

**STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
Holiday Inn Express, Minot & Virtual
August 7-8, 2025**

Call to Order: Brittney Hogan called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. A quorum was present.

Roll Call:

Members Present: Leon Dietrich, Angie Bosch, Scott Burlingame, Brittney Hogan, Peter Yung, Chelsy Sondrol, Lisa Hermosillo, McKenna Thrush, Ben Wolf Necklace, Warren Granfor, Gillian Plenty Chief, Shannon Bozovsky, Emma-Leigh Miller, Ali Brown

Members Absent: Robyn Soiseth, Joe Yasenchack

Non-Council Members Present: Aimee Volk, Jim Fleming, Cody Kurtz, Kianna Roecker, Randy Sorensen

Approval of the August 2025 Agenda:

Scott Burlingame made a motion to amend the agenda to reflect Vote on 2026 SILC Meeting Dates, not 2025. Angie Bosch seconded the motion with amendments. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

Approval of May 2025 Minutes:

Peter Yung made a motion to approve the May 2025 SILC minutes as presented, Leon Dietrich seconded the motion. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

Correspondence – Brittney Hogan

The SILC PPR for FFY 2024 was returned for a couple of edits and will be resubmitted for approval.

The Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL) Conference is October 17-19, 2025, in Portland, Oregon. The conference is Empower Your Inner R.O.S.E – Resilient, Outspoken, Steadfast, and Engaged.

Jim discussed the agreements with the Centers for Independent Living. An interim legislative committee was formed called the ND Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). Within this committee, they have requested that information be provided on how our agreements and funds are supporting communities. The goal is to show how the dollars are being used and why continued legislative funding is important. We will focus on identifying data that demonstrates the return on investment, which will be shared with Vocational Rehabilitation to support ongoing funding.

Treasurer's Report – Peter Yung

Reviewed the Treasurer's Report.

Scott Burlingame made a motion to accept the Treasurer's Report as presented, Lisa Hermosillo seconded the motion to approve. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

The APRIL Conference was discussed, and a discussion was held on sending SILC members. If people are interested in attending, please send Aimee Volk your name and interest by August 20th.

Vote on 2026 SILC Meeting Dates – Brittney Hogan

Discussion was held on meeting dates. It was decided to have the meetings on the first Thursday (1:00 pm – 5:00 pm) and Friday (9:00 am – 12:00 pm) in February, May, August, and November.

February 5-6, 2026 – Bismarck, ND

May 7-8, 2026 – Grand Forks, ND

August 6-7, 2026 – Minot, ND

November 5-6, 2026 – Fargo, ND

Leon Dietrich made a motion to approve the dates as presented for the 2026 calendar year, McKenna Thrush seconded the motion to approve. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

Minot Commission on Aging – Roger Reich

Roger talked about aging and statistics in North Dakota.

- 23% of the population are elderly
 - 6.5% of those have food security issues and 4% have severe food problems
- 26.5% seniors live alone
- 12.6% seniors live below the poverty line

There are 23 transportation services, including rural towns. There are hubs in every region (eight regions) through the contracts in the state. There are 131 meal sites throughout the state to make food available to seniors (60+).

In Region 2, there are 28 meal sites and two contractors. In the city of Minot, they do 21 routes per day to get meals to seniors.

Before every legislative session, they send an email educating on why senior meals are beneficial through “Feeding Grandma”. The cost of one year of food for a senior costs the same as 10 days in a nursing home or two days in a hospital. This follows the Independent Living Philosophy of individuals getting to age in place the way they want.

Legislative Updates – Senator Burckhard

He has been serving for 14 years and is currently in his 4th term, representing one of the 47 districts in North Dakota. For the 2026–2027 session, North Dakota had a \$20 billion budget. Of that, \$2.4 billion (15%) was allocated to K–12 education, with \$11,349 appropriated per student. Higher ed received \$3.4 billion (16%), while Health and Human Services was allocated \$6 billion (30%).

One of the major legislative accomplishments was property tax reform, which resulted in \$1,600 in relief per household. This was funded through earnings from the Legacy Fund. In addition, \$25 million was invested in the Housing Trust Fund and \$10 million was directed toward homelessness initiatives.

