

MORE than you think.

THE INITIATOR

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Your Go-To Group: Disability Network's Information and Referral Services

When people with disabilities need help paying rent, feeding their families, or navigating the Social Security system, they may not know where to begin. But Disability Network/Lakeshore does.

"I keep a long list of all the resources available to people with disabilities," says Information and Referral Specialist Faith Avery. "When people call me, I can put them in touch with someone who has the answers or services they need, either inside or outside of our own offices."

For example, Disability Network staff members can offer support in the areas of housing or employment. However, they rely on others to help with food, home repairs, family counseling, legal assistance, one-time rent payments, or emergency short-term relief when someone has lost a job. "Because we collaborate with so many other agencies, we can work together to find a fit for every individual need," says Avery.

Having Disability Network in your corner can be especially valuable when quick action is needed. "Hospital case workers often call to tell me they're about to release a patient whose home is not wheelchair-accessible," says Avery. Disability Network can help residents of Holland apply for the city's ramp grant. They also

coordinate efforts with organizations such as His Harvest Stand for those who live outside the city. "We've built a lot of ramps in a very short time span. That makes people happy since they're able to stay in their own homes," adds Avery.

Disability Network also offers an emergency shortcut to the typical approval process for Social Security benefits. "We use a program called SOAR, which expedites benefits for people who are homeless or in jeopardy of becoming homeless," says Avery. "I help people gather their medical records and put together a summary showing why they should be considered eligible. Then I make an appointment with Social Security and accompany our clients to the meeting, where I can advocate for them. It can literally take years off the approval process!"

Whatever form it takes, Disability Network's information and referral service is there to provide calm to those in crisis. "When people call, they're often upset, unable to think clearly, and not sure where to turn next," says Avery. "We show them that support is available and give them the tools to help themselves. We provide both the resources and the listening ear they need."



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I&R in Our Corner

Five months after Thomas and Michelle Marsalla got married, Thomas became disabled due to a hereditary condition. "Since then, we've lost everything, including our home," says Michelle. While seeking support at another agency, she heard about Disability Network.

After hearing their story, Faith Avery introduced the couple to SOAR and has been working to secure Thomas's eligibility for disability benefits. "Thomas has worked so hard his whole life, and it's very gratifying to provide hope to someone so deserving," she says. "We're still in the process, but we're beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel."

Michelle Marsalla adds, "Faith has been our angel. She's gone over our medical history and done so much legwork for us. We've hit some bumps in the road, but she's not giving up. Just knowing that she cares and she's behind us means the world to us."

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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.



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Volunteers

We rely on our wonderful volunteers for so much of what we accomplish. To find an opportunity that fits your skills, interests, and schedule, please call:
616 396 5326

Donations

As a non-profit organization, we welcome gifts of all sizes. You may make a tax-deductible contribution by calling 616 396 5326 or mailing a check (payable to Disability Network/Lakeshore) to:
Disability Network/Lakeshore
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Join Us

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