
E-LIFELINES WINTER 2022



Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

As 2022 draws to a close, I want to wish everyone a safe and happy holiday season. Our year at LIFE CIL has been one filled with success in continuing our mission to advance the equality and integration of all persons with disabilities.

One of LIFE CIL's core services is advocacy. Advocacy seeks to ensure that all people can: Have their voice heard on issues that are important to them. Protect and promote their rights. Have their views and wishes genuinely considered when decisions are being made about their lives.

Our team has worked hard this year advocating on the following:

- rights of people in nursing homes during COVID
- increased home and community-based services needed for seniors to allow for more community living choices instead of institutionalization
- low-income and accessible housing needs
- accessible design options for outdoor dining and business expansions
- need for home modifications funding for persons with disabilities
- legislative accessibility at the State Capitol
- input into ADA transition plans in local governments
- transportation barriers for people with disabilities in rural areas
- teaching 8 people with disabilities how to self-advocate

LIFE CIL's staff spent over 415 hours this year advocating for these and many other areas. If you would like to learn more about advocacy and how you can help further our mission, please contact Conan at our Bloomington office, and sign up for our next Community Advocacy Training class.

We look forward to continuing our work and wish you a very happy new year!

Sincerely,

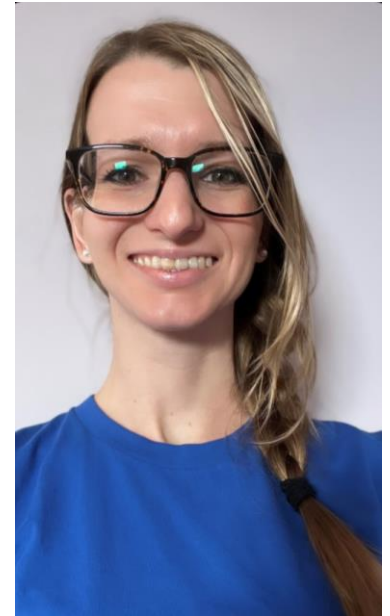
Rickielee Benecke
Executive Director

MEET OUR NEW TEAM MEMBERS!

We are so excited to announce we have added two new team members, bringing us back to a full staff! It has been quite some time since we have had all available positions filled in both offices.

Alyssia Christ is our new Independent Living Advocate in our Pontiac office. She joined our team the first week of October. Her primary responsibilities include assisting individuals with disabilities to identify and achieve their goals in becoming more independent. She provides information and referral, independent living skills training, individual advocacy, peer mentoring, and transition services that help prepare youth to transition into life.

She has an Associate's Degree in General Education from Kankakee Community College. She has a passion for helping others, being a role model, and engaging with and educating community members. Alyssia believes that individuals with disabilities can do anything. Alyssia, herself, has worked hard to stay independent as she navigated her own transition into adult life, college, and working independently. She is married, is a "Fur-mom" to her pets and loves making crafts!



Sydney Denney is LIFE CIL's newest team member, joining us in the Bloomington office as our new Administrative Assistant. She had been working at LIFE CIL through a temp agency and officially became a member of the LIFE CIL team in late November. Her responsibilities include assisting with our equipment loan program, directing consumers to the proper advocates to assist with their needs, and assisting with our vision program and other staff accommodations. Her previous professional experience includes over 10 years of providing excellent customer service. Sydney has worked with diverse people in all sorts of settings: from grocery stores, to an office, to guiding guests into escape rooms! During her time living in Phoenix, AZ, she also worked for Arizona Autism, providing respite services for families of children with Autism. Her experience and skills will help maintain a systematic flow in the office.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS!

In October, LIFE CIL Members voted for five new individuals to join our Board of Directors starting in January 2023. The ballots were counted and results were announced at our Annual Meeting. The following individuals were newly elected and will join our Board of Directors starting in January. Congratulations to each of them, we look forward to seeing what they will do to help advance LIFE CIL's mission. Read our next article to learn more about becoming a Member!

