

Lending Their Voice to Others

Susan Downs lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. But she has traveled to Springfield, Illinois to advocate for her brother, Bill, before state government officials.

“I really want to do whatever I can as a family member to make sure that my brother’s best interests are at hand and that someone is speaking on his behalf,” Susan Downs said.

She plays a key role with Illinois Mosaic Allied Voices (MAV) because she feels strongly about the rights and lives of people with intellectual disabilities.

“I want to be as involved as I can in Bill’s life and in helping not only him, but others as well,” she said. “I care so much about my brother and his future and that he maintains the quality of life that he deserves.”

Bill Downs receives services from Mosaic in Pontiac, Ill. Susan Downs said that she and her brother have always had a strong bond. She said that she thinks the passion a family member can bring when speaking with state officials makes an impact on the listener.

Susan Downs made her first visit to the Illinois capitol along with other members of Illinois MAV. She was nervous, wondering whether the fact that she is just an ordinary citizen and not someone in government would make it hard. Instead, she said, she found welcome and respect from representatives of elected officials.

“Not being an Illinois voter did not matter,” she said, noting that a couple of people were impressed she came all the way from Milwaukee to speak on behalf of her brother.

“We’re at a critical time,” Susan Downs said. “My whole motivation and passion behind this is my brother and ensuring that as long as he is on this earth, he is going to receive the quality of care and quality of life that he deserves. A lot of that is going to depend on the state and what happens there.”

Mosaic Allied Voices is open to anyone who has an interest in advocating for people with intellectual disabilities. Members receive email messages alerting them to pressing legislative issues and are asked to contact their representatives.

“People with disabilities need the support and love and voice of their family members to speak on their behalf,” Susan Downs said. “Get the word out – if the family members do it, it is more voices. I think it is important that we do whatever we can that they have a life they deserve.”

To learn more, or to become a member, visit www.mosaicalledvoices.org.

Bill Downs and his sister, Susan Downs

