

On Target

Informing Indiana About Disability Issues
Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities
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Speaking out loud

Kacie Weldy, from Brownsburg, Hoosier advocate for people with disabilities and vice president of the Indiana Deaf Blind Association, stood before a Senate committee at the Statehouse in downtown Indianapolis, her service dog, Rei, obediently by her side. Though nervous at first, Weldy's confidence grew as she testified at a March 18 hearing for House Bill (HB) 1603, legislation that would allow individuals to be accompanied by their service animals in schools and employer facilities. With a positive attitude and an enlightening speech, Weldy inspired change.

"Service animals not only give their handlers independence and the ability to do the daily functions that are often taken for granted, but also give a quality of life and level of confidence that is immeasurable," Weldy stated in her written speech. Although she came prepared with a written testimony, Weldy avoided reading it word-for-word.

HB 1603, authored by Rep. Dan Leonard (R), passed unanimously out of the committee, thanks in part to Weldy's and other testimonies. There were six guide dogs in the small room, and the committee members were in awe of how well-behaved and quiet the animals were, according to Weldy.

The new legislation was originally initiated by Huntington resident Gary Johnson, who uses a service dog. Johnson approached Rep. Leonard about the bill after meeting a woman who wasn't allowed to have her service dog with her at work. Johnson and Weldy are both currently enrolled in the Partners in Policymaking Academy, the Governor's Council's program to educate and train advocates for people with disabilities.

According to Johnson, HB 1603 provides that employers must allow an employee with a disability to keep a guide animal with him/her at all times. In addition, the bill provides that a person with a disability is entitled to be accompanied by a guide/service animal in educational facilities, without an extra charge.

"When Rei came into my life, for the first time in several years, I was able to safely and independently travel on my own with confidence," Weldy stated in her testimony. "[Rei] is an extension of my person. Rei is my eyes. Rei is my independence."

Weldy, the mother of three, expressed her concern to the committee about not being allowed in her children's schools with Rei, as well as her fear of not being able to return to the workforce once her children are in school full time. The current statute doesn't include employers or schools in the list of public accommodations that are required to allow service animals in their facilities.

It was Weldy's first time testifying at a hearing, and she credits much of her motivation and confidence to Partners. "I have learned about the multitude of resources out there,

and the Partners session we had the weekend prior to that hearing was crucial to building my confidence, as we did a mock testimony during the session,” said Weldy.

Weldy said she would advise other advocates testifying for the first time to keep their testimonies short, simple and personal. “Speak from the heart,” she said.

At the time of print, HB 1603 had passed both the Senate and House of Representatives. The bill is now awaiting the governor’s signature to be passed into law.

To learn more about Weldy, as well as see her updates about HB 1603, visit her online blog at hearnoevil-seenoevil.blogspot.com.

Web site uses innovative technology to connect job seekers and employers

GettingHired.com has partnered with the U.S. Business Leadership Network (USBLN®) to promote the employment of qualified job seekers with disabilities. Free for job seekers, GettingHired.com is a social networking community that was established to connect people with disabilities with potential employers and mentors. The Web site contains several accessible tools that help connect the nation’s 22.3 million working-age people with disabilities with peers, employers, advocacy organizations and service providers.

The mix of individuals and organizations combines USBLN’s national business-to-business network and GettingHired.com’s innovative “Right Match” technology.

Job seekers can find opportunities posted by employers that purchase annual subscriptions. The portal then matches individual qualifications to specific job requirements. No person is ever asked to disclose his or her specific disability.

GettingHired.com also benefits others through a generous contribution from employer’s paid annual subscriptions. It donates 5 percent of net profits to the GettingHired Foundation, which supports organizations dedicated to the advancement of people with disabilities.

For more information, visit www.GettingHired.com.

INDATA provides aid for affordable assistive technology

Assistive technology can be difficult to afford, especially in the current economy. INDATA, an Easter Seals Crossroads program begun in 2007, helps people with disabilities afford assistive technology devices. The program started when Indiana Family and Social Services Administration’s Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services contracted with Easter Seals Crossroads to be the statewide provider of the Federal Assistive Technology Act.

