



IndependenceFirst Program Highlights: 2014/2015

- Staff spent over 1500 hours meeting, planning, and implementing various community events in honor of the 25th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Over 1,600 IL goals were set by ILS consumers, of which 92% were met at closure. 85% reported that they were more independent as a result of the assistance they received from us.
- Self-Advocacy training workshops/classes were held 12 times with 76 individuals. 100% of those who responded to a survey reported the advocacy services they received resulted in an improvement in their lives and/or increased their ability to advocate for themselves.
- 122 consumers received advocacy services; 100% of persons with disabilities who responded to a survey reported an improvement in their lives and/or increased their ability to advocate for themselves. An additional 183 individuals received advocacy services through Information and Referral services.
- Staff provided 405 testimonies on disability-related issues and impending legislation.
- 170 independent living classes/workshops were held with 255 individuals; 99% of persons who responded to a survey reported that the education/training they received helped them to live more independently in the community.
- Staff responded to 4,228 I&R inquiries regarding 5,329 topics; 96% of those responding to a survey indicated that they were satisfied with the I&R services/information received from IndependenceFirst and would refer others to our agency.
- IndependenceFirst provided peer support to 260 persons with disabilities; 99% of persons with disabilities that responded to a survey reported that the peer support they received increased their independence and/or helped them to cope better with their disability.
- The IndependenceFirst Mobility Store has two locations, one in the Madison and one in the Milwaukee area. 1,923 individuals purchased equipment (a 12% increase in customers over last year), with \$258,725 in sales. 53 tons of equipment was collected and kept out of landfills; while 32 tons of equipment was sold. 98.4% of customers receiving services that responded to a survey, at both store locations, reported satisfaction with their equipment purchase outcomes.
- Increased the knowledge of over 245 adults and youth who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind or Hard of Hearing regarding AODA prevention, treatment and/or peer support (recovery) services. 96% reported an increase in their knowledge.
- 97 persons with disabilities received assistance with their employment goals.

2014-2015 Highlights of Agency Activities

- 287 persons with disabilities, family members, and/or service providers became knowledgeable purchasers of adaptive equipment or assistive technology; 98% of persons with disabilities, family members, and/or service providers who responded to a survey reported that the ability to try out the technology assisted them to make an informed decision on the AT equipment.
- Working collaboratively with the other CILs in Wisconsin, qualified persons with disabilities obtained loans from Independence*First's* WisLoan program to purchase assistive technology. 23 applications were approved for a total of \$292,133.
- 293 persons with disabilities received benefits counseling services; 98% of those responding to a survey reported that the benefits counseling and assistance they received was helpful to them.
- 349 low-income persons with disabilities received a refurbished computer; 99% of persons who responded to a survey reported that the computer they received has helped them achieve their goals.
- 4 persons with disabilities relocated from a nursing home or other institutions into the community and an additional 18 individuals are receiving assistance with their relocation goals.
- 112 sports/recreation opportunities were offered to 134 youth and adults with disabilities; 99% of persons who responded to a survey reported satisfaction with the activity and that the activity was something that they would not otherwise have been able to participate in if not provided by Independence*First* because other community sports/recreation activities were not accessible to them.
- Independence*First* collaborates with the Southeastern Wisconsin Adaptive Ski Program (SEWASP) to provide various downhill ski opportunities.
- 1,468 persons with disabilities received personal assistance services during the reporting year. 53 persons with disabilities received assistance in recruiting, training, and hiring their own personal care attendant through the Attendant Referral Program a United Way funded program. 95% of persons who responded to a survey reported that these services prevented them from having to live in an institution.
- 536 volunteers provided 8,567 hours of service to our agency (this number represents over 4 full time positions!). 85 volunteers attended the Annual Award Murder Mystery Themed Dinner held at Tripoli Shrine Center in May. Independence*First* was designated as a Service Enterprise Organization by the National Points of Lights Foundation. We participated in the pilot program sponsored by the Nonprofit Center of Milwaukee. Independence*First* was the first agency to achieve this status in the state of Wisconsin.
- Independence*First* hosted 7 interns this year that worked 1,202 hours towards their educational goals and contributed to the mission of our agency.
- Independence*First*, for the next two years is hosting a Trinity Fellow Intern from Marquette. She is working in our Youth Leadership Program helping to further development the program.

