

New Horizons

Housing That Supports Independence



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Freedom Village at Town Center South Ribbon Cutting



Freedom Village at Town Center South was officially opened on June 9th with the Robbinsville Township Team of officials, the project funders and board members in attendance.

This seventy-two-unit apartment community features one, two and three-bedroom apartments surrounding a large Community Center. It is located in the designated Town Center of Robbinsville, a diverse community with a school district rated in the top 10 statewide. Shopping, restaurants, and medical offices as well as an NJ Transit bus line are within easy walking distance.

The buildings are a three-story design, with private entrances in front and all are either barrier-free or adaptable to be accessible for people using wheelchairs. The buildings have elevators, central heat and air conditioning that incorporate Energy Star designed features as well as being LEED compliant, with laundry rooms on each floor.

NJ Transit 606 Bus line stops at the complex for trips to Hamilton Marketplace or into Hamilton, Trenton, or Princeton. Nearby highways I-95, I-195, I-295, US 130, and State Route 33 provide quick access to many attractions in Mercer, Monmouth, Burlington, Middlesex, and Ocean Counties.

For more information, contact Freedom Village at Town Center South, 500 Ravens Road, Robbinsville, NJ 08691 Phone: 609-934-3600 Fax: 609-934-3601

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“My Inaugural Two Cents”

By Tracee Battis, Executive Director



I am deeply honored and grateful to take the reigns as Executive Director of this incredible organization.

It is with a very heavy heart that Project Freedom says goodbye to our fearless leader, Tim Doherty. Along side of Norm, Tim has been the heart and soul of Project Freedom for the past twenty years. These are very big shoes to fill.

There is no better challenge than a bar set high. Under Tim’s direction, Project Freedom developed 13 projects with 685 units. We are going to continue that legacy with our start of construction on a 72 unit project in Hamilton in July.

Additionally, we are also applying for tax credits for a 72 unit project in Florence. We are also applying for preservation tax credits for our first Robbinsville Project that is over 30 years old now and in need of renovation.

Our successes have and will continue to come from the ingenuity and passion of our Board of Trustees, staff, and most importantly, the continuation of our mission to ensure that our tenants live and thrive in our Project Freedom communities.



From Norman's Desk



Our nation celebrates its Declaration of Independence from Great Britain on July 4th.

We celebrate the idea that this nation wanted to be free from rules, regulations, and laws created without input from the Colonies.

We need to remember what we are celebrating and why. We need to remember the sacrifices of those who have died for the concepts of independence, liberty, and freedom. We must also remember that the fight is not over for many people with disabilities, and, indeed, remember that the fight is only beginning for many of us.

The promise has been slow in coming for people with disabilities, and for many of us, equality is still not here, is still a concept enjoyed by others, and is a promise that still needs to be kept.

The promise is a lofty one, yet for some people with disabilities the promise translates into more practical considerations: the freedom to make choices in their daily lives, to be responsible for their lives, and to be a contributing part of their community.

Freedom and independence are grand sounding words, but for some they mean the right to do simple tasks.

Freedom and independence are empty and hollow words when government pandemic policies made the lives of people with disabilities expendable through improper planning or indifference.

Conversely, expecting the promise of freedom to be kept without struggle and sacrifice is foolhardy. Again, our history teaches that participatory governance over oneself or one's country means stepping up to participate and sacrifice. Individuals must take up the cause of freedom, work together, and battle for the promise to be kept.

This is true now for people with disabilities.

