



Noble County Convention & Visitors Bureau, Inc.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Bridging Barriers

Project aimed at ‘Bridging Barriers’ gets underway in Noble County

Kendallville, IN - The Noble County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) is leading a new project, working in collaboration with other community partners and investors, to help make the community more inclusive and accessible.

“Bridging Barriers” is just getting underway in Noble County and will include multiple steps aimed at significantly improving the accessibility of community assets, ensuring that people living with disabilities and who have special needs can engage, be enriched, and rejuvenate without barriers.

“Bridging Barriers is just beginning,” explains Grace Caswell, CEO for Visit Noble County. “Our first step in this project is to do a needs assessment of many of our tourism destinations, but our vision is much larger than just the tourism sector. We hope that by positioning the CVB as a leader in accessibility in the community, we will inspire others to learn about and adopt inclusive strategies, too.”

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2023 population data, about 5,000 individuals who reside in Noble County are under 65 years of age and have a disability. There are about 8,500 more residents who are aged 65 and older. The Centers for Disease Control reports that about 44% of adults aged 65 and older have a disability. These statistics mean that as many as 8,700 Noble County residents could be living with a disability. Many of those are likely to encounter barriers that limit their engagement in the assets available in their community.

The Bridging Barriers project was recently awarded a \$10,000 grant from the Community Foundation of Noble County through the AWS Foundation Accessible Communities Fund. The Arc Noble County Foundations is also partnering in the project, which will include surveys of existing tourism sites and retail businesses, as well as public feedback surveys to gain an understanding of existing barriers and identify opportunities for improvement. The CVB will also work to gather demographic data from top target tourist markets to gain a better understanding of accessibility needs and expectations of visitors to Noble County.

A Trends Global Survey found that 80% of global travelers seek to book their trips entirely online. That number grows to 86% for Millennials. Visit Noble County relies extensively on its website and social media to market to travelers, so the Bridging Barrier project also includes work to ensure it complies with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

Catchy Creations LLC, a locally owned strategic solutions business, has been secured to implement the UserWay AI Accessibility Widget Pro Plus on Visit Noble County’s website. UserWay AI is a digital accessibility solution that will help audit and provide a roadmap for website content and accessibility improvements. Website upgrades are expected to be completed over the next several months.

“UserWay AI is a tool that helps website visitors interact with web content,” Lori Gagen, owner of Catchy Creations explains. “With the widget, users can navigate and interact with an accessibility dashboard and tailor their experience for specific conditions, such as ADHD, dyslexia, visual impairments, and more. They can increase text sizes, change colors and contrast, and more to help improve the online experience.”

UserWay AI provides a free version of the widget that can be added to any website. The Bridging Barriers project team will be working to provide support to others in Noble County to incorporate the tool into their websites as well.

Local tourism partners, residents, and visitors are encouraged to get involved now to help inform the project’s efforts to develop strategies to improve accessibility. Participation will help Noble County raise the bar collectively to make information, products, services, and both physical and digital environments more accessible in the months and years ahead. All data collected will remain confidential and the CVB will circle back to help partners with strategies to improve as the project continues to unfold.

“The surveys for local businesses and attractions serve as a sort of self-assessment,” Caswell continues. “Taking an inventory of where we are and knowing where we hope to be in the coming years will help inform funding strategies and build more collaborations to improve.”

Surveys are available at www.visitnoblecounty.com/bridging-barriers and will remain open until at least March 31. Paper copies and personal assistance to participate are available by calling the CVB at (260) 636-3602.

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