

MILC RUN

MIDSTATE INDEPENDENT LIVING CHOICES

“Working for persons with disabilities towards empowerment to make informed choices.”



A note from the executive director

Dear Friends,

Recently, I had the opportunity to attend my very first IL Days in Madison. This is a yearly opportunity for staff from all eight Independent Living Centers (ILC's) to come together with disability advocates from across the state for educational training, collaborating with peers, and meetings with legislators. While the weather didn't exactly cooperate, I can say that the MILC staff had an amazing time and came back energized with a sense of purpose and pride to continue delivering high quality services to the communities we serve.

This year's legislative talking points included increase in state IL funding, address the healthcare workforce crisis, address mental health and substance abuse, and address transportation issues. (Continued on page 2)

In this issue:

- 1-2: IL Days
- 3: Current openings
Event recap
- 4: Being an organized advocate
Preventing evictions
- 5: TREES
Ambulatory wheelchair user day
- 6: AT review
Call to action
- 7: Loan programs

IL Days — A note from the director

(Continued from page 1)

Increase in State IL Funding: Wisconsin's Independent Living Centers (ILCs) are the only consumer-run, community-based, nonprofit, nonresidential organizations serving persons of any age and with any type of disability in all 72 counties. The 8 ILCs that serve all of Wisconsin have received no increase in state funding for over 20 years, despite increased operating costs each year. We asked legislators to take two actions related to increasing funding for Wisconsin's Independent Living Centers: (1) Sign on to a bill asking for increased funding for WI Independent Living Centers, and (2) Sign on to the corresponding budget motion to be put forth and ask the Joint Finance Committee to include this funding in the Legislature's budget.

Address the Healthcare Workforce Crisis: The impact of a lack of personal care workers on disabled people is significant. A recent Wisconsin Personal Services Association survey indicated that Medical Assistance Personal Care providers need an increase of 32% to cover the actual costs of service. We ask that the legislature provide the needed increase for providers and begin the process of creating the needed structures to support home care workers, and the people who rely on them.

Address Mental Health and Substance Abuse: Peer Run Recovery Centers are staffed by Certified Peer Specialists who support individuals living with a mental health or substance use related barrier. Peer Run Recovery Centers provide opportunities in a safe, comforting, and judgment-free space for one-on-one connections and group activities focused on education, information sharing, skill-building, and socialization. We asked legislators to support Governor Evers' budget proposals to invest in mental health services.

Address Transportation Issues: Wisconsin's current transportation system is costly and difficult to navigate. The difficulty in accessing meaningful transportation is one of the main drivers of social isolation for people with disabilities, and older adults, and unnecessarily excludes them from our communities. We asked legislators to support creating a state level committee and developing a pilot program to braid specialized transportation funding in a way that will allow greater access to multi funded rides for people with disabilities and seniors.

In addition to the training, collaboration and advocacy, attendees spent an evening recognizing community members for their outstanding achievements. The Relentless Badger Award is given to individuals who seek to improve the lives and independence for people with disabilities. Stevens Point's own Mayor Mike Wiza received this year's 2023 Relentless Badger award in recognition of the efforts he has made to make Stevens Point a more accessible and accepting community for people with disabilities.

Mayor Mike has long been advocating for inclusivity and increased accessibility in Stevens Point and has made the city a more accessible and disability friendly place to live and experience. He continues to be instrumental in the building of accessible playgrounds, increasing the number of designated public parking spaces, and improving accessibility in parks and pathways. It was an honor for MILC to present him with the Relentless Badger Award for 2023.

- *Don Wigington, Executive Director*

IMMEDIATE OPENINGS!

Variety of shifts! Positions available throughout our
11 county service area!

Great
opportunity to earn
extra income!

Midstate Independent Living Choices



is in search of **CAREGIVERS** interested in assisting individuals in their homes providing personal, supportive and/or respite care. Travel allowance for eligible cases/employees. Experience preferred, or willing to learn new skills.

To see a full listing of our current openings visit

www.milc-inc.org

Complete the application online and submit to

ebuckles@milc-inc.org or

call 715-344-4210, ext. 222 to request an application

Event Recap: Adapted Ice Skating

On March 11, 2023 we hosted our 2nd annual adapted ice skating event at the K.B. Willett Arena in Stevens Point. This was an event for individuals with disabilities and their family members to try ice skating and engage in an activity they may not have previously thought possible.

