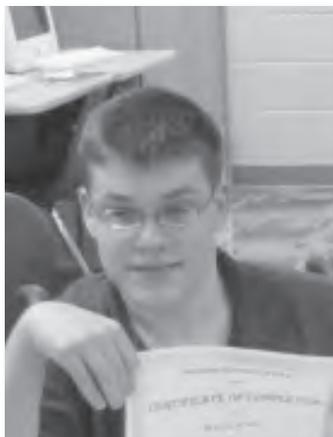


the Independent

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

October 2014

Finding the Light and Independence



Marcus Krebs

You may remember Marcus Krebs from the 2014 April edition of the Independent (Gaining the Skills to Pay the Bills) where we explored youth transition to employment. Since that time, Marcus has taken additional steps to further his independence including a trip to Duluth's Lighthouse for the Blind. We caught up with Marcus to talk about his trip and discuss his future goals.

According to its website, the Duluth Lighthouse for the Blind works to keep individuals with visual impairments living as independently as possible at home, through the use of technology and simple, but effective, lifestyle tools. "It was a very

intense two weeks in Duluth full of activities and hands on learning," Marcus commented "but I was very open to new challenges."

Providing specialty services to people with visual impairments often times require planning and a distant travel. "We chose to attend the Lighthouse because of their specialty in helping people with visual impairments." Marcus' mom, Barb, told us. Marcus lives with cerebral palsy which has impaired his vision.

"I didn't realize how many things my mom did for me that I can do for myself."

Their time spent in Duluth gave Marcus the opportunity for real world experiences when it came to employment and transportation. "I spent time working at Choice Unlimited where I worked the copier and the phones." Marcus continued, "At St. Luke's Hospital where I worked with linens and placing silverware. I also had the chance to work in a nursing home clearing tables and packaging cookies."

Returning back to the Fergus Falls area, Marcus attends Kennedy School three days a week where he runs a paper shredding business. He says the most difficult part of the job is finding a time for pick up with various teacher's schedules.

As they move forward, Marcus is confident things will continue to go well. "After my time at the Lighthouse, I didn't realize how many things my mom did for me that I can do for myself." Marcus continued. "I want to get out in the community and learn more."

Asked about his goals for the upcoming year, Marcus said he'd like to continue to work on his independent skills and find employment. He would enjoy to work in the food industry or with games and videos. Marcus and his family plan to attend more intensive training next year at the Lighthouse in Duluth.



Lighthouse Center in Duluth

Until Marcus and his family return to Duluth, Freedom Resource Center looks forward to partnering with Marcus to help promote his independence. Freedom Resource Center will be able to help teach the ropes of the local transportation system in the Fergus Falls and surrounding areas as well as teach the soft skills needed for steady, reliable employment that Marcus seeks.

What's

- They
- Work Incentives and Social Security Disability
- Trunk or Treat
- What's Wrong With This Picture?

INSIDE

They



By Jerry Christianson

First, a small disclaimer. I know some of the grammar in the following paragraphs is incorrect. "They" is a plural word, but often the grammar used treats "they" as

if they is singular. Keep in mind, I am using 'they' as if it were someone's name.

They, we need to find out who they is. Often times as I am talking with folks I know or listening to a conversation among a group of people, they is the main topic of discussion. Rarely is anything good said about they. The heritage of they is often questioned with words much, much worse than, "Dumb Norwegian". They either didn't do something that the speakers figure they should have done, or they did something the speakers figure is the stupidest thing in the world to do. Somehow they have entered into the lives of these folks and they cause a lot of problems.

Example #1: A conversation I heard last winter had to do with a car crash in which 'Sara' had rear ended a car that stopped in front of her. Sara was telling how she had explained to the Deputy that responded to the crash that is wasn't her fault that she ran into the car ahead of them, "They hadn't put salt on the road, so the road was icy. Then they stopped so quickly that I couldn't stop before I hit them."

Example #2: One morning at coffee I listened as 'Bill' described his trip to work. He said, "They made me late for work yesterday and then they yelled at me when I got to work. They still haven't gotten that mess on 25th Street done. They made me wait as they drove cement trucks in and out. After I got past that mess then they were only driving 30mph. (Note: The speed limit on the road being talked about is 30mph.) Don't they know that some of us have to get places on time? Why do they always screw up my roads? By the time I got to work, they had me so worked up that I couldn't even think straight." Bill's complaints went on for

the rest of our coffee break.

