

ON THE LEVEL

From the League of Human Dignity
February 2023

ON THE LEVEL is the bi-monthly newsletter of the League of Human Dignity, Inc.

The League of Human Dignity is a consumer-based, nonprofit organization, dedicated to promoting independent living for people with disabilities, in their own homes instead of nursing homes. To this end, we will advocate for the rights and needs of people with disabilities, while providing quality services to assist them in becoming and remaining independent citizens.

Established in 1971, the League now offers services in all 93 Nebraska counties and eight southwest Iowa counties, through our Centers for Independent Living in Lincoln, Norfolk and Omaha, Nebraska, and Council Bluffs, Iowa; and our Medicaid Waiver offices in Scottsbluff, Kearney and North Platte, Nebraska.

ON THE LEVEL is available online, by email subscription, Braille and on audio CD. To subscribe in any of these formats, contact the Public Information Office in Lincoln or your nearest League of Human Dignity office. Our website: leagueofhumandignity.com

League ILA Named Area Person of the Year by Norfolk Daily News, Elkhorn Valley Bank

Many of us wish the world was a better place to live and a few of us work hard at making it so — Beth Plisek is one of those few.

For years, Beth has worked diligently to see that people with disabilities have what they need to live and thrive as independently as possible.

She recently was honored for her efforts by being named 2022 Person of the Year by the Norfolk Daily News and Elkhorn Valley Bank. The two businesses co-sponsor the award, which recognizes people who make Northeast Nebraska a better place to live and work.

Beth was formally presented with the award during a reception Jan. 17 in Norfolk.

She was nominated by Melissa Thies a fellow volunteer at The Arc of Norfolk.

Thies was quoted in the Norfolk Daily News as saying that Beth “works tirelessly to ensure people in all walks of faith and mindsets realize their potential and live their best lives.”

In addition to volunteering her time and effort with nonprofits and on state and local councils serving people with physical and cognitive disabilities, Beth is an Independent Living Advisor in the League of Human Dignity’s Norfolk Center for Independent Living.

She has been a League ILA since the spring of 2021, and she described it as the best job in the world for helping people.

One of Beth’s latest projects has been helping plan and organize Northeast Community College’s NEA Big Read. The months-long program of events is made possible by a National Endowment for the Arts grant, which Beth helped write. The program will focus on the book *Sitting Pretty: The View from My Ordinary Resilient Disabled Body* by Rebekah Taussig. The program includes events related to disability, disability services, accessibility and inclusion.

Read more about the Big Read on Page 3.

CEO’s Note

One in 4 U.S. adults – 61 million Americans – have a disability that impacts major life activities, according to a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The most common disability type, mobility, affects 1 in 7 adults. As people age, they are more likely to experience a disability. According to the CDC, disability will affect about 2 in 5 adults age 65 and older.

“At some point in their lives, most people will either have a disability or know someone who has a one,” said Coleen Boyle, Ph.D., director of CDC’s National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities.

Mobility Disability is characterized by difficulty walking or climbing stairs. Cognitive is next and includes serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions. Hearing difficulties and seeing difficulties are next on the list. Finally, independent living difficulties, which include the inability to completing errands as well as barriers to dressing, cooking, cleaning and bathing complete the list of common disabilities.

If a person lives long enough, they will experience a disability. Why is this important? This illustrates that the “Disability World” is a world one can always cross over to and live in. The borders are fluid and easily crossed. Whether the relocation into this other world is temporary or permanent, everyone needs to be aware of the existence of this world. It is not a separate world, but a world everyone may eventually inhabit.

Learning alternative ways to accommodate to a disability and get the supports one needs to stay or become independent is very important to a person’s quality of life. One important element in addressing disability is to ensure that people do not develop additional disabilities. At the League of Human Dignity, we teach a course called “Living

Well With a Disability". This course encompasses healthy living and practices to ensure that a person can stay as healthy as possible. For example, many people with mobility disabilities may go on to develop diabetes or hypertension. Also, people with a disability often become isolated and develop additional disabilities such as depression and anxiety. We teach people how to ensure that they have systems and procedures in place to circumvent these pitfalls to their health.