The INDATA Project provides several resources to assist those in need of assistive technology:

- Σ **Device demonstration and lending:** INDATA offers assistive technology device demonstrations. These demonstrations, offered statewide, allow people with disabilities to interact with different assistive devices, as well as meet with an assistive technology specialist. In addition, several assistive technology devices are available for a trial assessment.
- Σ **Equipment reutilization:** The program offers an online buy/sell/trade resource that coordinates the reuse of previously owned assistive technology devices.
- Σ **Recycled computer program:** Under INDATA, Hoosiers with disabilities may be eligible to receive donated computers free of charge.
- Σ **Training:** INDATA is hosting a statewide assistive technology conference, "Get Connected," Friday, Aug. 7, at the Convention Center in Indianapolis. Quarterly training sessions, held in Indianapolis, are also available to educate people with disabilities on device training, funding and clinical techniques.

Easter Seals Crossroads also continues to research funding alternatives, such as low-interest bank loans, for those in need of assistive technology devices.

To learn more, visit www.eastersealstech.com and click on "The INDATA Project," or call (888) 466-1314 (toll free, voice).

Purdue University acquires leadership of National AgrAbility Project

Of the 54 million people with disabilities nationwide, thousands earn a living as farmers, ranchers and other agricultural workers. The National AgrAbility Project (NAP) seeks to help these individuals continue to succeed — despite their disabilities.

NAP, begun in 1990, recently came under the leadership of Purdue University's Breaking New Ground Resource Center, one of 21 State/Regional AgrAbility Projects (SRAPs) affiliated with the national program.

NAP and the state/regional AgrAbility projects provide education and resources to people with disabilities involved with agriculture using a three-pronged approach:

- Σ **Technical assistance:** Delivering direct assistance to agricultural workers and their families in assistive technology, worksite modifications and independent living.
- Σ **Information dissemination:** Providing research-based resources to enhance the independence of farmers and ranchers with disabilities.
- Σ **Professional training:** Offering training opportunities for consumers and professionals.

AgrAbility continues to collaborate with rehabilitation engineers, designers, custom fabricators and manufacturers to develop new and creative ways for accommodating disabilities in the agricultural fields. One such example is lifts, manufactured by Life Essentials in West Lafayette, Ind., that help individuals with mobility disabilities access the operator stations on tractors, combines, pick-up trucks and semi-trucks.

To learn more about AgrAbility, visit www.agrability.org or call (800) 825-4264 (toll free, voice).

Vacationing in your own backyard

Summertime is right around the corner, and your vacation planning may be underway. But in these tough economic times, going out of town might not make your wallet very happy. You may have recently heard the term “staycation,” which refers to spending your vacation in your own neck of the woods — which can be much more affordable.

Here in the Hoosier state, there are many attractions that are accessible for people with disabilities and can make for a great vacation close to home. The Indiana Department of Natural Resources maintains a variety of accessible attractions that offer everything from exploring historic sites to venturing into the great outdoors.

Parks and reservoirs

- ∑ Clifty Falls State Park (Madison, Ind.): A new accessible trail at this attraction allows all visitors to visit the Falls up close. And the remodeled Clifty Inn includes a variety of accessible features. “The Inn is extremely accessible. In my opinion, it’s a four-star quality hotel,” said Ric Edwards, director of safety and ADA compliance for the DNR. www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/inns/clifty or (812) 265-4135 (voice).
- ∑ Brown County State Park (Nashville, Ind.): This destination offers everything from festivals to shopping to outdoor recreation. One of the Park’s many accommodations, the Abe Martin Lodge, just added an indoor water park that’s accessible for people with disabilities. www.browncounty.com or (800) 753-3255 (toll free, voice).
- ∑ O’Bannon Woods State Park (Corydon, Ind.): Nestled in Indiana’s deep south, next to the Ohio River, this attraction offers areas for camping, hiking, picnicking and horseback riding. (812) 738-8232 (voice).

Museums and historic sites

- ∑ Gene Stratton-Porter State Historic Site (Geneva, Ind.): Located just west of Fort Wayne, this historic site is a tribute to one of Indiana’s most famous female authors. Recently, the DNR restored a cabin located on the property to now include a lift, as well as other accessible features, for people with mobility disabilities. An accessible boardwalk along the waterfront was also installed so that all visitors can walk right along and sit by the lake. www.genestrattonporter.net.

