

Centerpoint

Taking Control of Tomorrow

SPRING ISSUE 2025

From the Director

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we reflect on the end of 2024 and the first quarter of 2025, there are many exciting updates to share from Options for Independent Living. We're proud to celebrate accomplishments that highlight the work we're doing to support individuals in their communities which you'll find through this newsletter.

At Options, we remain driven by our mission: to help people with disabilities remain independent and thrive in their communities. We continue to advocate for services that enhance accessibility and opportunity.

In February, our staff traveled to Madison to advocate on behalf of individuals with disabilities. With the changes in the federal landscape under the new presidential administration, there has been much speculation and concern regarding potential reductions in Medicaid and Medicare, particularly those that are critical to the independence of people with disabilities. While we have not yet seen any concrete proposals or cuts, we understand the anxiety that many people are feeling about how these changes could impact them.

Considering this uncertainty, I encourage you to reach out to your legislators and share how Medicaid or other long term care programs have positively impacted your life or how cuts would create challenges for you living independently. Your voice is powerful, and it is important that policymakers hear directly from the people whose lives are affected by these decisions. Below is a link to help you find your legislators and contact them directly.

Find out who is your Legislators through this link:
<https://maps.legis.wisconsin.gov/>.
Or you can also reach your legislators by calling the Legislative Hotline toll-free at 1-800-362-9472.

Thank you for being part of the Options family and for your continued support. We look forward to the opportunities ahead to continue making a meaningful impact in the lives of those we serve.

Thank you,
Josh Theis



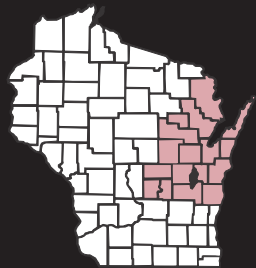
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Serving 17 counties in
Northeast Wisconsin
and the Fox Valley

In this Issue:

Remember to Vote!	2
IL Days at the Capital	2
Sensory Santa Event	3
Kitchen Skills Class	4
Virtual Peer Support	4
APRIL Peer Support	5
Join Act Now!	5
Benefit Success Story	6
Access to Adventure	6
Adaptive Adventures	7
-Huckleberry Hiking Cart	7
-Consumer Highlight	7
Join ILCW	8
LEND Program	9
Tech Closet News	10
-Hearing Amplifiers	10
TEPP Information	12
HOME Loan Program	13
PAS Program	13
WisLoan-Telework Loan	14
Directory	15
Mission Statement	16



A publication of:

options
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2025 Elections

Please Remember to Vote!

Your Voice Counts & is Needed!

2025 elections will soon be upon us. Statewide contests on the ballot will include a seat on the Wisconsin Supreme Court and an election for Superintendent of Public Instruction of Wisconsin. The election will also feature several other local and judicial elections. Please make sure you are registered to vote and be aware of where you can vote in your area. Below is information on upcoming elections in WI and how to make sure you are registered or how to register, find your polling place, how and when to apply for absentee voting, etc.

Remember, voting is a right! Please exercise your right to vote!

2025 Wisconsin elections are scheduled to be held on:

- **Tuesday, April 1, 2025:** General election

Statewide contests on the ballot will include a seat on the Wisconsin Supreme Court and an election for Superintendent of Public Instruction of Wisconsin. The election will also feature several other local and judicial elections. Please make sure you are registered to vote and be aware of where you can vote in your area. Below is information on upcoming elections in WI and how to make sure you are registered or how to register, find your polling place, how and when to apply for absentee voting, etc.

Remember, voting is a right! Please exercise your right to vote!

Justin Dart, the Father of the ADA, is quoted saying “Vote as if your life depended on it, cause it does!!!” ○



IL Days at the Capitol for 2025

Every year Options staff, Board members, and consumers meet with staff and Board from all the WI Independent Living Centers in Madison for a day of training and a day of meeting with our legislators. We call this IL Days. Options group met with over 20 of the 30 legislators/staff serving Options 17 county service area. This year our topics for discussion with our legislators were supporting an increase for independent living centers throughout the state and not Medicaid cuts.

