

ON THE LEVEL

From the League of Human Dignity

April 2024

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

Annual Giving Day Set for May 30

Charitable giving days are an easy way for people to show their support for local nonprofits like the League of Human Dignity.

The upcoming Give To Lincoln Day online giving event is one such opportunity. The annual event, coordinated by the Lincoln Community Foundation, is 24-hours of giving starting at midnight on Thursday, May 30, and running through 11:59 p.m. This year marks the 13th straight year for the event.

During the annual giving day, residents can go online and give to any of the hundreds of registered nonprofits serving Lincoln and Lancaster County. Giving shows their support for the needed services these organizations provide in the area.

Donations primarily will be made online at www.givetolincoln.com. On the website, donors can easily find their favorite nonprofit or learn about other organizations and make their gifts. But the foundation also has in the past made arrangements for in-person donations.

Donations also have in the past been matched proportionally, based on dollars raised by each nonprofit, from a match fund, provided by the Lincoln Community Foundation.

along with the event's presenting sponsor, West Gate Bank. This year's match fund totals \$650,000.

So far, there are about 25 other sponsoring organizations and individuals.

Links soon will be available on the League's website, leagueofhumandignity.com and Facebook page. And follow the League on Twitter (@league68508) for the most up-to-date information.

The League has participated in each of the past 12 Give To Lincoln Days.

Since the first Give To Lincoln Day in 2012, thousands of generous donors have raised more than \$57 million. That includes last year, when 24,110 donors gave \$7.4 million.

For more, visit www.givetolincoln.com.

Planning Begins for 2024 Golf Benefit

The League's Center for Independent Living in Lincoln has started making plans for its annual golf fundraiser later this year.

The golf benefit is the major fundraising event of the year for the center. It is scheduled for Sept. 19, 2024, at the beautiful Highlands Golf Course in Lincoln. For more details, see the box on page 5.

Proceeds from the event will help provide services for people with disabilities throughout the Southeast Nebraska counties served by the Lincoln center.

Last year's event attracted 25 four-person teams. A portion of the proceeds was donated to Mission 22, an organization that supports veterans, active military, and their families, in the name of the late John Fink, a longtime friend of the League.

CEO's Note

It has been an exciting time for the League of Human Dignity, Inc. In response to rapid growth and the need for more staff, we have recently finished a major remodel and expansion project at the League's Center for Independent Living Office located at 5513 Center Street in Omaha. This major project took 10 months from start to finish but was worth the inconvenience and discomfort that the staff endured during the construction.

Please stop in and see the renovation. Not only did we double our usable office space, but we have included many design elements that reflect our IL Philosophy. We even have a hallway that has Braille embellished wallpaper. The building combines accessibility with beauty and functionality.

Another important timeline for everyone to know are the changes in Voter Registration and Voter ID. According to the VOTE 411 Website, beginning April 2024, voters will be required to provide their Nebraska drivers' license or state ID number when requesting and returning a ballot by mail. Alternatively, voters could include a photocopy of their qualifying ID.

All county election offices will accept early voting applications up to 120 days prior to a statewide election. However, regular early voting ballots are not sent out or voted until 35 days before the election. The last day to request an early voting ballot to be mailed is the second Friday before the election. All early voting ballots whether personally delivered, delivered by agent or delivered by mail or other carriers must arrive by the closing of the polls on Election Day: 8:00 pm central time and 7:00 pm mountain time.

So, put two things on your to do list: visit the newly renovated office of the Omaha Center for Independent Living and make sure that you have the required identification for voting as well as getting registered for early voting ballot to be able to vote from home.

Happy Spring Everyone!

Kathy Kay, League Co-CEO

Youth Transition Course

The League of Human Dignity is excited to announce a course designed to help young people ages 14-21, who have disabilities find success in their lives after high school.

Whether your plans include continuing education, joining the workforce or simply living productive, independent lives as part of your community, this six-week course will provide the tools needed to help you make healthy changes, set and achieve goals, overcome obstacles, and advocate for yourself as you make the transition from high school.

This is a six-week Youth Online Transition Course, Tuesdays at 10 a.m., June 4 through July 9.

Classes will be held on Zoom. To register, contact Shawna Keller at 402-441-7871. The registration deadline is May 14.

Classes will focus on:

- Effective communication and dealing with negative emotions.
- Acquisition and use of information.
- Physical activity and healthy levels of exercise.
- Maintaining a healthy diet.
- Advocating for personal and healthcare system improvements.
- Maintaining positive changes.
- Work on and discuss setting goals and problem solving.

- Eligible students are age 14 through 21 and have a disability.

Celebrate National Fair Housing Month in April

This year, marks the 56th anniversary of the passage of the Fair Housing Act.

The landmark civil rights law was signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson on April 11, 1968, and made discrimination in housing transactions unlawful. The act prohibits discrimination in housing because of race, color national origin, religion, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, and familial status.

This year's Fair Housing Month theme is "Fair Housing: The 'Act' in Action." For more information about fair housing rights, visit the Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity website.

