

It's in our power to change.

# THE INITIATOR

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## The Power of Zero: A Look at the ZeroStep Program

Ideas that make sense for people with disabilities often make just as much sense for everyone. That's the case with ZeroStep™, a program from Disability Advocates of Kent County.

ZeroStep uses the principles of universal design to create homes that are more functional, safer, and even easier to move into. Common features include a no-step entry, low or flush threshold exterior doors, wider hallways and doors, more spacious bathrooms and kitchens, higher outlets, and lower light switches.

"A ZeroStep home provides the most inclusive environment for everyone, whether they have a disability or not," says Joanne Feutz, Occupational Therapist for Disability Advocates. "You never know when you or someone you care about will have an injury or disability, and by planning ahead, your home can accommodate anyone."

Typically, this approach adds minimal construction costs, and it may even increase value. "As the population ages, more people will be looking for this type of home," says Feutz. "By planning ahead, you can stay in your home as you age, which studies show most people prefer to do."

Disability Advocates is working to spread the word about ZeroStep through public seminars. But the program also serves the community in other ways, according to Margaret Biggs of Disability Advocates.

One of these services is residential design consulting by ZeroStep's interior designer. Biggs explains, "We recently worked with a condo developer who wanted to build

family-friendly housing. He called ZeroStep, and he and the construction manager met with our interior designer. She looked over the plans, identified all of the interior and exterior issues to address, and suggested solutions using ZeroStep guidelines. The developer made the changes, and one of his models achieved ZeroStep Certification."

Another ZeroStep service is consulting with commercial and government organizations. "We review plans for new construction and existing facilities and parks for accessibility," says Biggs. "For example, a local children's camp requested an assessment of their cabins, medical facility, trails and swimming pool. ZeroStep assessed the property according to Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines and shared their expertise in universal design. Now the camp has a document for architects and engineers to use as they develop renovation plans."

Finally, ZeroStep also supports individuals through occupational therapy. One recent success focused on a senior citizen who had moved into a family member's home. ZeroStep's occupational therapist evaluated the home, developed a plan for a ramp and adaptive equipment, found an adult day care center, and secured community funding to help the family pay for expenses. "This man was able to remain in the community with his family, thus increasing his quality of life," Renee Thompson, Certified Occupational Therapist Assistant for Disability Advocates. "He and his family are extremely grateful for ZeroStep's services."



**"You never know when you or someone you care about will have an injury or disability, and by planning ahead, your home can accommodate anyone."**  
-Joanne Feutz

### More about ZeroStep

ZeroStep Guidelines are voluntary standards for building a universally designed home. They meet or exceed ICC/ANSI A117.1 - 2003, Fair Housing Guidelines, Michigan Building Code 2006 (based on International Construction Code 2006) and Michigan Residential Code 2006. They are also the qualifying criteria for a "ZeroStep Certified Home®." Visit our web site, [www.zerostep.org](http://www.zerostep.org).

For more information about ZeroStep Guidelines, ZeroStep Certification, or universal design, contact Margaret Biggs at 616 949 1100, ext. 249 or [Margaret.b@zerostep.org](mailto:Margaret.b@zerostep.org).

To learn more about ZeroStep Occupational Therapy home assessments and adaptive equipment and the Assistive Technology Loan Fund ([www.michiganloanfunds.org/atlf/index](http://www.michiganloanfunds.org/atlf/index)), contact Lisa Nelson-Williams at 616 949 1100, ext. 255 or [lisa.n@zerostep.org](mailto:lisa.n@zerostep.org).



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Most people equate disability with limitations. But it's our job to change the perceptions and realities that prevent people with disabilities from sharing in the community. Every year, we provide training, mentoring, and referrals to help people with disabilities and their families live productive lives. Because disability touches so many people, we also work on a larger scale, helping governments and businesses make changes that benefit not just those with disabilities, but everyone in the community.

## Who we are

3600 Camelot Drive SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49546  
t 616 949 1100  
f 616 949 7865  
www.dakc.us



## Volunteers

We rely on our wonderful volunteers for so much of what we accomplish. To find an opportunity that fits your skills, interests, and schedule, please contact:  
The Volunteer Coordinator  
616 949 1100 Ext. 247

## Donations

As a non-profit organization, we welcome gifts of all sizes. You may make a tax-deductible contribution by calling 616 949 1100 or mailing a check (payable to DAKC) to:  
DAKC (Disability Advocates of Kent County)  
3600 Camelot Drive SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49546

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