Mary Darling Mary is interested in serving LIFE CIL's board because advocating and improving the rights of individuals living with disabilities is a passion to her. She says that having a multifaceted disability diagnosis gives her a different perspective that she would love to share and teach the community about. Mary has a multidisciplinary degree in Psychology and Special Education specializing in intellectual disabilities. She is currently a board member and artist at Threshold to Hope, a non-profit organization that offers hope and healing through art for low-income individuals and persons with disabilities. Mary also volunteers at her church, educating members about living with hidden disabilities and for the ISU music therapy program, where she helps educate students about working with people with disabilities. She is also a former LIFE CIL Community Advocacy Training class graduate.

Brittany McLean Brittany is an ASL sign language interpreter who recently graduated from ICC last May. She has a heart to help as many people's lives as possible. Brittany has an "invisible" disability herself, and understands the barriers faced by people with disabilities. She describes herself as having skills in customer service and understanding how to talk to others so that they can understand as well. Brittany works well with the Deaf community and looks forward to helping LIFE CIL.

Nick Pedernana Nick applied to serve on LIFE CIL's board because he loves the sense of community that LIFE CIL fosters and enjoys being a part of it. He wishes to give back to the organization that has given him so much: the courage to grow as a leader in this community and at work, in addition to improving his quality of life and ability to make some of the most meaningful connections in his life. Nick is a person with a disability and takes part in the Adult Peer Support Group as a peer leader where he has been nicknamed the group's "evangelist" for how much he shares the mission of LIFE CIL with others. Nick has a background in tech support and customer service experience.

Christina Sansone Christina shares that she has been disabled since birth and knows what it's like to have various disabilities. Her goal is to help disability and deaf communities come together by bridging the gaps and finding ADA friendly accommodations as well as advocating for them. Christina moved to this area 2 years ago and is familiar with LIFE CIL from being provided resources for the low vision program after utilizing the Equipment Loan Closet. She currently works for a German automobile company that is a largely disability diverse employer. Additionally, she is a strong advocate and has worked with deaf schools and worked as an employment specialist for the deaf and blind plus disabled clients for 25 years. Christina lists her strengths as being a strong advocate for the deaf/blind, ability to research resources, as well as grant writing and human resource experience.

Shari Weitekamp Shari has dedicated her life to serving individuals with disabilities and their families. As a speech-language pathologist for over 20 years, she has worked with individuals from birth-to-adult to improve their communication and cognitive skills for increased independence. As Pastor of Special Needs at Eastview Church, she strives to promote an inclusive environment where individuals with disabilities are not only welcomed and accepted but are a valued part of the

congregation. Shari says it is her mission to collaborate with community organizations to serve, partner with, and empower individuals with disabilities. Shari worked with a former LIFE CIL employee in the mid-90's to develop a Buddy Program at Metcalf school to foster friendships between kids with and without hearing impairments and received the LIFE CIL Volunteer of the Year Award for her efforts.

These five individuals will make our Board of Directors complete for the new year, joining our current Board:

Officers:

- **Liz Malone**, President
- **Erin Engle**, Past President
- **Monica Innis**, Vice President
- **Jim Martin**, Treasurer
- **Wes Cowden**, Secretary

Directors:

- **Amber Broad**
- **Melissa Kearney**
- **Megan Klemme**

If you are interested in becoming a Board member, please complete the application at <https://www.lifecil.org/application-board-of-directors/>.

Be a Friend for LIFE: Become a Member

We would like to thank all our friends for their support. We hope we have been able to assist you and/or someone you care about through our programs and services. We ask that you continue your support by becoming a member or renewing your membership.

Why become a LIFE CIL member? LIFE CIL helps people with disabilities lead active, independent lives in the community. By becoming a member, you are supporting the Independent Living philosophy, our mission, and our organization. Help us help others! *Your membership allows us to better assist over 3,000 people each year!*

What do I get for my membership fees? As a member of LIFE CIL you will receive *invitations to our events* throughout the year, including our Annual Meeting in the fall. You will have *the right to vote in the election of our Board of Directors*. You will receive a *LIFE CIL t-shirt* and *window cling*. LIFETIME members additionally receive a LIFETIME Membership Certificate.

LIFE CIL is a charitable, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, which means your membership fee could be tax deductible, as the law allows.

How do I become a member?

Complete a *membership application* in one of 3 easy ways.

