



# Michigan Partners For Freedom

Fall 2012

## Midland Local Leader Says: I believe that...



Jennifer Gentile, Midland Local Leader  
& Friends

My name is Jennifer Gentile and I am here to tell you how my life started out and how I believe that self-determination has changed my life dramatically. I would like to start out on October 26th, 1997 when I was admitted into a nursing home called Autumn Wood of Deckerville, Michigan. Shriners, an orthopedic hospital in Chicago, sent me there for more rehab for about a month. That one month turned into seven long months. If it wasn't for my foster mother, Sandy Moe, I would still be there today. Sandy put a lot of dedication and hard work into

communicating with the Arc and CMH of Midland. Through Sandy I met Rebecca Shuman and Jan Lampman of the Arc of Midland. I also met Carol Wallace through CMH of Midland. These ladies helped in introducing me to "Self Determination". To me, self-determination is having a dream and finding all the ways possible in accomplishing that dream.

In the past 13 years I've had lots of dreams and goals that I have pinpointed through a process called person-centered planning. I have made lots of mistakes, but have had guidance through several people. They have been a great help to me. They have taught me that you learn from your mistakes and start over with a positive attitude. The key to everything in life is to always find the positive outlook, even in the worst situations.

In the beginning of moving

forward with my life I had to prove to CMH that I needed a funding program to help pay for staffing support hours. I had to go through DHS to apply for this support in my area. DHS only allowed eight hours and for the rest of my staffing hours I had to go through CMH. At first I was denied all CMH services so I had to go to court to prove my eligibility, with the help of Jan and Rebecca. Through this whole process I was granted a HAB waiver through CMH, which provided me with the additional hours that I needed. These hours made it possible for me to be as independent as possible and to contribute to my community. I've always told Jan that one of my biggest dreams was to own my own home. One day, Jan came to me and asked, "Jen, do you still want your own house?" She explained to me because of the back pay that I would be receiving through Social Security, I would be eligible to afford my own home.

*(continued on Page 4)*

## From MPF Coordinator

Hello!

As I was trying to find a good way to start this letter, I was given an article with the following quote:

*“Individuals with developmental disabilities are spokespersons for freedom itself — they ask for the freedom to live, the freedom to belong, the freedom to contribute, the freedom to have a chance. And, of all the values that unite and inspire us to seek a better world, no value holds a higher place than the value of freedom.”*

*Eunice Kennedy Shriver*

Freedom, as you know, is the first principle of self-determination. You know what? I really believe that if we were all together from birth on, *really included* in all aspects of life, disability would not be a big deal and everyone would have the same freedoms. But since that's not the case, we must work to make sure that people with developmental disabilities and their families have the freedom to expect and enjoy the same life opportunities as those without disabilities. The earlier we reach people, the better.

This year, to make sure we do just that, Michigan Partners for Freedom is holding workshops about the importance of self-determination for parents at locations around the state. The sessions are called *Looking for a Good Life* and are done in partnership with the Developmental Disabilities Council and the Family-to-Family Health and Education Information Center. Since September, workshops have been held in Marquette, Flint, Gaylord, Farmington Hills, and through teleconference to people in Menominee. As is the case with all training Michigan Partners for Freedom provides, the critical piece is that it is delivered by people for whom self-determination is most critical, people with developmental disabilities. To see future training dates, just check the Events section on our website, [www.mifreedom.org](http://www.mifreedom.org). Feel free to contact me with any questions.

I'd like to close with a big thank you to everyone for all the work that you do for Partners! I'm so impressed with what gets done! Next time, I'll update you on this past year's accomplishments.

Have fun,

Jill

## It's About Fairness

Manistee/Benzie MPF Local Leader and MDD Council President Sheryl Kuenzer and Advocate Robin Sefton represented Michigan at the 2012 Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) National Conference this past summer in St. Paul, Minnesota. More than 650 self-advocates attended this year's conference, ***“It's All About Fairness,”*** which was hosted by SABE and Advocating Change Together, Inc.

Here Robin and Sheryl display the Michigan state flag following the opening flag ceremony. The Self-Advocacy Nation edition distributed at the conference states ***“As people with intellectual disabilities, we should be treated fairly like everyone else because we are human too. It is not fair when we are treated different because of our disability. We should be treated with respect, humanity, dignity, loyalty.”***



Robin & Sheryl with flag

## Recognizing Demand for Self-Determination

Michigan Partners for Freedom's one goal is to enhance self-determination. We do this in many ways. We publish this quarterly newsletter of stories and events. We keep the website updated and full of resources. We host trainings across the state all year long and meet with our Partners (Local Leaders, Steering Committee, Coordinators) monthly. We reach out to people living in group homes, students in transition and many others in assorted artificial "special" environments. We meet with parents and agency professionals. We make videos...

Yet people still say things like "No one has asked us for self-determination... at our agency... or in my classroom... or on my caseload..."

Do people bang their fists on the desk of system professionals assigned to assist them and say **I DEMAND SELF-DETERMINATION?** Not too often. But they do say "I want my freedom" in numerous other ways. They might indicate

their life needs to change with their actions and communication. They might show sadness. Or agitation. They could be angry. Or loud. Or extremely quiet. Some can tell you in plain English at their PCP meetings. Others might sing of their longing to change in the shower.



This cry for change could be rooted in the lack of control that is so often present in our helping systems where the only choices to be had are offered by others. Therefore, we must be openly receptive when people want to challenge

what's offered. We need to recognize with perseverance as to how communication is presented or withheld; it's up to us to see that demand.

