

Promise Newsletter April 2015

Getting The Word Out

Getting the word out about Promise for me personally has ranged from Community Conversations, to on site presentations, collaborating with Milwaukee Housing Authority and even the Hunger Task Force with "You Can Work" flyers being distributed to thousands of potential eligible families. However, contacting eligible youth/families from the list provided by the Social Security Administration is proving to be more successful. Promise packets are mailed to those on the list then phone calls are made to follow-up. For one reason or another, many of those I speak to say they don't recall receiving a packet or thought it was junk mail and tossed it out. Some are leery about the program and even cautious about speaking to me, yet with just a bit of persuasion and permission to have a few seconds of their time, fears subside and interest piques. By speaking to them on the phone we have the opportunity to immediately answer their questions and start a relationship with Promise.

Neelam's Story: A Quest for a Better Quality of Life

My name is Neelam. I moved to the United States from India with my family in 1994. I was an 11-year-old kid beaming with hope because I was moving to a country that is a bastion of civil rights for people with disabilities. Many immigrants who move to the U.S. come for a better quality of life.

Education and Financial Independence

I wanted to come here for formal education, which I never received in India. I believed that education was a necessary, basic human right for everyone. But that is not how people in many parts of the world think. As a person with a disability, I feel very fortunate to live here. My biggest passion in life has been education because I know that through schooling, I can grow up to be independent financially. I was always taught that without education I could not obtain employment with a livable wage, which means I would have to rely on government or family assistance.

If You Can Do It, So Can I

Because I have a disability, I could not grow up to be independent like everyone else my age without education. I do not want to rely on government assistance my whole life and not all families are financially capable of supporting their children into their adulthood and one should not expect that. I always wanted to live on my own once I turned 18, go off to college, graduate, and ultimately get a job that will help me become independent and take care of myself. If able-bodied people can do it, so can I. That was always my attitude. This does not mean I did not face any challenges in life but I grew up in a very supportive and loving family. I would not be where I am today without them. My path to academics was not a smooth one. Let me tell you a little about my journey from India to USA and how I got where I am today and why education is so important to me.

Access and Accommodations

India did not have any accessible schools for people with disabilities. My parents did everything they could in their power to get me enrolled in schools. However, schools either rejected my admission or informed my parents that the staff will absolutely take no

responsibility in caring for me, or in accommodating me. I would have no basic civil rights. If I wanted to go to a restroom, that would not be possible since there is no such a thing as an accessible bathroom. There would be no aids to assist me and the school curriculum would not be tailored to my needs, although I also have a learning disability and I was really behind all the kids. There were some schools which were far away from home that took people with disabilities. My parents took me for a day and stayed with me the whole time. The school was in a deplorable condition. There were kids with all kinds of disabilities (mental, physical, developmental) all mixed together. They just played with toys the whole time; they were not receiving any academic education, and were in terrible condition. They were crawling and crying. My parents were appalled and decided they would just home-school me to the best of their ability but they would never send me to a place like that.

A Life with Dignity and Respect

My parents instilled the value of education in me from infancy. They never subscribed to the cultural belief that as a girl with a disability, I had nothing to offer (though to be fair not everyone in India thinks in such a narrow-minded way). My parents had high expectations and believed in me. They pushed me to get an education and it was decided very early on that I would attend college. And I wanted nothing more. My parents felt that it was especially important for me to fulfill my highest potential in education, so the outcome could result in gainful employment. They taught me very early on that they will always be loving and very supportive of me. They will never give up on me; however, they won't be around forever. My parents understood that by instilling the value of education, self-advocacy and independence from infancy, not only would they help me live a life with dignity and respect, but I would be able to survive and thrive on my own, without family help or government assistance.

Resources and Opportunities

While we continue to make progress for people with disabilities, we should continue to take advantage of all the resources and opportunities this country offers. I understand everyone has a different kind of disability and abilities of that person may vary, and that not all programs may be suitable for everyone. But one cannot give up and lose hope. If you truly want something and believe in something, it can be achieved. The expectation has to come first, and then success will follow.

[About the author.](#)

Wisconsin Promise Helps Family After Father Loses Job

A Promise benefits specialist, Rosie, recently worked with a family to identify resources and assistance just when it was more needed. The father of a family she was working with through Promise was laid off from his job. Rosie assisted the family with restarting cash benefits while the father looked for new employment. She also connected them to community resources to improve their housing situation. Way to go Rosie!

