



## **DON Breaks Ground, Receives Employment Award and Makes Homeownership Dream a Reality**

October was a busy month for DON which was recognized in the newspaper four different times. On Oct. 3, DON held a ground-breaking ceremony for the first new home construction in the rehabilitation of the lower East Side region of New Castle. The partnership between the Lawrence County Land Bank, the Lawrence County Commissioners, the Department of Planning and Community Development, the City of New Castle, Blueprint Communities, New Visions, Bible Way Church, the Caroline Knox Memorial Trust Fund, Lowe's, Columbia Gas, Penn Power, Butler Siding and Windows, First Commonwealth Bank, the United Way of Lawrence County, Lower East Side Neighborhood Watch and Eckles Architecture is making this project a reality. The first new accessible home construction has begun on Mulberry Street with a targeted completion date of spring 2019.

Then on Oct. 16 DON was presented with the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Business Award for Employer of the Year. The award was given to Chris Lloyd, CEO to recognize the agency for securing and maintaining employment for people with disabilities. Kris Scanlon is employed as the Career Assessment Coordinator for DON who is now working with consumers that want to return to work as a way to increase their discretionary income beyond any disability benefits they may receive.

### **Office Closed:**

**Christmas**  
**Mon. - Tues.,**  
**Dec. 24 -25**

**New Year's Day**  
**Mon., Jan. 1**

**Fri, Jan. 4**

At the end of the employment awards celebration, DON also presented the deed to a consumer for the first home that was completely rehabilitated in the Building NewCastles project. This project will grow to involve additional homes to be rehabilitated, new accessible homes, and also includes partnership grants from several sources to provide financial support to current home owners on fixed incomes that are in desperate need of making repairs to the homes they live in.

Finally, in October a consumer wrote very thoughtful Letter to the Editor thanking DON for the assistance she received to make necessary repairs to her home.

## **The Importance of Voting**

“The Right to Vote”, was not an automatic right granted to most citizens. In 1789 when George Washington was elected President only 6% of the population could vote. Only white male property owners were considered “Citizens” who could vote. No one else had citizen status.

In 1870, the 15th Amendment passed and the right to vote could no longer be denied because of race, explicitly. In 1920, the 19th Amendment passed, giving women right to vote in both state and federal elections. It took 131 years since Washington got elected for women to be able to vote! In 1963-64 voting rights became civil rights and large-scale efforts in the South to register African Americans to vote were intensified.

However, since 1870 all steps forward were met with the same general backlash. State officials refuse to allow African Americans to register by using voting taxes, literacy tests and violent intimidation. Among the efforts launched is Freedom Summer, where close to a thousand civil rights workers of all races and backgrounds converge on the South to support voting rights.

In 1964 the 24th Amendment passed. It guarantees that the right to vote in federal elections will not be denied for failure to pay any tax. In 1971 the 26th Amendment passed, and the voting age was lowered to 18. The amendment is largely a result of Vietnam War protests demanding a lowering of the voting age on the premise that people who are old enough to fight are old enough to vote.

In 2002 to try to solve election inconsistency with more federal voting standards the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) passed in response to disputed 2000 presidential election. Massive voting reform effort requires states comply with federal mandate for provisional ballots, disability access, centralized, computerized voting lists, electronic voting and requirement that first-time voters present identification before voting.

This all leads us to the 2018 mid-term election on November 6th. United States of America is a divided nation. Possibly more divided at any time since the Civil War. We have political divisions, racial divisions, and gender and lifestyle divisions. The one power that we all share is the power of the VOTE. We’ve seen the fighting and death it cost to get us this far. Yet in the 2016 Presidential election only a little more than 50% of eligible voters cast a ballot. It seems to be a great lack of respect for the power of the VOTE.

Maybe it’s time we looked back at what it cost to get us the VOTE and remember why we fought so hard for it.

## **Having a Career While Collecting Benefits**

Getting signed up for Social Security benefits can be a scary process, and often, people with disabilities must fight for their rights to those benefits. It can become even more confusing when you add the topic of work to the discussion. There are a lot of misconceptions out there about working and how that will interact with the benefits you receive.

