There are three especially important laws that protect the civil rights of people with disabilities:

- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**
- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**
- **Affordable Care Act (ACA)**

All three of these laws are in grave danger of being weakened. They have recently come under threats that would hurt people with disabilities.

- The ADA Education and Reform Act of 2017 (H.R. 620) would make it harder to protect our rights and stay independent.
- The Education Department has canceled 72 policy documents that outline the rights of students with disabilities.
- Congress is trying to repeal the Affordable Care Act and cut Medicaid, which will harm people with disabilities.

We must all continue to fight for our civil rights and for the healthcare that we need. Contact us to learn more about how you can advocate to protect the rights of people with disabilities.

For people with disabilities, the world is always changing…

…”Be the change you wish to see in the world.” – Mahatma Gandhi
This past year as President I have been impressed with the continued growth and success of LIFE CIL. Even when facing the continued uncertainty of funding sources the Center has continued to persevere and even thrive by exploring new areas for development. We approached funding with a conservative approach which allowed us to continue to provide quality services without any further furloughs or reduction in staff. The stress from the previous year brought resolve from both the staff and board to find a way to continue our mission of advancing equality and integration of all persons with disabilities through advocacy, education, support services, and raising awareness.

This year has been the beginning of a transition period for the Center. As part of the natural progression our long term Executive Director, Gail Kear, is retiring within the 2018 calendar year. Due to her 21-year tenure at the center, a process has begun to find a new Executive Director for the Center. This past year has included adding policies and procedures to ensure a smooth transition. Within those procedures evolved the development of a management team who have received additional training as well as taken on added responsibility for the Center. The result has been noted by other CILs within the state as well as providing our Center with a plan that will benefit us with needed structure in case of a planned or unplanned leave of any Executive Director.

One of the Board’s most important responsibilities is hiring a new Executive Director. Training and consultations with professionals have resulted in a board that is ready for this challenge. Our goal is to complete interviews and have the person designated before the end of this calendar year to aid in the transition. The board’s standing committees, which include the Administrative, Board Development, and Community Relations, have continued to address each committee goals so that the board can support the Independent Living Philosophy. Each board member volunteers their time and efforts to further the center and its mission. Each of them is appreciated for all of their time and effort.

It is with pride that I have been associated with LIFE CIL for many years. I have been amazed with how the Center has grown providing needed services throughout our four counties. We continue to look forward to new growth and challenges as we continue our mission for many years to come.

Donna Evans
…LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In looking back over my 21-year tenure with LIFE CIL, I am amazed to realize how far we have come!

We moved to attractive, spacious new offices in Bloomington, and we opened a Livingston County branch office in Pontiac. We started new programs that have enhanced the rights and opportunities of the people we serve.

- Our Community Advocacy Training program has taught hundreds of youth and adults with disabilities how to have a voice in government and how to be effective disability rights advocates.
- Our Community Reintegration program has assisted 72.5 people to move out of nursing homes into their own homes.
- Through our partnership with Connect Transit, we certify the eligibility of persons with disabilities to utilize paratransit services, and teach people how to utilize the transit system.
- We are expanding our services to youth with disabilities, to assist them in making the transition from school to independent adult lifestyles.

We expanded our services to persons age 55 and over who are blind or have low vision, providing enhanced services to more people in a program that is recognized statewide for its quality. Our core independent living services and our personal assistant program continue to provide top-notch services.

Our Center’s excellence has been demonstrated in several ways. Many of our staff members have been chosen to lead statewide, regional and local boards, commissions and committees, and several have been honored at the statewide and national levels. For many years, we have had excellent results in compliance reviews and fiscal audits.

Recent years have been very challenging for human services in Illinois, with reduced availability of funding and delays in grant payments. LIFE CIL has successfully navigated these challenges and remains fiscally sound, with well-diversified sources of income.

We have a very dedicated, diverse Board of Directors and the best staff ever! It has been an honor and privilege to work with all of them.

