

Earned Income Tax Credit

EITC is for working people who earn less than \$49,078. This year, the credit can be from \$2 up to \$5,751. The credit amount changes based on:

- if you are single or married
- if you have no, one, two, or three or more children
- the amount you earned

Are you eligible to claim EITC for 2011?

Here are the rules to claim the credit . . .

- Must work and have earned income
- Must have a valid Social Security number
- Investment income limited to \$3,150
- Generally must be a U.S. citizen or resident alien all year
- Cannot file as married filing separately
- Cannot be a qualifying child of another person

You have to file a federal tax return to get EITC even if you owe no tax or are not required to file. EITC can provide a boost to help pay your bills, fix up your place, or save for a rainy day.

2012 Transportation Voucher Program Rolls On

North Country is proud to announce the launch of our 2012 Transportation Voucher Program. If you're already a participant, or you're on our waiting list, we will be contacting you soon. If you haven't yet contacted us and you or a family member or friend would like to find out more about our voucher program, please contact Bob Olsgard, Transportation Coordinator at: bob@northcountryil.org or call 1-800-924-1220, ext. 20.

This will be the fifth year that North Country has offered area consumers this very popular and successful program. Since it began in 2008 the program has helped many people with disabilities overcome transportation barriers. In four years, 160 voucher program participants made nearly 20,000 trips, traveling a total distance of more than half a million miles.

Where did people travel? Shopping was the most popular trip purpose, with more than a third of all trips. The second biggest category—nearly tied with shopping—was medical, followed by social/recreational trips and trips to work. Thanks to all of our program participants, their drivers and other transportation providers who have made this program so successful.

Funding for the North Country Transportation Voucher program is provided in part by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) as authorized under 49 U.S.C. § 5317 New Freedom (CFDA 20.521).

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Planned Giving By John Nousaine

Like many people who are my age I do not have a will and probably should have one. I am in reasonably good health except for the usual aging aches and pains, accelerated by disability and lifestyle. My plan is to stick around awhile but not to ever slow down, and you never know what could happen.

Being a bachelor, I will not leave anyone in a lurch when I die so I have decided to include North Country Independent Living in my will. I got this idea from a workshop I attended on planned giving. Like many of us I do not have lots of cash on hand to contribute to the causes I embrace, but I can contribute in the future to North Country through a planned gift in my will.

I will still split up my toys (boats, scuba, ski gear, etc) to my friends and family members but much of my estate will go to North Country. I have started by naming North Country as the beneficiary in my life insurance and retirement plan while I research wills. There are many tools available for planned giving. Please consider planned giving to the organizations you believe in.

I appreciate all the contributions many of our consumers and friends make to North Country. Most of you have very little but you share a lot! The time and energy you contribute to this organization and promoting disability rights is invaluable.

Paralympics World Cup in Cable

Some of the world's best cross country skiers with physical disabilities came to Telemark resort, near Cable, Wisconsin, on the second of three stops as part of the 2012 International Paralympic Nordic Skiing World Cup series. It was the first time the United States has hosted a major Paralympic Nordic ski event in seven years.

"We're excited to bring elite competition onto our home soil," said John Farra, director of High Performance Paralympic Nordic Skiing for the U.S. Olympic Committee. "This is an exceptional opportunity for many of our up-and-coming athletes to get some international experience two years out from the 2014 Paralympic Games in Sochi."

The event featured four cross country and two biathlon races where athletes earned World Cup points. The first half of the competition was held Jan. 26-30 at Telemark Lodge in Cable, Wis., home of the famed Birkebeiner ski race. Competition concluded Feb. 1-2 at Theodore Wirth Park in Minneapolis.



TELEWORK The Wisconsin Telework Program is a statewide, alternative loan program that allows Wisconsin 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 is made possible through a grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration. The Department of Workforce Development and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation received the grant and provide program and fiscal oversight.

North Country Independent Living staff are able to answer questions you may have. Call 800-924-1220 v/tty.

Personal Care Program Now Offers Personal Care Worker Training

We are very excited about a new opportunity that is available. NCIL is offering Personal Care Worker (PCW) training. We are able to train people to become certified PCW's in our own training space in the Superior office of NCIL. The PCW training will typically take two weeks. Participants may be able to get the training costs paid through a grant and may be eligible to receive a stipend for finishing the class!

Upon completion these folks will have their PCW certificate and will be ready to work in the community. This is a very exciting opportunity that is being offered on a first-come basis for a limited time only. For more information, please contact Tami Oswald in our Superior office at 715-392-2533.



