

New Horizons

Housing That Supports Independence



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Freedom Village at Town Center South Opening This Month

Project Freedom's newest complex, Freedom Village at Town Center South in Robbinsville, starts becoming a home as tenants start moving in this month. The opening marks several new milestones for the nearly 37-year old nonprofit.

This new complex will be the eleventh built and opened by Project Freedom. It is the second one located in Robbinsville where the first-ever "Project Freedom" was opened in 1991. That is another "first" and a testament to the quality of the housing provided.

These 72 units are contained in four, three-storied buildings forming a quadrangle with a community center at its head. The motif mirrors the design used in Gibbsboro.

The apartments are spacious with wide living and sleeping areas. They contain the latest energy efficient appliances designed to save energy and money for the tenants.

The completion and rent-up of this complex comes on the proverbial heels of the openings of both the West Windsor and Gibbsboro "Freedom Villages." This was a remarkable feat considering the Pandemic started during the same period.

Tenants will be moving in February and March as the last buildings are finished...stay tuned after April for exciting news about the next site too go forward!



Project Freedom, Inc. wishes to thank our sponsors and benefactors who have provided valuable support to our organization throughout the year.

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“My Two Cents”

By Tim Doherty, Executive Director



“Another Opening, another Show”. Lines from a famous musical, it appropriately describes the feeling of excitement and happiness that comes from opening a new housing community. And all this took place on the day of the worst snow storm to hit our area in quite some time.

What I am taking about is our new housing community, “Freedom Village at Town Center South” in the heart of Robbinsville. On Feb 1, our staff ushered in 11 new families into their brand new apartments on Ravens Road, all during the worst snow storm to date this year.

Under the leadership of Dara Johnston and Jackie Elsowiny, along with Brianne Foley, Kathy Forcellini, Maria Azcona, the day began 7 am in the new Community Center which had been organized with several tables upon which sat the new tenant files. Prior to that, PFI maintenance staff, Johnny Anaya and Doug Ashey Jr had to snow plow and clear the sidewalks so that everyone could get into the buildings. Work on that area, continued most of the morning, until finished.

Appointments for lease signing, had been preset prior to Monday, and were scattered throughout the day. As each family came for their appointments, a PFI staff member would take them to their apartment for their lease signing. This allowed staff to go over the amenities of the unit-- how the heat and a/c work, the stove, etc, as well as review any imperfections that might still exist. PFI staff also go into great detail explaining the sections of the lease and house rules, so that everyone can be a good and respectful tenant.

This process can take about an hour with each applicant so there is a lot to do and go over, at this time. Once all the papers are signed, the tenants receive their apartment keys and their new life at Freedom Village begins.

I know that there is always great joy felt by the new tenants, when they receive their keys and can begin moving in. There is also great excitement and joy for our staff, to once again go through this lease up process and know that they are helping someone into one of our brand new apartments.

On Friday, I met with a Selective Insurance safety engineer who was to do an inspection of our new housing. As we walked over to the 400 building, she commented to me how impressed she was with our housing but most of all, our staff. She said that she goes into a lot of establishments and housing facilities, and that PFI staff were the most professional and courteous people she had met. She said that she always finds our staff so easy to deal with and that they were always willing to help her in any way they can.

That’s what you call great team work, and it certainly was on display Monday Feb 1. Let’s keep it going.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Timothy J. Doherty". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large 'T' and 'D'.

People with Disabilities Desperately Need the Vaccine. But States Disagree on When They'll Get It.

By Jessica Contrera / Reprinted from The Washington Post / Jan. 13, 2021

Wendy Lincicome is a live-in caregiver for Sloan Meek, 33, in Durham, N.C. She has been trying to find out when she and Meek will be eligible to receive the coronavirus vaccine. (Justin Eisner)

For weeks, Wendy Lincicome has been asking the same question. She asks it on the phone. She asks it in emails to state officials. She cares for an epileptic blind man with cerebral palsy 24 hours a day, and when he is asleep, she types her question into Google. "When will people with disabilities get the coronavirus vaccine?"

Tens of thousands of Americans with intellectual and developmental disabilities — who are two to three times as likely to die of covid-19 — are waiting for an answer. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said health-care personnel and residents of long-term-care facilities should be first in line, in phase "1a." Disability advocates say guidance should be interpreted to include all people with disabilities who receive long-term care, whether in large institutions, smaller group homes or in settings like Lincicome's, who is paid to live with a North Carolina man who has round-the-clock needs. But as guidance from the federal government has been translated into vaccine distribution plans made by states, those with disabilities have been downgraded to lower priority status.

