

Centerpoint

Taking Control of Tomorrow

Centerpoint Newsletter. A publication of Options for Independent Living Inc

FALL ISSUE 2021

From the Director

Let me introduce myself. In July of 2021 I started as the new Executive Director at Options for Independent Living. I can't express enough to all of you how excited I am to be here at Options. My background is in Health Care. I am a graduate of the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire Health Care Administration Program. My career has been leading teams to provide quality of care in post-acute and skilled nursing facilities where I served as the Administrator. I worked for both non-profit and for-profit organizations in Minnesota and Wisconsin over the course of the past twelve years. Personally, my wife, Kari and I live in De Pere. We have one son, Christian who turned three this past June.

Over the past months, I had the opportunity to meet with all the Option's staff. Through this experience, it is evident that our Team continues to be driven to carry out our mission to empower people with disabilities to live independent and productive lives. I'm looking forward to working with Option's staff to enhance our core services of advocacy, peer support, information and referral, independent living skills and transition services as well as breaking down other barriers to independence we discover along the way.

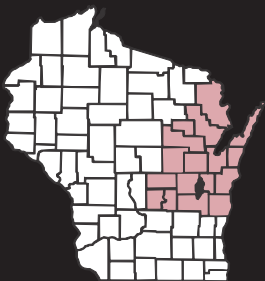
The Covid-19 Pandemic has brought about changes to the way Options works to deliver on our mission. With the generous support of the Community Foundations and private donors we have been able to continue our mission. On June 1st Options re-opened the doors of our David L. Hall showcase model home and office complex to consumers by appointment only. We have been able to safely serve consumers in the model home/office complex by masking, developing cleaning protocols, and physical distancing. In addition, Option's staff is once again back in the field completing in-home assessments with safety at the forefront. And we've used virtual technology such as zoom or FaceTime to meet with people and help remove barriers they may be experiencing toward their independence, if they are not comfortable with in-person visits. In

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Serving 17 counties in
Northeast Wisconsin
and the Fox Valley

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early September, we re-opened our LEND closet by appointment only and in two weeks have lent out nearly 50 pieces of durable medical equipment to consumers.

This Newsletter is great way to introduce myself and provide all of you with information and highlights about what Options does. We also have sad news about an Options employee and friend, John Meissner. In addition, we are also kicking off our annual fundraising campaign. I look forward to growing relationships with all of you and encourage you to give me a call, send me an e-mail and hopefully soon, stop by the model home office to say hello. ☺

Take care and stay healthy,

Josh Theis

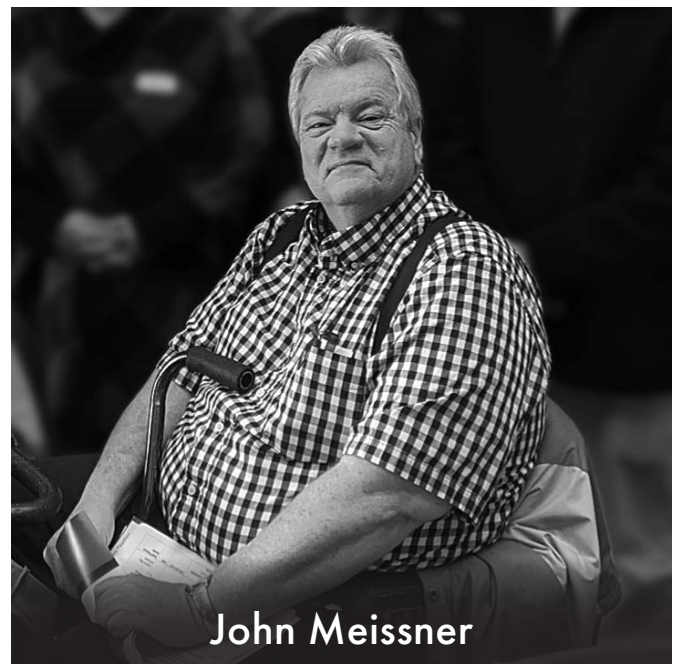
Executive Director
josht@optionsil.org
920-393-1045

Saying Goodbye to John Meissner, a dear co-worker and friend

On Thursday, October 7, John Meissner, Options Independent Living and Advocacy Coordinator, passed away unexpectedly at home. John worked for Options for 28 years, starting his Options career in 1993. He was known locally and state wide for his advocacy efforts in the area of accessible transportation, long term care services, equal access in housing and much more.

