

# Southern Illinois Center for Independent Living

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## Inclusive Home Design Act Does It Require Visitability Standards?

*Source: Ability Magazine*

"Universal standards for homes built with federal money are long past due," said Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-IL. "Implementing accessible features when homes are built is a simple matter of fairness, cost effectiveness, and common sense." People with mobility impairments have limited access to most homes constructed with federal assistance because there are currently no federal standards for accessibility features that these homes must include. However, new legislation introduced by Rep. Schakowsky, the Inclusive Home Design Act (HR 1408), would greatly increase the number of homes that are accessible for people with disabilities.

Currently, 95 percent of new single-family homes and townhouses built with federal assistance fail to include any features that make it possible for people with mobility impairments to live in or visit the homes.

states, including Chicago, Naperville, and Urbana, Illinois; Atlanta, Georgia; Vermont; Texas; and Kansas. Bolingbrook, IL and Pima County, Arizona have the two most successful laws, requiring that every home built be based on inclusive design. Respectively, over 4,000 and 11,000 homes have been built under their standards with more homes added every day. This legislation builds on that momentum.

Specifically, the Inclusive Home Design Act would require that all newly-built single-family homes and townhouses receiving federal funds meet four specific standards:

- Include at least one accessible ("zero step") entrance into the home
- Ensure that all doorways on the main floor have a minimum of 32 inches of clear passage space
- Build at least one wheelchair accessible bathroom on the main floor
- Place electrical and climate controls (such as light switches and thermostats) at heights reachable from a wheelchair

The legislation applies to new construction, not renovations of existing homes. The average added cost per home for the required features run from \$98 (for homes built on a concrete slab) to \$573 (for homes with a basement or crawl space); however, retrofitting a home can cost several thousand dollars. In multi-story homes, the requirements apply only to the main floor.

Residents who develop disabilities or face age-related mobility problems often face expensive renovations at their own cost or public cost. More often, when renovations are unfeasible, residents live in unsafe conditions or are displaced from their homes into nursing homes. Additionally, disabled people – from children to the elderly and their families – can become socially isolated.

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The Inclusive Home Design Act, authored by Rep. Schakowsky, aims to increase the residence and accessibility options available to mobility-impaired individuals by employing "visitability" standards. The principles of visitability and inclusive home design seek to create homes that are affordable and sustainable and utilize a design approach that integrates accessibility features into newly-built homes. Inclusive standards and incentives have been adopted by at least 44 towns and

## How One Autistic Young Man Runs a Business

*Source: U.S. News and World Report*

Joe Steffy is off to Overland Park, Kan., this week to do a PowerPoint presentation on his business, Poppin' Joe's Kettle Korn. He's a 23-year-old small businessman with a goal of \$100,000 in sales by 2012. Joe also has autism and Down Syndrome and is nonverbal. When he gives his talk, he will push buttons on an augmentative speech device to deliver the words. His audience will be parents who fervently hope their own special-needs children will be able to work, too.

Joe's parents, Ray and Janet, of Louisburg, Kan., didn't agree with the assessment of the school district in which they lived previously, which had said Joe would never be able to work or live independently. "I'm one who can easily get ticked off," says Ray. "That ticked me off. We saw more in Joe than that. We set out to prove to the school that he had capabilities." They came across kettle corn while on a trip to Alaska and realized that all that popping, scooping, and serving suited Joe's love of work.

The path to Joe Steffy's success was not an easy one; Ray Steffy worked closely with Dave Hammis, an advocate for self-employment for people with disabilities in Middletown, Ohio, who trains business owners, government employees, and parents on how to make use of state and federal programs. The Steffys wrote up a business plan and helped Joe secure \$25,000 in grants from programs like Social Security Administration's Plan to Achieve Self-Support program (PASS).

In 2005, Poppin' Joe's Kettle Korn was born. Sales have grown from \$16,000 in 2005 to \$50,000 in 2008, both from selling at festivals and from delivering popcorn to local outlets. Joe has five part-time employees, and his parents help out with driving and other tasks. "Pop and everyone that works with him knows whatever Joe wants to do you let him do, because he's the boss," Ray says. "If he wants to pop, he'll shove Dad out of the way and pop."

If the business stays on track, it should be grossing more than \$100,000 in three years, and the Steffys are seeking a business partner who can work with Joe to manage the business. Joe is no longer on Social Security disability payments; instead, he pays state sales tax and state and federal income tax. He rents his own house and is helped by caregivers who are paid by a state program.

"It's been hard work, from the standpoint of physical work," says Ray Steffy, who is 67. "But a parent with a child like Joe has a choice. You can either kick in and do this kind of thing, or you can sit and fret emotionally with the same amount of energy, worrying about what's going to happen to them."

