

STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Holiday Inn Express, Fargo & Virtual
November 6-7, 2025

Call to Order:

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

Roll Call:

Members Present: Angie Bosch, Shannon Bozovsky, Ali Brown, Scott Burlingame, Leon Dietrich, Lisa Hermosillo, Brittney Hogan, Warren Granfor, Robyn Soiseth, Chelsy Sondrol, McKenna Thrush, Joe Yasenchack

Members Absent: Peter Yung, Emma-Leigh Miller, Gillian Plenty Chief, Ben Wolf Necklace

Non-Council Members Present: Aimee Volk, Cindy Gabbert, Kayla, Randy Sorensen, Stephanie Bouche

Approval of the November 2025 Agenda:

Scott Burlingame made a motion to approve the agenda as presented, Leon Dietrich seconded the motion. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

Approval of August 2025 Minutes:

Lisa Hermisillo made a motion to approve the August 2025 SILC minutes as presented, Robyn Soiseth seconded the motion. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

Correspondence – Brittney Hogan:

The SILC PPR for FFY 2024 was approved and we are working on the FFY 2025.

A new VR Director was hired and started on Oct. 27, 2025.

We will be starting the next three-year (2027-2029) State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL). We need to start thinking about the Triannual Survey. The SPIL is due on June 30, 2027.

Treasurer's Report – Aimee Volk:

Reviewed the Treasurer's Report.

Warren Granfor made a motion to accept the Treasurer's Report as presented, Leon Dietrich seconded the motion to approve. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

Committee Breakouts

Discussion from Breakout Sessions

SILC brochure was completed and printed versions available. An online version will be available by the next meeting.

Committee Reports:

Governance Committee – Royce Schultze: We have a full council.

Internal Affairs – Chelsy Sondrol: Reported on the GRID.

External Affairs – Angie Bosch: Reported on the GRID.

Special Session and Federal Spending Affecting the State – Senator Tim Mathern

Senator Tim Mathern provided an overview of the components of the Big Beautiful Bill and discussed the Rural Health Transformation initiative, which allocates \$1 billion to each state. Due to North Dakota's smaller population, this equates to a higher per capita funding amount.

Each state was required to submit a plan, and ND established a 33-member committee to develop it. The plan was submitted at the beginning of November and includes \$200 million per year for five years. The dollars available must be spent in such a way that there is no expectation that they will not continue after the five-year timeframe. Federal approval of the plan is pending.

The plan and data metrics are now available online at <https://www.hhs.nd.gov/rural-health-transformation>.

Special session dates have not been set at this time, but it will likely take place in January. They will review the Rural Health Transformation Plan along with approximately five to ten other bills. The Special Session will follow the same procedures as a regular session.

Senator Mathern noted that with the Rural Health Transformation Plan that while significant resources are available, he urged the SILC to provide public comment to ensure they are distributed effectively and professionally to those who need them most.

Unifying Our Voice – Brittney Hogan and Scott Burlingame

Scott and Brittney discussed the importance of collaboration between the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) to strengthen advocacy and support Independent Living (IL) services. They emphasized the need for consistent communication, shared messaging, and aligned priorities to effectively influence policy and funding decisions.

Challenges noted included flat funding despite increasing service demands and the need for coordinated advocacy to ensure equitable resource allocation. Ways to increase unified efforts are through storytelling and a strategic communication plan are essential to sustaining leadership, securing funding, and advancing the goals of Independent Living across North Dakota.

Friday, November 7, 2025

Call to Order:

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

Roll Call:

Members Present: Leon Dietrich, Lisa Hermosillo, Brittney Hogan, Scott Burlingame, Warren Granfor, Chelsy Sondrol, Randy Sorensen, Robyn Soiseth, Angie Bosch, McKenna Thrush, Shannon Bozovsky, Ali Brown

Members Absent: Peter Yung, Joe Yasenchack, Gillian Plenty Chief, Ben Wolf Necklace, Emma - Leigh Miller

Non-Committee Members: Aimee Volk, Cindy Gabbert, Darrel Hannum, Stephanie Bouche, Merri Christlieb, Randy Sorensen

Roundtable Discussion – Home Modifications for Home and Community Based Services (HCBS)

The Council discussed ongoing challenges related to home modification services. Participants seeking home modifications are referred to ND Assistive, which utilizes program specialists; however, this process can cause delays. Recent changes in the Transition and Diversion Program (TDP) and Money Follows the Person (MFP) have affected home modification reimbursements, as payments can only be made once services are fully completed due to waiver requirements.

