

Wisconsin's New SSDI Employment Pilot

Scott Anderson, Benefits Specialist

Are you a person with a disability who wants to work and earn more money? The **Wisconsin Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Employment Pilot** addresses one of the biggest barriers that people on SSDI face when going to work. Currently, SSDI beneficiaries who want to work and earn above \$860.00 per month (SGA) are at risk of losing their entire SSDI benefit. This pilot project can allow a person to earn above \$860.00 and still receive some of their SSDI benefit.

Rather than an immediate end to their benefit, participants will experience a gradual decrease in their SSDI cash payment as their earnings increase ("cash benefit offset"). For every \$2 earned above SGA (\$860.00 in 2006), participants will experience a \$1 decrease in their SSDI payment rather than losing their entire cash payment. This cash benefit offset will last up to 72 months depending on individual benefit situations. To be eligible for the SSDI Employment Pilot, a person has to be on SSDI only, and be between the ages of 18-64.

Interested persons must be enrolled in the SSDI Employment Pilot by July 31st, 2006. If you are interested in finding out more about this project or would like to enroll contact: Scott Anderson, Benefits Specialist at North Country: 715-392-9118, V/TTY or 1-800-924-1220, V/TTY or by email to Scott Anderson at ncilscott@superior-nfp.org.

Assistive Technology & Resource Fairs Coming in April to Red Cliff and Bad River

North Country Independent Living will present two upcoming Assistive Technology & Resource Fairs located on the Red Cliff and Bad River Reservations. The first of the two Fairs will be held on **Wednesday, April 26th** in Red Cliff at the Isle Vista Casino. The second Fair will be held on **Thursday, April 27th** in Odanah at the Bad River Casino in the Gitchee Gumees Convention Center. The Casino is located east of Ashland next to Highway 2. Both Fairs are free and open to the public from 11am to 3pm.

There will be a limited number of stipends available to people with disabilities who attend the fair and complete a pre- and post-test about Assistive Technology. Stipends will be mailed following the event.

If you would like further information or would like to pre-register, please contact Jeri at 800-924-1220 v/tty and complete registration over the phone or leave a message and a registration form will be mailed to you. Please make any requests for accommodations to attend the events by April 5, 2006.

Presented by North Country Independent Living and supported in part by a grant from the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Education and Training Foundation.

Inside this issue:

Long Term Care Redesign 2-3

Calendar of Events 3

North Country Loan Closet 4

Support Groups 5

Transportation Update 6

Plan to Participate in 2006 Elections 6

Transportation Update 6

Special points of interest:

- Northern Advocates Participate in IL Legislative Days and Superior Days—Page 2
- Reggie Leckel Receives WCILC Award—Page 2
- Superior to Improve Sidewalks—Page 4
- 2006 Youth Leadership Retreat—Page 5
- Disaster Preparation, The First Step is You—Page 6
- North Country Seeking Board Members—Page 7

Northern Advocates Participate in IL Legislative Days and Superior Days

John Nousaine, Director

Ten advocates from Northwestern Wisconsin participated in **Independent Living Legislative Days** February 6th – 8th in Madison. We met with all Wisconsin senators and representatives (or their aids) who represent North Country's service area. We assisted our brothers and sisters from other ILC's as we visited the office of EVERY member of Wisconsin's senate and assembly.

Sponsored by the **Independent Living Council of Wisconsin** and the **Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers** IL legislative days is an annual event where consumers meet with state legislators to discuss important issues for people with disabilities. This year started with a couple days of training on grassroots organizing and a slate of three issues. This year's agenda focused on principles of **Long Term Care Reform, Assistive Technology, and Independent Living Services.**

Several of us barely had time to unpack as we again headed to Madison for **Superior Days**, an annual grassroots approach to community development in Northwest Wisconsin. February 28th through March 2nd found seven representatives of North Country arm- and- arm with our neighbors educating EVERY member of Wisconsin's Senate and Assembly on abatement of invasive species to our pristine waters and other unique needs to our part of the state.

