

Black

Lives

Matter

“ THE PREVALENCE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST PEOPLE OF COLOR,  
ITS CONNECTION TO DISABILITY RIGHTS, AND ITS IMPACT,  
IS TOO GREAT TO REMAIN SILENT. ”



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# Important service updates due to Covid-19

Access to Independence is taking proactive measures to protect our staff, the people we serve, and our community as a whole. While our building is closed, we continue to deliver services through video, phone and email. During this office closure, Access to Independence will continue to provide services to the extent possible. This means that:

- No in-person services will be provided.
- Assistive Technology (AT) services, including loans and donations, are now being provided in a contactless manner.

We want to encourage you to practice social distancing, and take other steps to keep the virus at bay. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact us through phone or email.

Register! Educate! Vote!

Use *your* Power!

# REV<sup>✓</sup>UP!

MAKE THE **DISABILITY VOTE** COUNT

## The 2020 Election and the Disability Vote

Too much is at stake to not take the time and effort to be prepared

By the time this edition of *The Open Door* is published, we'll have just completed the August 11<sup>th</sup> Partisan Primary Election, and will be focusing on the November 3<sup>rd</sup> election. It is critical that the disability community continues to increase our voter participation, but a worldwide pandemic, and recent court decisions about state election, laws have complicated things significantly. We have no time to sit and wait for Election Day to arrive, and we need to do to exercise our fundamental right.

The COVID-19 Pandemic adds additional barriers to voters with disabilities. Barriers such as inaccessibility and disenfranchisement have only been exacerbated by the health risks of voting in-person, inaccessible absentee ballots, and limited polling places. People with disabilities must start planning for November, now, and here is what you may need to know. For more information and resources, check out the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition website at [disabilityvote.org](http://disabilityvote.org). Much of the information is directly from the WI Disability Vote Coalition.

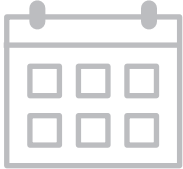
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### HELP ACCESS REDUCE COSTS

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*.

# KNOW BEFORE YOU



## WHEN IS ELECTION DAY?

### **November 3, 2020 General and Presidential Election:**

General Election for President and Vice President, for all US Congressional Representatives; all State Assembly Representatives, State Senators from even numbered districts, and county District Attorneys.



## BE REGISTERED TO VOTE!

You can first check if you are registered by going to the WI Election Commission's voter website, [myvote.wi.gov](http://myvote.wi.gov). If you do not have access to the internet, call your local municipal clerk. If you are still unsure who to call, contact Access to Independence, and ask for assistance. If you are not registered to vote, you have these options:

- Online at [myvote.wi.gov/](http://myvote.wi.gov/). Up to 20 days before Election Day. Requires a valid State of Wisconsin Driver License or State of Wisconsin ID card issued by the DMV.
- Mail. Up to 20 days before Election Day. Mail completed form to your municipal clerk.
- In person at your municipal clerk's office during the clerk's business hours. You must provide proof of residence. This option ends 5 PM on Friday before election. Find your Municipal Clerk's Contact Information here.
- At your polling place on Election Day. Must provide proof of residence and a Photo ID.



## ABSENTEE VOTING

Absentee voting has grown tremendously this year, as it allows voters to cast a ballot, without going to their polling place on Election Day.

Individuals can vote early at their clerk's office, or can cast a vote by mail. Each municipality is responsible for setting the dates and hours of in-person absentee voting, so contact your clerk before making the trip. To vote by mail:

- A voter can apply for their absentee ballot in-person in the clerk's office or the request can be made in writing by mail or online at [www.myvote.wi.gov/en-us/VoteAbsentee](http://www.myvote.wi.gov/en-us/VoteAbsentee).
- You must provide a photo ID with your absentee ballot request if you have not submitted a copy of your photo ID for a previous request at your current address. If you are applying online at the MyVote website, you will need to upload a picture of your photo ID. Mobile phone users can take a picture and upload it to MyVote.
- If you are "indefinitely confined" due to age, illness, infirmity, or disability, you may certify this on your request and you will not need to submit a copy of your photo ID.