CILs reported difficulties securing local contractors, as many require a 50% down payment that the programs do not cover, resulting in stalled projects. Additionally, CILs expressed concern about assuming liability since reimbursements occur only after completion of services. Members discussed exploring legislative advocacy to address these barriers and suggested outreach to volunteer groups and the North Dakota Association for the Disabled (NDAD) for potential support.

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.

APRIL Conference Update – Shannon Bozovsky and Lisa Hermosillo

This was a great opportunity for networking. Just seeing the level of impact on people and hearing their stories was impactful. The impact of the funding was discussed and what to look for and who to reach out to. Stay vigilant with advocating. There was a vast array of sessions that were offered. There was a lot of information on homelessness and how the elderly are often forgotten about.

State Rehabilitation Council:

The October meeting was cancelled. They will need to plan another meeting in 2026.

Committee on Aging – Royce Schultze:

The Committee on Aging is now officially recognized as the *North Dakota Committee on Aging* under the North Dakota Century Code. Rules of Order were reviewed and approved. Two vacancies remain—one in Region VII (Standing Rock) and one in Region VIII.

Nancy reported reduced funding for the Family Caregiver Support Program due to the end of COVID-related funds. She also noted that about 500 of the 1,100 care providers are family members and discussed the need to increase the number of care providers statewide

Olmstead Commission – Scott Burlingame:

Next meeting is next week.

NASILC:

No report.

Region 8:

No report.

Public Comment:

No comment.

The next SILC meeting will be on February 5-6, 2026, in Bismarck, ND, and will have the virtual option.

Leon Dietrich made a motion to adjourn the meeting, and Warren Granfor seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 10:30 a.m.

Freedom ND SILC Director's Report – November 2025

Fargo - Highlights/Consumer stories From our IL Advocate: Katelyn Vilmo (Fargo)

I have been meeting with a person who is accessing Information and Referral services that I have been meeting with on Teams. He is a young adult who hasn't wanted to set up a formal goal. After a few Teams meetings, he vocalized that I've been the first person that hasn't told him what to do. He expressed finding my listening ear helpful as he felt more accountable to the personal goals; he set for himself without needing anyone's help achieving. He is now wanting to find employment, make new friends in the community, and find social gatherings in the community. He is aware of FRC social events but hasn't expressed interest in participating but would rather go to community events. I provided some resources for community events that may interest him. He expressed feeling free for the first time in a long time since he could make decisions without someone telling him what to do.

From our IL Advocate: Sarah Weisser (Fargo)

On August 15, a consumer sought assistance after receiving an eviction notice despite having reasonable accommodation allowing rent payments to be due on the 16th of the month. He was visibly distressed and expressed interest in relocating due to financial strain. I advised him to request a meeting with his landlord and offered to attend.

By August 26, the consumer was prepared and confident for the meeting, and we had discussed a plan for him to move independently into a family home with his brother. We reviewed his concerns, including flooding-related damage and pest issues, which he believed were not his fault. During the meeting on September 4, 2025, with apartment staff, it was agreed that the consumer would move out immediately. He received a pro-rated refund for September rent, was not held responsible for water damage or pest issues and was reimbursed for electricity used to air out the apartment. He was able to advocate for himself regarding what he wanted and what he thought was right. Afterwards, the consumer expressed relief at resolving the situation and leaving an environment that had negatively impacted his health and finances.

A woman had been struggling to find work and felt that she had been discriminated against due to age and disability. She met with me, and we explored various strategies for handling work-related scenarios and adjusting her job search criteria so that she could apply for jobs that would fit her needs.

Together, we worked on her resume, practiced job interviews, and talked through how to ask for accommodations when she needed them. Our Resource Specialist, Machaela, assisted with a mock interview and she helped draft a reasonable accommodation letter. A local college hired her.

To help her get started, I assisted her in applying for the Grace Tveiten grant, which covered work pants, shoes, and a 31-day bus pass. Through outreach and some research, a community resource was identified to provide rides on Sundays and during bad weather to and from work via Resource Connect, when the bus wasn't an option. A referral was put in for the FM Lions Club, where she was able to get a new eyeglass prescription, and a referral for new glasses was put in at Eyemart Express. This was a team effort.