Gail Kear
LIFE Center for Independent Living (LIFE CIL) is a community-based, not-for-profit, non-residential organization that was founded in 1985. LIFE CIL promotes disability rights, equal access, and full community participation for persons with disabilities. We assist individuals with disabilities to empower themselves to take charge of their lives and to be as self-sufficient as possible. We lead efforts to break down barriers and prejudices within our communities. When these barriers are removed and prejudices are replaced with positive attitudes, persons with disabilities will have equal access to society.

**OUR MISSION**

LIFE Center for Independent Living advances equality and integration of all persons with disabilities. To achieve this mission, we:
- promote local, state, and national advocacy
- educate persons with disabilities about their rights and responsibilities
- provide support services
- raise community awareness about disability issues in DeWitt, Ford, Livingston and McLean Counties.

**WHO WE SERVE**

We serve people of all ages and all kinds of disabilities and their families and friends who reside in DeWitt, Ford, Livingston, and McLean Counties. Services are available regardless of type of disability, sex, gender identity, income, ethnicity, or citizenship status*.

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*Some specific grants and programs through the state or federal government do have income and citizenship eligibility guidelines.
As a Center for Independent Living, there are five core services we are required to provide, along with an array of additional services that promote independent living.

**Advocacy**
Advocacy is central to a Center for Independent Living’s mission. We offer both individual and systems advocacy. Individual advocacy is assisting an individual with a disability to protect his or her rights or to fight for needed resources. Through systems advocacy, we advance civil rights and equal access for all persons with disabilities on the local, state and federal levels.

**Information and Referral**
We assist people with disabilities, their families, and the community in locating available services and products such as affordable accessible, integrated housing, transportation options, adaptive equipment, support services, and more.

**Independent Living Skills**
We teach a wide range of skills needed to live independently and manage life with a disability. Skills training is available to persons with disabilities in almost any topic where there is a need for more independence.

**Peer Support and Mentoring**
Peer support is one of the fundamentals of a Center for Independent Living. Who better knows the issues individuals with disabilities face than another person with a disability who has been there and done that? Peer mentors provide role modeling and share experiences, feelings and awareness of disability issues.

**Transition**
We assist people with disabilities to move out of nursing homes and other institutions into independent lifestyles of their choice; help to prevent people with disabilities from entering institutions; and assist youth in transitioning from high school to adult life.
In addition to the five core services, LIFE Center for Independent Living also offers the following programs and services:

**Community Reintegration: Getting Out of Nursing Homes**
We help eligible persons with disabilities plan and carry out a move from a nursing home to their own home or apartment. We can pay for certain one-time moving expenses and household goods. We also connect individuals with other LIFE CIL services such as independent living skills, peer counseling, advocacy and information and referral. Anyone aged 18-59 who resides in a nursing facility and meets program criteria may be eligible for this program.

**Personal Assistant Program: Help at Home**
We assist individuals with disabilities to hire, train, and manage personal assistants (PAs) to help with daily tasks as needed to live at home independently. We refer PAs to be hired and employed by individuals with disabilities. If you want to work as a PA and be on our referral list, complete our data sheet and attend an orientation.

**Self-Empowerment**
We teach the knowledge and skills that allow individuals with disabilities to empower themselves by understanding their rights and responsibilities and by knowing how to protect those rights. We teach about the Americans with Disabilities Act, Fair Housing, Illinois Human Rights Act, and other laws relating to disability. We also teach self-advocacy skills and provide individual advocacy assistance when needed.

**Seniors with Low Vision**
We help seniors 55 or older with severe vision loss maintain independent lifestyles. We provide free low vision aids and assistive devices such as magnifiers, large print items, and talking devices. We arrange community orientation and mobility training, teach sighted-guide techniques and suggest small home adaptations for increased safety.
**Mobility Assistance for People Who Are Blind**
We have restricted funds through the Cox Bequest that allow us to purchase wheelchairs for persons of any age who are blind, and to help persons who are blind with certain costs associated with obtaining a guide dog or assistance dog. The Cox Bequest purchases individualized products and services based on the consumer’s needs.

