News about: MERIL’s 25th Year! Fundraisers!

Learn about the importance of disability advocacy.

Part-time caregivers are needed in all NW Missouri counties!
Disability Advocacy
Welcome to the Spring issue of the MERIL newsletter. The theme of this issue is advocacy.

Advocacy, one of the five core services for all Centers for Independent Living, is essential for persons with disabilities in our fight for civil rights. Before Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), it was legal for businesses, restaurants, and employers to deny services or employment opportunities simply because someone had a disability.

Through advocacy efforts, this was all changed. Doors to opportunities were thrown wide open. And today, even with civil rights laws to protect persons with disabilities, there are additional areas of concern that keep people with disabilities busy.

Just last month, for example, four staff members from MERIL travelled to Jefferson City to educate legislators and push for funding to help individuals with disabilities remain in the community of their choosing. In addition, we educated and advocated for better laws to protect and recognize Consumer Directed Services (CDS) providers who work to safeguard the program against potential fraud.

Even though these issues are not “civil rights” issues per se, they are important quality of life issues that must be addressed. And we do this through advocacy.

MERIL’s 25th Anniversary!
MERIL is celebrating its Silver Anniversary this year! From its humble beginnings as an outgrowth of a Traumatic Brain Injury support group, to where we are today, MERIL has served thousands of individuals and many, many communities.

MERIL was incorporated as a non-profit agency on February 22, 1994 and first worked out of a donated office space at the old Heartland Hospital in St. Joseph. Cheryl Price served as the first executive director and was instrumental in introducing the Independent Living concept and philosophy to the community.

During the early years, I served on the MERIL board of directors from 1995 to 1997 and saw the growth of the organization from about two staff members to about seven. The number of participants grew, and MERIL hosted the “No More Stares” conference, provided assistive technology services, and hosted support groups, among other things. In the mid-90s, MERIL moved from the original hospital location to its own office on 36th Street in St. Joseph.

During the 2000s and 2010s, MERIL continued to grow with additional programs added, including the Personal Attendant Services (PAS) program, Bridge Interpreting, and Angels Home Health. Staff size grew as well. It was during the early 2000s that MERIL moved from 36th Street to Beck Road, where the office remained for several years.

In the early 2010s, MERIL moved from Beck Road to its current location on South 40th Street (A Highway). By the late 2010s, MERIL downsized its operations and began to focus on its primary services of Independent Living, Consumer Directed Services, and In-Home Services.

Our 25th anniversary is a year-long celebration and I will return with additional information. If you have been affiliated with MERIL for a long time and would like to add information, please pick up the phone and call me at 816-279-8558 or email me at rhonan@meril.org.
- Rob Honan, MERIL CEO

Carbon monoxide detectors save lives!
Recently, one of our Consumer Directed Services (CDS) participants told us she called the fire department because the alarm on her carbon monoxide (CO) detector had sounded. Emergency personnel discovered elevated levels of carbon monoxide in her home.

The participant did not suffer any adverse health effects from the exposure, and she told us she was thankful that MERIL had helped her obtain the CO detector.

This is a reminder of the importance of having a CO detector—with working batteries—in your home if you have a gas utility, a fireplace, or a garage.

MERIL is able to help people obtain necessary devices, such as carbon monoxide detectors, through our grants and from the fundraising money we receive.

Stay up to date with the latest news, events, and resources:  
Facebook.com/meril4u  
Twitter.com/meril4u
We are celebrating MERIL’s 25th anniversary this year!

We are selling artisan coffee and greeting cards as a fundraiser! Visit [www.meril.org/help](http://www.meril.org/help) to learn more.
Advocacy, one of MERIL's core services, can be divided into three categories: self-advocacy, social advocacy, and systems advocacy. These types of advocacy often overlap and inform one another, and many of MERIL's services simultaneously address all three levels.

MERIL provides information about ADA compliance, workplace accommodations, career preparation for youth with disabilities, skills training, and self-advocacy support for people with disabilities. We are available to speak at organizations about the importance of inclusion and accessibility.

**Self-advocacy:** Empowering people to have as much control over their own lives as possible, including where they live and how their care is provided. Peer support and skills training play an important role.

**Social advocacy:** Removing barriers in society (public spaces, workplaces, etc.) so people with disabilities are fully included in the community.