D.C. as well as Maryland, Alabama and many other states are leaving people with disabilities who live in large institutions and group homes out of their Phase 1a plans, instead moving them to 1b or 1c. In Indiana and Rhode Island, group homes have been pushed to Phase 2, with the likelihood that vaccinations are months away. Most states make no mention of disabilities in their vaccine plans, leaving people like Lincicome panicking and confused about how long they and those for whom they care will have to wait.

She is terrified that the man who relies on her, 33-year-old Sloan Meek, could end up as another case of a disabled person being allegedly discriminated against in a hospital after falling ill with covid-19. Without her help, or the help of a computer, Meek is extremely limited in what he can communicate to medical professionals. "They don't look at Sloan and see what I see," Lincicome said. "They don't see the guy who just recorded an album or has an annual Christmas carol concert. They see a wheelchair, and somebody who is laying in their bed all day."

By North Carolina guidelines, Meek may not qualify for the vaccine until Phase 2, because he doesn't live in a home with other individuals with disabilities. If Meek lived in Tennessee, according to its state plan, he'd be a part of the very first wave of vaccinations because of the level of care he receives. Though some state plans would count Lincicome — a caregiver known as a "direct support professional" — as a health-care provider to be provided for in Phase 1a, most have no public plans for caregivers in her role. The lack of consistency is the result of a lack of guidance from the CDC. Other than acknowledging those with Down syndrome should be prioritized along with people with high-risk medical conditions, federal recommendations for vaccine rollout make no explicit mention of any other disabilities.

A CDC spokesman said states could request that intermediate-care facilities, the large, often government-run institutions for the disabled, receive vaccinations through the same pharmacy partnership program as nursing homes. Decades of reform efforts have closed many of those institutions, moving people with disabilities into small group homes or other living situations integrated into their communities. But despite an estimated 70,000 people living in group homes, the CDC recommendations do not include them, leaving states to decide where in line those residents, and their caregivers, should fall.

Germán Parodi, a co-director of an organization focused on natural disaster response, hosts a daily phone call for people with disabilities and the agencies that support them. Parodi, who is quadriplegic, has listened as a vulnerable population has been made more vulnerable with each new challenge: disability care workers passed over for protective equipment, testing sites inaccessible to wheelchairs, funding cuts to in-home care programs, and now, trouble getting vaccines. "For our marginalized community, it feels like fighting against Goliath," Parodi said.

Bascom and other advocates have been stymied even in their efforts to get the federal government simply to count the number of covid-19 outbreaks in facilities for disabled people in the same way they are counted in nursing homes. Researchers such as Scott Landes of Syracuse University have tried to fill the void, studying what little state-level data is available to learn how covid-19 is affecting the disabled community. Landes knew before he looked at a single number that the circumstances were stacked against those with disabilities: an abundance of preexisting conditions. Communal living. Close contact with caregivers who are so low-paid they must work multiple jobs. Cont'd Page 6

From Norman's Desk



A year ago this month I wrote about the presidential election, the campaigns, and how people with disabilities should get involved and be heard about our issues. While I was aware of COVID-19 emerging as a “worry” and the potential for a pandemic as a possibility, I did not comprehend it as the all-consuming crisis that it has become.

History will tell the final story of what happened during this time. It will praise the heroes, condemn the villains, and chastise the fools who defied common sense by refusing to act. Every historical event is replete with these characters, and this is no different.

In the midst of this crisis, we try to move forward with our lives. We try to stay on course, achieve our objectives, and reach our goals. It is like a defense mechanism that tries to keep out the ugly reality. Perhaps that's why people look “foolish” when they ignore an ugly reality.

But we must move forward with our lives while dealing with the ugly reality. This is the one lesson that we all must accept from this crisis. We cannot stop living and we cannot stop fighting for our lives!

In terms of disability, this means fighting for equality in medical care and treatment. I know of two cases where people with disabilities were forced to die based solely on their disabilities. In both cases, the medical resources were not being strained or rationed. In both cases, it was done against their families' wishes.

One case happened in a so called “progressive” state and the other in a “conservative” state. One was male and black; the other was female and white. The common denominator was a severe disability and a medical system that could not see beyond that factor.

In terms of disability, we cannot let this crisis strip away our rights and protections. Some in Congress are using the pandemic to strip ADA protections under the guise of “liability protections” for businesses. This is the continuation of the war against the ADA, and the pandemic is no reason not to be vigilant against these attempts.