**SEE REV UP, PAGE 4**



## STAYING SAFE WHILE VOTING IN-PERSON DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

If voting early by mail is not an option, or you simply prefer to cast your ballot in-person, here are some tips to help you stay safe:

- If you mail your request, the request should state the election you are requesting an absentee ballot for, include the voter's name, voting address, mailing address (if different than voting address). Include or attach a copy of your photo ID (if not previously provided) or indicate you are indefinitely confined.
- You can mail your completed ballot if it is at least a week before Election Day. Otherwise, drop off your ballot at your polling place or at the clerk's office. Check with your clerk for additional information. Some communities have drop boxes for absentee ballots.
- You must return your absentee ballot by mail or delivery to your municipal clerk, your polling place, or a local dropbox established by your clerk (if available). Your ballot must be received by your municipal clerk no later than 8:00 p.m. on election day.
- You may have someone else deliver your ballot for you.
- Return your ballot as soon as possible to ensure your vote is counted. If it is within a week of the election, the US mail may not get your ballot there in time. If at all possible, drop off your ballot to your clerk or to a drop box if available.
- If you have questions, or need assistance, contact your clerk's office, or reach out to Access to Independence.

- Review your ballot online before you go to the polls. That will give you a chance to research candidates in advance and decide who you want to vote for to minimize the amount of time you have to spend at the polls. To see who is on your ballot go to [www.myvote.wi.gov/enus/PreviewMyBallot](http://www.myvote.wi.gov/enus/PreviewMyBallot).
- Check your polling place before you go. It may have changed. You can find your polling place at [myvote.wi.gov/enus/FindMyPollingPlace](http://myvote.wi.gov/enus/FindMyPollingPlace). You may also want to call your municipal clerk to check as there is not a deadline for making updates on the My Vote WI website. Find your municipal clerk here [www.myvote.wi.gov/en-US/MyMunicipalClerk](http://www.myvote.wi.gov/en-US/MyMunicipalClerk).
- You must have an acceptable photo ID to vote, such as a current Wisconsin driver's license or state ID. *Bring It to the Ballot* has a list of acceptable Photo IDs: [www.bringit.wi.gov](http://www.bringit.wi.gov).
- If you are not able to enter your polling place due to disability, you may request curbside voting. Curbside voters are exempt from signing the pollbook. We recommend that you contact your Municipal Clerk in advance to determine the process to access curbside voting.
- Your polling place may be offering drive through voting.
- Voters who are unable or unwilling to use the drive-through process should have the ability to vote using traditional methods in the polling location, or the location that may have been moved outdoors to complement the drive-through voting option. This includes the use of accessible voting equipment if requested.
- You may want to bring your own black pen to use to mark your ballot, to avoid using the same pen as others.
- If you must get out of your car to vote, practice social distancing, and wash your hands before and after you vote.
- Be patient and courteous. Election workers are doing their best under difficult circumstances.

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### FILE A COMPLAINT!

If you have any difficulty with voting, file a complaint with the Wisconsin Elections Commission, so the concern can be addressed.

Complaints may be entered online at [www.elections.wi.gov/complaints](http://www.elections.wi.gov/complaints) or call the Commission. You may use the option to "Report an Accessibility Concern".

You may also call or email to request that a complaint form be mailed to you, or to share your concern. Email [elections@wi.gov](mailto:elections@wi.gov) or call 1-866-VOTE-WIS.

For assistance with reporting a complaint, contact the DRW Voter Hotline at 1-844-DIS-VOTE or email [info@disabilityvote.org](mailto:info@disabilityvote.org).