**Personal Power and Advocacy**
We teach class participants how to take action to advance equal opportunity for all persons with disabilities. Participants will learn about the disability rights movement, how to find their personal power and voice, as well as practice how to speak out and make changes that will help all persons with disabilities. Participants will also learn how they can get involved in the legislative process in order to create change.

**Public Awareness and Technical Support**
We provide disability awareness presentations about disabilities and disability-related issues. We also provide technical assistance to organizations, local communities, service providers and businesses about how to respond to the need of employees and customers with disabilities and make their businesses comply with Illinois Accessibility Codes and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

**FREE Amplified Phones**
We are a selection center for the Illinois Telecommunications Access Corporation (ITAC) amplified phone program. You must complete an application and be a resident of Illinois, have a hearing loss (your physician or audiologist will need to certify your hearing loss), and provide proof of phone service (landline or cellular). Call us to learn more or to get an application to begin the process.

**Partnership with Connect Transit**
LIFE CIL is proud to assist Connect Transit in determining eligibility for paratransit services and in helping people learn to ride fixed-route buses. If you are interested in these services, please apply to Connect Transit at: [www.connect-transit.com](http://www.connect-transit.com) or call them at 309/828-9833.

**Durable Medical Equipment Loan**
We loan certain durable medical equipment free of charge for up to 90 days: walkers, wheelchairs, canes, crutches, commodes, raised toilet seats, shower seats, and more. Equipment is available on a first-come, first-serve basis; you can call ahead to reserve equipment for same-day pickup. We can also help you find resources to purchase your own equipment.
LIFE CIL touched 2,587 lives this year!
Services provided from 10/1/2016 – 9/30/2017

INDIVIDUALIZED SERVICES
DEMOGRAPHICS

Based upon the requested service(s), an individual works with the appropriate staff member to identify what the person would like to accomplish and then develops action steps. Periodically, the two meet to discuss their accomplishments on each goal. At that time, person can determine if they have accomplished a goal or goals, if progress is being made, or if they want to drop a goal. Individuals may withdraw at any time. It is the person who decides when goals have been reached.

Number of persons receiving extended individual services: 244

Age:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 5 years old</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 5-19</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 20-24</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 25-59</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 60 and older</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age unavailable</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>244</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Gender:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Ethnicity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Disabilities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental/Emotional</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Disabilities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### County:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DeWitt</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livingston</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McLean</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Types of Individual Services Provided:

Individuals direct their own services and may receive more than one service from us at a time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistive Devices</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing, Home Modifications and Shelter Services</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL Skills Training and Life Skills Training</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Mentoring and Support</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COMMUNITY SERVICES PROVIDED

Persons receiving Information and Referral: 2,343 (unduplicated)

Persons Receiving Loaned Equipment (by County):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DeWitt County</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford County</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livingston County</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McLean County</td>
<td>1,368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another County</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,527</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Time Spent in Community Education Activities: 3017.5 hours

This include staff time for all of the following:
- Community and Systems Advocacy
- Communication Education
- Paratransit Certifications
- Outreach
- Collaboration and Networking
- Technical Assistance
- Publications
- Maintaining Registries
**LIFE CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING**'S 
**FINANCES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INCOME</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DHS Independent Living</td>
<td>$186,612</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide Independent Living Council</td>
<td>$1,398</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHS Bureau of Blind Services</td>
<td>$99,181</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McLean County 377 Board</td>
<td>$10,811</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHS Personal Assistant</td>
<td>$50,103</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairbury Community Fund</td>
<td>$800</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees for Service and Misc.</td>
<td>$8,524</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHS Community Advocacy Training</td>
<td>$27,834</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Dept Health &amp; Human Services</td>
<td>$128,129</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Way of Livingston County</td>
<td>$8,750</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHS Community Reintegration</td>
<td>$104,524</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHFS Money Follows the Person</td>
<td>$3,766</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect Transit Contract</td>
<td>$85,470</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund Raising, Contributions</td>
<td>$22,689</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; Memberships (Net)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL INCOME</td>
<td>$738,591</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCOME OVER EXPENSE</td>
<td>$17,278</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPENSES</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff Salaries</td>
<td>$354,057</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplies</td>
<td>$18,090</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupancy Costs</td>
<td>$69,532</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Fringe Benefits</td>
<td>$145,083</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>$15,052</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment</td>
<td>$1,373</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractual Services</td>
<td>$56,502</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>$12,583</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Training</td>
<td>$5,327</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous Costs</td>
<td>$8,597</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exams/Devices for Older Blind</td>
<td>$19,720</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Reintegration Costs</td>
<td>$4,004</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management &amp; General</td>
<td>$11,393</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL EXPENSES</td>
<td>$721,313</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures based on unaudited yearend financial report.
WAYS YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE
How you can contribute to LIFE CIL