- **IF Website:** There were 96,658 visitors (40% new visitors) between October 1, 2014 and September 30, 2015, an increase of 38% with 69,909 visitors during the previous timeframe. Visitors are spending an average of 4.10 minutes per visit with a total of 225,393 page views. A majority of users looked at Home page, Contact Us, Services, and About Us.
- **OnMilwaukee.com** promoted events including Stride & Glide and the Mobility Store.

Social Media

- Independence*First* Facebook page: 3,317 followers, up from 3,065 at this time last year (post two times daily on weekdays)
- Mobility Store Facebook page: 213 followers, up from 177 at this time last year (daily or weekly posts on weekdays)
- **Twitter** – @Independence1st: 6,617 followers, up from 6,034 at this time last year (a few posts daily on weekdays)
- **YouTube** – Independence1st: 3,374 video views during time period
- **Pinterest** – Independence1st: 903 followers, up from 808 at this time last year (a few posts monthly, some shared through Twitter)
- **LinkedIn** – Independence*First*: 560 followers (one post every few weeks)

News Stories (text is linked to URLs for stories)

[9/16/15 Independence*First*'s Computer Recycling Program Helps the Community](#)

[8/27/15 Independence*First* Employees Attend NCIL Conference](#)

[8/06/15 Independence*First* and United Way Partner to Provide Volunteer Opportunities](#)

[7/27/15 Independence*First* Appoints Kathy Murtell Director of Public Relations & Marketing](#)

[7/20/15 Americans with Disabilities Act Celebrates 25-Year Anniversary \(news story on CBS58 featuring Michelle Martini\)](#)

[3/30/15 Transportation advocates offer differing perspective on urban transit issues \(Milwaukee Neighborhood News\)](#)

[2/13/15 Brookfield Central Hosted Big Cheese Classic](#)

[88.9 Radio Milwaukee Community Story \(February 2015\) - A few winter tips to help out folks with mobility issues.](#)

[88.9 Radio Milwaukee Community Story \(January 2015\) - 25th Anniversary of monumental civil rights law.](#)

[January 2015 Award Recognition for Outstanding Employer Internship Program \(Milwaukee Area College Internship Consortium Blog\)](#)

[November, 2014 Alie Kriofske Mainella shoots straight when it comes to the birds and the bees \(Milwaukee Magazine\).](#)

- Independence*First* spent \$145,788 on the provision of sign language interpreters for staff, consumers, events and activities.

- Agency has 8 staff who is bilingual Spanish-speaking, 3 who are bilingual Russian-speaking, 3 staff that has low vision and 5 staff who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing and several hearing staff who know sign language.
- During this reporting year, Independence*First* received and responded to 309 requests for translations (including Braille –17, Acabic-6, Karenni-2, Spanish-266, Russian-19, and Korean-1. Our agency spent \$18,301 for both written and in-person language translation services (does not include sign language services referenced above).
- 82 grants/proposals were developed and submitted.
- An annual appeal was completed.
- Two special events were completed – the Stride-n-Glide, and Gallery Night. Jason Wellington a young artist from Washington, D.C. was our featured artist at Gallery Night.
- 20 Staff and board members attended the NCIL Conference in Washington, D.C. celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Americans With Disabilities Act.
- 15 staff received tuition reimbursement assistance, for a total of \$ 14,807.19
- Independence*First* continues to serve as a host site for the Recovery Implementation Task Force of Wisconsin proctoring the state certification examinations for persons seeking to become Certified Peer Specialists and providing reasonable accommodations for those requesting them.
- Independence*First* continues to participate in the U.S. State Department’s EMPOWER Program that is managed by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Office of Citizens Exchanges, administered by Mobility International USA (MIUSA). MIUSA pair’s disability rights advocates from around the world to promote inclusion, access and a greater awareness of the rights of people with disabilities. In October, we hosted two staff from Argentina; they learned about IL services, experienced cultural events and gained an understanding of disability related services.
- Independence*First* continues to provide meeting space for several organizations.
- Becky Visocky received the Relentless Badger Award for her advocacy work.