For questions about discrimination or to file a complaint in Nebraska and Western Iowa, contact the Fair Housing Center of Nebraska and Iowa in Omaha at 402-934-6675 or toll free at 800-639-5853.

People who believe they have been discriminated against can also file a complaint by contacting HUD's Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity at 800-669-9777 (voice) or 800-877-8339 (Relay). Housing discrimination complaints also can be filed at [hud.gov/fair housing](http://hud.gov/fair-housing).

League Employees . . .

Saying Hello:

Amy Gross, Panhandle Medicaid Waiver Office Director, Scottsbluff
Erica Moyer, Medicaid Waiver Services Coordinator, Omaha
Noelle Miller, Services Coordinator, Omaha
Kate Esterling, Services Coordinator, Omaha
Hope Robson, Services Coordinator, Lincoln

Saying Good-Bye:

Niki Rafiner, Medicaid Waiver Services Coordinator, Omaha
Rae Dixon, Services Coordinator, Lincoln

2024 Lincoln Benefit Golf Event

Save the date! The 2023 Lincoln Benefit Golf Event is Thursday, September 19, 2024, at The Highlands Golf Course, 5501 NW 12th St., Lincoln, NE.

The event includes an 18-hole, four-player golf scramble, silent auction, buffet dinner and more! Register a team!

Proceeds from this annual fund-raising event go to the League of Human Dignity Lincoln Center for Independent Living to help fulfill its mission: promoting and supporting independent living and the full integration of people with disabilities into society.

Mark Your Calendar!

Contact the League of Human Dignity, 1701 P St., Lincoln, NE 68508, call toll free 1-888-508-4658 or email janderson@leagueofhumandignity.com

Nebraska Disability Pride Celebration

10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, July 27, 2024, Auld Pavilion in Antelope Park, Lincoln

Look for updates on the celebration on our Facebook page at facebook.com/NebraskaDisabilityPride

New Rule Would Protect Wheelchair Users

Transportation officials are asking wheelchair-users to comment on a proposed new rule for airline travel.

The U.S. Department of Transportation is proposing to strengthen the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA) to ensure passengers who use wheelchairs can travel safely and with dignity.

The proposed rule would require that airlines do a better job accommodating passengers with disabilities through prompt, safe, and dignified assistance procedures, as well as mandating enhanced training for airline employees and contractors who help passengers with disabilities and handle their wheelchairs.

In addition, the proposed rule outlines steps airlines must take to protect passengers whose wheelchairs are damaged during transport. The proposed rule would make it easier to hold airlines accountable when they damage or delay the return of a wheelchair by making it an automatic violation of the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA) to mishandle wheelchairs.

US Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg emphasized the importance of the proposed rule by noting that millions of Americans with disabilities do not travel by air because of inadequate airline practices and regulations.

“But now we are setting out to change that,” Buttigieg said. “This new rule would change the way airlines operate to ensure that travelers using wheelchairs can travel safely and with dignity.”

Comments may be submitted online, by mail or fax, or hand-delivered through Monday, May 13, 2024.

For more information, contact Christopher Miller, Staff Attorney, or Blane Workie, Assistant General Counsel, of the Office of Aviation Consumer Protection, U.S. Department of Transportation, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE, Washington, DC 20590; phone 202-366-9342, or fax 202-366-7152; email christopher.miller1@dot.gov or blane.workie@dot.gov

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

2024 Health Observances

April

Irritable Bowel Syndrome Month, International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders
Medicaid Awareness Month, Protect Our Care coalition
National Autism Acceptance Month, Autism Society
National Cancer Control Month, National Foundation for Cancer Research
National Sarcoidosis Awareness Month, Foundation for Sarcoidosis Research
Oral Cancer Awareness Month, Oral Cancer Foundation
Parkinson's Awareness Month, Parkinson's Foundation
Stress Awareness Month, Health Resource Network
Testicular Cancer Awareness Month, Testicular Cancer Awareness Foundation
April 21-27 is National Infant Immunization Week, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

May 2024

Arthritis Awareness Month, Arthritis Foundation
Hepatitis Awareness Month, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Lupus Awareness Month, Lupus Foundation of America
Mental Health Awareness Month, National Alliance on Mental Illness
Celiac Disease Awareness Month, Celiac Disease Foundation
National High Blood Pressure Education Month, National Heart, Lung & Blood Institute
National Stroke Awareness Month, American Stroke Association
Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month, Cystic Fibrosis Foundation
May 12 is International May 12th Awareness Day (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Awareness Day), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Learn How Best to Cope with Arthritis

May is Arthritis Awareness Month.

Take time during the month to learn about prevention and medical care. Find out which physical activity helps, which foods can help, and learn how proper self-care can make a big difference.

Arthritis is one of the most common health conditions in the United States, and a leading cause of disability. Almost 59 million adults (1 in 4), have arthritis that has been diagnosed by a doctor, said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That's an increase of more than 4 million since 2013–2015.

Nearly 26 million are unable to do everyday activities because of arthritis.