There are several ways you can contribute to LIFE CIL and support our mission and the services we provide.

✓ **Monetary Donations**
You can make a monetary donation to support our mission and the services we provide. Cash or checks are accepted; checks are made payable to LIFE CIL. You could also go to our website (www.lifecil.org) or Facebook page (www.facebook.com/lifecil) and make a contribution using a credit or debit card.

✓ **In-Kind Equipment Donations**
You can donate durable medical equipment that you or a family member no longer need, for us to loan to others. You are welcome to contact us to be sure we can accept the equipment you have available. Due to our limited storage space, we only accept certain items that are in high demand.

✓ **Wheelchair Basketball: Monetary and/or In-Kind Contribution**
LIFE CIL’s biggest fundraising event is our wheelchair basketball event each spring. You could become a sponsor and/or donate items for the silent auction or concessions for that event.

✓ **Become a Member of LIFE CIL**
Just like you, LIFE Center for Independent Living (LIFE CIL) needs support from our friends. In order for us to carry out our mission to provide advocacy and services to people with disabilities in DeWitt, Ford, Livingston and McLean Counties, we ask all of our friends, past and present, to show their support by becoming members or renewing their membership.

SMALL WAYS TO MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

Many thanks to everyone who has made a contribution to LIFE CIL! We thank you for your support and helping advance LIFE CIL’s mission and the services we provide to our community.
2017 AWARD RECIPIENTS

Each year we give awards to individuals, businesses and organizations that have done something to assist persons with disabilities to be more independent. We appreciate what each awardee has done and believe they should be recognized. Congratulations to each and every 2017 award recipient, and thank you for the outstanding work you’ve done!

2017 Do the Right Thing Award

Over the past year and a half LIFE Center for Independent Living and **Eye Surgical Associates** have developed a very collaborative relationship. Julie Payne, Practice Administrator for Eye Surgical Associates, has really helped to bridge the provision of professional eye care services with LIFE CIL’s Older Blind Independent Living Services. She set up an in-service for all of their staff - doctors, nurses, technicians, and support staff - to learn about our Older Blind Independent Living Services. Their staff had the opportunity to see and try many of the different assistive devices that we provide to people over the age of 55 with severe vision loss due to age-related eye disorders.

Eye Surgical Associates staff regularly refers consumers to LIFE Center’s Older Blind Program and as a result, there are many seniors over the past 18 months who have received magnifiers, lamps, talking and low vision clocks and watches, large print items such as address books, check registers and calendars; all at no charge. They would not have known about this program and would be at greater risk of depression, isolation and feeling that they could no longer live in their own homes without Eye Surgical Associates referring them to LIFE CIL.

LIFE Center for Independent Living sponsored several Low Vision Fairs this past spring. Dr. Pinter, Dr. Brownstone and Dr. Vies all volunteered their time to come and speak to the participants who attended. The entire Eye Surgical Associates staff has demonstrated the desire to assure that their patients know that there are low vision services which assist them in maintaining independence regardless of vision loss. It is
for this reason Eye Surgical Associates, a wonderful team of professionals, is the winner of the 2017 Do the Right Thing Award.

Congratulations to Eye Surgical Associates for being this year’s Do the Right Thing Award winner!

