



ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES PROGRAM

A **NEW** SERVICE ANNOUNCED

By Amber Brunas
PROGRAMS AND COMMUNICATION ASSISTANT

Last year, Access to Independence introduced our new line of Accessibility Services. This menu of services is specifically designed to provide businesses, organizations, governments, event planners and others in the community with an opportunity to utilize the expertise that comes from south-central Wisconsin's only disability-run, cross-disability organization.

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Artist Beyond Boundaries Returns
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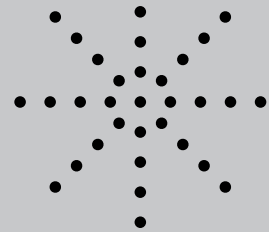
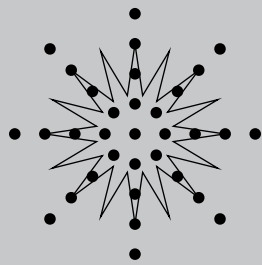


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Artists Beyond Boundaries returns to an in-person event

By Amber Brunas

PROGRAMS AND COMMUNICATIONS ASSISTANT

The annual Artists Beyond Boundaries art event and fundraiser is back! For this event, we invite artists with disabilities to submit their artwork via an online form. We then work with visual arts professionals to help us determine the top twelve works of art. Those twelve finalists win cash awards and have their artwork featured in the yearly Artists Beyond Boundaries calendar.

We are proud of the successful virtual events of the last three years, but virtual events have their limits. And so, for the first time in four years, Artists Beyond Boundaries will return to an in-person event in 2023! Moving back to an in-person event allows the artists, jurors, staff, sponsors, and attendees to connect, and feel the empowerment of art. It's also more fun to celebrate over drinks and hors d'oeuvres! Having the event in person also allows us to partner with another local organization, the Goodman Community Center. The Goodman Community Center serves people of all ages with programs, older adult activities, meals, a food pantry, event spaces and more. Part of what makes this partnership unique is we will have the pleasure of working with their unique catering service wherein their catering team is part of the TEENworks vocational program that offers valuable, marketable work skills and experience to teenagers.

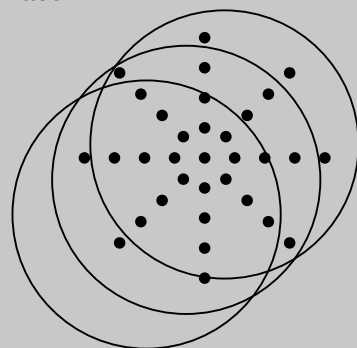
Whether you are interested in submitting artwork, in becoming a sponsor, or in attending our in-person event, stay tuned to our event website and agency Facebook page for more details. We can't wait to see you there!

..... IMPORTANT DATES

Call for Art: June 1st - August 31st, 2023 artists will be invited to submit up to two works of art to this year's event through an online form

Event Date: On October 12th at 5:30pm, we'll host the in person event at the Goodman Community Center in Madison, WI where we'll take a look at ALL of the artwork submitted to the event and learn more about the artists who entered their work. We'll also learn more about the jurors, sponsors, and others who work behind the scenes to make this event a success, as well as announce which works of art the jurors have selected as this year's Top Twelve!

LEARN MORE AT [ARTISTSBYONDBOUNDARIES.WEBLY.COM](https://www.artistsbeyondboundaries.weebly.com)



Pictured above: Access to Independence staff attending the Independent Living Legislative Days in-person event.

Annual Independent Living Days Event

By Tracy Miller

INDEPENDENT LIVING SPECIALIST

Our annual Independent Living Days event is a chance for all 8 Independent Living Centers to gather in Madison for 2 days of training and legislative advocacy. In February, we met in person for the first time since 2020, and it was good to be together. On February 8, several training sessions for IL staff and board members had an advocacy theme, focusing on positive social change and disability justice. As has often been the case in past years, we braved a snowstorm on February 9 to make our way to the Capitol to meet with our state legislators - testing our dedication to this advocacy work! Our legislative visits focused on 4 key areas:

Funding for the ILCs, Long Term Care, Mental Health / Substance Use, and Transportation.

