As 2019 begins to wind down and we begin looking at a new year and a new decade, I think back to the last decade I’ve spent here at the Center. I started out in the Assistive Technology department and the advancements in the last 10 years have been beyond anything I would have imagined. Smart technology has bridged the gap so that typical devices we use every day are also adaptive tools for people with vision loss, mobility limitations and hearing loss.

Looking beyond the Center at our community, the last few years have shown an increased access for sensory disabilities. Many businesses have provided opportunities for those with sensory sensitivities to access their venues in a way that accommodates their needs. We now have a coalition of many organizations and businesses working toward expanding opportunities through the Ozarks Inclusion Partnership.

Statewide we are seeing movement toward improved access to employment through Governor Parson’s Missouri as a Model Employer program. As part of this initiative Missouri will seek to hire qualified people with a disability to set an example for other businesses. Competitive employment has long been a barrier many people with disabilities have struggled to overcome.

Signs of progress are encouraging, yet we are far from eliminating the multitude of barriers faced in our community and society. We must continue to push, knock down, and demand equality in all areas of life. We cannot become complacent with what we’ve achieved when there is so much yet to be done. The disability movement is not over yet, and our children may have to take up where we left off in the decades to come.

We’ve enjoyed, and sometimes take for granted, the work that those who came before us. Many of us have only known life under the protections of the ADA. It is our job to keep pushing forward so that one-day equality is the norm and disability does not hinder anyone from achieving their dreams.

Shannon Porter
CEO
LIVE & THRIVE 2020

January 8, 2020
2nd & 4th Wednesday of every month
1:30pm-3:30pm
Locations will vary depending on activities planned

Are you tired of being bored, looking at the four walls at home?

Come and make some new goals this year focusing on the care of you! This group is all about health and fitness for individuals with a disability. Create a healthy program that works for you! This group is for adults of any age and ability. The group will meet from January-October.

"OUR VOICE" NEWSLETTER

If you have suggestions for stories or content you would like to see in the newsletter, please email cboyle@empowerabilities.org.

October - December 2019  www.empowerabilities.org  Page 2
OUR VOICE

news and information on disability matters

MEDICARE OPEN ENROLLMENT
Part D and Medicare Advantage Plans
October 15 - December 7

The link between you and Medicare.

Compare Plans • Check Your Coverage • Lower Your Costs

CLAIM counselors are available: Appointments Only

Mondays
October 21st - December 2nd
8:00 AM - 5:00 PM

empower:abilities (formerly SCIL)
Building B
2864 S. Nettleton Ave.
Springfield, MO 65807

Call 417-886-1188 X217 to schedule an appointment.

Contact our CLAIM counselors to make an appointment at (417) 886-1188
Steve Wrigt - swright@empowerabilities.org
Stacie Amschler - samschler@swcil.org
Chelsea Polonus - cpolonus@empowerabilities.org

October - December www.empowerabilities.org Page 3
SOCIAL AND RECREATIONAL EVENTS

Post-Polio:
Even months -3rd Mon 1:30 - 3:30
Contact Ishelfton@empowerabilities.org

Youth Social Club Springfield
2nd Thursday 4:30-6:30
Contact bgober@empowerabilities.org

Circle of Friends Social Club
Wednesdays 1:30 - 3:30
Contact
samschler@empowerabilities.org

Women Inventing Tomorrow
Odd Months - 1st Thursday 1:30 - 3:30
Contact
samschler@empowerabilities.org

Craft Group
Occurs monthly 1:30 -3:30
Contact
bhopkins@empowerabilities.org
for dates

Spinal Cord Injury Support Group
Beyond Mobility
3rd Thursday 4:00 - 5:30
Contact bgober@empowerabilities.org

Live and Thrive
Wednesdays 1:30-3:30
Contact
samschler@empowerabilities.org

Cooking Club
Thursdays 11:30-1:30
Contact bhopkins@swcil.org for dates
"In the past 4 years 10 months and 28 days i have never felt this close to my old self again! Feels sooo good! No matter what life throws at you, continue to chase your dreams people!