**2017 Advocate of the Year Awards**

There are two individuals who we feel deserve this award this year for amazing advocacy for people with disabilities in our community.

Kim Tarkowski, our Vision Access Advocate, has been involved with educational advocacy for many years and has crossed paths with one of the award winners while sitting across the table from one another, supporting the rights of youth with disabilities and their families during Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings.

**Dr. Charles “Chuck” Hartseil** has been retired as the Director of Special Education for Unit 5 Schools for several years. He developed programs within Unit 5 to address all of the different needs of children and youth with disabilities. He was a participant in the Local Inter-Agency Council that streamlined the transition of children from Early Intervention Programs to Early Childhood Education. Many years ago he gathered team members for a Bowl-a-thon to raise money for the Center on Deafness. He was a long time Board Member of the McLean County Autism Society, in fact, one year had the winning ticket and got to shave his head!

Earlier this spring, we learned that he was assisting with education advocacy for children with disabilities during their IEPs. He told us that we could refer any parents who needed help advocating for their child’s rights in school. He travels the counties in our service region free of charge. This is a man who has given his time and expertise in Special Education law to help families that need it. We honor Chuck for his commitment and efforts with LIFE CIL’s Advocate of the Year Award.

This year’s second Advocate of the Year Award winner embodies the true meaning of advocacy. You may have read his story on our website or in our newsletter. With the help of LIFE CIL’s Community Reintegration Program, **Rob Ballantini** moved out of a nursing home in the Spring of 2016 and has regained his ability to be active in the community. He is a member of the Knights of Columbus, and is an avid
fan of the Bloomington Thunder hockey team. He attends games frequently and enjoys having the freedom to do what he wants without any restrictions. Rob is a very social person; he has coordinated group trips for his apartment complex and is working with his property manager to plan future events. He had participated in the annual Parkinson’s Unity Walk in New York for five years and is currently organizing a local walk. Rob is also a graduate of LIFE CIL’s Community Advocacy Training class. He has taken trips Springfield and had conversations with both State and Federal legislators regarding various advocacy topics. Rob even came to last spring’s Community Advocacy Training class as a guest speaker to share his story with future advocates. Rob has noticed various accessibility issues with businesses in the City of Bloomington and has put his advocacy skills to use, breaking down barriers and gaining access to the community for himself and others. Full of energy and armed with knowledge, Rob doesn’t stop until the job is done!

Congratulations to Chuck Hartseil and Rob Ballantini, our 2017 Advocates of the Year!

2017 Advancing Community Access Awards

This award is given to someone who works to increase accessibility within the community. We had no problem figuring out who deserved this year’s award!

The Town of Normal has worked with LIFE CIL and held five trainings to educate their employees about disability related topics in the past three years alone. Ensuring that their employees learn about disability etiquette, and how to better interact and communicate with persons with disabilities. Ensuring that employees with disabilities have the accommodations and modifications needed to perform their job duties. Ensuring that any physical and attitudinal barriers are corrected. They have also coordinated with LIFE CIL for technical assistance regarding website accessibility. But they didn’t just stop with the trainings, they implemented the things they learned, such as implementing the use of audible barriers and correcting incorrect Braille signage. They actually made the changes to advance access in the community.

And that’s not all. The Town of Normal also employs two specific people who we also want to recognize.
Greg Troemel and Scot Williams work in and direct the Inspections and Planning Department, which is responsible to plan, regulate and maintain a built environment that is safe for residents, business and visitors. Greg and Scot are both fierce advocates for accessibility, and truly want to make sure that all persons with disabilities have equal access to the community. Greg and Scot are extremely knowledgeable about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Illinois Accessibility Code (IAC), and the numerous other laws that are in place to assist people with disabilities. They understand the Independent Living philosophy and not only work extremely hard to make sure the laws are adhered to, but also diligently work to break down the barriers that exist and make community integration a reality. In fact, they were both instrumental in assisting LIFE CIL during a multi-year advocacy effort involving access to healthcare. If there was ever a time where we need more people like Greg and Scot in the world, fighting for the rights of people with disabilities, that time is now!