### BE INFORMED!

Spend time learning about candidates. Check local news sources for candidate information. Check out candidate websites and social media pages: [www.vote411.org](http://www.vote411.org) is a non-partisan source of information on candidates. Look for positions or statements on issues like long-term care, healthcare, housing, transportation, and employment. Lastly check out the myvote website to see your ballot, so you know what candidates to research.

Access to Independence believes in the power of the disability vote, and encourages all voters with disabilities to be prepared, and cast your ballot.

## NEW EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



**Eddie Andersen**  
Independent Living Specialist

I am Eddie. I am the newest Independent Living Specialist at ACCESS. I've been with ACCESS since July. I have a background with caregiving and re-integration. In my free time I like to fish, spend time with family, my dog, and my wife Ash.



## Join the ACCESS to Independence Board of Directors!

Do you want to be a part of a unique, cross disability organization? Does representing diverse communities in Dane, Dodge, Columbia, and Green counties sound exciting? Help support our agency by becoming a Board Member!

### Talents Needed:

- ✓ Lived experience with a disability
- ✓ Fundraising and development knowledge
- ✓ Non-profit service or management experience
- ✓ Business development experience
- ✓ Marketing or public relations experience
- ✓ Legal background

### Expectations:

- ✓ Attend bi-monthly meetings (2 hours long)
- ✓ Participate in at least one committee (1-2 hour meetings)
- ✓ Participate in agency events, including fundraising events (2-3 times a year)

### Are you interested? We'd love to chat!

Contact Jason Beloungy at 608-716-7266 or via email at [jasonb@accesstoind.org](mailto:jasonb@accesstoind.org)



# Diversity, equity and inclusion at Access to Independence, Inc.

**By Jason Beloungy**

Executive Director

Access to Independence is not innocent of perpetuating systemic racism. That may come as a shock to some of you, and that may seem like old news to others. While the continued murders of Black people, including Black people with disabilities, has given further rise to the Black Lives Matter Movement, these issues have been there, in plain view, all along. Unfortunately, it took too many of us too long to start acting.

So why do I believe the organization I love, and have been a part of for over 10 years, perpetuates systemic racism, despite being a social justice organization? This article is not a complete examination, but an opportunity to shine the light on ourselves, in an effort to be the type of organization we must be. I want to be clear that this is not an indictment on any particular people, as systemic racism is the policies and interactions (or procedures) that have been in place that continue to exclude people of color from the benefits of our programs and services, as well as benefiting through employment, and leadership.

One example is the lack of racial diversity in the leadership of the organization. While Access has a history of quality leaders, it is alarming that in 42 years, there has not been a person of color in leadership positions in the organization. That extends throughout the organization, as very few people of color have ever been employed by Access. While the desire may have been to recruit people of color, no strategic emphasis has resulted in a vastly white agency, from top to bottom. The same can be said for our board of directors. An organization cannot adequately serve communities of color if it doesn't make an honest commitment, and act accordingly, to build a diverse staff and leadership.

Another example is that we have not made diversity, equity, and inclusion a priority. We haven't applied the racial equity lens to decisions and actions. It has been relegated as an after-thought, or we respond with "at least we tried". Looking back at our past few strategic plans, goals around diversity or cultural competency have been included, but we have not reshaped policies or procedures that are necessary. We have not built and supported relationships

with various marginalized communities. We have not provided adequate training to staff about how to be anti-racist, and so on.

My final example is that our movement has not been diverse, or inclusive. We celebrate icons of the disability rights and independent living movements, and very few of the individuals we celebrate are people of color, even though people of color were very much involved. While the intersections of race and disability are strong, we haven't aggressively built on those intersections, but rather operated in our own lane. We tout the virtues of the independent living philosophy, but have ignored the barriers people with disabilities of color face as a result of their race. Looking only at the disability-specific barriers, and not also addressing the racist barriers, perpetuates racism.

