A Message from Shannon:

2020 has definitely thrown all of us curveballs that we were not anticipating. As the leadership team took steps to protect staff and consumers from COVID-19 exposure, I wasn’t sure how we would manage to provide services with our offices closed. Technology has become vital in providing tools to stay connected to each other and those who need us so that we can confidently say we are still here for you, even if we aren’t in the same physical location.

I’m so proud of how our staff has adapted and found innovative solutions to meet the needs of people with disabilities while minimizing exposure to the virus. Virtual meetings and programs have expanded our capacity to reach those who may have not had the opportunity to come to our offices and participate in our events.

I want to thank our leadership team for working as a team to quickly take action and our staff for adapting and shining throughout it all. One thing that provides some comfort is that we are all in this together, and we will get through it together.

- Shannon Porter, CEO

Our doors may be closed, but we are still here for you.

empower: abilities

MISSION:
To remove barriers and empower independent living for all people with disabilities.

VISION:
To assist all people with disabilities to live their fullest life and participate in an accessible world of social equality.

Help us get a little greener!

Sign up for a digital version of "Our Voice" newsletter
empowerabilities.org/our-voice

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STAY CONNECTED

Board of Directors 2020

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SHARE YOUR VOICE WITH "OUR VOICE" NEWSLETTER

If you have suggestions for stories or content you would like to see in the newsletter, please contact Marketing and Development Director, Amy Temple amyt@empowerabilities.org.
LOTS of Virtual Groups to check out!

Basic American Sign Language Class - Every Monday 1:30p
Whether you are a beginner or fluent, this is a great opportunity to connect and communicate with others also interested in increasing their ASL ability - as well as expert presenters and special guests.

Live and Thrive - Every Wednesday 1:30p
A group to enhance your overall well being with a variety of workshops and educational programs.

Virtual Social Hour - Every Friday 3:00p
(Replacing our usual "Social Club" for the time being) A light-hearted opportunity for social connection, typically with a weekly topic.

Youth Social Club - 2nd Thursday 3-5:00p
A monthly gathering for social interaction and community involvement through fun activities.

Team Access - 2nd Friday 10-12:00p
A group for local advocates who work to break down barriers, including opportunity to participate in City of Springfield's ADA Committee.

Cooking Club - Last Thursday 11:00a
A monthly virtual group that explores various cooking skills through peer learning and adaptive equipment.

empower: independence -
Virtual classes starting in September
A group for youth with disabilities in their junior / senior / first year after high school. Topics include: Life & Social Skills, Leadership, Advocacy, Budgeting, Employment, & More!

Amputee Support Group: All Amp’d Up -
1st Friday 1:30-2:30p
For amputee peer support, contact Jennifer 417-370-7593.
This is an important election year. We are proud to partner with Missouri Foundation for Health for an "Empower the Disability Vote" campaign initiative. We have been hosting public conversations, presentations, and resources to educate and inform our community and promote advocacy - especially self-advocacy! We are without a doubt in a fight for civil rights, and we need YOU to help us WIN TOGETHER! Stay connected with upcoming opportunities to help EMPOWER THE DISABILITY VOTE!

"Empower the Disability Vote" campaign is in partnership with Missouri Foundation for Health

9/22 1:30p
National Voter Registration Day - Michelle Bishop from the National Disability Rights Network in Washington DC joins us for an important conversation!

10/7
Last Day to Register to Vote for the Nov 2nd election!

10/13 9:30a
Empower YOUR Vote! Join us for a zoom session with the League of Women Voters as they share their resources and Voter Guide to help you be prepared to vote!

11/3
VOTE AND MAKE YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!

**Links to virtual events will be shared on our Facebook and/or via email.
Back to our Roots: 
The Year it all Began

by Shelby Butler, empower: abilities Community Outreach Coordinator

I sat down with Ann Morris, the first Executive Director of empower: abilities, to help paint a picture of where it all started. She shared some photos and after she paused, she began to share.

We started out in late 1985 as the Springfield Coalition for Disability Rights. We were the 5th center for independent living to receive grant money and open up in MO. A CIL is defined by four core services and having 51% of staff and 51% of the board are those with disabilities. Consumer control is another important element where the individual guides their own services through the goals they set for themselves. The services required are still advocacy, peer support, information and referral and independent living skills with the addition of transitions in recent years. Today there are almost 500 CILS across the United States. We were set up to cover 21 counties. “It was a lot of work but so glad we were helping people,” said Morris.

