



# Independent Living Resources

# Empowerment

Spring 2021

## A Note from the Executive Director

### Moving Forward

Over the course of the past year, as with all businesses, Independent Living Resources has had to make multiple necessary changes to the way that we were able to provide services and resources due to the COVID pandemic. As an Independent Living Center, ILR not only serves people with disabilities but is also mostly staffed by individuals living with a disability. In order to ensure safety for all, it was necessary to significantly restrict face to face services and instead become highly creative in how we delivered services. It was not ideal, and was often challenging and frustrating, but we never lost sight of our goal - continuing to provide effective services and supports. We are happy to report that we have met that goal. Now, we are excited for the next step in the recovery process - reopening for face to face services.

Beginning on March 1<sup>st</sup>, ILR began providing in-person, face to face services once again for all of our programs. We are following CDC, State, and local guidance for our processes to ensure safety for both staff and consumers. Masking, sanitizing, and social distancing are required for all interactions; we are cleaning and sanitizing office spaces after each meeting as well. We can meet with people in the office, at their home, or in the community. Our offices are currently open for meetings by appointment only, so please call ahead (608-787-1111) for an appointment.

Also, we are happy to share that we are in the process of re-opening Recovery Avenue (RAVE) drop-in center to its regular Monday through Friday hours. We are hoping to have Recovery Avenue fully reopened by sometime in May. Masks and social distancing are required, so please be patient - we do still need to limit the number of participants to ensure adequate social distancing. If you have any questions, you can call ahead to Recovery Avenue at 608-785-9615.

Take care,

Sara Eckland

# New Staff Spotlight

ILR would like to welcome several new staff to the organization!



**Name:** Beth Kramer  
**Role at ILR:** Community Liaison

**Educational background:** Human Services Degree from Western Technical College

**One thing that helps you feel at peace:** The beach on the ocean

**A hobby you enjoy:** I LOVE to cook! I'm constantly saving new recipes to try for the family

**Something you are looking forward to in 2021:** Being able to spend time with family and friends after a crazy pandemic year!

**One thing on your bucket list:** Skydive

**Favorite Caffeinated Beverage:** Iced Chai Latte

**Favorite Quote:** "It's never too late to be what you might have been" -George Eliot

**Educational background:** Graduated Elkhorn Area High School in 2008

**One thing that helps you feel at peace:** Singing

**A hobby you enjoy:** Making candles

**Something you are looking forward to in 2021:** Kayaking and camping this summer

**One thing on your bucket list:** Travel to Wales

**Favorite Caffeinated Beverage:** Iced Chai latte

**Favorite Quote:** "Imperfections create character." -Ellen Hopkins



**Name:** Lizz Thomas  
**Role at ILR:** Community Skills Trainer

# Fue's Reflections

## Developing Self-Compassion through work as a Peer Specialist



Image is a headshot of Fue Yang Housing Specialist and Certified Peer Support Specialist at ILR.

Like many who work with people on the daily, I did not always start my day with a reminder that there is only so much I can do in one day. I have learned to recognize I only have seven-and-a-half-hours to make sure that I attend meetings, work on projects, meet with consumers, write notes, and most importantly, stay on my toes about health and safety protocols.

In my role at Independent Living Resources, I provide services to youth and adults of a wide range of disabilities and experiences. Through this work I have grown professionally, and I have had to process the difficulties of navigating systems. I have learned to develop big picture thinking to combat seemingly constant systemic obstacles. It was not always easy to take a step back from a situation that felt immediate and crisis-like. Often

someone's emotional responses, paired with my own emotional reaction to a situation, requires finding balance to provide quality service and support. Finding the balance can be tricky, but it is possible. I am now clearer and more realistic in my own expectations, and more understanding of the need for flexibility. A large part of being a peer support specialist for me is knowing that each situation is unique. I may be with someone at only one stop, multiple stops, or at one stop multiple times on their road map to independence.

I have now found my lane and know that it takes time, and can be difficult for someone to communicate about the barriers they may be facing throughout their day. It is important I listen to understand and consider how that affects a person's independence. I learned to listen and to retract my focus from in the moment situations so that I can see the entire trip. I now also know to take care of myself after a long seven-and-a-half-hour day so that I can start the next day understanding that I still can only do so much in one day.

