

Moving Forward With High Hopes

By Mike Winge

Imagine a culture where everyone gives back to their communities. Imagine a place where everyone has what they need and no one is struggling. Imagine a person who has the attitude to stay committed to those that are in need, even after suffering a terrible loss.

Cheri Lamba, 41, and mother of four is someone who comes to mind. Cheri, like many, has gone through some difficult times. She and her family moved several times throughout the years, finally making the move from Wahpeton to the Fargo/Moorhead area. She spoke with Joyce Wolter while she was in Wahpeton about services that Freedom offers and worked with her for several months. After her move to Fargo, she began working with Diane, an independent living advocate in our Fargo office. Cheri spoke highly of Diane. "Whenever I am not sure where to turn, Diane is always there to point me in the right direction," she said.

When she left her husband, she had nowhere to go and found herself homeless. She stayed in shelters and did everything she could to get back on her feet. This went on for many months while she was working to better her situation and her health. Finally, with the help of many friends and support from Freedom she was able to find an affordable apartment. Since her first goal was complete she immediately started looking for work. This was a tough time for a month or two until she finally found a position in a food establishment close to her home. She has been working there for over a month now. After her divorce she has not been able to see her children as often as she would like and is now working on establishing more frequent visitation times with them.

Cheri had a traumatic experience on April 21, 2006 when her oldest son, Andre, passed due to an unexpected medical phenomenon. This threw Cheri into a spiral of emotions that she did not know how to handle for quite some time. She grieved for months

and realized that she needed to move forward and stay strong for her sons.

Years later when she came to Freedom for guidance, she had found ways to break through this wall of PTSD and wanted to help others who were dealing with similar issues. This is when Cheri decided to become a peer mentor. "If I have a little bit to give, even if it was a penny off the street, I would do it. It helps me because when I needed so much it was people in our community who were there for me, and I realized when I got back up I needed to give back," she said.



Cheri and Barb

Barb Mason was also someone who had been dealing with PTSD from the loss of her son. Justin Kietzman, our Peer Mentoring Specialist here at Freedom, chose Cheri to mentor Barb because she was having a really tough time with her recent loss. Barb spoke about her feelings: "I was at a loss and didn't know what to do. I am very thankful that Cheri has been here for me during this difficult time and am coping well thanks to our time together."

Cheri has been dealing with her emotions over the loss of her son for many years now and is farther along in her grieving process. She has learned skills and techniques over the years to cope with her grief. Due to this element of time and practice she is able to give Barb direction when she struggles with how to deal with her grieving, something that is still taking a toll on her. Cheri says that getting together once a month or more allows them to keep each other on track and organized. What makes her such a great peer mentor can be summed up with her statement, "I don't like to be judged, so I don't judge anybody."

Meeting once a month they both work through issues that are going on, specifically in Barb's life, and talk about what is bothering them. "You have to hear yourself say it. You cannot keep those feelings down in you. They will devour you over time," says Cheri. "I have been both a caretaker and a patient. I understand the process from both sides and that really helps."

Barb and Cheri have structured, productive mentoring sessions. They sit down with their planners and phones out, going over their schedules and goals that they have accomplished, and ones they set for the next meeting. They have a complete agenda

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with homework due every time they meet so that they are continually learning.

Cheri explained that peer mentoring is all about matching the right people in order to foster honesty, which in turn will give way to trust and trust is what it is all about. "The beautiful thing about peer mentoring is that both the mentee and mentor learn something new every day. Although these are not simple or basic ideas; rather lessons in human nature, compassion, understanding, and are very therapeutic to the mind," she said.

Cheri is a volunteer and peer mentor here at Freedom and has helped several others cope with their PTSD. To commemorate the anniversary of both their children's passing, Cheri and Barb will be releasing balloons in remembrance of them on April 23, 2013. To sum up Cheri's advice, she has one word to offer: "Attitude; even with the negative being thrown at you, you must maintain a positive attitude."

To Know

Upcoming Events

Freedom In Action in Fargo-Ducks in a Row

Tuesday, April 30 @ 2 pm
Freedom office

Spring Extravaganza

Thursday, May 2, 11 am- 3 pm
Wahpeton Eagles Club

6th Annual CTIC Transition Gala and ESTR Award

Friday, May 3 - Avalon Events Center, Fargo

Freedom in Action - Jamestown

Gardening Tips
May 7th at 1:30 pm

Spring Appreciation Luncheon

Wednesday, May 15, Noon-1:30 pm
Venue at the Hub, Fargo

How much can I work on Supplemental Security income (SSI)?