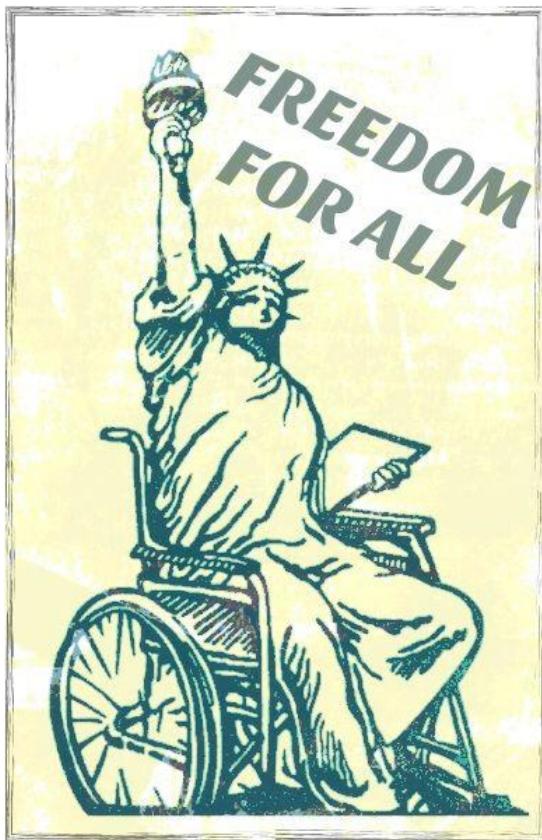
So, while we celebrate what happened 245 years ago, let us remember for many of us with disabilities the struggle for freedom continues!

Norman A. Smith, Co-Founder & Associate Executive Director –

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Teen With Autism Heads Up New Produce Pantry For The Needy

Reprinted from The San Diego Union-Tribune/TNS by Pam Kragen, | June 4, 2021

SAN DIEGO — When it came time to pick lemons and oranges in a backyard grove on a recent Tuesday, Paige Cook was all business.

The Oceanside teenager, who is on the autism spectrum, quickly pulled on her work gloves and headed straight for the trees. Paige didn't dawdle or get distracted. She worked at a breakneck pace, clipping off dozens of citrus fruits and dropping them into a plastic crate. Within 20 minutes, the crate was full.

Gardening and picking fruit is one of Paige's favorite hobbies. It's also the inspiration for Paige's Pantry, a new nonprofit started by her mom, Malinda Dalton-Cook. The business aims to distribute produce to the food insecure in North County while providing life, social and job skills to young adults like Paige with developmental disabilities.

Paige, 19, is one of 20 students, ages 12 to 22, at TERI Inc.'s The Country School in San Marcos. She is mostly nonverbal and her curriculum at the school is focused on social and vocational training rather than academics. For each of the past seven years at the Country School, Paige has worked to achieve a series of learning and life-skills goals, including in agriculture. Her teacher, Meghan Hoppes, said that whenever Paige worked in the raised-bed gardens at a TERI group home in Vista, she was always extremely focused.

Dalton-Cook said things were going well for her daughter until the pandemic arrived last year, shutting down the school campus and Paige's access to the gardening work she loved and the socialization she craved. So in April 2020, Hoppes invited Paige and her mom over to her house in Escondido to pick as much as they liked from the orange, lemon and grapefruit trees in her backyard.

"So with masks on, a plastic tub that I found in my garage, gloves and garden shears we met Paige's teacher and started picking the fruit. Holy smokes ... I knew Paige loved a task but was blown away with her hustle," Dalton-Cook said.

Paige typed up a letter with ideas and recipes for the citrus fruit and mom and daughter delivered the fruit to the porches of 10 staff members from the Country School. Week after week, mom and daughter picked fruit and delivered it to an expanding number of recipients, including a church that provides meals to the hungry and elderly.

Once the local fruit trees were exhausted, Dalton-Cook began reaching out to new groups that could donate surplus produce, including backyard vegetable gardeners, the Escondido zero-waste group More than Apples, which collects and distributes surplus food, and local commercial growers like Yasukochi Farms in Oceanside, which donates several crates of vegetables to the cause each week.

Last July, Dalton-Cook filed the paperwork to turn their weekly hobby into a business, Paige's Pantry, and in January the organization earned nonprofit status. The program now serves about 30 families. That number will soon grow to 40 and the goal is to reach 100 families by year end, Dalton-Cook said.

Every Thursday afternoon, Dalton-Cook and Paige go out to pick fruit or collect produce donations and bring them home. On Friday mornings, four other volunteers on the autism spectrum come over to the house to help sort and bag the items. On Friday nights, mom and daughter do drop-offs for program recipients who can't drive. And on Saturday mornings, Dalton-Cook hosts a drive-through pickup service in front of her home for the rest of the families.