Independence*First* Consumer Demographics

Total number of consumers served in ILS and PAS: 2,616

Age of Consumers Served	ILS Department	PAS Department	Total
(1) Under 5 years old	0	0	0
(2) Ages 5 – 19	622 (54%)	58	680 (26%)
(3) Ages 20 – 24	141 (12%)	84	225 (9%)
(4) Ages 25 – 59	350 (30%)	791	1,141 (44%)

2014-2015 Highlights of Agency Activities

(5) Age 60 and Older	33 (3%)	535	568 (21%)
(6) Age unavailable	2 (<1%)	0	2 (<1%)
(7) Total	1148	1468	2,616

Gender of Consumers Served	ILS Department	PAS Department	Total
(1) Number of Females served	571 (50%)	934	1505 (58%)
(2) Number of Males served	577 (50%)	534	1111 (42%)
(3) Total	1148	1468	2616

Race of Consumers Served	ILS Department	PAS Department	Total
(1) American Indian or Alaska Native	8 (<1%)	6	14 (<1%)
(2) Asian	14 (<1%)	2	16(<1%)
(3) Black or African American	405 (35%)	725	1130 (43%)
(4) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1 (<1%)	1	2 (<1%)
(5) White	605 (53%)	187	792 (30%)
(6) Hispanic/Latino of any race or Hispanic/Latino only	101 (9%)	154	255 (10%)
(7) Russian	0	251	251 (9%)
(8) Two or more races	5 (<1%)	35	40 (1%)
(9) Race and ethnicity unknown	9(<1%)	107	116 (4%)
(10) Total	1148	1468	2,616

Disability of Consumers Served	ILS Department	PAS Department	Total
(1) Cognitive	702 (61%)	77	779 (30%)
(2) Mental/Emotional	100 (8%)	15	115 (4%)
(3) Physical	262 (23%)	743	1,005 (38%)
(4) Hearing	25 (2%)	2	27(1%)
(5) Vision	11 (<1%)	0	11 (1%)
(6) Multiple Disabilities	42 (4%)	631	673 (25%)
(7) Other	0	0	0

(8) Unknown/Not Reported	6 (<1%)	0	6 (<1%)
(9) Total	1148	1468	2,616

*****945, or 82%, of the ILS consumers served indicated that they had more than one disability.**

Community Activities

In addition to work we do with consumers we also spend a great deal of time in our community collaborating with people with disabilities, friends, family members, agencies and organizations that serve people with disabilities, people in public service such as legislators, lawmakers, decision-makers and members of our community-at-large. We do this in many different ways to make a positive impact towards improvement in community access and to promote positive change for people with disabilities, not only in our service area, but in our state, in our country, and worldwide. Overall, **21,013 individuals were impacted.** The information tables below outline the areas in which we were able to impact our communities, along with the number of individuals in various categories we affected.

Community Involvement: Activities staff participates in related to meetings within the community for the purpose of exchanging ideas to determine areas of mutual interest to work on.

Individual Category	Number of Individuals Reached
Persons with a Disability	1324
Family Member	203
Youth	304
Service Provider	977
Community-at-Large	1932
Youth with Disability	129
Volunteer	3
Vendor	89
Legislators	55
Service Provider w/disability	252
Representatives of Technology	1
Representatives of Education	2
Persons who are Deaf	46
Persons who are Deaf-Blind	5
Veterans	50
Total Persons Impacted	5,408

Outreach: Activities staff participates in that encourage, promote, invite and/or facilitate the delivery of independent living services to unserved/underserved populations including minority groups (African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Hmong), identified disability groups (DD or MH) and urban and rural populations.

Individual Category	Number of Individuals Reached
Persons with a Disability	94
Family Member	172
Youth	1
Service Provider	657

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Community-at-Large	1814
Youth with Disability	145
Vendor	15
Service Provider w/disability	20
Representative of Education	5
Person who are Deaf	30
Veterans	115
Total Persons Impacted	3,068

Public Information: Activities and information programs that staff participate in to enhance the community's awareness of disabilities and disability issues, including providing information about our agency, using venues such as community education presentations, booths at community events, trainings, workshops, etc., local TV, radio or newspaper campaigns. Includes creation and distribution of publications such as accessibility guides, disability awareness brochures, ADA information, PSA's, and database or directories for personal care workers, and other publications related to recreation opportunities, accessible transportation, accessible housing and other available services.