He was a frequent presenter, with his side kick John Breaker, at Fox Valley high schools talking to students about the ramifications of drinking and driving. He served on the Governor's Council for People with Physical disabilities for many years advocating for services and programs for people with disabilities in Wisconsin and assisting with the development and promotion of the Emergency Planning Tool Kit for people with disabilities. He was also a long time member of the Advocacy Coalition of the Fox Valley.

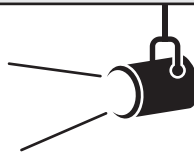
John was an easy going, all around good guy. He was hired by Options back in 1993 despite him being a very loyal Bears fan. 😊 He is survived by his wife, Renee, and daughter Kim and son Josh, and his five grandsons. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him and worked with him. ☺



John Meissner

Consumer Spotlight on Advocacy

By: Alyson Johnson, Options IL Coordinator for the Fox Valley



In August I received a call from Garry Gallagher who was coming to WI from Georgia to play at Whistling Straits with his dad and two brothers. One of the brothers was diagnosed with ALS shortly after they had made travel arrangements a year ago. Walking had become difficult for the brother with ALS, so Garry reached out to me to see if Options had anything like a beach chair that they could use on the course to move his brother easily from hole to hole.

Whistling Straits has strict policies against anything motorized on the course, so no golf carts allowed. I was finally able to get golf course management to approve an adaptive stroller and collaborated with Easter Seals in Appleton who happened to have a stroller that would work. I delivered it to the family's cousin, who got it to the family for use on the course. Garry stated "Alyson was our guardian angel. Without her, the trip would not have happened!" Above are two of the pictures the family shared with us from their day. The one on top is of three members of the family walking/wheeling the course with a caddy, the one on the bottom is the family by Hole #1 at Whistling Straits. ○



Vaccination Information

Wondering about getting your COVID shot?

Do you want to get your COVID vaccines, but find it difficult to figure out where to go, how to get there, what happens if you cannot leave your home, etc. If you need help getting your shots call us. Options is here to help people with disabilities.

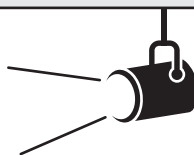
We can help you with:

- Finding places/ways to get the COVID-19 vaccine
- Registering for the vaccine appointment
- Finding transportation to the site
- Answering any questions you might have

Call us today! (920) 490/0500 V/Relay or 888-465-1515 toll-free

Consumer Spotlight on Transition

By: LeAnne Loveless, Independent Living Coordinator



A big part of what Independent Living Centers do is transitioning those with disabilities out of the nursing home or long-term care facilities into their own homes to live independently. About a year ago, I received a call from someone asking for assistance to move home after residing in a nursing home for a year. Due to their disabilities, they were unable to communicate with staff in the nursing home. This consumer was a lifelong ASL user, and during COVID times, reading lips was impossible to do with everyone wearing masks in health care facilities. Options was able to assist this consumer with purchasing an iPad and iPad holder so they could connect with their friends and family during COVID, and hopefully make communication easier for the individual and the nursing home staff. This summer, the consumer's family decided to relocate consumer to a different facility that wasn't a nursing home but a rehabilitation center with the hopes this consumer would be able to eventually gain the strength so they could go back home and live independently again. I was able to work with social workers, advocates, transportation companies, and the consumer's family to ensure this individual's move went as smoothly as possible. ○

Gaming Anyone?

Video Games aren't just for kids anymore. Thanks to advancements in gaming technology, video games are becoming more and more accessible for players of all ages and players with disabilities.

Did you know that Wisconsin has a statewide gaming group specifically for gamers with disabilities? We meet every other week from 4:00-5:00 pm for a social hour. Join us to learn about different games and assistive technology that's available for gamers with disabilities! We also have a 6-week educational curriculum about gaming safely online.