If you have no other income, you can earn \$85 per month; after that for every \$2 made, SSI benefits will reduce by \$1. This needs to be reported monthly and includes all household income. Example: If you work and earn \$585 in one month, your countable income for SSI would be \$500, so your SSI would be reduced by \$250. Rather than living on \$710, you would receive \$460 in SSI and your \$585 in earnings, so your monthly income would be \$1045. Wages affect your SSI check 2 months after you receive the earnings.

How will they calculate my benefits?

They will look into your living arrangement, household income, and any other resources that are available to you. For an individual the maximum SSI benefit is \$710 per month.

Will I lose my medical assistance?

If you return to work, and earn enough money to no longer receive SSI, you may still be eligible for Medical Assistance. You are simply placed in a "no pay status" and receive Medical Assistance under Section 1619B. This will stay in place as long as you are still considered disabled and meet other Medicaid eligibility requirements.

Who do I go to for benefits analysis and information about work and SSI?

*Minnesota Work Incentive Connection
<http://www.mnworkincentives.com/site/resources/social-security>*

*Rehab Services (North Dakota)
<http://www.minotrehabservices.com/default.asp>*

*Freedom Resource Center
800-450-0459*

**The information provided in this article is not intended to be legal advice. Each individual situation may vary. Next month: More about SSDI.*

What's Wrong With This Picture?



ADA compliant urinals have a rim height of 17 inches or less from the floor. The urinal rim must extend at least 13 1/2 inches from the back wall and be elongated. Flush controls shall be hand operated or automatic. When hand operated flush controls exist, the forward reach height shall be 48 inches maximum. The clear floor or ground space in the urinal stall has to be at least 30 inches wide and 48 inches long.

From Where I Sit

By Nate Aalgaard,
Executive Director

The Value of Relationships

Our feature story this month is about two women who have developed a friendship over a shared sense of loss. They both benefit from this relationship and are also giving back to this organization and their community. For some people, friendship is the glue that holds their life together. For others, it's family; but for all of us, relationships are an important part of the quality of life.

Many of my current friends have been so for over 30 years. I just talked to a couple of guys this week who I met in college back in the late 70's. I reconnected with another college friend recently who moved back to North Dakota from the West Coast. These long-lasting relationships have helped sustain me through life's challenges. Many of my closest friends, to this day, consist of people I met in college or even back to my grade school and high school days.

Relationships are also important in our work. I recently talked to a college business class. The last question I received that day was what advice could I give them as they start their careers. After thinking about it for a few seconds, I told them that one of the most important things that I have found in doing my job is the value of relationships. I told them a story of going to the Capitol in Bismarck and speaking to four senators, two Democrats and two Republicans, all of whom thanked me for coming out there and genuinely appreciated seeing me and visiting with me for a brief time.

I'm sure that some of them vote differently on bills that I think are important. But as I told the students, it is important that I have a relationship with them and they respect what I do. Part of that respect comes from being honest, upfront, and consistent in the issues that I promote and how I communicate. I've always felt that as advocates, we need to be professional in what we do and how we do it. Name-calling and making up wild accusations will get us nowhere.

Mentoring

which comes from the Greek word meaning "enduring" - is defined as a trusted and sustained relationship between two or more people.

One of the most interesting books I've read is called Blue Zones, by Dan Buettner. He and his team of researchers partnered with National Geographic to study the population groups around the world that live the longest. Believe it or not, one of those groups is in the greater Los Angeles area.

Through their study they determined nine evidence-based denominators that led to the longest and healthiest lifespans. You might readily expect that physical activity and proper diet are in the mix, which they are. What I didn't

necessarily expect was the value of relationships. They found that all of the world's longest living peoples had social circles that supported healthy behaviors. It is also true that surrounding yourself with positive, happy people leads to a more satisfying life.



Nate Aalgaard

So there you have it – one of the keys to a better life is positive relationships. It helps you defeat loneliness and isolation, helps you get more accomplished in your work world, and even allows you to live longer and healthier. Sometimes it takes a fair amount of effort to find and keep those relationships, but it is well worth it.

Peer Mentoring Fun Facts

68 mentor matches since August

50 mentors on the roster

Top Issues:

Socialization

Studying for Driver's Permit & Test

Learning independent living skills

Dealing with stress

Information

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*“Helping Bridge Your
Path to Independence”*

Board Members Wanted

Freedom will have two openings on its Board of Directors due to retirement. If you are interested, please contact Nate Aalgaard

Appreciation Luncheon -- **YOU'RE INVITED!!**

Equal Choice, Equal Responsibility



May 15th, 12-1:30 P.M.
Venue at the Hub
2525 9th Ave S
Fargo, ND 58103



Tickets are just \$20 to attend!

Join us for our 2nd Annual Appreciation Luncheon as we recognize and appreciate the people who have helped us achieve our mission and have done outstanding work in the areas of volunteerism, advocacy, accessibility, and employment.

Call us at 701-478-0459