



INTRODUCTION

Disability Rights and Inclusivity: Forty Years in the Making

It's hard to imagine. If you *can* imagine, it is a painful image.

The years before 1999, it was common to discriminate against, and segregate people with disabilities. This meant many people were put into institutions and had little free-will about the lives they lived. Some languished in dark and overcrowded facilities, without the proper education and attention necessary for them to reach their full potentials. Employers often discriminated against people with disabilities in the workforce, saying there were no resources to accommodate them.

In 1999 the U.S. Supreme Court made a landmark decision that would change that. The Olmstead case challenged the separation of people from the general community. The justices ruled to uphold the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) which mandates integrating everyone into the community, regardless of disability.



This helped forge the mission of Independence First and other Independent Living Centers across the country.

Independence First has the mandate from the Federal and State government in our area to provide opportunities for choice, committed to fostering ways everyone can live in the community, in their own homes, instead of institutions.

An important value, is that with peer support, everyone, including people with extensive disabilities, can live with their families if they chose, learning how to prepare for independent living.

It has been forty years since Independence First started providing these resources in Milwaukee County, Washington County, Waukesha County, and Ozaukee County. Those resources include Personal Assistance Services with individualized caregiving, and programs and education for Independent Living. Independence First, which is run and staffed primarily by people with disabilities, is proud to help in making giant strides for equal rights, but there is much more work to do. Our advocacy continues, fighting for equality for all.



2019 CONSUMER SUMMARY

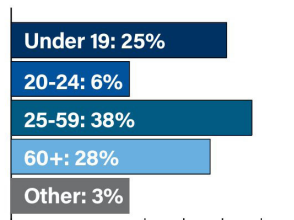
Total number
of people served
in 2019

7,036

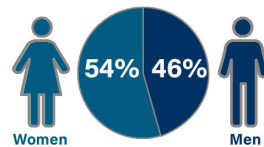
11,152

Additional individuals
impacted through staff
community activities

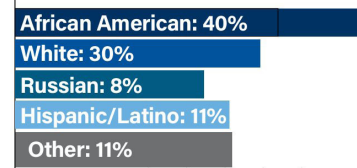
AGE OF CONSUMERS



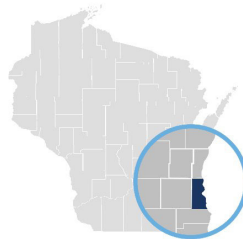
GENDER



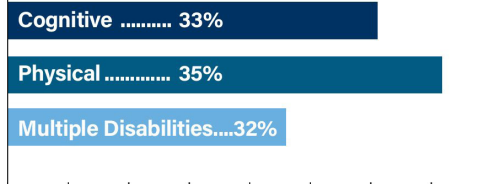
RACE AND ETHNICITY



PEOPLE SERVED BY COUNTY



DISABILITY OF PEOPLE SERVED



PROGRAM SERVICES IMPACT



1,024

Number of those
benefiting from the
Independent Living
Services Program



1,193

Individuals who receive
Personal Care Services
in their homes



3,237

Number of people
utilizing Information
and Referral Services



1,582

Individuals impacted through
Assistive Technology, Substance
Use Disorder Services, Rep.
Payee, Benefits Counseling
and WisLoan/Telework



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The importance of empowering people with disabilities, providing services, information, and options, advocating for equality, and inclusivity is extremely apparent this year as we reflect on thirty years of struggle and strides. Independence First has become one of the leading agencies in the country dedicated to these goals, succeeding in helping people stay, live, work, and recreate as equals in the community. Independence First offers more than forty different programs and workshops as well as supporting self-advocacy and personal care services.

The true difference between Independence First and many other organizations is that we are dedicated to choice. We believe it is important that the person participating in our programs make their own decisions and control their own destinies. We partner with the people who seek our help each and every day.

In 2019 we've been able to grow, exceeding a \$31 million annual budget.

Our advocacy initiatives included becoming a City of Milwaukee polling location, which allows us to open the doors to our 100% accessible building in Walker's Point to voters. While the COVID-19 pandemic changed our plans to be open for the general election due to safety concerns, we were able to provide an accessible voting location with accessible voting machines for the early election in 2019.



Partnering with the community is always one of our favorite endeavors.