Katelyn and I put a lot of effort into the ideas for Freedom In Action (FIA), and it's very rewarding when they turn out well. The last three FIAs in particular have been very memorable and successful. Here's how: July's FIA Redhawks game, there were 15 participants and 3 Freedom staff. One of the participants has never come to an FIA event, and she came and had a great time. I think it's the first time I have seen her laugh and have a huge smile. I have been working with her for a while, and sometimes communication is a struggle for her. But I was able to learn more about her, gain a better understanding of her communication style, and have a few laughs. Probably one of the best FIA moments I have had in the last two years was the August FIA barbecue. This was great to see consumers sitting and interacting with not only each other, but many of the staff at Freedom took the time and got to enjoy each other's company in a very relaxed environment. September FIA couponing and saving. It was great to see consumers giving each other tips and advice. There was a lot of feedback, and the range of ages was great to see there were transition students, adults, seniors, and they were learning from each other. They had great discussions with lots of smiles. I feel like these last three FIAs have been the most successful, ranging from educational and fun to really fulfilling what FIA stands for.

MFP & TDP- Program Highlights - From our Assistant Program Director: Merri Christlieb

The referral for Money Follows the Person (MFP) and Transition and Diversion (TDP) have been down a little in September. MFP had 4 referrals in September and 3 transitions. The transitions were likely not the new referrals received because many times with MFP referrals the process to transition takes many months and, in some cases, years. The advocates do also find there are consumers referred that never transition either due to family not being in support of a transition or challenges with memory, finances, etc.

Transition and Diversion Program or TDP's referrals are higher with 12 referrals in September. TDP assisted 9 people in transitioning in September. Many of the TDP referrals are classified as a diversion by the State of North Dakota, which means due to the assistance the advocates and grant can provide the consumer is "diverted" out of a higher level of care. Many times, the diversion is assistance to an apartment to better fit the consumer's needs (i.e. Accessible apartment or on the first floor without steps). Freedom Resource Center is fortunate to have such a dedicated staff to assist the consumers with this challenging work. Each and every one of the staff goes above and beyond on a regular basis in order to assist their consumer to be successful and live a more independent life.

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. I am working with many consumers in various stages of transitioning out of facilities or already transitioned.

A Consumer I am working with, whose primary language is not English, was approved for a tablet through Money Follows the Person (MFP) grant to access translator services to communicate with in-home staff whose primary language is English.

Another Consumer I am working with, who has already transitioned out of a facility, is trying to navigate resources and services to increase financial stability after having electricity turned off due to non-payment.

Other areas of my focus include working with coworkers on our internal FRC Event planning committee to plan the first Freedom Resource Fair taking place this fall (scheduled 9/23/25). As well as attended a meeting for the Senior Coalition of Cass & Clay Counties, where we learned more about the Alzheimer's Association, and discussed upcoming events in the community.

TDP – Highlights/Consumer Stories - From our IL Advocate/Transition Coordinator: Gibb Sheets (Fargo)

It has certainly been a whirlwind of events and meetings lately. Earlier this month, I assisted in the transition of an elderly woman, from her apartment downtown to the nice new building, Elliot's Place. She was living in the 400 building, and it was just too small for her, and she was experiencing issues with other tenants, which made her feel unsafe. We have had this referral for an extremely long time because of some barriers she had, like past due bills. We worked diligently to look for places over the last year, as well as advocate and try to get her past due bills paid off. With enough hard work, we were able to find her a unit at Elliot's place, a subsidized apartment building that was only built a few years ago. She had central air, brand new appliances, and finally enough space for her and her pet. She was thrilled with how gorgeous her apartment was and finally getting out of the older apartment building downtown. She was also sleeping on an air mattress for a long time, so we assisted in getting her a brand-new bed which she was incredibly grateful for. It's transitions like this that really fill my bucket with good energy and remind me why we do this job.

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

I've been working with several different consumers in the TDP program. I completed my first transition independently recently since starting with Freedom. It was with an older lady that needed a more accessible apartment due to her physical disability. The transition went smoothly (though the movers were slow), and she was very grateful for the assistance from FRC. Another consumer I've been working with has lived in the same apartment building for the past 20 years. He was facing a non-renewal as his unit had multiple bed bug infestations. Merri and I were able to meet with his team and Fargo Housing. We advocated on his behalf, were able to get grant money to remove an old couch and rug, and after another round of fumigation, he's bug-free.

