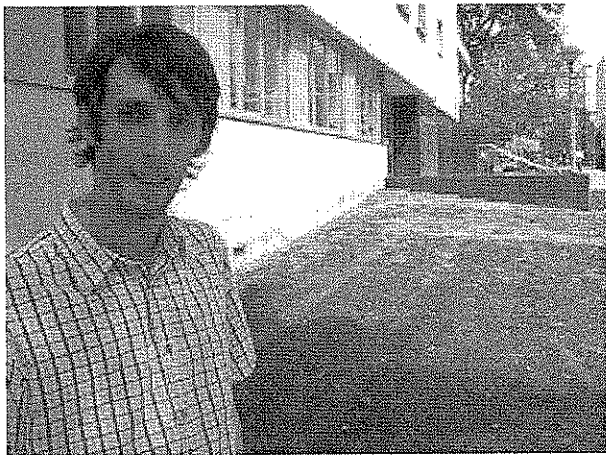




## Grass Roots: Madison's new advocate for the disabled believes in 'radical inclusion'



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People with disabilities live today in an America that is kind of like the South in the days of Jim Crow: the law produces a "separate but equal" existence that is often less often equal, says Jason Glozier.

The law today confers a legal equality on people with disabilities, but beyond the rights it dictates they, like blacks in the post-Civil War South, are not accepted by society, says Glozier, who began work July 1 as the disability rights and program services specialist for the city of Madison.

"I believe in the concept of radical inclusion," Glozier tells me. "And part of my job is to support everyone being included in every aspect of life in Madison."

Glozier is not disabled, but he brings to the job a passion fired while growing up in a family dedicated to disability rights activism and burnished while working as an advocate himself, most recently at Access to Independence, a local nonprofit group.

Glozier, 28, admits he may need to dial down the advocacy a bit in his new role, and says he already is feeling the difference between demanding change and working to identify issues and strategies to bring about change from inside city hall.

He stepped into a post in the city's Department of Civil Rights that had fallen out of the city budget after the 2009 departure of his predecessor and stayed vacant until Mayor Paul Soglin restored funding for a three-quarter time position this year.

"He has been exceptionally supportive of disability issues," Glozier says of Soglin. He points as an example to Soglin's insistence that sandwich board signs in front of local businesses, the target of a controversial crackdown, be removed because they make it hard for wheelchair users to use the public right-of-way on the sidewalk.

Other city departments are attentive to disability issues, too, Glozier says. Madison Parks, for instance, has already been in contact with him about assessing city parks and playgrounds for accessibility. "I'm really encouraged with what happens here," he says.

Tom Masseur, director of Disability Rights Wisconsin, feels the same way. The Madison-based nonprofit lately has been focusing on protecting services to people with disabilities as public funding to programs is cut. But the organization also fields calls on basic accessibility issues, and Madison

seems to be doing a good job there, he says.

Masseau is looking forward to finding ways for agencies like his to work with the city to create more awareness about accessibility issues. "I think it will be a good opportunity for all of us," Masseau says.

Access to polling places is another area where the city of Madison has focused attention, says Randy Black, long-time chairman of the Commission on People With Disabilities, a citizen panel on which Glozier previously served that advises policy makers. Black says Glozier's background in community-based advocacy "will be helpful in assuring a base of community support."

The commission has struggled to keep all its 12 slots filled in recent years, meaning that sometimes the panel did not have a quorum and therefore could not meet. But Glozier says it's important that the city take the time to find commission members who will help build a panel that is proactive in identifying and finding solutions to accessibility issues rather than just responding to them.

For example, the panel long has registered complaints when winter snow clearing falls short of the mark, he says. But in the past year, the commission has begun to reach out to other committees focused on snow removal to build allies on the issue and spread the idea that "disability" issues are everyone's issues.

"People don't realize the benefits that improving access for people with disabilities has provided for everyone. I can't point to a person who doesn't appreciate a ramp, or a curb cut or 'Walk' lights at intersections that stay on a little longer so people who are slower can get across the street," Glozier says.

Commonality around disabled people's full membership in society is a goal that may take a couple of generations to reach, says Glozier, who began learning about disability rights as a boy as his family advocated for his younger brother, Kyle, who has cerebral palsy.

In the meantime, people often continue to think of practices that separate disabled people in housing or employment not as segregation, but as "caretaking" of people not able to care for themselves, Glozier says. And that allows for the continued isolation of people with disabilities, putting them out of sight of the general public which, as a result, continues to see them as less than equal.

"We've got people who promote the concept that people with disabilities are 'pitiful,' so they don't get treated equally," Glozier says. "And being treated equally means being given the opportunity to fail. That's part of life, and if people don't get to experience that, then they don't learn how to cope with struggles when they come up, and there's more reliance on the service system."

## Grass Roots blog



**Pat Schneider**

For more than a decade, Pat has reported on the communities -- neighborhood, ethnicity, lifestyle