Individual Category	Number of Individuals Reached
Persons with a Disability	232
Family Member	51
Youth	120
Service Provider	229
Community-at-Large	96
Volunteer	1
Service Provider w/disability	41
Representative of Health & Rehabilitation	40
Representative of Employment	40
Persons who are Deaf	1
Persons who are Hard of Hearing	2
Personal Care Workers	31
Total Persons Impacted	884

Systems Advocacy: Activities that staff participates in that help people with disabilities understand a new change that may have an impact upon them and how they can advocate expressing their opinion. Other activities would involve individuals with disabilities and staff involvement in a Consumer Advocacy Team to advocate for changes they want in their community. Staffs also express their opinions on legislation that affects people with disabilities by contacting community leaders or decision makers and legislators. Some activities include Legislative Visit Days in February, NCIL visits during the summer, and attending public forums, etc.

Individual Category	Number of Individuals Reached
Persons with a Disability	3223
Family Member	129
Service Provider	1006
Youth With Disability	180
Community-at-Large	2351
Volunteer	3
Legislators	352

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Service Provider w/disability	691
Representative of Education	1
Person who is Deaf	9
Persons who is Hard of Hearing	2
Total Persons Impacted	7,947

Technical Assistance: Assistance to the community on making services, programs, activities, resources, and facilities in society accessible to individuals with significant disabilities. Examples include but are not limited to, advising the community on disability law compliance, advising, or providing peer support to another CIL staff person or board member, on policy or other issues of concern at the CIL, accessibility site surveys, etc.

Individual Category	Number Reached
Persons with a Disability	11
Service Provider	224
Volunteers	1
Service Provider w/disability	69
Representative of Health & Rehab	44
Representative of Education	4
Person who is Hard of Hearing	1
Total Persons Impacted	354

Networking: Activities that staff participate in related to building coalitions or collaborative partnerships designed to expand the participation of individuals with disabilities in services, programs, activities, resources and facilities. This is generally done through continued work with groups such as PeopleFirst, NCIL, Consumer Advocacy Teams, WCILC, WILN, Waukesha DD Council, MCTAB, LTC Council, etc.

Individual Category	Number Reached
Persons with a Disability	1456
Family Member	233
Service Provider	807
Community-at-Large	354
Legislators	25
Service Provider w/disability	344
Representative of Health and Rehab	4
Representative of Education	4
Representative of Employment	109
Veterans	16
Total Persons Impacted	3,352

A Variety of Stories Submitted by Staff:

The Youth Leadership Program conducted several disability awareness and independent living history classes at school with classrooms that are integrated with students with and without disabilities. In one particular classroom, a teacher asked Youth Program staff to come and talk about disability and Down Syndrome because one of the students, Mike, is a child with Down Syndrome. Staff talked about what disability is and showed a video called "Just Like You" about young people with Down Syndrome. The class had a lot of questions and Mike spoke up to answer many of them. He also shared that he didn't want to be treated any differently from the other students in the class. A follow up email from the teacher after the workshop indicated that the behaviors of the students towards Mike had changed. They were talking to him about inappropriate behavior instead of laughing at him as they had done before. They were also inviting him to work in groups with them. Mike showed an increase in self-advocacy and began calling students out on discriminatory behavior. In addition, Mike and some of his classmates chose accessible transportation for people with disabilities as a research project.

Making Proud Choices is a comprehensive sexuality education class offered at Independence *First* for youth with disabilities ages 11 and older. This class has been offered since 2013. One school has requested that our staff come each year to provide the course to a classroom of youth with cognitive disabilities. One boy in the class, Chris, has been in each of the classes since 2013. Back in 2013, he was quiet, embarrassed about the material and sometimes downright hostile about having to take the class. During Making Proud Choices in 2015, Chris went from being sullen to be an active participant in the class. He was happy to be there and showed how far he had come, even taking a leadership role by volunteering to present information to his class. Chris' teacher reported that she had noticed he was making healthier relationship choices by citing what he had learned in the Independence *First* classes when telling friends that their behavior was unhealthy.

