

New Horizons

Housing That Supports Independence



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Feds Launch Hotline To Help People With Disabilities Access COVID-19 Vaccines

Reprinted from Disability Scoop by Shaun Heasley | June 14, 2021

A new push is underway to help more people with disabilities get vaccinated against COVID-19.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is unveiling what it's calling a first-of-its-kind national hotline offering information and services directly aimed at boosting access to the shots for people with disabilities.

Officials said the Disability Information and Access Line can help people find nearby vaccine sites, make appointments and link people with local services like accessible transportation.

"The hotline also can provide information and resources to answer questions and address concerns about the vaccines and can connect callers to information and services that promote independent living and address fundamental needs, such as food, housing and transportation," the federal health agency said.

The resource is being offered through a partnership of the Administration for Community Living and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in collaboration with the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities, the National Council on Independent Living, the National Disabilities Rights Network and other organizations.

The Disability Information and Access Line can be reached between 9 am and 8pm ET at 888-677-1199 or by emailing DIAL@n4a.org.



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“My Two Cents”

By Tracee Battis, Executive Director



It was wonderful to see the Project Freedom vans on their way to the Morristown Mall the other day as we are slowly resuming our social activities at the different complexes. We want to encourage everyone to enjoy themselves, but at the same time to stay safe.

Well, Project Freedom has started construction on yet another housing community. Our newest Project will be our second one in Hamilton Township and will be located on Samuel Alito Way across from the Township Library. This will basically be a “twin” of our Town Center South Project with seventy-two units in four residential buildings with a large community center. Construction is expected to be completed in early 2023.

While we continue our mission to develop new housing opportunities, it is equally as important to invest in preserving and maintaining our older housing stock. Our Project Freedom development team is busily working on our first Preservation Tax Credit application for Freedom I in Robbinsville. If successful, we will be able to raise new capital to fund much needed repairs. This is a competitive process, so keep your fingers crossed.

Please enjoy the rest of the summer and please stay safe!



From Norman's Desk

As the chairperson of the NJ Statewide Independent Living Council, I have been working with The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies and Senator Bob Casey, Congressman Chris Smith and Congressman Jim Langevin on an historic piece of disability and disaster legislation.

The Real Emergency Access for Aging and Disability Inclusion for Disasters Act (REAADI) will be introduced this month. The legislation will that will dismantle barriers faced by disaster-impacted people with disabilities, older adults, and people with access and functional needs impacted by disasters. It will improve recovery outcomes and increase disaster resources for disability organizations, emergency managers and local communities.



Here is what REAADI will do:

- Modifies and expands the National Advisory Committee on Individuals with Disabilities and Disasters (NACIDD) to ensure that it accurately reflects the diverse characteristics of the disability community.
- Ensures there is a strong disability and older adult voice throughout the preparation, response, recovery, and mitigation of disasters,
- Includes universal design and visitability standards, as well as reasonable modifications before, during and after disasters,
- Creates a network of disaster and disability centers focused on training, technical assistance, and research to assist states and localities to better include and support disaster-impacted people with disabilities, older adults and others who also have access and functional needs;
- Directs the Government Accountability Office to review the spending of disaster funds by federal agencies and states to ensure funds have been spent in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act
- Creates a competitive grant program to pilot strategies for greater inclusion of people with disabilities, older adults and people with access and functional needs throughout disaster preparation, response, recovery, and mitigation;
- Requires the Department of Justice to examine how the civil rights of people with disabilities and older adults are or are not upheld during and following disasters; and
- Establishes a role for centers for independent living throughout local disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.

I'm really pleased that Project Freedom's friend Congressman Chris Smith has once again stepped up to be the primary Republican sponsor of the REAADI Act. By Chris taking this lead role with Congressman Langevin, he demonstrates that this issue of inclusive emergency planning is truly bi-partisan. Congressman Langevin is a Democrat from Rhode Island who is a power-chair user. Smith and Langevin have worked together on other legislation.

Of course, I will be reporting here on REAADI's progress, but if you want to support this important legislation, email me at either nsmith@njsilc.org or nsmith@ProjectFreedom.org for more information.