History tells us that pandemics have three waves of infections. We are probably in the second wave that is, hopefully, cresting. We need to ride this wave and the next one by respecting reality, but also by holding tight to what we want as our future, holding tight to our values, and holding tight to our humanity.

Norman A. Smith,
Follow us on Twitter @TheFreedomGuys
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Airlines Crack Down On Service Animals

Reprinted from Disability Scoop / By Kyle Arnold / The Dallas Morning News/TNS / January 8, 2021

DALLAS — American Airlines says it will no longer allow emotional support animals and other pets on its planes that don't meet strict service animal requirements for individuals with disabilities. The change was made after more lenient policies had frustrated flight attendants, disability support groups and airlines themselves.

The Fort Worth-based airline will start the stricter requirements for pets in the cabin on Jan. 11 and will soon require anyone traveling with a service animal to complete a federal form two days in advance.

The change comes after the U.S. Department of Transportation tightened rules for service animals in December, ending years of complaints from passengers and crew members about travelers flaunting service animal rules to fly with pets for free. Airlines were often left with little choice as federal law allows service animals for people with disabilities but had given little guidance on what a disability was or what kind of animals were appropriate.

Now the new rule says a service animal is **“a dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability”** and that it “no longer considers an emotional support animal to be a service animal.” Trained psychiatric service animals will still be permitted.

American Airlines follows Alaska Airlines, which said last week that it will ban the practice of transporting emotional support animals starting Jan. 11 as well. American will still allow customers to transport small pets under 20 pounds in an approved carrier, but those animals will no longer be allowed to sit on customers' laps during flights.

The Association of Professional Flight Attendants, the union for American's flight attendants, had complained that emotional support animals were dangerous and unfair. The union said flight attendants had been bitten and snarled at by untrained animals. “In an era when personal space on the aircraft is at an all-time minimum, there is not adequate room for animals that are not specifically trained and certified to assist their handler,” said a statement from APFA president Julie Hedrick when the DOT passed its rule. “More and more animals are encroaching on the personal space and comfort of other passengers.”

Over the years, passengers claimed exotic pets such as peacocks, kangaroos and snakes as emotional support animals. American and other airlines have moved recently to restrict more powerful dog breeds and other animals from access to flying with customers.

Travelers could purchase certifications on the internet for as little as \$50 saying that they needed an emotional support animal for issues such as anxiety. Veterans groups, disability advocates and flight attendants unions all lobbied DOT to amend its rules to allow airlines to take a stricter stance. “Our team is motivated by a purpose to care for people on life's journey, and we believe these policy changes will improve our ability to do just that,” said a statement from Jessica Tyler, American's president of cargo and vice president of airport excellence. “We're confident this approach will enable us to better serve our customers, particularly those with disabilities who travel with service animals, and better protect our team members at the airport and on the aircraft.”



Multiple airlines are putting new rules in place surrounding service animals on planes following years of complaints. (Thinkstock)

But the results were even worse than he expected, with data showing people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are at least two or three times as likely to die if they contract the virus and even more at risk if they receive intensive nursing care. He hoped those numbers would be enough to push the government to track outbreaks in institutions and group homes. “To me, it’s unconscionable. We know this is a vulnerable health population. We can show they’re not doing well. I just cannot fathom why states are being allowed to not report,” Landes said. If states had a greater focus on the pandemic’s impact on the disabled, he said, “vaccination prioritization would be much clearer. You would have the evidence to tell you what needs to be done.”

Advocates calling governors and legislators trying to get clarity on vaccination rollout plans are also asking about direct-service professionals, the caregivers like Lincicome. The majority of “DSPs,” as they’re known in the disabled community, are women of color, and many are immigrant women. As the Justice Department has pushed to close large institutions for disabled people, and instead encourage them to live in group homes or in their own homes within communities, these caregivers have become more and more essential.

Faustina Baiden, left, and Margaret Acheampong, right, are direct support professionals who care for Ericka Yates, a resident of a Dumfries, Va., group home for women with disabilities. They bathe and clothe their clients, administer medication and manage feeding tubes, lift in and out of wheelchairs, and monitor oxygen levels and vital signs. But unlike health-care workers with higher levels of certifications, they are typically paid close to minimum wage. Lincicome, 48, works 18 or more hours to earn \$142 per day. Many caregivers depend on multiple jobs in multiple group homes to survive, increasing the coronavirus risk for themselves and those for whom they care. But most state plans do not say whether the caregivers are counted as health-care workers or at what stage they will be vaccinated. Donna Martin of the nonprofit ANCOR has been trying since November to decipher what each state’s plan means. As of Jan. 8, she could confirm only that 15 states had some kind of plan for caregivers to be vaccinated. “There is a large sector [of the disabled community] that depends on DSPs for 24 hours a day support,” Martin said. “That is as essential to them as someone who shows up in the ER and needs a nurse or doctor in that moment.”