Then in 1986 that same group of people who had wanted to organize a group to advocate for the removal of barriers for people in the area with disabilities and now had grant money and a place to work. There were no curb cuts and ramps and people were really struggling to get around. We started in downtown Springfield which quickly became our stomping grounds. “I so much appreciate the work of Doris Ewing and others who helped write the grant and get us off the ground. In the beginning we all chipped in. “I remember mowing the grass in my heels and cars driving by taking a second look,” shared Morris.

Ann Morris was named Executive Director of the Springfield Coalition for Disability Rights which became the Southwest Center for Independent Living. Ann hired an administrative assistant who kept the office running and started calling businesses to get the word out and gather support. They quickly moved to a bigger location and took steps to make modifications to their building and teach others how to do it, too. They had to Most requests came in about no curb cuts throughout the city and no way to get over them. If you used a wheelchair or you were blind very few things were accessible. Ann traveled to a small town close by to talk about making changes and why. The response was that “no one ever came in to that town's downtown.” Ann simply replied, “because they can’t”. The man she was talking about simply replied, “well I never thought of that.” That’s when things began to change.

They hired more people who had disabilities and grew their efforts. Serving 21 counties was a big task. They started using volunteers and people came right away like there had been nothing else like it. The group started going to Washington DC once a year and advocated for the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which was proposed by the National Council on the Handicapped, which became the National Council on Disability in 1988. The ADA would not officially pass until 1990. In 1986 the need for the ADA was very evident. Transportation wasn’t accessible and many programs had not been able to serve those with disabilities because of lack of access. That year the Mayor of Springfield, George Scruggs, cut the ribbon at the Open House on July 31st and read a proclamation declaring that day as “Independent Living Day.” Our community finally had a mission to break down barriers, and Morris, along with the group of other engaged citizens, set out to do just that.

Today, as we protect the ADA and all the work that has been done before us, we remind ourselves that we have to keep on educating the general public and those in decision making roles that people with disabilities need to be included and not left out. We need to work hard to share these stories with the youth, who will become the next leaders, and how their voice matters. When talking with Morris I can hear the pride and joy she feels from all the groundwork laid. We are so proud of the work our community did to start our organization and are honored to keep the work going. Included are some of the visual memories Ann shared. One quote that stuck out came from a corporation we all are very familiar with. “At McDonald’s, we believe the only thing that can truly disable a person is the loss of opportunity.” We believe this, too!
Why Vote?

By Leah Shelton, empower: abilities Assistant Program Director

I know it can feel daunting to go to the polls and vote, and seriously...
Many times it doesn't seem like it really even matters, right? WRONG!
Let me help you see why it's so important that you vote EVERY time:

Did you know when you vote for city aldermen and local commissioners (think police and fire) you're helping determine who the chief of police will be? The city aldermen also listen to community members and make decisions for the city based on what they hear. A great example of this is recently due to COVID-19. Many of our surrounding cities held hearings to determine if we should have masks mandates. Each meeting lasted approximately 5 hours, and Springfield decided to have a mask mandate. Nixa voted it down. (Of 5 hours of testimony, only about 6 people were for wearing masks.)

Did you know that your county sheriff is also elected?
Imagine how bored Robin Hood would have been if all the people would've gotten out and voted the Sheriff of Nottingham out!

What does our State Governor do? They make state ordinances that help determine how the entire state responds to crises. They're like the president of our state. It is their job to ensure public safety and security.

The District Attorney decides if an arrest will actually lead to a charge.
State legislators determine policies and laws that govern the State of Missouri. They also speak on our behalf regarding issues we find important.

Did you know that you can call our legislators and tell them what you think about a proposed bill or law? These are just a few examples of how important it is for YOU to get out and VOTE, EVERY TIME.

Are you confused about a role, why you should vote, or what your vote impacts? Get more info on local government: mo.gov/government

Also, I am always willing to help you find answers, so give me a call or send me an email and we'll explore this together!

lshelton@empowerabilities.org or (417) 886-1188 x 206
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:

Monday - Friday
October 15 - December 7, 2020
8 am - 5 pm

By appointment only. Call 417-597-4430 to schedule your appointment.

empower: abilities

Visit missouriclaim.org or call 800-390-3330 for our FREE service.
We have a Transitions Department dedicated to transitioning individuals from a medical facility into their own home. We help find the right living arrangements, set up utilities, and furnish the living space, including any assistive equipment needed.