Thank you and congratulations to the Town of Normal, Greg Troemel and Scot Williams, the 2017 Advancing Community Access award winners!

2017 Building Independence Awards

This award is to be given to someone who does something to give individuals with disabilities greater access and independence as a result of their actions.

There are four individuals who are receiving the Building Independence Award this year. All four are drivers for Connect Transit or Connect Mobility buses. These individuals go above and beyond to make their riders, especially individuals with disabilities, feel more independent by being able to use public transportation to get where they are going.

Rod Hughes is a fixed-route bus driver. He learns all his regulars’ names and is welcoming to all new riders. Even when he’s busy, he says hello to everyone with a fist-bump! He is accommodating with the lift or kneeling the bus usually before you can even ask, and he wishes everyone a great day as they head on out. Rod is ready to help people find the fastest route to their destination, and always calls out the upcoming stops with plenty of time to spare. Catch Rod on the Brown/Tan bus route!
Kurt Hutson is always calm and reassuring to his Connect Mobility riders. Sometimes you might feel like you are taking too much time to board or get situated. But not when Kurt is your driver! He’s quick to let everyone know he’s got time for them to get seated and belted in, and always checks that his riders are ready to roll.

Heidi Humble is always positive and goes the extra mile for the passengers. She takes pride in her work and makes sure everyone has a pleasant trip. She is always willing to assist fellow drivers and help out when needed. Heidi provides exceptional customer service.

Callen Boddie is extremely positive in his interactions with the passengers. He is always prompt and on time, and stays connected to his riders, making sure they have a great trip. A great help to his fellow drivers, Callen is respected by all.

Thank you and congratulations to Rod, Kurt, Heidi and Callen, the 2017 Building Independence Award winners!

2017 Volunteer of the Year Award

There is a group of individuals who have eagerly assisted LIFE CIL with our Wheelchair Basketball event for the past several years. Not only do these individuals volunteer their time for the day of the event and assist us with our silent auction, but they also put together amazing baskets that become part of our silent auction to raise money for LIFE CIL.

Epsilon Sigma Alpha (ESA) is an international service organization comprised of members just like you – busy people who share a passion for community service. ESA provides the opportunity to meet new people, grow as a person, and make a difference in the lives of others. The Tau Tau chapter is a fun-loving group, working together to serve communities in DeWitt, McLean, and Macon Counties of Illinois. We are grateful for their time, assistance and donations.

LIFE CIL appreciates ESA Tau Tau Chapter and what they do not only for us, but for the communities they serve. Thanks to their community service, they are the 2017 Volunteer of the Year Award recipient.

Congratulations to Epsilon Sigma Alpha Tau Tau Chapter on being LIFE CIL’s Volunteer of the Year Award winner for 2017!
2017 Leader of Tomorrow Award

Serene Helbig is a student at Heartland Community College, and also serves as an Office Assistant while pursuing her Administrative Office Professional Associates in Applied Science degree. Additionally, she has been a part of Heartland’s Project RISE, an educational support program that offers a variety of services to assist students who are committed to academic success in becoming familiar with the Heartland Community College campus and accomplishing their educational goals.

Serene has volunteered her time to help LIFE CIL present at Bloomington Junior High School about disability awareness, where she shared her experiences and helped the kids learn how to better communicate with people with disabilities. Serene also assists LIFE CIL by making sure students at Heartland Community College are aware of our services and events. Her outreach includes not only referring students with disabilities to us for services, but also personally escorting students up to LIFE CIL’s table during Heartland events and introducing them to us. Serene is a great disability advocate, calling out discrimination and bad word choices to others, making sure that everyone understands that people with disabilities are people first. She understands the Independent Living philosophy and definitely stands out to us as a rising star, a true advocate who is fighting for the rights of persons with disabilities every day.

Congratulations to Serene Helbig, 2017 Leader of Tomorrow Award winner!

2017 Distinguished Leadership Award

The Distinguished Leadership Award is fairly new, with only two of these awards given before. This award is given to someone who exemplifies leadership to the Disability Rights Movement as a whole.

