

## **Statement for Tuesday**

There is nothing more painful and traumatic, than having your self-identity stolen from you, when acquiring a disability. People who become victims of guns, and other forms of violence initially find their inabilities to be overwhelming. Doctors, nurses, and other Allied Health professions often paint a negative picture of the new circumstance, often leaving them with an inability to see a future. Most of the time, people who are sent home from hospitals are not provided with adequate resources and supports they would need to help them regain their self-esteem and self-worth: often they find themselves alone as try to work through the process of understanding their new “selves.”

In Chicago and Suburban Cook County there are currently 2 centers for Independent Living: Access Living and Progress Center. For many years these centers have been a beacon of light for those with newly acquired impairments. In one of these centers, people with disabilities can connect with qualified professionals who also have similar disabilities and who are knowledgeable about the services, programs, equipment, and other things one may need, not only to survive but to become full and active members of society again. From assistance with finding employment, to finding affordable, accessible housing, to simply connecting with people who understand what one is going through, centers can be a real blessing; that is, for those who live nearby or are aware of them.

Progress Center serves 121 townships that make up Suburban Cook County and we have been doing so for over 25 years: Many who live within blocks of our Forest Park location though, often say that they never heard of us before. Imagine those who live even further away. Access Living services Chicago but as you all know, our wonderful city stretches really far. Even more important, the lack of a state budget has placed both Centers for Independent Living on the brink of extinction. People with acquired and genetic disabilities need to have a place where they can go that is (or will be) well-known and well-established. A main hub where everyone from each township and section of the city can find representation. A county-wide center that would work together to provide people with disabilities much needed resources and supports.



**Progress Center treats people with disabilities with respect and recognizes that each person has skills which they can continue to develop. With a positive attitude, each of us can continue to grow, learn and develop as leaders who contribute to society.**

**Click here to watch video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyxjtZhbEUg>**

Mission and History: Progress Center for Independent Living, (PCIL) founded in 1988, is a non-profit, non-residential service and advocacy organization operated by and for people with disabilities. It is chartered to serve suburban Cook County. As a part of the disability rights movement, PCIL's mission is to build a society in which people with disabilities shall have the same freedoms, rights, and civil liberties as everyone else. We directly assist individuals with all types of disabilities and a wide range of accommodation needs to achieve their self-determined goals. We also engage in social justice advocacy and community organizing for the rights of people with disabilities on the local, state and national levels. This work includes advocacy to affect public policy that supports, protects, and enhances critical community-based services needed to enable independent living as well as to guarantee access to opportunities that should be open to all: housing, education, employment, voting, and more.

Primary Focus of Progress Center: work with people with disabilities as peers and to empower them to live independent lives within the community and to achieve their self-determined goals.

Community that Progress Center Impacts: Suburban Cook County, which includes 132 municipalities and a population of 2.5 million. Over 450,000 of the residents of suburban Cook County are people with disabilities. In addition, significant numbers of our members are Chicago residents.

Progress Center works with people with disabilities as peers and empowers them to live independent, productive lives within society while building their spirits of dignity, self-sufficiency and self-confidence. Progress Center helps people with disabilities to develop as leaders in the community. Progress Center has a reputation for working closely with individual consumers to help them to achieve their self-determined goals.

Due to the state Budget Impasse, Progress Center may soon be closing its doors for good. Without our staff, people with disabilities in Suburban Cook County will not have anyone to turn to for support as they continue to struggle for something that should be everyone's right - the right to live independently and productively within their respective communities. After eight months of the State not paying the \$140,000 owed to Progress Center, Progress Center was forced to lay-off 40% of its staff. In addition, as of March 18, the office is closed every Friday. These changes were necessary to try to stretch the remaining financial reserves. If Progress Center uses up all its reserves before a budget is signed and is forced to close its doors completely, it is unlikely that we will ever be able to reopen, because the state would no longer be required to pay the money that they have promised to pay.

## **Accomplishments:**

► Progress Center has assisted over 250 people to move out of nursing homes and into the community to live independently in society.

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- ▶ Progress Center assists people to connect with potential Personal Assistants who they can interview and possibly hire to assist them with activities of daily living so that they can remain living independent, productive lives in the community and not in nursing homes.
- ▶ Both of the above accomplishments have and **continue to save Illinois tax payer dollars** because it costs the State less money (1/3 less) to provide the supports needed to help a person with a disability to remain living independently within society, than it does to house those same people in a nursing home.
- ▶ Progress Center assists people to register to vote. Progress Center regularly partners with the Cook County Clerk's office by hosting Deputy Registrar Trainings which equip leaders with the knowledge and qualifications necessary for them to assist other people to register to vote. Progress Center maintains a number of available Deputy Registrars, people who are qualified to assist people (at any time) in registering to vote.
- ▶ Progress Center assists people with disabilities and seniors to obtain funding to help pay for home modifications which keep their homes accessible so that they can remain active taxpaying homeowners in their community. Progress Center continually works with other townships throughout Suburban Cook County to urge them to create similar home-modification programs to help people with disabilities and seniors living in their township to age-in-place.
- ▶ Progress Center works to increase access for people with disabilities by routinely identifying inaccessible businesses throughout Suburban Cook County and encouraging them to make their businesses wheelchair accessible. We answer any questions they may have and occasionally we are able to offer advice on how they can make the businesses more accessible at a very low cost. We then follow up with them to see if they have followed through with the necessary work.
- ▶ Progress Center works in partnership with the Cook County Board of Elections to provide Disability Awareness Trainings to election judges to help them to ensure that their polling places are accessible to people with different types of disabilities. In 2014 Progress Center staff provided disability Awareness trainings to over 4,600 election judges throughout Suburban Cook County.