

THE PATH AHEAD

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tmg[®]
Let's clear the path ahead.

FINDING OUR COMMUNITIES



Everyone deserves to be part of a welcoming community. For many of us, our communities are more than just where we live; they are the groups of people we share our hobbies, interests, and beliefs with – like a book club or a church. Our communities provide a safe place where we can be ourselves and feel

like we belong. It's where we can make connections with others.

Many people are excited to see others in person again. Some, though, might feel nervous about rejoining their community after being away for so long due to the pandemic. Others might be having a hard time finding a community. Stefanie Primm,

Executive Director of Living Our Visions Inclusively (LOV Inc.), says that while it may take time to find the right fit, many groups are excited to have new people join. She also believes that taking the time to find a good community is worth the effort.

“I see community as a welcoming space,” says Stefanie. “I see it as a necessary part of someone’s life.”



Stefanie’s work at LOV Inc. is all about helping people across Wisconsin make those community connections. Since 2007, LOV Inc. has partnered with adults with disabilities and their families to help them find and create opportunities to socialize, connect with others, and gain independence.

The reason that being part of a community is especially important for people with disabilities, says

Stefanie, is that it lets them share their talents with others. It also allows them to show others how they're an individual with unique abilities and interests. Stefanie saw this when her brother, who has a disability, decided to join a computer club. At first, she worried the group would only see her brother as a person with a disability and not as an individual. However, the computer club thought Stefanie's brother was a fantastic addition to their community, and he's been a valued member of the group for almost ten years.

"The computer club doesn't care that my brother has autism," says Stefanie. "They only care that he knows how to talk about [computer stuff like] motherboards and central processing units. They see his personality and what makes him unique."

While finding community and making connections might seem challenging,

Stefanie says it all starts with simply finding groups that enjoy the same things as you do. If you like to paint, you can look for a painting group. If you want to sing, you can join a choir. If you think rocks are the coolest, you can sign up with a geology club.

You can search online to see if there are local groups that you find interesting. If you can't find groups in your area that you want to be a part of, there are many virtual groups that you could join to meet like-minded folks. Stefanie says that no matter what your interest or hobby is or how rare it might be, there's somebody out there who shares that same interest.

Once you've found a group you like, don't be afraid to learn and share with other people in the group. Talk about things you're interested in, and over time you'll get to know the members of the group and may even become

friends with some of them outside of the group setting.

Most importantly, though, don't put pressure on yourself when you first join a new community. Stefanie says that becoming a part of a new community and finding friends is something that happens naturally. Eventually, you'll become a valued member of that community, and the group wouldn't be the same without you.

Sometimes finding the right community can take some time. When we find a great community, it can make our lives feel more meaningful and worthwhile, so don't give up the search.

"We all need to be part of a community," says Stefanie. "We all need to belong to something bigger than ourselves. That's just part of what makes us human."

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: LIVING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

The pandemic has been a challenging time for all of us. It also taught us important lessons. **Thanks to everyone who shared what they've learned over the last year and what they look forward to doing again soon!**



Greg Cain

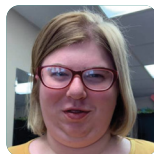
Madison, WI

For Greg, the pandemic has been a time to reflect on life. Having lost his mom, brother, and cousin in the same year, he understands how hard it can be to lose people you love. He sends his prayers to everyone who's suffered during this pandemic.

However, even during hard times, Greg finds ways to feel optimistic. He says it's important to slow down and appreciate the time we have on earth. Greg also says it's helpful to take a close look at the way you think about things. Doing that helped Greg remember all of the good things he has in his life. When things are safer again, the first thing Greg would like to do is simply stop and breathe in the fresh air and then be around people in a restaurant.

Greg's Words of Wisdom:

"What I have learned from this pandemic is to live each day to the fullest, and not to take life for granted! It can all be over in a flash. Every day I thank God for giving me the strength to wake up each day."



Miranda Whiting

Waunakee, WI

The pandemic put a pause on many things. Because of this, Miranda says there's a lot she'll no longer take for granted. Things like getting together with friends and going to work and not needing to wear a mask. She looks forward to going to a concert, or on vacation, or to family gatherings. Miranda is excited for when she can do all of these things safely once again.

Miranda says that there were some positive things she learned during the pandemic. She discovered that doing puzzles relaxes her. She also started doing diamond painting and really likes it. And Miranda found that connecting with friends and family over video chats is pretty fun! After the pandemic, Miranda can't wait to go on vacation with her family and watch movies with friends. She is also ready to get back to work!