My special thanks to **Jeff and Rudy Fox, Ben Barrett, Reggie Leckel, Paul Zahaurance, Gayle Wahner, Mary Schmidt, Gail Pearson, Stewart Holman and Bob Olsgard** for their commitment to our movement by participating in IL Legislative Days and Superior Days.

Also I would like extend a very special thanks to the **Independent Living Council of Wisconsin** for their generous support of consumers who participated in these events.

Reggie Leckel Receives WCILC Award

Reggie Leckel of Superior received the 2006 Consumer Advocate Award from the Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers (WCILC) on February 7th, 2006 at a reception during Independent Living Legislative Days in Madison.

Reggie was in Madison as an advocate for IL Legislative Days, a community advocacy effort. Reggie is a member of the Superior Mayor's Commission on Disability, Northwest Wisconsin Disability Rights Coalition, ADAPT (American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today) and a well known advocate for the rights of people with disabilities.

"Reggie is a tireless advocate and volunteer, always willing to pitch in and help," says John Nousaine, Director of North Country Independent Living. "She has a great sense of humor and really tries to make this a better world for everyone, especially children."

Long Term Care Redesign

John Nousaine, Director

Nine counties in NW Wisconsin are participating in a planning grant that will define how Long Term Care services will be available in our region. I strongly encourage you to get involved in this process. We will be as will the Northwest Wisconsin Disability

Coalition. When meetings are announced we will make every effort to list them on our website northcountryil.com. Also call your local county department of human services to make your opinions known and get involved in the planning process!

North Country's LTC Reform

Guiding Principles:

Implement a Community Entitlement—

* Individuals choose if they want to live in an institution or the community and receive appropriate funding and supports, regardless of setting.

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

- * While savings can be achieved due to the difference in average costs of institutional versus community care, a high-cost rate (an average rate high enough to serve those with more intensive needs) must be available. The rate must not reduce the frequency or intensity of services (unless individual needs have changed).
- * Eligibility for services needs to remain essentially the same as it is now. Everyone who is eligible will receive the appropriate service.
- * Eliminate the current institutional bias that denies people the right to the supports they need in the most integrated setting – no “slot” limits or waiting lists.
- * A full range of services must be available statewide and across county lines.
- * Allow individuals to increase their safety by hiring family members and spouses for personal care services.
- * Continue to downsize Intermediate Care Facilities for individuals with Mental Retardation (ICF-MR), Nursing Homes, and close state centers by FY 2009.

Maintain Public Accountability – Whether the LTC system is managed publicly, privately, or as a partnership of public and private:

- * There must be an effective consumer/user friendly independent advocacy agency.
- * All system information (non-consumer-specific) must be publicly available.

Other Guiding Principles–

- * Increase worker’s wages now, and build in a mechanism for automatic cost of living allowance (COLAs) for the future.
 - * Reform health insurance so that it is affordable and available to direct service workers.
- A lack of affordable housing limits LTC choices.
- * Ensure there is sufficient affordable, accessible and integrated housing to meet the needs of those leaving institutions.

Calendar of Events

March 15, Voting Machine Vendor Fair. More details can be obtained by contacting North Country Independent Living.

March 22, Transportation Summit, Hayward Inn & Suites, Hayward. See pg 6 for details and registration information. Presented by North Country Independent Living and supported in part by the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant.

April 11, North Country Board of Directors, Barker’s Island Inn, Superior, 8:30- 1:00 p.m. Call John Nousaine in our Superior office for more information.

April 26, Assistive Technology & Resource Fair at Red Cliff and

April 27 at Bad River. See pg 1 for details and registration information. Presented by North Country In-

dependent Living Supported in part by a grant from the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Education & Training Foundation

May 5-7, 2006 Youth Leadership Retreat. See pg 5 for details and application information. Presented by North Country Independent Living and supported in part by a grant from the Independent Living Council of Wisconsin, Inc.