Disability cannot always be avoided throughout one's lifetime. But, there is no reason to not deal with a disability in an informed and positive approach. At the League, we can help you to accept and adapt to these changes and learn ways to accommodate a new way of living.

If you wish to learn more about how to live as healthily as possible with a disability, please contact us at the League. We are here to help you on your journey.

Kathy Kay, League Co-CEO

NEA Big Read Highlights Disability Issues

The public is invited to be a part of the NEA Big Read in Northeast Nebraska.

Northeast Community College in Norfolk is one of 62 organizations nationwide awarded Big Read grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. Events will focus on the book *Sitting Pretty: The View from My Ordinary Resilient Disabled Body* by Rebekah Taussig.

Spring 2023 Big Read programming aims to inspire meaningful conversations, artistic responses, and new discoveries and connections in participating communities. Events center around shared reading experiences involving one of 15 contemporary books, including Taussig's memoir.

The program of events starts Feb. 23 and wraps up on May 2. The Big Read is a program of the NEA in Partnership with Arts Midwest. Northeast Community College in Norfolk is the host and Healthy Blue of Nebraska is the primary sponsor. Partners include a variety of Northeast Nebraska organizations, including the League of Human Dignity.

Beth Plisek, an Independent Living Advisor in the League's Norfolk Center for Independent living, helped write the grant for the project and has been involved in event planning.

Many events have been planned for people of all ages and abilities, focusing on disability, disability services, accessibility, and inclusion. Events showcase a diverse range of themes, voices, and perspectives, meant to promote open dialogue leading to a deeper understanding of how best to respect and serve one another.

The kick-off event is 5 to 9 p.m. Feb. 23, at the Lifelong Learning Center on the Norfolk Campus. It features a talk by Edison McDonald, Executive Director of The Arc of Nebraska, and author of *Sowing the Seeds of Change: The Organizers Handbook*. Music will be performed by Gotta Be Me's Heartlight Choir, composed of people of all abilities.

The kick-off includes a disability services fair featuring organizations like the League, that offer services and benefits.

Other events involving the League include an educational series presented by Plisek on March 15 and 22, and April 5 and 12. Themes include exploring disability identity, statewide support for people with disabilities, inclusion in the community, and the stigma of mental health in society and existing supports.

Plisek also will facilitate two mixed panels discussions, on March 29 and April 19. Panels will be composed of people with disability and professionals who provide disability services. Conversations will center on topics from *Sitting Pretty: The View from My Ordinary, Resilient, Disabled Body*, as a way of increasing understanding and empathy and to build a more close-knit community.

Taussig, a Kansas City author and educator also will be involved in the programming, leading an April 21 professional development session, as well as reading from her book and answering audience questions.

For a complete list of events, including times and locations, visit the Northeast Community College NEA Big Read web page at northeast.edu/events/neabigread and click on the Events link

Health Observances

February 2023

American Heart Month, National Heart, Lung, & Blood Institute.

Age-Related Macular Degeneration/Low Vision Awareness Month, National Eye Institute.

National Cancer Prevention Month, American Association for Cancer Research.

Feb. 4 is National Wear Red Day, American Heart Association.

Feb. 28 is Rare Disease Day, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

March 2023

Bleeding Disorders Awareness Month, National Hemophilia Foundation.

Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month, National MS Society.

Myeloma Action Month, International Myeloma Foundation.

National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, Colorectal Cancer Alliance

National Kidney Month, National Kidney Foundation.

National Endometriosis Awareness Month, Endometriosis Association.

National Traumatic Brain Injury Awareness Month, Brain Injury Association of America.

National Trisomy Awareness Month, Support Organization for Trisomy 18, 13, and Related Disorders (SOFT)

March 13-19 is Pulmonary Rehabilitation Week, American Association for Respiratory Care.

March 14-20 is Brain Awareness Week, the Dana Foundation.

March 10 is World Kidney Day, International Society of Nephrology (ISN) and International Federation of Kidney Foundations-World Kidney Alliance (IFKF-WKA)

March 21 is World Down Syndrome Day, Down Syndrome International.

