



Independent Living Resources

Empowerment

Fall/Winter 2021

Hello All,

I am happy to introduce myself as the new Assistant Director for Independent Living Resources. I recently joined the ILR team on June 28th, 2021. Although I am new to the non-profit world, I am passionate about the Independent Living philosophy that Independent Living Centers, like ILR, embody and the mission they represent. I am very excited to learn and grow in this new journey!

Prior to this role, I was a Program Director for the Rehabilitation Department within a skilled nursing facility. I was responsible for day-to-day operations as well as providing therapy services for residents on my caseload as an Occupational Therapy practitioner. Occupational Therapy was the gateway to recognizing my passion for empowering others in achieving the highest quality of life through achievement of independence and person-centered goals.



Throughout my Occupational Therapy Assistant career, I have gathered experience working with individuals of all abilities in various settings and populations including pediatrics, physical medicine, mental health, veterans, and geriatrics. During this time, my desire to advocate for the right to person-centered care and access grew. Along with my educational background, I also gained insight and experience from my military career as a sergeant in the Wisconsin Army National Guard for 8 years. Paired together, I decided to transition from healthcare to utilize my knowledge and experiences gained and apply it within the Independent Living Community, where I can continue to advocate, grow, and serve others.

Outside of the office you can find me outdoors or in my craft room. I reside in the La Crosse area, in a house my fiancé and I purchased in 2017. We have three large, rescue dogs that we love to spend time with. We also enjoy hiking, traveling, kayaking, and DIY projects on our home. I enjoy learning and very excited for this new opportunity!

Sincerely,

LaRae Tessman

A Letter from our Executive Director



REACH Service and Resource Center opens in La Crosse

As a consumer driven organization, ILR strives to make certain that the services that are being provided are meeting the needs of the people that we are serving. Over the course of the last decade, ILR has seen a steady increase in requests for helping people to find and maintain safe, affordable, sustainable housing. In addition to providing one to one support for individuals as they work on their housing goals, ILR has worked to partner with other community organizations throughout our service region to work on ways to help people access necessary services as easily as possible. ILR staff frequently hear that it can be challenging to navigate the multiple programs necessary to receive help with finding long term, sustainable housing.

In early 2021, ILR partnered with several other community agencies who were working with the YWCA to submit a grant application for a federally funded COVID Relief grant for an innovative housing resource center. These agencies included Couleecap, Catholic Charities, and The Salvation Army. The concept of the resource center was straightforward- to bring as many housing organizations as possible together under one roof to ensure that people who were unsheltered or in need of housing assistance in our community had to only go through one door to begin receiving necessary services. This dream came to fruition in October when the REACH Service and Resource Center opened its doors 212 11th Street South in La Crosse after many months of planning. The agencies continue to develop and expand partnerships with local organizations in order to expand the impact of REACH.

Since REACH's opening, ILR has had Homeless Street Outreach staff available each weekday at the building. Street Outreach staff are available to help people who are unsheltered begin making all the necessary community and resource connections to begin the process for finding housing. This can include assistance with accessing emergency shelter, help with applying for necessary benefits such as Food Share or Badgercare, support in finding warm winter clothing and transportation options, etc. To receive assistance from the Outreach Team, you can contact them at ILR at 608-787-1111, via our website at www.ilresources.org, or stop in to REACH weekdays from 8 am to 4 pm.

Sara Eckland

Kathie Knoble-Iverson has Retired!

After 27 years as ILR's Executive Director, Kathie Knoble-Iverson has left the agency for a well-deserved retirement. Kathie stepped down as Executive Director in January but stayed on with the agency to offer support until a new Assistant Director was hired. Kathie fully retired in June.

Kathie's long-term direction and commitment to the agency has had a lasting impact on people with disabilities, both across our service region and across the state. Under Kathie's



leadership, ILR grew from a handful of staff in 1994 to a bustling organization with more than 30 employees by the beginning of 2020. Kathie's leadership during the early days of the pandemic helped ensure that ILR remained viable as an organization and helped the agency to move quickly towards a recovery plan. Kathie's tireless work to form community collaborations and partnerships helped expand the services and supports that ILR could offer, including her work to help establish and expand the utilization of certified peer specialists in the State of Wisconsin. Her work continues to benefit people with disabilities across Wisconsin.

Enjoy retirement Kathie!

Accessibility

Just a reminder that as the weather gets colder and the snow begins to fall, please keep in mind those that may have a more difficult time when traveling outside. Be sure to keep your sidewalks shoveled and corners cleared to allow for all to be able to access and navigate all that our area has to offer!



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.



SSI Increase

Approximately 70 million Americans will see a 5.9% increase in their Social Security benefits and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments in 2022. Federal benefit rates increase when the cost-of-living rises, as measured by the Department of Labor's Consumer Price Index (CPI-W).