Educating our legislators on these important topics, and more, helps them to consider the needs of people with disabilities when creating pieces of legislation or supporting legislation that is out there. Pictured below is Options IL days Team in two different meetings with a group of legislators and legislative aides. ○



Options First-Ever Sensory Santa Event A Success!

What started as an inspiring idea from another Independent Living Center, Midstate Independent Living Choices, Steven's Point, which has hosted their event for nine years, turned into a heartwarming event for our own community. Thanks to the determination of Options Advocacy Coordinator, Autumn, and the incredible support from our Board, staff, and community, we hosted our very first Sensory Santa event in early December 2024—and it was a joyful success!



Santa welcomed 24 amazing children into a cozy, sensory-friendly environment, ensuring each family had the chance to spend personalized time with Santa creating unforgettable holiday memories. From crafts and festive decorations to thoughtful, sensory-friendly touches, every detail was designed to make the visit extra special.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the families who joined us and to our incredible team of volunteers and supporters who brought this event to life. Melanie from POP of Color - Green Bay Balloons, added to the magic with her magical balloon columns art, and Stacie Scheibe, Independent Living Supervisor, created a magical, festive atmosphere. Special thanks go to Danette Thieme and Brenda Guyette for their generous personal donations, which made our craft table a hit.


Santa is already penciling us into his 2025 calendar, so stay tuned for even more holiday magic next year! Thank you for helping us make this dream a reality. ○

Kitchen Skills Class In Partnership with CESA 7 & Learning for Independence

In late summer, Options welcomed the opportunity to partner with Cooperative Educational Service Agencies 7 (CESA 7) in Brown County, specifically their Learning for Independence student program. The students in this program are ages 18-21. Each semester they choose from approximately 15 various courses that are otherwise hosted at NWTC.

We were asked to host and teach a brand new 'Kitchen/Cooking Skills' class in our Showcase Model Home Adaptive Kitchen for the Fall 24.


In Kitchen Skills class, students learned and practiced a variety of skills from food safety/storage to oven & stovetop safety/use, and everyone's favorite: how to follow a recipe to meal prep/cook yummy foods. This Kitchen Skills class follows a curriculum that was developed by Options staff which allows for much flexibility and adaptability to maximize student's individual abilities.

We are very excited to have been asked to instruct and participate the Learning for Independence program this upcoming Spring 25 semester! We look forward to hosting and getting to know another group of students "right at home" here in our "kitchen-classroom." 

Options is Looking to Form a Virtual Peer Support Group and Needs Your Input!

Options is looking to form a Virtual Peer Support Group! This will be a welcoming space where individuals whose lives are affected by disabilities or mental health can come together in a safe space to share experiences, reflect, and grow.

This group will be facilitated by Options staff, Peer Support Specialist Dave Zanon and Advocacy Coordinator Autumn Nordall, both of whom bring personal and professional insights to guide and support meaningful conversations.

We are looking for feedback from the community on who is interested and what is the best time to meet virtually. To find out more information or to share your interest, reach out to Autumn Nordall at autumn@optionsil.org or call 920-393-1035. Let's support and uplift each other—join us in this safe and understanding space! Caregivers welcome! 

APRIL Virtual Youth Peer Support Meeting - Nationwide


APRIL- Association for Rural Independent Living Programs, invites you to join a nationwide Youth Peer support Group meeting via Zoom on the 4th Tuesday, of each month at 6:00 pm Central!

Come spend an hour chatting with youth and young adults with disabilities from all over the United States about our experiences, both shared and unique!

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYtf--uqDstGN2LZqO7-PkkhrCP315lryrC#/registration>

To attend you do need to register. Use the link above if you are reading this online or you can call or text APRIL at 501-753-3400 to register. Ask for Ellissa and state that you are calling or texting to register for the APRIL Youth Peer Support Meetings. If you want, please provide the following:


- First and Last Name, Email Address, State that they want help registering for the Youth Peer Support Meetings, Any accommodations they will need to attend (ASL, Captioning, etc.)