March 26 is Epilepsy Awareness - Purple Day, Anita Kaufman Foundation.

March 28 is American Diabetes Alert Day, American Diabetes Association; National Institutes of Health.

Diabetes Alert Day a ‘Wake-Up Call’

The first American Diabetes Alert Day was in 1988, sponsored by the American Diabetes Association to educate the public about Type 2 Diabetes and the risk of getting it.

Today more than 37 million Americans, or more than 11 percent of the population have the disease — and about one in five don’t even know it. Another 96 million Americans have pre-diabetes, defined as blood glucose levels that are higher than normal but not yet high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes — and 80 percent of them don’t know it.

The main causes of diabetes vary by type, but the disease leads to excess glucose in the blood.

Because the disease is so common, people frequently fail to take it seriously. The annual Alert Day aims to highlight the risk factors and dangers of the disease — which can be disabling and even life threatening. Long-term complications develop gradually and can include, among other things, cardiovascular disease, neuropathy, kidney damage, eye damage and a possible increased risk of dementia.

American Diabetes Alert Day is held on the fourth Tuesday of March — March 28 this year — to sound the alarm about the prevalence of type 2 diabetes by asking everyone to take the Type 2 Diabetes Risk Test. The free test is available online at diabetes.org/diabetes/risk-test and takes only a minute.

One of the goals of the observance is to aid preventative action. If people are aware of their risk level, it becomes easier for them to take steps to reduce it as much as possible.

ACA Open Enrollment Sees Record Sign-Up

More than 16.3 million people nationwide selected an Affordable Care Act Marketplace health plan during the 2023 open enrollment period —Nov. 1, 2022 through Jan. 15, 2023.

This was the 10th year of open enrollment under the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare. More people signed up than ever before, said a news release from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Since Pres. Joe Biden took office, the number of people who have signed up for an affordable health care plan through HealthCare.gov has increased by nearly 50 percent, saving an average of \$800 on their health insurance premiums last year.

Total plan selections include 3.6 million people (22 percent) who are new to the Marketplaces for 2023, and 12.7 million people (78 percent) who had active 2022 coverage and made a plan selection for 2023 coverage or were automatically re-enrolled.

More than 1.8 million more people have signed up for health insurance, a 13 percent increase, from this time last year.

Nebraska and Iowa both are Healthcare.gov states. In Nebraska, 101,490 people selected health-care plans, with 82,704 Iowans selecting plans.

The Biden-Harris Administration has made expanding access to health insurance and lowering costs a priority, and the national uninsured rate reached an all-time low earlier this year. The 2023 open enrollment period saw the highest number of plan selections of any year since the launch of the marketplaces 10 years ago.

Ninety-two percent of HealthCare.gov enrollees had access to options from three or more insurance companies when shopping for plans. New standardized plan options were available, which helped consumers compare and select plans. Thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act, more people this year continued to qualify for help purchasing coverage with expanded financial assistance, resulting in four out of five people returning to HealthCare.gov being able to find a plan for \$10 or less after-tax credits.

New Start Time for New Medicare Part B Enrollees

Medicare Part B now has new start times.

Beginning in 2023, when a person enrolls in Medicare Part B — medical insurance — coverage starts on the first day of the next month. This is a change from past years, when coverage could begin two to three months after signing up.

Most people become eligible for Medicare at age 65. The Initial Enrollment Period begins three months before their 65th birthday and ends three months after.

People who did not apply for Medicare Part B during their Initial Enrollment Period have another chance, during the General Enrollment Period, which runs from Jan. 1 to March 31 each year.

There is a permanent penalty for not enrolling in Part B when first eligible. The monthly premium increases 10 percent for each 12-month period that you were eligible for Part B but did not sign up for it.

About 99 percent of people 65 and older are eligible for free Medicare Part A — hospital insurance — provided they have worked and paid Medicare for at least 40 quarters.

To learn more about Medicare, please visit Social Security's Medicare Benefits page at www.ssa.gov/benefits/medicare, or visit www.cms.gov.