May 8 & 9 Positive Practices: Creating a Map for Success, Brain Injury Conference at the Kalahari Resort in Wisconsin Dells. April 21st registration deadline. Two scholarships covering registration costs only are available for consumers or family members who are part of the Ashland Area Brain Injury Support Group. There are also some at-large scholarships still available to cover registration

costs. In order to qualify for these scholarships, you will need to be a member of the Brain Injury Association of Wisconsin. The cost is \$35 per member. For those with limited income, the cost of a membership is \$10. For more information, call BIA-W at 1-800-882-9282. North Country has several conference brochures. Call us in either Superior or Ashland and we can send you one. *If you would like a scholarship, the deadline is March 31st.*

May 19-21, Fishing Has No Boundaries in Hayward. April 21st registration deadline. The fee is \$30 per person. For more information, call 634-3185 or send an e-mail to: hayfhnbc@cheqnet.net.

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

Superior to Improve Sidewalks

John Nousaine, Director

North Country thanks U.S. Rep. Dave Obey for his success in securing \$525,000 in federal funding to improve the condition of sidewalks in the City of Superior. The funds will increase access for people with disabilities and help Superior comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Congressman Obey worked with U.S. Senator Kohl to secure this funding, which advocates and residents with disabilities hope will aid Superior in conducting a sidewalk assessment, making improvements and creating a long term plan for sidewalk maintenance.

North Country appreciates the leadership of State Senator Bob Jauch who was instrumental in making sure the concerns of people with disabilities were heard by the City and elected officials.

Residents with disabilities, North Country Independent Living and Disability Rights Wisconsin (formerly Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy) have been working for several years to push the City to address their concerns. Problems include steep curbs and buckling and crumbling sidewalks and curb cuts, which have caused some residents using wheelchairs to fall and others to be forced to use the street, risking an accident with a vehicle. Residents were also alarmed that newly constructed sidewalks were being done improperly, requiring costly renovations.

As a result of complaints, the city has made some repairs, increased oversight of contractors for new construction, implemented a sidewalk policy and developed a sidewalk complaint procedure.

North Country appreciates the commitment of the City of Superior and Mayor Dave Ross in addressing the concerns of people with disabilities. These funds will be vital in allowing the city to continue to make the sidewalks usable for people with disabilities, seniors, and parents with strollers and other citizens.

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. Contact North Country for more information.

North Country's Loan Closet We May Have What You Need

We all want to live as independently as we can. Today, there are a lot of assistive devices that can help us do every-day tasks easier, quicker, and with less fatigue.

North Country has a loan closet with hundreds of items designed to make your life easier. For people with disabilities, getting the right piece of technology to do a task can mean the difference of being able to stay in your home or going to a nursing home. Put simply, you want to do as much as you can for as long as you can.

Maybe you need some help getting that jar open. We have devices that can help. We have devices that can help you cut, slice, measure, scoop, and mix the food you are preparing. North Country has bath benches and toilet grab bars to help you use the bathroom safely. We have some portable ramps that can handle a one-step rise. We have a variety of amplified phones with big buttons. North Country also has a variety of devices that can help you hear conversation at a meeting or with a group of friends in your living room.

The best news is that technology is now available to help all of us live independently in our homes. You are welcome to borrow any item in our loan closet on a try-out basis for up to 30 days at no charge.

North Country is willing to come and provide a demonstration of what is available in our lending closet and talk about the other programs we offer to help people with disabilities. To schedule a presentation, call our Superior office at 1-800-924-1220 v/tty or 715-392-9118 v/tty.

North Country can also help locate funding resources so you can buy needed technology. WisLoan, for

example, is a low interest loan program designed to help people with disabilities buy technology such as scooters, wheelchairs, hand controls, vans and lifts and much more. The current interest rate is 5 percent. WisLoan can also help pay for ramps, lifts and home modifications. WisLoan is a flexible loan program that helps people get what they need to increase their independence. A new, related program is WiTelework. This low interest loan program is designed to provide people the technology they need to work from home. Fax machines and office equipment may be covered. The Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program is a voucher program that provides funding for consumers to purchase phones and phone-related equipment. The Wisconsin Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired also has visual aids to try out.

If you would like more information on these programs and resources, call North Country in Superior or our Ashland office at 1-800-499-5676 v/tty or 715-682-5676 v/tty.

2006 Youth Leadership Retreat

The 2006 Youth Leadership Retreat will be held at the Pine Forest Lodge in Mercer, Wisconsin May 5th thru 7th. The retreat focuses on the development of self-determination skills, planning for your future and learning more about ones unique talents and strengths

Who should attend? Young people with disabilities who want to discover their potential for leadership, who are currently in the 10th or 11th grade.