At a crowded MPF training at a large provider recently, a person who receives support slipped her job coach the note seen here. The note was signed and included her phone number. That's it, we thought! That's another way to recognize demand for self-determination.

Could it be any clearer?



A warm wish from all of us that your holidays will bring all the best of everything.

## Midland Local Leader Says: I believe that... *(continued from Page 1)*

Then she told me about the building trade program through Midland Public Schools that are building barrier free, zero step design houses. I told her that it was a wonderful idea and that I was completely interested. She started the process out having Michelle, from the Arc of Midland, work with Social Security. Then we met with the builder and designer of the house. Bill, the supervisor of the Midland Public School Building Program, was just as excited as me to get started. Next I sat down with Brandi, the house designer, and we started designing my soon to be new home.

The only thing left to get for my new home was the money. My first route for this process started out through CMH. I applied for funding through Medicaid to help pay for some modifications on the new house. The

funding through Medicaid was a long process because of all the complicated paperwork needed for the funding to be approved. I was granted the funding with the help of my CMH coordinator, Kristen.

I am a person who was limited in my own home. With the help and dedication of numerous people I am now able to be independent, more independent than I ever dreamed. I got the opportunity to follow out one of my biggest dreams through the help of a lot of people in my circle. Throughout the years I've learned all you need is to stay positive and dream big. I've learned that dedication and hard work will get you far in life. I am an individual that has developed self-determination and because of it I've grown as a person and achieved my dream.

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## Increasing Demand Through Public Policy Advocacy

Dear Senator Stabenow,

My name is Ryan Nicholas Gray. As a self-determined individual with a disability, I am disappointed that you have not discussed self-determination in the U.S. Senate.

It is important to me that my elected representative supports and upholds self-determination rights for people with disabilities.

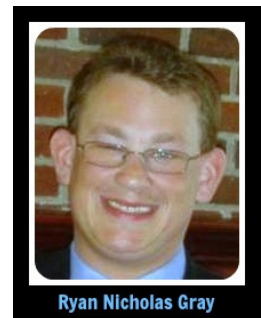
Self-determination matters to me because it gives people with disabilities the authority to participate in the democratic process, confirms their responsibility and right to determine their own destiny, teaches them to wisely budget the public funds allocated to them, provides them with the freedom to work, volunteer, and vote as they wish, and maintains the support network needed to provide our services.

In my life, self-determination has made a significant difference. Because of self-determination, I have been able to interview local reporter Karen Drew on a television show that I co-host, I have won awards for volunteering and public service, and I've been able to participate in Speech Crafters, a local program that helps me to develop my public speaking skills. None of this would have happened without Community Living Services of Oakland County or their self-determination program — I would not have even known my own rights.

I hope that you and your colleagues can find the opportunity to think about what I've presented today and that you can make services for people with disabilities a priority. Thank you.

*Ryan Nicholas Gray*

Ryan Nicholas Gray





## Welcome to Kalamazoo Coordinator

Self-determination just makes sense to Marie Eagle. Although she's been the Kalamazoo SD Supervisor and MPF Coordinator for less than a year, Marie's professional investment in the movement started 14 years ago at Allegan CMH with the original Robert Wood Johnson pilot projects. Personally, Marie has a lifetime invested in assisting others to direct a good life. Like many who readily and naturally understand the depth of self-determination, Marie's uncle has an intellectual disability and she says *"as a family, we made sure he has always lived the life he wants. He has a job and an apartment..."*

At Kalamazoo County CMH Marie works with 250 individuals who use some sort of arrangements that support self-determination and supervises a SD specialist, SD peer mentor (MPF Local Leader John Donlin) and an administrator. Because of her expertise, Marie also consults with other CMH systems working through self-directed service implementation issues.

Recognizing the value of MPF, Marie states that much of John's value as a Peer Mentor comes from the skills learned at MPF trainings. *"He has confidence and skills*



KCCMH Self-Determination Coordinator, Marie Eagle and Peer Mentor, John Donlin

*as an advocate and public speaker. We've done a ton of presentations to staff, providers and families." She says that in turn, "Everybody knows about self-determination in Kalamazoo. And that can be a challenge...it's important to keep reaching new people and re-educating others and making sure SD stays as a focus and in the forefront". One attempt at promotion is the new video outlined below.*

***"When the original project officers first asked me about the self-determination initiative in Michigan, I was like 'Yeah...like...right...of course...why does this have to be a thing???' Just made sense to me..."***

Marie Eagle



## KALAMAZOO VIDEO

Kalamazoo Community Mental Health Services and Substance Abuse Services and Public Media Network recently produced a 24-minute video about four individuals using the principles of self-determination to become more involved in their community. MPF Local Leader John Donlin and John Argo are featured. If any agency or group is interested in obtaining a copy of the video, please call the Self-Determination department at KCMHSAS at 269-553-8060.

Find the video at: <http://www.youtube.com/kcmhsas>.



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Michigan Partners for Freedom is a grassroots coalition of people with disabilities, family members, advocates, organizations and other allies working together to build statewide demand for self-determination



Michigan Partners for Freedom is supported by a grant (#2013030) from the Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council to The Arc Michigan.



## LOCAL LEADERS TO PLAN 2013 MPF SUMMIT

MPF is seeking members for the 2013 Summit Steering Committee. This group is charged with planning and implementing the Summit scheduled for June 2013. Participants will be compensated for time and expertise and can expect to participate in three to four meetings and/or teleconferences. Interested? Contact Jill Gerrie at 800-292-7851 x114 or email: [jill.gerrie@arcmi.org](mailto:jill.gerrie@arcmi.org) by January 15, 2013.