For those interested in advocacy, it was recommended to work through an agency to draft a bill. Legislators receive numerous texts, voicemails, and emails daily, so direct communication can be overwhelming. Meeting with lobbyists is often more effective, as they regularly interact with Senators and Representatives. It was strongly advised to avoid yelling, threats, or toxic behavior when trying to influence policy.

2025 Legislative Session Outcomes – Veronica Zietz

There were 1,089 bills and resolutions. 489 failed, 601 passed, and 4 were vetoed.

- SB 2014 Industrial Commission appropriation (housing finance agency) \$10 million for homelessness and \$25 million for housing, passed.

Criminal and Juvenile Justice

- HB 1166 - Dealing with sealing criminal records allows the sealing of a criminal record if the individual was not convicted, passed.
- HB1263 – if the sealing of a criminal record, this now allows them to wait one year if the petition was denied.
- SB 2036 – related to age and definition of child offender, proceedings, and assessment, passed.

Housing

- HB 1610 – related to landlords not allowed to charge a tenant fee for paying rent in cash or check, passed.
- SB 2238 – relates to the expungement of eviction records. This bill passed, they can move to have the record sealed after seven years.

Education

- HB 1160 prohibits students from having cellular phones during instructional time. Each school has to have a policy related to this. It does have language that protects students with disabilities, passed.
- SB 2241 related to the authorization and administration of public charter schools, passed.
- HB 1540 related to the education savings account program, it did pass, but was later vetoed.

Voting

- HB 1165 related to election practices “clean-up” bill. If you are an absentee voter, the ballot has to be received by the close of election day. Absentee voters can also bring their ballot in person by the end of the election day.
- HB 1245 removed part of the section that makes it unlawful to pay or receive pay for collecting petition signatures based on the number of signatures obtained. This failed.
- HB 1287 related to the registration of voters, and this failed.
- SB 2230 required the Secretary of State to distribute information on constitutional measures passed.

Mental Health

- HB 1468 \$16 million for behavioral health beds in West Central Human Service Center region, passed.
- SB 2079 relates to the definition of a mental health professional, passed.
- SB 2081 relates to the operation of geropsych facilities, passed. Not necessarily positive for the disability community as there are now more beds and may not look at HCBS services.

Services

- HB 1114 relates to health insurance coverage of insulin drugs and supplies \$25, which passed.
- HB 1485 requires the personal needs allowance to be reviewed and adjusted for inflation annually. It went from \$100 to \$115 per month.
- SB 2070 Resident rights in health care facilities passed.
- SB 2112 relates to eligibility, services and program management at Life Skills and Transition Center (LSTC) passed with a sunset.
- SB 2193 relates to the definition associated with assistance animals, failed.
- SB 2222 related to the definition of assistance animals and disability documentation for a service/assistance animal in a rental, failed.

Transportation

- HB 1106 relates to grants for non-fixed route transit providers, and they passed with \$2 million.
- HB 1137 relates to the display of mobility-impaired parking permits to be hung or placed in the dash, passed.

Interim Studies

- Study the costs and benefits of regional correctional facilities.
- Study the funding needs of fixed-route city transportation networks.
- Consider studying costs and savings associated with pretrial service programs operating in the state and opportunities to reinvest savings to improve re-entry outcomes.
- Consider studying expanding access to criminal record sealing.
- The Legislative Management created the Legislative Task Force on Government Efficiency.
- Study of the accessibility of state and local services for individuals who are deaf, hard of hard, or have hearing differences.
- Consider studying homelessness in the state.

Committee Breakouts

Friday, August 8, 2025

Call to Order: Brittney Hogan called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. A quorum was present.

Roll Call:

Members Present: Ben Wolf Necklace, Chelsy Sondrol, Warren Granfor, Brittney Hogan, Shannon Bozovsky, Angie Bosch, Scott Burlingame, Lisa Hermosillo, Leon Dietrich, McKenna Thrush, Gillian Plenty Chief

Members Absent: Robyn Soiseth, Peter Yung, Joe Yasenchack, Emma-Leigh Miller, Ali Brown

Non-Committee Members: Aimee Volk, Stephanie Bouche, Kianna Roecker, Cody Kurtz, Randy Sorensen

Pathfinder Services of ND – Mistie Bouly-Clementich

Their mission is to help families, youth, and professionals through engagement, education, and empowerment. They have three major funding sources for their three major programs: The Parent and Training Information (PTI) Center, Continuum of Care Program (COC), and the Pathfinder Services of ND Broadway Circle (PBC). Every state is required to have a PTI.