Why have the retreat? With the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), youth have unprecedented opportunities to fully develop as constructive, contributing members of our society. However, many need encouragement and information about resources to develop as leaders in their communities.

What will happen at the retreat? Youth will identify barriers to personal success and develop plans to deal with these barriers and will participate in activities such as, small group discussions, leadership activities, team participation and outdoor activities.

How are students recruited? Approximately 12 youth will be accepted to attend based on a competitive selection process. Applications will be distributed to schools by North Country Independent Living. For more information or to request an application contact Gloria at 800-924-1220. Application deadline is April 7, 2006. *Supported in part by a grant from the Independent Living Council of Wisconsin, Inc.*

Support Groups



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.

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 at 682-5676 v/tty or 1-800-499-5676 v/tty.

Women's Peer Support Group meets the third Tuesday of each month, 10:30 a.m. at North Country Independent Living, Superior. Contact Gloria for more information, 392-9118 v/tty or 1-800-924-1220 v/tty.

Chronic Pain Support Group meets the first and third Wednesdays from 1–2 p.m. at the Goslin Court main building on Summit Street, Spooner. Contact Sue at 635-9138 for more information.

Recreation/Social Group Meetings will be the first and third Wednesdays at 1:30 p.m. at North Country Independent Living, Superior. For more information, contact Gloria at 392-9118 v/tty or 1-800-924-1220 v/tty.

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

Disaster Preparation—The First Step Is You!

John Nedden-Durst, Disability Navigator

To be better prepared as a community, we all have a part to play in a plan for disasters. All individuals, with or without disabilities, can decrease the impact of a disaster by taking steps to prepare **BEFORE** an event occurs. There are many sample plans and checklists available to guide you. However, **your plans must fit your own unique circumstances.**

Start today! You can take small steps every day to become better prepared. Learn about how emergencies can impact you and your community. Identify your resources, make a plan, and create a “ready kit” and a “go kit”. **Start today to become better prepared, safer and more secure.**

Be Informed

1. Learn about the types of hazards that may impact your community (blizzards, tornadoes, floods, and so on). You can get information from your local Emergency Management Office.
2. Find out what emergency plans are in place in your community, workplace, service agencies, etc. Look over whether those plans have considered your specific needs.
3. Identify what the plan is for notifying people when a disaster may be on its way or is actually occurring.
4. Consider how a disaster might impact your daily routines. Make a list of your specific needs before,



during and after a disaster. (Adapted from the National Organization on Disability www.nod.org)

In the next issue of North Country News: Identifying your Resources

Transportation Update

Bob Olsgard, Transportation Coordinator

North Country Independent Living presents a day-long Transportation Summit for the community of Northwestern Wisconsin to learn and plan for how we can work together to provide more rides for more

Those who should attend are those who ride, provide, or work to get rides for others

people to more of the places our friends and neighbors need to go. The event will take place on March 22, 2006 at the Ramada Inn, Hayward, WI from 8am until 4pm. A limited number of stipends are available to people with disabilities who would like to attend the event.

You will learn about the national community transportation picture from Easter Seals Project Action, Training and Technical Assistant Specialist, Dan Dalton. Bill Ton and Jeff Heinzen will tell us about the results from our transportation surveys of Burnett, Sawyer and Washburn Counties. We’ve also lined up presentations on volunteer recruitment and retention, voucher programs, coordinated transportation and state DOT funding programs.

For more information about the summit or to register, contact Bob at: ncilbob@superior-nfp.org or by phone at 800-924-1220. Don’t delay. The registration deadline, March 14, is fast approaching.

Presented by North Country Independent Living and supported in part by the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant.

Hurricane Efforts Honored

John has received a **Certificate of Commendation**

from the State of Wisconsin for his work in Louisiana with people with disabilities following hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The commendation which was signed by Governor Doyle recognized John’s efforts as North Country’s Disability Navigator in helping people with disabilities recover from these storms.

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.

