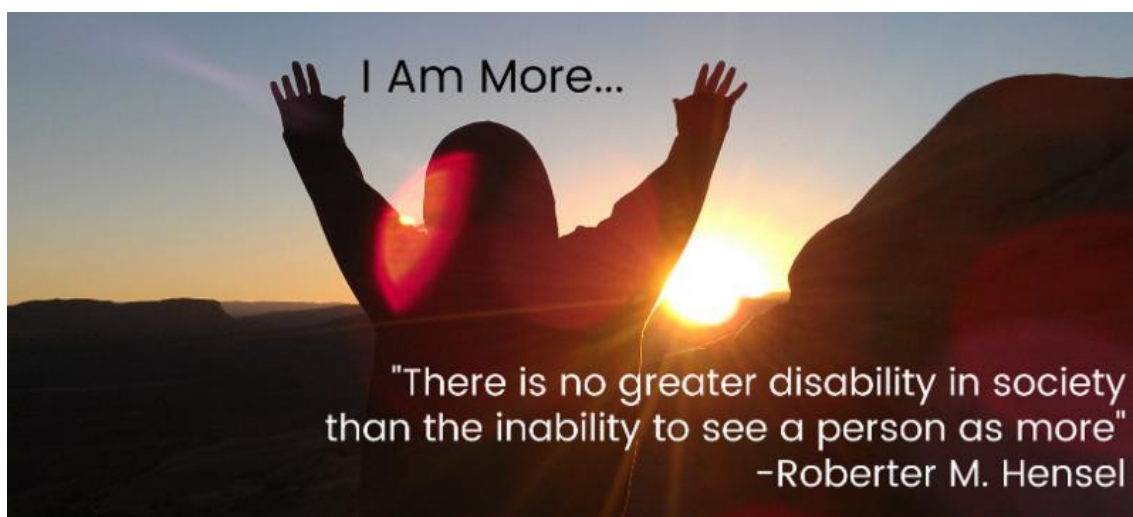




*"Maximizing the independence of people with disabilities through advocacy, peer support, training, transportation and community education"*



## Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges Fall 2017



### What does Independence mean to you?

We want to hear from YOU! Tell us what you think - click here on [Share your thoughts!](#) to tell us what independence means to you and we'll share your response in our next newsletter! From personal experience

### DMD Youth Reach for the Stars

"I Am More" theme motivates and empowers When you have a powerhouse like our own Ranita Wilks, Independent Living Skills and Peer Counseling Specialist for **Independence, Inc.**, on your team, you can expect great things - and great things happened indeed! Our 16th Annual Disability Mentoring Day, was our largest to date with 80 youth participants, 42 businesses providing mentoring opportunities and a full house of over 170 total guests! With the theme "I am More" in hand, graffiti style artwork and media, and a whole lot of positive energy, we packed into the DoubleTree Hilton Hotel Ballroom, enjoyed a great meal, networked with local business representatives



or poems, to definitions, quotes or insights - they are all welcome! Join the conversation!

## Picture This! DMD 2017



and educators, met some wonderful youth and experienced an amazing motivational keynote address with artistry and entertainment from Richard Hight. From the enthusiasm of the students, the laughter of the audience and the huge 6ft one-of-a-kind art piece created on stage, to the photo ops with the speaker and his daughter Avery, the volunteers that filled the hallway and the meaningful one-on-one conversations that took place at the end, this was a Disability Mentoring Day to remember. DMD is a nationwide effort to break the barriers between young adults with disabilities and the employment they wish to seek. Here at **Independence, Inc.** we coordinate a morning of job shadowing and mentoring through local business volunteers, matching the youth with the career of their choice, then follow with a banquet to celebrate them and the unique strengths and talents each has to offer. It's a day of learning, growth, vision and networking. Thank you to ALL of the many hands, donors, participants, supporters and coordinators that made DMD 2017 possible!



