



Advocates for developmentally disabled rally
BY SCOTT FITZGERALD, THE SOUTHERN
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MURPHYSBORO - Doug Pelka of Carbondale considers himself one of the luckier ones.

Having been institutionalized for 20 years because of a developmental disability, Pelka eventually got selected to live in Community Alternatives Illinois South of Carbondale and work at Specialized Training for Adult Rehabilitation (START).

"I've got freedom. I've got a job. I hope for the best," Pelka said Tuesday at the conclusion of Freedom Quest '09, a statewide rally focusing attention on people with disabilities.

Pelka joined other Freedom Quest participants and area supporters for nearly an hour-long rally on the north end of START in downtown Murphysboro.

Simultaneous rallies were being conducted in Zion on the Freedom Quest northeast route and Rock Island on the northwest route. The statewide campaign consists of three groups traveling different routes with 13 stops total before everyone converges Thursday on Springfield, said Krescene Beck of Blue Tower Training, a service provider company from Decatur. Beck said advocates who stopped in Murphysboro numbered about 50.

"Our mission is simple. We want to bring awareness to the plight of the developmentally disabled. We need the funding. We are spreading the message so people can choose where and choose how they live," Beck said.

According to statistics read at the rally, Illinois ranks very low in providing community integrated supports for people with developmental disabilities. Only 13 percent of the people with developmental disabilities in the state have jobs. Only three states provide less money than Illinois for community funding to aid the developmentally disabled. There are nearly 17,000 people with developmental disabilities waiting for services.

Amy Foster of Alton said she has been on a waiting list for developmental disability services since 2006.

"I'm thinking of moving out of state," Foster said.

Cindy Stamm who works at START said the Murphysboro nonprofit agency has sent letters to state Rep. Mike Bost, R-Murphysboro, and Gov. Pat Quinn stating Freedom Quest's cause and seeking lawmakers' support.

scott.fitzgerald@thesouthern.com / 618-351-5076

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Krescene Beck of Decatur speaks Tuesday morning at Specialized Training for Adult Rehabilitation (START) in Murphysboro during a Freedom Quest '09 rally.