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Zoo Program Helps Teens With Disabilities

by Alexandra Mester, reprinted from The Blade/TNS | June 25, 2021

TOLEDO, Ohio — Zoe Hamblin's favorite place at the Toledo Zoo is somewhere full of her favorite hue. "I like to go to the greenhouse because it's really warm in there," the 16-year-old said. "And green is my favorite color."

The 16-year-old from Whitehouse is one of a record-breaking 46 teenagers with varying disabilities participating this year in the zoo's Advocates for Disabilities and Partners Team, a division within the Zoo Teens volunteer program. ADaPT pairs individuals with disabilities, both physical and intellectual, with other Zoo Teen members as they complete volunteer tasks together.

"The program has grown over the years, in part driven by parents," said Bill Davis, the zoo's director of volunteers. "It's always a challenge to find meaningful, rich and valuable life experiences when there are obstacles."

It was a mother calling on behalf of her son with autism in 2008 who prompted the idea. The teen had interviewed for the broader volunteer program, but wasn't selected because staff did not believe they could accommodate his needs.

"His mom called shortly after the interview and she was very nice about it," Davis said. "Rather than being angry her son got turned away, she started to help us understand how we could provide support for him." The next year, that teen and a second with a disability were the first to be taken on board in the pilot program.

This year, 36 ADaPT participants, called advocates, are paired one-on-one with another teen, called a peer-support partner, while they volunteer. The remaining 10 advocates in the program don't need constant direct supervision, but are monitored by partners who occasionally check with them. In June alone, ADaPT participants have contributed more than 360 volunteer hours.

"They do everything that the other zoo teens are able to do," said Kevin Fong, the volunteer accessibility supervisor. "They are advocates for their own disability. They are out there showing that they have the ability to do everything."

Hamblin likes it so much, she tallied 30 volunteer hours in only two weeks since her first day June 4. Visitors often encounter her telling people entering the tropical greenhouse at the ProMedica Museum of Natural History to watch their step and look out for animals that may be on the path.

ADaPT receives funding from several sources, including the Lucas County Board of Developmental Disabilities. The number of advocates accepted each year depends on the resources and peer-support partners or staff available, and the zoo can't accommodate every individual who applies.

"We don't want to turn people away, but sometimes the needs may outstrip our capacities," Davis said. Participants identify and work on goals each year, which could be long-term or short-term — such as communication, social skills, friendships or developing greater independence, Fong said.

Teen partners undergo training similar to what zoo staff members take, teaching them how to recognize advocates' needs and assist them. The zoo also provides sensory kits with items that help teens fulfill those needs as they volunteer.

Clara Burkin, 16, of Perrysburg, has been in the program since 2019 as a partner.

"I enjoy the partnership with the other teen," she said. "They're some of the best people I know. It's always fun to be out there with another person."

Zoo officials say the community response to ADaPT teens as visitors meet them has been very favorable overall. It's also important for guests who may have disabilities themselves to see people like them among the zoo's volunteers.

"It is always a pretty positive response that I receive," Burkin said. "It always leaves me happy."

Golfer Becomes First With Down Syndrome To Compete In College Championship

By Zach Dean / Reprinted from The Daytona Beach News-Journal/TNS / May 12, 2021

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Amy Bockerstette has made history.

The 22-year-old from Arizona became the first person with Down syndrome to compete in a college championship event Monday after she teed off at 11:50 a.m. at Ormond Beach's Plantation Bay.

Bockerstette is playing in the National Junior College Athletic Association Women's Golf Championship along with her four Paradise Valley Community College teammates. The four-round tournament runs through Thursday.



Golfer Amy Bockerstette with Paradise Valley Community College high-fives dad and coach Joe Bockerstette during the National Junior College Athletic Association Women's Golf Championship at Plantation Bay in Ormond

This is Bockerstette's third year on the team, but second full season. She also made history two years ago when she joined the team, becoming the first person with Down syndrome to earn an athletic scholarship.

Bockerstette, who has been golfing since middle school, is perhaps most known for her viral video two years ago with U.S. Open champion Gary Woodland.

The two were playing a practice hole at the par-3 16th at TPC Scottsdale before the 2019 Waste Management Phoenix Open. Bockerstette hit her first shot into the bunker, but managed to save par by sinking an 8-foot putt.

