WHY ADVOCATE?
BECAUSE IT'S
YOUR LIFE!

News about:
Legislative advocacy
Voting education

Personal stories of
overcoming accessibility barriers

Part-time caregiver jobs with benefits!
Legislative Advocacy

The 2021 Missouri General Assembly legislative session completed its work on Friday May 14, 2021. This was the first (and hopefully the last) session in which Covid-19 protocols were in place from the beginning of the session until its end.

For much of the session, only legislators, support staff, lobbyists, and minimal members of the public were allowed in the capitol building, but many of the restrictions were gradually lifted towards the end of the four-month session.

With this as an introduction to a very odd year, I want to talk about the primary issue that MERIL and other Missouri Centers for Independent Living (CILs) faced in an environment of Covid-19.

The primary legislative concern for Missouri CILs every year revolves around funding. The two appropriations bills that pay for the vast majority of our services are House Bill 2 (HB2) and House Bill 10 (HB10).

HB2 funds the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, which includes the Independent Living (IL) Program.

HB10 pays for all of the Department of Health and Senior Services programs. The ones that we are most concerned about are the Consumer-Directed Services (CDS) program, the In-Home personal attendant services program, and the In-Home nursing program.

As with any legislative session, there is a “story” behind how we got to where we are. At the beginning of each legislative session, the governor makes his departmental (Transportation, Health and Senior Service, Elementary and Secondary Education, and so on) recommendations to the General Assembly, based on revenue and expense projections, among other things.

For HB2, the governor recommended no statewide increase of IL funding. And for the CDS portion of HB10, the governor recommended a significant cut to the CDS reimbursement rate and then a second cut weeks after the session started.

The governor used an outdated report as the basis for his cuts in the CDS program. So, statewide advocates, including those from MERIL, knew that something had to be done. We got to work.

In normal times, we would go to the capitol, hundreds of us, and explain the importance of the program to legislators. But this year was anything but normal. We had to do all of the advocacy by phone, email or through other virtual means.

The first round of advocacy was to target House members in an attempt to restore the cuts the governor recommended. To this end, MERIL staff and participants (well over 20 of us) contacted, by phone and email, the six House members in our nine counties in order to advocate for the restoration of cuts. In the end, however, the House voted to retain the cuts, so our work shifted to the Senate side.

The secret to turning the tide with the Senate was a virtual legislative day. We used the Facebook “write-on-the-legislators-Facebook-wall” function to successfully get the Senate to rescind the two cuts and add 5.29% to the reimbursement rate. I firmly believe that the Facebook advocacy was the tipping point in getting the Senate to pass the more favorable CDS appropriations legislation.

The situation was the opposite for the IL funding in HB2. The House voted to increase IL funding statewide by $300,000 while the Senate voted to keep the funding flat. Because the House and the Senate had different results in both HB2 and HB10, a Conference Committee was set up to iron out the differences.

And due to continued advocacy, again primarily accomplished through distance and virtual means, the more favorable versions of the two House Bills were passed. We got our $300,000 statewide IL increase in HB2 and the proposed cuts were rescinded, along with a 5.29% rate reimbursement increase was gained in HB10.

Now all it takes is the governor’s signature and we accomplished what we needed to in the strangest of years.

- Rob Honan, MERIL CEO

Update: The governor vetoed the CDS line in HB10.
The 31st Anniversary of the ADA

MERIL CEO Rob Honan was featured in a news story about the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

“There’s been a lot of advances in disability rights and awareness because of the law,” Honan said. “The three main titles are Title I — employment; Title II — local and state government access; Title III — public accommodations, and that’s such things as restaurants, bars, you know, hotels, doctors offices.”

Honan believes there still are barriers that people with disabilities face when it comes to the workplace, as some employers are hesitant because they may not understand a disability fully.

Continue reading here.

You can also visit www.adaanniversary.org for more information about the celebration of the ADA.
We help caregivers find part-time jobs!

MERIL accepts applications for caregivers to work for a Consumer Directed Services (CDS) participant, and/or to work for participants in MERIL’s In-Home Services program. Caregivers help people with disabilities with personal care tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, and bathing. Caregivers do not need any prior experience and the hours are flexible. Visit meril.org/caregivers to learn more.

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. Thank you!