Calendar of Events

All phone numbers are in area code 715 unless otherwise noted.

First Monday of the month, NorthernBridges Board of Directors meeting, Ramada Inn, Hayward, 10290 Highway 27 South, 9-3. Open to the public.

Legislative Days - North Country representatives will meet with area legislators in Madison on **February 8th** and discuss disability related issues.

Avalanche Ski Clinic will be held at Granite Peak in Wausau on **February 11th**.

The **9th Annual Great Lakes Mono-Ski Camp** will be held from **Feb 15th – February 17th** at Spirit Mountain Duluth. For more information on this event, please contact Mark Hanna at Courage Duluth 218-726-4834 or mark.hanna@couragecenter.org.

Superior Days – Citizens representing northwest Wisconsin will discuss issues unique to our area with state legislators in Madison on **February 21st and 22nd**.

NCIL Board meeting on **May 11th** in Hayward from 9-12. Please contact John Nousaine for details.

Support Groups

Superior MS Support Group, meets the 2nd Tuesday of each month from 6-8 p.m. at the Superior Public Library. For more information, call Pam at 394-6958.

Ashland Area Brain

Injury/Stroke Support Group, meets the 3rd Wednesday of the month at the Chequamegon Clinic, 415 Ellis Ave. Call Stewart at North Country for more information.

Visually Impaired Support Group, Park Falls Area, meets the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 1:30 p.m. at 700 Division Street, Park Falls. For more information, call Arnold at 762-4018.

Ashland Area Low Vision

Support Group, meets the 2nd Wednesday of the month at the Ashland Senior Center. Call the Senior Center for more information, 682-4414.

Advocates for People With Disabilities, meets each month on the 1st Wednesday at the Phillips Development Center, 598 Peterson Drive. Call Jeff for more information, 339-4223.

An **Alzheimers Caregiver Support Group** meeting will be held on the 2nd Wednesday of each month from Noon – 1:00 in the meeting room at the Chequamegon Clinic in Ashland. For more information contact Freda Carlson at 392-3255.

Access to Community Employment Update

Happy New Year from the ACE program! We are beginning our third year of the Access to Community Employment program and are committed to providing integrated employment services to people with disabilities. Our program operates under the philosophy that there are opportunities in the employment community for people with disabilities.

The ACE program uses "Vocational Futures Planning" process. The first step in this process is "Assets and Barriers" identification. That simply means we get to know people we are working with, learning about what their skills are, how to transfer their skills in relation to employment, and how to develop new needed skills. We also address barriers to employment, such as transportation.

One important employment skill is the ability to talk about ourselves positively. People may not have had chances to practice interview skills. We all struggle with coming up with statements that describe ourselves and our skills. We recommend that people who are looking for employment think about how to create their own 10-second commercial about themselves. Imagine having a business card that has one or two sentences about your skills and abilities.

Try this exercise. Write down a list of your skills, then turn that list into a couple sentences, then practice saying those sentences. With practice it becomes easier to talk about your skills, strengths, and abilities. Then, in a job interview, you can talk about yourself much easier.

Bayfield Recreation Center Pool Lift

The Aqua Creek Pro Pool Lift is the newest feature to the Bayfield Recreation Center pool area. The Aqua Creek Pro Pool Lift is designed to provide access to the pool for persons with physical disabilities. Now individuals can use the pool without having to climb up or down stairs. For information on hours of operation at the pool, please call 715-779-5408.

Scholarship Opportunities

Through the Looking Glass and its National Center for Parents with Disabilities and their Families are pleased to announce new scholarships specifically for high school seniors who will be graduating this summer or college students who will be enrolled in the fall, who have parents with disabilities.

A total of fifteen \$1000 scholarships will be given out Fall 2012. Scholarship information and applications are available on Through the Looking Glass' website www.lookingglass.org All application materials must be postmarked by March 5, 2012.

Drivers Needed!

Volunteer drivers are needed to help give rides to medical appointments and other community activities. Drivers are paid mileage at the Federal Rate; currently **55.5 cents per mile**.