If you want more information on adaptive gaming or on joining these statewide gaming groups, please contact LeAnne Loveless, Independent Living Coordinator, at (920) 328-9867 or via email at leannel@optionsil.org. ○

Emergency Broadband Benefit Program

Can't afford the Internet...maybe this program can help: Emergency Broad Band Assistance



The Emergency Broadband Benefit Program is a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) program that provides a temporary discount on monthly broadband bills for qualifying low-income households. If your household is eligible, you can receive...

- Up to a \$50/month discount on your broadband service and associated equipment rentals
- Up to a \$75/month discount if your household is on qualifying Tribal lands
- A one-time discount of up to \$100 for a laptop, tablet, or desktop computer (with a co-payment of more than \$10 but less than \$50)

Only one monthly service discount and one device discount is allowed per household. To receive the connected device discount, consumers need to enroll in the EBB Program with a participating provider that offers connected devices (not all service providers offer device discounts). The service provider will provide the discount to the consumer.

The program will end when the fund runs out of money, or six months after the Department of Health and Human Services declares an end to the COVID-19 health emergency, whichever is sooner. ○

A New Company Called Veyo Will Manage Your Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT)



Starting November 1, 2021, Veyo will replace Medical Transportation Management, Inc. (MTM) in providing non-emergency medical transportation, (NEMT) services for Wisconsin Medicaid and BadgerCare Plus members. MTM will continue to provide services until November 1, 2021.

As a reminder, NEMT provides rides to covered Medicaid and BadgerCare Plus appointments if you have no other way to get there. Rides may be on public transportation (such as a city bus), in specialized medical and transportation needs.

What Will Not Change Under Veyo?

The number that you call to schedule a ride for covered services will stay the same: 866-907-1493 (or TTY 711). Also, your NEMT benefits will be the same under Veyo. If you are eligible for rides, bus tickets, or money for gas through MTM, you will still be eligible through Veyo. ○

Recreation Resources - Access Ability Wisconsin

Thanks to Options partnership with Access Ability Wisconsin, we are able to make an outdoor wheelchair available to all of our consumers for no cost. The Action Trackchair model that we currently have available is similar to a standard power wheelchair, but has tracks instead of wheels, allowing it to traverse all different kinds of terrain that a standard chair would be unable to. The chair can easily maneuver across sand and rock beaches as per the images below of a gentleman who used it recently. This summer, individuals with disabilities have used the chair for boy scout retreats, duck hunting and just getting outdoors. If you have aspirations to trek to places that you are unable on foot or with your current mobility device, please contact Calvin Richtig at 920-393-1037 today to inquire about the outdoor wheelchair.

Lisa - "Options for Independent Living gave Mr. I the Independent freedom to go and enjoy and be part of this most amazing event! He was able to travel anywhere and enjoy all the activities at any time... Options for Independent Living gave him the joy, the excitement, the freedom to enjoy life like never before!!! Words cannot express the ultimate joy and sincere gratitude both Mr. I and I have for Options for Independent Living!! Thank you for giving ultimate freedom and independent movement to Mr. I - he is able to go & visit all those trails, and places he once traveled so freely which he thought he could only visit again in a dream- thank you for making his dreams become a reality!" ☺