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.
On October 5, 2020, I was diagnosed with a Detached Retina. I found that I must act quickly and receive an eye surgery to get the problem corrected. This would mean that I would have to miss work and take several hours of PTO. My Retina was detached and I was losing my vision quickly.

My vision was like a shadow over my eye and unable to see things as I once did. The good news is that Dr. Poulse was able to perform the surgery, which left me with several days of missing work. It was important to take care of myself as if going back to work too early, it might cause to not heal properly and have to get another surgery. No way that was happening!

As I sat at home in the dark as the light made my eye very sensitive, my vision was impaired and how was I going to be able to go back to work and see a computer screen, not to mention driving. I couldn’t read, watch TV or do things that I really enjoyed. Well, I called MERIL and they said I could look into accessibility for my low vision. By the way, I thank Lauren Lynch for assisting me as I spoke to her about my barriers, she assisted me with finding the right devices to help me. People with low vision can still do things, we just have to do them differently and set up accessibility to complete tasks.

So I went to MERIL and was able to borrow a Zoom Text keyboard so I was able to see what I was typing and I also was able to borrow a magnifier to see words on a form that I was unable to see. I also contacted our computer team to assist me to have accessibility on my computer for a dark screen and increase font, it also allows me to change the color of the font. I was unable to see with the white background which was very hard on my eyes. MERIL also assisted me with a larger monitor to see the words on my screen. As far as the driving, I was able to talk with my employer about accommodations for my vision impairment. My husband was able to drive me to appointments to complete those parts of my job. It is now January 11th, 2021 and I am able to see better and I returned the items that I borrowed so I was able to do my job. Last week, I was able to start driving.

I now understand so much that people with disabilities go through. It is a chore to get dressed in the morning and complete tasks to take care of myself. It also discourages you and provides issues with mental health. I also was counting on my job to be understanding until I was able to come back to work and I was not disappointed. It is important to understand that you have that right and I was able to count on my doctor to assist with a recovery schedule. I still cannot move at the rate before my surgery as I was pretty active; however, my hope is that I will be able to do the things I did before surgery at the same pace. Not to mention the issue with your independence and doing things on your own. This is a big deal! I am so thankful that Independent Living Centers exist and Assistive Devices. If you are unsure about the help you can get for your disability, please call your local Independent Living Center!

- Lisa Gabriel, Independent Living and Transition Specialist
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.

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

Stay connected to your local Independent Living Center for important legislative information!

Follow us on Facebook to receive important updates about legislative issues that affect people with disabilities.

**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.
Welcome to Missouri’s voting center where you can find answers to your voting questions. Learn how to vote absentee, how you can vote if you’re in the military, or where your polling place is for voting on election day.

Missouri’s elections are decentralized, and the state is composed of 116 local election jurisdictions. Each jurisdiction is led by an elected county clerk or a board of election commissioners, which are appointed by the Governor. In addition to conducting local, state and federal elections, local election authorities are responsible for the registration of voters and maintenance of voter registration records.

The Secretary of State follows and implements election law as set forth in Chapters 115 and 116 in the Revised Statutes of Missouri.

For Voters
- Be a Poll Worker!
- Check Your Voter Registration
- Register To Vote

For Candidates
- Candidate Filing Information
- Political Party Information
- Independent Candidates
- Write-In Candidates

For More Information:
https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/legupdates.htm
https://www.paraquad.org/policy-and-advocacy/
https://www.stjoemo.info/334/Americans-with-Disabilities-Act-Complian
https://www.sos.mo.gov/elections/goVoteMissouri
https://thewholeperson.org/core-services/advocacy/publicpolicy411.html
https://legislookup.mo.gov/
http://www.senate.mo.gov/LegisLookup/Default.aspx
We enjoyed an ice cream social in the warm weather.

We helped clean up MERIL’s dedicated stretch of highway in St. Joseph!

MERIL hosted vaccine clinics in February and March. The Covid-19 vaccine was available to all MERIL participants, attendants, and staff members. Over 90 people were vaccinated during these clinics!

Jim Carrithers is our new HR and Business Officer! Laura Hagan is our new CDS Support Specialist!
“A lot of (people with disabilities) have underlying health conditions that make them more susceptible to contracting COVID,” said Rob Honan, CEO of MERIL (Midland Empire Resources for Independent Living).

Continue reading here.