There are two fears that seem to come up repeatedly when talking about going back to work, "I'll lose my benefits if I try to work" and "I'll lose my medical assistance/Medicaid insurance coverage if I start to work."

The good news is that the Social Security Administration has several work incentives in place to encourage and promote work for people with disabilities. These programs are centered around the idea of helping individuals to become financially better off.

Sometimes that will eventually mean that benefit payments fade away, but that is not always the case. Every individual is in a unique situation, so it's important to understand your specific circumstances and how work will interact with the benefits you already receive.

There are trained professionals that will work with you to understand how to make your benefits work for you. If you're interested in returning to work and would like to learn more, contact the Center for Independent Living for help with the right connection for where you're at in the process.

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### **Terms to Know**

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- Supplemental Security Income (SSI): Federal (unearned) income benefit for adults and children with disabilities; adults 65 years or older who have limited income and resources.
- Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI): An earned benefit for individuals with significant disabilities who's no longer able to work. SSDI is funded through payroll taxes, so the amount that you receive is based on how long you have worked and how much you have paid into the system. Individuals must be between the ages of 18 and 65.
- Medicaid: Provides health insurance to low income families, pregnant women, the elderly and individuals with disabilities.
- Medicare: A federal health insurance program. To qualify, you must be a U.S. citizen or lawfully present in the United States. You must be 65 or older, under 65 with certain disabilities, or have end stage renal disease.

## Community HealthChoices

As Southwestern Pennsylvania approaches the anniversary of managed care, the Southeast is just getting ready for their January 1, 2019 implementation. Individuals who are 21 and older and have Medicare and Medicaid insurance plans or receive long-term-support services – such as attendant care -- through Medicaid have been receiving information about selecting a managed care organization which will serve as their medical insurance provider.

Hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians will be affected by these changes upon completion of the rollout in 2020. The Department of Human Services continues to monitor the program and make changes in areas that are of major concern to participants. It is important for plan participants (consumers of services and these health plans) to report any issues to the CHC Participant Hotline at 1-833-735-4416.

You can access more information on Community HealthChoices by visiting [www.healthchoices.pa.gov](http://www.healthchoices.pa.gov). You can also join your MCO's Participant Advisory Committee to have your voice be heard regarding significant issues for future change. Contact your MCO for more information.

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### November is American Diabetes Month



If you have diabetes, your body has trouble keeping your blood sugars in a healthy range. Both adults and children can have diabetes. A healthy diet can help you prevent or manage diabetes. The recipes in this newsletter are 'diabetes friendly.' Recipes with this nutrition badge have no added sugar. They meet the nutrition needs of people with diabetes.

Check out the back page of this issue for tips on choosing healthy foods.

For more information, here are a few helpful resources:

- Talk to your doctor. Your doctor can help you find out if you are at risk for developing diabetes and can help you make a prevention or management plan.
- The American Diabetes Association has information about meal planning and appropriate foods. Visit their website at [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has resources about diabetes basics and living with diabetes. Visit their website at [www.cdc.gov/diabetes](http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes)

## **Building Livable Communities with Transit**

On October 21-24<sup>th</sup>, Disability Options Network was invited to attend the 2018 Rail-volution Conference in Pittsburgh. This conference was organized to discuss transit from multiple perspectives. This included a look at the history of transit, challenges, new ideas, success stories and new technology. The conference represented an opportunity for Disability Options Network to gain a comprehensive perspective on the state of transportation and insight into how to use this information to help consumers.

The conference focused on several areas both nationally and locally. On day 2, Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto spoke about transit goals. The information provided was overwhelming, but there were a few clear ideas that rose above.

First, there is a strong community of advocates for transit, and supporters of individuals with disabilities should join those advocates. Technology has never been more available. And yet there are numerous obstacles that hamper efforts at creating effective transit opportunities. Progress can seem extremely slow. It is up to advocates to explain why transit is necessary, especially for outlying communities. It was clear from the conference that there isn't expected to be any massive attempt to spread transit outside of Pittsburgh as of now. That can change, but the market forces are not working in favor of that.

There is still reason to hope. As new technology brings costs down, it is possible that transit may be able to reach sprawling Western Pennsylvania communities that sit on the outer edges of the Pittsburgh area. We must be a voice in that change.