# Join the ILR Board

**ILR is seeking board members who can help lead our agency promoting: consumer control, inclusion, diversity, and equality in all aspects of society.**

ILR's Board of Directors must be made up of at least 51% of people who have lived experience with a disability. Board members must live or work in our service region comprised of 13 counties (Buffalo, Trempealeau, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Juneau, Vernon, Richland, Sauk, Crawford, Grant, Iowa, and Lafayette)

- ILR has switched to virtual meetings so no travel is necessary
- Applications can be completed online or in paper format
- Interviews with recruitment committee are virtual
- Board orientation is virtual
- Meetings are currently 6-7 times per year on the last Monday of every other month



**Please call Sara at 608-787-1111 to learn more.**

## ABLE Act

**Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act** allows people with disabilities to save for the future while protecting their eligibility for their benefits. The beneficiary has to have a disability determination before the age of 26. A beneficiary or others can put money into an ABLE account and that amount would not be tax deductible and will not be counted as assets towards SSI or Medicaid eligibility. Funds in the ABLE account can be used for Qualified Disability Expenses, expenses that maintain or improve the beneficiaries' health, independence, or quality of life. Total annual contributions to the account may not exceed \$15,000. For SSI purposes the first \$100,000 would be exempt from the \$2,000 individual resource limit.

Wisconsin currently does not have an ABLE program. Eligible individuals in Wisconsin can open an ABLE account in other states. To compare ABLE accounts in other states and to get more information go to [www.ablenrc.org](http://www.ablenrc.org).



# Peer Recovery Conference

## Scholarship Applications

The 6<sup>th</sup> Annual WI Peer Recovery Conference will be held virtually this year **August 18-20, 2021**. You can join online from the device of your choosing from wherever you have access to the Internet. Scholarships are available for Wisconsin peers, or their allies, who require financial assistance to attend the conference. Scholarships cover the full amount of conference registration (\$75). The various breakout sessions and workshops will honor Certified Peer Specialist continuing education requirements. The Conference is funded by Wisconsin DHS—Division of Care and Treatment Services. Keynotes will be announced on the [Conference Website](#) and Wisconsin Peer Recovery Center [Facebook Page](#) in May. For information on scholarships, how to become an exhibitor, or any other information about the conference, please contact the Coordinator Chelsey Myhre-Foster at 608-787-1111 or email [Chelsey.MyhreFoster@ilresources.org](mailto:Chelsey.MyhreFoster@ilresources.org) We hope you can join us!

For more information or to complete a scholarship application visit:

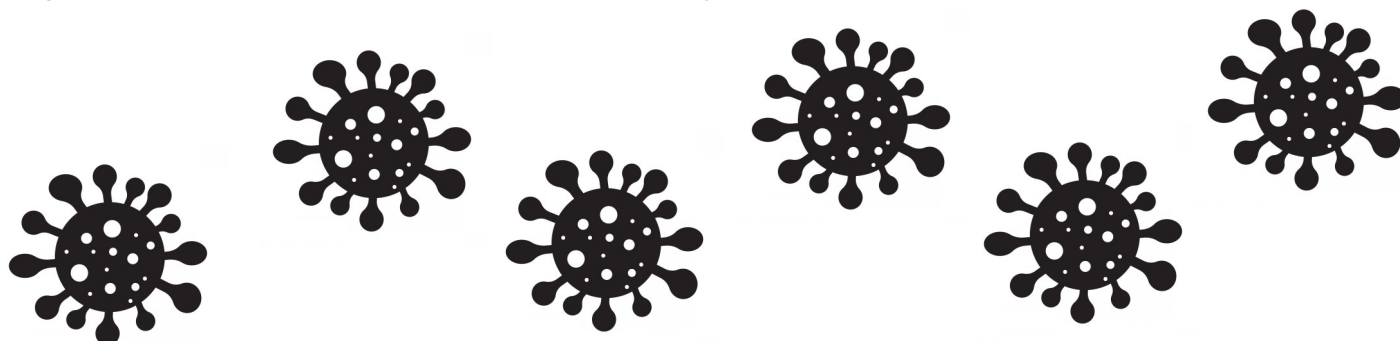
<http://bit.ly/wipeers2021>



# COVID-19 Support

## ILR can assist with COVID-19 Vaccination Navigation

If you are looking to get vaccinated for COVID-19 and are in need of assistance navigating the process in your area you can reach out to ILR at 608-787-1111, or email [advocacy@ilresources.org](mailto:advocacy@ilresources.org) to be connected with a staff member who can support you. You can also find information about the health departments in our service region on our website: [www.ilresources.org](http://www.ilresources.org)



# May is Mental Health Month

The past year has tested both our strength and resiliency. The global pandemic pushed us into situations most of us had never imagined. It comes as no surprise that our mental health was impacted by the stress and changes of the COVID-19 Pandemic. This May we hope to highlight tools and resources that can support the well-being of both individuals and communities.

We recognize the need to combat the stigma surrounding mental health concerns. This Mental Health Month Independent Living Resources is highlighting our version of Mental Health America's **#Tools2Thrive** in various ways including activities like **#LetsChalkAboutMentalHeath** where we will create colorful messages with sidewalk chalk in our community. This activity will include ideas for maintaining or promoting wellness and what individuals can do throughout their daily lives to prioritize mental health, build resiliency, and continue to cope with the obstacles of life during COVID-19 and beyond.