1. Online: <https://www.lifecil.org/application-for-membership-online/>,

2. Print off a PDF at <https://www.lifecil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Membership-Application.pdf>, OR
3. Contact Brianne by phone 309/663-5433 or email (brianne@lifecil.org) to receive a membership application in the [mail](#).

How do I pay my Membership dues? Membership Dues may be paid in full online through PayPal or, you can mail a check payable to “LIFE CIL.” You can also come by the office and drop off cash or check. Please make it clear that the payment is for membership.

All memberships (except LIFETIME) will be valid for one year. Financial assistance is available for those who wish to become individual members but are unable to pay the fee.

A Few Reminders:

LIFE CIL is NOT an Emergency Response agency.

We do our best to return calls within 1-2 business days, but longer waits may occur in busier months. We thank you for your patience.

LIFE CIL is a SCENT/CHEMICAL – FREE ENVIRONMENT.

We ask that you refrain from applying scents such as cologne or perfume and limit your use of other heavily scented hygiene products.

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) is still being studied but is acknowledged by many doctors “as a medical disorder triggered by exposures to chemicals, electromagnetic forces, or other environmental triggers. This often begins with a short-term, severe chemical exposure, such as a chemical spill, or a longer-term exposure.”

Side effects can range from mild to very severe for those with MCS. Reported symptoms include headache, fatigue, dizziness, nausea, congestion, itching, sneezing, sore throat, chest pain, changes in heart rhythm, breathing problems, muscle pain or stiffness, skin rash, diarrhea, bloating, gas, confusion, trouble concentrating, memory problems, and mood changes.

Thank you for your cooperation!

A Consumer IMPACT Story

“LIFE CIL has impacted me in so many ways that I cannot describe it.”

~ Steph



Steph

When I first became so disabled that I was no longer able to work, I had a lot of fear and so much shame that I cannot even describe it. When I called LIFE CIL in October 2021 and spoke with the Independent Living Advocate (ILA), I felt an instant connection and that she would mentor me through the SSDI application process. The ILA showed me where to go to do the application, taught me more about what to expect in the process, and walked me through next steps as issues big and small were encountered.

Beyond providing help with my SSDI application, LIFE CIL also has an Equipment Loan Closet where I could get needed items for free. Back in March 2022, I had plans to go to a Billie Eilish concert. My doctors said they weren't sure it would be safe, but that I could go if I had a wheelchair that would allow me to elevate my feet and if I stayed in it. LIFE CIL loaned me an adjustable wheelchair with elevating leg rests, and we had a great time!

The peer support I received was also meaningful in my journey. Both LIFE CIL's ILA, and the Adult Peer Support Group helped me understand that being disabled isn't all that I am, but it's still okay for me to have a bad day. There's so much toxic positivity that goes around where people say, "Well, you have to have one good thing about a day." The peer group members have never forced me to do that because they know that some days are just crummy. I'm so grateful for all the support!

The ILA and the Adult Peer Group continue to reach out to support me, even though my doctors' appointments now conflict with the normal group schedule and I cannot attend as often. It's still nice to get the invites, even if I have to decline them. I really enjoy being able to talk to other people that "get it" within the support group that we have.

The only thing I would change is to see LIFE CIL do more advertising! A lot of people don't know about LIFE CIL, and I want that to change! I post about LIFE CIL quite frequently and I talk about their services all the time!

REMINDER REGARDING EQUIPMENT LOAN

We have a number of loans that are past due and we have not heard from the individuals who have borrowed the equipment. Without the equipment, we are not able to assist others in the community who need the item(s) to be more mobile and independent.

Our inventory is getting very low on many items and we have not had the items that many individuals are needing.

If you have equipment that you loaned from us, have had it longer than the 3 or 6 months, and still need it, please call our office at 309/663-5433 or email brianne@lifecil.org to see what other options might be available to you.

If you no longer need the item(s), please call 309/663-5433 and schedule a time to return the equipment to us to help others. We appreciate it!

We Still Accept Donations of Durable Medical Equipment

If you have any durable medical equipment that you no longer need and would like to donate to LIFE CIL, below is a list of items we can accept. Please call to complete a donation form over the phone and schedule a time to drop it off to us. Thank you!

The items need to be in good condition and easy to clean.