There have also been a lot of new referrals I've taken on. One lady who's in her early 40's had a stroke in her spine. She was brought to Sanford in Fargo from Ft. Yates, ND for treatment. She has lost all movement from the waist down, and I'm working with housing (it will be a CIL to CIL transition) to get her back home and eventually into her own accessible apartment. I've also worked with a client (and going over paperwork with another one this week) that doesn't speak English. Using a translator has been an interesting experience.

Since I began at Freedom, there have been many fun, sad, and unforgettable experiences working with people in our community. I look forward to continuing to do so.

Fargo Office Highlights - From our Resource Specialist: Machaela Mund (Fargo)

I've had the chance to do a variety of things. A lot of time has been spent planning for our first ever Resource Fair, which has been a big learning experience. I also had the opportunity to attend my first outreach booth, which went well and gave me good experience in connecting with the community.

I've noticed a steady increase in information and referral requests, so I've been handling a lot of those by either setting them up with our services or connecting people with the resources and/or the information they need. This has really helped me grow my knowledge of community resources, and I feel more confident in pointing people in the right direction when they reach out to us.

**Jamestown - Highlights/Consumer stories - From our IL Advocate/Transition Coordinator:
Keeta Smith (Jamestown)**

I have had a busy summer with my consumers transitioning or preparing to transition. I had 5 MFP consumers that transitioned in August. 2 of them had transitioned prior to receiving the referrals, so it was a mad dash to ensure that they had what they needed.

One of the gentlemen transitioned into his first-ever apartment at the end of August, and he is doing great. He is also working full-time and loves it. It's been different communicating with him because of his hours. He and I can only communicate via text message. He works when I work, and he can't receive phone calls while at work. I text him and he responds when he's on break. It's working well and he's really happy in his new place.

I've also been very busy preparing for the transition of my consumer, who is moving home after 2 years in facilities following a fall. He's the gentleman who needed the bathroom remodel to make his home accessible. All the work is completed, and the next hurdle was DME. The MFP team assisted with securing approval from Medicaid, and the equipment was ordered. It was all delivered this past week, and he transitions home today, September 22.

From our IL Advocate: Ashley Gabehart (Jamestown)

Fall semester has started for the Transition Class. It is a smaller class this year, and we have started the IL Skills Class: Living Well 101: Independence. The students have already had some great discussions about independence, disability, and what it means to be independent as someone with disabilities. I am also facilitating a Living Well 101 class in the community. There are several of the same individuals taking this class that also took the Money Smart class that just ended. It's hard to believe the Money Smart Class is already over. As a 14-week class, it took most of the summer to get through. I have gotten positive feedback from the individuals that took the class; they learned a lot. In August we did a Rock Painting FIA event, to use up some rocks that have been floating around the office for a few years since the last rock painting event. It was a blast, and participants had a good time painting their rocks. I attended The University of Jamestown's Block Party as a vendor. It is a community event to welcome the new university students to Jamestown. This year there were over 2,000 attendees from all over the community. I was able to have conversations with community members and students about Freedom's services and upcoming events. September Young Adult Gathering was a pizza party and had several attendees. We had a good time eating pizza and playing a few pizza related games. I'm excited to continue engaging with the community and the various events the Jamestown office is facilitating.

Lisbon - Highlights/Consumer stories - From our IL Advocate: Kristine McFarland

I would like to share a bit of my experience last week. I had a lady come to the office who is terminally ill. She couldn't figure out how to work through obtaining Social Security Disability. Together we called the Social Security office. The lady from Social Security kept asking her what her mother's maiden name was, and this lady kept getting it wrong. She broke down crying. I asked her

to take a deep breath and drink water. I later found out her mom used many different names. We were able to schedule a phone appointment for October to complete her Social Security application. Prior to leaving my office, she said to me that she had found an angel in me and was grateful for all my help. I will be attending the phone application process with her.