We saw numbers of attendees double from last year. This year we added a sled hockey clinic that was run by Brad Roethlisberger from the Wisconsin Amateur Hockey Association (WAHA) to teach people about sled hockey and how to properly propel themselves in sleds. The rest of the time was an open skate opportunity for people to engage in skating how they saw fit. Free skate rentals were available at the rink for individuals that didn't have their own skates. Walkers, wheelchairs, and sled hockey sleds were available for participants to use to access the ice.



We hope to gain enough interest in sled hockey to assist in starting a sled hockey team in Central WI. If you are interested in learning more about sled hockey, reach out to Alex Lena at 715-344-4210 ext. 232 or alena@milc-inc.org

Being An Organized Advocate



When it comes to being a great advocate, organization is key. It is important to keep records in coordinated sections. Having a binder with your records from each agency you work with is a great way to stay organized. If you are a parent advocating for your child at school, putting everything into writing is very important. Email instead of making phone calls. If you do have a verbal conversation with school staff, follow up with an e-mail and document the dialogue. Keep a phone log and have a notebook for discussions. During meetings, take thorough notes. If

you need assistance, ask someone to attend the meeting and take notes for you.

One of the core services at Midstate Independent Living Choices is Advocacy. If you need help advocating for services you are entitled to, contact our office for assistance.

- **Sandi Walkush, IL Consultant**

Housing: Preventing Evictions

There are a few main reasons why landlords may feel the need to evict a tenant:

1. Violation of the lease or rental agreement such as: Not paying rent on time, smoking in a non-smoking area, too many people living in the unit (or not on the lease), and lastly, housing a pet in a pet free unit/pet not on the rental agreement.
2. Causing imminent harm: A tenant who is deemed a threat against another tenant may include a protection order, condition of release not to interact with the other tenant, or the tenant receives a criminal complaint against them.
3. Any illegal activity: threatening the safety of others, creation/distribution of a controlled substance.
4. Non-renewal of Lease: This is typically at the landlord's discretion.

How do you prevent an eviction from happening in the first place?

- Pay your rent in a timely manner, or talk to your landlord ASAP to make other arrangements.
- Understand your lease. Many potential tenants do not read the lease thoroughly before signing.
- Do a walk through of the apartment/rental unit with the landlord and take notes.
- Take pictures before and after tenancy for proof of the apartment's condition.
- Ask if the rental will include electric, gas, internet, cable, sewer, water, garbage, or parking.
- Find out if you are allowed to have pets in the unit. Many places have restrictions on the types and sizes of the animals you may have.

If you have further questions on housing, please contact us at (715) 344-4210.

- **LeeAnn Kopecko, IL Consultant**

TREES

Trees are no longer only large plants that provide oxygen and rid the atmosphere of carbon dioxide. The staff at the independent living center in Racine, WI (Society's Assets) created TREES, making it a metaphor for our daily relationships. TREES is an acronym for teaching relationships for everyone in everyday situations. This curriculum is used by the independent living centers of Wisconsin to teach relationships to youth with disabilities. TREES was designed with everyone in mind regardless of disability and can be modified for the specific needs of our consumers. TREES starts at the roots: the relationship with oneself, the trunk: close relationships with family or best friends, the branches: friends but not close friends, twigs: coworkers and classmates, and leaves: The acquaintances throughout daily living. The roots and trunk are the most intimate relationships, further from the roots, to the leaves, the intimacy drops. For example, there may be a discussion of the differences in interaction techniques between one significant other and their coworkers. Discussions include many topics including personal boundaries and relationships. The six modules all incorporate several discussions and activities throughout the module. This six-week class is better suited for group settings to allow for better discussion although, it can be in a one-on-one setting, dependent on participants' needs. MILC offers this course to any young person (ages 14-24) with a disability and can work with other agencies for funding.

Please contact Eric Riskus with any questions or inquiries at extension 238 or eriskus@milc-inc.org.

- Kent Henderson, IL Consultant

Celebrate Ambulatory Wheelchair User Day on June 11th, 2023!



Individuals who use a variety of mobility aids are referred to as ambulatory wheelchair users (AWU). These individuals may have limited ability to stand and can use anything from a cane, crutches, walker, wheelchair, and more to ambulate depending on the day, their symptoms, and the task at hand. AWU's have been historically excluded and misrepresented in the media.

This has led to the misconception that if you use a wheelchair, you must "always" use a wheelchair and never use another type of mobility aid. This has led to the popularity

of videos in the media that show a person in a wheelchair standing up to reach something off the shelf. Many comments accuse the person of "faking" their disability when they are just an ambulatory wheelchair user.