North Country Seeking Board Members for Iron & Price Counties

North Country Independent Living is seeking to fill vacancies on their Board of Directors. Current openings are for Iron and Price Counties.

North Country is a private, nonprofit agency serving people with disabilities in Iron, Price, Ashland, Bayfield, Douglas, Sawyer, Washburn and Burnett Counties. North Country's mission is to Empower People With Disabilities. Our board provides oversight and management of all of our services and provides community-based input into North Country's operations.

For more information, contact NCIL in Superior at 1-800-924-1220 v/tty or 392-9118 v/tty. If interested in serving on the NCIL board, send a letter to Gayle Wahner, c/o North Country Independent Living, 2231 Catlin Ave, Suite 16, Superior, WI 54880.

Plan to Participate in 2006 Elections

2006 will be an important election year for all of us. Some key jobs in Wisconsin Government will be up for grabs this year including Governor and Attorney General. Members of the Wisconsin Assembly serve two-year terms, so all these offices will be on the line on November 7th. In addition, all 435 members of the U.S. House of Representatives will be on the fall ballot. Control of Congress is at stake.

You won't need to vote for all of these offices, of course, but it will be an important election year in Wisconsin. Now's our time to get out and participate. Here's some important dates to remember:

- April 4th, Wisconsin Spring election
- September 1, deadline when cities change to accessible voting equipment.
- September 12, Wisconsin Primary election
- November 7, General Election in Wisconsin

One piece of legislation important to people with disabilities is the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). This law is forcing states, including Wisconsin, to make changes to voting equipment and take other steps to make our voting experience accessible. People with disabilities have the right to have an accessible voting booth and to make their choices in private like everyone else.

Let's participate this year like never before. If you have questions or concerns about voting, feel free to call North Country in either our Ashland or Superior office (see our back page). You can also visit the State Elections Board website at: <http://elections.state.wi.us>. They have the forms you need such as the absentee

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

I would like to volunteer at North Country

Board of Directors

Gayle Wahner, Superior
Tom Draghi, Hayward
Ben Barrett, Trego
Paul Zahurance, Saron
Brad Culligan, Ashland
Johnilee Nyberg, Minong
Mary Jane Grande, Ashland
Justin Nicoletti, Herbster

~~~~~

**Superior Main Office**

2231 Catlin Avenue, Suite 16  
Superior, WI 54880  
(715) 392-9118 V/TTY  
1-800-924-1220 V/TTY  
TTY Message Line (ext. 23)

Visit us on the web at  
**www.northcountryil.com**  
**Email: [ncil@superior-nfp.org](mailto:ncil@superior-nfp.org)**

**John Nousaine**

Director  
[nciljohn@superior-nfp.org](mailto:nciljohn@superior-nfp.org)

**Dee Truhn**

Assistant Director  
[ncildee@superior-nfp.org](mailto:ncildee@superior-nfp.org)

**Nickoel Anderson**

Accountant  
[ncilnick@superior-nfp.org](mailto:ncilnick@superior-nfp.org)

**Jeri Collier**

Office Assistant, Web Master  
[nciljeri@superior-nfp.org](mailto:nciljeri@superior-nfp.org)

**Gloria Hakkila-Johnson**

Independent Living Specialist  
[ncilgloria@superior-nfp.org](mailto:ncilgloria@superior-nfp.org)

**Gail Pearson**

Independent Living Specialist  
[ncilgail@superior-nfp.org](mailto:ncilgail@superior-nfp.org)

**Scott Anderson**

Benefits Specialist  
[ncilscott@superior-nfp.org](mailto:ncilscott@superior-nfp.org)

**Bob Olsgard**

Transportation Coordinator  
[ncilbob@superior-nfp.org](mailto:ncilbob@superior-nfp.org)

~~~~~

Ashland Branch Office

422 West Third Street, Suite 114
Ashland, WI 54806
(715) 682-5676 V/TTY
1-800-499-5676 V/TTY

John R. Nedden-Durst

Disability Navigator
nciljnd@superior-nfp.org

Stewart Holman

Independent Living Specialist
ncilstew@charterinternet.com

ALTERNATE FORMATS AVAILABLE

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