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Welcome to the January 2010 issue of the Real Choice Newsletter

## In this Issue

- ▶ [IN MEMORIAM](#)
- ▶ [City of Urbana honors Lester with MLK award](#)
- ▶ [Update on Howe](#)
- ▶ [2010 Campaign actions](#)
- ▶ [Help for Voters with Disabilities](#)
- ▶ [The Campaign Welcomes a New Organizer](#)

## Upcoming Events

2010 Election

- Primary - Feb 2
- General - Nov 2

## About REAL CHOICE

The Campaign for Real Choice in Illinois is people with disabilities organizing for freedom and choice. We are a grassroots, citizen action organization consisting of people with disabilities and their supporters. For more on the Campaign, go to

## IN MEMORIAM

### LESTER T. PRITCHARD

**SEPTEMBER 25, 1949 - OCTOBER 12, 2009**

Lester Pritchard had a vision for people with disabilities. In that vision, he saw people living independent lives that are meaningful and full of purpose. More importantly, Lester did not just possess this vision, he lived it and worked for its fulfillment every day. Lester devoted the last 30 years of his life to the relentless pursuit of his vision.



To read a full memorial to our leader and founder, Lester - [click here](#).

## City of Urbana honors Lester with MLK award

On Friday, January 15, the City of Urbana honored Lester with the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "Outstanding Achievement Award". Lester served for 16 years on the Urbana Human Relations Commission and advocated for accessible housing in Urbana through Citizens for H.O.M.E.S. (Housing Options Meeting Equity Standards), an organization that he co-founded with his wife, Barbara, in 1997. Barbara accepted the award for her late husband at a Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration that honored several civil and human rights activists in Champaign County.



## Update on Howe

On August 28, 2009 Governor Quinn announced that he will close Howe Developmental Center in Tinley Park. After months of rallies, protests, hearings and meetings with many state officials, the state of Illinois has heard our cry for the closure of another failing state institution. Howe is scheduled to close by April 30, 2010 with many residents transitioning to life in the community. Congratulations to all the advocates who have fought so hard for the freedom of Howe residents!



[realchoiceinillinois.org](http://realchoiceinillinois.org)

## Pass it on

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The anticipated closure comes on the heels of a report released by the Department of Justice in November, 2009, which highlights a disturbing pattern of inadequate and often abusive care experienced by residents of Howe.

For more information, [click here](#).

## 2010 Campaign actions

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Be on the lookout for several Campaign for Real Choice actions in 2010. With the elections coming in November, and the state budget in shambles, this year should prove to be incredibly challenging and full of opportunities for advocates to push for change in Illinois.

- The Campaign will continue to push for quality community supports and services for people with disabilities. As we follow the closure of Howe Developmental Center, we will be working with state officials and community providers to help ensure that Howe residents are transitioned safely yet efficiently.
- The Campaign will be teaming up with several statewide disability rights organizations to help coordinate a series of legislative forums around the state in preparation for the November 2010 elections. Don't miss a chance for participatory democracy as we demand "Life My Way" for people with disabilities in Illinois. The forums will offer self-advocates an opportunity to ask critical questions of gubernatorial and legislative candidates and have a real impact on this year's elections. Watch out for announcements from the Campaign, the Arc of Illinois and the Family Support Network and participate in a legislative forum near you!
- The Campaign will also be collaborating with the Illinois Self-Advocacy Alliance for Change and Illinois Voices to work with self-advocates from around the state and discuss what reform, choice and independence means to them.

## Help for Voters with Disabilities

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Equip for Equality has developed a helpline for voters with disabilities. On Tuesday, February 2, Equip for Equality will have advocates available by telephone to assist voters with disabilities. They will be ready to answer any questions about any voting problems you might experience.

For Assistance:

Call: 1.800.537.2632

TTY: 1.800.610.2779

## The Campaign Welcomes a New Organizer

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In August, 2008, the Campaign for Real Choice hired a part-time organizer, Nick Quealy-Gainer. Nick was a student at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign for both his undergraduate and graduate education, where he received a Masters in Social Work from the Advocacy, Leadership and Social Change program. Nick has worked over the last ten years as a violence prevention educator in the fields of domestic violence and sexual assault as



well as a community organizer for health care reform and disability rights. He is now working with the Campaign for Real Choice as well as the local Community Choices Cooperative to bring about real reform in Illinois and help people with disabilities advocate for themselves. You can reach Nick at - [nick@realchoiceinillinois.org](mailto:nick@realchoiceinillinois.org)



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