Then that same afternoon I went to see one of my Consumer's whom I was going to try to help put money on his son's canteen account, as his son is in jail in Grand Forks and he hasn't spoken to his son since June. Setting up his canteen contribution was short of easy and one of the items he needed was an email. My Consumer is 91 and didn't have an email account and didn't think he should have one. After multiple phone calls we were able to deposit money in his son's phone account and hopefully he will be able to have a visit. This Consumer broke down crying and thanked me multiple times for the help. He told me that I had no idea what I had given him.

Wahpeton - Highlights/Consumer Stories From our IL Advocate: Raegan Klosterman

Hi! In July I spent a week in Washington D.C. for the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) Conference with my supervisor Merri Christlieb. I listened to many advocates from around the United States and even one from England share their journey and work towards disability rights. We spent a day marching to the Capitol, a couple days at workshops listening to speakers talk about their work, and a lot of time connecting with advocates like me from other states. I brought back a lot of knowledge and experiences that will last me a lifetime. To see so many people in one space have the same motivation to advocate for people with disabilities felt so special.

I also was able to help a couple of consumers transition to accessible apartments. One in particular is a man who is in his early 30's with end stage renal failure. He had little to no funds to his name and really had no spirit anymore. We were quickly able to get in moved to his preferred accessible apartment across town with the things he needed. He tells me he is thriving and loves living his life now. Consumers like these are the people who remind me just how special my job is and how rewarding hard work can be.

Event Updates - From our Office Coordinator: Wanda Lokhorst

Our first-ever Freedom Resource Center Resource Fair was held in September.

- 57+ vendors were on-site, plus organizations provided resources on our information tables.
- Duck Duck Goose Food Truck served lunch.
- Following the fair, we hosted a Social Security 101 webinar.
- We had 190 people attend!

Looking ahead, our team is beginning preparations for Giving Hearts Day 2026. Staff planning meetings will begin in the coming weeks. This year's campaign will once again feature the always-popular "Pie in the Face" fundraiser. Our first goal is to raise the required \$3,000 match by January 1, and we'll be working to build momentum from there.

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

Three staff attended the APRIL Conference.

Community Education

The Cross Disability Panel presented at Bismarck State College.

Staff presented on our services to the Bismarck Unitarian Church and the statewide Community Action meeting.

Information booths were set up at the Missouri Slope Health Fair, the Standing Rock High School Health Fair, Project Service Connect, Veterans StandDown, and the Harvest Festival in Dickinson.

Community and Systems Advocacy

Completed 37 polling site evaluations. The sites had the same issues with accessible parking as before. They had no designated parking spaces or did not meet ADA guidelines.

Staff sit on the Bis/Man Transit board, and the board is looking to expand its paratransit and fixed-route services. This is possible because of an increase in sales tax for public transportation in Burleigh and Morton counties. The increase in sales tax was 2/10 of a cent.

Partners in Progress: NDHFA Homeless Conference.-Staff attended the first Homeless Conference to address homelessness and the needs of our community and throughout the state, where we met to discuss ways our community can assist those experiencing homelessness. We discussed how to improve housing, food shortages, shelters, transportation issues, etc., and ways to address these within our own communities.

Re-Entry: Ministry on the Margins-Staff attended the Re-Entry Conference to discuss community options for people leaving prison and re-entering society. We were able to collaborate and discuss all community resources and how to improve upon them for those coming from jails/prisons.

Resource Development

Laughing Sun Brewery held a Dine to Donate event to help us raise money for programming. Staff are also able to talk about this event and disability etiquette on a local TV station. This event raised \$425.

The ARC of Dickinson chose us for their Roundup at the Tills, and this raised \$1,100.

Success Stories

An individual was referred to us for payee services. This individual had substance abuse issues and was in prison. With staff encouragement, he went for treatment, continues treatment, and has been clean for eight months. He recently purchased a vehicle and got his driver's license. He said he has not felt this good in years. When he comes to the office, he has a swagger showing his confidence and happiness.

Independence, Inc. Director's Report – November 2025

Individual Services

Successes

A 19-year-old woman was at risk of being sent to live in a nursing home permanently. Every organization she approached told her she would have to be institutionalized, which deeply impacted her mental health. When she came to Independence, Inc., she joined the Transition and Diversion Program and is now preparing to move into her own apartment. Independence, Inc. provided DME equipment to support her independence.