-Derrick Duncan
Springfield, MO

Tour De Maryhill 2019 was an event of many firsts. The Maryhill Ratz hosted a World Class event, all while navigating through new territory with an adaptive category. The skaters in the adaptive category did not disappoint. Springfield’s own Derrick Duncan competed in a fight to the finish taking second place. Follow Derrick on Facebook to learn more about him and his story!

Did you know we have an adaptive sports and recreation group right here in Springfield?

Shanie Campbell, owner of ATOP Outdoors, works to serve and educate any who desire to take the challenge, overcome their obstacles, resume life and live it. If you have a disability and want to step outside to experience the thrill of outdoor sports, contact Shane at (417) 766-0332.
Google Improving Accessibility For Those With Cognitive Disabilities

Google says it is working to make smartphones easier to use for people with cognitive disabilities. The technology giant unveiled a new functionality this week called Action Blocks, which allows users to create custom commands to do virtually anything on their phones with the tap of a single icon. The feature, which relies on Google Assistant, is aimed at simplifying regular activities for people with disabilities.

“Think about the last time you did something seemingly simple on your phone, like booking a rideshare. To do this, you had to unlock your phone, find the right app and type in your pickup location. The process required you to read and write, remember your selections and focus for several minutes at a time. For the 630 million people in the world with some form of cognitive disability, it’s not that easy,” wrote Ajit Narayanan, an accessibility software engineer at Google.

Action Blocks is the first of many efforts Google is doing to empower people with cognitive disabilities, help them gain independence, connect with loved ones, and engage in the world as they are.

Read more about Jesi’s story on www.7billionones.com.

Jesi Stracham

"I had to make the decision to work. I put in work daily both physically and mentally. Some days it feels like I'm moving backwards. One day I feel everything and my legs will be strong; others I'm right back where I was when first injured. This is beyond taxing. Without regular meditation and self-care, I break down. Countless times I have had mental breakdowns on the floor similar to the one I had on the hotel room floor, though they are less frequent these days.

That's the thing about tragedy. It isn't prejudice. It doesn't care about your age, social class, race or gender. It can affect anyone at any moment. After you are hit with this life changing event, you must make a choice. Do you give up? Or do you use it as an opportunity to live life to the fullest?"

October - December www.empowerabilites.org Page 6
Last week, Senator Bob Casey (D-PA), along with Representatives Lloyd Doggett (D-TX), and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), introduced legislation to improve the health and economic security of people with disabilities—the Stop the Wait Act (S. 2496, H.R. 4386). Currently, after waiting months to qualify for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), most individuals with disabilities must wait an additional five months before they can begin to receive benefits, and another two years before they are eligible for Medicare coverage.

Only people with End-Stage Renal Disease and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS, or Lou Gehrig’s disease) are excluded from the Medicare waiting period. These delays mean that people with disabilities often cannot get the help they need, when they need it, putting them at risk of worse health outcomes and high out-of-pocket costs.

The Stop the Wait Act would eliminate these dangerous waiting periods. It would require the Social Security Administration to begin payment to an individual eligible for SSDI immediately after they are determined to be eligible. It would also phase out the 24-month waiting period for Medicare Disability Benefits.

In 2017, more than 10,000 Americans died while waiting for SSDI benefits to begin. Medicare Rights has long advocated for improving this broken system, and we, at the Medicare Rights Center, strongly support the Stop the Wait Act. People with disabilities must not be forced to wait to access needed SSDI benefits and health care coverage.
Congratulations Becky!

After attending a 1-week training in Denver, CO in August 2018 and 1-year of required assignments, Becky Clifton Hopkins, MS, obtained certification through Virginia Commonwealth University’s National Training and Data Center. She is now a Community Partner Work Incentive Coordinator and can provide Benefits Analysis Services for those with disabilities who wish to return to work and maintain their benefits.