For more information and to get your application call:
Bob at 715-392-9118 or 800-924-1220

New Office Assistant in Personal Care

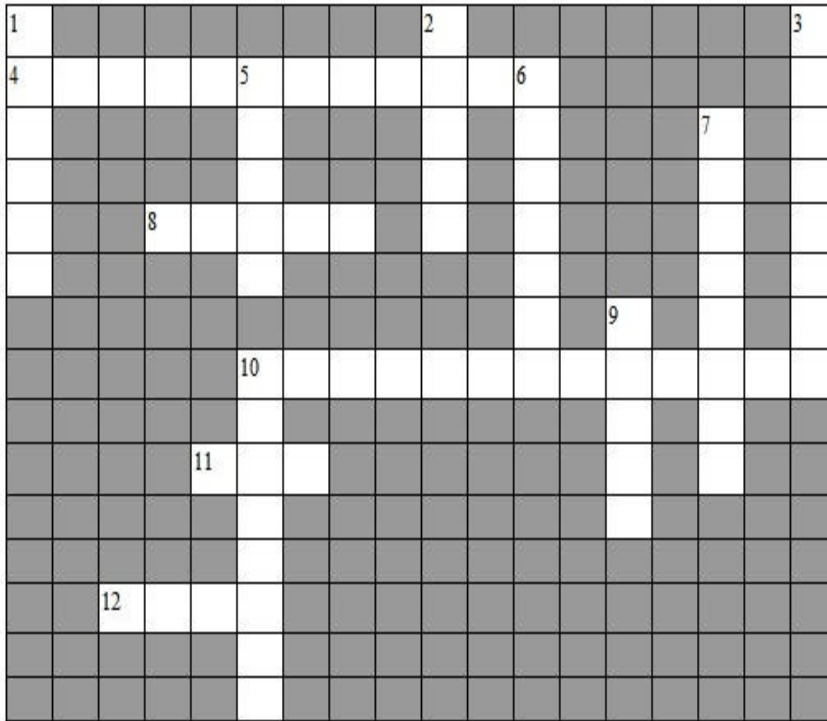
Hello! My name is Jodi Zukowski. I am an office assistant at NCIL in the Personal Care Program. I am so excited and honored to be a part of the team.

I was born and raised in Duluth and then I moved to Superior where I met my wonderful husband Michael. I am a proud mother of two daughters and two nieces. I have a passion for many crafts. I enjoy painting and scrapbooking.

Recently I was on a medical journey with my sister, mother and father which has changed my life. On my journey I experienced the caring ways of the advocates, doctors, nurses and hospice staff who worked very hard everyday to help my family. I am grateful they were able to guide me.

Within the last year as my journey settled down I decided that I want to use my experience and skills to give back to the community. So I am glad to have this opportunity to work with everyone here at NCIL and I look forward to meeting all of you.

February Crossword Puzzle



ACROSS

4. The iPod Touch, smart phones, and the iPad have these which can be used for communication, learning, organization, etc.

8. You may be eligible to claim the Earned Income Tax Credit for 2011 - review these to find out if you are or may be eligible.

10. John Nousaine attended a workshop on _____ pertaining to planning your will. (2 words)

11. To become a volunteer driver contact this person from North Country.

12. North Country's new Office Assistant in the Personal Care Program.

DOWN

1. A group that was developed by and for people in our region who are interested in advocating for full inclusion and independent living in their communities.

2. The 2014 winter Paralympic Games will be held in this city.

3. The most popular trip purpose for people who participated in North Country's voucher program was?

5. You and your _____ are members of the IEP team.

6. If a person finishes the PCW class and training they may be eligible to receive this.

7. _____ Days on February 21 & 22 will be when citizens representing NW WI will discuss issues unique to our area with state legislators.

9. 2012 marks the _____ year of the Transportation Voucher Program

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance

VITA is a program of the IRS and provides FREE income tax return preparation to households making less than \$49,000.00/year.

Qualifications include:

Full year Wisconsin resident

Return completion limited to basic types of taxes

Cannot complete married filing separate

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

715-392-5127 (Superior)

715-292-6400 (Ashland)

Tips for Having an Effective IEP

What Parents of Students with Disabilities Need to Know

An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is one of the most important documents to develop during your child's time in school. The IEP is the written tool that guides what programs, services, and supports your son or daughter is entitled to in order to receive a free, appropriate, public education like everyone else. Keep these points in mind when planning to attend an IEP:

You and your child are members of the IEP team. You can ask questions and provide ideas of what needs to be on an IEP. Write down some questions you want to ask. Have your son or daughter prepare what they would like to have on the IEP. Bring along a friend to provide support and take notes. If you need more time to think about what's happened at the meeting, ask for another meeting. You don't have to sign the IEP at the meeting, take the IEP home and review it. Give it some thought. Get everything in writing. IEP's must be reviewed at least once a year, but if your child's needs change, you can request an IEP review at any time.