PTI is federally funded. They assist families of children with disabilities (birth-26) understand their rights, access services, and actively support their child's education. They help North Dakotans understand their rights in education, collaborate effectively with school staff, navigate educational plans, support services, etc.

The Continuum of Care Program supports rural youth (14-24) experiencing or are at risk of homelessness through the Pathways to Success program. They provide one-on-one support and guidance from staff with lived experience to help youth set and reach goals in housing, education, and well-being.

Pathfinder Services of ND Broadway Circle (PBC) is a family shelter in Minot, and this is a new program. It will have 17 apartments. Their office will move to this new location.

Quarterly Director's Report:

Angie for Freedom: See attached.

Royce for Dakota Center for Independent Living: See attached.

Scott for Independence, Inc.: See attached.

Randy for Options: See attached.

Committee Reports:

Governance Committee – We have two new board members: Lisa Hermosillo took over for Hope Wolbert, and McKenna Thrush took over for Nancy Lundon. We have a full council.

The Training and Technical Assistance Needs and the Self-Assessment forms need to be filled out. This will be emailed out.

Internal Affairs – Chelsy Sondrol: Reported on the GRID.

External Affairs – Angie Bosch: Reported on the GRID.

State Rehabilitation Council:

Aimee Volk is the interim liaison.

Committee on Aging – Royce Schultze:

No report.

Olmstead Commission – Scott Burlingame:

The Olmstead Committee had a presentation on customized employment. They discussed how they can engage in the community.

NASILC – Aimee Volk:

A meeting was held on July 30th, discussion was held on the upcoming State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) and whether anyone has started a timeline. There were discussions about how SILCs developed a survey and extracted the data to make goals and objectives.

Public Comment:

No comment.

The next SILC meeting will be on November 6-7, 2025, in Fargo, ND, and will have the virtual option.

Scott Burlingame made a motion to adjourn the meeting, and Lisa Hermosillo seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

Directors' Report-Independence, Inc. – Scott Burlingame, Executive Director – 8/8/25

Individual Services Successes

A 59-year-old male was referred to Independence, Inc. after health problems. Independence, Inc. helped him get referrals to other agencies from his traumatic brain injury to better understand how it affects him. Independence, Inc. and NDCPD got him moved out of his uninhabitable trailer into an apartment. He is now working on getting his license back and learning about his brain injury.

A 63-year-old male was referred to Independence, Inc. in need of assistance with assistive technology. This gentleman is hearing impaired and unable to know when people were at his door, if the fire detector was going off, or when he was getting a phone call. We were able to assist with getting a doorbell with a camera, a detection system that flashes when the gentleman's phone is ringing or when the fire alarm is going off. Since working with Independence, Inc., this gentleman has completed and been approved for LIHEAP, learned about the public bus system, and received assistance with his Section 8 voucher.

A 36-year-old gentleman has been working with Independence, Inc. and the Transition and Diversion Program for a year. While working on his recovery, he wanted to save up money before finding an apartment to ensure he was successful. We assisted him with finding an apartment that was within his price range and assisted with setting up his new place.

We are working with a 94-year-old woman who has dementia and lives with family. She has started to wander out of her apartment, causing safety concerns for her family. With the assistance of the Transition and Diversion Program, we helped get door alarms that will chirp when the front door opens, notifying the family of her trying to leave. This will allow her to stay at home longer and not end up in a nursing facility or assisted living.

An 18-year-old woman connected with Independence, Inc., seeking help to find employment in Minot. She lives with right-side paralysis and severe anxiety and wanted to overcome the challenge of finding a job that could accommodate her disability. With support and guidance, she successfully secured a local job that works with her needs and accommodations.

A 37-year-old woman who had struggled with sobriety for several years was recently accepted into a local sober living program. She is currently sober, committed to her recovery, and actively searching for a job. She came to Independence, Inc. after a friend recommended our services, and she shared that we helped her feel supported, empowered, and free from judgment as she works to rebuild her life.

We assisted an 88-year-old man and his wife in understanding and managing their finances. We provided tools to help them create a budget, offered financial guidance tailored to their situation, and connected them with a free financial counseling resource for future support.

