

# *the* Independent

A Publication of Freedom Resource  
Center for Independent Living, Inc.

April 2015

## Mary Smith



Mary Smith

Flood, fire, earthquakes, tornados, and windstorm; all of these natural disasters are frequent nationwide. Nonetheless, often it is only after first-hand exposure to a natural disaster that someone realizes preventive training is needed. Mary Smith, 68, was born in Lisbon but grew up in Jamestown because she attended the Anne Carlsen Center. In describing the instilled mindset at Anne Carlsen she stated, "attitudinal barriers were inexistent."

In 1976, President Jimmy Carter convened a conference at the White House about policies for people with disabilities, and she went as an alternate delegate of North Dakota. Eventually, most of the policies ended up in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Mary moved to Oakland, California, in 1987 where she was a graduate intern at the World Institute on Disability. "I got to meet the movers and shakers of the Independent Living movement," said Mary. She described numerous encounters she had while living in California with famous activists like Ed Roberts, father of the disability rights movement; and Judith Heumann, an internationally-recognized leader in the disability community. When asked why she started being an activist she said, "I felt that decisions were made to you, for you, but without my input."

In 1989, Mary experienced her first earthquake in Oakland and then in 1991 an urban fire occurred in the vicinity of her neighborhood. "After that I thought you have to take this preparedness seriously," she recalls. Indeed, anyone living in a region where natural disasters are frequent should be prepared at all times. Now imagine Mary, who has arthrogryposis multiplex congenital and using a wheelchair. She felt she ought to take the disaster planning training in order to face any other arising natural disaster with maximum preparedness.

***"My whole life isn't about the Disability. I love the arts, dance; In California I learned how to sail and to camp by myself," she stated. Mary prefers people-first language, and said it's better to refer to her as Mary the humorous rather than the wheelchair-bound lady.***

Two years ago when she moved back to Jamestown, she looked in the yellow pages for services that different organizations had to offer and was interested in Freedom Resource Center. Mary and Beth Dewald, Independent Living Advocate, have a lot of friends in common within the Jamestown community. Therefore Beth was able to approach Mary for an opportunity to co-teach and facilitate April's Freedom in Action Disaster Planning and Preparedness for People with Disabilities class. "I'm just glad that Freedom Resource Center is available and I look to further collaboration," said Mary, regarding Freedom's services in the community.

Do you want to learn how to be self-sufficient for one week without any external aid? Do you have an adequate personal kit for your special needs? Have you identified someone in your neighborhood to buddy up with in case of a disaster? For more information call Beth at 701-252-4693.

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# INSIDE

# Freedom's Top Volunteers

April is the National Volunteer Month. At Freedom Resource Center we are forever grateful for all the volunteers we are fortunate to have. All the effort and time they devote to Freedom make a tangible impact in the different communities where they operate.

Whenever entering Freedom's main office in Fargo, one cannot avoid crossing paths with our top volunteers, Sherry and Keith Bjornson. This sexagenarian dynamic duo lives in Fargo and have seen Freedom Resource Center's evolution from the beginning with Ron Sandness, the first Executive Director and a friend of theirs, to present time.

Sherry was born with cerebral palsy and Keith broke his neck in 1970 while diving into a lake. In 1978 they met each other at New Horizons Manor, the Fargo Housing & Redevelopment Authority accessible housing community. They were married in October 1978.

Sherry worked briefly for Blue Cross/Blue



Keith and Sherry Bjornson

Shield before moving with Keith to Hawley in 1979. Keith was able to provide for the family with his federal Small Business Administration occupation for the next three decades until he retired.

In 1981, Keith received the top 10 outstanding Minnesotans Award and in 1985 the top 10 federal employees Award. These empowering awards symbolized a lot to Keith and Sherry because in their own words "society and family have low expectations for the people with disabilities." Keith drives an accessible van and this is a true symbol of independent living and it inspires others who were falsely told that

"disabled" means dependent.