A good resource for parents needing help with planning an IEP is Special Education in Plain Language, a User-Friendly Handbook on Special Education Laws, Policies and Practices in Wisconsin. Contact the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction for more information: 1-800-441-4563.

What's new with DARING and Grassroots?

DARING stands for Disability Advocacy, Resource and INclusion Groups and was developed by and for people in our region who are interested in advocating for full inclusion and independent living in their communities. We hope you'll be DARING and join our grassroots efforts! You can sign up to contribute and receive emails about resources, trainings, legislation, accessibility, barriers to independent living, technology and other items of interest to those in our region. We have over 140 members now in the network but we need YOU!

Three DARING members recently attended a grassroots advocacy and community building training in Stevens Point. This training provided a great opportunity to network with other grassroots leaders in Wisconsin and to learn effective ways to prioritize an issue from a larger problem, to strategize effectively, to optimize tactics and determine the people who hold power in decision-making. We hope to use these skills to positively impact issues in our region – increase accessible and affordable housing, increase access to equal education for students with disabilities and increase community employment opportunities.

Two DARING members attended the annual Self-Directed Supports Conference in Wisconsin Dells and were inspired by spoken word poetry, the Encore Theater Group and learning sessions covering a broad range of topics in independent living. Many self-employed persons with disabilities were on hand to demonstrate their business models and products. Truly inspiring! To sign up, contact Martha at martha@northcountryil.org

Crossword Puzzle Answers:

Across:

- 4. applications
- 8. rules
- 10. planned giving
- 11. Bob
- 12. Jodi

Down:

- 1. DARING
- 2. Sochi
- 3. shopping
- 5. child
- 6. stipend
- 7. Superior
- 9. fifth
- 10. pool lift

The most important measure for preventing colds and flu is frequent hand washing, for at least 20 seconds, with warm soapy water. You can also get a flu vaccine to prevent seasonal influenza. For more information, please consult your medical professional. (info from www.webmd.com)

IPod, iPad and Proloquo2go, Oh My!

Assistive technology is getting more accessible, less expensive and more widely available. You may be familiar with some of the software and devices for people who need alternate access to a computer, such as Dragon Naturally Speaking, Window-Eyes or JAWS, or augmentative communication devices such as the Dynavox or Lightwriter, but did you know there are some newer applications that are comparable?

The success of devices such as the iPod Touch, smart phones and the iPad are due to the many applications (apps) that are used widely for communication, for learning in schools, organization in the workplace, as well as for many other areas of life.

One of the first successful applications was Proloquo2go. Proloquo2go software provides a full-featured communication solution for people who have difficulty speaking. It brings natural sounding text-to-speech voices, close to 8000 up-to-date symbols and a large vocabulary, customizable for each individual.

To learn more, there are online videos at <http://www.proloquo2go.com>. Similar text-to-voice apps and devices have replaced some of the more expensive augmentative communication devices. They are smaller, lighter and much easier to use. Some of the most dramatic success has been for people on the autism spectrum. The order, control and predictability that can be part of these applications have opened communication for individuals with autism.

There is much yet to be done to increase accessibility in assistive technology, but these applications are a great start. To find out more, call NCIL for appointment to demonstrate the Ipod or Ipad and review available apps.

WISLOAN

WisLoan is a statewide, low interest loan program that allows a Wisconsin resident with a disability to purchase assistive technology or make home modifications so that he or she can live more independently or productively. **Contact North Country for more information.**

WisLoan is a federally-funded project of the National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) and the U.S Dept. of Education.

Donation for North Country Independent Living

North Country welcomes your support in fulfilling its mission of empowering people with disabilities. Your contribution is tax deductible. North Country Independent Living is a non-profit agency with 501(c)3 status.

Enclosed is my donation of \$ _____

Name _____

Organization/Company _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

I would like to volunteer at North Country

Mail to:
North Country Independent Living
69 N 28th St. Suite 28
Superior, WI 54880

Board of Directors

Bill Gallik, Superior
Karen Secor, Montreal
Larry Quam, Superior
Jeff Kieffer, Catawba
Lauri Solberg, Superior
Denise Marquardt, Hayward
Lori Bina, Shell Lake
Ben Barrett, Trego
Steve Terry, Washburn

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**ALTERNATE FORMATS AVAILABLE**

If you require any of this information in an alternate format, please contact us.