Helping people with disabilities and people who are aging live independently in Northwest Missouri.

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There is a brief article about service animals and some excellent information from the Governor’s Council on Disability.

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About this issue: A message from Executive Director Rob Honan

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It’s National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)!

As a Center for Independent Living, more than half of MERIL’s board members and staff have a disability.

We know the importance of inclusion in the workplace, and we have seen many examples of how simple workplace accommodations can allow an employee’s abilities to emerge, letting them fully contribute to an organization or company.

MERIL can provide education and advice for businesses and other organizations regarding workplace accommodations, ADA compliance, emergency preparedness for people with disabilities, health and safety resources, and more.

Please call us for more information. You can also learn a lot from these featured resources:

- www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org
- www.askearn.org

Support our mission! You can do small things right now to help people with disabilities. Learn more at www.meril.org/help.
This month we would like to shine a spotlight on attendant Mary Jo Tapp.

Mary Jo has worked for her sister (a MERIL CDS participant) for 10 years, and the participant said she values their close relationship.

“Mary Jo cares for me,” she said. “More than that though, she cares for everyone and tries very hard to be as helpful and kind to everyone she meets. She is a very kindhearted person.”

In addition to Mary Jo’s compassion, the participant said she respects her integrity.

“Mary Jo is very honest,” she said. “She always comes back from an errand with a receipt so that I can keep track of my finances. She is my sister and she loves me, so I know she’d never be anything less than honest with me, but her honesty is very admirable.”

Like all CDS attendants, Mary Jo provides personal care services so the participant can live independently in her own home.

“Mary Jo helps me with the things that my heart condition and my arthritis keep me from doing,” the participant said. “Mary Jo helps me with little things like putting my socks on and keeping my hair neat and clean. Mary Jo also helps me with things like taking a bath and makes sure I am safe while doing so. There are times also, when I need her to go to the store or around town paying bills for me and she does these things for me too.”

Jay Claywell, the MERIL CDS specialist who works with the participant, said Mary Jo and the participant are a great team.

“This participant/attendant pairing have been together longer than I have worked at MERIL,” he said. “Over the course of my tenure at MERIL, I have seen the participant’s health and mobility ebb and flow as the years have passed. Sometimes, simple things like the weather get in her way, slowing her down. Despite the participant’s challenges, the constant in her life has been her sister, CDS attendant, Mary Jo Tapp. Mary Jo and the participant work together to ensure that the participant’s CDS service plan is delivered in such a way that her independence is maintained at a level that the participant has grown accustomed to over the last decade. This pair is a shining example of the effectiveness of the CDS and IL programs here at MERIL.”

To find out more about the MERIL CDS program, including how to become an attendant, visit www.meril.org/cds.

CDS attendant Mary Jo Tapp provides reliable and kind support

The use of service animals is a necessity for many people with disabilities.

Service animals must be trained to perform a task for an individual with a disability. Emotional support animals are not trained to perform a task and only provide comfort to an individual.

There are also different laws that govern training and what is acceptable in public accommodations (stores, hotels, doctors’ offices, etc.) and in housing.

The Missouri Governor’s Council on Disability (GCD) has published an excellent and informative video outlining some important concepts around service animals.

You can find this information on the GCD website: http://disability.mo.gov/serviceanimals.htm.

In addition, if you are in the St. Joseph TV viewing area, Laura Mueth from the GCD will be the featured guest on KQ2’s “Live at Five” TV show on October 10 at 5:00 p.m. She will bring her service animal, Syler, for a short demonstration and will talk about service animals.

MERIL appears on Live at Five on the second Tuesday of each month. Captioned videos of our segments are available on our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/pg/MERIL4U/videos/
Participants from People First of St. Joseph and MERIL staff members attended the Real Voices, Real Choices conference in August.

The conference featured several events and resources for people with disabilities, including information about self-advocacy, employment, healthy living, and social support.

Lisa Gabriel, from MERIL, said attending the conference was a fulfilling experience.

“This conference was an amazing way to help people with disabilities celebrate who they are and connect with others, learn about topics that can help them through life, as well as meeting new friends,” she said. “People participated in activities such as bingo, karaoke, and movie night, which gave them the opportunity to relax and socialize with others. This is a fantastic conference that happens every year, and I am so honored to share such an impactful learning experience.”

More information about the conference can be found here: https://dmh.mo.gov/constituentservices/consumerconference.html

People First Self-Advocacy Group
People First is a non-profit self-advocacy organization formed by and facilitated by people with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

There are two People First chapters in Northwest Missouri, in St. Joseph and in Maryville.

For more information about People First, visit: www.missouripeoplefirst.org

Our assistive technology demonstration site is open for public use

At MERIL’s main office in St. Joseph, we have an assistive technology demonstration site that is open to the public.

This demonstration site allows people to try out a wide variety of assistive devices—such as phones and computer equipment—so they can find a device that is a good fit for them.

This month we are featuring our Clearview digital magnifier. You can use this device for things like paying your bills, reading the news, and other things that might otherwise be difficult to do because of small print and picture size.

This magnifier has several features besides just magnification that make reading easier and more enjoyable.

In addition, you can use our computer lab for access to the Internet.

When you visit our office, we will demonstrate these items so that you can see how easy they can be to use. We will also discuss possible financial assistance for purchasing a device.

In future newsletters, we will feature “give-away” assistive devices. We often accept and find new homes for donated assistive devices so that people who may not have room in their budget can get a needed item for free.
This summer, Lisa Gabriel, MERIL’s Youth Services and Transitions Specialist, coordinated our first Career Exploration summer program for youth with disabilities.

The program ran for seven weeks, and featured a weekly workshop often led by a guest presenter.

Lynette Saxton, Program Manager for SJC Marketing, led a discussion about the importance of matching your personality traits to your career interests. Students also learned skills related to professional interactions and goal setting.

Cindy Wells, from the University of Missouri Extension office in St. Joseph, provided tips for online job searching and for successful resume building. Students then completed a mock online job application to practice these skills.

MERIL’s Chief Human Resources Officer, Deann Young, conducted a mock job interview with the students, explaining to them what an employer would be looking for and giving them personalized feedback. Beforehand, the students learned how to prepare for an interview, including wearing appropriate attire, researching the company before the interview, and anticipating some common interview questions.

Lisa Warner, from the University of Missouri Extension Hook Center, discussed strategies for advocating for yourself and for others in the working world. She also informed students about self-advocating in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting, as well as information about other resources and supports.

MERIL provides youth transition services throughout the year, and we are looking forward to another career exploration program next summer.

For more information about youth services, contact:

Lisa Gabriel  
LisaG@meril.org  
816-279-8558

Eligibility Requirements

To participate, the student must:

- be 16-21 years old
- be currently enrolled in high school with plans to return to high school in Fall 2018
- have an education plan (IEP or 504)
- be motivated to learn about the career process!

MERIL provides pre-employment training for youth with disabilities

Thank you to everyone who attended our Andrew/Buchanan County networking luncheon on September 7.

These luncheons are a great way for members of social service organizations, public officials, and other members of the Northwest Missouri community to connect and share information.

If you would like to attend the Atchison County networking luncheon in Fairfax on November 2, please RSVP before October 25 by emailing us at meril@meril.org.

MERIL provides pre-employment training for youth with disabilities