- Σ Lanier Mansion (Madison, Ind.): This 200-year old historic site is the former home of pioneering businessman James Franklin Doughty Lanier. Just this year, the DNR added a lift to make the mansion accessible for people with mobility disabilities. (812) 265-3526 (voice).

Outdoor recreation/fishing and wildlife

- Σ Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore (Porter, Ind.): This 25 miles of lakeshore spans portions of Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties in northwest Indiana. The park features beaches, dunes, rivers, woodland forests and marshes. The Dunes offer a TracAbout wheelchair that is equipped to travel in the sand and up many of the dunes. (219) 926-1952 (voice).
- Σ Atterbury State Fish and Wildlife Area (Edinburgh, Ind.): Part of Camp Atterbury, this attraction offers hunting and fishing opportunities. In addition to an accessible pier for fishing, Atterbury has an accessible shooting range. (812) 526-2051 (voice).

The DNR also offers four-wheel drive wheelchairs that allow visitors to travel various hiking paths at some state parks, including McCormick's Creek State Park (Spencer, Ind.), Brown County (Nashville, Ind.) and Lincoln (Lincoln City, Ind.)

To learn more about the various attractions maintained by the DNR, visit www.in.gov/dnr.

Hotels.com to increase accessibility

Travelers with disabilities will soon be able to reserve accessible hotel rooms through Hotels.com, an online travel agency. This option is available to settle a 2007 lawsuit in which the company was accused of refusing to guarantee reservations for rooms that are wheelchair accessible.

According to an article in the "San Francisco Chronicle," Plaintiffs Bonnie Lewkowicz of Berkeley and Judith Smith of Oakland claimed Hotels.com treated accessibility as an optional "amenity," such as requesting a king-size bed. When the two women called the company's customer-care line, they were informed that accessible rooms could not be guaranteed. Lewkowicz and Smith both use wheelchairs.

Hotels.com, a subsidiary of Expedia.com, will gather information about hotels' accessibility features and incorporate them into its Web site. This will allow travelers to book accessible rooms, and customer service representatives will be trained to handle these requests.

In a statement released earlier this year, Scott Booker, chief hotel expert and guest advocate for Hotels.com, said "Our customer service and technology teams are working carefully to implement changes to our sites, which will enable travelers to search and book properties which meet their accessibility requirements."

Another source for booking accessible hotel rooms is www.accessible.travel. This new Web site offers information about accessible features in a variety of travel destinations.

Of Note

Obama announces disability policy advisor

President Obama has announced that Jeffrey S. Crowley will join the Domestic Policy Council as senior advisor on disability policy and top advisor on HIV/AIDS issues. Crowley most recently served as the senior research scholar at Georgetown University's Health Policy Institute, where he provided policy analysis and technical assistance to the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities and the Disability Policy Council.

New IPAS report

Indiana Protection and Advocacy Services (IPAS) has published a report titled "Time-Out, Seclusion and Restraint in Indiana Public Schools." The report is intended to raise awareness of current policies related to restraint and seclusion in Indiana schools. IPAS says its goal is to ensure proper policies regulate any use of restraint or seclusion. Visit www.in.gov/ipas/2760.htm to download the report.

Nominations open for Community Spirit Awards

The Governor's Council is now accepting nominations for the 2009 Community Spirit Awards for both distinguished leadership and outstanding Disability Awareness Month campaigns. To nominate an individual or group, visit www.in.gov/gpcpd and click on the Community Spirit Awards logo. Nominations must be postmarked no later than Friday, Aug. 21.

Phone number correction

The phone number for the Family Involvement Fund (FIF) was incorrectly listed in the April issue of "On Target." For information about FIF, contact the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community at (800) 825-4733 (toll-free, voice)

Save the date!

The 2009 Conference for People with Disabilities, themed "Invest in People and Share in the Profits," will take place Tuesday, Nov. 17, and Wednesday, Nov. 18, at the Hyatt Regency in downtown Indianapolis. Look for more details in future issues of "On Target."

On Target is a monthly publication of the Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities. We welcome your suggestions for newsletter content and ideas concerning the actions of the Council. on target is made available in accessible formats upon request.