- Bedrails (that go under the mattress)
- Canes (straight or quad)
- Commodes
- Crutches
- Hip Kit Pieces (grabber, extended shoe horn, sock aid, dressing stick)
- Knee scooters
- Portable ramps
- Raised toilet seats (with or without arms)
- Shower Seats (chairs, stools or tub transfer benches)
- Slide boards
- Toilet rails
- Transport or Companion Chairs
- Tub Grab Bars (that clamp on to the tub)
- Walker baskets
- Walker trays
- Walkers (wheeled, hemi or seated)
- Wheelchairs

WINTER WEATHER SAFETY

Winter storms can be dangerous – cold temperatures, power outages, loss of communication services and snow packed and icy roads. Below are some safety tips for you and your loved ones to keep in mind this winter from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Indoors:

- Stay indoors as much as possible – protect yourself and your loved ones during a winter storm
- Heat your home safely – have extra blankets or coats, firewood for your fireplace and a portable space heater with automatic shut-off switches and non-glowing elements.
- Light your home safely – have battery-powered flashlights or lanterns ready; if you use candles, never leave the candles unattended
- Conserve heat – avoid opening doors or windows, close off unneeded rooms, stuff towels or rags in cracks under doors to keep the heat in
- Keep a water supply – leave all your faucets open and continuously dripping to avoid frozen pipes and allow heated air to reach pipes by opening your cabinet doors beneath sinks
- Eat well-balanced meals to help you stay warmer and avoid alcoholic or caffeinated drinks that will make you lose your body heat quicker

Outdoors:

- Dress warmly and stay dry – layer in loose fitting clothing; wear a hat, gloves, scarf, water-resistant coat and shoes
- Know the signs of frostbite and hypothermia –
 - **Frostbite:** white or grayish-yellow skin area, skin that feels unusually firm or waxy, and numbness. Frostbite can lead to a loss of feeling and color in the areas it affects, usually the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers, and toes. Frostbite can permanently damage the body, and severe cases can lead to amputation.
 - **Hypothermia:** shivering, exhaustion or feeling very tired, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech, and drowsiness. In babies, signs include bright red, cold skin, and very low energy.
- Stay off the ice - Keep your steps and walkways as free of ice as it is very dangerous and often leads to falls and injuries.
 - Consider using pet-safe salt to prevent ice build-up. Some rock salt has jagged edges and can cut the pads on our pets' feet.
- Avoid over-exerting yourself and stay safe during cleanup - cold weather puts an extra strain on the heart so be careful when shoveling or doing other hard work in the cold. Dress warmly and work slowly to avoid excess sweating.
- Be safe during outdoor activities – do not leave skin exposed in the cold, try not to sweat, be prepared to take emergency shelter

- Be careful while traveling – do not travel in low visibility conditions, avoid ice-covered roads, and be extremely careful on bridges and overpasses (they are the first areas to freeze!). Always have extra clothes and blankets with you and let someone know where you are going and when to expect you so they can notify authorities if needed.
- Know what to do if you get stranded – move anything you need from the trunk to the passenger area, wrap yourself in blankets or extra clothing, stay awake, run the motor with the heat on for about 10 minutes per hour, make sure the exhaust is not being blocked and keep moving your arms and legs to keep your circulation going. Huddle with others to keep warm if you are not traveling alone.

All of this and more can be found at

<https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/duringstorm/indoorsafety.html>

A Note About That Sidewalk...

Each winter numerous children and adults who are struck by vehicles and injured while walking in the plowed roadway. Most of those who are injured state they were walking in the road because the sidewalks were impassable.

Every community has different rules (written or not) about who is responsible for sidewalk upkeep. If you're not sure, call your streets and sidewalk maintenance department, or City Codes enforcement. Someone there will be able to tell you what the rule is for your community. Regardless of the ordinance in your town, it's just plain nice to shovel and/or salt your sidewalk if you are able. If you have neighbors with mobility concerns, consider offering to shovel their portion of the sidewalk as well.

People of all abilities in our communities use the sidewalks. The very young and old, those with disabilities, and even parents carrying the unwieldy toddler or pushing a stroller will thank you!

Personal Assistants make all the difference!

