As we begin the new year, MERIL continues to serve individuals with disabilities in Northwest Missouri, to provide participants, family members, and the community the resources to live in the community of their choice.

I see a great 2018 shaping up, where we not only continue to provide services but increase options through our assistive technology and consumer assistance fund programs.

The new year also gives rise to the new Missouri General Assembly. The MO legislature began its yearly session on January 3rd, and it will end on May 18th.

Because much of what we do depends on funding from the General Assembly, we pay close attention to appropriations (HB 2) in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), which funds the Independent Living Grant, and HB 10, which is the core funding for the Consumer Directed Services program. These two bills are key funding bills that are essential to our participants.

As part of our efforts at advocacy, we are inviting you to the March 13th Legislative Day at the Capitol. This advocacy event will showcase speakers from all over the state and highlight issues pertinent to this year’s session.

As a precursor to this event, MERIL is offering a training on March 8th at our St. Joseph office. Contact Rob Honan for more information about the Legislative Day itself and the advocacy training on March 8th.

We wish all of you a great year!

Happy 85th Birthday!

Twyla Morgan was MERIL’s first board president. We wish Twyla and her family a joyful year in 2018!

Save the date for our fundraiser on April 15!

MERIL will host a fundraiser at D&G Pub & Grub in St. Joseph on Sunday, April 15. There will be a spaghetti dinner and an acoustic rock ‘n’ roll performance from two local bands.

More details will be available soon. In the meantime, be sure to mark your calendars. This will be a great way to spend an evening and to support our mission of helping people with disabilities live independently in Northwest Missouri. We’ll see you there!

In addition to our fundraisers, there are many other ways you can support MERIL and those we serve. Please take some time to review the opportunities listed here, and visit www.meril.org/help for more!

Donate: We are thankful for any amount of money you can contribute. You can send a check to our office or use our PayPal account by clicking on the link above.

Amazon Smile: With no extra charge to you, Amazon will donate 0.5% of your purchase to MERIL! Use the link above whenever you shop on Amazon.

Stay up to date with the latest news, events, and resources: Facebook.com/meril4u Twitter.com/meril4u
Money Follows the Person: Transitioning to independent living

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.

One year ago, Jessica Zielinski contacted MERIL to learn about resources for people with disabilities in Northwest Missouri. Jessica was living in a nursing home in Maryville, recovering from a brain tumor surgery. She had experienced stroke-like symptoms and had limited ability of her left leg. She had been in the nursing home for about a year, and was now ready to move into a place of her own.

Because she was eligible for MFP assistance, Jessica began discussing the process with Lisa Gabriel at MERIL. Jessica said she had never lived by herself, but she was comforted by Lisa’s guidance.

“My apprehensiveness grew to excitement when Lisa said that she could help me,” she said.

Jessica searched for an apartment that would work for her. With the financial assistance from MFP and the support from MERIL, Jessica moved into her apartment in December 2016.

A year after her successful transition, Jessica said she loves independent living.

“I am so happy to be living on my own, to have freedom to decide my own schedule, and I can have my children and family over when I want,” she said. “I just had my daughter and niece over for a slumber party last week. I now feel like I have freedom and control over my life, and my quality of life has improved.”

Contact MERIL for more information about the MFP program. You can also visit http://dss.mo.gov/mhd/general/pages/mfp.htm to learn more.

Paul Bergonzoni discusses assistive technology on KQ2’s Live at Five

If you want to learn more about technology that can help people with low vision, low hearing, or other types of disabilities, call MERIL to schedule an appointment. We have a demonstration site at our office that is free and open to the public. You can try out various devices to help you make an informed decision about what is right for you.

Click here to see Paul discuss a few popular assistive devices.

Visit our Facebook page to see our other videos: https://www.facebook.com/pg/MERIL4U/videos.
Helping people with disabilities and people who are aging live independently in Northwest Missouri.

February 2018

Legislative Advocacy: A letter from Executive Director Rob Honan

As we move into February, the legislative session in Jefferson City is in full swing. Governor Eric Greitens published his departmental budget recommendation on January 23 for the Independent Living grant. Administered through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, he recommended to keep the Independent Living grant flat funded (no increase) from last year. As you may recall, we took a 40% cut from the previous year’s allocation, and we are hoping to restore all or part of these funds. Given the current budget climate, this will be difficult, but is possible. In order to make change possible, Centers for Independent Living must advocate for our legislative issues and educate our legislators about the importance of this and other programs and bills.