Upcoming Conferences

NCIL Conference

The National Council on Independent Living is holding its annual conference July 24-27 at the Grand Hyatt in Washington, D.C.

This year's theme is "Indivisible," organizers said, because the Independent Living movement is Indivisible.

"We must advocate together for disability justice, unite with our allies, and fight against ableism and prejudice of all types," said NCIL's announcement.

The Annual event provides peer support, organizing, advocacy, and learning opportunities. It is the largest Independent Living event of the year, hosting more than 1,000 people, including grassroots advocates, CIL and SILC leadership, members of Congress, government officials, and representatives from other organizations that work for justice and equity for people with disabilities.

The event will be archived and available online for those who cannot join onsite. All main events and workshops will be archived for virtual attendees and available on the conference website within about 48 hours.

ADA Symposium

Registration for the 2023 National ADA Symposium opened on Jan. 23.

The annual event is May 21-24, at Westin Crown Center in Kansas City, MO. A virtual event is June 12-14, and registration will open in February.

The symposium is the most comprehensive conference on the Americans with Disabilities Act. It is the source for the latest information on regulations and guidelines, implementation strategies, and best practices related to the ADA. Presenters include representatives of agencies and organizations that are involved with the ADA.

The ADA will mark its 33rd anniversary in 2023. The annual conference is an initiative of the ADA National Network and is coordinated by the Great Plains ADA Center, based in Columbia, Mo.

Other details for this year's symposium are yet to be announced. For the most up-to-date information, visit www.adasymposium.org.

League Employees

Saying Hello:

Dana Barringer, AD Waiver Supervisor, Lincoln (Dana formerly was a Services Coordinator)

Michelle Niederhaus, Services Coordinator, Lincoln

Ben Latka, Services Coordinator, Omaha

Jenny Duffek, ADRC Information and Resource Specialist, Lincoln (Jenny formerly was an Independent Living Advisor)

Julie Gubbels Thompson, Services Coordinator, Norfolk

Katy VanPutten, Associate Financial Officer, Lincoln

Kathleen Harlan, Secretary, Lincoln

Sarah Weber, Independent Living Advisor, Lincoln

Abbey Green-Walsh, Services Coordinator, Omaha.

Saying Good-Bye:

Stephaney Sprinkel, Independent Living Coordinator, Council Bluffs

Lynn White, Secretary, Lincoln

ABLE Account Savings Limit Increases

People with ABLE accounts will be able to save more money this year due to a federal tax adjustment.

The savings limit goes up to \$17,000 in 2023.

ABLE, or Achieving Better Life Experience, is an act passed by Congress in 2014 and later by the Nebraska and Iowa legislatures. The accounts allow people with disabilities and their families to save for disability-related expenses without losing eligibility for other assistance programs like SSI or Medicaid.

The maximum amount a person can save in an ABLE account annually is tie to the federal gift tax, set by the Internal Revenue Service. The IRS made an inflation adjustment for 2023, increasing the limit by \$1,000 over last year.

For more information about Nebraska's ABLE savings program, called Enable, call the Nebraska State Treasurer's Office, at 402-540-3134. Contact the Enable call center at 1-844-ENABLE4. Or email for information at clientservices@enablesavings.com.

The Enable website is at www.enablesavings.com/ and the Treasurer's website is treasurer.nebraska.gov/

In Iowa, the program is called IAble. For more information about IAble, call 888-609-8910, or visit www.IAble.gov to obtain Plan Disclosure Documents, which include investment objectives, risks, charges, expenses, and other information.

Keep Sidewalks Clear, Passable This Winter

Winter is still with us, as are the chances for snow and ice, making it harder for everyone to get around.

If you find it difficult walking through snow or on ice, imagine the difficulty for someone using a wheelchair, walker or other mobility device. The League reminds everyone to keep that in mind this winter and please keep your sidewalks and curb cuts clear and passable.

Sidewalks are a lifeline for people with disabilities and seniors. When snow or ice makes them impassable, that may prevent people from getting to work, to the store, or to the doctor. If someone using a wheelchair is forced into the street because of a blocked sidewalk, that puts them at the mercy of traffic and could become a matter of life or death.