Besides keeping Paige engaged and feeding the needy, Paige's Pantry is also providing job skills to the volunteers with autism, ages 17 to 24. They all have different abilities, Dalton-Cook said, but everyone contributes.

"Part of the plan is to help them develop job skills," she said. "Even if they can only open a bag and hold it open while someone else puts stuff inside, that's great. Even if they can only move produce from point A to point B, that's great. We can work with everyone."

Firmer Accessibility Standards Sought For Health Care

By Michelle Diamant / Reprinted from Disability Scoop | June 18, 2021

Doctors' offices are supposed to be accessible to people with disabilities, but rules outlining what that means are going unenforced. Now, an independent federal agency is calling for change.

The National Council on Disability wants the U.S. Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Human Services to issue new regulations outlining exact parameters for what constitutes accessible medical and diagnostic equipment.

The standards already exist. They were published in 2017 by the Access Board, a federal agency devoted to accessibility for people with disabilities, in consultation with the Food and Drug Administration. But since the so-called Standards for Accessible Medical Diagnostic Equipment haven't been formally adopted by the federal agencies responsible for enforcement, they lack teeth.

The recommendations from the National Council on Disability, which is charged with advising the president and Congress on disability issues, come in a 75-page report outlining the barriers still present as people with disabilities seek health care.

Despite requirements in the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Affordable Care Act that full and equal access be provided to health care services and facilities, the report notes that basics like examination tables, weight scales, examination chairs and imaging equipment "are usually inaccessible for people with physical disabilities." And, health care facilities generally lack trained staff to help people with disabilities transfer safely to such equipment.

Even when accessible equipment is available, the council said that medical staff often don't know how to use it. As a result, people with disabilities say that health care professionals frequently skip portions of exams or even refuse care, the report found.

Currently, individuals with disabilities can file complaints with the Justice Department and the Department of Health and Human Services over inaccessible medical and diagnostic equipment, but the National Council on Disability said this remedy is inadequate.

"Thirteen percent of American adults have some form of disability impacting their functional mobility, which means there are a significant number of Americans who experience significant barriers to health care exams and preventative care for the absence of accessible examination tables, examination chairs and other medical and diagnostic equipment," said Andrés Gallegos, chairman of the National Council on Disability. "As someone who has experienced this firsthand, I can attest that health equity for people with mobility disabilities will remain elusive, absent formal adoption of the MDE standards by enforcing federal agencies."

The Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services did not respond to requests for comment about whether they are considering regulations to adopt the Access Board standards.



Project Freedom Hamilton Has New Activities For Tenants

PF Hamilton recently started a **Food Pantry** for their tenants along with a **Hot Dog Friday** which provides hot dogs, chips and a small water bottle to tenants. On **Coffee Mondays**, coffee or tea is provided along with a coffee cake or honey bun (packaged). (The church sometimes donates donuts.) **The Garden Club** meets every other Monday at 1:30. Currently there are 8 tenants that daily help water and nurture the tomatoes and strawberries. **Monthly Bingo** is also a big hit with tenants as well as the community center being open daily for games like pool, checkers and puzzles. The **Trex Recycling Program**, at both Robbinsville locations and Hamilton, is collecting plastic bags to keep them out of the landfill and can earn a new Trex Bench for every 500 lbs of plastic collected. Way to go Hamilton!



On Left: Cobie Meulman helps Bob Martin bag with some food. On Right: Krystal Anaya helps Bob get a top shelf item.
Below, tenants enjoying a recent "Hotdog Friday".



Hamilton's 4th of July Fireworks are Back ON

Reprinted from article by Chris Rollins 94.5 WPST online

Hamilton's concert and fireworks will be held on Friday, July 2nd, with a rain date of Saturday, July 3rd, at Veterans Park. If you're planning on attending, use the Kuser Road entrance to the park.

Come early for some pre-fireworks fun. The concert, with The Heartbeats headlining, will begin at 6pm, so make sure to bring a blanket or chairs, and relax. You'll be able to buy food and drinks from food vendors on site.

The fireworks show will start right after dark, around 9:30pm.