They were denied child adoption because of their disability. Therefore they opted for being foster parents, but they kept on persisting to be granted the rights to adopt. In 1994 Tim, a 19-month-old baby, was placed with them temporarily. In 1995, when the opportunity of adopting Tim was introduced to them they seized it without hesitating. Finally their resiliency had paid off.

Keith is an active board member of Freedom Resource Center. Since he retired from his 35-year career, he was now able to devote, with his supportive wife, more hours in volunteering. When asked where they found all this energy and time to volunteer they said, "We believe in the purpose of Freedom. Great things are done here and a lot of people can benefit from it." Sherry then added, "We enjoy being part of it!"

Do you know a volunteer who is paying it forward and giving back to the community? If you do, it is time to acknowledge their exemplary actions. We here at Freedom Resource Center recognize all you devoted yet humble volunteers who are making a difference!

## EYI

### Wahpeton: Nourishing Boomers and Beyond

Nourish your eyes on April 16th & Manage Stress on April 30th

Time: 1:00-3:00 pm

Place: Community Room

Free class to all and will continue through August.

Call Joyce at 701-672-1648

### Fargo:

#### Living Well 103: Vocation

Dates: Tuesdays for 8 weeks beginning April 21, 2015 (class will not meet on Tuesday, May 5)

Time: 1:30-3:30 pm

Place: Freedom Resource Center

Class Limited to 15 participants.

Call Cindy at 701-478-0459 to confirm your spot.

### Fargo:

#### Health Care Directives & Power of Attorney

Date: April 30th

Time: 1:30-3:30 pm

Place: Freedom Resource Center

Call Cindy at 701-478-0459 to sign up

### Detroit Lakes:

#### Making Rain sticks

Date: April 30th

Time: 1:00-3:00 pm

Place: 808 Washington Ave. Ste. 11

Class limited to 10. Call Tanya at 218-844-5884

### Jamestown:

#### Schemes, Scams & Flim-Flams

Date: May 15th

Time: 2:00 pm-3:00 pm

Place: James River Senior Center 419 5th St NE

Call Beth for details & to RSVP at 701-252-4693

## What's Wrong With This Picture?



Does this picture really need an explanation? Perhaps the good points should be discussed and the obvious should be ignored. When a wall mount toilet is used, the 2010 Standards call for a 60" wide and 59" deep stall. The grab bar behind the toilet should extend 12" from the center of the toilet toward the closest side wall and 24" from the center of the toilet to the open side. The toilet paper is to be 7" – 9" from the front of the toilet and between 15" and 48" above the floor. This stall appears to meet or exceed the standards in those cases. The Standards do not say that the toilet paper should be on the wall closest to the toilet.

## From Where I Sit



*Nate Aalgaard, Executive Director*

I was talking with a colleague today and he was telling me how he was flying to Virginia Beach the next day. He relayed telling a co-worker how much he hated flying, with the cramped seating, the flight delays and transfers, etc. She reminded him that he was going TO VIRGINIA BEACH. Then it struck him; that's a pretty good deal—trading cold, snowy, windy North Dakota for an Atlantic vacation spot this time of year. And even better, his work was paying for it.

How often do we get caught in this trap of looking at the negative instead of the positive. I know I do. Maybe it comes from watching too much TV news. Plenty of negativity there. I've been telling people all the things that have gone wrong for me in the past few weeks. My van went down, wheelchair stopped

working while I was in Bismarck, my smoke alarm malfunctioned. The list could go on and on.

Just imagine if I reframed this and emphasized that even though I had to call a tow truck to start my van, I got over to Bert's Mobility and Steve had a new computer for my ramp and I was back on the road within an hour. My chair problem was fixed within an hour by Paul over at Healthcare Accessories. I called my attendant, Kirstin, and she was over in about 15 minutes to deal with the smoke alarm. So how about I be thankful for the people and services I have at my disposal? I think I'll try that.

This is the last newsletter Freedom will publish before our annual Appreciation Luncheon. That day is always one of my favorite days of the year. There's nothing like hearing and seeing the response of some of the people who receive recognition at this event. It is our opportunity to formally say "thank you" to those people who help us accomplish our mission. We do this because it's important to step back once in a while and appreciate what we have accomplished. This work isn't always easy or popular.