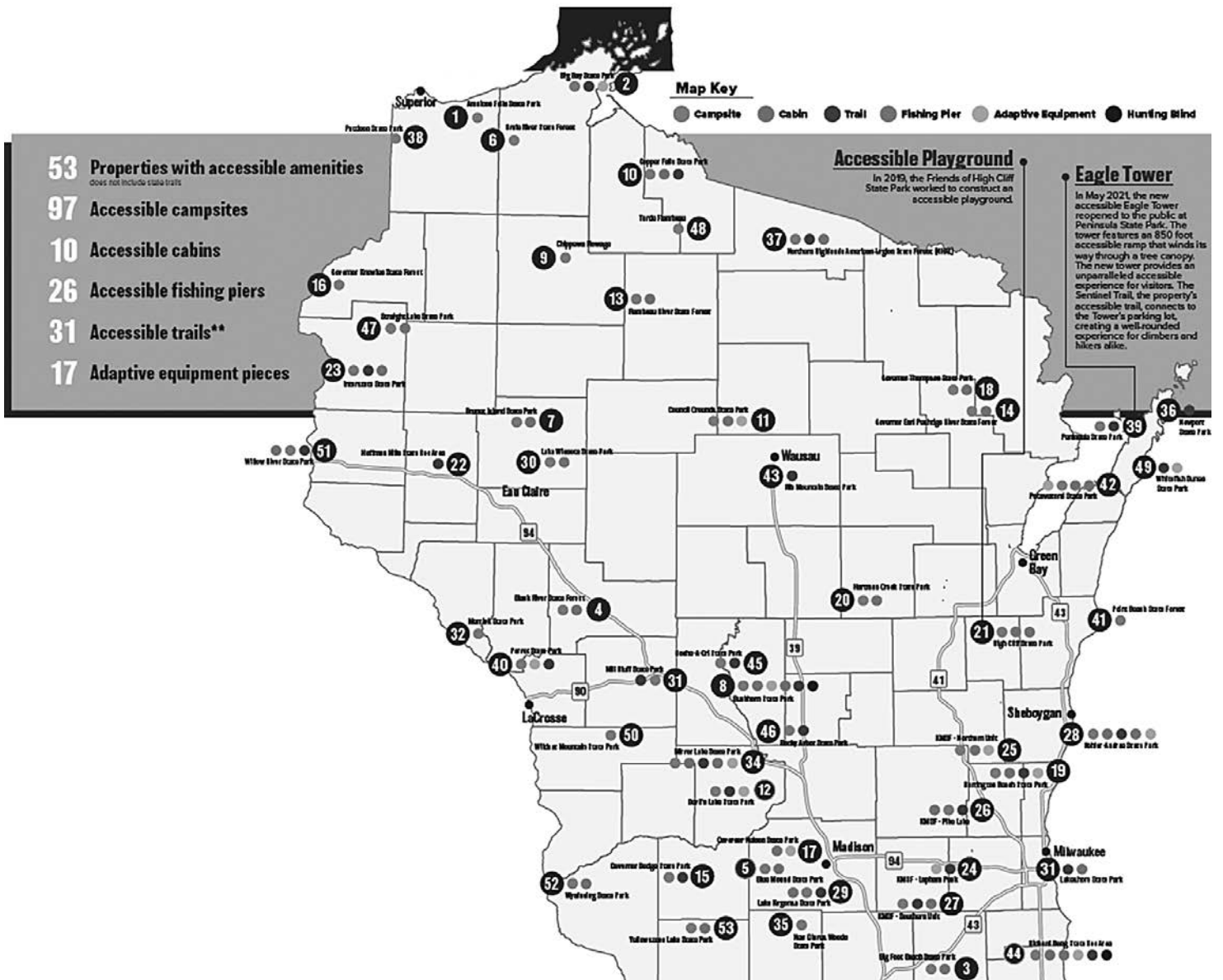
Accessibility at Wisconsin State Park System Properties

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is excited to share, with guidance and input from Options and the Disability Advisory Council (DAC), great improvements have been made to enhance the usability of our state parks for people with disabilities. The DNR recently completed an inventory of accessible features within state parks for people with disabilities.

Continued on page 7

If able, visit the "Find a Park" page on their website (<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/parks/findapark>) for an interactive map that allows you to filter by "Accessible Features and Services". This tool can help provide people with more confidence in what they can expect on a visit to one of Wisconsin's wonderful state parks.

The state park system includes 53 properties with accessible amenities, 97 accessible campsites, 10 accessible cabins, 26 accessible fishing piers, 31 accessible trails and 17 pieces of adaptive equipment. It also highlights the new accessible playground at High Cliff State Park and the new accessible Eagle Tower at Peninsula State Park. Options, the DAC, and the DNR will continue to expand and promote the availability of accessible recreational opportunities in Wisconsin. Please contact us if you'd like to learn more about these or other recreational opportunities in our state parks. ○



Benefits Buzz

Continuous Health Care Coverage



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT
of HEALTH SERVICES

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) temporarily changed BadgerCare Plus and Wisconsin Medicaid program rules starting March 18, 2020, so that people who would have normally stopped getting health care benefits would continue to get them during the federal COVID-19 public health emergency. The only exceptions are people who move out of state or who ask to stop getting benefits.

