

The LINK



A publication of Disability Network Southwest Michigan

Reflecting on the Past 40 Years

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of Disability Network Southwest Michigan. In reflecting back over the years, the thing that stands out most is our ability to adapt to change. This is reflected strongly in the variety of services we have provided over the years. We have also undergone some identity changes over the years.

Disability Network Southwest Michigan sprouted its roots in October 1981 when a small group of disability advocates opened what was then called, "Kalamazoo County Center for Independent Living" (KCCIL). KCCIL opened in a one-room office on N. Pitcher Street with a grant of \$26,000 – enough to hire 1½ staff positions.

Since opening our doors 40 years ago, our office location in Kalamazoo has changed 4 times, finding our permanent home on the corner of E. Crosstown Parkway and Vine Street in 1999. Our agency has also undergone several name changes—we were "Disability Resource Center" for about ten years.

Karen Duckworth, the original Executive Director, remained with the agency for 20 years. In 2001, Karen stepped down and our current President and CEO, Joel Cooper, started his tenure at Disability Network.

Our programming has rolled with the times.

Through all the changes and growth we have experienced, none of it is more notable than the variety of services and programs we have offered. In the end, this is the measure of who we are. Over 40 years, our services and programs have changed to meet the needs of the communities we serve.

We opened our doors in 1981 with three core services: Peer Support, Information & Referral, and Advocacy; we later added Independent Living



Services and Transition Services. Over the years, Disability Network Southwest Michigan has operated an adaptive driving school; partnered with Michigan Career and Technical Institute to provide Independent Living and Professional Counseling; provided TTY relay services so that people with hearing or speech disabilities could use a telephone; spearheaded the Benefits Counseling services program; developed Disability Pride and Anti-Ableism curricula; and so much more.

What comes next?

More change awaits us. After twenty years at the helm, Joel Cooper has announced he will be retiring and leaving us this year. And though we are saddened to say goodbye to Joel, we welcome his successor and the next era at Disability Network Southwest Michigan.

There have been many changes over the years – changes in name, location, services and programs – however, one thing that has never changed is our dedication to the independent living philosophy. We are proud of the work we have done, and look forward to continuing our record of excellence in supporting the independent living philosophy.

Ed Roberts Day – January 23

January 23 is Ed Roberts Day. Roberts is often referred to as “the father of the Independent Living Movement” because of his persistent and successful advocacy work for disability rights beginning in the 1960s. As a result of contracting Polio when he was eight years old, Roberts was paralyzed from the neck down and required the use of an iron lung to assist him with breathing. He started advocating for his rights at a young age when his high school threatened to deny him a diploma because he had not completed driver’s education and physical education.

Roberts went on to college at the University of California–Berkeley where he continued to be a disability rights advocate, forming a student group known as the “Rolling Quads.” Their success in advocating for disability rights on campus soon grew to include the broader community which eventually led to the creation of the Berkeley Center for Independent Living (CIL)—the first independent living service and advocacy program run by and for people with disabilities.

Advocacy continues to be the cornerstone of the Independent Living Movement. CILs throughout the country have adopted the phrase, “Nothing about us without us,” which reflects the deeply held principle that people with disabilities should be included in, and central to, discussions and policy making pertaining to disability.

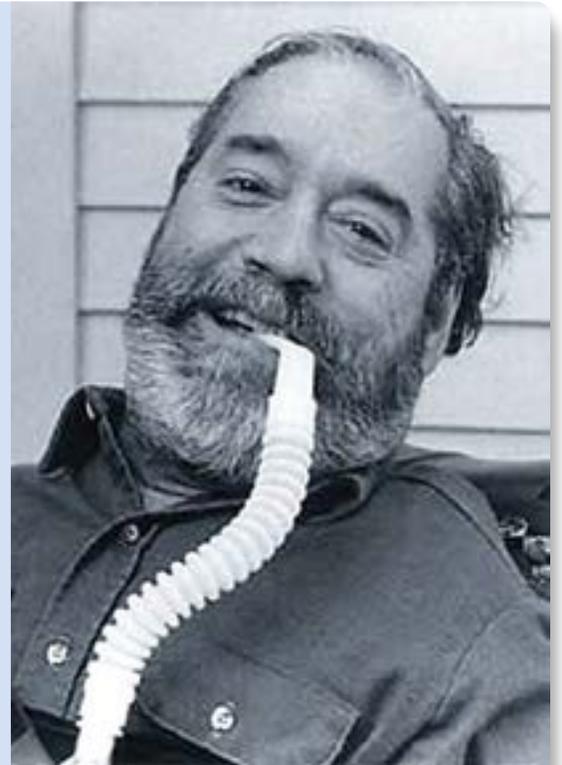
Rise Up! Disability Resistance, History and Pride

