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Kansas Disability Caucus 2015

Executive Summary Highlights of the Kansas Disability Caucus

2015 Kansas Disability Caucus - Executive Summary

ADA 25: Igniting the Fire for “Employment, Involvement, Independence”

In August of 2015, over 225 Kansas Disability Rights Advocates gathered in Topeka to celebrate 25 years of the ADA and Ignite the Fire of Employment, Involvement and Independence!

The Kansas Disability Caucus opened with a look at the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) past, present, and future! Carrie Greenwood of the Kansas Youth Empowerment Academy challenged us to take responsibility for the future by taking action that increases involvement, employment and independence for all people with disabilities.

Centers for Independent Living gave a summary of the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) transportation, housing, employment and outreach workgroup activities.

Kansas Department of Commerce, Kansas Rehabilitation Services, Kansas Adult Education and Kansas Workforce Centers discussed exciting new changes coming with the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the need for disability advocates input on the Kansas WIOA Plan.

CAUCUS SESSIONS

Kansas Disability Rights Advocates attended West, East, or Central Caucus Regional sessions. Each region was assigned the task of figuring out what people with disabilities need to increase their independence, community involvement and employment. Ideas were to include solutions to be carried out by the disability advocate. Once each Caucus Region presented their findings, the Kansas Disability Caucus 2015 chose Voting, Advocacy, Education, and Employment as the major issue areas. The following represents their combined voices.

VOTING

- Voter Education** on “how to register to vote” and “how to be an educated/informed voter.” A concerted effort is needed to assist people with disabilities in securing the necessary documents to become registered voters. Additional concerns noted around ensuring people are afforded physical accessibility to the polls as electronic machines are replaced and polling sites are moved.

EDUCATION

- ADA** All Caucus regions felt we should educate our communities on the value of the ADA and remind them how curb cuts, ramps, automatic doors, etc. benefit all people with and without disabilities (runners, parents with strollers, travelers, etc.).

- Transition Youth** must know they have a future beyond “drawing Social Security and sitting on the couch.” We need to collectively raise the expectations of parents and educators of youth with visible and invisible disabilities K-12. A possible solution is to develop a statewide youth parent education campaign.

- Adult Education:** people who acquire their disability as an adult need education about the resources, assistive technology, and training that are available.

ADVOCACY

We need to advocate for our rights. We need a universal self-advocacy skills training for people with disabilities developed with the input of consumers and other advocacy groups.

- Communication:** To increase understanding across all disabilities, we need to advocate that written and electronic materials used by all service agencies and providers to be in “plain language.” In Kansas, it is very difficult to get sign language interpreters outside of the big cities. We need to advocate that courts, doctors and hospitals statewide provide certified medical and court sign language interpreters.

- Services:** We need to advocate for the right to have the full array of services available in local communities. In addition, we need make sure the salary level is sufficient to keep certified qualified dedicated staff, especially Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors.

- Transportation:** Statewide transportation continues to be a barrier for employment and community involvement. We need to make the most out of current transportation services, for example anyone should be able to ride Medicaid transportation. We need to talk about possible assistance from the Chamber of Commerce.

- Housing:** We need to restore the Kansas Accessible Modification Program funding as an economical way to increase affordable, accessible, and integrated housing. There is also a need for a similar program for home repairs. As an advocacy effort, we need to present information about the ongoing housing needs of persons with disabilities to city and county councils.

EMPLOYMENT/TRAINING

We need to publically give credit to employers who hire people with disabilities and make the workplace accessible.

We need long term employment supports that extend beyond the 90 day VR closure and are readily available when a job needs saved.

Social Security work incentives need to be taught by everyone not just Working Healthy Benefit Specialists.

AWARDS

Lifetime Achievement Award

For 30 years of work on the Kansas Disability Caucus, her passionate advocacy at the National Council on Independent Living, Kansas Youth Empowerment Academy and at Southeast Kansas Independent Living.

- Anne-Marie Hughey-

Community/Business Achievement

For their continued efforts to make Wichita the most accessible city in Kansas by upholding the ADA and by partnering with the Independent Living Resource Center.

-City of Wichita-

Local or State Government

For the quiet steadfast strength he has brought to the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill board of directors, the State Independent Living Council of Kansas board of directors and Working Healthy.

-Steve Curtis -

Youth (up to 19 years of age)

For her vision of a “Little Miss Wheelchair Kansas” and her dedication to make that happen.

-Hannah Shaver-

Youth (20 to 30 years of age)

For being the peer role model in the children’s book, Darby Boingg Has an Adventure and Meets a Person With a Disability to be used to increase disability awareness.

-Ian Kuenzi-

GOALSa story from 2011



Stephany Priddy: “I came to the 2011 Kansas Disability Caucus and I could hardly get around. I topped at 550 pounds. I had started losing weight; but I still couldn’t drive or take care of myself. I didn’t have a high school diploma and I had lost my job of 13 years building airplane radios. “

The 2011 Disability Caucus inspired me into action. Since then I have lost 200 pounds. I graduated from High School in 2013. In 2014, I started working as a part-time para-professional. Every night I would be in great pain but I was determined to work. In January of 2015, I became a full time para. I’m 53 years old. It’s never too late, never too late to start your journey. Our journeys are one day at a time, one step at a time.”

After hearing Stephany’s story these are highlights of some of the goals that were set by Kansas Disability Advocates:

Employment:

- Find a career that challenges my abilities and is appreciated.
- Switch careers and develop my own program to help people with disabilities by 2016
- Get education on computer skills
- Keep making myself more marketable
- Continue to grow my small business
- Open my own restaurant
- Find a job

Involvement:

- Speak up at state level
- Advocacy/support groups
- Going to work every day
- Go to more City Council meetings
- Get out and tell people
- Help more in my community
- Get into rural schools to get youth involved with their community and advocacy
- Get involved with local concerns

Independence:

- Stand longer and walk longer distances
- Make myself more eligible to move out of the house
- Make more informed decisions about my health
- Look into a loan to modify my bathroom for a lift
- Get help installing new software
- Be stronger so I can make a difference in other’s and my own life