An individual who was loaned a power wheelchair provided these comments. Cindi, I thank you and Independence *First* for allowing me to use the wheelchair. It helped me in so many ways to feel comfortable operating one and what to expect on paratransit. It gave me a chance to see the grounds around my apartment complex which I had not seen since I moved in the apartment complex 3 years ago. I only used it to get outside on the grounds and to go to work. I can't tell you how much it helped me to sit with nature. Now, I can go to a bookstore, Dollar Tree, and doctor's appts. without pain. Cindi, your kind assistance is deeply appreciated.

This past summer, Independence *First* held a Promise Soft Skills training workshop for youth with disabilities. This workshop taught various soft skills for on the job such as: communication, enthusiasm, attitude, teamwork, networking, problem solving, critical thinking, and professionalism. These workshops also included fun, hands-on activities that provided real life situations for the youth to build confidence and experience. The Promise Soft Skills training was truly a success! All of the participants really opened up and felt like they learned a handful of new skills that will help them not only with their employment skills, but in the community as well.

An Employment Consultant had been working with Ann, an individual who is deaf for over a year. She came close to securing employment on several occasions but something always stood in her way. Ann experienced discrimination from both employers and from service providers who should have known better. She was very frustrated and started to wonder if she would ever find a job. The Employment Consultant connected with the owner of a local warehouse who was frustrated by the quality of workers he was employing. He said that he had trouble finding dependable workers. He

was hoping that Independence*First* could help him solve this problem by recommending someone with a disability as he knew that in general people with disabilities are good workers. Ann immediately came to mind. Ann and the staff person met with the warehouse owner for a tour and an interview. He was very impressed with Ann and hired her. He saw Ann's disability as an asset and not a liability. Ann has been successfully working now for three months and is receiving wonderful feedback. Her supervisor and coworkers are eager to learn ASL and she has been happy to teach to them. Ann feels very successful, confident, and fulfilled.

Diane, an individual with a mental health disability, worked with an Independence*First* IL Coordinator on a goal to improve her self-esteem. The two worked together on ways to have a more positive outlook. At the beginning, she filled out a worksheet of positive thinking statements and she struggled through most of them. The staff person kept that worksheet and toward the end of their time working together, she asked Diane to complete a new worksheet with the same questions. When they compared worksheets, Diane was pleasantly surprised because she saw how much she had grown in a short period of time. Diane said that she will keep on working on improving her self-esteem.

Jane is an individual who is deaf. Her goals were to become a US citizen and to get a driver's license. Jane was really determined and attacked her goals back to back. An IL Coordinator assisted her with studying for the US citizenship test and she passed with flying colors! Then right after that, Jane began working towards getting a driver's license. With assistance from the Independence*First* staff member, she did the same thing by studying and memorizing the rules of the road. Jane passed it beautifully and now feels so empowered and independent; she even got a new part-time job.

Mary received assistance with money management and had a goal to move out on her own. She was living with her daughter and her young family but wasn't very happy where she was. She felt out of control with her money situation and overwhelmed living with her daughter, her daughter's husband and a toddler. Mary was very low and wanted to get control of her own life. She worked really hard on her money management goal and by getting a representative payee was able to catch up on her old bills. Mary obtained a part-time job and found an apartment. She is so happy now with her privacy and has a better relationship with her daughter and her family.

Heidi received employment services from Independence*First*. She is mature worker with a disability, who is also a mother of a child with a disability. For years she struggled between temporary jobs. In February 2015, she got a job with a popular food service chain. Additionally, with help from DVR she was able to purchase a used vehicle which allows her to not only be on time for her 6 AM start time at work, but also allows her to make it home after school to spend quality time with her child.

Joe is a student at the Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) and is hoping to one day become a theater manager. Joe obtained a part-time usher position, with assistance from his Employment Consultant, at a large local sports arena that hosts three major teams. Joe is pleased that this position is close to school and has a flexible schedule so he can still focus on his studies. In August, 2015, Joe happily reported that his employer offered to start training him in other areas of the facility.

Molly loves poetry and reading, she also has ADHA. Ever since she was in school, she wanted to work in a library. Molly had little work history, so through the Employment Program she completed a temporary work experience in a library. She was also encouraged to volunteer to build her work skills. She volunteered at the local conservatory, the art museum and the historical center. In July 2015, Molly finally was able to realize her dream when she was hired at a suburban library for an entry level

“shelver” position. Molly is building relationships with her coworkers, learning new skills and plans on moving up to a Circulation Assistant in the library as soon as she can.

