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SARAH PIERSMA-MANISTEE-BENZIE

### **Tireless Advocate Educates Rural Community**

If you get a chance to talk to this dynamic woman, in 30 seconds, you'll realize how fascinating she is and what a tireless advocate she is for herself and others.

One of Sarah Piersma's biggest accomplishments so far (we know there will be others) is diving into a political campaign that involved educating hundreds of people in a small, rural town (25 miles from Traverse City, Michigan) about the importance of voting 'yes' on a new transportation system, in a state where its economy is dead last in the country.

"It was sometimes difficult, asking voters to go to the polls for something a lot of them may not use and telling them to reach into their pockets for an extra \$30 a year, but it was important to me and to others with disabilities and it was actually fun! I was in commercials, I talked to anyone and everyone and I got a chance to meet some nice people," said Sarah.

In January 2007, her hard work paid off. Voters agreed to the new bus system, appropriately called the 'Benzie Bus' and Sarah's popularity rose to new heights.

"I was interviewed by the newspaper and I was on TV, it was pretty exciting. Since it started, I ride that bus everyday to work and I tell everyone else to use it. It is terrific!"

Sarah has more amazing accomplishments to share, she just recently became a homeowner!

"I moved in five days before Christmas and I am so happy because no tell is telling me what to do, when to go to bed, when to eat. I've been through all of that, it's not fun and I don't ever want to go back to that way of living. I am finally living my life the way I want to, it's awesome."

Sarah works with supports coordinators through Manistee-Benzie Community Health. They help her customize her Person-Centered Plan exactly the way she wants it and assist her with finding natural supports in

the community. She also has her own personal budget which has been in place for several years.

When Sarah isn't being interviewed by the media or lounging around in her new home with her kitty cat, she works full time at a local grocery store where she's been employed for the last three years.

“Some people say they only come in and shop when I'm there because I like to smile and ask them how they're doing. I love my job.”

Sarah is very involved on several committees and plays an active role as Chairperson of the local Regional Interagency Coordinating Council (RICC). She just recently got paid to be presenter at a Developmental Disabilities Council conference and is looking forward to attending the June Self-determination conference in Lansing.