

THURSDAYS ● 50¢ BEERS ● 10-12

Program pairs peers, disabled

By Doug Kerns
Staff Reporter

Confronted by the intimidating nature of life, each of us can use the help of someone who has overcome the obstacles we face.

For the disabled, these obstacles are expanded and magnified, and the help of a peer is even more valuable.

The Nebraska League of Human Dignity's peer counseling and support services pair those on the road to independent living with volunteers having similar disabilities and goals. Joni Thomas, Independent Living

Services Coordinator, said, "Peer counseling is a kind of linking between two people who have either similar limitations or different disabilities with somewhat similar life experiences."

Thomas said a plus of peer counseling is that the disabled person can take advantage of the volunteer's wisdom.

"It may be someone with a new disability that is causing them to have certain limitations, and they may want to talk to a person who has had a similar situation for a long time," she said.

Thomas encouraged anyone interested in the program to volunteer.

She said, "We are always looking for individuals who want to be a peer."

According to Thomas, peer counseling has been very beneficial.

"All of the feedback that I'm aware of has been very positive. It has given people a real social knowledge of how to get by out in society and a real confidence in their own abilities."

Thomas said in the past some volunteers were trained, but this is not always the case.

"We have found that people just relating their former experiences to someone and being on a friend-type level works well," she explained.

The League is also involved in other areas, including disability awareness training, independent living skill training, and individual advocacy.

Thomas defined advocacy as "bringing about some type of change. It may be regulatory change; in the past it has been legislative change that we've been an integral part of getting accomplished."

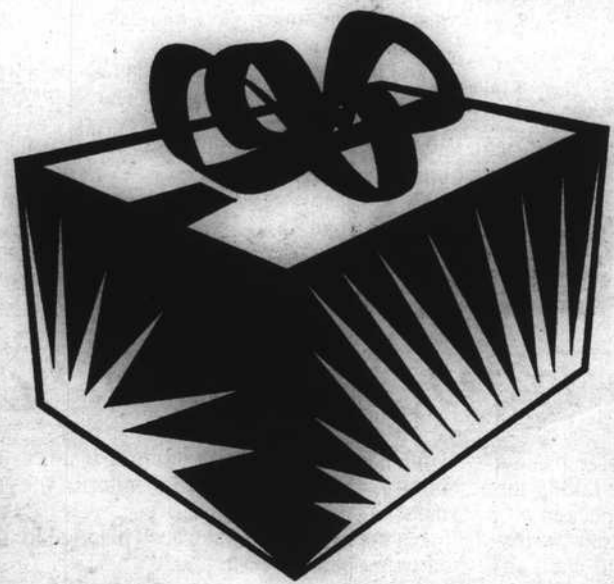
Individual advocacy can help the disabled receive the benefits they are eligible for.

"A lot of the time we will just help people express themselves," Thomas said. "Kind of a helping hand."

The League of Human Dignity is located at 1701 P St. Its phone number is 441-7871.

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