

“ *I stand up for people with disabilities – it’s the right thing to do.* ”



Meet

Kurt Rutzen

Sioux Falls, SD

Kurt Rutzen, Disability Advocate

Kurt Rutzen isn't afraid to make his voice heard. In fact, speaking up on behalf of people with disabilities is his job and his passion. As someone who was born with cerebral palsy, Kurt knows full well the challenges that people with disabilities face.

But what's most important to Kurt is helping people recognize that individuals with disabilities are just like anyone else – they have hopes and dreams, but just need a little extra support.

Kurt lives in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and grew up not so far from there in Worthington, Minnesota. He attended Worthington High School, graduated with general office assistant certificate from college in Willmar, and worked a variety of retail jobs. But he always knew he wanted to do something to help people with disabilities realize their full potential.

That work started in the Twin Cities, when he joined the Institute on Community Integration, part of the University of Minnesota which conducts research on disability issues. He served with ICI for about 10 years, and was a board member of The ARC of the United States in Washington, D.C., for about eight years. It was during this time that he heard about Bethesda, which has a large presence in Minnesota and across the country. Feeling he could make an even bigger impact, Kurt joined Bethesda's Board of Directors, where he became a valued voice for people with disabilities.

From there, a natural progression came as Kurt joined the Bethesda staff as a disability advocate. Today, he writes articles and travels the country, visiting lawmakers at state capitols and attending disability related conferences, always sharing his personal story and making the case that all of us should do a little more to help.

Kurt is thankful and blessed that he gets to do what he loves. He drives his own car and lives in his own place. His biggest frustration is for others who have to wait for services for a long time, depending on when Medicaid waivers are available. Sometimes, the wait can literally become a matter of life and death. Housing is a critical issue, too. People with disabilities deserve a quality, safe place to live, and, sadly, many don't have this basic necessity.

Kurt says that while we've come a long way, we have a long way to go. It is this reality that motivates Kurt to try even harder.

When he is not at work, Kurt spends time hanging out with his girlfriend, and his family is very important to him, too. His brother Kevin is like one of his best friends. Kurt also enjoys talking with people on Facebook and watching football games and the news. He especially likes comedy and his friends tell him he should find an amateur night at a comedy club!

Kurt notes that while a lot of his job is very serious, he feels he can't take himself too seriously. That mindset, and being very outgoing, helps him break the ice with people. That's the first step toward changing hearts and minds.

#IncludeAllAbilities