So what are we doing about it? As Tracy Miller talks about in her article, we are taking steps to listen, and learn, from other community partners, and leverage that knowledge to make systemic change throughout the organization. For example, with support from the YWCA in 2018,

**SEE DIVERSITY, PAGE 8**

## ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

# Do it yourself with Assistive Technology

A pool noodle can be cut down to create an DIY easy grip for writing utensils.



Many people have need for Assistive Technology (AT). Unfortunately, there are many challenges we face during the current COVID 19 pandemic, and it's often hard to find the AT you need. However, we've discovered some creative solutions and useful tricks toward Do It Yourself AT!

Did you know that pool noodles and PVC pipe can pave the way toward many solutions? For example, a simple pool noodle, which is easily bought online or a local store, can help create easy grip for things like silverware, brushes, pens, and even bucket handles? Pool noodles are especially handy because they come in all sizes and colors, you can easily cut them to any length, and many of them even have the center hollowed out!

PVC pipe is another very versatile

material. PVC pipe is a hard plastic that is mostly used for plumbing. You can buy sections and joints that allow you to create stands, arm rests, or even a walker.

These are just two of many, many solutions for DIY assistive technology. To find more information, an organization called Assistive Technology in New Hampshire (ATinNH), has put together hundreds of videos on Youtube.com about do it yourself AT! Just search for "ATinNH" on Youtube.com to find their DIY videos.

No matter what your disability, there are ways to tackle your challenges by reaching out to other people for help and finding creative solutions. If you need help brainstorming or have questions, you can always call us at ACCESS.

## Is ACCESS part of your year-end giving?

**DONATE TODAY!**

**2 EASY  
WAYS TO  
DONATE**

### ONLINE

Visit [www.accesstoind.org](http://www.accesstoind.org) and click the 'Donate' tab.

**CASH or CHECK (payable to ACCESS to Independence):**

3810 Milwaukee St., Madison, WI 53714



“

...I believe that the struggle for racial and social justice provides an unparalleled lens through which to visualize – and achieve – more honest, just, and positive interrelationships in all aspects of our lives together.”

**John A. Powell**

*Director of the Othering and Belonging Institute,  
UC Berkeley*

## SOCIAL JUSTICE

# A commitment to disability and racial justice

**By Tracy A. Miller**

CPS, Independent Living Specialist

As an organization that historically has been, for the most part, led and staffed by white people, we at ACCESS to Independence know that we still have work to do to become the anti-racist organization that we want to be. As a civil rights and social justice organization, we know that this work is integral to our journey, and that Disability Justice and Racial Justice are not separate or distinct from one another, but are part of the overall transformation that we want to see happen in society. As the push for this transformation accelerates around us, we are striving to be

community leaders in confronting the full array of social justice issues that affect the people we serve. This work requires deep self-examination, and first confronting our own biases and limitations, as individuals and as an agency. In partnership, and with help from, other organizations, we have begun this process. As we seek to implement our new goals, we know that many community partners and leaders who are miles ahead of us on this journey will be there to help lead us along. We know that the journey before us may be long and hard, but there are no shortcuts to any place worth going. What we stand to gain along the way will benefit all of us. And our commitment is strong.

## DIVERSITY

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Access participated in the Creating Equitable Organizations program, and began to implement a Change Team to work on organizational change within ACCESS. One goal of the Change Team has been seeking to make ACCESS an anti-racist organization at a much deeper level than we have gone before. Several staff members participate, and the team meets monthly.

Another effort has been to develop an entire goal area around diversity, equity, and inclusion in our new three-year strategic plan. We have very robust goals around creating diverse partnerships in our region; dismantling the intersecting levels of oppression that exist in our organization, and in the communities we serve; and to have inclusive organizational practices, policies, services, and culture. The staff and board review our plan on a regular basis, to ensure we follow through with what we established.