Thank you to everyone who braved an early fall snowstorm to attend our Empower Lunch on November 6. Your support contributed to a hugely successful event that raised more than \$50,000 for our programs and heightened public awareness of Independence First's mission and our accomplishments. We are also grateful to the participants in the Summer Arts Program who decorated centerpieces displayed on every table that were greatly admired by our guests."

Special thanks to our presenting sponsor BMO Harris Bank, and to our other sponsors for their generous investment in our mission.

Our keynote speaker, Green Bay legend LeRoy Butler, delivered an engaging speech on his journey from using a wheelchair as a child to his successful career in the NFL. Indie Award Winners the Milwaukee Bucks accepted an award for the accessibility of the Fiserv Forum, and Moriah Iverson of the Medical College of Wisconsin was awarded the Martha Valerio Disability Advocacy Award. We want to thank Martha's longtime friend Doris Heiser for presenting this award and Martha's son Joe for traveling to Wisconsin to be a co-presenter.

In our 40th year of being a trusted community partner, Independence First directly served more than 10,000 people—providing choices and available services to individuals with disabilities. Independence First has more than 20 programs and 40 workshops that teach people with disabilities how to advocate for themselves, where to receive services in the community and how to perform independent living skills such as budgeting and cooking, and we also have one-on-one and group mentoring. We also assist with transition out of nursing homes or diverting individuals so they can live at home with their loved ones. This work can't happen without the generosity of the

community, so thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

As 2020 begins, I'd encourage everyone to help us continue the wonderful work we do at Independence First and remember us in your giving. Thank you and have a great start to the New Year."



Pictured Above:
Marci Boucher, President & CEO



Pictured Above:
LeRoy Butler delivering his speech at the Empower Lunch



EMPOWER LUNCH & INDIE AWARDS

A HUGE SUCCESS

By Myra Sanchick, Marketing & Communications Manager

Hundreds of people from the business community and other supporters gathered at the Italian Community Center November sixth, for the 2019 Empower Lunch.

Their generous support helped to raise more than \$50,000 to support individuals with disabilities to live independent lives.

Keynote speaker, Packer legend LeRoy Butler, the group about his journey from using a wheelchair as a child, to joining the NFL.

Indie Awards were presented to Moriah Iverson of the Medical College of Wisconsin, who received the Martha Valerio Award for dedication to advocacy and inclusion for people with disabilities. The Milwaukee Bucks received an award for the accessibility of the Fiserv Forum.

Artists from our Summer Youth Program volunteered to decorate centerpieces, which were enjoyed by the guests, and offered as keepsakes. Funds raised through the Empower Lunch are used to help maintain the Summer Youth Program as well as more than twenty programs for people with disabilities of all ages and all kinds of disabilities.

Independence First thanks all those who attended to make this a memorable event, and thank you to presenting sponsor BMO Harris, as well as our other supportive sponsors.





INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES

YOUTH PROGRAMMING

Young people have dreams and desires, and often welcome help navigating the challenges of entering the adult world.

Often teens and young adults with disabilities face added obstacles which include bullying, and a lack of inclusion. Many enjoy the peer support Independence First offers in our youth programs.

The youth programming at Independence First offers classes and seminars for those age 11 to 26, with a focus on leadership, family relationships, and friendships and dating. Independence First's youth programming also offers creative outlets such as art, mindfulness, and cooking.



Pictured Above:
Independence First staff working on garden near mural

In 2019, the youth programming at Independence First helped — young people with disabilities in the Milwaukee metro area, with programs that foster success in school, fun and educational summer activities, and healthy and fulfilling social relationships.



Pictured Above:

Lily, one of our youth programming participants and youth leaders

YOUTH PROGRAMMING

MEET LILY

"I just absolutely LOVE being a part of Youth Leadership Conference and I want to be more involved with Independence First or as much as I possibly can! I am also pretty serious about possibly working at Independence First someday whether a position opens up while I'm in college or after I earn my degree. I have been the most comfortable in a long time with the people and environment than I have anywhere else. It's just a very uplifting, supportive, open-minded, and positive place and it makes me so happy! " — Lily



Pictured Above:
Ruth, one of our rep payee participants

REP PAYEE PROGRAM

MEET RUTH

"I am a special-ed learner. I don't comprehend that well. I was in special education all my life," said Ruth, one of Independence First's consumers.