**Systems advocacy:** Ensuring laws protect the rights of people with disabilities, and supporting adequate funding of independent living resources.

Lisa Gabriel (right) from MERIL and members of the [People First of Missouri](#) self-advocacy group visited Jefferson City on March 13 for Legislative Day. They met with legislators and networked with other disability rights advocates.

Members of the People First of Missouri self-advocacy group helped us decorate the “IL Rocks” featured on the cover of this newsletter. The rocks were given to Missouri legislators to remind them to support disability issues.
The political landscape in America in 2019 can be divisive and confusing. But, as citizens, we have the right to vote for or against legislation and legislators that can have significant impact on our lives.

There are lots of places to get information these days. The most important thing to do while making your way through it all is to be discerning. Ask questions. Have conversations about the issues that concern you.

When you come upon something that you don’t agree with, remain civil but know that you absolutely have the right to express your view and advocate for yourself and the things you need.

One of the easiest and most impactful ways to do that is to vote in every election you can. Make sure that your voice is heard.

If you need help registering to vote in Buchanan County, come see me at MERIL. I, as a Buchanan County Registrar, can get you started on your path to political self-advocacy.

- Jay Claywell, MERIL CDS Specialist

Disability Advocacy Resources

Governor’s Council on Disability legislative updates: https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/legupdates.htm

Information about accessible voting: https://www.sos.mo.gov/elections/goVoteMissouri

Contact your state legislators: http://www.senate.mo.gov/LegisLookup/Default.aspx

Paraquad advocacy alerts: https://www.paraquad.org/policy-and-advocacy/

The Whole Person advocacy newsletter: https://thewholeperson.org/core-services/advocacy/publicpolicy411.html

MERIL’s Executive Director Rob Honan is a member of the St. Joseph ADA Compliance Board: www.stjoemo.info/index.aspx?NID=334

Missouri Statewide Independent Living Council: https://mosilc.org/

People First of Missouri self-advocacy support group for people with developmental disabilities: https://www.missouripeoplefirst.org/

National Disability Employment Awareness Month: www.dol.gov/ndeam

Office of Disability Employment Policy: https://www.dol.gov/odep/

The campaign for disability employment: www.WhatCanYouDoCampaign.org

The Arc: https://disabilityadvocacynetwork.org/


Our staff and board members posed for a photo after our employee appreciation luncheon.

MERIL’s Halloween Bash featured free food, games, candy, community partners, and a costume contest!

We learned a lot about assistive technology at the 2019 Power Up Conference. Stop by our St. Joseph office to visit our assistive technology demonstration site!

Lisa Gabriel (left) and Jean Boyer (center) demonstrated disability simulations to students at My Success Event.

Welcome our newest team members!

Lexie Marshall is our new Information & Referral (I&R) Communications Specialist!

AJ Warner is our Spring intern from Missouri Western State University!
From left to right: AJ Warner, Lisa Gabriel, and Jean Boyer. We attended the Transition Skills Day events in Maryville and St. Joseph to provide resources and share information about our youth services.

Visit meril.org/resources to see the information shared during our St. Joseph networking luncheon.

Deann Young (left) and Jay Claywell (right) at the MERIL Coffee and Crafts Fair fundraiser.

Rob Honan (left) and Rachael McElvain (right) at the Maryville Health and Fitness Fair.
We help caregivers find part-time jobs!

In our Consumer Directed Services (CDS) program, people with disabilities can hire caregivers to help them with personal care tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, and bathing. Caregivers do not need any prior experience and the hours are flexible. Caregivers are especially needed in lower-population areas of Northwest Missouri.

Caregivers make a BIG difference in the lives of people with disabilities, making it possible for them to live independently in their own homes and communities. By working for a MERIL participant, caregivers also support all of the other Independent Living (IL) services MERIL provides.

For providing care to our participants and for supporting our services, we appreciate the caregivers who partner with us to fulfill our IL mission. We try to show this appreciation in many ways. For example, this April we celebrated the one-year anniversaries of two of our In-Home Personal Care Attendants (PCAs): Lisa Hallacy and Kimberly Matthews!

Caregivers are needed in all nine counties!