Laura is a 49 year-old African American woman, with an Intellectual Disability, who has worked on advocacy skills with Independence*First* staff. Laura lives with her family in Milwaukee and has progressed a long way from being a timid, unsure and shy individual. This was evidenced by a recent phone call. Laura said she returned some books to the Milwaukee Public Library, but the return was not credited to her account. The library was going to charge Laura the cost of the books. Laura told the library staff that it was not right that she had to pay because she was certain she returned the books. She reminded the library that her record showed she had never failed to return a book to the library. Laura held her ground, spoke to a supervisor and asked for a dispute form. Fortunately, the books were eventually found and Laura’s patron-record was cleared. Laura even verified this by checking the Milwaukee Public Library website. The books were verified as returned and Laura started a new chapter in her life as a self-advocate.

James is a 23 year-old male with Autism. James is a highly motivated individual, having just completed a computer software degree at a local college. James knew that his Autism could hold him back socially. James contacted Independence*First* to help increase his conversation skills. Staff methodically worked with James on how to read body language as well as how to start, maintain and end conversations. They also worked on how to portray a polite tone with requests via email. James met with the staff member on a regular basis. James was hired by a major local software company, yet he saw the value in improving his social skills, so he continued meeting with the Independence*First* staff person in spite of new work demands. Staff watched James transform from a mechanical, forced style to a more comfortable, natural relaxed demeanor. After several weeks James determined he achieved his goal. Services were successful and James decided to discontinue services for the time being. He is hoping that he can think of a new independent living skill topic to work on at some point in the future.

Kurt is a 48 year old individual who entered a nursing home because the supported apartment that he lived in became classified and did not accept individuals with spinal cord injuries. His case manager in Waukesha County had mistakenly told the apartment complex that Kurt had a disability that was accepted. Kurt then had no other option than to enter a nursing home. His case manager refused to give him any other options. Kurt lived in a nursing home for approximately 5 years. He contacted Independence*First* for relocation assistance. Staff assisted Kurt in getting connected to IRIS (self-directed long term care program) and finding housing and supports in Waukesha County. The Personal Assistance Services Program at Independence*First* was Kurt’s first choice for a provider to meet his needs. Kurt connected with this program and currently has a nurse that assisted him in setting up his cares and supports in his community. Kurt moved into the community with all these supports in place and is now very happy to be living in a place where he is in charge of his own care and can make his own decisions on how he spends his time.

Gerry is a 59 year old individual who has lived most of his life with a mental health disability. In 2014 Gerry started having physical difficulties walking and using his legs. Due to these issues and a new physical disability diagnosis Gerry was placed in a nursing home. Gerry did not want to live in a nursing home and contacted Independence*First* for assistance. Gerry had been a housing inspector for the city of Milwaukee for most of his career and he did not want to be stuck in a nursing home during his retirement. Staff assisted Gerry in problem solving his situation and helping in his

relocation back to his home. Gerry consulted with the WisLoan Program and a number of other home-improvement funding institutions as he looked into ways of making his home more accessible. Gerry did not want any assistance from Milwaukee County Disability Services. Staff also assisted Gerry in finding medical and mental health providers in his community once he relocated.

Excerpt from grateful letter to our PAS Department on their decision to change their personal care provider that better fits their needs for their now 3 adult children:

Thank you for your continued offers of flexibility for your meetings with us. We recognize and appreciate your efforts to help keep things simple. My husband and I have spent some time talking with our kids and we have decided that now is the time that makes sense for us to transition our kids into another self-directed personal care program. This has been an incredibly difficult decision for my husband and me. We have been with Independence*First* on behalf of our three kids for about 15 years and truly it is the support of Independence*First* services that “saved our lives” as I have told many others. I don’t know if my husband and I could have survived without the people that were hired by Independence*First* to provide cares and help for our kids especially during the kids’ younger years. Paul in the Payroll Department has been patient, understanding and respectful with the complicated timesheets and errors and the nurses who have been assigned to our family have been caring and professional.