I joke with my coworkers that it's the best when someone cries; not from sadness, but because they are so happy. Even the presenters, usually Freedom staff, get emotional. I remember one year when a couple of young guys from Jamestown got the Volunteer of the Year award. It was like

they'd won the Oscar. They thanked their friends, their moms and dads. It was priceless.

Last year a young man from Fargo, Logan Broad, received the youth advocate award. At first he didn't want to go up to the mic and say anything. But after he thought it over for a bit, up he went. He thanked his parents for their support. He made special mention of his teacher, Ruth Carnal. He made quite an impact.

Also last year, one of the best lines ever was delivered by Dean Larsen, the manager of the Dilworth Pizza Ranch. He said he felt sorry for employers who don't hire people with disabilities. In receiving an accessibility award a few years ago, Monte Jones said that providing accessibility is just part of providing great service, and it should go without saying.

Almost every retiring board member has expressed their gratitude for being able to serve such a great organization. I am so thankful for that board who hired me over 19 years ago, and all the people since who have freely given of their time and talent to help me move this organization forward.

So here it comes again—Freedom's Appreciation Luncheon. It's May 5 from noon to 1:30 pm. A couple attendees last year told me, at another very nice awards event, that ours was better and we should charge more. That's very gratifying to hear. So come and check it out. Who knows, you might even get a good cry out of it.

## A Call for Artists

The third annual Art of Freedom will be held in the Fall therefore take advantage of this marvelous opportunity to showcase your artistic talents with the community. Remember that before being a person with a disability you are an artist with a dream! Call Freedom to register for the show.

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more independently for 25 years”*

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& click



## Welcome to the Family!

Over this past month Freedom has hired two new staff to join our team.  
Join us in welcoming Deb Nelson and Jana Lefor to the Freedom Resource Center family!



*Deb Nelson*

After a few weeks of part-time operations, Freedom's Fergus Falls office is now back to full time. Deb joins our staff as an Independent Living Advocate in the Fergus Falls office. Deb will assist people with disabilities to become more independent through Freedom's core services. What's more, Deb anticipates fostering relationships within her community to ensure a sustainable support system. Deb has a history of advocating for independence. Prior to

Freedom, Deb worked with Section 8 housing, Catholic Charities, served on the board of Northwest Legal Services, and has been a Legal and Women's advocate.

Born and raised in central North Dakota, Deb moved to Fergus Falls 30 years ago. She and her husband Nate have been married for 24 years and enjoy riding their Harley Davidson in their spare time. "This is my dream job. It is what I was made for; empowering people to find the freedom," Nelson said. "They all have abilities, but they don't always fit the established societal norm. I have trust in the people here at Freedom because we share the same beliefs and goals of people living independently."

Deb plans to use her knowledge of the community and natural interest in helping people to build a strong presence for Freedom in Fergus Falls. She has been introducing herself to area agencies, and participated in the Family Expo on April 11.



*Jana Lefor*

Jana joins us in the role of Nursing Facility Transition Coordinator in Fargo. "We challenge the norms of society by assisting individuals out of the nursing homes instead of keeping them institutionalized," stated Jana in describing her role at Freedom. She will be helping people achieve their goals and watching them live successfully in the community. She is looking forward to interacting with a wide variety of people. Prior to Freedom, Jana worked at Prairie

St. John's doing outreach and business development. While attending MSU-M she worked at Sanford's walk-in clinic doing registrations at the front desk. Jana was born and raised in Fargo. In 2014 Jana got her social work degree at MSU-M on May 16, married Jason Lefor on August 23, and received her Social Work licensure in the same month. During her collegiate years she was the vice-president of the Dragon School of Social Work Club and volunteered at Churches United, the food pantry in Moorhead, and the Second Chance Job Fair. Jana has a strong passion for bettering the lives of people in her community. In her spare time Jana enjoys spending quality time with family, going to the lakes when it is finally nice out and foremost "having my baby boy who is due on May 11, but at this point it could happen anytime!" she said. "Freedom is opportunities for individuals who may be overlooked somewhere else."