Improving mental health and finding tools that help you thrive can take time. A magnificent change often doesn't happen overnight. By focusing on small steps and changes, you can move through the stressors and develop long-term strategies to support yourself on an ongoing basis.

One possible starting point for a person who is ready to start prioritizing their mental health is to take a mental health screening at [MHAscreening.org](https://MHAscreening.org). It's a quick, free, and confidential way for folks to assess their mental health and begin finding hope and healing.

Ultimately, during this month of May, ILR wants to remind everyone that their mental health experiences are valid, and recovery is possible. By developing your own **#Tools2Thrive**, it is possible to find balance between life's ups and downs and continue to cope with the challenges brought on by the pandemic. We encourage you to join us and together **#LetsChalkAboutMentalHealth**.

For more information, visit ILR's website [www.ilresources.org](https://www.ilresources.org) 608-787-111 or visit Mental Health America at [www.mhanational.org/may](https://www.mhanational.org/may).



# Recovery Avenue

**Recovery Avenue is celebrating Mental Health Month & Grand Re-Opening of the Drop-in Center to full time operating hours this May!**

The Grand re-opening event takes place May 5th from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM, with food served from 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM. All are invited to come join us to celebrate the full time reopening of Recovery Avenue. There will be food, drinks, games and fun for everyone. Call 608-785-9615 with questions. Masking and social distancing will be required. Indoor capacity will also be limited to ensure safety.

The Recovery Avenue Drop-in Center will be open Monday through Friday 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM beginning in May.



## **Important Dates:**

**05/05** 9:00 AM Grand Re-opening until 5:00 PM with food from 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM.

**05/13** 10:00 AM Fishing Trip

**05/24** Mental Health Awareness “Lifting Spirits Week” Mismatch Monday – All are invited to wear a mismatched outfit

**05/25** Mental Health Awareness “Lifting Spirits Week” Team Building Tuesday – All are invited to wear Green for MH Month

**05/26** Mental Health Awareness “Lifting Spirits Week” Wellness Wednesday – All are invited to wear something related to a wellness tool, hobby, or activity that supports your mental health

**05/27** Mental Health Awareness “Lifting Spirits Week” Throwback Thursday – All are invited to wear something related to a decade of your choice.

**05/28** Mental Health Awareness “Lifting Spirits Week” Self-Care Favorite Friday – All are invited to wear comfy clothes, pajamas, or another favorite item.



**Notice of Amtrak  
Claims Fund Under  
the ADA**



Amtrak has entered into a Settlement Agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice to resolve a lawsuit brought under the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”). The Settlement Agreement resolves alleged violations of the ADA.

**If you were harmed by Amtrak’s lack of accessible transportation services between July 27, 2013 and December 2, 2020 you may be eligible to receive payment from a compensation fund established by Amtrak.**

To be eligible for consideration for possible payment, you must submit a claim by May 29, 2021. You may obtain information on how to submit a claim in several ways: (1) by visiting [AmtrakDisabilitySettlement.com](http://AmtrakDisabilitySettlement.com), (2) by sending an email with your name, address, and telephone number to [info@AmtrakDisabilitySettlement.com](mailto:info@AmtrakDisabilitySettlement.com), or (3) by calling the Fund Administrator at (888) 334-6165 or TTY: (866) 411-6976.

A copy of the Settlement Agreement between the U.S. Department of Justice and Amtrak is available at [AmtrakDisabilitySettlement.com](http://AmtrakDisabilitySettlement.com). For further information about the ADA, visit [www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov) or call the Department of Justice’s toll-free ADA Information Line at 1-800-514-0301 (voice) or 1-800-514-0383 (TTY).

*Esta Notificación y otra información están disponibles en español en [AmtrakDisabilitySettlement.com](http://AmtrakDisabilitySettlement.com).*





Assistive Technology (AT) is any product or device that enables people with disabilities to improve their independence and quality of life in the community, at home, at work or at school. Assistive Technology can include, but is not limited to: I-Pads, ergonomic writing utensils, amplified cellphones, computer equipment such as keyboards, monitors, software, screen readers and ergonomic office equipment and furniture. There is truly a piece of AT to fit any of your needs!

ILR also has a Device Loan & Demonstration Program with over 400 Assistive Technology devices that can be loaned out and/or demonstrated by an Independent Living Specialist. If you are interested in receiving more information on this program, or would like to have a demonstration, please contact ILR at 608-787-1111.