APRIL is currently holding their Youth Peer Support meetings the fourth Tuesday of every month at 6 pm Central time. The meetings will take place on Zoom and will require participants to register. ASL and CART will be available for all participants. 

Want to Get Involved in Legislative Advocacy? It's easy, join Act Now!

Do you want your voice to be heard, but feel your voice alone would not be enough? Join Options' legislative advocacy network, Act Now! Individuals in the network receive legislative alerts and updates on issues impacting people with disabilities. When an alert or update is received, everyone on the network is encouraged to pursue the issue by contacting their area legislators, therefore combining your voice with many! Act Now alerts can be delivered either through email or US Postal Mail.

Contacting your legislators about issues that may affect you, or someone you know, is important. Your legislators want to hear firsthand how legislation being considered can impact your life positively or negatively. It helps in their decision making. Joining Act Now will assist you in those efforts. This network will educate you on the issues and help you to advocate more effectively. The more people in the network, the greater the impact.

If you are interested in joining Act Now, contact Sandy Popp at Options (920) 393-1043 or toll-free at (888) 465-1515, ext.179, or sandyp@optionsil.org. 

Benefits Success Story

Options Benefits Specialist worked with a consumer who was receiving a higher disability payment than he was due. Consumer received a letter from social Security letting consumer know he had been overpaid and would need to pay Social Security back the overpayment. Consumer was not at fault with the overpayment, it was Social Security.

Options Benefits Specialist contacted Social Security at the consumer's request. She worked with him and Social Security to get the overpayment stopped. By that time, the overpayment was over \$18,000.00. Options Benefits Specialist helped the consumer request a waiver. Social Security approved his request and waived the need for consumer to pay back the overpayment. ○

Expanding Access to Adventure: New Adaptive Electric Mountain Bike Hand Cycle Now Available

Options for Independent Living, Inc. is thrilled to announce the addition of a Bowhead RX adaptive electric mountain hand cycle to our adaptive recreation equipment inventory! Thanks to the generous support of Brown County's Section 85.21 Specialized Transportation Program and Team Bowhead, we now offer this innovative and exciting device through our demonstration and loan program.

This addition provides individuals with disabilities in our community the opportunity to experience the thrill of mountain biking, promoting independence, adventure, and outdoor accessibility.

For more information about this or our other adaptive biking opportunities supported in part by WisTech, Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, Green Bay Packers Foundation, please contact Calvin at (920) 393-1037 or calvinr@optionsil.org. ○



Options Adaptive Adventures Program

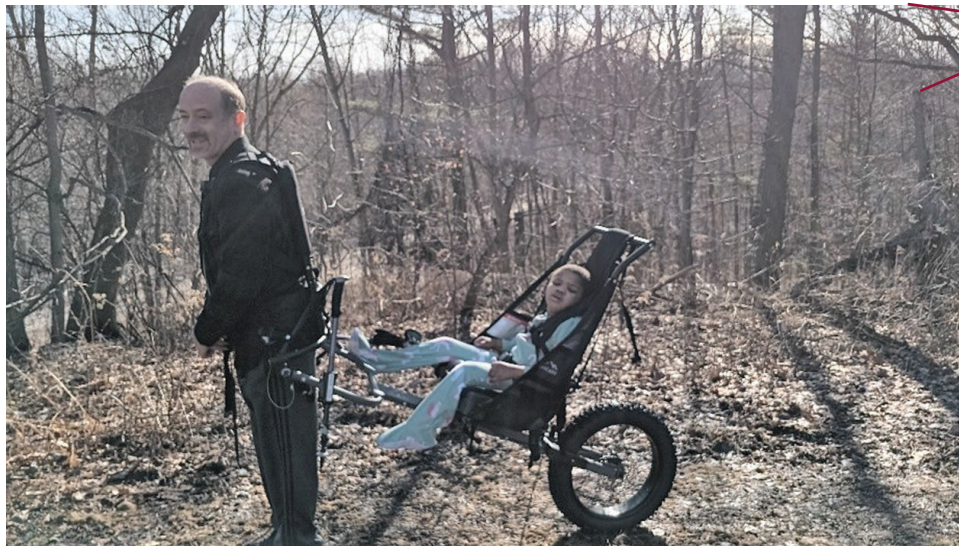
Did you know Options started an adaptive recreation program named Adaptive Adventures. Options AT staff person, Calvin Richtig, has written grants or accepted donations for numerous pieces of adaptive recreation equipment. Currently Options has a Track chair, a Terrain Hopper, a Firefly attachment for a manual wheelchair to become like an E-bike, an E-Trike, and two tricycles. Calvin also wrote a couple grants and was able to acquire an adaptive kayak, along with the new item below, the Huckleberry Hiker Cart. If you would like to learn more about the recreational equipment/programs available and how you or someone you know can experience being outdoors and active once again, please contact Calvin at 920-393-1037 or calvinr@optionsil.org