The network of centers has not had an increase in state funding since 1999, while the average increase in requests for core services has been 229% over the past 20 years! There is currently a bill in the state legislature, SB71, which will increase state funding for the eight Independent Living Centers in Wisconsin. Additionally, the IL Network is encouraging the state legislature to include the increase in the 23-25 biennial state budget, as described in SB71. If you have been supported by Access to Independence, or any of the state's Independent Living Centers, you may want

to contact your state legislators and share your story.

On long term care, we asked our legislators to address the workforce crisis for people who rely on home and community-based services (and their families) by increasing MA reimbursement rates, and other measures to support both a reliable pool of workers and the people who rely on them.

Governor Evers has declared 2023 "The Year of Mental Health" and the centers showed their support for investing in expanding peer support programs and offering specific behavioral health services for people who are Deaf or Deaf/Blind.

SEE LEGISLATIVE, PAGE 6

Pictured left to right: Relentless Badger Award winner Iris Mickey (middle) with Tracy Miller (left) and Jason Beloungy (right) of Access to Independence.



Relentless Badger honoree Iris Mickey making 'Yoga Accessible For All'

By Tracy Miller
INDEPENDENT LIVING SPECIALIST

As part of Independent Living Days, each Center celebrates someone from their region who embodies the Independent Living Philosophy as a "Relentless Badger." This year, we chose Iris Mickey as our Relentless Badger honoree. As the co-founder and program director for the Madison-based non-profit *Yoga Accessible For All* (YAFA) Iris, who has been teaching yoga for more than 22 years, brings the benefits of yoga to people of all abilities and backgrounds. Starting this spring, we are thrilled to be partnering with Iris and YAFA to host a series of yoga classes for people who are Hard of Hearing or Deaf! (See Yoga Classes article for more information on this exciting initiative.)

ARE YOU HARD OF HEARING OR DEAF?

YOGA CLASSES START MAY 2!

What: Weekly Yoga classes for Hard of Hearing or Deaf people
When: Tuesday afternoons, 2-3:15 p.m., May 2 - June 13
Where: Ultratec, 450 Science Drive, in Madison
Cost: \$40

Classes will be taught by instructors from Yoga Accessible For All (YAFA) with a consistent Sign Language Interpreter. The room will have a loop system for people with hearing aids. Other accommodations will be provided, as needed. Classes will be adapted for any age and physical level. Come join us!

If you are interested in participating, or have questions, please contact Tracy at 608-716-7101 or via email at tracym@accesstoind.org with "Yoga" in the subject line.

Our thanks to YAFA and Ultratec for their support!



GAMING UNLOCKED

△ □ × ○ **SPRING 2023** ○ × □ △

By Rachel Thielen
YOUTH SERVICES SPECIALIST

In early April, our Gaming Unlocked program kicked off adaptive gaming groups for youth here at Access to Independence. Since our first session in the winter of 2022, enrollment in the program has more than doubled, with kids of a wider age range signing up to participate. This unique opportunity allows participants to engage in the gaming community by learning essential social skills to build connections with peers in the gaming community. Each group begins with 30 minutes of peer discussion around topics related to gaming,

including safety and barriers in the gaming community.

In collaboration with Able Gamers and The Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation, Gaming Unlocked continues to provide an impressive array of assistive technology, consultations, assessments, and loans to participants of the program. This includes an array of switches, mounts, the Xbox Adaptive Controller, and many more pieces of gaming technology. This program is open to all students receiving services from Children Long Term Support (CLTS).

If you have any questions, please email Rachel Thielen, rachel@accesstoind.org or call 608-716-7109.

City of Madison resolves to address home care crisis

By Tracy Miller
INDEPENDENT LIVING SPECIALIST

On March 7, the Madison Common Council passed a resolution directing the Disability Rights Commission and city staff to report on and develop a comprehensive response to the crisis in home health care in Madison. Many people spoke up about how this issue impacts them, and the city responded. You can get involved in local advocacy efforts on the issues that impact your life. Contact Access if you want to learn how.



Would you be interested in a poetry group at Access?

We have a Peer Mentor who writes poetry and is involved in a local poetry group. He is interested in facilitating a group of peers to share ideas, focusing on poetry and creative writing. If you would have an interest in joining a group like this, contact Tracy at Access at tracy@accesstoind.org (if you email me, please put "poetry" in the subject line).

