**ACCESS to Independence turns 40**

Next year, ACCESS will be celebrating our 40th anniversary of providing quality independent living services to people with disabilities in south-central Wisconsin. Planning is underway for some fun and exciting events, and we hope you will make plans to celebrate with us. Some of the activities in the works include:

* Fundraiser(s) with local bands.
* A contest and event to celebrate the talents of local artists with disabilities, with art works depicting the mission and values of ACCESS. (We will choose 12 winners for a 2019 calendar!)
* A community picnic to celebrate the history of ACCESS, with a timeline of highlights from our many years of working for independence and self-determination for all.
* Details will be announced on our website and Facebook pages, as well as in future editions of The Open Door.

If you have been a part of ACCESS as a staff or board member, a volunteer, a partner provider, or especially as someone who’s used our services, we’d love to hear from you. Call Dee Nash at 608-242-8484, ext. 233, or deen@accesstoind.org, to share your story. You can also contact Dee if you’d be interested in volunteering for one of the anniversary events during the year.

**Looking forward, looking back**

**by Tracy A. Miller**  
*CPS, Independent Living Specialist*

Next year, as we get ready to celebrate 40 years of ACCESS, I am getting ready to celebrate 35 years that I have been employed by ACCESS! November 14, 2017, was my 34th anniversary. I pulled out my original offer of employment from our first director, Eileen Berkley, that I still keep in my office. I made $4.50 an hour (that’s about $11.00 in today’s dollars) and I was hired to work “approximately 10 hours a week” as a “limited term” clerical aide. My position was made permanent in 1984, and I’ve been here ever since.

I’m known as the “ACCESS historian,” which mostly just means that I am a very old pack rat! But I am proud to have served the local community of people with disabilities through ACCESS over the years - and to be able to share the remarkable story of ACCESS - almost from the beginning - with new generations of disability rights advocates. ACCESS is not just a place, but it is PEOPLE like you and me! I hope you will consider helping all of us to celebrate our 40-year milestone by sharing your stories about what ACCESS has meant to you.

**Teamwork makes the dream work**

**by Moriah Grace**  
*Lead Youth Staff Member at ACCESS*

Every October, the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL) holds its annual conference in a different community across the country. APRIL is a national membership organization that promotes and addresses independent living issues of people with disabilities living in rural America, and which Access to Independence is a proud member. The theme of this year’s conference was “Teamwork Makes the Dream Work”. One area of focus was the intersectionality of different civil rights movements with disability rights. There was discussion about how race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and age intersect with disability, and how we can all work together towards greater overall equality. Each year, there is also a youth conference, in conjunction with the full conference. I had the privilege of chairing the planning committee, and over 115 youth with disabilities attended. The youth participated in activities demonstrating unconscious bias and institutional inequality. The youth also got to talk about their own experiences regarding race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation and discrimination. At the end of the weekend youth were charged up and ready to go back to their communities, armed with tools to better support each other and grow their IL movements. In addition to the learning and networking, we did have time to live it up and had a youth dance Saturday night. All people from the conference were invited and we had a great mix of people. Yours truly DJ’d and youth in attendance got to learn the electric slide and “discovered” the Bee Gees for the first time. It was an honor to be able to help with the conference planning, and to work with other tremendous advocates from around the country. As our side motto stated “The People United Can Never Be Divided”.

**Say goodbye to 2017 by Supporting Access to Independence**

Is Access to Independence part of your end-of-year giving?

ACCESS wants to remind readers that your financial support is crucial to our ability to serve people of ANY type of disability, and of ALL ages, throughout Columbia, Dane, Dodge, and Green Counties. If you would like to make a tax-deductible contribution, you can:

* Clip out the donation slip from this newsletter and mail with a check to Access to Independence.
* Go to www.accesstoind.org, click on the DONATE button, and make a secure payment with your debit or credit card, or PayPal account. If you’d like to make your payment recurring, you can do so online as well.
* Contact Dee Nash at 608-242-8484, ext. 233, or deen@accesstoind.org if you are interested in discussing planned giving opportunities.
* Nearly ninety cents of every dollar is used for direct services, and ACCESS greatly appreciates any support you can afford.

**1st annual Reel Access to Real Independence fundraiser a success**

On November 1st, a few ACCESS staff and board members, and volunteers, gathered at the office for the final drawings of the fundraising event. Over $600 worth of raffle prizes were awarded, a fishing contest winner was announced, and the winning name of the $1,000 grand prize was drawn. ACCESS would like to thank all those who supported this inaugural event by purchasing tickets, providing sponsorship support, and volunteering. For a full list of this year’s sponsors and partners, go to www.reelaccess.org. Planning for the 2018 event is already underway, and some exciting changes and opportunities will be announced on the event website and Facebook page. There will be a need for volunteers, sponsorships, and prize donations, so if you are interested, please contact Jason Beloungy at 608-242-8484, ext. 229, or jasonb@accesstoind.org.

**Two new Independent Living Specialist/Youth Staff at ACCESS**

**Ashley Beal** joined the Access to Independence staff, as an Independent Living Specialist and in Youth Services. Ashley is a former consumer with Access to Independence, and is a compassionate supporter of disability and youth rights. Ashley is also certified as both a Peer Support Specialist and in Comprehensive Community Services. With her beliefs, education, and personal and lived experience, Ashley has found her calling in working with others on achieving their goals towards independence. As a Wisconsin Native, Ashley enjoys spending time outdoors with family and friends, watching her son play basketball, and catching a good concert, especially if it’s at Alpine Valley Music Theatre.

**Danielle Kaiser** joined the Access to Independence staff, as an Independent Living Specialist and in Youth Services. Danielle recognizes the need for advocacy and systems change as she has navigated systems as the parent of an individual with disabilities. She learned firsthand that barriers can exist for people with disabilities trying to access their communities and their rights. Danielle has previously worked in the public school system, and the supported employment field while attending college. She has worked with people with disabilities from four years old through adulthood. Danielle is a graduate of Wisconsin’s first Partners in Policymaking advocacy training program and used that experience to correct a fundamental error to the state’s respite care program. Danielle holds a Bachelor’s of Science degree in Public Affairs from Indiana University, graduated with an Occupational Therapy Assistant degree, and is a licensed COTA. She has experience in hospital, school, mental health and senior care settings. In her free time, Danielle spends time volunteering in the community with her daughter, attending concerts, and dining out.