We assisted a 22-year-old woman in developing the skills needed to live independently. Over several weeks, we taught her about tenant rights, using public transportation, time management, safety preparedness, and basic self-care skills. She successfully signed a lease for an on-campus apartment and received resources on how to connect with HCBS if she needs additional homemaker services.

Not long ago, Jo Fox faced deep uncertainty. Living with end-stage renal disease and adjusting to life as an amputee, she felt isolated, in pain, and unsure if she could continue living independently after losing her primary caregiver. When she connected with Independence Inc., our team helped her navigate services like food assistance, medical coverage, in-home support, and accessible equipment. We secured 24/7 care, reliable transportation to dialysis, and the supplies she needed to stay safe and comfortable at home. With a nurse now helping her manage medications and monitor her health, Jo has regained energy, reduced pain, and enjoys small outings again. “I’ve never had people help me like this before,” Jo said. “It makes me feel rich. I’m just so grateful.”

Transportation Advocacy

Independence, Inc. strongly encouraged people with disabilities, along with their family members and service providers, to participate in Minot City Transit’s Neighborhood Meeting. We emphasized that public transportation in Minot is often undervalued by those who do not rely on it, and that decisions about potential reductions or changes could be made without fully considering how essential it is for individuals with disabilities. Our outreach highlighted the importance of showing up and speaking out to ensure the voices of those most affected were included in the conversation.

The event was very well attended, with a diverse group of community members sharing their experiences, concerns, and ideas. Attendees provided significant feedback on issues such as long wait times, accessibility challenges, and the need for routes and schedules that better support employment, medical appointments, and daily living. Many participants also spoke about the consequences they face when transportation is unavailable or unreliable, reinforcing how critical these services are to maintaining independence.

This level of community engagement sent a clear message to city decision-makers: public transit is not a luxury, but a lifeline for many residents. The input gathered during the meeting will be vital in shaping a transit system that works for everyone and in preventing reductions that could harm our community’s most vulnerable populations.

Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)

As a member of the 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) Committee, I continue to represent the perspective of people with disabilities in this long-range planning process. The MTP will guide how transportation investments and improvements are prioritized through 2050, with a focus on building healthier, smarter, and economically feasible communities.

During Phase 2, we have emphasized the importance of smart growth, accessibility, and collaboration with other city planners and decision-makers to ensure transportation planning does not happen in isolation. Creating inclusive, connected communities requires reliable access to jobs, healthcare, recreation, and community spaces for people with disabilities.

To support this effort, Independence, Inc. encouraged people with disabilities, their friends, and allies to complete the Phase 2 public survey, and all of our staff were asked to participate as well. While the survey is listed as a 10-minute activity, it can take longer because of its detailed and dense content. Still, time is a valuable investment, as this feedback directly informs strategies and priorities for the future. This survey is just one step in a comprehensive process that will continue over the next year, and I plan to keep engaging our network as the plan develops.

Homelessness

Independence, Inc. hosted the Minot Alliance to End Homelessness, a coalition of local nonprofit organizations committed to addressing the growing issue of homelessness in Minot. As a key partner in this effort, Independence, Inc. plays an important role in coordinating community-wide initiatives and fostering collaboration among housing, mental health, recovery, and peer support services. This summer, Independence, Inc. facilitated Minot's annual Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, part of a nationwide effort to document homelessness. Volunteers identified multiple camps on the island near Holiday Village and learned that many individuals experiencing homelessness are employed but face barriers such as unaffordable rents, long waitlists for housing assistance, poor credit, and past criminal records. The PIT Count also highlighted the lack of low-barrier emergency shelter options in Minot following the closure of Project BEE, leaving many without safe housing alternatives. The Minot Alliance to End Homelessness emphasizes that banning encampments does not solve homelessness but merely displaces vulnerable individuals, making outreach and services more difficult to access. Effective solutions require input from across the community, including elected officials, service providers, businesses, faith groups, and neighbors.

Homelessness is not solely a law enforcement issue but a community challenge that demands coordinated, compassionate responses focused on housing access and long-term support. Independence, Inc. and the Alliance remain committed to advancing these efforts and facilitating collaborative discussions to develop sustainable solutions.