When conversations are about they, listen closely. Is the speaker trying to blame they to escape personal responsibility? We all find it easier to blame someone else than to accept that we could change to make our lives simpler, easier and happier. In the examples above 'Bill' and 'Sara' could remove a large amount of their frustration by leaving home a few minutes earlier and reducing their "rushed" feeling. "Bill" could chose a different route to work to avoid the traffic snarl that he knows is happening at 25th Street.

We all (yes, even I!) need to consider what they are doing to make our lives unpleasant. We need to empower ourselves by asking, "What can I do to make the situation better?" If we can't change the situation, then we have to learn how to change our response to the situation.

Thanks for reading my rant,

Jerry Christiansen

EYI

Making Healthy Choices when Learning to Prepare Food

Freedom in Action

When: Friday, October 31st

Time: 11:30am to 1:00pm

Where: Cass County Annex, 1010 2nd Ave. S. Fargo, ND 58103

RSVP to Cindy at 701-478-0459

Cooking 101

Freedom in Action

When: October 28, November 4, 25, December 2, 9

Time: 1:00pm to 3:00pm

Where: Community Room, Law Enforcement Center, 413 3rd Ave. N. Wahpeton, ND

RSVP to Joyce at 701-672-1648

Service Animals and Disability Laws

Free training on disability laws

Where: TRAC Center, 207 5th St. S. Wahpeton

When: October 28th

Time: 9:00am to 11:30am

Register at 701-672-1648 or email joycew@freedomrc.org

Trunk or Treat



Freedom staff and volunteers at Trunk or Treat

Freedom participated in Trunk or Treat, an event held to remove barriers for children while participating in Halloween traditions.

Work Incentives and Social Security Disability

October is Disability Employment Awareness month. We hear from many individuals who say they would like to work but are afraid to lose their Social Security benefits they rely on. Below is a breakdown of work incentives to help people get back to work without losing their benefits.

Both the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs have work incentives. These are special rules that offer you an advantage when you work. Each program has specific rules when it comes to working and receiving benefits. It is important to know whether you receive SSI, SSDI, or both.

Social Security wants you to increase your income by working, so they count only a portion of your earnings in calculating your monthly SSI payment. The first \$65 of earnings is not counted, and then your SSI check is reduced by \$1 for every \$2 you earn. Thanks to this formula, people on SSI are almost always better off working.

Social Security offers several work incentives. These incentives allow you to receive your cash benefits and keep your Medicare coverage as you try out working. For example, the Impairment Related Work Expense (IRWE) is a work incentive available to individuals who receive SSDI and/or SSI. An IRWE allows certain expenses, necessary to go to work, to be disregarded from the amount of earnings counted by Social Security Administration (SSA).

An IRWE can help you if you receive

Supplemental Security Income (SSI), your SSI check is gradually reduced as your earnings increase. The amount of an approved IRWE is deducted from the earnings counted by SSA, giving you a higher SSI check than you would otherwise receive.

The Trial Work Period (TWP) is a 9-month period, which allows you to test your ability to work. When in your TWP, you can earn significant income and continue to receive an SSDI payment. This is especially helpful for people who want to return to work full time, but are not sure if they can. When you first return to work, you enter the Trial Work Period when you earn a minimum of \$770 per month (2014 limit). Each month you earn above the Trial Work limit that was in effect during the year you worked counts as one Trial Work month. If you earn less than the Trial Work limit, the month does not count toward your nine Trial Work months. Trial Work months do not have to be consecutive. The Trial Work Period ends when you complete nine Trial Work months within a 60-month period. During the Trial Work Period, you continue to receive your full SSDI payment each month.

Expedited Reinstatement (EXR) allows people whose Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits ended because of their earnings to have those benefits restarted without having to file a completely new application. The purpose is to encourage people to work more by removing fears that they won't be able to access Social Security again if their situation changes.

In addition to work incentives for people receiving disability benefits, there are also tax incentives for people with disabilities who work. The Federal Earned Income Tax Credit can reduce taxes for low income workers. If you live in Minnesota and qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit on your federal taxes, you can also claim the Minnesota Working Family Tax credit on your state taxes.

To learn more about these programs and the benefits of going back to work, contact Freedom Resource Center at 1-800-450-0459.

In the Community



Jamestown staff visit with parents.



Learning about voter rights.

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If you would like to be removed from our mailing list please call 1-800-450-0459.

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***The Mission of
Freedom Resource Center for
Independent Living is to work
toward equality and inclusion for
people with disabilities through
programs of empowerment,
community education and
systems change.***

***We envision a society where ALL
individuals are valued, respected
and have equal opportunity,
access, responsibility,
and freedom of choice in
all aspects of life.***

What’s Wrong With This Picture?



Answer: There is a step to enter this restroom.