This affects members in the following BadgerCare Plus and Medicaid programs: BadgerCare Plus; Emergency Services Medicaid; Family Planning Only Services; Foster Care Medicaid; Institutional Medicaid; Katie Beckett Medicaid; Medicaid Purchase Plan; SeniorCare; Supplemental Security Income Medicaid; Supplemental Security Income-Related Medicaid; Tuberculosis-Related Medicaid; Waiver Medicaid; Wisconsin Well Woman Medicaid

The federal government has said the federal COVID-19 public health emergency will last until December 31, 2021, at least. DHS will check at the end of the federal emergency to see if you can keep getting health care benefits. If not, DHS will send you a letter before your benefits end to let you know.

Make sure you continue to let DHS know of any changes to your situation, such as changes to your address, during this time. You can report changes online through the ACCESS website or by calling the program you are enrolled in.

On a side note, the annual Cost of Living Adjustments for FoodShare will take effect on October 1, 2021. As a result, people's FoodShare benefits may change starting in October. ○

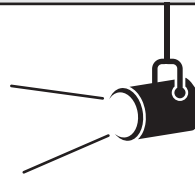
Social Security Increase for 2022

Social Security benefits and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments for approximately 70 million Americans will increase by 5.9% in 2022. This is the annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA). By law, federal benefits increase when the cost of living rises, as measured by the Department of Labor's Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W).

The increase will begin with benefits that Social Security beneficiaries receive in January 2022. Increased SSI payments will begin on December 30, 2021. If you would like more information visit <https://www.ssa.gov/>. ○

Consumer Spotlight on Benefits

By: Karin Zuleger, Options Work Incentive Benefits Specialist



This past spring/summer I helped a consumer appeal an SSDI overpayment of \$22,000.00. Social Security had decided the person's work earnings should have stopped his SSDI benefits over two years ago. I was able to help the consumer utilize work incentives that lower the amount of earnings Social Security counts. He sent Social Security the information needed to document those work incentives. Social Security made a decision on his appeal in June. They notified the consumer that his SSDI benefits should not have stopped and he does not have an overpayment. ○

Get ready! Medicare's Open Enrollment starts October 15. Every year, Medicare's open enrollment period is October 15 - December 7.

What's the Medicare Open Enrollment Period? Medicare health and drug plans can make changes each year—things like cost, coverage, and what providers and pharmacies are in their networks. October 15 to December 7 is when all people with Medicare can change their Medicare health plans and prescription drug coverage for the following year to better meet their needs.

How do people know if they need to change plans? People in a Medicare health or prescription drug plan should always review the materials their plans send them, like the "Evidence of Coverage" (EOC) and "Annual Notice of Change" (ANOC). If their plans are changing, they should make sure their plans will still meet their needs for the following year. If they're satisfied that their current plans will meet their needs for next year and it's still being offered, they don't need to do anything.

When can people get information about next year's Medicare plans? Information for next year's plans will be available beginning in October.

Where can people find Medicare plan information, compare plans or find help with enrolling? You may be able to find free information and events online, or get help from health insurance counselors in your area by calling 1-800-242-1060 or 711. You can also find assistance online at [Medicare.gov](https://www.Medicare.gov). ○

Wisconsin WisLoan Program

WisLoan is a statewide alternative loan program helping Wisconsin residents with a disability purchase assistive technology that assists them in living more independently and productively.

Any Wisconsin resident with a disability over the age of 18 in need of assistive technology or home modifications is eligible to apply for a loan. Some examples of assistive technology include wheelchairs, hearing aids, Closed Circuit Televisions (CCTV's), and vehicles with modifications, or the modifications necessary to make a vehicle accessible.

For more information or to apply for WisLoan call Options at 920-490-0500 or toll-free at 1-888-465-1515.

WisLoan is a federally-funded project of the National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation, and a cooperative service of the Wisconsin Dept. of Health Services, IndependenceFirst, and BMO Harris Bank. ○



WisLoan + Telework

Telework Loan Program

The Wisconsin Telework program is a statewide, alternative loan program that allows Wisconsin residents with disabilities to purchase computers and other equipment needed to work from home or from other remote sites, e.g. work on the road or at a telework center.

Loan funds can be used to purchase equipment, training to use equipment, extended warranties, and cost of maintenance and repairs. For more information, contact the staff at Options for Independent Living at 920-490-0500 or toll-free at 1-888-465-1515.

