

It's in our power to change.

THE INITIATOR

DECEMBER 2007

Open for Business: Making Our Community Accessible to All

At Disability Network, we want everyone to be able to share in our community. That means helping businesses and public places spot potential barriers and find ways to remove them.

Headed by Accessibility Specialist Lucia Rios, our Access Team visits sites to educate the staff, analyze the space, and brainstorm solutions. Typical changes include widening parking spaces, adding ramps, lowering counters, and improving restrooms.

These changes can benefit the entire community, according to Rios. "Accessibility is not just a disability thing," she explains. "It's an everybody thing." For example, a sidewalk ramp helps people using wheelchairs as well as parents with strollers, delivery staff, and older people. "And remember, disability has open enrollment," adds Lucia. "Any one of us can 'join' at any time."

While the Americans with Disabilities Act mandates certain standards, many people either aren't aware of barriers to accessibility or are concerned about the cost of fixing them. "The truth is, many of the changes are simple and don't cost much at all," explains Rios. "We try to find low- or even no-cost solutions, and some businesses even qualify for tax credits."

Ron Martin, a longtime Access Team volunteer, says, "There's no need for a business to feel defensive about accessibility. Sometimes all you need is a rational conversation to show how a few simple changes

can increase business and benefit everyone."

The Access Team works with organizations of all sizes, including Herman Miller and small, family-owned businesses like Margarita's Mexican Restaurant. "I'm quite a fan of their food," says Rios, "so I approached the owner about assessing the facility. He was more than willing to have me come in. After our visit, we talked about how to resolve the issues I found. Some of them were as simple as removing the legs from a counter or moving a crate to improve access to the restroom."

Owner Alonzo Salinas says, "Lucia's insights were very helpful because we don't automatically think about accessibility. I didn't even know there were things to be addressed, but the changes she suggested can be made quite economically. We want to welcome everyone. If word gets out that we're accessible, more people will say, 'Why not go to Margarita's?' That would be a big positive for us."

"Remember, people with disabilities have as much spending power as anyone," says Lucia. "Don't assume your place doesn't need to be accessible because 'those people don't come here.' Of course they don't, if they can't come in the door! But if you're not open to them, you're losing out on their business - and that of their friends and families, too."

To learn more about accessibility or schedule a site visit, contact Lucia at 616.396.5326 or lucia@dnlakeshore.org.



"Our approach is non-threatening. Instead of telling people, 'This is the law; you must change,' we like to say, 'This could really help your business.'" —Lucia Rios

Join the Access Team!

Interested in making the lakeshore area accessible to everyone? Consider volunteering with the Access Team at Disability Network.

Who can help: Anyone with or without disabilities. Those who notice barriers and those who can do the physical work of measuring are needed.

What's involved: Visiting public places to measure and evaluate accessibility and informing us of barriers they notice around town.

Time commitment: Completely flexible and up to you.

How to join: Contact Lucia Rios at 616.396.5326 or lucia@dnlakeshore.org. She'll teach you about ADA regulations and provide hands-on training.

Join Us

Your gifts of time and resources can help us change everything for the better.

Holland, MI 49423

426 Century Lane

Disability Network/Lakeshore

(payable to Disability Network/Lakeshore) to:

contribution by calling 616 396 5326 or mailing a check

of all sizes. You may make a tax-deductible

As a non-profit organization, we welcome gifts

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Kim Romero

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We rely on our wonderful volunteers for so much of what

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Who we are

Most people equate disability with limitations. But it's our job to change the perceptions and realities that prevent people with disabilities from sharing in the community. Every year, we provide training, mentoring, and referrals to help people with disabilities and their families live productive lives. Because disability touches so many people, we also work on a larger scale, helping governments and businesses make changes that benefit not just those with disabilities, but everyone in the community.