“We’ve purchased the clear shields that go over the face,” said Deann Young, human resources officer at MERIL. “It provides the same protection as masks. It also allows individuals to read lips and see the facial expressions.”

Continue reading here.

“When you deal with winter weather, and snow particularly, one of the things that jumps out is the parking,” Honan said. “You know, (just having) accessible parking for people that need it. Sometimes stores tend to plow the snow into the access aisles for the van-accessible (spots), which can cause a really big problem for people.”

Continue reading here.
Independence with Assistive Technology!

Missouri Assistive Technology provides a wide variety of assistive technology devices—including phones, magnifiers, and computer equipment—to MERIL so that we can demonstrate them to people with disabilities throughout Northwest Missouri.

MERIL provides informed demonstrations of the devices, either in our office or in people’s homes, so they are able to find out which device best fits their needs. And many people qualify for free devices!

The most popular devices are the telephones available through the Telecommunications Access Program (TAP). These telephones are designed for people who have hearing loss, low vision, and other types of disabilities.

Pictured at the top is a participant holding a cordless TAP phone with amplified volume. This participant is unable to use a standard telephone due to hearing loss.

MERIL’s Lauren Lynch demonstrated different phone models for the participant so that he could select the one that would best allow him to communicate.

During this demonstration, Lauren asked the participant if he was experiencing any other barriers due to hearing loss. It was discovered that the participant was unable to hear a smoke alarm or carbon monoxide detector while he was sleeping because he removed his hearing aids before going to bed.

Pictured at the bottom is a participant who experiences tremors in both hands, which make it difficult for her to complete certain daily living tasks, such as holding a cup, holding silverware, writing, turning knobs, and checking her blood sugar levels.

Lauren showed this participant a variety of devices that could possibly help her, including: a rocking knife, writing bird, universal knob turner, food bumper, meal lifter, liftware, and dycem mat. The participant was able to try these devices to see which were best suited to her needs.

Assistive technology devices are important tools that allow people with disabilities to live independently in their homes. More information is available at www.meril.org/tools.
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, use our PayPal link, or donate on Facebook.

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.

We thank all of the kind people who help us fulfill our mission by making charitable contributions, and donating assistive devices and durable medical equipment.

Support MERIL.

When you shop at smile.amazon.com, Amazon donates.

If you go to smile.amazon.com and shop, Amazon will donate 0.5% of your purchase amount to a nonprofit of your choice. We hope you choose MERIL as your donation recipient!

Assistive devices for holding utensils

While receiving help with daily living tasks from a MERIL In-Home Personal Care Attendant (PCA), the participant pictured here expressed concern that she was having difficulty holding silverware and feeding herself.

MERIL’s Amber King met with the participant in her home to demonstrate some assistive tools that may help her with this problem.

The first devices demonstrated were SureHand Utensils, which the participant found to be too heavy and large for her to use comfortably.

The second devices demonstrated were adaptive grip aids, which the participant found to be a better choice. The grip aids allowed her to better hold silverware and writing utensils.

Assistive technology devices are important tools that allow people with disabilities to live independently in their homes. More information is available at Missouri Assistive Technology and at www.meril.org/tools.

www.meril.org/help
In honor of Missouri’s 200th anniversary, Robert Miller, MERIL’s Information and Referral (I&R) Communications Specialist, researched notable Missourians with disabilities.

Howard Rusk: Father of Rehabilitative Medicine

Howard Rusk was born in 1901 in Brookfield, MO. He graduated from the University of Missouri in 1923. He went on to get his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.

During World War II, Dr. Rusk joined the Army Air Corp (modern day Air Force). He was assigned to Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis as the Chief of medical services. While working there, he noticed that the wounded and disabled soldiers were just left to lie around. It was during this period that Dr. Rusk started to develop ideas to rehabilitate the wounded and disabled soldiers. Some of the soldiers were even able to return to active duty after going through his developed rehabilitative program.

His program included physical therapy, mental health help and vocational training. The soldiers could take various training courses that would help them find viable vocations for when they returned to civilian life. His rehabilitative program was so successful that it was eventually was implemented in all branches of the military.

After the war, Dr. Rusk continued to champion the cause of wounded soldiers and even civilians that had disabilities from birth and even from accidents. He started the first training program for rehabilitative medicine at the University of New York for doctors wanting to do rehabilitative work with patients.