Ed Roberts is one of many dedicated disability rights organizers who have paved the way to a greater awareness of disability rights within the framework of civil rights. To celebrate Ed Roberts Day, we are offering our workshop titled *Rise Up! Disability Resistance, History and Pride*. Being offered as an interactive online workshop, *Rise Up!* will include discussion and activities that promote knowledge of disability history and support the journey to disability 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 *Rise Up!* to get started.

- Friday, January 22 10:00 AM – 12:00 Noon
- Tuesday, January 26 1:00 – 3:00 PM

Participants can join using a computer or call in on a phone. Pre-register on our [website](#) or contact Miranda at grunwellm@dnswm.org or 269-345-1516 x120.

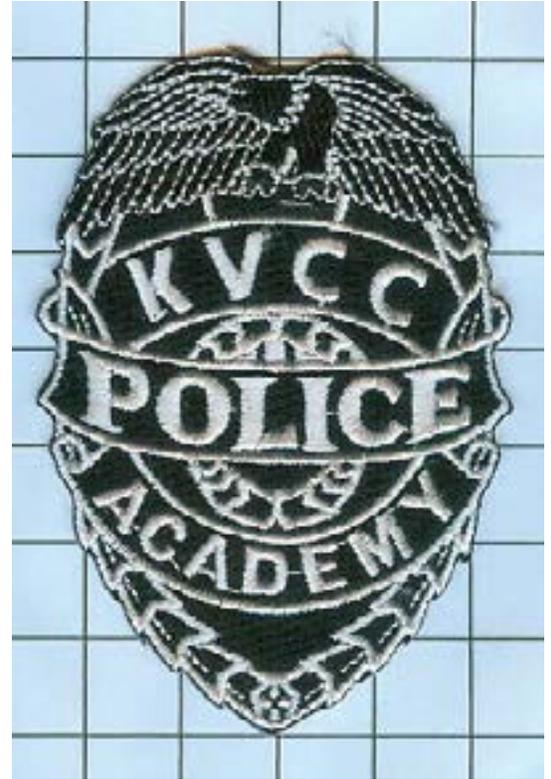


Ableism in Law Enforcement

Disability Network recently presented anti-ableism training at the Kalamazoo Valley Community College Police Academy as part of their implicit bias training.

When we learned that Kalamazoo Valley Community College Police Academy is the only police academy in the State that includes diversity, race, and implicit bias in their police training, we reached out to Vic Ledbetter, Director of the KVCC Police Academy, to inquire about including ableism in their training. Mr. Ledbetter was very open to the idea and invited us to present Ableism 101 and 102 in two four-hour sessions. The trainings were well-received with positive feedback.

People with disabilities are sometimes unable to communicate with police or unable to comply with instructions being given. This simple fact can lead to misunderstanding and escalate an already tense situation. According to a recent study, one-third to one-half of all people killed by police each year have a disability, including people with mental illness. By providing police with training specific to the needs of people with disabilities, we hope to be part of a solution to this alarming problem.



Welcome to Our Newest Board Members



Josh Park

Josh and his family moved to Kalamazoo in May 2019 to work for Stryker Instruments in Portage, Michigan. He has extensive experience in business development and corporate finance, general management, and has served in board director and chairman roles with previous organizations. Josh began his career with eight years in the United States Marine Corps in various active and reserve assignments. He credits the military with giving him an appreciation of diverse cultures, love of learning languages, and passion for serving others in need. Josh is thrilled to leverage his experiences and personal network to help support Disability Network.