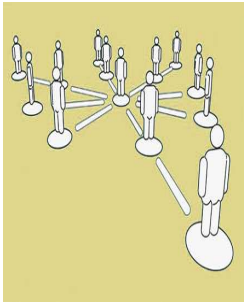
The payoff for that effort, as far as the Steffys are concerned, has been priceless. They see their son make a local popcorn delivery, accept payment, fold it, and put it in his pocket. When he walks out, his dad says, Joe looks three inches taller than when he walked in.

For further information on Poppin' Joe's, check out the website:<http://www.poppinjoes.com>.



## Facebook is Accessible to the Visually Impaired

*By: Bill Kaiser*



In order for individuals with visual impairments to use computers, they utilize a screen magnification program to enlarge fonts in order to optimize the screen for reading, or they use a screen-reading program that reads the text aloud. These are quick, efficient, and simple solutions.

However, the challenge is that not all Web pages are compatible with screen readers and magnifiers. When a website is built without regard to accessible design, screen-reading software cannot interpret the information, which prevents the visually impaired individual from accessing the site. Social networking sites present some especially difficult challenges. For instance, images are an important part of the site experience, but it is rare that photos get described. Even while in the middle of reading a page, comments or links can change in ways that are undetectable to the screen reader or fall outside the viewing window of screen magnification.

A few years ago, the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) approached Facebook in order to combat the accessibility problems of blind members who were having trouble using the site and its applications, including AFB's own cause on Facebook. Ever since the initial meeting, Facebook has been cooperative and has been improving its design for not only the visually impaired but also for accommodating other disabilities. Due to the collaboration with Facebook, there is an accessibility-specific help center page to channel feedback from the disability community and provide instructional tips on using assistive technology with Facebook.

## Career and Preparation for People with Disability

*Source: Thisabled.com*

There are many reasons why it is good business practice to hire people with disabilities for specific jobs in the United States. In a country where there is a growing labor shortage many companies are starting to outsource work such as data entry and telemarketing to other countries. Unfortunately, there is also a growing labor pool of disabled individuals between the ages of 19 and 65. Some statistics indicate that as many as 70% of this population is unemployed. Without exploring the details of the Civil Rights Act or the Americans with Disabilities Act, the concept of social conscience or federal or state program incentives there are numerous good business reasons to hire individuals with disabilities. These reasons go right to the bottom line.

- The Department of Labor says that there will be 168 million jobs in the US in 2010 with 158 million available workers.
- Individuals with disabilities are not counted in that above stated labor force number, and there will be more than 10 million disabled individuals who could fill that labor gap in 2010.
- Disabled workers are known to be as productive or more productive than their non disabled counterparts in similar jobs.
- Disabled workers take less personal and sick time off from the job than their non disabled counterparts.
- Workers with disabilities are typically more loyal and stay longer on the job than their non-disabled counterparts (i.e. disabled workers are less likely to quit and leave for another job.)
- The cost of reasonable accommodation for workers with disabilities is said to be less than \$500 per job. In other words, it doesn't cost that much for an employer to accommodate the job for an individual with disabilities to perform at that job.
- Research indicates that disabled workers are much more satisfied with their work than their non-disabled counterparts.

## New Illinois Law to Increase Medicaid Eligibility

*Source: Chicago Sun-Times*

A new Illinois law increases the amount of income and assets that workers with disabilities can have before they become ineligible for Medicaid insurance.

The changes are significant because not every job offers health insurance, and people with disabilities are most often not able to get private insurance with adequate coverage. Many people with disabilities across the country are not able to work as they might like for fear of jeopardizing their Medicaid health coverage.

Previously, Illinois' annual income limit for Medicaid coverage was about \$21,000 for individuals, or \$44,000 for a family of four. It has been raised to \$38,000 for an individual, or \$75,000 for a family. The new law also allows workers with disabilities to have up to \$25,000 in assets instead of \$10,000.

## Proposed Bill Would Allow Tax-Free Trusts for Those with Disabilities

*Source: disabilitycoop.com*

A bill proposed in Congress would allow tax-free savings accounts for people with disabilities much like those already in existence for those saving for college.

The bill sponsored by Sen. Robert Casey, D-Penn., and Rep. Ander Crenshaw, R-Fla., would allow trusts to be created to pay for disability-related expenses such as education, housing, health-care, and personal support services. The funds in the trust would not count against the individual's maximum asset amounts to qualify for Medicaid and other government programs.

Called the Achieving a Better Life Experience Act of 2009 or the ABLE Act of 2009, the bill would create accounts similar to the 529 plans that currently exist to save for college. Up to \$500,000 could be invested in the accounts, which would be tax-free in many cases.

Too often persons with disabilities are caught in between the cracks in our society. The ABLE Act will provide families with a savings tool that is flexible and portable. The accounts are designed to help ease difficult financial situations and provide peace of mind to the families of individuals with disabilities. In order to become law, the bill would need to pass both the Senate and House and be signed by the president.