Ruth lived much of her life in group homes, and faced eviction with mounting unpaid bills. Her cognitive disabilities and mental health issues made it difficult to keep track of budgeting. A friend recommended she go to Independence First. Ruth's life was about to change.

At Independence First she decided to enter the Rep Payee Program, which provides budgeting education and bill

paying services. With the help of her Rep Payee Ruth is able to pay monthly rent, and feels the accomplishment of paying her own utility bills.

Ruth beams as she talks about her new life, "I'm so proud because I never thought I could live this long on my own because I was always in group homes."

The Rep payee program at Independence First helped Ruth save money to travel and visit her sister for a 75th birthday celebration. "It was the most fun I've ever had", said Ruth.

At Independence First, Ruth also found a peer support counselor who encouraged her to strive for even more.

"He has taught me to never give up," Ruth said. "That's the biggest one right there, never ever give up. You can do whatever you want as long as you put your mind to it." She fought back tears as she talked about her future, "I'm going to school right now. I'm about to cry because I have a dream. I'm going to fulfill that dream."



Pictured Above:
Cynthia from our transition program

TRANSITION MEET CYNTHIA

Cynthia is a 63-year-old woman who has multiple disabilities, including a condition that affected the nerves in her spine and body so she is no longer able to walk and get around without the use

of assistive technology and a wheelchair. Cynthia spent a lot of her life working but as her nerve damage increased, she lost her jobs and insurance and ended up in a nursing home without a place to move to called "home."

She connected with Independence First because she didn't want to be in a nursing home—she wanted to

be out in the community. Independence First staff assisted Cynthia in her housing search by providing resources, support and encouragement as she looked for housing. Cynthia was also eligible for a special grant from Independence First through the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, which allowed her to receive funding to help restart her life when she found housing and moved out of the nursing home. Through this grant, Cynthia was able to purchase furnishings for her new apartment, batteries for a scooter that she had gotten previously and some startup supplies that allowed her to have things she needed now that she was on her own again.

Cynthia indicated to me that she feels so grateful because now she has a bed to sleep on instead of just an air mattress. This is the first time in her life that she has ever had a bed. She is also so grateful to have working batteries for her scooter because now she can get out into the community and enjoy going to different places and connecting with people. She thanks Independence First and the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation for working with her and providing her with support, encouragement and the startup supplies that she needed so badly. She said she wakes up every day being grateful.



ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

The assistive technology experts at Independence First provide options available and geared towards each individual's needs so everyone can live and participate in daily life. This ranges from knowledge about specially equipped vans and other vehicles to home modification. Independence First has more than 1,300 pieces of equipment to demonstrate options for bathrooms, computer accessibility and recreational equipment. Independence First has an all-



Pictured Above:
All-terrain wheelchair free for the community to use

terrain wheelchair available to loan free of charge so people with mobility disabilities can go on the beach, fish, take a trip on a nature trail or go into the woods.

Independence First also provides options to people who would like help with loans and funding to make inclusivity a reality for all.



ADVOCACY

Independence First works to facilitate change in the systems that could stand in the way of empowerment for people with disabilities, and we support those in their journey to advocate for themselves. Brian Peters, our community access and policy specialist, serves on numerous boards in the four county area to ensure that people with disabilities can have input on the future of our community. From increasing accessible transportation options to expanding affordable accessible housing, Brian coordinates and mobilizes advocacy teams for the disability community.



Pictured Right:
*Brian Peters, our Community
Access & Policy Specialist*





Pictured Above:
*Kevin an active member of our
Transportation Advocacy Committee*

ADVOCACY MEET KEVIN

"I'm an individual with a disability, not a disabled individual! My disability is only a part of me. There is much more to who I am!"

"Back in October 2016, I was waiting for a cab outside the insurance company where I was employed. The cab never came, even though I phoned several times."

"I'm blind, standing outside very close to the curb and the cab couldn't find me?"

This is Kevin's story:

"I felt very degraded by the calls I made in the next few weeks. The

people I talked with at (at the cab company) belittled me...I felt very degraded. They said it was my responsibility to locate the cab. I was notified if I was "no show" two more times I would be suspended (from taking the taxi.)"

