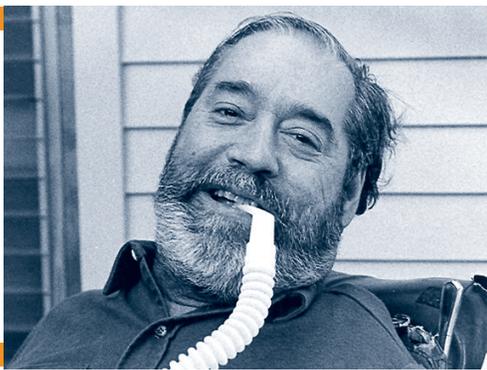
RSVP to Miranda (269) 345-1516 x120 or grunwellm@dnswm.org for the location & date that works for you and let us know if you need an accommodation to participate or have any dietary requirements.

In St. Joseph:

Monday, January 22, 2018 | 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Disability Network Southwest Michigan
2900 Lakeview Ave., St. Joseph

In Kalamazoo:

Tuesday, January 23, 2018 | 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Kalamazoo Public Library - Van Deusen Room
315 Rose St., Kalamazoo



Ed Roberts Day is January 23

“We are no longer asking
for charity.
We are demanding
our rights!”

Ed Roberts is often referred to as the Father of the Independent Living Movement. Join us at our **Rise Up!** workshop in January to learn more about him and other leaders in the movement.

Our Publications:

The LINK is our quarterly newsletter, available in printed format or emailed in electronic format.

Disability Digest is a monthly e-newsletter focused on Disability Rights issues and upcoming Disability Network happenings. Available in electronic format only.

You can sign up online for our publications at www.dnswm.org, or contact Dale at abbott@dnswm.org or (269) 345-1516 x123.

Current and past issues of our publications are available on our website at www.dnswm.org.

This newsletter is available in alternative format upon request.

Support Our Work:

You can help support the work we do with a tax-deductible donation to Disability Network. Visit our website to donate online or call Kristen at (269) 345-1516 x119.



Find us on
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Disability Network Southwest Michigan

Serving 8 counties in
Southwest Michigan:

BARRY
BERRIEN
BRANCH
CALHOUN
CASS
KALAMAZOO
ST. JOSEPH
VAN BUREN

Office Locations:

517 E. Crosstown Pkwy
Kalamazoo, MI 49001
(269) 345-1516

2900 Lakeview Avenue
St. Joseph, MI 49085
(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.

Mission Statement:

We educate and connect people with disabilities to resources while advocating social change.

Vision Statement:

Our vision is a community that values disability as human diversity, free of attitudinal barriers, where all people benefit with full access and inclusion.

Andrei: Living the Dream!

While growing up in Southwest Michigan, Andrei, a young man who has cerebral palsy, didn't give much thought to government and politics. He certainly never thought it would be part of his career path. When Andrei was 14 he traveled to Washington, DC with his parents on vacation and that peaked his interest a bit. Andrei attended college where he studied history and communications and his interest in politics grew.



Two years ago Andrei learned about Disability Network Southwest Michigan's summer internship program, Advocacy Academy. He applied and was accepted, spending two months emerging in learning the skills of advocacy including how to develop and implement an advocacy campaign. Andrei says that his experiences in Advocacy Academy solidified for him the path he wanted to be on and gave him the confidence to know he could make it happen. There was no stopping him! Andrei made several trips by train to Washington DC, meeting with as many people as he could each trip. On his third trip he interviewed for a position with the US House of Representatives and was hired on the spot!

Andrei continues to live in Washington and work "on the hill" — he says he feels like he's "living the dream!" Disability Network is happy to have played a role in helping Andrei build the skills and confidence he needed to make this leap in launching his career. Congratulations, Andrei!

Charting the Course

Advocacy Academy is one way Disability Network helps prepare young adults with disabilities for their path forward. At Disability Network Southwest Michigan, we are helping people with disabilities chart their course to increased independence in a more inclusive community. We cannot do this important work without your support. To learn more about our programs and services, visit our website at www.dnswm.org or [find us on Facebook](#).



Meet our Newest Staff Member



We recently welcomed Maggie Slocum to the Disability Network team as our new Travel Trainer/ Transit Outreach Specialist. Maggie is a recent graduate of Western Michigan University with a major in geography with an emphasis in urban planning and a minor in non-profit management.

Beware of Social Security Phone Scams

The Social Security Administration (SSA) recently cautioned that people have been receiving phone calls from scammers threatening that their Social Security benefits will stop immediately unless they provide personal information. Scammers have many ways to lure their victims into providing information and then steal their identities. Sometimes they call under a guise of helping to complete a disability application. Any request from SSA will always come as a written notice first. If a legitimate SSA representative does call, they always provide a telephone number and extension.



Here are a few clues to watch for. A legitimate SSA representative will NEVER do any of the following:

- Call to demand an immediate payment;
- Demand you pay a debt without the ability to appeal the amount due;
- Require a specific means of payment, such as requiring payment with a pre-paid debit card;
- Ask for credit or debit card numbers over the phone;
- Threaten you with arrest or deportation.

If you receive an SSA scam call, do not provide any information to them. Instead, hang up immediately.