## Tips for Doing Disney with a Disability

*By: Bill Kaiser*

I have been to Walt Disney World many times staying on property, here are my top tips for making a trip with a disability possible. My observations are based on traveling by plane, staying on Walt Disney World property, and taking advantage of their specials.

- Research is your best friend. There is always some type of special going on. The top places to look at these specials? If you have the internet, go to [www.mousesavers.com](http://www.mousesavers.com), [www.wdwenchanted.com](http://www.wdwenchanted.com), [www.disboards.com](http://www.disboards.com), and the Disney official website [www.disneyworld.com](http://www.disneyworld.com). A great book to get would be *PassPorters Open Mouse for Walt Disney World and Disney Cruise Line*; this wonderful resource book deals with many different types of disabilities.
- Did you know you don't have to pay for the whole trip when you book it? If you want a vacation package (tickets, room, and the option of a dining plan) you have to pay a deposit of \$200.00 and the balance is due 45 days before your arrival date. If you are doing room only, they require the equivalent of one night's stay. The balance is due at check in.
- Decide which travel option is best for you. Do you plan to drive or fly? My experience is if you are going to fly, a direct flight is best. That way you don't have to worry about changing planes, or your mobility devices accidentally being unloaded when you are not at your destination. Southwest Airlines has very good airfares out of St. Louis and you can download their "Ding" application to your computer to get even better deals. There are rental companies right at the airport or you can take advantage of Disney's free shuttle service called "Disney's Magical Express". Just let them know if you need a wheelchair-accessible bus.
- The on-property hotels have many degrees of accessibility. There are rooms with grab bars, there are roll in shower rooms, you can get a tty kit placed on the phone, etc.

## Obama Signs Reeve Act

By: *Bill Kaiser*

According to the April 2009 issue of *New Mobility Magazine*, the Christopher and Dana Reeve Paralysis Act, a bill to advance research and improve quality of life for people with spinal cord injuries, became law March 31 in a signing ceremony at the White House.



President Obama stated that the Christopher and Dana Reeve Paralysis Act is the first piece of comprehensive legislation specifically aimed at addressing the challenges faced by Americans living with paralysis. He said, "Many folks and organizations from across the disability community worked hard to get this bill passed, and we are grateful to each of you for bringing us that much closer to providing all Americans with disabilities a full, fair and equal opportunity to achieve the American Dream."

The act provides funding for collaborative research through the National Institutes of Health, enhanced rehabilitation services and assistive equipment and technology development.

### His Awesome Light

Shared by: *James David*  
(Friend of SICIL)

He brings me from the dark to light  
He makes my mess turn out alight  
He's full of mercy loving kind  
He lifts me up and makes me shine  
All the people sing him praise  
He has loved us since ancient days  
All my sins are now forgiven  
Because his ways I try to live in

He's my protection and my shield  
He adorns me like lilies of the field  
He's faithful and he's always true  
Living water's what I drew  
His hands and feet were pieced by nail  
And now I've got the Holly Grail  
So I'll never have to stumble  
His Awesome Light will keep me humble

The tears I shed now turn to joy  
His instruction I employ  
What he says and what he does  
Is always good and always was  
His ways are pure and righteous too  
His will is what I want to do  
It keeps me on the path of life  
Illumined by his Awesome Light

### The Power of Negative Thinking

Shared by: *James David*  
(Friend of SICIL)

The power of negative thinking  
Is insidious and destructive  
It saps the drive to survive  
It makes life unproductive  
It brings on toxic shame  
And the need for someone else to blame  
It turns the world into hate  
And others will respond  
And every time you take the bait  
Its got you in a stronger bond  
Depression will set in oh yes  
Of that you can be sure  
There's never any need to guess  
It's miserable to endure  
It takes away everything  
You ever held so dear  
Its violence is a powerful sting  
A constant state of fear  
To get out is to change cognition  
Not an easy task  
Pain and fear exposed condition  
Taking off the mask  
Spitting and sputtering on ignition  
Relief will come at last  
Embarking on a life long mission  
Doesn't happen fast  
And the road in between  
Has all its ups and downs  
Careful balance on the beam  
And turn that frown upside down

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## **Reasons The English Language Is So Hard To Learn**

1. The bandage was wound around the wound.
2. The farm was used to produce produce.
3. The dump was so full that it had to refuse more refuse.
4. Polish the polish furniture.
5. He could lead if he would get the lead out.
6. The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert.
7. Since there is no time like present, he thought it was time to present the present.
8. A bass was painted on the head of the bass drum.
9. When shot at, the dove dove into the bushes.
10. I did not object to object.
11. The insurance was invalid for the invalid.
12. There was a row among the row of oarsmen about how to row.
13. They were too close to the door to close it.
14. The buck does funny things when the does are present.