**Above:** some of the 2017 DMD student participants representing Baldwin, Eudora and Wellsville, posing in front of the artwork produced by Richard Hight

**To the Left:**

**Top** - Richard Hight giving his keynote after creating his original work of art "I am More"

**2nd** - Ms. Wheelchair Kansas Deb Young has some face time with Richard Hight after his encouraging keynote

**3rd** - Richard talks with a DMD youth participant after the event

**Left** - 4 of our wonderful Sigma Nu volunteers from our SFC partnership with KU

**Bottom** - Co-director Jill Enyart with Independence, Inc. staff and guests.

**Below:** Ranita Wilks, DMD coordinator with Co-Director, Bob Mikesic and DMD guest





## Support Independence, Inc. This Season

Give the gift of independence to youth who want to work

*Have you thought about giving to Independence, Inc. but want to make sure your money directly supports one of our valuable and growing programs? How about supporting our Youth Employment Program (YEP!) or DMD 2018?*

Here at **Independence, Inc.** we care about youth and their path to independence. And we could use your help!

YEP! is a program that matches area youth ages 15-21 with members of the business community for mentoring and job skills development and possible permanent employment. We cover the match-making, the continual support and the paychecks while the employer provides the opportunity for the young person to gain the experience necessary to put them on the path to successful employment. We have the pleasure of working with and watching our YEP! kids like Patricia Jarvis (pictured above) develop skills, create goals, work hard and achieve success every day here at Independence, Inc.



**Disability Mentoring Day** is a separate event but shares the same mission and goal: to prepare youth for a future of successful job placement and ongoing employment through job-shadowing and mentoring relationships. Independence, Inc. is the primary coordinator and sponsor for DMD. Help support our 17th Annual DMD now by giving to this great cause! (And then come join us in the celebration banquet, October 2018!)

Read more about DMD by visiting our website: **DMD 2017**

**Above:** Ranita Wilks giving a check to

Won't you join us?

Learn more about your YEP! program by visiting our website: ***Independence, Inc. Youth Employment Program***"

To donate now and help local youth get the job skills training they desire, click on the image to the right. Thank you!

YEP! participants.

**Above Left:** Baldwin City YEP! participant Patricia Jarvis was hired for permanent employment by the Baldwin City Market



## Reliable Transportation: One Key to Independent Living



Getting where we need to go. It's a fundamental part of life, work, play, education and recreation. For Douglas County residents who are unable to drive, the use of a trusted source of transportation is vital to their independence and well-being.

Independence, Inc. Transportation Manager LaNeece Jardon and her team of drivers, coordinate and provide thousands of rides each year to area residents, "roughly 490 per month depending on the demand at the time" says LaNeece. "Most of the rides are medical" she says. And the 2nd largest request for transportation? To get to and from work. That's just how we met Tony Schweger, transporting him via our general transportation services as he worked to build the business he shares with his family, Anthony's Beehive, now operating as a full-on brick and mortar store, located in the Malls Shopping Center, 711 W. 23rd Street, Lawrence. Anthony's is a story of passion, determination, hard work and overcoming obstacles to create an independent and fulfilling life for himself. Want to read more about Anthony's Beehive? Check out the CNN story and the more recent Journal-World article here:

***Read Anthony's story on CNN money here***

***Read Anthony's story in the Journal-World here***

The Independence, Inc. General Transportation Department offers door-to-door transportation throughout Douglas County as well as rides to medical appointments in Kansas City and Topeka. We operate Monday-Friday from 8:00-5:00 (last ride at 4:00) and fares start at just \$3 per ride. We accept Medicaid for non-emergency medical rides. Need a ride? Call 785-843-5576



# Independence Works! Independent Living Skills Training Helps Set Consumers Up for Success



## **Karla Westphal's Pet Sitting Services takes shape with a dream, support and a healthy dose of hard work.**

Some ventures begin with a dream or an idea, some with a passion or a vision, some to fulfill a need and some with all of the above. Add in an extra dose of the love of pets and you've got something good on your hands. Meet Karla Westphal. Following a transient ischemic attack (TIA or mini-stroke) in 2013, Karla was unable to return to her place of employment. With a need for work and income,

Karla decided it was time to explore self-employment options and landed on two ideas stemming from longtime dreams: to work with pets or own a flower shop. When pressed by her husband, Matt, as to what her lifelong dreams were and what she really would like to do the most, Karla decided that her passion for animals won out over flower arranging. "I have always wanted to work with animals, especially cats" says Karla, "I'm a cat person."

For Karla, independence means the ability to do something for herself and not rely on anyone to do it for her. With the love of caring for her own cat as inspiration, Karla set off on a journey to do just that - to create a job for herself that was hers - her dream, her vision, her enthusiasm and her own hard work. Karla Westphal's Pet Sitting Services is the culmination of that dream.