Financial Matters

• **AT Loan Fund Can Help**

The Assistive Technology Loan Fund (ATLF) is available to help people pay for tools for independence. The ATLF is a low interest loan available to people with disabilities and their family members to help purchase items like wheelchair-accessible vehicles, hearing aids, mobility devices, communication devices, or adapted recreation equipment. The ATLF can also pay for home modifications, including ramps, to make your home more accessible. For more information, contact Lewis Whalen at whalenl@dnswm.org or (269) 345-1516 x107.



• **ABLE Account Cap raised to \$15,000**

ABLE accounts are tax-advantaged savings accounts for individuals with disabilities and their families which have been made possible as a result of the passage of the Stephen Beck Jr., Achieving a Better Life Experience Act, better known as the ABLE Act. The Internal Revenue Service has increased the total annual contribution limit on an ABLE account from \$14,000 per tax year to \$15,000 per tax year beginning in 2018. According to the ABLE National Resource Center this increase is due to IRS adjustments connected with inflation rates. For more information about ABLE accounts, visit the ABLE National Resource Center at www.ablenrc.org or call our Information & Referral department.

• **Free Tax Preparation Resources**

You may qualify for FREE tax preparation services by an IRS trained volunteer income tax assistance (VITA) or tax counseling for the elderly (TCE) preparer. You must meet certain requirements to be eligible, however if you qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit, Medicaid, Food Stamps or any other assistance program, there is a good chance you qualify for free tax help, too. To locate a free tax site near you, dial 2-1-1 or check on the following websites:

- IRS free tax service locator (<https://irs.treasury.gov/freetaxprep>)
- AARP Tax Aide locator (<https://secure.aarp.org/applications/VMISLocator/searchTaxAideLocations.action>).

MOVIE + LUNCH + DISCUSSION

2018 Movie Series

We are hosting a series of disability-themed movies over the next few months. Join us for lunch, watch the movie and discuss the issues afterward. We are offering these events in both our Kalamazoo and St. Joseph Offices. Join us for one, two or all three movies! Select the location and date that works for you and RSVP to Miranda for the event(s) you'd like to attend at (269) 345-1516 x 120 or grunwellm@dnswm.org.

In **Kalamazoo**: Disability Network Southwest Michigan
517 E. Crosstown Parkway

In **St. Joseph**: Disability Network Southwest Michigan
2900 Lakeview Avenue



FEBRUARY: Monica & David explores the marriage of two adults with Down syndrome. Monica and David are in love and want what other adults have—an independent life. While Monica and David are capable beyond expectations, their parents, aware of mainstream rejection of adults with intellectual disabilities, have trouble letting go. Full of humor, romance and everyday family drama, the film uses intimate fly-on-the-wall footage to reveal the complexity of their story.

In **Kalamazoo**: Wednesday, February 21, 12:00 –1:30 p.m.

In **St. Joseph**: Tuesday, February 27, 12:00–1:30 p.m.

MARCH: Who Cares About Kelsey? documents the lives of students with emotional/behavioral challenges, and shows innovative educational approaches that help these students to succeed, while improving the overall school culture and climate. When Kelsey Carroll entered high school, she was a more likely candidate for the juvenile justice system than graduation. Diagnosed with ADHD and carrying the emotional scars of homelessness and substance abuse, as well as the actual scars of repeated self-mutilation, Kelsey was volatile, disruptive and, by her own admission, “not a nice person” to be around.

In **Kalamazoo**: Wednesday, March 21, 12:00 –1:30 p.m.

In **St. Joseph**: Tuesday, March 27, 12:00–1:30 p.m.

APRIL: Dina is autistic, and getting married in a few weeks, and there's still so much to do. On top of all the wedding arrangements, she has to move her boyfriend, Scott, who is also on the spectrum, from his parents' house to her apartment, and settle him in to only the second home he's ever had, all while juggling his schedule as an early morning Walmart door greeter. Throughout it all, in the face of obstacles large and small, Dina is unstoppable, a force of nature, and as the star of her own life story, she's an unconventional movie protagonist the likes of which hasn't been seen before.

In **Kalamazoo**: Wednesday, April 18, 12:00 –2:30 p.m.

In **St. Joseph**: Tuesday, April 24, 12:00–2:30 p.m.



Disability Network Southwest Michigan

517 E Crosstown Parkway
Kalamazoo, MI 49001

www.dnswm.org



Sign up for our
**electronic
publications!**
Details inside

Lunchtime Book Club!

Wednesday, February 7, 12:00 noon–1:30 PM
Meets in both our Kalamazoo & St. Joseph offices

The Ballad of Blind Tom by Deirdre O’Connell

The true story of a black musical savant in the era of slavery. Born into slavery in Georgia, Tom Wiggins died an international celebrity in New York in 1908. Eventually freed from slavery, “Blind Tom” as he was called, toured the world playing for celebrities and dazzling audiences everywhere. One part genius and one part novelty act, Blind Tom embodied contradictions—a star and a freak, freed from slavery but still the property of his white guardian. His life offers a window into the culture of celebrity and racism at the turn of the twentieth century.

RSVP: Leatrice (269) 345-1516 x118 or
fullertonl@dnswm.org

For more information about the Lunchtime Book Club, visit www.dnswm.org/connect/book-club.