MERIL has set up two workshops to assist in preparation for the March 13 advocacy day in Jefferson City. The first will be in conjunction with the People First of St. Joseph meeting on February 8 at 3:00 p.m. The second one will be held at noon on March 8. Both workshops will serve food and will be held at the MERIL office in St. Joseph. Call or email me for more information: 816-279-8558, Rhonan@meril.org.

An independent living success story with Money Follows the Person

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.

Jane Parman was living in a nursing home due to a broken femur and a cancerous tumor. She heard about MFP and asked the nursing home coordinator about the program. The coordinator referred her to MERIL, where she met with Lisa Gabriel to discuss the options available to her.

Jane found an accessible apartment in Andrew County, and she has been living independently since November 2017.

When asked how her life has improved since moving into her apartment, Jane said she loves the quiet, she sleeps great, the laundry facilities are accessible, and she likes the social interaction with other residents. Jane said she can’t wait until spring when she can sit on the patio and sip some tea and lemonade.

“Without MFP, I wouldn’t get the resources to help me with independent living,” Jane said.

Contact MERIL for more information about the MFP program. You can also visit http://dss.mo.gov/mhd/general/pages/mfp.htm to learn more.

Plan for our April 15 benefit! Our “Acoustic Noodles” fundraiser will include a full spaghetti dinner and an acoustic rock show at D&G / Cafe Acoustic in St. Joseph. More details coming soon!

Stay up to date with the latest news, events, and resources: Facebook.com/meril4u Twitter.com/meril4u
The city clerk of Craig, MO contacted MERIL for assistance in planning the addition of a ramp at the entrance to the town’s city hall building.

Paul Bergonzoni from MERIL assessed the building and found that the stairs to the entry presented a challenge because of the height of the entryway above ground.

Many rural areas struggle to afford the changes needed to improve access to their existing facilities, so Paul recommended that a transition plan be developed so the city would have a timeframe to achieve the addition of a ramp.

It took a few years, but a ramp was installed, and now those who use wheelchairs and other mobility devices can safely get in and out of city hall. As you can see from the photos above, a lot of materials were needed in order to achieve this goal.

MERIL thanks those who worked to build the ramp and make city hall more accessible to the Craig community.

MO ABLE financial accounts will be discussed on KQ2’s Live at Five

On February 13, MERIL will present a featured guest on Live at Five.

David Pearce from the state treasurer’s office will share information about MO ABLE savings and investment solutions for Missourians who developed disabilities before the age of 26.

The MO ABLE accounts feature a tax-free savings plan for disability-related expenses, as well as the ability to save and invest up to $14,000 per year without losing federal needs-based benefits.

Visit [www.moable.com](http://www.moable.com) to learn more about the program.
Helping people with disabilities and people who are aging live independently in Northwest Missouri.

Advocacy matters: A message from Executive Director Rob Honan

Several hundred disability rights advocates from all over the state, including five from MERIL, converged in Jefferson City on March 14 for the 17th Annual Disability Rights Legislative Day. Advocates heard speeches about disability pride, guardianship legislation, ABLE accounts, Home and Community-Based Services, and Independent Living funding. In addition to the speeches, advocates visited their state legislators to urge them to think of the disability population when making decisions on pending bills.

MERIL was represented by staff members Jay Claywell, Lisa Gabriel, Rob Honan, intern Will Vick, and program participant Chris Fagan. The MERIL group visited all six house members and the two state senators in our service area.

The message that we provided to our legislative delegation was that Centers for Independent Living (CILs) are critical agencies that keep individuals living in the community of their choice and that a major way to do this is to support HB 2002 (an appropriations bill) that would restore $1.8 million worth of state funding to the 22 CILs in Missouri. This is a significant restoration of what we lost last year and would be extremely beneficial.

The legislators are on spring break next week and there is still a lot of work to do. Please contact me at 816-279-8558 or rhonan@meril.org if you have questions or would like to assist us in our advocacy efforts.

March 2018

Tickets are on sale for our benefit dinner and concert on April 15!