Sloan Meek, 33, is waiting to learn when he will be vaccinated. Until Lincicome and Meek get their shots, she said they’ll continue to live the way they have for nine months. Because she’s trying to limit the number of people to whom he’s exposed, she rarely gets a break, sometimes sleeping just three hours per night. Three air purifiers she bought for their living room and bedrooms hum alongside the David Bowie Pandora station he likes to play. She does not go to the grocery store, the pharmacy or anywhere else she might have even a small chance of becoming infected. She doesn’t see her own family members.

Disability Discrimination In Health Care Under Scrutiny

By Shaun Heasley / Reprinted from DisAbility Scoop / January 19, 2021

Federal officials are weighing a rewrite of regulations designed to ensure that people with disabilities do not face discrimination from medical providers amid persistent concerns about unequal access. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office for Civil Rights is issuing a request for information on disability discrimination in the health care and child welfare systems.

The move comes as the agency said that it “is aware that significant discrimination on the basis of disability against persons with disabilities persists in the nation’s health care system and in its child welfare system.” In addition to reports of discrimination that have surfaced during the course of HHS OCR’s own activities, officials said that they’ve heard about issues from researchers, advocates and disability organizations. As a result, HHS OCR is reviewing existing relevant regulations and mulling revisions.

Now, the agency is looking for feedback on what any updates should address. Specifically, officials said they would like information about disability discrimination in the context of organ transplants, life-saving or life-sustaining care, suicide prevention and treatment, crisis standards of care, health care value assessment methodologies, child welfare and the availability of auxiliary aids and accessible medical equipment. HHS OCR said it wants input from people with disabilities, their families, providers, disability advocates, hospitals, child welfare agencies and other stakeholders. In addition to information on discrimination, the agency indicated that it would like to hear about the costs and administrative burdens related to various approaches to tackling the issue. “We believe that persons with disabilities should not be discriminated against in vital health and human services including organ transplants, suicide prevention, the provision of life-saving care and child welfare,” said Roger Severino, director of HHS OCR. “We believe the American public agrees that persons with disabilities deserve full protection under law and we seek public input on achieving that goal with respect to the most consequential, life-altering contexts.”

Once the request for information is published in the Federal Register, the public will have 60 days to submit comments.

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Across

1- Swedish auto; 5- Closes; 10- Cop's collar; 14- Gimlet garnish; 15- Square; 16- Hurler Hershisser; 17- Mine entrance; 18- Gaucho's rope; 19- Costa ____; 20- Zany; 22- Shaky; 24- "____ Alibi"; Selleck film; 25- List from which to choose; 26- Divide; 30- U-Haul competitor; 35- Doo-wop syllable; 36- Caesar of comedy; 37- Piece of poetry; 38- Determined; 41- See-through material; 43- Specialized language; 44- Jurist Fortas; 45- ____ Brooks, filmmaker responsible for "Blazing Saddles"; 46- Tiny; 47- Eyeglasses with tinted lenses; 50- Light source; 53- Bind; 54- Antiapartheid activist; 58- Guarantee; 62- "Hard ____!" (sailor's yell); 63- More aloof; 66- Aviation pioneer Sikorsky; 67- Midday; 68- Rasp; 69- Spicy stew; 70- Longings; 71- Wanderer; 72- Russian no;

Down

1- Close with force; 2- Verdi heroine; 3- Among; 4- You ____; 5- Astonishment; 6- Chemical ending; 7- Caught ya!; 8- Brit's bottle measure; 9- European kingdom; 10- Flesh of a hog; 11- HOMES part; 12- Four-sided fig.; 13- Drama; 21- ____ Lingus; 23- Bend; 25- Kind of school; 26- Fiddlesticks!; 27- Chicago's airport; 28- Big; 29- Clearasil target; 31- Nevertheless; 32- Stage play; 33- Politico Kefauver; 34- Staggers; 39- Put on; 40- Elegance; 41- "Aladdin" monkey; 42- In the middle; 44- Nile reptile; 48- Rickey ingredient; 49- Wound; 51- Straighten; 52- PC shortcut; 54- Numerous; 55- Burn balm; 56- Dodge model; 57- Studies; 59- Unattractive; 60- Acting part; 61- Quod ____ demonstrandum; 64- Cartesian conclusion; 65- LAX posting;