This is more than an issue of good citizenship and neighborliness – it's also the law. Lincoln, Omaha, Council Bluffs, Norfolk, and most other cities and communities have ordinances that require snow removal on public sidewalks within a specified period of time. Fines may result for not abiding by the ordinances. Contact your local city government for more information on snow removal ordinances.

League Services Promote Independence

People with disabilities often face barriers to achieving and maintaining their independence.

The services provided by the League of Human Dignity's four Centers for Independent Living in Nebraska and Southwest Iowa are designed to help them overcome those barriers.

Services provided by the League include:

- Individual and systems advocacy
- Information and referral
- Independent living skills training
- Peer counseling and support
- Transition from institutions to the community or from school to next phase of life
- Training in personal assistant hiring and management
- Barrier removal grants
- Equipment loan and rental

The League has the experience and the expertise — we have been helping people achieve and maintain their independence since 1971.

Find out whether we can help you achieve or maintain your independence by calling 402-441-7871. Contact our offices at 1701 P Street in Lincoln from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, or call any of our other Centers for Independent Living, listed elsewhere in this newsletter.

Our Centers for Independent Living serve 43 Nebraska counties and eight counties in Southwest Iowa. We also serve all 93 Nebraska counties through the state's Medicaid Waiver Program for adults who are aged or have disabilities.

The League of Human Dignity is a statewide partner agency with Nebraska's Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC). The ADRC is a state agency providing information, referral and assistance for accessing community services and long-term care options.

Barrier Removal Grants

Barrier Removal Grants are available to qualifying renters or homeowners and their family members who have mobility limitations.

Grants are available to:

- People in Omaha, Council Bluffs, and Lincoln & Lancaster County.

- People with low to moderate income, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- People who need help removing barriers in their homes.

Examples of eligible modifications include outside ramps and lifts, grab bars, handrails, widened doorways, accessible tubs and showers, and reachable sinks and counters.

League staff offer a variety of services to assist in making homes more accessible to people with disabilities. For more information or for an application for a Barrier Removal Grant, contact:

Lincoln CIL, 1701 P St., Lincoln, NE 68508; Ph.402-441-7871

Omaha CIL, 5513 Center St., Omaha, NE 68106; Ph. 402-595-1256

SW Iowa CIL, 1520 Avenue M, Council Bluffs, IA 51501; Ph. 712-323-6863

Where to Find Us

LINCOLN

Center for Independent Living
1701 P Street, Lincoln, NE 68508
Phone 402-441-7871

OMAHA

Center for Independent Living
5513 Center Street, Omaha, NE 68106
Phone 402-595-1256

NORFOLK

Center for Independent Living
400 Elm Avenue, Norfolk, NE 68701
Phone 402-371-4475

SOUTHWEST IOWA

Center for Independent Living
1520 Avenue M, Council Bluffs, IA 51501
Phone 712-323-6863

PANHANDLE

Medicaid Waiver Office
17 E 21 St., Scottsbluff, NE 69361
Phone 308-632-0470

KEARNEY

Medicaid Waiver Office
3811 29th Avenue, Suite 2
Kearney NE 68845

Phone 308-224-3665

NORTH PLATTE

Medicaid Waiver Office

2509 Halligan Dr., North Platte, NE 69101

Phone 308-532-4911

Online at: leagueofhumandignity.com

& Please follow us on Facebook and Twitter

Loan & Rental Program

Has a recent illness or accident required that you or a family member use a walker, transfer bench or a commode? Do you have equipment that you no longer need?

Through the League of Human Dignity's Equipment Loan Program, you can rent or borrow many durable medical equipment items for a small fee. We also encourage donations of equipment.

We loan Tub Seats & Benches, Walkers, Canes, Crutches, Commodes, Toilet Risers, Reachers, Grab Bars and more.

A small one-time fee is required and the loan lasts as long as the items are needed.

Items we rent include Manual Wheelchairs, Transport Wheelchairs, Rolling Shower Chairs, Knee Walkers, and Hoyer Lifts.

Monthly rental and deposits vary by item and rent includes maintenance and servicing during the rental period.

All loans and rentals are subject to availability.