Minot Mayor's Race

For our recent Get Out The Vote (GOTV) efforts during the Minot special mayoral election, we focused heavily on engaging people with disabilities, their families, friends, and allies to emphasize the importance of local elections in shaping accessibility, transportation, housing, and community services. Through targeted outreach, educational materials, and partnerships with local organizations, we encouraged voter participation and made sure voters knew how to prepare with proper ID and where to cast their ballots.

Hopefully, our efforts helped Minot experience the best voter turnout for any local election in years. This strong participation reflects the community's growing commitment to inclusion and advocacy, demonstrating that when empowered with information and support, voters with disabilities and their allies will show up and make a difference at the polls.

Options IRCIL – August 2025 SILC Report

The Independent Living Program is one of the few programs that can assist people with a multitude of needs. During the last quarter, some of the more unique assistance provided included Options staff assisting a school in identifying where a ramp could be secured so a Graduate could walk across the stage. Helped an individual sign up for and participate in a “Fishing has no Boundaries” event. Found an individual an electric mobility device so they had a means of transportation when discharged from the Hospital. Helped a person identify and sign up for a Dental Plan so they can fund their dental work. Additionally, Options worked with a person to get a new cell phone and then helped them set it up, making sure all their contacts transferred.

In collaboration with the State, Options has been utilizing Public Health Worker funds to fund a position to help people with disabilities reduce their social isolation through recreational/leisure activities. The activities can be in a group setting through events, Options facilitates or learning how to become more involved in the Community through one-on-one assistance.

To increase the number of opportunities where people can interact with others, two venues have been utilized. One uses Mountainbrook, a mental health drop-in center, and the other is located at a local housing complex. The sessions held at these locations are cross-disability and open to guests without disabilities. Through the organized events, it is hoped people will make connections with others, build their own social networks, and learn to plan their own independent activities. Some people being assisted have unique goals outside the planned events and when they do, the staff person works on barriers inhibiting leisure activity participation, such as transportation, cost, and the lack of accommodations needed to participate. In some cases, the people being served need help learning how to plan and carry out activities on their own.

The funding for this effort is set to end in September, so Options is currently working on how to take aspects of the service and integrate it with services provided to people. Options provides relocation services to. It is hoped that through these services, this population will be less isolated.

Options has worked on various community activities that have included marketing our services, providing technical assistance to businesses to increase their accessibility, advocating for greater outdoor accessibility, and advocating for services for people with disabilities. In early June, a trainer was contracted to assist staff with increasing their knowledge of assessing trails. As part of the training staff spent half of a day evaluating trails at Turtle River State Park, adding to the trails surveyed the prior year. The data collected includes trail surface, grade, cross slope, features found, and obstacles.

Four staff persons from two Centers, that included Freedom and Options, met with part of North Dakota’s Congressional Members in conjunction with the National Council on Independent Living’s Annual Conference held in Washington D.C. Staff provided the members with information about the Centers for Independent Living, the SILC, and some of the issues people with disabilities are experiencing.

Dakota Center for Independent Living Director's Report – August 2025

Outreach & Community Engagement

- Attended multiple community health fairs and awareness events:
 - *Be Aware Vision Loss Open House*
 - *Doors to Success Resource Fair*
 - *10th Annual Riverwalk* – 647 attendees visited our booth
 - *Disability Pride and Awareness Day*
- Provided a DCIL presentation at the *Missouri Valley Coalition for Homeless*
- Hosted a *Consumer Appreciation Luncheon* at the Eagles
 - Bingo, trivia, word searches, hamburgers, brats, root beer floats

Special Events

- Celebrated the *35th Anniversary of the ADA* with a community picnic
 - Hot dogs and burgers, potluck for the consumers, prizes

Grant Funding & Projects

- Received funding from:
 - Gibbens Memorial Grant (NDAD)
 - Eagles Grant
- Grants will support:
 - New KIDS Program (Knowledge, Inclusion, Development & Support)
 - Gardening Program featuring an ADA-compliant raised bed
- Facing contractor challenges—currently seeking a builder for the raised garden bed after three contractors backed out

Assistive Technology (AT)

- Multiple AT booths were presented throughout the 18 counties
- AT outreach has led to several new consumers purchasing or exploring equipment

Consumer Services

- Active consumer count on IL side only: 107 as of 8/7/2025

Social & Recreation Program

- Participation has tripled:
 - Past attendance: 2–5 participants
 - Current attendance: 10–20 participants
- Recent events include:
 - Kindness Rocks
 - Mandan Rodeo
 - ND Heritage Center Tour
 - Bingo Night
 - Dakota Zoo Trip
 - Seed Paper Art Class
 - Mandan Concert Series
 - Smoothie & a Movie Afternoon

MFP/TDP

- New staff starting at the end of August 2025
 - Recent turnover – looking to turn one of our MFP slots into a TDP position.