But pursuing independence and self-advocacy certainly doesn't mean going the whole process alone. Support is the key to success and Karla looked for this support when it was needed. "I had a lot of questions about getting started (in her business), like how I was going to set it all up, how to fill out the paperwork and make it all come together".

When Karla recognized this need for support along the way, she turned to **Independence, Inc.** for assistance. "Staff there at Independence, Inc. helped me to get the paper work set up, details worked out, and especially helpful was that a volunteer in the computer lab worked with me to get my social media set up, like my business Facebook page". For Karla, all of the hard work was well worth it. "It's a very rewarding and challenging job that brings me comfort and therapy" says Karla. "I enjoy that I can go to the houses, take care of the animals, and feel relaxed. It brings a smile to my face". Karla has been in business now for over 3 years and has many satisfied clients as testament to her hard work and responsibility. To reach Karla for pet-sitting, visit her Facebook page [Karla Westphal's Pet Sitting Services](#)

**Need computer-based assistance? Our computer lab here at Independence, Inc. is open to the public weekdays 8:30-5:00 and is staffed by a volunteer ready to assist with your computer needs, every Thursday from 2:30-4:30.**

**Top:** Karla and her husband, Matt Westphal

**Right:** One of Karla's fun, furry, feline friends



TOGETHER WE CAN  
MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Contribute Now



It's that time of year - As 2017 enters it's final phase and thoughts of holiday's, family, get-together's, gifts and giving are on the minds of most, we here at **Independence, Inc.** are busy touching base with supporters, reaching out to those that believe in our mission, and giving thanks to all who have followed us, volunteered with us, referred consumers to us, and of course,

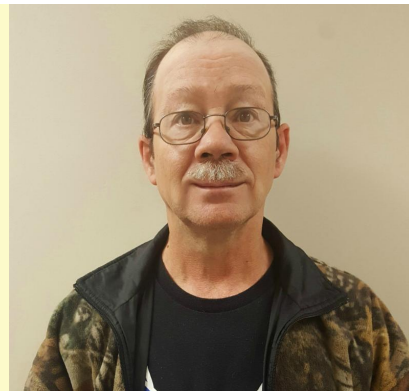
financially supported us over the past year. Your support, in whatever form, is greatly appreciated and we **THANK YOU** for giving of your time, money and resources! Whether you are hearing about us for the first time, have been a part of our organization, or have financially supported us in the past, we would love for you to come on board as an end-of-the-year giver to Independence, Inc. Our services like the ones you read about here, and the outcomes they produce are essential to people with disabilities in Lawrence, KS and surrounding areas that we serve. But we can't do it without the support of people like you! Won't you consider giving to our annual fund? Call us or visit website if you want more information about Independence, Inc. and the services we provide. Ready to give? Click the link above.

## In the Spotlight: New Staff at Independence, Inc.



### Welcome Staff Johnson!

Help us welcome our new Independent Living Specialist, Staff Johnson to Independence, Inc.! Staff is from Leavenworth, KS and received his Bachelors of Arts in Philosophy from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. He is currently pursuing his Master's in Divinity at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. "I am deeply honored to be a part of the team" says Johnson, of his new position, who's life passion he says is "to help impact the lives of others through a ministry of hope and encouragement". "I am looking forward to serving the people of



### Welcome New Drivers!

Transportation is a vital element when it comes to independent living and our fabulous transportation department here at **Independence, Inc.** is as valuable to us as it is to our consumers.

Welcome new drivers Dean Hodges (pictured above) and Larry Tyler (pictured below) to the team! We are glad you are here!





## We Got a Parking Lot, Shiny and New!

Thanks in part to a grant from the **Douglas County Community Foundation**, a hard-working crew was busy resurfacing our "tired out" (pun intended) parking lot this fall. From potholes and cracks to smooth and shiny, **Independence, Inc.** can now serve YOU even better with a smoother, safer entrance to our facility. Thank you DCCF and the crew at McConnell & Associates!