LIFE Center for Independent Living presents the 2017 Distinguished Leadership Award to our keynote speaker, Amber Smock. Amber is the Director of Advocacy at Access Living in Chicago, where she has worked for over twelve years. During this time, Amber has demonstrated her leadership through involvement in various organizations such as the Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission, the Cook County Commission on Human Rights, and Chicago ADAPT. She also serves on the Statewide Independent Living Council’s Advocacy Advisory group.
and is co-chair of the Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living Advocacy Committee.

Many of you may know Amber from the advocacy alert emails you get, urging you to contact your legislators about key events or bills that affect persons with disabilities. It is through this medium that Amber assists other CILs with information and easy access to advocacy issues and, therefore, makes all of our jobs a little easier. Amber has exhibited her leadership skills in the Capitol building during numerous rallies and legislative days, taking new advocates under her wing and showing them the way. And she doesn’t stop there! She is involved in many other committees and social media forums that educate, inform, motivate and empower both advocates and persons with disabilities alike.

Amber has received numerous awards for her leadership, including the Justin Dart Lead On! Award, the Paul G. Hearne Leadership Award, the Best Deaf Activist Award, and many more.

For her outstanding leadership in the disability rights movement here in Illinois, in the United States, and beyond, we proudly present her with the 2017 Distinguished Leadership Award. Congratulations Amber!

2017 President’s Award

The President’s Award is to be given to recognize outstanding service to LIFE Center for Independent Living over a long period of time, and is awarded at the president’s prerogative. It is not given every year, but this year it is being awarded to someone who has served the Center for over 21 years.

This person came to the center when it was just in existence for 11 years. She came with remarkable enthusiasm and a skill set that the Center needed at that time. Her budgeting skills are legendary as she ensured that the Center become more solvent. Even in the face of State funding issues, the Center was able to weather the fiscal climate as a result of her crunching and re-crunching the budget. She has methodically built a staff that has shared her vision and expanded the services to people with disabilities.

Under her direction the current board of directors is the most trained and committed to the Center’s mission. The board has become accustomed to hearing yearly audit reports of no findings. This year LIFE CIL had
the experience of undergoing a full on-site Compliance Review which included programs, administration, and fiscal operations of the Center. LIFE CIL was one of the few centers that was given a rating of NO FINDINGS.

I had the privilege of seeing the staff receive the news of no findings. To see the looks of pride from them made me realize that Gail Kear has been an excellent Executive Director who has fostered a board and a staff that are proud of their work and the Center. They are indeed committed to the Center.

Gail is in the process of retiring within the next year. The board and staff are deeply sorry that she is leaving, but she has left a sound legacy through her dedicated service to the LIFE Center. In recognition of her dedicated service to LIFE Center, we congratulate Gail as the recipient of the President’s Award for 2017.

Congratulations to Gail Kear for being this year’s President’s Award recipient!

To our awardees...

You have all set wonderful examples in our community through the work you do, the voices you make heard, and the compassion you have for others. We appreciate your time, your determination and your dedication to advancing independence for people with disabilities.

Your actions, your words and your efforts support the mission of LIFE Center for Independent Living and we are honored to present you with these awards. You are a role model for others, we hope you will continue the good work and others will follow your lead. We are looking forward to what next year brings!
At least 51% of our Board of Directors and Staff members must be persons with disabilities. They govern and guide our Center and serve as strong advocates and role models for independent living and disability rights.

OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Board members serve one-, two-, or three-year terms and must be elected by LIFE CIL’s members or be appointed by the Board President. Officers are elected by the Board of Directors for two-year terms.