Freedom - ND SILC Director's Report – August 2025

Fargo - News

Highlights/Consumer Stories

From our IL Advocate: Katelyn Vilmo (Fargo)

I have been collaborating with Job Service to present a Cash Confidence presentation at their youth workshop. For a consumer success story, I have been working with a consumer for a couple of years. She experienced difficulty finding housing and advocating for herself. It took around two years before we were able to start meeting in person, as meeting by phone worked best. We were able to work on talking points for her medical providers as she experienced barriers communicating to them. We have been working on communication skills to help her continue to learn how to advocate for herself. She's starting to grow more confident in the ability to speak for herself and she's starting to request more appointments to work on putting her words into bullet point lists.

MFP & TDP- Program Highlights

From our Assistant Program Director, Merri Christlieb

2 positions based out of Fargo were hired at the beginning of June for the MFP & TDP programs.

The Transition and Diversion Program (TDP) continues to be busy with 30 referrals in May; 16 in June and already 15 in the first half of July. The transition coordinators are assisting consumers with many challenges including mental health diagnosis, hoarding tendencies, poor credit, outstanding debt, no income, or apartments that no longer meet their needs due to accessibility, etc. to name a few. Of these referrals, there have been 9 transitions!

The Money Follows the Person program (MFP) has also been busy with 7 referrals in May; 12 referrals in June; and 8 in the first half of July. The challenges for the transition coordinators with MFP are often related to back debt, evictions, the need for all necessities to get them re-established in the community, and the need for durable medical equipment. Of these referrals, there have been 10 transitions.

Freedom Resource Center is extremely fortunate to have such dedicated and knowledgeable transition coordinators doing this challenging work, as every transition is life-changing for the consumer!

Merri and Raegan attended the NCIL (National Council on Independent Living) Conference in Washington, D.C. the week of July 21.

MFP Highlights/Consumer Stories

From our IL Advocate/Transition Coordinator: Tricia McNamee (Fargo)

I have been working with consumers on transitioning out of facilities back into independent living in the community. Assisting them to get connected to resources and access funding for needed items such as assistive equipment. For example, one consumer was just granted funding to purchase a portable lift that a caregiver can use to transfer the consumer into a vehicle, then fold and bring the lift along to use at the destination. This equipment will increase the consumer's access to the community.

Another consumer currently has a temporary ramp from Freedom's Ramp Loan program that our Accessibility Specialist, Jen, helped coordinate. I have also been working with this consumer (and family) to obtain a long-term ramp for access to the home.

Outreach efforts have been completed recently. I collaborated with an ND Options Counselor to visit residents at a nursing home to educate them about the services and resources available. A home care agency (Griswold Home Care) came to Freedom to meet with Resource Specialist Macheala and I, to learn about and discuss services.

I have recently attended a meeting for the Senior Coalition of Cass & Clay Counties. "*The purpose of the Senior Coalition is to bring together persons interested in promoting the well-being of the elderly in the community*" - Meeting Agenda. The Coalition puts together a yearly resource guide for the community.

The internal FRC Event planning committee has been another area of focus of my time lately as we plan two events. First is the Open house to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the ADA (scheduled 7/23/25). Second is our first ever Resource Fair this fall (scheduled 9/23/25).

From our IL Advocate/Transition Coordinator: Irina Schanilec (Fargo)