Miranda's Words of Wisdom:

"People need to work together and care about each other so that they don't catch COVID. Also, washing hands is really important!"



Mike Hipple

Appleton, WI

Mike found that despite the pandemic's uncertainty, many positive things happened in 2020. First was his nephew's birth – Mike reports that his nephew is a beautiful and healthy baby boy! Mike also was excited to spend more time writing about disability topics. He enjoyed creating a job in the assistive technology field with his job coach.

Of course, the pandemic has also helped Mike appreciate the little things in life – like being able to have in-person meetings and see old friends at conferences. He promises he won't complain about long car rides anymore because that means he's traveling to visit friends!

Once it becomes safer to be out and about again, Mike looks forward to visiting his little nephew in Oregon and seeing his friends in the Wisconsin disability community in person.

Mike's Words of Wisdom:

"I learned how to wait for things. I now truly understand that some things in life will happen that no one can control. You will need to learn how to adjust your life and let it surprise you. I was surprised by some things last year. I think people with disabilities and their family members have always needed to know how to adjust on the fly, but this past year we needed to do that a lot more."

“We all need to be part of a community,” says Stefanie. “We all need to belong to something bigger than ourselves. That’s just part of what makes us human.”

Stefanie Primm, Executive Director
Living Our Visions Inclusively (LOV Inc.)





RESOURCES FOR RIDING OUT THE PANDEMIC

Thanks to the COVID-19 vaccine, we're getting closer and closer to being able to safely get back into our communities and do all the things we enjoy doing. But until then, we need to make sure we stay healthy. Here are a few resources that can help you get through the last stretch of the pandemic. You'll find ways you can virtually build your community, get tips on how to take care of your mental health, and find information about the COVID-19 vaccine. Be well!

Building Community

Living Our Visions Inclusively (LOV Inc.): This organization helps people with disabilities find ways to connect to their communities. LOV offers a variety of programs, including the Bridge Builder project, which helps people figure out how to overcome obstacles to participate in their communities. LOV also hosts Virtual Distractions currently through June as a fun way to connect to others. Virtual Distractions are for adults with disabilities to connect over Zoom and talk about fun topics like art, dance, wildlife, yoga, trivia, and more. Check out lovinc.org today!

Meetup.com: Curious to see if there's a photography group in your town? Want to get together with other nearby Sci-Fi fans? No matter what you're interested in,

you can check out Meetup.com to search for local groups of folks who share your passion. Many of these groups are offering virtual meetup options during COVID, so no need to wait. Visit meetup.com to learn more!

Mental Health

Seize the Awkward: Talking to others about your mental health can sometimes feel a little uncomfortable. Seize the Awkward can give you the tools you need to have these tough conversations to get the help you need. This website also has an excellent section dedicated to mental health during the pandemic and can help you learn how to manage during these stressful times. Visit seizetheawkward.org/coronavirus to learn more.

Vaccine Information

COVID-19 Vaccine Fact Sheet: Do you have questions about the COVID-19 vaccine? Then check out the plain language fact sheet created by the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (WI BPDD) about the vaccine for people enrolled in IRIS. Visit TMG's homepage at tmgwisconsin.com and go to the COVID-19 Update section to find a link to WI BPDD's most up-to-date fact sheet.



SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS: THE PATH AHEAD SURVEY

Thank you for reading The Path Ahead! We hope you enjoy hearing from self-advocates and experts who share their stories and advice to help others live independent, self-determined lives.

We want to get your thoughts about our newsletter to learn how we can make it better! Please take a few moments to fill out this quick, 6-question online survey. **Visit tmgwisconsin.com/the-path-ahead-survey to take our survey by June 30, 2021.**

Thanks for taking the time to share your thoughts about The Path Ahead. We can't wait to hear what you have to say!



UPCOMING EVENTS

To learn more and register for these events, visit tmgwisconsin.com/tmg-events.

Wisconsin Employment First Conference

May 13, 2021 | Held Virtually

2021 Healthy Aging Summit

June 3-4, 2021 | Held Virtually

Family Voices Leadership Conference

June 8, 10, & 15, 2021 | Held Virtually

Wisconsin Summer Inclusion Institute

July 26-28, 2021 | Held Virtually

Wisconsin Self-Determination Conference

October 18-20, 2021 | Held Virtually



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FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

A lot has been happening on TMG's Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter pages! Have you visited them lately?

There, you can read important news and events, learn about others who are living self-determined lives and see what TMG has been up to throughout Wisconsin. Be sure to share your favorite posts and become part of the broader self-determination community in Wisconsin!



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