Adaptive Adventures New Item... the Huckleberry Hiking Cascade Cart

Last year Options received a grant from the Green Bay Packers Foundation that allowed us to purchase equipment a Huckleberry Hiking Cascade Cart. We chose to purchase this cart due to a successful beta test by a family for their spring break trip to Great Smokey Mountains National Park in 2024.



The Cascade Cart is a device that provides access to rugged terrain and trails for an individual with limited mobility where they can't access in a wheelchair and may be too heavy for a backpack. This cart is towed by a "sherpa" and provides a stable and safe ride for the user. We are excited to announce that we now have the Cascade Cart available in our Adaptive Adventures program, and it is free to use for members of our community. The Huckleberry Hiking Cascade Cart is free to use for anyone with a disability in our community. For information about this or any other adaptive recreation equipment please contact Calvin at (920) 393-1037 or calvinr@optionsil.org.



Adaptive Adventures Consumer Highlight:

“My daughter “K” has Rhett Syndrome and cannot walk or talk and has limited trunk control. Our family has spent the last 3 years struggling to include her in our hiking adventures. She outgrew our backpack and really dislikes being restricted in the bigger hiking backpacks. The Huckleberry cart worked amazingly for us and her. She seemed comfortable and enjoyed the ride. It was easy to pull once we got used to the feel of pulling it. It was extremely easy to assemble and disassemble. This cart is definitely a game changer for our family and will allow us to continue to include “K” on family adventures.” ○

Join the Independent Living Council of Wisconsin (ILCW)

They are currently welcoming applications from individuals who want to serve as members of the Council. All Council members are appointed by the Governor and must live in Wisconsin. Council members are required to attend ILCW quarterly meetings, which can be virtual. ILCW’s mission is to ensure a statewide array of independent living services that promote full inclusion, equal access, and personal choice for people of all ages with all types of disabilities in Wisconsin. ILCW seeks qualified individuals that understand the Independent Living movement and can contribute to the diversity of the Council.

If you are interested in checking us out, please call or text us at (608) 575-9293 or email at ILCWinfo@gmail.com or visit our website at Wisconsin Independent Living Network. We look forward to connecting with you! ○

Options LEND Program

Options LEND Program is available for people who have temporary or long-term need for durable medical equipment such as walkers, wheelchairs, bath benches, etc. Options takes in donated durable medical equipment that is in good working condition, cleans it up and gives it back to those who need it in our community. We do not take items with electrical cords, power wheelchairs, medical supplies, or hospital beds. Options LEND closet is **open 9 to 11:30 am and 12:30 – 3 pm Monday through Friday**. For any questions contact Roxanne at Options at 888-465-1515.

LEND Program Consumer Highlights:

- Thank you so much for the use of the wheelchair for my friend, we are so grateful.
- Thank you so much for the equipment loan. It was a godsend when my daughter was recuperating from long co-vid.
- Great service!! My dad was able to use equipment for several months, now back to Options for others! Thanks!
- I thank you guys for being out there. You guys obviously saved me a lot of money and hassle and had quality products that were very helpful in my recovery. Thanks again for your help.
- So very nice to have the use of a commode. My sister-in-law was here for 3 weeks and didn't have to worry about making it to the bathroom in time. Thank you very much.
- Extremely helpful for someone who just needs a wheelchair for recovery. 🙏

Tech Closet News

Options has Assistive Technology (AT) Specialists who can assess an individual with a disability to determine the role assistive technology can play in achieving greater independence. For more information on assistive technology that can help you reach your goal of independence, contact Calvin Richtig, Options AT Specialist, at 920-393-1037 or Ian at 920-393-1053 or 920-490-0500 and ask for Calvin.