**Donna Evans,** President
**Cathy Ahart,** Vice President
**Nancy Warner,** Secretary
**John Evans,** Treasurer

Wes Cowden
Erin Engle
Cindy Hauk
Renee Ingalsbe
Vasu Kalla
Melissa Kearney

Nancy Littell
Jim Martin
Samuela Perez
Kevin Roberts
Cheryl Strong

OUR STAFF MEMBERS

**Gail Kear,** Executive Director
**Meri Helbig,** Program Director
**Rickielee Benecke,** Advocacy and Advancement Director
**Brianne Anderson,** Administrative Services Director
**Keith Adams,** Custodian
**Georgene Chissell,** Independent Living Advocate
**Norma Espino,** Secretary
**Vicky Hogan,** Community Living Advocate
**Andrea Kindseth,** Community Reintegration Advocate
**Kim Tarkowski,** Vision Access Advocate
**Shannon Tarkowski,** Transportation Specialist
LEARN MORE ABOUT US

Check us out on the web, where you can learn about:
• Upcoming events
• News related to LIFE CIL or our community
• Learn more about our programs and services
• Meet our staff
• Locate your legislators
• Apply to be a volunteer
• Apply to be a Personal Assistant (PA)
• Contact us with questions or concerns

www.lifecil.org

Like us on Facebook! We’ll keep you updated with events in the community, news relating to disabilities, how you can help and get more involved, as well as some fun facts.

www.facebook.com/lifecil
This year members of the University of Illinois Wheelchair Basketball teams played a wheelchair basketball game against a team from a local gym, Be Strong. It was a great game and fun was had by all.

This year was our nineteenth year for this event and we raised the second highest amount of money for this event. This would not have been possible without all of the businesses, organizations and individuals who were involved and supported this event.

A special thank you to the University of Illinois Wheelchair Basketball Teams and their staff for continuing to work with us and make this event possible. As well as our home team that played against the U of I team, coaches and members of Be Strong:

- Rory Nolan, Coach
- Joshua Bales
- Brandon Bates
- Matt DeMatteo
- Logan Heisler
- Dylan Long
- James Monroe

- Brendan Quinn
- Marlene Shepherd
- Dalton Starkey
- Doug Whitted
- Drew Whitted
- Heather Wickenhauser
Wheelchair Basketball 2018 is set!

SATURDAY,
APRIL 7, 2018

At Kingsley Junior High School, 303 Kingsley, Normal, IL

Our 10th anniversary of this event!!
A BIG THANK YOU
TO OUR VOLUNTEERS
THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

We could not do everything we want or need to do without our volunteers. We appreciate your time and your efforts to help support our mission and services. We greatly appreciate each and every one of you!

Cathy Ahart
Joshua Bales
Brandon Bates
Caleb Bent
Margarite Brooks
Curran Brown
Jennifer Brown
Tony Brown
Netia Carey
Seth Carter
Wes Cowden
Carole Cox
Kelly Day
Matt DeMatteo
Erin Engle
Donna Evans
John Evans
Jeff Fritzen
Maureen Gilbert
Charles Goode
Cindy Hauk
Logan Heisler
Renee Ingalsbe
Martinez Johnson
Ryan Juguan
Vasu Kalla
Melissa Kearney
Collin LaFon

Michael Lee
Nancy Littell
Dylan Long
Jim Martin
Stella McMillan
James Monroe
Mak Nong
Rory Nolan
Kathy Owen
Brendan Quinn
Joyce Reed
Kevin Roberts
Leslie Romagnoli
Kate Rougeau
Frank Salata
Jo Salata
Cynthia Shepherd
Marlene Shepherd
Dalton Starkey
Dale Strassheim
Cheryl Strong
Patrick Tomic
Wilson Velasquez
Joy Voorhees
Justin Volk
Nancy Warner
Wayne White
Doug Whitted
Drew Whitted
Heather Wickenhauser
Carly Wilson
OUR GENEROUS DONORS

The following individuals, businesses and organizations made a contribution to LIFE CIL between July 1, 2016 and June 30, 2017. These contributions include both in-kind and monetary donation to the Center.

A&W/Long John Silvers
Susan Aaron
AB Hatchery
Judith Addicks
Advocate at Home
Janet Amis
John Anderson
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Anonymous (several)
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Rodney and Carlotta Dryer  
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Phone: 815/844-1132

Hours: Monday – Thursday
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Located in the same building as Pontiac Township Supervisor

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