A 20-year-old man moved from Dickinson, ND, and was uncertain about the transition. Independence, Inc. assisted with relocation expenses and ensured a smooth process. Over the next two months, his physical and mental health improved significantly as he worked toward his goals with growing confidence.

A 76-year-old man needed a more accessible apartment due to mobility challenges. After spending nine months in a nursing home recovering from open-heart surgery, Independence, Inc. helped locate an accessible unit that met his needs. He successfully discharged to his new apartment, where he now receives 24/7 care.

A 59-year-old woman with mental and physical disabilities was residing in a nursing home but desired to return home. The Transition and Diversion Program provided the necessary equipment for her to do so safely, allowing her to live independently once again.

A 17-year-old young woman came to Independence, Inc. seeking help to study for her permit test. After two months of preparation, she passed the exam on her first attempt and is now practicing driving with her family.

Community Services

Civic Engagement

Independence, Inc. launched a community outreach campaign titled "Your Voice Matters: Minot Area Residents, Help Shape Our Community and Win an Awesome Prize Package." The goal was to encourage civic participation among people with disabilities, their families, and allies by demonstrating the power of every voice in shaping Minot's future. Participants were invited to complete three community surveys addressing public transportation, behavioral health, and city services to ensure diverse perspectives were represented.

REMIX: The Sound of Independence – Celebrating 30 Years of Breaking Barriers

On September 11, Independence, Inc. hosted REMIX: The Sound of Independence – Celebrating 30 Years of Breaking Barriers. The event drew approximately 250 attendees and celebrated three decades of service promoting inclusion and independence. The program included a ribbon cutting with the Minot Chamber EDC, activities highlighting Independence from Institutions, Youth Transition, and Community Leadership Development.

Guest speaker "Big Mike," a graduate of the Community Leadership Academy, shared his personal story of transformation through Independence, Inc. The event also featured annual awards, a Q&A with Mayor Jantzer, and six musical and comedy acts performed primarily by people with disabilities.

Youth Advocate of the Year – Kylie Anderson

Kylie Anderson exemplifies lived leadership rooted in resilience, service, and youth-driven advocacy. Diagnosed with ADHD later in life, Kylie has used her experiences to lift others up, transitioning from a volunteer at the Minot Area Council of the Arts to her current AmeriCorps leadership role. Her quiet yet powerful approach to advocacy builds trust, inclusion, and meaningful change.

Advocate of the Year – Katie Shekley

Katie Shekley, owner of Ready, Set, Release LLC, has made an extraordinary difference in the lives of people with disabilities through her compassionate decluttering and organizing services. Her work supports individuals at risk of institutionalization, promoting dignity, independence, and emotional well-being.

Homelessness

Two Independence, Inc. staff attended the Partnerships for Progress Homeless Conference in Bismarck. Sessions covered housing stabilization, fair housing rights, eviction prevention, and strategies for building stronger community partnerships. Minot continues to face a severe shelter shortage, leaving many without safe housing options. Independence, Inc. staff often step in to fill service gaps, connecting individuals to resources and housing solutions.

An estimated 77 percent of individuals experiencing homelessness have a disability, emphasizing the need for accessible and coordinated support systems. Independence, Inc. helps organize the Minot Alliance to End Homelessness and leads awareness activities to engage the community in finding compassionate, sustainable solutions.

Employer Experience Survey

Independence, Inc. launched the Employer Experience Survey to understand workforce challenges faced by local businesses. The survey gathers input on hiring, retention, and workforce needs to better align employment readiness programs with employer expectations. By listening directly to business leaders, Independence, Inc. aims to strengthen partnerships that build a more inclusive and skilled workforce.

Transportation Advocacy

Independence, Inc. continues to play an active role in shaping accessible and equitable transportation in the Minot region. As a member of the Minot Area Metropolitan Transit Development Plan Steering Committee, Executive Director Scott Burlingame participated in planning discussions led by SRF Consulting. The committee reviewed system strengths and weaknesses, identified service gaps, and explored long-term strategies for improvement.

Key goals included improving service frequency, expanding evening and weekend hours, enhancing bus stop safety and accessibility, exploring new payment technologies, and addressing funding challenges. Independence, Inc. also promoted and distributed both digital and paper versions of a public transit survey to ensure inclusive community participation.

Through ongoing collaboration, Independence, Inc. continues advocating for a reliable, inclusive transit system that supports independence for all residents.