I have been working with a genuinely nice couple, both individuals need transition services. In June 2025, I received a referral for a 78-year-old from Options Counseling, which is an extension of the state transition programs consisting of options counselors who cover the entire state (ND) and interview people who may be eligible for MFP to see if they're interested in community living. She was a candidate for our services; therefore, I met with her at Bethany Nursing Home in Fargo, and while having a conversation with her regarding the MFP transition plan, she disclosed to me that her husband was also at the same facility, on the same floor in a different room. She had a serious infection, which led to sepsis and which in turn, led to the occurrence of dementia, and she had had a brief period of time when she experienced memory loss and confusion. She has recovered from her infection and her functioning has returned remarkably close to normal. There are a few details she may forget, such as specific numbers, but otherwise, she is ready to live independently at home again. Her husband has diabetes, an amputation of his toes, and was in recovery for cervical spine surgery. Once we found out that her husband was also in the same facility, we went to his room to visit. He was also eligible for MFP, so I filled out all the referral forms and submitted them to the state, so that he could also participate in the MFP program and hopefully get all the support they both need to get back to the community. They have a home that is already accessible that they are renting in Wahpeton and wanted to return to as soon as possible. I was successful in getting him accepted on the MFP program very quickly after that initial meeting. We then met as a team and discussed what services they may potentially qualify for, as they both are aging, and would need help with maintaining their home, doing chores such as washing bedding, etc., and preparing meals. She holds a graduate degree from Wisconsin University and has been a teacher for over 30 years. He is a US veteran, and he was a school librarian for the same amount of time. They both receive small pensions along with their Social Security, and unfortunately, due to this circumstance, they do not qualify for home and community-based services through state aging, unless they could pay out of pocket. With this information, I worked with our team as well as with the resources available through our resource specialist at Freedom, and through the resources that I am aware of in the community, to get some referrals placed for them to be able to return home safely. The MFP program could purchase groceries and some adaptive equipment. I was able to place referrals to the Senior Safety program so they could have some additional adaptive equipment and an emergency response, should they need it. I also advocated with them/for them to set up a budget so they may hire a specific service dedicated to taking care of their pets, so they do not have to be put at risk when they are taking them out for walks etc. I also contacted the VA and communicated with the nursing staff about the needs,

so that he may investigate the possibility of getting in-home services through the veteran health care available to him.

They are both home currently, and incredibly happy to be reunited with their dogs after almost 5 months stay in the nursing facility. They have most of what they need; however, I wanted to share this story because often in our day-to-day work, we see a lot of barriers for people to receive services or housing. Often, the individuals we work with have a poor rental background or no income and therefore cannot get accessible housing. In this case both of these consumers feel that they are at a huge disadvantage because “we worked our whole life for what we've earned, and we feel they are being punished for it.” So sometimes another big barrier for our consumers is having an income too high to qualify for aging services in their home. Without access to those services, it is even more important for our Freedom advocates to utilize the resources we have, to make their transition as safe as possible and connect them to other resources available to them.

From our IL Advocate/Transition Coordinator: Skyler Eck (Fargo)

My first transition as a Transition Coordinator was with a consumer who was very dissatisfied and frustrated with almost every program she was working with. Despite her feeling her needs were not being met, Freedom Resource Center's team was able to work towards a path of support to ensure she continued to live independently. After going through the process, the consumer successfully transitioned through the MFP program and showed gratitude and relief to the team, and everyone involved in the transition.

TDP – Highlights/Consumer Stories

From our IL Advocate/Transition Coordinator: Gibb Sheets (Fargo)

A consumer has been meeting with me for a few months to get help with random things like filling out Medicaid paperwork or getting a referral for Fix It Forward. She is super nice and has a heavy accent as English is her second language. She has been through some very rough few years. About two years ago she got sick from diabetes and was put into a medical coma. During that time, her son (who she was living with) had died. Since she was not on the lease and was in a coma, she was unable to stay living there and became homeless because of it. She was also unable to apply for SSDI because she has not had a work history for the last two years. During that time, she had also lost her husband. She has been through so much, but we are trying our best to get her back on track. When she was in my office last week, I was facing her in my chair after helping her fill out some paperwork. She said that I sat like her son who passed away. She said she would go into his room, and he would help her with paperwork, and this reminded her of that. She said when she went to her car after an appointment here, she just started crying, not because she was sad but tears of happiness from all the help she had gotten from us. She also said that it is extremely easy to work with me, and I understand her better than most people do.

A University Drive Recap:

In March we were tasked with assisting in finding housing for everyone at University Drive Manor. Everyone there was asked to leave because the building was being remodeled. Most of the people there have low income, are people with disabilities or are older adults. Many have little support from family or friends. Over the next few months, I got to know many of them. There were so many different personalities and wonderful people that lived there, and I often think that these people were overlooked. I was so glad to be a part of this whole project. Everyone is housed now and many of them went over to Prairie Ridge apartments in south Fargo. Compared to University Drive, these apartments are brand new and gorgeous. It feels so nice going in there and seeing familiar faces and being greeted by the same people living at University Drive Manor. It is like they are completely different people now, thriving and happy, and living a great life in their new home.