While it is good to acknowledge that we're starting our efforts toward becoming an antiracist organization, these activities themselves do not make us antiracist. We have a lot of work to do, and we can't sit back, comfortably, and believe that goals and groups make us better. We expect to be a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization, for all people with disabilities. We've waited too long.





ACCESS has started offering  
online workshops for youth.

## ACCESS WORKSHOPS

# Virtual workshops for youth available

During the last few months, as ACCESS shifted to virtual services, we have continued to offer transition workshops to students in special education, and 18 – 21 year old transition programs, within our four county service area (Dane, Green, Dodge and Columbia counties).

ACCESS offers four programs that educate and promote independence to students as they transition into the next phase of

their lives: whether that is going to college or entering the workforce. The four programs that we offer are Help Yourself (a self-advocacy curriculum), Dollars and Sense (a financial literacy curriculum), Skills to Pay the Bills (an employment soft skills curriculum), and Healthy Relationships (a healthy relationships curriculum).

Due to COVID-19, ACCESS began offering these workshops online via the Zoom platform. Having

successfully facilitated these workshops this past spring, we are excited to have this option available again for the 2020-2021 school year.

If you are a teacher that is interested in an online workshop for your students or if you are a parent interested in more information to pass on to your child's teacher please contact Ashley at [ashleyb@accesstoind.org](mailto:ashleyb@accesstoind.org), or by phone at 608-716-7278.

# CALL FOR ART!



Calling all artists with disabilities across Wisconsin! Access to Independence's annual Artists Beyond Boundaries event has officially begun! We are looking for artists with disabilities from around Wisconsin to submit up to two works of art for this year's virtual event!

## **WHAT IS ARTISTS BEYOND BOUNDARIES?**

Artists Beyond Boundaries is an art competition celebrating the talents of artists with disabilities across the state of Wisconsin. This year is unique in that our gala and fundraising night will be completely virtual!

## **HOW DOES IT WORK?**

July 15<sup>th</sup> through September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 we will ask artists with disabilities to submit up to two works of art for this year's event.

Since this year's event is virtual, we will be asking artists to submit one high quality JPEG image of each piece they wish to submit.

Judges from the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art and other visual arts organizations will deliberate which 12 works of art will be selected for \$200 prizes. These 12 works of art will be included in a 2021 calendar!

On October 8<sup>th</sup>, we will host a FREE online virtual gala and gallery of ALL artwork submitted to the event. This gala also serves as a fundraising opportunity for our agency. All money raised will go toward providing services and programs to our consumers!

## **LEARN MORE AND APPLY!**

Learn more about this event and apply by visiting [www.accesstoind.org/callforart](http://www.accesstoind.org/callforart).

You can also follow us on Facebook for important updates and information @Access.to.Independence.WI



# **WisLoan and TeleWork Loan Programs**

## **FUNDING INDEPENDENCE**

Wisloan and Telework are alternative loan programs that assist Wisconsin residents with disabilities to enable people to become self-employed or to work from home. These loan programs are different than 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 call Access to Independence for information 608-242-8484.

## **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 amount 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.



## **A Peer Support Survey**

We are surveying people about different activities that connect people with each other and with their communities. In these times, there are unique challenges to making connections with and between people. We are working on developing safe ways to provide peer support and connection within the communities we serve.

A few months ago, we surveyed people about different activities that might interest them. The response was very small, and we would like more people to share their thoughts with us. So we have updated the survey, and are asking again that you let us know what's on your mind. If you would like to talk with an Independent Living Specialist about your interests, and how we can help you pursue them, please feel free to give us a call.

**TAKE THE SURVEY ONLINE AT**

**<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/KYL86QN>**



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info@accesstoind.org  
**www.accesstoind.org**

## **ACCESS Board Members**

David Rosenthal	Georgia Allen
Joanna Storm	Malachy Bishop
Keith Wanta	Wendy Weiler

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

**ACCESS to Independence**  
*is supported by:*



*And people  
like YOU!*

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