

NORTH COUNTRY NEWS

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Transportation Update

North Country's Transportation Program Rolls On

Bob Olsgard, Transportation Coordinator

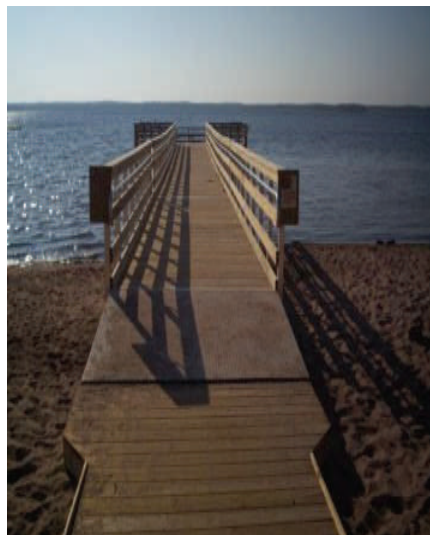
After two and a half years of work to increase transportation access for people with disabilities here in northwest Wisconsin, we have had some success and we're looking forward to more. As our recently completed transportation voucher program shows, there are many of our friends and neighbors, particularly in our rural areas who don't have the transportation they need to get to work, school, shopping, social and religious activities the rest of us take for granted.

Between now and the end of the year we have the opportunity to raise funds for several regional transportation access projects. First, special thanks go to Washburn County Health and Human Services for the funding they have been able to provide to continue the work of our transportation project through the end of 2007. This work will focus intensively on assisting the Washburn County Transportation Council with the implementation of new public transportation services in Washburn County.

Initiatives are also in the works to increase transportation options for people in Ashland, Bayfield and rural Douglas Counties, focusing on transportation between Ashland and Superior, serving western Bayfield and eastern Douglas Counties, with possible links to Ironwood, Michigan. Longer-range work looks to fund a regional voucher program and to work on coordinating services throughout the eight northwest counties to better support transportation as a crucial part of expanding Family Care to northwest Wisconsin. Be sure to watch this space in North Country News for further developments.

Shell Lake Pier Now Afloat

People with disabilities in the Shell Lake community now have an accessible fishing pier for their use this summer. Now people with disabilities can get out on the lake and fish, including people who use wheelchairs. Shell Lake received an almost \$37,000 grant from the Department of Natural Resources for the pier and the Shell Lake Lions provided 25 percent matching funds. Total cost of the project was \$49,000. Picture and story courtesy of the Washburn County Register and the City of Shell Lake.



Inside this Issue:

Page	
2	A New Resource to Help People Remain in Their Homes
2	Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
3	Talk To Our Law-makers About the Wisconsin Budget
3	Calendar of Events
4	What are Self Directed Supports?
4	Take Control of your Financial Future
4	PASS Plans, a SSA Work Incentive
5	Support Groups
5	Technology Corner
5	Rural Development Office Has Moved
6	Telecommunication & Internet Access Project
7	Working & Poverty

Receive North Country News via Email

If you would like to receive North Country News via email please contact North Country at ncilcheryl@superior-nfp.org or call 800-924-1220v/tty

A New Resource to Help People Remain in Their Homes

CORE Community Resources might be able to provide that extra help you need to continue to live at home. This service is now available to people with disabilities who live in the City of Bayfield, Towns of Bayfield, Bayview, Russell, and Bell. It is hoped that CORE Community Resources will be able to expand to other areas in the future. Services include:

- Companionship
- Rides to doctor appointments in Ashland
- Simple house repairs
- Grocery shopping
- Dog walking
- Check-in calls to see how people are doing
- Grass mowing
- Light housekeeping

Services are generally for people 55 and over, but will be considered for others on a case-by-case basis. Core Community Resources does not provide personal care. Volunteers who are screened and trained will be providing the services. To find out more or to arrange for services, call the Director, Shannon at 779-3457, or e-mail her at: director@corecr.org

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.

Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

The Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) is the primary state agency that promotes equal communication access and accommodations in statewide and community systems for people of all ages in Wisconsin who are deaf, deaf and blind, or hard of hearing. There are five regional offices throughout the state. ODHH Regional Coordinators are available to provide information, referral, education, training, technical assistance, and consultation to individuals and any public or private organization about communication access issues. These include hearing loss and its impact on communication, strategies to improve communication accessibility in the workplace, service or program setting, auxiliary aids and services available to improve communication such as use of assistive listening devices, sign language interpreting services, captioning services, video relay services, and video remote interpreting services.

ODHH offers the Wisconsin Interpreting and Transliterating Assessment (WITA) for sign language interpreters as well as manages the state-funded Telecommunications Assistance Program (TAP) that helps eligible, low-income deaf, deaf and blind, or hard of hearing persons to meet the co-payment requirement for the Public Service Commission's Telecommunication Equipment Purchase Program (TEPP) to buy telecommunications devices, visual alerting devices, telephone amplifiers, etc. Visit the ODHH website at www.dhfs.wisconsin.gov/sensory to locate the regional office nearest you.

