

## **Rally planned for developmentally disabled**

**By ROB STROUD, Staff Writer**  
[rstroud@jg-tc.com](mailto:rstroud@jg-tc.com)

CHARLESTON — A rally is scheduled Wednesday morning on the courthouse square as part of a statewide campaign for improved services for people who are developmentally disabled.

The rally at 10 a.m. will be one stop of many in the “Freedom Quest” campaign as people with disabilities and their supporters caravan to the Illinois Capitol on Thursday.

A presentation by one of the campaign’s leaders and live music are planned for the courthouse square rally, organized by Charleston Transitional Facility.

Mike Brown, vice president for operations at CTF, said CTF has worked closely with Illinois Voices over the years and was happy to help when this self-advocacy group for the developmentally disabled started co-organizing rallies throughout the state.

“We are not doing it for CTF. We want to raise awareness for all people with disabilities,” Brown said.

The stated goals of Freedom Quest are to campaign for reducing the number of state-operated institutions, increasing the availability of community-based housing, and ultimately eliminating the state’s waiting list for services for the developmentally disabled. This list purportedly numbers more than 15,000.

Brown estimated that a large-scale institution can provide housing and other services at a cost of \$150,000 to \$175,000 per client. He said group homes and other community-based housing offered by CTF and other organizations can offer these services at a third of the cost to the state.

“The continual funding of services at a large institution like that does not make any economic sense,” Brown said.

Illinois ranks last in the nation in terms of providing community-integrated support for people with developmental disabilities, Brown said. CTF officials are believers that the developmentally disabled have a better quality of life if they live in small

homes that are part of their communities, he said.

"To us, it's like a civil rights issue. People should be able to live where they want. They should receive the services they need in a less restrictive environment," Brown said.

The Freedom Quest three-day caravan will have three routes that will come together in Springfield and each route will have four stops along the way. Brown estimated a caravan of about two dozen people from a Mt. Vernon rally will spend the night Tuesday in Mattoon prior to the Charleston rally.

Amy Walker, an advocate for the developmentally disabled, is scheduled to speak at the Charleston rally. The event also is set to include a performance by the Motherlode acoustic trio, Abraham Lincoln speech excerpts by B.F. McClerren, and the singing of "We Shall Overcome" by the Giver of Song Choir.

The choir is from the Human Resources Center in Paris. Lauren Rogers, a case manager at the center, said the choir was formed a few years ago to bring developmentally disabled singers together in a group setting and give them an opportunity to interact with their community.

Rogers said the choir has mainly performed at Human Resources Center functions and senior living facilities in Paris up to now.

"It gives them a chance to express themselves. A lot of them really enjoy singing," Rogers said. "They are all really excited about the rally. They have been looking forward to it."

Contact Rob Stroud at [rstroud@jg-tc.com](mailto:rstroud@jg-tc.com) or 238-6861.