**ASSISTIVE
TECHNOLOGY
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The Future Call amplified picture phone is especially helpful for those with dementia, memory loss, low vision, and people having difficulty dialing a regular phone. This phone features pictures of the person you want to call! The Future Call has a handset volume control with 40 dB of amplification, a speakerphone, bright red LED light for incoming calls, and a green LED light to show the phone is in use. This corded phone is land-line powered, and hearing aid compatible.

Through a partnership with the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin, Access to Independence has a dedicated telecommunications room with over 100 different devices to help with telecommunication. You can borrow these devices for up to three weeks at a time. Try something before you buy it, to see if it's right for you!

Call 608-242-8484 or email info@accesstoind.org to learn more about this device, or our many other telecommunications devices.

SERVICE

FROM PAGE 1

We provide evaluations, technical assistance, and training services designed to show where accessibility can be improved, ensuring that people with disabilities have equal access to services, opportunities, and events.

We've already made meaningful impacts on events and businesses with partners like Willy Street Co-Op, the PBS WI Garden and Landscape Expo, Wisconsin Historical Society, Cheese Days, the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra's Concerts on the Square, and more!

The success of our Accessibility Services has led us to another exciting addition to this line of services; we are now offering website accessibility services! Our website accessibility evaluation and report clearly identify areas where accessibility on websites can be improved.

Online tools and widgets can address some aspects of accessibility, a professional evaluation looks beyond the obvious, and provides solutions for long-term access, not quick fixes in the moment.

Our Accessibility Services can positively impact businesses and events in a number of ways. They can improve their reputation as an inclusive and welcoming organization, which can lead to increased brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth marketing. They can help avoid legal repercussions by being in compliance with the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA), and much more!

We're proud to offer these services at Access to Independence, and we hope you'll check them out and share them with entities who would benefit.

To learn more, or request a free consultation, visit www.accesstoind.org/AccessibilityServices or contact Jason Beloungy at 608-716-7266.

LEGISLATIVE

FROM PAGE 3

Finally, we asked for the state to establish a transportation coordination committee, and a pilot program to effectively braid funding for federal and state-funded specialized

transportation for people with disabilities and seniors.

If you would like information about any of these advocacy priorities, or how you can share your personal story and get involved in advocacy work, please let us know!



**WISLOAN + TELEWORK
LOAN PROGRAMS**

FUNDING INDEPENDENCE

WisLoan and Telework are alternative loan programs that assist Wisconsin residents with disabilities to acquire technologies to become self-employed or to work from home. These loan programs are different from traditional bank loans because a bank doesn't make the final decision, the WisLoan and Telework Board does. That allows flexibility for people who have an item they need to maintain their independence, but have trouble coming up with the money all at once or finding other ways to pay for what they need. Simply contact Access to Independence for information at 608-242-8484 or email info@accesstoind.org.

WISLOAN

What Can I Buy with a WisLoan?

You can purchase technology such as wheelchairs, computers, ramps, vehicle modifications, or home modifications.

TELEWORK

What Can I Buy with a TeleWork Loan?

You can purchase items such as computers and software, scanners or fax machines, tools, office furniture, or modifications for an accessible office.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

How much can I borrow?

Loan amounts range from \$250 to \$50,000. The loan would be for the exact amount of the item.

Can I apply if I have no job?

Yes. Social Security Disability or Retirement benefits and other sources of income are considered.

Can I apply if my credit is poor?

Yes. The reason for the poor credit is considered, as is one's ability to repay the loan.

How do I apply?

Contact Access to complete the loan application materials in person. Application can be done at the Access office or at a location of your preference.

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS & SPONSORS

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Access to Independence greatly appreciates the generosity of all those who have made a financial contribution – big or small – to our organization. Through the generosity of our donors, ACCESS is able to expand opportunities for individuals with disabilities to access demonstrations and free loans of assistive technology equipment, skills training in peoples' homes and classes at our office in Madison, among the wide array of services we provide. We would like to thank each of our sponsors for their generosity!

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Local United Way 2022



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Access is seeking new board members.
 Contact us if you'd like to know more.

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