This program is made possible through a grant from Rehabilitative Services Administration and authorized by Section (303)b of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended and implemented by subsequent program regulation 34 C F R Part 373. The Department of Workforce Development-Division of Rehabilitation received the grant and provides programmatic and fiscal oversight. IndependenceFirst, a community based and consumer-controlled independent living center based in Milwaukee, administers the program in partnership with BMO Harris Bank and Wisconsin Independent Living Centers. ○

Options Personal Assistance Program Expands to Offer Services to CLTS Consumers

Options' Personal Assistance Services (PAS) Program empowers people & families with disabilities to manage their in-home cares, including the selection of their Care Worker so that they can maintain a strong relationship with them and remain involved in the daily life of their family.

Certified to provide services through Medicaid and to sub-contract services through IRIS, Options' PAS program has been helping adults in need of in-home cares for years. This year, PAS expanded to begin providing services for CLTS, Children's Long Term Support, child consumers in our service area.

With waiting lists for CLTS services in every county, Options began by establishing contracts in Brown & Manitowoc Counties and is looking to gradually expand to all 17 counties in our area.

If you live in Brown or Manitowoc Counties & would like to receive CLTS services through Options, contact your Case Manager at the County Health & Human Services department. If you live in other counties in our service area, contact Options' directly & they will reach out the county to get a contract established.

CLTS Services Offered: Supportive Home Cares, Respite Care, and Daily Living Skills

Benefits of Using Options for CLTS Services:

- Options is not a Staffing Agency. Families are expected to have adult siblings, extended relatives &/or family friends provide cares to encourage the child's participation in family life & have long-term consistency in cares.
- As a child ages out of the CLTS program, they can transition into Options' adult PAS services without interruption in care.
- A Case Manager will provide supervision of the Care Worker & coordinate service needs with the County.
- Competitive wages based on the child's level of need.
- Benefits including Health, Dental & Vision insurance as well as Retirement Savings Accounts for full-time Care Workers (30+ hrs/week).

For More Information Contact:

Val Tschampl – PAS Program Director valeriet@optionsil.org 920-393-1036 Toll Free: 888-465-1515 ext 182	or	Jennifer Lardinois – CLTS Case Manager/Care Coordinator jenniferL@optionsil.org 920-393-1032 Toll Free: 888-465-1515 ext 181
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Options has HOME funds for Home Accessibility, Rehabilitation, or Repair

The HOME Loan Program provides deferred payment/no interest second mortgage loans to make homes accessible or make home repairs. The loans are focused on providing resources to households that include someone who has a disability or is older and is at low-to-moderate income status.

Options receives funds for the HOME from the US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development through the State of Wisconsin Dept. of Administration, Division of Housing to administer the HOME Investment Partnership Program (HOME Loan Program).

The loan must be paid back when the property is sold, transferred or ceases to be the borrower's principal place of residence. Types of projects include (but not limited to) ramp construction, bathroom, kitchen and bedroom modifications, along with general housing rehabilitation and repairs.


The counties served by this program include Brown (outside Green Bay City limits), Calumet, Door, Fond du Lac, Green Lake, Kewaunee, Manitowoc, Marinette, Marquette, Menominee, Oconto, Outagamie, Shawano, Sheboygan, Waupaca, Waushara, and Winnebago Counties.

Applicants must meet the eligibility requirements to be considered for a loan. For more information contact Steve LaFrombois at stewel@optionsil.org, 920-393-1044, or toll-free at 1-888-465-1515, ext. 122. 

What is the Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program (TEPP)?

TEPP helps people with disabilities buy equipment they need in order to use basic telephone services. The TEPP is paid for by the Wisconsin Universal Service Fund (USF) established by the Public Service Commission. Money is collected from Wisconsin telephone service providers to fund the USF. TEPP requires that an applicant:

- Be a Wisconsin resident.
- Be a person who is deaf, hard of hearing, speech impaired, or mobility or motion impaired.
- Needs special equipment to use the telephone in the home or when traveling (like a TTY, amplification, visual alert system, etc.).

There is no age or income limit, but an individual can only get a TEPP voucher once every three years for the same type of disability. For more information on the TEPP program contact Calvin Richtig, Options AT Specialist at 920-393-1037. 