*Assistive technology partially supported by the WisTech, Assistive Technology Program.
Telecommunication partially is funded by the Universal Service Fund (USF.)*

Hearing Amplifiers

We frequently hear from community members that struggle with hearing loss because they can't afford hearing aids, and funding is difficult to find. Recently with support from our partnership with Public Service Commission of Wisconsin and the Telecommunication Equipment Purchase Program (TEPP) Outreach Program we purchased a few alternatives to hearing aids that may bridge the gap for many people with mild to moderate hearing loss.

While we always recommend people work with an audiologist to determine the cause of hearing loss, determine if there are medical situations present that need to be address and to find the best solution, these alternatives may be an option for those who simply can't afford to purchase hearing aids.

Hearing Amplifiers (continued)



A new category of product became available in 2022, Over the Counter (OTC) hearing aids approved by the US Food and Drug Administration. You can buy OTC hearing aids in person at a store or through an online retailer without the need for a medical exam, prescription, or a fitting adjustment by an audiologist. HearX USA Go Ultra and Apple Airpods 2 Pro are two devices that we recently added to our demonstration and loan program and are available for you to try. Go Ultra® OTC hearing aids are discreet with a comfortable behind-the-ear design that ensures easy, all-day wear. Answer phone calls or listen to your favorite music and media, directly through these hearing aids.

AirPods Pro 2 provides a clinical-grade Hearing Aid feature for perceived mild to moderate hearing loss and a Media Assist feature, which enhances the clarity of music, video, and calls. While not approved by the FDA as OTC hearing aids, we also have added Samsung Galaxy Buds 3 Pro to our inventory. Galaxy Buds Pro's Ambient Sound feature is effective in helping those with mild to moderate hearing loss to better hear sounds in their surroundings.

All these devices are great alternatives for people with mild to moderate hearing loss to improve access to telecommunications. Please contact Calvin at 920-393-1037 or calvinr@optionsil.org to learn more about these devices or setup an appointment. 📞

What is the Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program (TEPP)?

TEPP helps people with disabilities buy equipment they need to use basic telephone services. The TEPP is paid for by the Wisconsin Universal Service Fund (USF) established by the Public Service Commission. Money is collected from Wisconsin telephone service providers to fund the USF. TEPP requires an applicant:

- Be a Wisconsin resident.
- Be a person who is deaf, hard of hearing, speech impaired, or mobility or motion impaired.
- Needs special equipment to use the telephone in the home or when traveling (like a TTY, amplification, visual alert system, etc.).

There is no age or income limit, but an individual can only get a TEPP voucher once every three years for the same type of disability. For more information on the TEPP program, contact Ian Kaster, Options AT Specialist at 920-393-1053.

The Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program (TEPP)

is a funding source through the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin that helps people with disabilities buy specialized equipment they need to use with basic telephone services. The allocated funds at the state level help offset the price of equipment, which in turn makes the device more readily available to those who may not have the funds to purchase the device entirely on their own.

An application would be applied for with an AT specialist, then TEPP would issue you a voucher (physical copy) a few weeks after filling out that application with us. The voucher can then be applied to an item of your choice. People often have trouble understanding how to navigate the state program to determine exactly how to use the TEPP program or choose the appropriate equipment. We will help you make an educated choice on what voucher best fits your needs. We will also help direct you toward the equipment that would benefit you the most by demonstrating how equipment works and possibly loaning items to you. This would allow you to trial a device before you make a purchase. ○

Options has HOME funds for Home Accessibility, Rehabilitation, or Repair

The HOME Loan Program provides deferred payment / no interest second mortgage loans to make homes accessible or make home repairs. The loans are focused on providing resources to households that include someone who has a disability or is older and is at low-to-moderate income status. Options receives funds for the HOME from the US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development through the State of Wisconsin Dept. of Administration, Division of Housing to administer the HOME Investment Partnership Program (HOME Loan Program.)