There are more than 100 different forms of arthritis and related diseases. The most common types include osteoarthritis (OA), rheumatoid arthritis (RA), psoriatic arthritis (PsA), fibromyalgia, and gout.

Arthritis affects working-age adults, older adults, and even children. Researchers found that more adults in rural areas are affected by arthritis — nearly 1 in 3 — than in urban areas. Adults living in the most rural areas are more limited by their arthritis. Arthritis limitations can include difficulties with moving and performing daily tasks, as well as social and work limitations.

Recent research found that arthritis prevalence increased with age, body mass index, physical inactivity, and worsening physical and mental health. Arthritis was highest among adults who were unable to work, disabled, or had fair or poor self-rated health.

Equipment Loan Program

If you or a family member should find yourselves recovering from an injury or medical procedure and in need of a specific piece of durable medical equipment, either short term or long term, where would you turn? For crutches? A shower chair? A toilet riser?

Through the League of Human Dignity's Equipment Loan Program, you can borrow many durable medical equipment items for a small fee, for as long as you need them.

Items we loan include Tub Seats & Benches, 2-Wheel Walkers, Canes, Crutches, Commodes, Reachers, and Grab Bars.

There is a one-time \$10 fee — \$35 for Rollator Walkers — and the loan lasts as long as the items are needed. All loans are subject to availability.

We also have items for rent, including 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 rental period. All rentals are subject to availability.

We do not loan or rent items that require special or custom fitting supervision by a doctor.

We also encourage donation of gently used equipment. All donated items need to be in good shape. We do not accept donations that need repair.

For details, about obtaining equipment or donating, call or visit the League of Human Dignity office nearest you.

TBBS Helps Nebraska Readers Keep Reading

Don't think you have to give up enjoying your favorite books or magazines just because your ability to read, hold a book or turn pages may be limited.

You still can enjoy reading with the aid of Nebraska Library Commission's Talking Book and Braille Service. The service is a part of a nationwide network of cooperating libraries, spearheaded by the National Library Service, a division of the Library of Congress.

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

The program's collection consists of books and magazines like those found in a public library. Easy-to-use playback equipment also is provided free 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, including how to apply for the service, email nlc.talkingbooks@nebraska.gov or call 1-800-742-7691. The Nebraska Talking Book & Braille Service main web page is at the Nebraska Library Commission website, nlc.nebraska.gov.

SSA Implementing New Overpayment Policies

Agency Announces Reforms Aimed at Making Recovery Methods Less ‘Heavy-Handed’

The Social Security Administration has announced it will be implementing four steps to address overpayments in a more understanding, just way.

SSA Commissioner Martin O’Malley recently outlined the steps during testimony before the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging and the Senate Committee on Finance.

Social Security employees strive to pay the right amount, to the right person, at the right time. But sometimes the agency gets it wrong, O’Malley said, and pays beneficiaries more than they are due, creating an overpayment. Congress requires that the agency make every effort to recover overpaid funds.

“But doing so without regard to the larger purpose of the program can result in grave injustices to individuals,” O’Malley said, “as we see from the stories of people losing their homes or being put in dire financial straits when they suddenly see their benefits cut off to recover a decades-old overpayment, or disability beneficiaries attempting to work and finding their efforts rewarded with large overpayments. Innocent people can be badly hurt. And these injustices shock our shared sense of equity and good conscience as Americans.”

The agency has been studying the overpayment issue. As a result, O’Malley said, “our deeper understanding of the complexities of this problem has set us on the following course of action:”

Starting on March 25, the agency discontinued “the heavy-handed practice of intercepting 100 percent of an overpaid beneficiary’s monthly Social Security benefit by default if they fail to respond to our demand for repayment,” he said. Officials intend to use a more reasonable default withholding rate of 10 percent of monthly benefits — similar to the current rate in the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program.

Agency officials also will be reframing their guidance and procedures so that the burden of proof shifts away from the claimant in determining whether there is evidence that the claimant was at fault in causing the overpayment.

In addition, policy changes now will allow repayment plans of up to 60 months. To qualify, Social Security beneficiaries would only need to provide a verbal summary of their income, resources, and expenses, and SSI recipients would not need to provide even this summary. This change extended this easier repayment option by an additional two years (from 36 to 60 months).

Finally, it will become easier for overpaid beneficiaries to request a waiver of repayment, in the event they believe they were not at fault or do not have the ability to repay.

O'Malley said the agency is attempting to implement the new policy changes with urgency, diligence, and speed.

Social Security launched a comprehensive review of agency overpayment policies and procedures in October 2023. The four new changes are a direct result of the ongoing review.

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; 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.

There are no April classifieds.

The League of Human Dignity Building Corp. Is Taking Applications

The League of Human Dignity Building Corporation is taking applications for 1 & 2 bedroom ground-level apartments, wheelchair accessible, with roll-in showers in Lincoln, Omaha, Norfolk, Columbus & York.

These apartments are HUD Section 202 & 811 projects and are available to individuals who experience disability or who are elderly. Units come with a Section 8 Certificate. Eligible applicants 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) or email knavratil@leagueofhumandignity.com

Equal Housing Opportunity

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 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