"This is when I started to attend the Transportation Advocacy Committee meetings at Independence First. Joining the committee has been a great eye-opening (pardon the pun) experience."

Kevin is now opening the eyes of others, meeting with people in Waukesha, Washington, and Ozaukee counties regarding transportation issues for people with disabilities.



PERSONAL CARE SERVICES

MEET JACQUELINE, JUSTIN, MACK, & WESLEY

The Personal Care Services program at Independence First helps people who chose their own caregivers, whether it be a family member or friend, provide pay for the loving care they provide.

Jaqueline is able to help her son Justin, who has autism, helping him with meals and personal grooming among other cares. Through Independence First Jaqueline is paid so she doesn't have to seek outside employment and can do what's most important to her, caring for Justin.

"It gives me peace of mind to know I can stay they provide pay for us. That may be the best of both worlds", Jacqueline explains.

Her other son, Mack, is able to take care of his brother Wesley, who also has autism.

"Independence First is great in that it allows people to do what they would normally do anyhow, and also get compensated for it, because for a long time I didn't even

"Independence First is great in that it allows people to do what they would normally do anyhow, and also get compensated for it, because for a long time I didn't even realize that it was something you could be compensated for, so it's great to have that financial backing. I would do it for free anyway, but you know the fact that you don't have to is great", says Mack.



Pictured Above:
Jacqueline, Justin, Mack, & Wesley



LOOKING FORWARD

In 2019 we celebrated our 40 years of being an Independent Living Center. Forty years of expanding our core services, our staff, revenues and those we serve. We shared a new look 40th brand logo that we hope you enjoyed. The temporary logo highlighted the milestone while focusing on our five core initiatives. We appreciated everyone's involvement and support during this very special year for Independence First.

This past year was our first full year with our CEO & President, Marci Boucher. Marci relocated to Wisconsin and quickly immersed herself with Independence First. Our staff, Board of Directors, and community had the

pleasure of witnessing Marci's leadership, team building, innovation and networking. Marci has accomplished much in just twelve months and has been a leader within the Independent Living Center community. On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank Marci for her dedicated time and effort in transitioning into the leadership of our organization.

Our Board of Directors experienced a successful 2019 as well. We took measures to refinance the Independence First mortgage and shift the market gains of the past bull market towards our building loan. In hindsight, we made a responsible decision and just in time. We have a dedicated

Board and one that is eager to serve and participate in the oversight and contribution of Independence First.

I could spend more time celebrating our accomplishments in 2019, but I am caught in thoughts for 2019 and the issues surrounding the current Covid-19 pandemic. I can tell you that we are not sitting this out. Our staff and our leaders have made the necessary adjustments to maintain our operations and services. Our Board continues to keep our scheduled meetings although via the internet. We are determined and focused to continue to operate our programs and services seamlessly. The safety and well-being of our staff and consumers remains and will always be of utmost importance.

I appreciate your time in reading this Annual Summary. My hope for us all is health and safety while we pass through this pandemic. We appreciate your support and

ask that you continue to support Independence First in any manner that you are able.

Warm regards,

Mike Lipscomb

Independence First Board Chairman





THANK YOU TO OUR BOARD

- Mike Lipscomb - Chairman
- Scott Luber - Vice Chair
- Tom Rave
- Catherine Bulgrin
- John Lauber
- Billie Torrentt
- Jesse Waukau
- Anne M. Carroll
- William Crowley
- James Guckenberger
- Judy Haugslund
- Karen Hunt
- Ron Jodat
- Kim Marggraf
- Jason Ostrowski
- Ethiel Antonio Vega-Padilla
- Tiffany Wynn



THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

DONORS \$10,000+

- Alvin and Marion Birnschein Foundation, Inc.
- BMO Harris Bank
- Greater Milwaukee Foundation-
- Eugene J. Hayman IndependenceFirst Fund
- Peter Moede
- Rockwell Automation Charitable Corporation
- The Frank & Lucille Pincer Foundation
- United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County