The loan must be paid back when the property is sold, transferred, or ceases to be the borrower's principal place of residence. Types of projects include (but not limited to) ramp construction, bathroom, kitchen, and bedroom modifications, along with general housing rehabilitation and repairs.

The counties served by this program include Brown (outside Green Bay City limits), Calumet, Door, Fond du Lac, Green Lake, Kewaunee, Manitowoc, Marinette, Marquette, Menominee, Oconto, Outagamie, Shawano, Sheboygan, Waupaca, Waushara, and Winnebago counties. Applicants must meet the eligibility requirements to be considered for a loan. For more information contact Steve LaFrombois at stevel@optionsil.org, 920-393-1044, or 920-490-0500. ☎

Options' Personal Assistance Program for Those on Medicaid

Options' Personal Assistance Services (PAS) Program empowers people & families with disabilities to manage their in-home cares, including the selection of their Care Worker so that they can maintain a strong relationship with them and remain involved in the daily life of their family.

Certified to provide services through Medicaid and to sub-contract services through IRIS, Options' PAS program has been helping adults in need of in-home care for years.

Benefits of Using Options for Personal Care Services:

- Options is not a Staffing Agency. Individuals can have family or friends provide the care.
- Options can provide training for new Care Workers.
- A Case Manager will provide supervision of the Care Worker and coordinate service needs.
- Benefits include Health, Dental & Vision insurance as well as Retirement Savings Accounts for full-time Care Workers (30+ hrs./week.)

For More Information contact: Karen Phillips – PAS Program Director.
karenp@optionsil.org. 920-393-1036.

Jennifer Lardinois – CLTS Case Manager / Care Coordinator. jenniferL@optionsil.org.
920-393-1032. ☎

Wisconsin WisLoan Program

WisLoan is a statewide alternative loan program helping Wisconsin residents with a disability purchase assistive technology that assists them in living more independently and productively.

Any Wisconsin resident with a disability over the age of 18 in need of assistive technology or home modifications is eligible to apply for a loan. Some examples of assistive technology include wheelchairs, hearing aids, Closed Circuit Televisions (CCTV's), and vehicles with modifications, or the modifications necessary to make a vehicle accessible.

For more information or to apply for WisLoan call Options at 920-490-0500.

WisLoan is a federally-funded project of the National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation, and a cooperative service of the Wisconsin Dept. of Health Services, IndependenceFirst, and BMO Harris Bank.



WisLoan + Telework

Telework Loan Program

The Wisconsin Telework program is a statewide, alternative loan program that allows Wisconsin residents with disabilities to purchase computers and other equipment needed to work from home or from other remote sites, e.g. work on the road or at a telework center.

Loan funds can be used to purchase equipment, training to use equipment, extended warranties, and cost of maintenance and repairs. For more information, contact the staff at Options for Independent Living at 920-490-0500.

This program is made possible through a grant from Rehabilitative Services Administration (RSA) and authorized by Section (303)b of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended and implemented by subsequent program regulation 34 C F R Part 373. The Department of Workforce Development-Division of Rehabilitation received the grant and provides programmatic and fiscal oversight. IndependenceFirst, a community based and consumer-controlled independent living center based in Milwaukee, administers the program in partnership with BMO Harris Bank and Wisconsin Independent Living Centers.

**GREEN BAY
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Return Service Requested



Mission Statement

Options for Independent Living, serving people with disabilities in 17 counties of Northeast Wisconsin, is the pre-eminent non-profit organization of choice to empower people with disabilities. Options provides opportunities, through advocacy and education, for individuals with all disabilities and ages, to actively access their communities, maximize their independence, and connect with the resources and funding available to them.

Your Voice Your Vote! It Matters!

A large graphic of the word "Vote" in a dark blue, bold, sans-serif font. The letter "V" is significantly larger than the other letters and is colored a dark red. The "V" is stylized with a jagged, sawtooth-like top edge.

Don't Forget to Vote
April 1, 2025