**Top:** Crew members with McConnell & Associates work in the cold and drizzle

**Above Right:** Before - Large cracks in the parking lot

**Above Left:** After - Shiny and smooth! We love our new lot!

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**Advocacy, Information & Referral:** Core Services Provide Step-by-Step Support in Increasing Independence Through Home Modifications

Consumer-directed  
care, self-identifying



needs, advocating for ones owns rights - these are beautiful things and exactly what we value and support here at **Independence, Inc.** We are at work in our communities to educate, equip and support community members with

disabilities to do just that - become independent. Last month our team worked with Ottawa resident, Melanie Herken, to coordinate and carry out a much-needed home modification: a complete gutting and rebuilding of her bathroom to accommodate the use of her wheelchair. "I am 43 years young and was diagnosed with MS at the age of 27" says Melanie, who has been utilizing a wheelchair as her sole means of mobility for a little over a year now. "I reached out to my insurance (Sunflower Health Plan) for home modification approval.

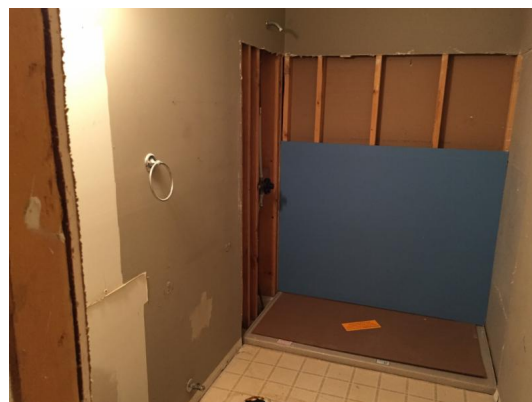
**Independence, Inc.** made contact and assessed my needs."

Co-Director Bob Mikesic and (now former) Independent Living Specialist Nabila Formusoh, assisted Melanie by doing the initial assessment to identify the needed modifications, contacted several contractors for bids and followed up on the progress throughout the process.

"Custom Home Design contracted to do the work, said Melanie," and within days they ordered supplies and provided a date of installation. I now have an accessible shower and sink that have improved my overall health".

Sunflower Health Plan covered nearly all of cost with additional assistance from the MS Society who donated an additional \$850 towards the cost of materials.

**Right:** The final product! Modifications included: widening the bedroom and bathroom doorways, installing a roll-in shower with a hand-held shower unit and installation of an accessible sink.



**Inset:** Melanie enjoying her new space!

**Top:** Before - a bathroom not fit for a wheelchair

**Above:** the demolition is complete! Now for the rebuild...







- Independence, Inc. staff began working on the Independence, Inc. Accessible Housing Program applications this Fall to provide grant assistance to renters with disabilities needing to make home modifications during Aug. 1, 2018 – July 31, 2019.
- Co-Director Bob Mikesic and an Access Task Force member met with the City of Lawrence, Planning and Development Director, the Code Enforcement Manager and a City Commissioner regarding enforcement of accessible parking requirements under the City Code and the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Independence Inc. staff reviewed and approved Assistive Technology grants through our Assistive Technology grant program, awarded by Grant Coordinator, Mary Ann Newton
- Independence, Inc. staff and Access Task Force members continue advocacy efforts with Regal Southwind Stadium 12 Theaters to improve their methods of identifying and reserving accessible seating.
- Collaborations took place this Fall between Independence, Inc. staff and local business owners to address accessibility issues such as an accessible entrance ramp at a restaurant, parking improvements at various businesses and accessible restroom stall doors at another restaurant.
- Staff worked on bid specifications for various Accessible Housing Program projects including Ottawa resident, Melanie Herken's home modification project highlighted

## Communities :

Mixed-ability workshop offers exploration of improvisational music-making



If you walked by **The Commons** on the KU campus on the mild late-summer evening of August 12th, your ears may have perked to a unique sound coming from inside. A mix of sounds actually, ringing, thumping and chirping from drums to a waterphone, cymbals to gongs, flutes to found objects and everything in between. And who was behind the magical mix of music? Community members with varying abilities and disabilities who came together for a week of experimenting with sound, learning about making music with limited mobility and culminating with a unique performance of improvisational sound. And what a beautiful sound it was. Lead by world-renowned composer, percussionist, artist and educator, Jesse Stewart (pictured above) and hosted by the Commons, AUMI-KU Inter Arts and **Independence, Inc.**, It was a night that the musicians, and those of us that attended, will not soon forget.



above.

## Follow Us



***Pictured to the right:*** Workshop participants create music and movement at the "Improvising Inclusive Music" workshop with Jesse Stewart



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