



PEOPLE'S VOICE

Spring 2015

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Mission Statement

To advocate for the freedom of choice for individuals with disabilities to live independently through the removal of all barriers.

That's My IL: Stephanie Watt

Jamie Hardt, Program Director and Sam Gores, Youth Transition Specialist

This article is a part of the "That's My IL" story series.

Stephanie Watt is a freshman student enrolled in the Dakota College Bottineau Passport Program offered at Minot State University. Stephanie is working towards a degree in Veterinary Medicine.

Stephanie was born in Idaho, but her father's occupation in the military allowed the family to live around the world, in places like Japan and England. Stephanie spent her early grade school years at Lakenheath AFB in England, where she first started to notice her disability. In the 2nd grade, she would be taken out of the classroom to play learning games and take tests. She also noticed it would take her hours to finish her math homework. Stephanie would occasionally wander away from her classmates, which caused the entire Air Force base to be shut down while people searched for

her. Around this time, she received the diagnosis of Attention Deficit Disorder.

Stephanie and her family moved to Minot when she was in the 4th grade. Throughout her school years at Bel Air Elementary school, Ramstad Middle School, and Minot High School, Stephanie attended her Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, which granted her access to the resource room. This allowed Stephanie to have readers for tests and extra time to finish homework. While attending Minot High, Stephanie had the opportunity to take part in Independence, Inc.'s BEYOND Program. This youth transition program promotes self-advocacy, self-determination, and disability pride. Stephanie enjoyed the program and remembers learning about IEPs, careers, community resources, and support systems.

Stephanie's participation in the BEYOND Program presented her with an opportunity to attend the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL) Youth Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico in October 2014. She was able to



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meet peers with similar disabilities and stories. At the APRIL awards banquet, Stephanie remembers, “I did something that I really don’t do, I stood in front of 400 people and handed out iPads.” She read out names and joked with the audience. Stephanie says, “I didn’t have time to be nervous.”

Stephanie graduated from Minot High School in May 2014. Apart from attending college, Stephanie has been employed at a retail store and is currently working at a coffee shop. She says she likes working because “it’s how you get anywhere.” In the future, Stephanie hopes to work with exotic animals in a zoo. She confesses, “I love snakes.” This summer, Stephanie plans to move to Utah with her family, where she will continue going to college. However, after living in Minot for nine years, Stephanie promises she will be back.

Ultimately, being a person with a disability has opened many doors for Stephanie. She has met new people through participating in the BEYOND program and attending the APRIL conference. Her experiences at the APRIL conference left Stephanie feeling inspired to help people. She feels comfortable telling other people about her disability, and advises, “don’t apologize for your disability.”



Independence, Inc. Receives Grant from Minot’s Power of the Purse

Jill McDonald, Finance Director

This fall, Independence, Inc. was selected to present a funding opportunity to the Power of the Purse group. Power of the Purse is a giving circle created by area women which benefits local organizations with financial donations. With this donation we purchased a pocket projector for our Youth Transition Specialist, Sam Gores, to use when presenting in area schools. Technology varies from one district to another and this will allow her to have the same technology available no matter what district she is in, and offer the same integrated lessons in all schools. This is truly a gift to the students in the BEYOND program. Thank you Power of the Purse!

Giving Hearts Day Warms Our Hearts

Jill McDonald, Finance Director

Our first Giving Hearts Day was successful for so many reasons. The biggest reason was the generosity of our supporters; we raised over \$1300 with this event! We also had the pleasure of collaborating with ten other nonprofits in the Minot area that all have vital ongoing missions within our community. We were able to work together to reach out to many service clubs and spread the word about Giving Hearts Day as well as share the way our organization impacts the communities we serve. Independence, Inc. has been impacting the lives of people with disabilities in Northwestern North Dakota for 20 years and it is heartwarming to feel the support of the community. These donations, as well as our grant funding, allow us to provide a community garden at the Bottineau office, a Cooking Club in Minot, assist in emergency response exercises, provide leadership training to youth with disabilities, as well as several other services. If you are interested in assisting with fundraising please call the Minot office at (701) 839-4724.

My Voice

Scott Burlingame, Executive Director



Back in September, the Board of Directors and staff of Independence, Inc. gathered on a Saturday to develop a framework for our organization over the next 3-5 years. In the process of meeting, we discussed how the world would look if Independence, Inc. had never existed, how we have changed the world so far, and how we want to change the world in the future.

At the end of the day, we developed a very short and concise “thematic goal” for our organization. A Thematic Goal is the single most important thing our organization needs to focus on, right now. It is a rally cry for the entire organization. The purpose of this goal will be to give us a target as we move forward. That goal reads as follows:

“Through collaboration, expansion, and innovation, Independence, Inc. will increase accessibility and integration of people with disabilities of all ages in our communities.”

Let’s talk a little bit about how we are going to accomplish this goal. First, let’s describe how Independence, Inc. collaborates. We are, for all practical purposes, a very small organization. We have 11 staff positions, a part-time Experience Works trainee, and a Social Work intern. That is not many people to serve an 11 county service area. We rely heavily on collaboration, building on the strengths of our communities to make our mission possible. Our staff are part of over 30 different collaborative groups. Each one of these groups gives us a chance to build our community’s capacity to improve the lives of people with disabilities.

Our expansion efforts are multifaceted. Even though we are serving many more people than in past years, we know we are not reaching every person who needs our services. We will serve more people by both increasing our efficiency of services and by finding ways to fund more staff. When we do this, we will expand our services into areas we have not yet been able to serve.

Our integration efforts reflect our core beliefs. Independent Living has long valued the importance of cross disability representation and participation. We value a society in which people with disabilities stop being divided by medical diagnosis and start coming together to remove the common barriers that prevent community inclusion.

I am proud to say the Board of Directors and staff at Independence, Inc. are very enthusiastic about working towards this goal. I would like to invite each of you to help us as we work towards these objectives. You can help us by making use of our services, telling a friend about the value of our services, attending one of our events, or even making a donation to help us achieve our goal.

Together, we can change the world for people with disabilities.

*Scott Burlingame, Executive Director
*Jill McDonald, Finance Director
*Jamie Hardt, Program Director
Lindsay Fleming, Nursing Facility Transition Coordinator
Connie Klein, Independent Living Advocate
Nancy Stute, Nursing Facility Transition Coordinator
*Pamala Mondragon, Information Specialist
Inez Rose, Independent Living Specialist
Michele Anderson, Independent Living Specialist
*Rhonda Thompson, Community Relations Specialist
Samantha Gores, Youth Transition Specialist
*Editorial Board

Information

If anyone is interested in receiving this newsletter in an alternative format or would like to submit articles or information of interest to individuals with disabilities, contact our office at 839-4724 V/TTD.

The contents of this newsletter were developed under a grant from the Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

The opinions expressed in “The People’s Voice” are not necessarily those of Independence, Inc. Mention of any product, service, or event does not constitute any endorsement or recommendation by Independence, Inc.



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Welcome Back Jamie Hardt



Independence, Inc. is excited to welcome Jamie Hardt back to our team. Jamie will serve as our Program Director. In that role, she will be responsible for the supervision of direct service staff, the development of individual services programming, and the provision of services to people with disabilities of all ages. Jamie had previously been employed at Independence, Inc. as a Youth Transition Specialist from 2012 until last September. In addition to her time at Independence, Inc., Jamie has previously worked for the Texas Department of Vocational Rehabilitation and the North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities. We are very glad to have Jamie back on our team and are looking forward to big things in 2015!