In-Home PCA Kimberly Matthews

In-Home PCA Lisa Hallacy

Apply in our St. Joseph or Maryville office to become a caregiver!

If you are responsible and have a passion for helping people with disabilities live independently in their homes, we want you to work for a MERIL participant! Visit www.meril.org/caregivers to learn more.
Your contribution will help change lives!

Donations to MERIL help fund programs that assist people with disabilities in their goal to live a full life in their homes and communities.

Please consider a financial gift to MERIL. You may mail a check or use the PayPal link on our website.

In addition to donating, you can help us immensely by spreading the word about our services. The more people who know about us, the more we can help.

Visit www.meril.org/help to read more about people who have benefited from our services.

Thank you to our recent donors:

Bob and Sue Macintosh
Jean Honan

We also want to thank the many people who donate equipment to us. We accept donations of assistive technology devices and durable medical equipment.

Thank you to Pizza Ranch in Maryville for hosting a fundraiser night for us!

Three St. Joseph businesses helped us with our youth transition skills day events: Target donated a $50 gift card; JCPenney donated a $50 gift card; and two employees from Dillard’s donated their time to do a first-impression and interview attire demonstration for the youth participants at the event!

And thank you to Mann’s Landscaping for donating the rocks (pictured on the cover of this newsletter) that we decorated for our advocacy day in Jefferson City.

Transitioning out of a nursing home with MFP and assistive technology!

Money Follows the Person (MFP) is a program that provides funding for people with disabilities who want to live in their own homes instead of in a nursing home or residential care facility. MERIL provides information and personalized guidance to those who participate in the program.

Carolyn Robbins resided in a nursing home for two years and four months due to a broken foot. She contacted MERIL to help her find a wheelchair-friendly apartment in St. Joseph. With the help of Lisa Gabriel at MERIL, Carolyn was put on a waiting list for an accessible apartment, and then she finally moved in to a home of her own.

“Without MFP, I would be between a rock and a hard place, never to get out of the nursing home,” Carolyn said. “MERIL gave me my life back.”

MERIL worked with Missouri Assistive Technology to deliver assistive devices—a lift chair, hospital bed, and a medical alert—to help her remain safe in her new home. MERIL visits Carolyn monthly to make sure her Independent Living needs are being met.

You can do small things right now to help people with disabilities!

www.meril.org/help
Helping people with disabilities and people who are aging
live independently
in Northwest Missouri.

Northwest Missouri’s Center for Independent Living
Since 1994, MERIL has provided five core services for people
with disabilities in our nine-county service area:
- Information and referral
- Independent Living skills training
- Transition services (youth and nursing home)
- Peer support
- Advocacy

Our vision is: A Barrier-Free Northwest Missouri.

More than half of our board members and staff have a
disability. We use our personal experiences to see the abilities
that people have, and we respect people for who they are.
We believe people with disabilities should have control over
their own lives, achieve their own goals, and fully participate
in their communities.

Learn more about Centers for Independent Living (CILs) in
Missouri at www.mosilc.org.

disability resources & referrals

Choose your own caregiver
help with cleaning, cooking, shopping, personal care

Phones & devices for
independence
low hearing, low vision
advocacy & peer support

Nurse visits at home
medication, blood pressure, diabetes care

Independent Living Skills Training

Nursing home transition
Accessibility

Call us. Tell us about your health condition or
disability. We’ll help you get the resources you
need to live independently.

MERIL offers a wide variety of services and
resources for people with disabilities.

Our most popular service is our Consumer
Directed Services (CDS) program, which allows a
person to hire a caregiver of their choice to perform
personal care tasks in their home.

We help caregivers find part-time jobs!

MERIL helps the CDS participant (the person with
a disability) find a potential employee (caregiver).
Anyone who is interested in becoming a caregiver
should contact MERIL to fill out an application. The
hours are flexible and no experience is required.

Midland Empire Resources for Independent Living (MERIL) is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization governed by a board of directors:
Jaren Pippitt (chair), E. Wayne Crawford (vice chair), Dr. Susan M. Bashinski (secretary), L. Kent Allen (treasurer),
Tammy Blakely (director), Jonathan Connally (director), Joseph D. Hegeman (director), Sandy Lewandowski (director),
Kelly Narowski (director), and Robert Honan (CEO).