From our IL Advocate/Transition Coordinator: Anthony O'Brien (Fargo)

One consumer I've been able to work with is a man with many physical disabilities and autism. He lives with his girlfriend and their apartment unit was flooded during a big storm. Many of his belongings were destroyed or grew mold on them (girlfriend is immuno-compromised) which left them with very little personal items. I and other Freedom employees were able to provide support with salvaging through personal artifacts and finding what could be saved/preserved, help with the transition into a new apartment, and purchase items through the grant that can help them through the dark time and aid in rebuilding their "home".

From our Resource Specialist: Machaela Mund (Fargo)

I've played a major role on the event planning committee, helping coordinate our events. I've been the first point of contact for most incoming calls and walk-ins, and I've been handling a growing number of Information & Referral (I&R) requests by connecting individuals with appropriate community resources. I've noticed an increase in individuals who are frustrated or overwhelmed by other systems and services, and I've been a listening ear and supportive presence for those needing to talk through their concerns. I've submitted referrals to programs such as Furniture Mission and the Transition and Diversion Program (TDP). I've also continued to manage social media content and graphics to promote our events and services and have been updating materials to reflect our recent rebrand.

Jamestown - Highlights/Consumer Stories

From our IL Advocate/Transition Coordinator: Keeta Smith (Jamestown)

The bathroom remodel project that I have been working on since March 2024 was completed on July 8, 2025. What we thought should take 2 weeks to complete took far longer. The contractor ran into a leak in the roof in the corner of the bathroom, a leak along the back door they were using to gain entry to the home, issues with a soft spot in the subfloor in a section of the bathroom, and shipping delays.

Now, durable medical equipment is the only thing preventing him from being home. The provider that saw him has not submitted the orders for the lift, shower/commode chair, hospital bed, trapeze, power chair, or any other items necessitating orders. I am working with the transition coordinator from Independence to secure equipment that can be rented while we wait for those orders so it can be submitted to Medicaid to see if it will be covered.

During the time since the last update, I've also assisted three other consumers that were TDP referrals successfully divert, one of which had a 6-day turnaround time from the day the referral was received and have received 6 referrals since the last update. Things are picking up.

Wahpeton Highlights/Consumer Stories

From our IL Advocate: Raegan Klosterman

Raegan attended the NCIL (National Council on Independent Living) Conference in Washington D.C. the week of July 21.

Accessibility Projects/Updates

From our IL Advocate/Accessibility Specialist: Jen Erickson

- We are working with Next Day Access to coordinate a new order of various ramp parts to expand existing inventory...requests continue to be steady.
- Consumer Advisory Board Meeting in July for ND Assistive. -\$25,000 authorized in Possibilities grant funding last year. The total amount left in this account

has declined and 100% of funds raised during Giving Hearts Day went to help replenish this fund.

-531 demos to 1,472 people; there have been 60 loans to date from their low-interest loan program.

- Working with consumers on resolving unauthorized charges on one of their accounts, transportation barriers, and home modification needs.
- Attended *Redefining Memory Loss* conference with other Freedom staff, good networking opportunity.
- Interviewed gentleman for Freedom's next newsletter feature/article; he worked with multiple staff/programs.... stay tuned!

Event Updates

From our Office Coordinator: Wanda Lokhorst

We had a great turn out for the Open House/ADA celebration. We had Bingo and Trivia with prizes. Bingo seems to be the thing that people really enjoy coming here to do. We had anywhere from 80-100 people come and go. The person who won our door prize (Solo Stove) decided to donate it back to us to use for another event. We will use it for the Resource Fair large door prize.

Freedom Resource Fair is September 23 from 11:30 am-2:00 pm. Vendor registrations must be submitted by August 15th. So far, we have 20+ vendors signed up. There will be a food truck and Bingo will be played to encourage guests to go to each booth with prizes to give away as well.

In August- we will also start planning for 2026 Giving Hearts Day! We will be submitting the application soon and have training events coming up for those who would like to attend, specifically the Giving Hearts Day kick-off event and training.