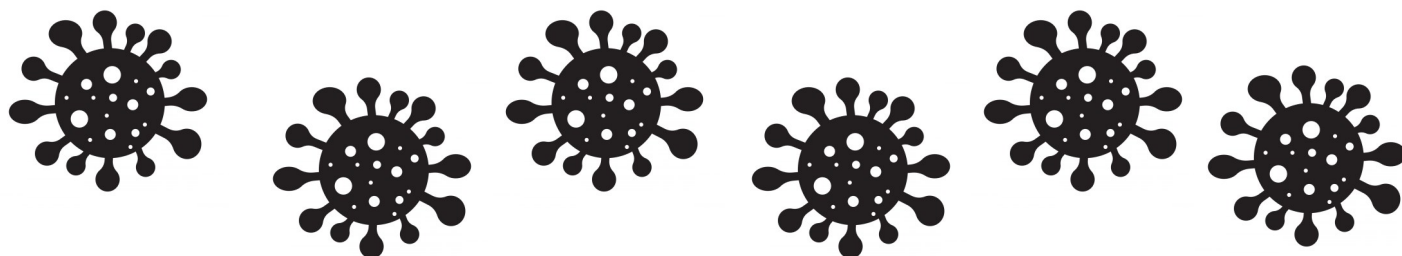
The SSA will mail cost of living adjustment (COLA) notices throughout the month of December to retirement, survivors, and disability beneficiaries, SSI recipients, and representative payees. But, if you want to know your new benefit amount sooner, you can securely obtain your Social Security COLA notice online using the Message Center in your *My Social Security* account. You can access this information in early December prior to the mailed notice.

If you have any questions, feel free to call Independent Living Resources at 608-787-1111.

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 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



Peer Recovery Conference



The 6th Annual Peer Recovery Conference (August 18-20, 2021) is officially in the books. The 2021 Peer Recovery Conference was held virtually for the second year in a row due to COVID-19 restrictions. Even though we were not able to meet in-person, our attendance of 340 people was a record number of attendees. 24 workshops were offered, which provided the Certified Peer Specialists in attendance a chance to earn continuing education credits. Also featured was a virtual exhibit booth page and two early morning facilitated networking sessions.

Unique to the conference this year was an opening ceremony which featured members of the Ojibwe Lac Courte Oreilles tribe in northern Wisconsin. Michelle Haskins provided an invocation and Michael Migizi Sullivan performed an Ojibwe welcome song in the round dance fashion.

Following the opening ceremony, our first keynote speaker, Tracy Littlejohn of the Ho Chunk Nation, provided the first keynote titled 'Intergenerational Trauma: How the Past Hurts the Present.'

Day two of the conference kicked off with keynote speakers Tanya Kraege and Skye Boughman talking on 'Healing Community-Wide Grief: Addressing Grief in the Age of Opioid, Suicide, and COVID Crises.' After a full day of workshop offerings, Disability Rights Wisconsin hosted a Mental Health Advocacy Assistance Information and Listening Session, which was an optional event for the conference attendees.

Day three of the conference started out with more workshop offerings and concluded with our third keynote Stefanie Lyn-Kaufman Mthimkhulu, speaking on 'We Keep Us Safe: An Abolitionist and Disability Justice Approach to Peer Support.'

The 7th Annual Wisconsin Peer Recovery conference will be held in-person **August 18-19, 2022** at the Madison Marriott West Hotel and Conference Center, so put it in your calendars now and we hope to see you there!

If you would like to be on the 2022 Conference Planning Committee or have an idea for a presentation or key note speaker, please reach out to Nicole Ravens at:

nicole.ravens@ilresources.org.

Richland Center Office

Happy Fall from Independent Living Resources in Richland Center. Our office is as busy as ever providing information and referral, independent living skills training, peer support, individual and systems advocacy, and transition services to individuals in Crawford, Grant, Iowa, Juneau, Lafayette, Monroe, Richland and Sauk Counties. We are very happy to be providing services in person or in a virtual format with a scheduled appointment. We are also very excited to introduce our newest employee, Melissa Touche.

We are thrilled once again to be participating in the Richland County Communities on Transition (CCoT). CCoTs include a group of stakeholders who have made the commitment to collaborate around identifying barriers to transition planning, to organize the supports needed and to develop solutions for youth with disabilities in the local county they serve. This service is essential to assist in pathways for youth to explore employment, training, post-secondary education, and engage in skills to be independent in their home and community while building self-advocacy skills. Stakeholders include Independent Living Centers, School Districts, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, ADRC, youth, family members or guardians, business members, adult long-term care organizations, and Children's Long Term Supports. If you or anyone you know would like more information on the CCoT services available in your county, reach out to ILR!

Independent Living Resources, Richland Center location recently participated in Elderfest 2021, a senior health and wellness fair. The fair is an educational opportunity for southwestern Wisconsinites living with barriers involving aging and disability. Area businesses that provide valuable services to this ever-growing population prepared informational goodie bags that were included in a larger, resource bag available to all drive through participants. Volunteers saw 394 cars come through and provided 473 bags to people from 39 different zip codes in the free Halloween-themed drive through event that took place at the Grant County Fair Grounds on Oct 22nd.

Independent Living Resources serves the following counties:

**Buffalo, Trempealeau, Jackson, La Crosse,
Monroe, Juneau, Vernon, Crawford,
Richland, Sauk, Lafayette, Iowa, and Grant.**



Upcoming Awareness Events

DECEMBER

- World AIDS Day (December 1st)
- International Day of Persons with Disabilities (Dec.3rd)
- Human Rights Day (Dec. 10th)

JANUARY

- National Blood Donor Month
- National Birth Defects Prevention Month
- International Mind-Body Wellness Day (Jan. 3rd)

FEBRUARY

- American Heart Month
- Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month
- Black History Month



From all of us at Independent Living Resources!



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

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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ILR Board of Directors

Michael Sersch: President

Marilyn Martin: Vice President

Janine Garvin: Treasurer/Secretary

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.



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