In 1955, Dr. Rusk developed the World Rehabilitation Fund (WRF) to help people with disabilities around the world. Being an expert in the field of rehabilitative medicine, he was a consultant for 9 US Presidents, the Veteran’s Administration and even the United Nations. In 1974, the University of Missouri named its rehabilitative center in his honor. He received numerous awards for his work in rehabilitative medicine and was even nominated for a Nobel Prize even though he didn’t win.

Dr. Rusk died in 1989 and is buried in his hometown of Brookfield. The moto he lived by which he wrote in his 1972 autobiography was: “To believe in rehabilitation is to believe in humanity.”

Learn more at www.historicmissourians.shs.mo.org.

John William “Blind” Boone: Musical Prodigy

Blind Boone was an African-American musical prodigy born in Miami, MO in 1864 during the Civil War to a mother that was a slave and a father that was a bugler in the Union Army stationed nearby. He grew up in Warrensburg, MO. At age 6 months, he was stricken with swelling in the brain and his doctor thought the best course of action was to remove both of his eyes to relieve the swelling thus rendering him blind.
As a child, Blind was educated in St Louis at the St Louis School for the Blind where he was being taught to make brooms. He was introduced to the piano when he heard a fellow student playing thus igniting a lifelong passion. He was later expelled from the school for repeatedly sneaking out at night to go listen to piano music at local barrooms.

Blind would eventually return to Warrensburg and would continue to pursue the piano. He would go on to become a professional traveling pianist playing over 7,200 concerts in a career that lasted 33 years. Blind was a very charitable man giving $180,000 (equal to $4.4 million today according to the blindboonehome.org website) to various charities, churches, concert halls and opera houses. Blind was even one of the first African American’s to be recorded by the QRS Piano Roll Company in 1912. Some of his compilations were so complicated, they couldn’t be recorded.

Blind is credited with being one of the creators of Ragtime music and is said to have been able to hear someone play a piece of music for him and then play it back to them note for note. Blind overcame racism, blindness and poverty and became one of the most successful musicians of his time.

Blind’s home in Columbia, MO has been saved and is on the National Register of Historical Places. Blind died in 1927 at the age of 63 and is buried in Columbia, MO. Learn more at www.blindboonehome.org.

Harry S. Truman: A Man of Vision but Poor Eyesight

The future spectacled President of the United States of America, Harry S. Truman was born in Lamar, MO in 1884 and grew up in Independence, MO. At the age of 10, he developed Diphtheria. It is speculated upon if this was the cause of his poor eyesight or if he had the issue prior to the disease. The disease can attack the muscles of the eyes that help with focus. Either way, Harry had poor eyesight.

In high school he dreamed of attending West Point Military Academy but his poor eyesight prevented that. In 1905, unwilling to give up on his military dreams, he memorized the eye test chart and joined the Missouri National Guard and served until 1911.

In 1917 he re-joined the National Guard and served successfully in WW I. After returning home from the war, he tried his hand unsuccessfully at a few ventures. Eventually he thought he would try his hand in local politics. He ran for County Judge for Jackson County in 1922 and won his first election, his second election was unsuccessful. He ran again in 1926 and won and won again in 1930.

After serving Jackson County, Truman wanted to try for a bigger office either at the state level or even on the national stage as a Congressman. In 1934 Truman ran for and became the Senator from Missouri thus starting his trajectory to ultimately becoming President of the United States in 1945.

Harry served as Vice-President then President during WW II. He used his experiences from serving in WW I to help him make world changing decisions. Whether you like his politics or not, his journey was one of incredible tenacity. Born a poor farm boy in rural Missouri, he had a dream to serve his country.

Harry S. Truman, the 33rd President of the United States of America died in 1972. He had been residing at the home of his mother-in-law in Independence, MO. Even though his eyesight was poor, he had a vision. Learn more at www.trumanlibrary.gov.

The Disability History Museum hosts a library of virtual artifacts, education curricula, and museum exhibits designed to foster research and study about the historical experiences of people with disabilities and their communities: www.disabilitymuseum.org.
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 and at www.mocil.org.

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

Phones & devices for low hearing, low vision

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: L. Kent Allen (chair), Sandy Lewandowski (vice chair), Christy McGuire (secretary), Joseph D. Hegeman (treasurer), Tammy Blakely (director), Kelly Narowski (director), and Robert Honan (CEO).