

THE OPEN DOOR

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ACCESS
TO INDEPENDENCE INC.

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SPOTLIGHT

INTO THE

NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ANNOUNCED

After an extensive search, the ACCESS to Independence Board of Directors selected Jason Beloungy as the next Executive Director. Jason succeeds ACCESS's long term Executive Director who retired after 10 years of service.

SEE DIRECTOR • PAGE 5



Pictured above is the group of staff, board members, and volunteers who helped make the event a success!

8th annual Brat Sale a success



Thank you to everyone who celebrated the first day of summer in style by attending our 8th Annual Brat Sale Fundraiser! It was a major success due, in no small part, to our dedicated team of staff, board members, and volunteers! Not to mention, all of our hungry patrons! We would also like to thank our generous sponsors whose support made this event possible: HyVee, Willy St. Co-Op, Metcalfe's, Costco, Pick N Save, Target, Woodman's, and Kwik Trip. ACCESS would like to thank everyone for making the 2019 Brat Sale a hit!

Ella B. and Ilana B. dressed as bratwurst. Their entertaining performances brought in a number of hungry customers.

New beginnings with Peer Mentor Program

ACCESS is seeking volunteers with disabilities

We are beginning to regrow our Peer Mentor program and we need volunteers with disabilities who are interested in becoming a Peer Mentor to assist others as they face challenges and barriers in their lives.

Supportive relationships with peers positively impact both the Peer Mentor and the peer in many different ways. Examples of ways that Peer Mentors can provide support to peers may include assistance to:

- Learn about valuable community resources.
- Learn about their disability and what it means for them.
- Learn new skills.
- Understand their rights.
- Advocate for themselves.
- And so much more!

We are looking for people with all types of disabilities who are interested in going through a brief training process to volunteer a few hours a month. Your life experience has great value and is an important tool you can share with others! Keep in mind what it may have felt like when someone shared their insights and life experiences with you in a way that made you feel that you were not alone on your journey. Mentoring is mutual and cyclical—we give to others what we have learned from others and with this they are able to give back. Someone you mentor today may be a mentor for someone else tomorrow. Knowing this is a great feeling!

If you are interested in volunteering to be a peer mentor, please contact Ashley Beal at ACCESS for more information.

Please note: if you have volunteered to be peer mentor for us before and are interested in doing it again, we'd also like to hear from you!



State Government 101 for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

How does state government work? We can help you find out! The Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) is hosting free workshops around the state for people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing to learn about government processes in Wisconsin. All Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and deafblind people are welcome to attend.

When: October 19, 2019
9:00 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Where: ACCESS to Independence

Presenter: Jason Altmann

Light refreshments and pizza will be served.

RSVP by Friday, October 11, 2019, to Bette Mentz-Powell by email at bette.mentzpowell@dhs.wisconsin.gov or by phone at 608-319-1249.

Interpreter and CART services will be provided. If you are deafblind and need an additional interpreter, please contact Bette Mentz-Powell as soon as possible.



HELP ACCESS REDUCE COSTS

By requesting your newsletter in email format, you can help ACCESS reduce printing costs while still receiving the same great information! Contact us today to change how you read ***The Open Door***.

A HUGE WELCOME TO OUR NEW STAFF MEMBERS!



Nicole Sanders
Independent Living
Specialist

Nicole moved to Wisconsin from Springfield, IL in 2014. Since then, Nicole has loved all of the fun and unique events Madison has

to offer. She graduated from Madison College in May 2018 with an Occupational Therapy Assistant degree, and is a licensed COTA. In her spare time, Nicole likes to kayak, spend time with her wife, Chelsea, and their dog, Barlie. Nicole also enjoys riding her motorcycle, checking out new breweries, visiting family, and playing video games.



Kirsten Schultz
Independent Living
Specialist

Kirsten's background is as a writer and sex educator focused on people with disabilities. Through their work as a disability activist,

they have earned a reputation for tearing down barriers while mindfully causing constructive trouble. Kirsten has been an influencer in chronic illness circles since they began writing about living with Systemic Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis back in 2007. In recent years, they have given presentations around North America in addition to working with organizations worldwide on all things related to sexuality, gender, illness, and disability.

Kirsten was incredibly thrilled to learn about the services available through ACCESS to Independence, but even happier to be hired on as an ILS. Working with ACCESS gives them the ability to work on things they love while helping people directly. It has been mind-blowing for them to work with other people so passionate about dismantling ableism.

Kirsten holds a Master of Science in Healthcare Administration from Utica College. In the little free time they have, they enjoy dancing, creating culinary experiments, and spending time with friends.



Rebecca Patterson | Independent Living Specialist

I am both a new and old employee here at ACCESS. My first experience with ACCESS began in 2002 when the office was located on Atwood Ave. During the next six years, I served as an Independent Living Specialist, the Assistive Technology Coordinator, and the Office Manager. I left in 2006 and have since held a few jobs, most recently raising my daughter and working for Social Security. My work

at Social Security taught me a lot about the fine details of SSI and SSDI, but I also learned that working for the government was not where I belong. I have low vision and it was a constant fight to get any accommodation, any empathy, and to simply fit in. Most importantly, I need to be part of a larger community such as ACCESS, although I also enjoy working with people on an individual basis. Since my return to ACCESS, I've become the go-to for Social Security questions and been crushed by my out-of-date knowledge related to assistive technology. Last time I worked here I had a flip-phone! Don't worry, I am quickly learning my way around the array of assistive technology we have. In my personal life, I love spending time with my family. This revolves around my 7-year-old who ensures that every day is unique. My husband and I love showing her the world. Now I can introduce her to a world that includes a range of people, abilities, challenges, and accomplishments. I am very happy to be back!