2025 Polling Site Surveys

In collaboration with the ND Protection and Advocacy Project, Independence, Inc. and the state's

network of CILs conducted 85 polling site accessibility surveys across North Dakota during 2025. The purpose of this initiative was to ensure that all polling sites comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards for Accessible Design and North Dakota Century Code requirements, helping to guarantee that every voter can participate in elections safely and independently.

The surveys found that while some polling sites have improved since the 2022 assessments, accessibility barriers continue to exist across many communities. The most common issues involved accessible parking, including missing or noncompliant markings and signage, as well as uneven parking surfaces, steep slopes, and door thresholds that exceeded ADA limits. These barriers directly affect a voter's ability to enter polling locations independently. The data also showed that although a few locations made meaningful progress, more sites declined in accessibility between 2022 and 2025, highlighting the need for continued monitoring and proactive solutions.

Recommendations from this year's survey include implementing temporary accessibility measures such as portable ramps, accessible parking striping, and clear signage for locations not yet fully in compliance. The report also stresses the importance of standardized training for staff conducting future assessments and ongoing collaboration between Centers for Independent Living and election officials to maintain long-term accessibility improvements.

Office News and Notes

Trainings Completed

Peer Support Training

Staff participated in Peer Support Training to strengthen their ability to provide empathetic, experience-based support to consumers. The training emphasized trust, empowerment, and recovery, reinforcing the organization's commitment to the Independent Living philosophy.

Domestic Violence Awareness Training

During Domestic Violence Awareness Month, staff completed training from the Domestic Violence Crisis Center on the intersection of disability and domestic violence. The session underscored the higher rates of violence experienced by people with disabilities and the need for accessible, trauma-informed services.

Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Training

Kayla Bauer, Independent Living Advocate, became the third staff member to complete the week-long Crisis Intervention Team Training. Executive Director Scott Burlingame also presented during the session, which included topics on mental health, substance use, veteran support, homelessness, disability awareness, and crisis management. The training fostered stronger collaboration between law enforcement and community partners to ensure compassionate and informed crisis responses.

Staffing Update

The remote position serving the four counties surrounding Bottineau is currently open. This role ensures that individuals in rural communities have access to Independent Living services. Additionally, recruitment is underway for a new Peer Support Specialist within the HCBS program to expand peer-led recovery and independence support.

Options IRCIL - Directors Report - November, 2025

Direct Service Scenarios

Options worked with a person who wanted Options assistance in getting a phone, he needed help figuring out if he could afford a phone, what public programs may be able to help subsidize phone service, which phone companies/plans would be best, and how to bring it all together. Options staff person met with the individual went over his finances helped him sort through the various phones and subsidies available helping him to get a phone of his own. While meeting to achieve the communication goal, the worker saw that he was sleeping on a metal bed frame with used couch cushions spread across it as his bed. The individual is very thrifty and hesitant to spend money for such things. In communicating with him it was found that it is very difficult to sleep due to the cushions moving and dropping down onto the bed frame. Through conversations between the two the Options staff person was able to reassure that it was fine to use some of his saved money to fulfill his personal needs such as this. Based on this the person agreed and they both shopped for a mattress. Upon purchasing the mattress and using it, the individual was very happy he had got it. He did not realize how wonderful it was to sleep on a real mattress. He also was very happy about having his own phone and not having to use his brother's.

Assisting people to live independently is important but when a person is assisted to live independently and then is more isolated than s/he otherwise would be ones quality of life suffers. An individual Options worked with asked for help getting more involved in the community to combat isolation. Options then helped him to identify his interests and ways to explore them in the community. One of areas that came to the forefront based on his interests related to reading pointing to libraries. Consequently, the local library was contacted to see if volunteer work was available and if the individual could apply. After making application and being accepted the person is now volunteering regularly. This is enabling him to meet other people and get out of his home on a regular basis. Options continues to provide support in his work to be more active in the community.

Options staff person has continued to help post-transition students in identifying their goals as they enter into adulthood. This is accomplished by linking people to adult services, and introducing them to post-secondary vocational options. For those wanting to move into their own homes Options helps them learn about budgeting, how to take care of a home of your own, cooking, and all the other skills needed to manage on their own. Once in their own home Options then helps people learn about how to navigate around their community, either using public transportation systems or how to acquire their own transportation. For many people with disabilities the world of work is an unknown, so Options tries to facilitate peoples' use of Voc Rehab.

