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Disability Network of Northern Michigan

Scott was hosting the webinar for Disability Network of Northern Michigan. The host from DNoNM is Jennifer Schultz, an alumnus of NMC! This webinar is learning about how DNoNM functions and what they do in the community. DNoNM does not have an official internal IT department, and Jennifer will touch on that.

Jennifer has multiple roles, Community Resource Manager which includes 17 counties, works with Safety Net (woot woot!). DNoNM is a center for independent living, focused on that philosophy. Emphasis on self help and determination, equal access and individual system advocacy in order to maximize the leadership, empowerment, independence, and productivity of individuals with disabilities and their integration and full inclusion into the mainstream of American Society.

DNoNM is one of 15 Centers for Independent Living in Michigan, they serve 17 counties. Mission is to promote personal empowerment and positive social change. Disability is a natural part of the human experience, it is not the disability that prevents people from participating, but the barriers that are in place. DNoNM helps individuals with disabilities and anyone that is touched in their lives by these individuals. Helps people navigate big difficult organizations.

Core services, Information and referrals, peer support, independent living skills, Individual system and advocacy, assisted living transferal. Life areas, accessibility, education, health care, assistive tech, employment, housing, other supports, relocation, recreation, transportation. “As humans we are not meant to be singular.” I really enjoyed this.

Jennifer showed us an image of some people that worked to change the wheelchair access signs to something more fitting to represent the way these individuals feel. Other examples included, beach access, sailing access, bicycle access, and accessible trails. The voices of everyone with a disability is important because each individual has a different perspective.

1200 individuals were a part of one-on-one work last year. 1200-2800 new callers each year as well, DNoNM has only 20 people that currently work there, and that is the most they’ve ever had! Once the pandemic hit it was more difficult to include everyone that needed to be kept in touch with as there is not always internet access everywhere in Northern Michigan. DNoNM decided to change from Jennifer being the main point of contact to Safety Net, during this time they also needed a server upgrade, and were still using paper instead of an online alternative.

Jennifer highlighted quite a few areas that were very difficult for her, but it boiled down to this in my mind, how can technology make everything more accessible? Many people are not able to effectively use technology if they are struggling with it, but can be helped with that same technology if it is more accessible.