Talk to Our Lawmakers about the Wisconsin Budget

Wisconsin's new budget is being developed this summer. The Assembly and Senate have each prepared their own proposals. The Assembly version, for example, eliminates the expansion of Family Care and the Senate version includes it.

The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin, a state-wide group of disability organizations, has put together several priorities for the new budget.

Under Long Term Care, these include:

- Have safeguards to ensure that self-determination is available to anyone who wants it.
- Provide adequate funding for Aging and Disability Resource Centers.
- Expand capacity to eliminate waiting lists.

For people with mental illness:

- Require health insurance policies in Wisconsin to provide coverage for mental health and substance abuse conditions equal to coverage for other conditions.
- Improve mental health care to those individuals who successfully return to their community.

Toward building stronger schools:

- Increase funding for special education.
- Reform the school finance system.

Senator Bob Jauch of Poplar is on the budget writing committee where a compromise between the Assembly and Senate proposals will be worked out. Contact Bob and tell him what you think is important to include in our new state budget. Call him at 608-266-3510 or drop him a note at his address:

Bob Jauch
State Capitol, Senate Office Bldg 118
Madison, WI 53702



Calendar of Events

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

August 7, Wisconsin Interagency Council on Transportation Coordination is sponsoring a one day conference to look for ways to improve coordination of human service transportation to people with disabilities. It will be held at the Kalahari Conference Center in Wisconsin Dells from **8:30 to 4:30**. To find out more, go to the DOT web site at: <http://www.dot.state.wi.us/news/events/ictc-welcome.htm>

August 15, Ashland Area Brain Injury and Stroke Support Group first annual picnic, **Pren-tice Park, Ashland, 12-4**. Consumers, family and friends are welcome. Please bring a dish to pass and your own beverage. This is a non-alcohol event. For more information, contact Stewart at the North Country Ashland office.

August 22, Senior Expo, Ashland High School, **7 a.m. to 1 p.m.** There will be free health screenings, educational seminars, food, and entertainment. Stop by and visit North Country's booth and find out more about our services.

First Monday of each month, Northwest Long Term Care Options Consortium, Ramada Inn, Hayward, 10290 Highway 27 south and County road B, 9-3. Open to the public.

Late September, a consumer forum on the expansion of Family Care and Self-Directed Supports. This will be your opportunity to ask questions and get the information you need as we continue reform of long term care in Northwest Wisconsin. Visit the web page of North Country Independent Living or the web page of your county human service department or of the Northwest Long Term Care Consortium, www.nw-ltco.org for more information.

What Are Self-Directed Supports?

A topic that everyone is talking about these days in northwest Wisconsin is Long Term Care Reform or the expansion of Family Care. A key feature of all these changes for people with disabilities is that we have choices in where we live, work, and what other services we need. What this means is that as people with disabilities, we have the right to arrange for the services that we want and need so that we can stay in our communities. We can also ask for the assistance of others in arranging for these services.

Under Family Care, you have the right to:

- Decide where I want to live
- How I spend the day
- Make decisions about my supports and services (Self-directed Supports)
- Determine a meaningful life for myself
- Stay connected to important people and places in my life

Take Control of Your Financial Future

It's a dream of many...if only I could be my own boss, manage my own business, set my own course...

Stop dreaming and get moving! Only you can make your dream of owning and operating your own business a reality. If you're feeling a little overwhelmed, the Small Business and Self Employment Service can help you. Here are some of the ways they can help:

- Develop business plans
- Help with market research
- Obtain start up funds

Learn about disability-related issues, including Social Security work incentives

SBSES services are free. For more information, visit their website at www.jan.wvu.edu/SBSES
Call 1-800-526-7234. (taken from New Horizons Unlimited).

PASS Plans, a SSA Work Incentive

Scott Anderson, NCIL Benefits Specialist

PASS, or Plan to Achieve to Self Support, is an under-utilized work incentive that is available to individuals who have an employment goal and need funding to make their goal happen. How it works is a person can set aside resources other than Supplemental Security Income (SSI) in a special account to be used to pay for things related to their employment goal. Once they do this, Social Security won't count these resources as income, thereby allowing a person to become eligible for SSI.

A common example is someone who is on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and wants to go to school, but they need money for tuition. If they write a PASS to Social Security, they can set aside their SSDI in a PASS to use for tuition, and Social Security will no longer count it as income, so they would be eligible for SSI. They would then save their SSDI for school tuition and get SSI to use for their month to month living expenses.

A PASS can be written for up to 18 months, with an additional 18 month extension, for a total of 36 months. In addition, a PASS must be in writing and approved by SSA. There are additional requirements for a PASS to be approved so if you are interested contact North Country's Benefits Specialist, Scott Anderson.