Before the shot, she went viral for telling Woodland, "I got this."

Bockerstette told The News-Journal last week that Woodland, who finished fifth at Quail Hollow over the weekend, texted her early last week to wish her good luck ahead of Monday's tee time.

"I loved it," she said of the par-3 moment. "It was awesome, and now we're best friends. I'm always so happy to see him."

ESPN To Honor Athlete With Down Syndrome

By Shaun Heasley / Reprinted from Disability Scoop / June 29, 2021



Chris Nikic will receive the Jimmy V Award for Perseverance during the 2021 ESPYS. (Nik Nikic)

A triathlete who became the first Ironman with Down syndrome will receive a prestigious award from ESPN on national television.

The network said that it will honor Chris Nikic with its Jimmy V Award for Perseverance next month. The award is given annually to a “deserving member of the sporting world who has overcome great obstacles through perseverance and determination.”

Nikic made history last November when he completed a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride and 26.2-mile marathon run to complete the Ironman Florida competition in Panama City Beach, Fla.

“Wow, what an honor to receive the Jimmy V Award for Perseverance and to be included with such an amazing group of people,” Nikic said in a statement. “As a Special Olympics ambassador, I represent millions of athletes around the world who can now believe that inclusion is real for all of them. Thank you for me, but more importantly for the Down syndrome community and my fellow Special Olympics athletes.”

In addition to the Jimmy V Award for Perseverance, Nikic is also nominated in the Best Athlete with a Disability, Men’s Sports category. Both awards will be given at the 2021 ESPYS, which will be broadcast live July 10 at 8 p.m. ET on ABC.

“Chris’ unique, inspirational story personifies the Jimmy V Award for Perseverance,” said Rob King, senior vice president and editor-at-large at ESPN Content. “We are honored to present him with this award and look forward to seeing what he accomplishes next.”

Previous recipients of the Jimmy V Award for Perseverance include former NFL quarterback Jim Kelly, sports reporter Craig Sager and Dick and Rick Hoyt. The Hoyts completed more than 1,000 races with Dick Hoyt pushing a wheelchair for his son, Rick Hoyt, who has cerebral palsy.

Bel Air teen's documentary about living with disabilities set to serve as teaching tool across the world

By JOHN-JOHN WILLIAMS IV / Reprinted from the BALTIMORE SUN / MAY 11, 2021 AT 5:00 AM

Faith Guilbault does not want pity. She just wants friendship.

The 17-year-old from Bel Air has not let cerebral palsy stop her from being a featured model during New York Fashion Week. It has not prevented her from regularly riding horses, playing sled hockey or even skydiving.

The cheerful go-getter will allow the world to get to know more about the realities of her daily life with disabilities through a documentary, "Faith's World," which she directed.

The 27-minute documentary, which premiered in April on Maryland Public Television, eventually will be sent to 1.8 million American teachers in 155 cities this spring. It will then be shown in 150 countries across the world.

Holly Carter, founder and executive director of BYkids, a New York City-based nonprofit that produced the documentary, believes that audiences will fall in love with the Guilbaults.



With guidance from Independent Spirit Award-winning director and filmmaker Joyce Chopra, Faith Guilbault shines light on her world, inviting viewers to focus on the similarities in rather than differences between abled and disabled people. Faith's documentary is titled "Faith's World." (Courtesy of BYkids) Guilbault's mother, Karen, said that she is excited to see how many people her daughter will "touch."

Depending on how far she needs to travel, Guilbault will use either a walker, wheelchair stander or house cane. In addition to cerebral palsy, she also has epilepsy and Cortical Visual Impairment, a condition where vision is decreased due to a neurological problem affecting the visual part of the brain.

What's next for Guilbault? She wants to get a service dog and live on her own by the age of 22. She also wants to star in a reality show, be an author and work in a day care. But most of all she wants to continue to educate others "and to let people know that people are different and that's OK. Her aim... "I want to put awareness out there."

Above: Faith Guilbault, 17, participates in Fashion Week in New York City. (Courtesy of BYkids)
The documentary was shot over the course of a month in 2019 and includes scenes from New York City for fashion week and then at the Guilbault family's Bel Air home.