Shari Bruner | Assistant Director

Several years ago I had my first exposure to an IEP meeting. This was new to me and I felt quite intimidated when entering the room of eight teachers. Needless to say, I felt very pressured to sign paperwork I did not understand in order for my child to receive the assistance they needed in school. There was no mention of any choices. Years later, I met someone who happened to be the Director of an Independent Living

Center. At the moment I was between jobs, so she encouraged me to apply to work for Midstate Independent Living Center (MILC) in Stevens Point. Before MILC, I had many jobs in the accounting field, including a family run business. I have worked at MILC for the past eight years. I started out as line staff with a focus on Assistive Technology. I soon took on the role of a Benefits Specialist as well. Three years ago, the opportunity arose for me to become the Independent Living Coordinator for MILC. During my time at MILC, I have sat on many committees and councils. I continue to sit on the WI Assistive Technology Advisory Council as the WICIL liaison and the Universal Service Fund Council.

On a personal level, I am a proud mother of 3 adult children, 2 of whom are married. I am a lover of music and have played piano since I was 5 years old. I play handful of other instruments but mainly consider myself a keyboardist. I've played in many bands over the years and claim blues as my genre. I served as the Choir Director at a local Stevens Point Church for 5 years. I also have a dream to one day conduct a symphony. I am a coffee lover, dog lover, and foodie. I am not originally from Wisconsin, but truly consider this to be my home.



Pictured is Jason Beloungy standing in front of the Access to Independence office

DIRECTOR

FROM PAGE 1

Jason has spent the last 15 years in a variety of roles within the independent living movement. Jason began as the Assistant Director of ACCESS in 2010. During his time as the Assistant Director, he provided leadership for the services offered by the agency, as well as involvement in systemic change through advocacy, education, and collaboration. Previously, Jason was a Policy Analyst for the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) in Washington, D.C. NCIL is the nation's longest-running, cross-disability grassroots organization run by and for people with disabilities. Jason began his work in the movement as an Independent Living Specialist for Independent Living Resources in La Crosse.

SEE BELOUNGY, PAGE 7

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and independence.**

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and click the 'Donate' tab.

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OPEN DOOR

CALL FOR ART!



CALL FOR ART!

ABOUT

Access to Independence is looking for artists with disabilities to feature in an art exhibit on October 24th, 2019!

If you are an artist with a disability, ACCESS invites you to submit up to two of your works of art for this year's Artists Beyond Boundaries event! On the evening of October 24, ACCESS will host a dinner, as well as an exhibition of all artwork that has been submitted. This dinner and exhibition will take place at the Concourse Hotel in Madison, WI.

AWARDS

Featured Artists (12 Awards): A panel of judges will select 12 Featured Artist Awards. These artworks will be included in a 2020 calendar with the theme "Artists Beyond Boundaries." Each recipient will receive a \$200 award.

People's Choice Award (1 Award): Event attendees will have the opportunity to vote for a "People's Choice" award, which will consist of works which have not been selected by the panel of judges. The artwork awarded the People's Choice Award will be featured on the calendar's cover. The recipient will receive a \$200 award.

IMPORTANT DATES

June 1st: Call for Art Begins!

September 13th: Last day to submit artwork

October 24th: Artists Beyond Boundaries Event Night!

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Call Amber at: 608-242-8484

Email: amberf@accesstoind.org

Visit our website: www.accesstoind.org

BELOUNGY

FROM PAGE 5

Working in a branch office in southwest Wisconsin, Jason led Independent Living Resource's disability advocacy efforts in addition to providing independent living services.

"I am thrilled to lead a one-of-a-kind organization that empowers people with disabilities through an array of services and is an agent of change throughout the counties we serve," says Jason.

"I AM THRILLED TO LEAD A ONE-OF-A-KIND ORGANIZATION."

- Jason Beloungy

Jason holds a Bachelor of Social Work degree from the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire. Further, he has experience managing residential services, providing county mental health services, and working with youth in an institutional setting. Jason is open about his own mental health disability and sees his lived experience as a strength and asset to lead South Central Wisconsin's consumer-controlled, cross-disability organization.



SAVE THE DATE

Please join us for a one-night-only exhibition, dinner, and program to celebrate this year's Artists Beyond Boundaries!

When: October 24, 2019
5:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Where: Madison Concourse Hotel
1 W Dayton Street, Madison, WI

Cost: All artists who submit at least one work of art will receive two free tickets to attend the event. All other tickets will be \$45.

Please visit www.accesstoinc.org beginning September 1st to register for this year's event!

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS & SPONSORS

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| 💰 Chuck Clair | 💰 Jerry McCloskey | ♥ Metcalfe's | | |
| 💰 Theran Colwell | | | | |

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!

- ⚡ AT Donation 💰 Financial Donation ♥ Sponsorship ▼ Volunteer



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ACCESS Board Members

Mary Meunier	Keith Wanta
David Rosenthal	Georgia Allen
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ACCESS is seeking new board members.
Contact us to learn more.

ACCESS to Independence
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*And people
like YOU!*

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