DONORS \$5,000 - \$9,999

- Doug Proebsting Memorial Fund at Schwab Charitable
- Green Bay Packers Foundation
- Krause Family Foundation, Inc.
- Elaine and Gerry Mainman
- Marsh & McLennan Agency
- Robert T. & Betty Rose Meyer Foundation
- Sensient Technologies Foundation
- Stackner Family Foundation
- Variety the Children's Charity of Wisconsin



DONORS \$1,000 - \$4,999

- Advocate Aurora Health Care, Inc.
- Anon Charitable Trust
- Anonymous
- Alfred Bader
- Michael Barber
- Bartolotta's Restaurants
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of WI
- Bob's Discount Furniture Charitable Foundation, Inc.
- Central Office Systems
- Clare M. Peters Charitable Trust
- Culver's Foundation, Inc.
- Educators Credit Union
- Betty and Ed Eich
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- Felss Rotaform
- FFBW Community Foundation
- First Midwest Bank
- GE Healthcare



- Goodwill Industries of Southeastern Wisconsin
- Greater Milwaukee Foundation-
- Asher and Susan Nichols Family Fund
- Greater Milwaukee Foundation-
- Catherine and Walter Lindsay Foundation
- Group One Marketing
- Pamela Hajewski
- Humana
- I-Care Inc.
- John & Deborah Lauber Charitable Fund
- The Luber Family
- Medical College of Wisconsin
- MHS Health Wisconsin
- Milwaukee Bucks
- Mutual of America
- Laurie Ocepek
- Park Bank Foundation, Inc.
- Paylocity
- Service Club of Milwaukee, Inc.



- Dale R. Smith
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- Joseph Valerio
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- Waukesha County Community Foundation, Inc.
- We Energies Corporation Foundation
- William and Sandy Heitz Family Foundation
- Wintrust Commercial Banking
- Wochinske Family Foundation, Inc.
- Megan Zimmerman



DONORS \$500 - \$999

- Anonymous
- Philip Barlow
- Catherine and Eric Bulgrin
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- Greater Milwaukee Foundation-
- Cottrell Balding Fund
- Judith Haugslund
- Ronald Jodat
- Larsen/Beadell Foundation
- Eric Nelson
- Rite Hite Company
- Tracy Thomas
- Robert Zweber



DONORS \$100 - \$499

- Annex Wealth Management, LLC
- Anonymous
- Ronnie Jean Artero Frederick
- Marci Boucher
- Diane Braza
- Yvonne Brodsky
- Karl Broman
- Teresa M. Bulgrin
- Michael Coffey
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- Sandra Gines
- Greater Milwaukee Foundation - Stephen L. Atwell and Karen Hunt Family Fund
- Grebner Family Charitable Fund
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- Lisa Troy
- Bernadette Trucco
- Susan Tsai
- Tobie Tyler and Roxan Perez
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- Victoria S. Wachniak
- Dawn Wallace
- Jesse Waukau
- Les Weil
- Kim Wynn
- Tiffany Wynn
- Sandy Wysocki
- Krista Zarcone





HONOR & MEMORIAL GIFTS

IN HONOR OF CHASE CETALU

- Lori Koslowski

IN HONOR OF JOHN LAUBER

- Julie Tolan

IN HONOR OF BEN NELSON

- Eric Nelson

IN HONOR OF MICHAEL SCHMIDT

- Debra Schmidt

IN MEMORY OF KAREN AVERY

- Tobie Tyler and Roxan Perez

IN MEMORY OF RICHARD BARTHEL

- Betty and Ed Eich
- Barbara Joyce
- Tobie Tyler and Roxan Perez

IN MEMORY OF SALLY BUCKLAND

- Stanley Tappa

IN MEMORY OF JESSE CRUZ

- Tobie Tyler and Roxan Perez

IN MEMORY OF FRED GREASBY

- Tobie Tyler and Roxan Perez

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- Joan Brenk



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- Tobie Tyler and Roxan Perez

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- Bernadette Trucco

IN MEMORY OF SHIRLEY PIERCE

- Lynn Powers

IN MEMORY OF JOYCE C. SMITH

- Dale R. Smith

IN MEMORY OF BILL SOWLLES

- Ann Sowlles

IN MEMORY OF MARTHA VALERIO

- Doris Heiser
- Moriah Iverson