Rural Development Office Has Moved

The Rural Development office has moved from Ashland to Spooner. This move was completed in July. This single office now covers an 11 county region, including the entire service area of North Country. They continue to offer the same services as before such as low interest loans for improving home accessibility. These loans are usually one percent, but if a consumer has low income and is at least 62, a grant may be possible. The purpose of these home improvement loans is to make repairs to modernize a home, make it safer or to improve accessibility. The maximum grant amount is \$7,500 and the maximum loan amount is \$20,000, repaid within 20 years at one percent.

Here is the new address of the U.S. Dept of Agriculture, Rural Development Office:
800 North Front Street, Room 102, Spooner, WI 54801 Phone 715-635-8228, extension 4.

Technology Corner

For sale: Power chair Jazzy 1113 ATS overall width 23", custom gel seat cushion 19"x18", custom back with headrest also have original back and headrest, versa tilt seating, manual elevating leg rests, oxygen holder, on board charger, used 2 1/2 years asking \$2,400.00 call Kathy at 715-469-3649

Transportation Survey Help!

Please help North Country find out more about transportation needs in Ashland, Bayfield and Douglas Counties. We are working with a group of agencies in the three counties on a survey of rural transportation needs.

You can help by completing a survey. To participate, contact Transportation Coordinator Bob Olsgard at North Country Superior or by email: ncilbob@superior-nfp.org.

Support Groups

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



Women's Peer Support Group will be meeting again the third Tuesday of each month starting in September at 10:30 - noon and 6 - 7pm at North Country Independent Living, Superior. Contact Gloria at the Superior office for more information.

Ashland MS Support Group meets the third Wednesday of the month in the Stockton Island Room at Memorial Medical Center. Contact Peggy at 682-6506 for more information.

Ashland Area Brain Injury/Stroke Support Group meets the third Wednesday of the month in the Twin Island Meeting Room of Memorial Medical Center, Ashland. For more information, contact Stewart in the Ashland office.

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

North Country Independent Living (NCIL) “Telecommunication and Internet Access Project”

The purpose of this project is to provide technology awareness training to consumers throughout an eight county area (Ashland, Bayfield, Douglas, Iron, Price, Washburn, Burnett & Sawyer) with a focus on activity associated with telecommunication and computer access for eligible individuals with disabilities.

The project also seeks to facilitate affordable access to telecommunications and information services by providing persons with disabilities the “tools” necessary to remove the barriers currently faced and **limited** financial assistance to assist with the Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program (TEPP) voucher co-pays and some start-up costs related to Internet access.

Project Services

Information on funding & financing resources

Provision of assistive technology try-out

Advocacy to ensure equal access to technology

Orientation on the use of telephone equipment and basic Internet usage

Limited funding assistance for TEPP voucher co-pays and Internet start-up costs

Eligibility

Be a person with a disability

Reside in one of the eight counties listed above

Be income-eligible

Participate in evaluation process

For an application packet, please contact:

Cheryl Stevens

Administrative Assistant

North Country Independent Living

715.392.9118 ext. 11 voice/tty

1.800.924.1220 ext. 11 voice/tty,

ncilcheryl@superior-nfp.org

If you need this information in an alternate format, please contact Dee Truhn, Assistant Director, at one of the numbers listed immediately above or at ncildee@superior-nfp.org

North Country Independent Living is an Equal Opportunity Employer/Program. Auxiliary aids and services available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Funding for this project is provided by the Wisconsin Universal Service Fund. (07/07)

Working and Poverty

Did you know that 1 out of 3 adults with a disability live in households with total annual income below \$15,000? Nearly 6 out of 10 people with disabilities are “asset poor”. This means if there is no regular monthly income, individuals or families will not have enough in savings or other assets to live on for three months at the federal poverty level.

So, if this describes your situation, what can you do about it? There are a number of tax credits that can assist people, including persons with disabilities, with lower incomes. One of them is called the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). According to the IRS, “The EITC is the most effective anti-poverty tool for working individuals and families”. It lifts over 5 million individuals out of poverty each year, and has the ability to turn a \$7 per hour job into a \$9 per hour job. Unfortunately, 1 in 4 eligible individuals do not claim the EITC at all.

One of the keys to claiming the EITC is having **earned** income that can assist an individual in becoming eligible for the tax credit. The way to have earned income is by working, even working part-time may qualify.

Many individuals with disabilities who are receiving Social Security Administration (SSA) benefits are very concerned about how income from work will affect those benefits. Fortunately, SSA provides an opportunity for recipients to get an analysis of how income from work will affect their benefits. If an individual has not been job seeking in awhile, they may want to access employment services at their local Job Center. If you, or someone you know, is interested in finding out more employment services, getting a benefits analysis or has questions about working, please contact John Nedden-Durst, the Disability Navigator, at the Ashland office of North Country Independent Living.

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 _____

Mail to:
North Country Independent Living
2231 Catlin Ave. Suite 16
Superior, WI 54880

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