To raise awareness, Annie Segarra, American youtuber and disability activist is encouraging ambulatory wheelchair users to take to social media on June 11th, 2023, and share their photos and stories to increase visibility on this identity. If you plan to post, make sure to use the hashtag: **#AmbulatoryWheelchairUsersExist!**

- Madison Matijevich, IL Consultant

Assistive Technology Review At MILC:

Looking forward to warm temperatures and outdoor activities like gardening? If you have a disability, gardening might come with some extra challenges like getting outside to a garden, difficulties getting down to ground level to tend the garden, temperature regulation difficulties, scent related sensory difficulties, etc.

These gardening tips can help make gardening more accessible:

1. Indoor gardening: If you live in an apartment or have limited space outside but you wish to garden, you can use indoor gardening kits or systems like Aerogarden to achieve your goals.
2. Layout: If you have a garden outside, making sure it is accessible to you is important. If you have difficulties getting down to the ground level, using raised containers or garden beds can be helpful. Also, make sure that there is enough space between them to allow you to get to them with a mobility device, if needed.
3. Use adaptive equipment: Adapted gardening tools such as rake handles to make it more ergonomic, long-reach tools to avoid bending, ergonomic grip tools to reduce discomfort in hands and wrists, and extendable watering wands are some of the many devices that can be used to make gardening more accessible.



At MILC we have a variety of adapted gardening tools that individuals can borrow at no cost to find out if they work or not before investing in equipment.

If you are interested in learning more about the adapted tools we have or would like to try any, please contact us, and ask to speak to an Independent Living Consultant.

Call To Action

Occasionally, I am made aware of legislation that is trying to be made into law, Action Alerts. MILC employees are required to respond appropriately. Want to help in this effort? Oftentimes, the more constituents legislators hear from, the more willing they are to listen.

I call each person who has been closed as a consumer and on that call, I ask whether you would like to join an email list related to advocacy, a Call To Action List. If you would like to help facilitate change, simply answer yes and I will get an email address where I can reach you and add you to the list. If you have not been a consumer of MILC but would like to be on the Call To Action list, you can reach me via email, kpeterston@milc-inc.org, or telephone, 715-344-4210 x230. Simply provide your name and an email address you'd like to be reached at and I will add you to the list.

Your name and information is always kept confidential and if at any point you'd like to be removed from the list, just reach out to me by either of the means listed above and let me know; I'll remove you. These emails are rather sporadic, we may receive a lot in a short time and then not again for a long time. Also, do not feel that you are required to respond to all of them; just the ones you feel passionate about.

- Karalyn Peterson, Resource Coordinator



LOAN PROGRAMS

What is Wisloan?

Wisloan is a statewide, alternative loan program that allows Wisconsin residents with a disability, or their families, to purchase adaptive equipment, assistive technology or modify their homes so that they can live more independently. The applicant must be 18 and a resident of Wisconsin who wishes to improve his or her quality of life through the acquisition of items (examples include assistive technology, modified vehicles, etc.).

Both Telework and Wisloan loan amounts will depend on the item being purchased and the ability to repay. The current interest rate is 6.5%.

Bad credit, including bankruptcy is not a reason to not apply. The focus is on the ability to make the monthly payments. Reasons for credit issues are taken into consideration by the review board. Contact an IL Consultant at the MILC office for assistance in completing an application.

What is Telework?

Telework is a statewide, alternative loan program allowing Wisconsin residents with disabilities to purchase computers and other equipment needed to work from remote sites away from the office, including at home, on the road or at a Telework center. In addition to the purchase of equipment, the loan funds can be used for training to use equipment, extended warranties, the cost of maintenance and repair.

What is TEPP?

Telecommunications, Equipment Purchase Program

If you are one of the millions of people who have difficulty using a telephone, you should know that help is available through the Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program, or TEPP. The TEPP Program provides funding, (through the Universal Service Fund), for people with disabilities to purchase specialized telephones and related equipment.



The TEPP program issues vouchers, each with different dollar amounts, based on several categories of disability. For example, the Hard of Hearing voucher is \$100, the Deaf/Severely Hard of Hearing voucher is \$800, and the Mobility Impaired voucher is \$1,600. (Vouchers over \$100 require a \$100 co-pay, but there are programs available that may help cover that cost).

If you don't know what kind of phone will work for you, we have several different types of phones that you can borrow from our Wistech Loan and Demonstration Program so you can 'Try before you buy'.

Please contact MILC for further information about the TEPP Program or to schedule an appointment to try a few phones. (We can also assist with the application).

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