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### **Resource Corner**

- How to properly dispose your medication and prescription drugs? Visit: <http://co.lawrence.pa.us/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/meds.pdf>
- Want to safely dispose of your smoke detector? Visit: <http://co.lawrence.pa.us/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Smoke-Detectors.pdf>
- Interested in learning key facts about the Flu Vaccine? Visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/keyfacts.htm>
- Want to learn more about The WHEELCHAIR MAINTENANCE APP? Contact Emily Bird at: (412) 648-4196 or eak20@pitt.edu

## **Tips for Job seekers with Disabilities**

Both experienced job seekers as well as those new to the world of employment can follow a few simple steps.

First, it is important to know what you are good at and what you enjoy and why you want it before going to the job market: this is essential to your eventual success.

Most individuals have enough concern to know what work activities they enjoy performing, and these usually connect with what they are good at. When skills and interests are combined folks can develop a passion which a recruiting or hiring manager can see.

The best way to find a job is through networking. Tell your support system about the kind of job are seeking. Go to events where you can network with others. Promote your interests on social media.

Getting a good job is usually a long race, not a dash. This is especially true for recent graduates and those who have been out of the job market for a while or are making a career change. Set aside hours each week for networking and research. It takes time to complete job applications. Answering want ads is usually the least effective way to find work but don't rule it out. Seek out job boards to identify open positions, then network to identify the hiring manager.

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### **Free Smoke Detectors**



On October 31st, Halloween evening, Disability Options Network was invited by The New Castle Fire Department to help promote fun and safety. Together, we handed out free smoke detectors to the community of New Castle. For the children, we were prepared with candy and educated lesson on the importance of fire preparedness. This was a very successful event and we look forward to working with the courageous New Castle firefighters in the future.

## **DME Program Has Another Successful Year**

Disability Options Network just concluded our 2017-2018 recording year for our Durable Medical Equipment Re-Use program grant. In this past year we were able to provide 109 pieces of durable medical equipment to 95 individuals. The equipment we provided included hospital beds, power wheelchairs, walkers and canes. The estimated value of the equipment given to consumers is \$91,000 at all no cost to the consumers to make it easier for them to remain living independently in their community.

It is more than just the numbers. Consumers get the equipment they need to do the things they love to do which is the goal of the program. For example, one of our success stories from the past year is when a man came to the office looking for a scooter for his wife. She was unable to get out of the house due to her disability and was getting more and more depressed her husband told us. Because of her size the scooters we had at that time would not fit her. A few weeks later we received a donation of a larger four wheeled scooter that could handle her weight. She can now get out and is looking forward to getting back to activities with friends and family.

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## **Craft Corner**

Disability Options Network is a great place to showcase and sell your handmade items. We accept items created by people with disabilities for display and marketing, as space is available.

If you wish to submit items, please contact Kris Scanlon at (724)-652-5144. Vendors will be responsible for stocking items and providing pricing details.





# OUT and ABOUT

## WE WANT TO HEAR ABOUT LIFE EXPERIENCES OF PENNSYLVANIANS WITH DISABILITIES!

The Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council (PA SILC), in partnership with the network of Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is providing opportunities to hear directly from you about what your life experiences are as Pennsylvanians with disabilities. The State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) uses money from the federal government to address independent living needs of people with disabilities. It is **our responsibility** to hear from the people to plan for the development of the SPIL. It is **your right to be provided with this opportunity to give input and have your voice heard.**

### These are a few questions that might help you frame your thoughts:

**What is your current situation? Are you satisfied with this? What should be different?**

**November 29, 2018  
11am – 2pm  
CLASS (FORMERLY UCP)  
1400 S. Braddock Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15218**

To request accommodations, please call the SILC office at (717) 364-1732  
**(Accommodations cannot be guaranteed if not requested by November 15, 2018)**

You can **submit your comments** to us through December 31, 2018

**By mail:** PA SILC | 207 House Avenue Suite 107 | Camp Hill, PA 17011  
**Email:** [spil@pasilc.org](mailto:spil@pasilc.org)  
**Telephone:** 717-364-1732 | **Fax:** 717-236-8800

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