Join us on Sunday, April 15 for an evening of delicious food and great music!

The benefit starts with a gourmet spaghetti dinner at D&G Pub and Grub from 5:00 – 7:00 pm. Then, we move next door to Cafe Acoustic for a rock ‘n’ roll performance from a fantastic local band: The Devil and the Southern Fellowship.

Don’t forget to bring a few extra dollars for our 50/50 raffle! Raffle tickets will be sold at the venue during the event.

Visit www.meril.org/noodles for all the details!

Acoustic Noodles

A Benefit for MERIL & People with Disabilities

Sunday, April 15

5 – 7 PM Gourmet Dinner

Spaghetti with handmade meat sauce, garlic bread, fresh salad, artisan dessert, soft drink

7:30 Acoustic Concert

The Devil and the Southern Fellowship

Buy tickets at MERIL, D&G, or: CafeAcousticLive.com

Event held at: D&G / Cafe Acoustic

1918 Frederick, St. Joe

Support our mission! You can do small things right now to help people with disabilities. Learn more at www.meril.org/help.
We made our voices heard in Jefferson City. Now it’s your turn!

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

Read the GCD legislative updates: https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/legupdates.htm.

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

Stay up to date with the latest news, events, and resources: Facebook.com/meril4u Twitter.com/meril4u

MOSILC Executive Director Adonis Brown (left) with Chris and Lisa.

Missouri State Capitol Building.

From left to right: Rob Honan, Jay Claywell, Sen. Dan Hegeman, Chris Fagan, Lisa Gabriel, and Will Vick.
Freedom with Money Follows the Person 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.

Roberta Patterson was living in a nursing home due to an amputation to her right leg. The social services specialist at the home referred Roberta to the MFP program at MERIL. Roberta met with MERIL specialist Lisa Gabriel to begin the process of moving from the home into an apartment.

Roberta has been living in her own apartment since January 2018.

“I would not have been able to leave the nursing home without the Money Follows the Person program,” she said. “I am so overwhelmed. The MFP program is marvelous! Without MFP, I would not have the ability and freedom to be me!”

In addition to using MFP, Roberta was able to receive items from Missouri Assistive Technology. These items, including a chair lift and rollator, have made it easier for her to live in her apartment.

“I am so happy; I just can’t believe it!” she said. “Thank you to MERIL and Missouri Assistive Technology.”

MERIL provided a demonstration of assistive technology devices for Roberta. Pictured above are some magnifiers for people who have low vision. These devices, as well as devices for low hearing and limited mobility, are available for demonstration at our St. Joseph office. The demonstration site is free and open to the public.

Register for MERIL’s youth pre-employment campout this summer

Time is almost up to register for MERIL’s youth campout this summer. If you know of an IEP or 504-eligible high school student (who will be returning to school in the fall) in Buchanan or Nodaway county who would like to participate in this free, educational (and fun!) event, call us soon.

The event will start at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, June 9 and end at 12:00 p.m. on Sunday, June 10. Students will learn how to think about their abilities and employment goals, how to create a resume and prepare for a job interview, and other skills related to life after school. Plus, a lot of fun socialization activities!

Learn more about the event on Facebook.com/meril4u.

Lisa appeared on KNPG news. Click here to watch!
Helping people with disabilities and people who are aging live independently in Northwest Missouri.

On April 15, MERIL hosted the “Acoustic Noodles” fundraiser at D&G Pub & Grub in St. Joseph. The purpose of the event was three-fold: (1.) to raise funds for our Independent Living Program, which helps people with disabilities live independently in the community; (2.) to raise awareness about MERIL; and (3.) to enjoy great music by local band The Devil and the Southern Fellowship.

We raised $878, and it was a true testament of teamwork between D&G, the band, and MERIL staff. I especially would like to thank Christina Grimes of D&G, and MERIL staff members Jay Claywell, Christopher Matthews, and Will Vick (intern) for their hard work in selling tickets, promoting the event, and organizing the spaghetti dinner that made this a successful first annual “Acoustic Noodles.”

