



*Achievements of independence*

My name is Kathy Fleury, I am 51 years old from Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. I have lived on my own since 1991. I have lived in the same apartment with The Arc Fond du Lac, for the entire 28 years. The Arc is my home even when I venture to Arizona to see my mom and sister. I feel more comfortable when I am back where my journey began. I like to do word searches and journaling, which helps me calm down when I have had a long day. I am part of the United Singers Choir, and I just finished being in The Arc Community Enrichment Programs Fondy Idol. I have my own vehicle and can drive wherever I need to go, mostly to work. I help with The Arc's Special Olympics program, helping with bowling and now playing in the basketball season.

I have a job at Hardees and work for The Arc doing maintenance. I completed Fire Safety Training through The Arc, to help me meet my job responsibilities. I clean at The Arc office buildings two days a week and clean three apartment complexes in entry ways, laundry rooms, and basement along with mowing lawn and removing snow. I will have been working at The Arc for nine years, this coming July. I am truly thankful for The Arc because I have friends, I have a job, and I have a home where I can take care of Cookie, my cat. I work at Hardees Mondays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays doing food prep and sometimes dishes. I have been working at Hardees three years in April. Before working at Hardees, I had a job at St. Vincent DePaul, but

it turned from a job to more of a volunteer opportunity and I am still doing that along with cleaning for them which is every other Monday.

I have my own insurance through the health marketplace instead of my employers. I make too much to be on badger care, so I had to go with the open market option. I will be meeting with someone later this month to discuss my insurance for next year.

For me challenges and obstacles were always there. One obstacle is the shortage of Direct Care Workers, which constantly has me working with new people. This is difficult for me in that I need more time to better understand why some things happen. It takes a longer time for this when new workers start and don't understand my needs. Now I am moving forward in a positive way by working with someone to get ready for interviews, so I can find a better paying position. Future goals and plans for me are to work hard, getting ready for that job and to overcome my obstacles.

Finally, my years in school were tough as I was often bullied. If my school had more money, they could have provided the support to help and protect me and other kids. It is important to me that kids in my community get support and a good education. I have been doing some self-advocacy work on this topic and speaking to my local state representatives. Please do all you can to support the increase in the state budget for special education. Special education costs have increased by 60% in the last decade while funding has remained flat. And kids in high school who have jobs are far more likely to have good jobs as adults. I'd like increased funding for this, too. I hope to continue my advocacy work on this topic.