We do not loan or rent items that require fitting and/or supervision by a doctor, such as braces or corsets.

All donated items must be in good shape. We do not accept donations that need repair.

For details, call or visit the League of Human Dignity office nearest you.

Keep Reading with Talking Book & Braille Service

People with limited ability to read, hold a book or turn pages still can enjoy their favorite books and magazines, through to the Nebraska Library Commission's Talking Book and Braille Service.

The free program provides audiobooks, audio magazines and braille through the mail and through digital download to people with a visual or physical condition, or a reading disability limiting use of regular print.

The collection consists of books and magazines like those found in a public library. The service is part of a nationwide network of cooperating libraries headed by the National Library Service, a division of the Library of Congress.

The program provides free, easy-to-use playback equipment on long-term-loan. Materials in the collection and the playback equipment are mailed to and from the library postage-free.

The service is available to individuals, as well as schools and other facilities, such as nursing homes, hospitals and senior citizen centers.

The program's in-house sound studios also record and produce audiobooks and audio magazines from Nebraska and regional authors as well as material about Nebraska and the Great Plains. The recordings from the Nebraska Collection also are made available for loan to patrons.

For more information, e-mail nlc.talkingbooks@nebraska.gov or call 1-800-742-7691. For more information, the Nebraska Talking Book & Braille Service main page is at the Nebraska Library Commission website, nlc.nebraska.gov.

Associations & Support Groups

The League maintains a list of associations and support groups in Nebraska, Southwest Iowa, the region and the nation for people with disabilities and their loved ones.

To see the complete list, in pdf format, please visit our website: leagueofhumandignity.com/getinvolved/ and click on "Support Groups."

We aim to keep the list as up to date as possible, so additions and changes are welcome. Call the League at 402-441-7871.

Classifieds

Classified ads cost \$5 for the first 25 words and 25 cents for each additional word. To place an ad, write to: On The Level, League of Human Dignity, 1701 P Street, Lincoln, NE 68508; call Jim at 402-441-7871 v/tdd; call toll free at 888-508-4758; or fax: 402-441-7650. Equipment, supplies and other items for sale must be accessible to, or for the use of, people with disabilities.

RECYCLING: We are recycling electric wheelchairs and scooters. Will pick them up if needed. Call 402-890-8235 (Lincoln).

The League of Human Dignity Building Corp. Is Taking Applications

The League of Human Dignity Building Corporation is taking applications for one and two bedroom apartments with roll-in showers in Lincoln, Omaha, York, Columbus, Norfolk and Hastings.

These are HUD units and rent is based on income. Eligible applicants experience disability and must qualify under income guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

To apply, or for more information, call Katie Navratil at 402-441-7871 or 888-508-4758 (toll free) V/TDD or email knavratil@leagueofhumandignity.com

Equal Housing Opportunity

League Donors

Nov. 22, 2022, through Jan. 15, 2023

Builder (\$500 or more): Donna & Jim Kalar, Joyce Holtmeier

Supporter (\$250 to \$499): DuTeau Chevrolet-Subaru, Caretech, Conner Roofing Inc.,

Century (\$100 to \$249): Jeffrey Patterson, Frank & Jeanne Andelt

Believer (\$50 to \$99): Denise Wiemer, Dan & Sharon Zach, Anonymous

Other: Paul Luther, Tim Lockwood

In Memory of Maggie Albertson: Rosanne Staniford

March is **National Kidney Month**

Take the time to learn about how your kidneys work and why they're so important. Find out whether you are at risk for kidney disease, what tests you need to check your kidney health and how to keep healthy.

National Kidney Foundation

TAGG Your Purchases & Support the League

1. Download the TAGG mobile app.
2. Choose us & Upload a photo of your receipt from a participating business.
3. The business will make a donation to us AT NO EXTRA COST TO YOU

Support the League with AmazonSmile

Do you already shop online at Amazon? Please try AmazonSmile! It's the same great Amazon you love, but a percentage of the value of your purchase will automatically be donated to the League of Human Dignity. You shop. Amazon gives! Just go online to AmazonSmile, sign in and start shopping!