Go Badgers! Benefit Specialists Attend Training on BadgerCare+ in Milwaukee

The benefits specialists recently held a two day training on March 10 and 11 in Milwaukee. Ryan Farrell from Disability Rights Wisconsin spent a whole day with us to fine tune our knowledge of BadgerCare+. We are also lucky enough to have someone from Hunger Task Force, Maureen Fitzgerald, spend a ½ day with us to ensure we know the ins and outs of FoodShare. As nerdy as it might sound, the benefits specialist are thrilled for this opportunity!

Changes to BadgerCare+

Someone in your family may have BadgerCare+. The Promise Benefits Specialists can work with your specific family situation to discuss BadgerCare+ eligibility when someone in your group increases their income through employment. Find out what options are out there for your family by contacting a [benefits specialist](#) today.

Continued Medicaid Coverage for People Who Work

People who get SSI worry about the loss of Medicaid if they work. Find out more about this great [work incentive 1619\(b\)](#). Individuals can work off of cash benefits, but keep their Medicaid if they meet the requirements for 1619(b).

Meet The Promise DVR Counselors

Kitra Thomas

"Ask me about some of my first jobs..."

Kitra Thomas is a Promise Grant Counselor/Case Manager in the Kenosha, Racine and Walworth Counties. She is a Licensed Professional Counselor and has been with the State of Wisconsin - Department of Workforce Development's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation as a Vocational Counselor in Kenosha County since 2006. Formerly, Kitra worked with adult/youth criminal offenders and veterans in Kenosha and Racine Counties for 2 years. Prior to that, Kitra worked with adults with co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders in Racine County for 4 years. Kitra earned her Master's Degree on-site at the Milwaukee County Mental Health Complex because she always wanted to become a DVR counselor. Kitra has been a Wisconsin resident since 1996. Prior to that she worked for the Lake County Fighting Back Project in Illinois, as a Community Coordinator working with groups dedicated to fighting alcohol and drug abuse among Lake County high school students. She worked for Manpower placing customers into temporary employment for over 2 years. She earned her Bachelor's Degree in Sociology at a State University and her Associate's Degree at a community college. Some of her first jobs included working at Six Flags Great America in their Entertainment department, Carson Pirie Scott as a Gift Wrapper, and Eagle Food Centers as a Utility Clerk.

To meet more Promise DVR Counselors, visit <http://promisewi.com/counselors/>

Promise Activity Highlights

Employment for At-Risk Youth And Those With Disabilities

WI Promise is organizing a Community Conversation on employment for at-risk youth and those with disabilities in Green Bay on April 21, 2015 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. at the Kroc Community Center at 1315 Lime Kiln Road.

This event, facilitated by Kristyl Thomas and Deborah Rezac, will bring a broad set of community members together to brainstorm strategies and resources that can lead to better employment outcomes for youth. Sponsored by the Greater Green Bay Chamber, West Corporation, Green Bay Area Public Schools, and Brown County United Way, in partnership with WI Promise, this event is a great opportunity to network and learn about local resources. Please join us! RSVP by April 13, 2015, to molly.cooney@wisconsin.gov or by calling 1-844-482-4566.

PROMISE Intake Coordinators (PIC) Update

As of March 25th, 272 youth have worked with a Promise Intake Coordinator (PIC) to navigate the enrollment process or receive their gift cards. If you know of a family who would like to work with a Promise Intake Coordinator to complete enrollment, please have them call Erin at 855-480-5618.

New enrollment option! Erin can work with families over the phone to complete the intake form and help facilitate the enrollment process. Encourage parents with eligible children to take advantage of this new option and call today

Need Promise Promotional Items for an Upcoming Event?

We have a variety of items promoting Promise including pens, pads, decals, lip balm, water bottles, etc. which you can now order online. Although we can't guarantee requests for specific items, we'll do our best to accommodate you! Order Promise promotional items for your next event online at <http://promisewi.com/materials/>.

Include Us in Your Newsletter!

Do you connect with youth and their families through a newsletter, or know of an agency that does? Let us know if you'd like information about Promise to include in your newsletter - we'll gladly provide a brief article and graphics. Simply contact us at <http://promisewi.com/contact/> or 1-855-480-5618.

Enrollment Update

Program	Usual Services	Total	%of target achieved
332	342	674	34%

Calendar of Events

[Click Here for Calendar](#)

PROMISE Grant Acknowledgement

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