A personal assistant, or PA, is an individual who assists a person with a disability in activities of daily living. The personal assistant works under the direction of their employer (the person with the disability) and may assist the person with personal care, meal preparation, shopping, errands, and housekeeping. Duties will vary depending on the person. PAs help individuals with disabilities live independently at home instead of in a nursing home or other institution.

LIFE CIL is always looking for individuals to work as PAs. Print an application from our website (<https://www.lifecil.org/employment/personal-assistant/>) or call and have an application mailed to you.

Contact Vicky with any questions about the PA program! 309-663-5433, x 205

The pay rate for PAs with the DRS Home Services Program recently increased to \$17.25 per hour. Workers won't see this rate increase until their first check in January 2023.

COMING UP: STAY CONNECTED

LIFE CIL offices will be **CLOSED Friday, December 23 through Monday, January 2**. We will be back in the offices on Tuesday, January 3, 2023. From everyone at LIFE CIL, we wish you and your family and friends a wonderful holiday season! Have a safe and happy ending to 2022 and a wonderful start to 2023!

****Due to the weather forecast, LIFE CIL will also be closed on Thursday, December 22****

The Board of Directors will be coming up with a calendar of event to raise funds for LIFE CIL. Please keep an eye out on our website (www.lifecil.org), Facebook page (www.facebook.com/lifecil), and future Newsletters to see what's coming up and how you can help. We appreciate your support!

Locations & Contact

Learn more about [LIFE CIL](http://www.lifecil.org), events, advocacy opportunities, & more at: <https://www.lifecil.org> and <https://www.facebook.com/lifecil>

Please reach out to us via phone, email, or message us on Facebook with any questions you may have about our services!

Bloomington

Phone: (309) 663-5433 / Toll-Free: (888) 543-3245
Fax: (309) 663-7024
2201 Eastland Drive, Suite 1
Bloomington, IL 61704

Pontiac

Phone: (815) 844-1132
601 North Ladd Street
Pontiac, IL 61764

If a friend sent this newsletter to you and you'd like to be added to our email list, give us a call or email us at brianne@lifecil.org.

We never sell or give away your information!





LIFE CIL funding provided in whole or in part by the Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services. The contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services, nor is it an endorsement.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Choose one: New Renewal

Individual's Name: _____ Date of Application: _____

Business (if applicable): _____

Title: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone Number: (____) _____ Voice TTY VRS

Email Address: _____

I/We endorse the mission of LIFE Center and want to become a member(s). **Financial assistance is available for persons with disabilities. (Choose one)**

As a thank you, a LIFE CIL T-shirt is included in your Individual, Family, or LIFETIME membership. If you would like a shirt, please include sizes for each person. We will reach out to make arrangements to get the shirts to you!

Individual Annual Membership (1 person) **\$10, T-shirt Size** _____

Family Annual Membership (3 or more members of your family) **\$25**

Please provide names of additional family members, and **T- shirt sizes**

_____, size _____, size _____

_____, size _____, size _____

Not-for-Profit Business/Agency Annual Membership **\$50**

For Profit Business Annual Membership **\$75**

LIFETIME membership **\$200**

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY:

NOTE TO STAFF: Date and Initial All

Date Received: _____

Entered in Database: _____

Thank you Sent: _____

Ballot Sent (FALL): _____

CONTINUED



WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT LIFE CIL?

Please check any that you are interested in and for which you'd like more information (check all that apply):

- Individual Services Offered
- Peer Mentoring/Support Groups
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Workshops, Trainings and Learning Opportunities
- E-Newsletter (please provide your email address):
- Community Services Offered
- Advocacy (Individual or Systems)
- Board/Committee Service (Volunteer)
- Donation Opportunities

Please make checks payable to:

LIFE Center for Independent Living or LIFE CIL

Enclosed is a payment of \$_____ for my/our membership fee(s).

Return your form and payment to LIFE CIL to the following address:

LIFE CIL
2201 Eastland Drive, Suite 1
Bloomington, IL 61704-7923

Please choose one:

- I/We agree to be recognized as members of LIFE CIL.
- I/We wish to remain anonymous and not be recognized as members of LIFE CIL.

***We appreciate our friends.
Thank you for your support!***

Membership Application Revised 10/2022