Annual Fundraising Campaign

Options would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has made a financial contribution to our agency.

We would ask that you consider a donation to our Annual Fundraising Campaign. Your donation will make a difference and allow uninterrupted services to people with disabilities, those who are older and the community in our area. If you wish to make a donation, there are two methods to do so.

Enclose a check in the pre-addressed envelope provided or go to Options website at www.optionsil.com and click on Donate Now button

To each and every one of you, our sincerest "thank you" for helping Options by making a financial contribution. Any donation, no matter the size, **DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**



options
for independent living^{inc}

Support Options on Amazon Smile

AmazonSmile is a program that donates 0.5% of your eligible purchases on Amazon to a charity of your choice. The process is easy. All you need to do is start your shopping at smile.amazon.com. and choose Options as the charity of your choice. The donation is made at no cost to you. It can also be used in the Amazon shopping app once activated. So shop and support Options at the same time. Options thanks you! ☺



Tech Closet News

OPTIONS AT Specialist can assess an individual with a disability to determine the role assistive technology can play in achieving greater independence. For more information on the pictured technology or other assistive technology that can help you reach your goal of independence, contact Calvin Richtig, **OPTIONS AT** Specialist, at 920-393-1037 or toll-free at 888-465-1515 ext 130.

Assistive technology partially supported by the WisTech, Assistive Technology Program. Telecommunication partially funded by the Universal Service Fund (USF.) ☺

WisTech
Assistive
Technology Program

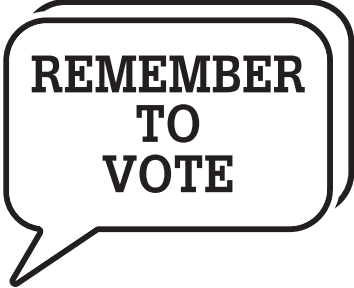
November 11th is the General Election... Please Remember to Vote!

If you don't know if you are registered or need to sign up for absentee ballot contact your clerk's office. Check if you are registered to vote at myvote.wi.gov In Wisconsin, you can:

- Register to vote online or by mail up to 20 days before Election Day
- Register to vote in person at your municipal clerk's office until the Friday before Election Day
- Register to vote in person at the polls on Election Day You will need to provide proof of residence when registering to vote.

Find examples of acceptable proof of residence documents at:

elections.wi.gov/publications/voter-guides/proof-of-residence 



REMEMBER
TO
VOTE

Want to Get Involved in Legislative Advocacy? Join Act Now!

Do you want your voice heard, but feel just your voice alone would not be enough? Join Options legislative advocacy network, Act Now! Individuals in the network receive legislative alerts and updates on issues impacting people with disabilities. When an alert or update is received, everyone on the network is encouraged to pursue the issue by contacting their area legislators, combining your voice with many! Act Now alerts can be delivered either through email or US Postal Mail.

Contacting your legislators about issues that may affect you, or someone you know, is important. Your legislators want to hear firsthand how legislation being considered can impact your life positively or negatively. It helps in their decision making. Joining Act Now will assist you in those efforts. This network will educate you on the issues and help you to advocate more effectively. The more people in the network, the greater the impact.

If you are interested in joining Act Now, contact Sandy Popp at Options (920) 393-1043 or toll-free at (888) 465-1515, ext.179. 

Vision and Mission Statement

Vision Statement: *OPTIONS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING* empowers people with disabilities.

Mission Statement: *OPTIONS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING*, serving people with disabilities in 17 counties of Northeast Wisconsin, is the pre-eminent non-profit organization of choice to empower people with disabilities. Options provides opportunities, through advocacy and education, for individuals with all disabilities and ages, to actively access their communities, maximize their independence, and connect with the resources and funding available to them.

options
for independent living inc

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COVID Information

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- Find places/ways to get the **COVID-19 vaccine**
- Register for the vaccine appointment
- Find transportation to the site
- Answer your questions

Call us today!

(920) 490/0500 V/Relay or
888-465-1515 toll-free

Counties Served

Brown	Menominee
Calumet	Oconto
Door	Outagamie
Fond du Lac	Shawano
Green Lake	Sheboygan
Kewaunee	Waupaca
Manitowoc	Waushara
Marinette	Winnebago
Marquette	

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www.optionsil.org

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