Options staff person came into contact with a person who needed help in order to continue living in her home. In this situation both the husband and wife were on disability and they did not have the money necessary to maintain their house. As the initial problem was being addressed, other problems were found. The main problem was that the well they had used was now not safe, not even for washing. Consequently, they had to drive 45 minutes away from their hamlet to wash their clothes. They would also have to fill jugs in order to have water available in their home. It was found that their community did not have rural water available and to get rural water, they would have to garner at least 25 neighbors' signatures on a petition to bring it in. If they could, they would also have to find the money to pay for the piping to go from the city water to their home. One of the resources that was evaluated was the USDA where it was found that they could possibly get funding for this but after the home inspection, they would have to have other areas of their home updated before the

USDA would invest the money. The house was in need of flooring in some areas that were down to the subfloor, paint, railings on stairs, roofing, to mention a few. Upon finding this out Options staff helped them find the resources and help to alleviate these problems and once they were alleviated, USDA reevaluated and approved paying for the water to be piped into their home. This process took months of work by the homeowners and Options staff person and resulted in a home that was habitable, giving the owners access to a fully functional bathroom, something they had not had for a few years. Additionally, what started out helping this one family helped the whole hamlet by providing access to rural water to all the petitioners' properties.

Outreach

During the last quarter Options conducted outreach to various entities including ten nursing facilities, one medical facility, two churches, six not for profits serving people with disabilities, and six state/county disability service provider organizations. When conducting the outreach staff will set up formal meetings to explain all our services and to provide marketing materials to them so they can inform the people they serve.

Options staff attended an annual event called "Rally for Recovery" an event to link providers to people who are homeless and in recovery this event had a 155 people attend.

Groups

Continued the coordination of an Autism Support Group with three families continuing to participate, and the coordinator providing outreach to other families and providers who may be interested in participating.

The Options Staff is co-facilitating a rural advocacy group in Harvey and did a presentation to the members on disability rights.

Recreation

Options held revolving recreation events at two locations, providing attendees with a venue where they could meet others while playing adult games with the intent of helping people build relationships in the broader community. In addition to these groups Options conducted regular cooking classes, exercise classes, and held two accessible deer hunts for people with disabilities. Though both deer hunts were held in Minnesota, both were open to North Dakota Residents. This year marked the 30th anniversary of Options' deer hunt at Rydell National Wildlife Refuge. A total of three hunters were accepted from North Dakota with two attending the hunt.

Community

Options staff are asked to be aware of the accessibility of the communities served. If a staff person notes any features they believe are out of compliance, they are asked to report them to Options' Accessibility Specialist. This period five sites were identified and forwarded to our Access Specialist. Five were from staff and another from a person with a disability within our community. Of those reported, two are restaurants, and one each being a City, grocery store, an apartment building, and a bowling alley. After a site is reported the Access Specialist will review the site and, if warranted, write a letter informing the entity of the feature out of compliance and their obligations. If the individual reporting the access issue chooses Options will assist the person to file an ADA complaint after an adequate amount of time has passed for the entity to respond with a remedy. This period Options Harvey advocated for and received approval by the City of Harvey for an additional accessible street parking space on Main Street.

Staff provided a short presentation on Options services to three different groups of students that are in their 2nd year of PT or OT courses. There was a total of 62 students who had signed up for the event along with four other providers who also presented. In addition to the presentations booth space was provided where additional information for the students was provided to enable them to better understand the resources available for people with disabilities.

Information and Referral

Options provided 516 instances of service through the Information and Referral Program. The predominant request was for information about Options services at 35% followed by information about equipment and attendant care. Other requests included information about Social Security, Accessibility, and people looking for referral points to fulfill various disability related needs. Of those calling, approximately one third were people with disabilities, followed by the general public and family/friends of people with disabilities.

Options provided eighty-eight people with various pieces of durable medical equipment with most wanting to borrow the equipment on a short-term basis and twenty-eight given equipment outright. Equipment commonly borrowed includes bath benches, commodes, grab bars, and high-rise toilet seats. The most commonly given out pieces of equipment include electric mobility devices such as scooters and electric wheelchairs. The equipment Options distributed are equipment that is given to us.