Hilary Selznick

Hilary is a professor specializing in disability studies and the rhetoric of health and medicine. Most recently, Hilary has been an adjunct professor at Albion College and a full-time lecturer in Western Michigan University's Rhetoric and Writing Studies Program. Hilary is passionate about using education to eradicate the socio-political, economic, and cultural barriers that exclude persons with disabilities from fully participating in public and civic life. Hilary identifies as a person with a disability and is pleased to be joining Disability Network Southwest Michigan's board of directors.

REMOVING BARRIERS . . .

Supporting People with the Challenges of COVID-19

The CARES Act (Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act), passed by Congress last March in response to COVID-19, has provided funding assistance for vulnerable populations with needs specific to the pandemic. Disability Network, as a Center for Independent Living, received CARES Act funding to provide COVID-19 related services to customers in our communities.

Lisa, a 51 year old woman who is hard of hearing, is a great example of how we have supported people in navigating new barriers that COVID-19 has presented.



When COVID-19 came along, forcing all of us to be more isolated, Lisa started participating in our online Community Education events which have helped her stay connected to people. Through this connection, Lisa reached out to us for assistance with communication at her doctor's appointments. Being hard of hearing, Lisa relies heavily on reading lips to help her understand conversations. People wearing face-masks during COVID-19 has created a significant barrier to her ability to communicate. Lisa wanted to find a Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART) service provider for her appointments. CART service is a person who provides live, immediate translation of speech into a typed format for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

Our staff did connect Lisa with a CART provider, and also continued to look into other options that might be more convenient for her. Through CARES Act funding, Disability Network was able to provide funds for Lisa to purchase a phone with voice recognition capability that can provide her with immediate translation service in her pocket whenever she needs it. Lisa told our staff, "It is remarkable how much it assists with being able to know what people are saying!"

AT Video Series

We have launched a video series called "Assistive Technology: Tools for Independence," which features a different person in each video talking about the assistive technology, or AT, that they use for their particular disability. The interviews include information about their AT as well as a discussion of the impact AT has had on their lives.

To view our AT video series, [find us on YouTube](#).

AT Loan Fund

The cost of some assistive technology can be overwhelming. If you are in need of AT, the Assistive Technology Loan Fund (ATLF) is available to help 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 adaptive recreation equipment. The ATLF can also pay for home modifications, including ramps, to make a home more accessible. For more information, contact our Information & Referral department at info@dnswm.org or (269) 345-1516 x106, or contact ATLF directly at 1-800-828-2714.



Community Education Online Programing

Due to COVID-19, we continue to offer our Community Education programming online. Participants can join using a computer or call in on a phone. Pre-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 at grunwellm@dnswm.org or 269-345-1516 x120.

In January

Webinar: **Serving Customers With a Disability** **NEW this year!**

Ensuring full access to a place of business is an important part of customer service and a great way to expand a business' customer base. This interactive workshop explores ways your business or organization can be more welcoming and inclusive to people with disabilities.

- Tuesday, January 12 at 10:00 AM – 12:00 Noon
- Thursday, January 28 at 1:00 – 3:00 PM

Webinar: **Ed Roberts Day: Rise Up! Disability Resistance, History and Pride**

This interactive online workshop will include discussion and activities that promote knowledge of disability history and support the journey to disability pride. See article inside this newsletter for more information about Ed Roberts and this workshop.

- Friday, January 22 at 10:00 AM – 12:00 Noon
- Tuesday, January 26 at 1:00 – 3:00 PM

Web Movie: **The R-Word** **NEW for us!**

This documentary film confronts the inappropriate use of the word retard(ed) as a derogatory term used to put people down, marginalize and dehumanize an entire population of people. This film will challenge viewers to put their mind where their mouth is and encourage everyone to think before they speak.

- Wednesday, January 20 at 1:00 – 2:30 PM

February & March

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



- Webinar: **Disability & The Media** **NEW presentation!**
- Webinar: **Know Your Rights**
- Web Movie: **Becoming Bulletproof** **NEW for us!**
- Webinar: **Ableism 101** **AND** **Ableism 102**
- Web Movie: **The Peanut Butter Falcon**

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; or contact Dale at abbottd@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.



Find us on
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