

My name is Lindsey, and I am a young woman with cerebral palsy living in northwestern Wisconsin. Self-advocacy is essential in all areas of my life, like transportation, education, employment, and personal health. I have had some incredible role models that have helped me learn to advocate for myself and become independent. Being self-advocate taught me to do things differently and that it's okay. Although initially frustrating, I learned to have patience and perseverance and keep trying to solve problems that arise in my life. Eventually, I will find a way to modify systems to work for me.



Getting around my community can be challenging in rural areas of the state. Throughout my life, I have learned how to get around safely and independently. It's not a one-time deal; I'm constantly adjusting and advocating as systems often change. I use public transportation for errands or attending appointments around my community and other cities in Wisconsin. I am fortunate to have an excellent company providing transportation in my town. It hasn't always been that way. Several years ago, transportation was being cut out of the budget. I wrote a letter to the city council and contacted a friend who knew someone on the council. I felt proud that my letter was read aloud at the meeting, and although changes came, I communicated the transportation needs for myself and others. I have also found that clear communication is essential with transportation companies; I check that I have given them the correct pick-up and drop-off times and locations. I always let them know the time needed and the assistance I need getting in and out of the vehicle. My voice is difficult to understand on the phone, so I have requested to use email and texting whenever possible to organize my trips. Communication and organization are key to making public transportation work for me.

As I began my college journey, I wanted to enter a program of study that would challenge my mind and allow me to do the work successfully. I knew I wanted to pursue a degree, but I needed to gain some skills to be accepted into my program of choice. Some college instructors and support staff met with me and directed me to the Student Success Center. The support staff assisted me in building my reading, writing, and math skills so I could be accepted into the program. That brings me back to patience and persistence; this

preparation took a long time and hard work. I learned many missing math skills and became a confident reader and writer. I am grateful to those instructors to this day! They also helped me develop an accommodation plan, which I presented as I started each new course. As a rule, the teachers were happy to know about my accommodation and more than willing to help. My hard work over several years paid off because I was able to graduate with my degree. Because this did take time and money, I also want to mention that I applied for numerous scholarships and grants to fund my schooling. I encourage students to go for it because there are many opportunities if you look.

After finishing my degree, I wanted to find a job in my field. One of the challenges of applying for a position is determining if you have all the qualifications for the job. You want to be honest and show the business that you are the right person for the position. Disclosing your disability can be tricky, and it can have a positive or negative impact. I worked with a job coach, and we determined in each situation whether it was best to let the employer know about my disability before an interview so they could be prepared. Again, communication is so important. If you need job accommodation, you must speak up about what you need to do the job successfully. Being a strong advocate, you may find outside funding sources for the necessary accommodations.



With cerebral palsy, I have had many health and medical issues to deal with over the years. I have had several surgeries, ongoing physical therapy, changing needs for mobility aids, and speech and communication tools. I have had to become my secretary to coordinate my doctors, appointments, insurance, payments, transportation, and special programs. Health is a priority in my life, and I try to educate myself on how to be the best version of myself. I have learned to ask when I need assistance; I can still feel independent with the proper support. We all experience ups and downs and use our support systems to celebrate joyful moments and overcome hardships. With so many moving parts and constant change, self-advocacy will always be necessary in my life.