For a full list of ILR's inventory of Assistive Technology please visit: [www.wisconsinat4all.com](http://www.wisconsinat4all.com)

## **Wisconsin Telework and WisLoan Programs**

### **Telework**

The Wisconsin Telework Program is a statewide alternative loan program that allows residents with disabilities to purchase computers and other equipment needed to work from home or from other remote sites away from the office, such as work on the road or at a telework center. Telework Loan funds can be used to purchase office equipment such as furniture, computers, printers, software, telecommunication devices and other office machines. Home modifications can also be paid for through the loan to create an accessible home office.

### **Wisloan**

The Wisconsin Wisloan Program is a statewide alternative loan program that allows residents with disabilities to purchase assistive technology and/or make home modifications that help a person with a disability live more independently and productively. Examples of Assistive Technology that would be approved through the program would be wheelchairs and motorized scooters, hearing aids, visual aids and magnifiers, computers with modifications, controls or switches and vehicle modifications.

# TEPP and TAP

## What is the Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program?

TEPP helps people with disabilities buy equipment they need in order to use basic telephone services. TEPP is paid for by the Wisconsin Universal Service Fund (USF) established by the Public Service Commission. Money is collected from Wisconsin telephone service providers to fund the USF. There is no age or income limit, but an individual can only get a TEPP voucher once every three years for the same type of disability.



### TEPP requires that an applicant:

- Be a Wisconsin resident.
- Be a person who is deaf, hard of hearing, speech impaired, or mobility or motion impaired.
- Needs special equipment to use the telephone in the home or when traveling.



### **How much do I have to pay?**

You pay the first \$100 (except for Hard of Hearing vouchers). The voucher pays the rest, up to the maximum voucher amount. If you buy equipment that costs more than the voucher plus your \$100, you also pay the extra charges.

### **What if I can't afford the \$100?**

The Telecommunication Assistance Program (TAP) may be able to pay the \$100. TAP is a program of the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. TAP is only for persons who are deaf or severely hard of hearing in a low income household. TAP funds pay the \$100 TEPP co-payment, if you qualify.



If you are interested in the TEPP or TAP program, contact ILR today to begin the process and receive a demonstration of eligible equipment for the TEPP Voucher!

## **Independent Living Resources, Inc. Core Services:**

**Information & Referral:** ILR provides information about disability-related resources and services to people with disabilities, families, professionals and the general public. Staff are available to listen and assist with locating resources and developing strategies for individuals to resolve barriers such as: housing issues, transportation, employment, accessibility, discrimination and legal rights, adaptive equipment, and community supports and services. The Information & Referral process is the gateway into other services at ILR.

**Independent Living Skills Training:** Independent Living Staff provides one-on-one skills training to overcome individualized disability-related barriers. Acquired skills include any life skill needed to become or remain independent. Skills training can be provided in the community, at home, and/or in the best possible setting for meeting the goals of the individual with a disability.

**Individual & Systems Advocacy:** ILR works with individuals with disabilities to provide support and guidance related to individual and systems advocacy. Self advocacy is about having the personal confidence to dictate individualized needs and wants. Systems Advocacy is looking at impacts that can be made at a local, state or national level. Independent Living Specialists can teach self-advocacy skills and help individuals develop strong advocacy skills so that they are able to make individual or system-wide impacts.

**Peer Support:** Peer Support is working with someone who has already been through a similar path as you and is willing to help guide you through the resources and support needed to accomplish your goals. Peer support is really the philosophy of "someone who has 'been there, done that - let me offer guidance and support." ILR offers peer support in a number of different ways: through day-to-day interactions with staff who have disabilities themselves, or through a Certified Peer Support Specialist.

**Transition Services:** ILR will facilitate the transitions of individuals with disabilities from nursing homes to home or community based living, provide assistance to those at risk of entering institutions so they may remain in the community, or facilitate the transition from school to post-secondary life, including work.

**Additional Services:** ILR also provides Benefits Counseling and Employment Services (SSI and SSDI), Assistive Technology assessments and training, Public Education, Mental Health First Aid, Soft Skills Training, Housing/Homelessness assistance, Home Modification assessments, and Home Safety assessments.



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La Crosse, WI 54601

## Contact Us

### ILR—La Crosse

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(888) 474-5745 Toll free

(888) 387-2198 Toll free TTY

### ILR—Richland Center

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Richland Center, WI 53581

(608) 787-1111 Phone

Email:

[advocacy@ilresources.org](mailto:advocacy@ilresources.org)

Website:

[www.ilresources.org](http://www.ilresources.org)



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## ILR Board of Directors

Michael Sersch: President

Marilyn Martin: Vice President

Janine Garvin: Treasurer/Secretary

Susan Bramwell

John Davis

Lucas Herro

Amy Dummer

Looking for board members now.

See pg. 4 for more info.

**For your convenience, this newsletter is available in audio tape, braille, large print, e-mail, computer disc format, or on our website in text version. Let us know your particular format needs and we will make a copy for you accordingly.**