For the last three months, MERIL has been blessed to have an intern work with us to fulfill his requirements for graduation and to get some hands-on job training. Will Vick did a great job for us using his phone skills to line up in-services at a variety of Emergency Medical Services offices in our catchment area, selling tickets to the “Acoustic Noodles” fundraiser, assisting those with low vision and blindness, and getting local restaurants to sponsor our “Silent Lunch” Deaf and Hard of Hearing events.

Will was also instrumental in assisting Lisa Gabriel with our Youth Pre-ETS event that will be held in June. Once Will was given a task, he tackled it with abandon until it was finished. We have not seen the last of him since he will be volunteering for MERIL until he finds employment. Thank you, Will!

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We are planning to host a similar “Acoustic Noodles” event next year. Stay tuned for more information. In the meantime, you can view photos and videos from this year’s fundraiser at www.meril.org/noodles.

Don’t miss the video of Rob Honan and Jay Claywell thanking the attendees and drawing raffle tickets: https://www.facebook.com/MERIL4U/videos/1713994308690143/

Support our mission! You can do small things right now to help people with disabilities. Learn more at www.meril.org/help.
Moving home and setting goals with Independent Living programs

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.

Two-and-a-half years ago, Michael Van Sickle had an unexpected seizure, which resulted in brain bleeding. After emergency surgery in Kansas City, he underwent recovery in Lincoln, Nebraska and Keokuk, Iowa. Mike was not able to move to a rehabilitation facility closer to his Northwest Missouri home because no facilities in Missouri are equipped to care for a person who is quadriplegic and vent-dependent.

Mike’s mother and guardian, Pam Van Sickle, spent hours researching online for options that would allow Mike to return home. She discovered the Money Follows the Person program and contacted MERIL for more information.

Lisa Gabriel, MERIL’s Money Follows the Person coordinator, met with Mike and Pam to begin the process of transitioning Mike from a rehabilitation facility to his own home. Now, Mike lives at home and is able to spend time with his family. Mike also participates in MERIL’s Consumer Directed Services (CDS) program, allowing him to hire two caregivers to help him with personal care tasks.

Mike said he likes to be able to manage his own care and hire his own attendants.

Pam said that Mike is much happier now that he is able to be around his family and friends.

“MFP helped alleviate some of our stress,” she said. “We are happier that we don’t have to travel four hours away, each way, to visit Mike.”

Lisa and CDS Specialist Lauren Lynch visit Mike periodically to discuss other resources available to him.

Mike has been able to access funding from Missouri Assistive Technology to help him obtain a transfer and mobility (TRAM) device to assist him with standing.

Mike has set a goal for this summer. He wants to be able to stand at a wedding he will be attending in June.

With the help of MERIL’s Independent Living programs and other community resources, he is well on his way to attaining this goal. We wish you the best, Mike!

Thank you to Pizza Ranch for sponsoring “Silent Lunch”

MERIL hosts a monthly lunch social for people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. Anyone is welcome to attend. The lunches usually occur on the first Sunday of the month, but the schedule may vary, so follow us on Facebook for announcements.

Pizza Ranch in St. Joe provided pizzas for our Silent Lunch guests in April. You can see photos of the event on our Facebook page. Thank you, Pizza Ranch!
Students with disabilities prepare for employment after high school

At Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville, teachers and IEP students in 7th through 12th grade learned about the skills needed to succeed in life after school.

The Regional Transition Network (RTN)—which consists of members from several agencies, including MERIL, throughout the Northwest Missouri area—hosted the event.

This year’s keynote speaker was John Gilbert, a Paralympian wheelchair basketball player who won a gold medal in the 2016 Rio games.

John grew up in Fairfax, Missouri, and began using a wheelchair when he was six years old after a spinal cord injury. He started playing wheelchair basketball when he was 10, and he has continued since.

From John and the other presenters, attendees learned about the significance that discipline, goal-setting, and self-advocacy can have on employment success.

A prescription reader for people who are Blind or have low vision

At MERIL’s office in St. Joseph, we have an assistive technology demonstration site that is free and 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 works for them. Call us to make an appointment if you’re interested in visiting the demonstration site.

This month we are featuring the ScripTalk prescription reader. This device reads aloud prescription label contents using an RFID chip. This is useful because many prescription labels provide only some of the medical information in a Braille format. With the RFID chip, the patient can hear all of the information about the medication. Visit www.envisionamerica.com to learn more about the device.