

**STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
Wingate, Bismarck & Virtual
February 6-7, 2025**

Call to Order: Brittney Hogan called the meeting to order at 1:04 p.m. A quorum was present.

Roll Call:

Members Present: Angie Bosch, Shannon Bozovsky, Ali Brown, Leon Dietrich, Nancy Lundon, Joe Yasenchack, Warren Granfor, Ben Wolf Necklace, Robyn Soiseth, Chelsy Sondrol

Members Absent: Brittany Hogan, Scott Burlingame, Jan Beddes, Emma-Leigh Miller, Hope Wolbert, Pete Yung

Non-Council Members Present: Aimee Volk, Randy Sorensen, Royce Schultze, Jana Johnson,

Approval of the February 2025 Agenda: Robyn Soiseth made a motion to amend the agenda as the Participant Panel Discussion participants canceled and move the Roundtable Discussion: SILC Stakeholders and Organization in ND up to 1:30 p.m. to move the Committee Breakout Sessions to 3:30 p.m., Leon Dietrich seconded the motion of the amended agenda. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

Approval of November 2024 Minutes: Warren Granfor made a motion to approve the November 2024 SILC minutes as presented, Robyn Soiseth seconded the motion. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

Correspondence – Nancy Lundon:

The SILC PPR for FFY 2024 was submitted on Jan. 6, 2025, We are waiting on approval from ACL (Administration of Community Living).

Jim Fleming, Interim Director of Vocational Rehabilitation provided an update. HB 1012 is the Appropriation funds for the Health and Human Services (HHS) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) budget which is where the Independent Living contracts are housed. The budget was proposed to the House on Tuesday, Feb. 4, 2025.

Treasurer's Report – Aimee Volk: Reviewed the Treasurer's Report.

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

Vote on a New Vice-Chair – Nancy Lundon:

Discussions and nominations were discussed. Our current Vice-Chair, Nancy Lundon, will complete her second term on 6/30/2025. The new Vice-Chair will assume this position on 7/1/2025.

Vice-Chair

Leon nominated Warren Granfor; Warren accepted the nomination for the role of Vice-Chair.

Nancy Lundon made a motion to close voting to appoint Warren Granfor as the Vice-Chair of the SILC and Robyn Soiseth seconded the motion. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

Roundtable Discussion: SILC Stakeholders and Organization in North Dakota

We discussed stakeholders that the SILC could partner with to increase our presence in North Dakota. A list was created and will be emailed out to the board.

Disability Related Bills – Veronica Zietz

Veronica is with Protection and Advocacy (P&A). They monitor and track bills and educate people on the bills and laws. They have legislative groups that are in-person and online.

ND meets every other year (odd years) and it lasts 80 days. As of today, they are 21 days into session. There are over 1000 bills that were introduced. Bills always start in the House or the Senate. Cross-over will be Feb. 28, 2025. HB 1012 is the HHS budget, and they track this because it has the potential to help the most people. Below is a list of the bills P&A is tracking.

Things to note to HB 1012:

- Provider inflation 1.5% increase for each year of the biennium.
- Cross disability waiver for \$5 million.
- \$5.3 million for qualified service providers (QSP).
- \$2.47 million for private duty nursing.
- \$1.3 million guardian services.
- \$300 million ask for a new state hospital.
- Ask for Community Connect program dollars to increase the number of people who are being served.
- Substance Use Disorder (SUD) voucher and Valley Care for dollars to continue.
- \$75 million to improve childcare services and affordability.
- Housing initiative \$14.5 million HHS for eviction prevention, modification, rental assistance, etc.
 - Housing package \$55 million.

Housing Bills:

- HB 1362 creates a fund to support housing development through low-interest loans from the Bank of ND.
- SB 2238 relates to the expungement of eviction records.
- SB 2225 appropriation to the Department of Commerce for housing for opportunity, mobility, and empowerment program.
- SB 2235 requires payments to be applied to rent before late fees. This one has failed so it will not move on.

Criminal and Juvenile Justice

- HB 1166 relates to the grounds needed to file a petition to seal a criminal record. This passed the House floor.

- HB 1231 relates to the petition of relief from the sex offender registry. This has passed the House floor.
- HB 1263 relates to petition to seal the criminal record.

Voting

- HB 1287 relates to the registration of voters as ND is the only state that does not require voter registration.

Education

- HB 1160 prohibits student cellular telephone use during instructional time. P&A put in an exception for individuals with a disability or medical issues. It has passed the House floor.
- HB 1358
- HB 1164 defines the terms used for special education. P&A had some concerns as it left out multiple disabilities.
- SB 2213 relates to mathematics curriculum, professional development, screening (example: dyslexia and dyscalculia) and intervention, etc.

Mental Health

- SB 2081 relates to the operation of geropsych facilities. This passed with amendments.

Other

- HB 1485 requires the personal needs allowance to be reviewed and adjusted for inflation annually.
- SB 2193 relates to the definition associated with assistance animals.
- SB 2222 relates to the definition of assistance animals and disability documentation for a service or assistance animal in a rental dwelling.
- HB 1513 relates to the notice to construct, rebuild, or repair sidewalks. It states they will have two and a half years to do this.
- HB 1556 relates to adoptive parents terminating parental rights in extreme circumstances.
- SB 2291 relates to removal, resignation and death of a guardian, notices in a guardianship.
- HB 1567 relates to a study of dental/oral health care services for Medicaid recipients.

Transportation

- HB 1106 relates to grants for public transportation providers.
- HB 1137 relates to displaying a mobility-impaired parking permit on their dash. This has passed the House.

Committee Breakout

Friday, February 7, 2025

Call to Order: Brittney Hogan called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. A quorum was present.

Roll Call:

Members Present: Ali Brown, Warren Granfor, Leon Dietrich, Joe Yasenchack, Nancy Lundon, Chelsy Sondrol, Angie Bosch, Shannon Bozovsky, Robyn Soiseth, Ben Wolf Necklace

Members Absent: Jan Beddes, Scott Burlingame, Brittany Hogan, Emma Leigh Miller, Hope Wolbert, Peter Yung

Non-Committee Members: Aimee Volk, Tonya Parker, Kianna Roecker, Cody Kurtz, Royce Schultz, Jana Johnson, Randy Sorensen

Safe Routes to Services – Blue Weber and Cody Christianson, Bolton and Menk

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program in Bismarck and Mandan, North Dakota is a collaboration between the city, the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), and other organizations. The program's goal is to make it safe and convenient for people to walk and bike to school. The project history was targeted at looking at housing such as senior housing and how to get to the services they needed. It was looking at how to get from point "A" to point "B" safe and accessible for all users. The problem is intended to solve traffic speeds, exposure, traffic control, etc.

The study found that 9% of households are living below the poverty line. About 10% of the population is Native American. In 2018-2022 there were 242 bike/pedestrian crashes and 26% of bike /pedestrian crashes were fatal.

The intended outcomes are accurate outreach, identifying issues, priority improvement areas, and implementation strategies. The unintended outcomes that they identified were implementation partnerships, policy impacts, collective momentum, and grant applications.

The priority strategies they identified for this project are a transit circulator route, micromobility study mobility hubs, and a complete streets policy.

The next steps will be more grant applications, policy changes, transit changes, and lean into the completed engagement.

For more information on this project visit [Safe Routes Bismarck-Mandan Study](#).

Arcos Services for Medicaid Expansion – Jana Johnson, Mobile Coordinator

They have nurses, nurse practitioners, licensed social workers, etc. They help patients navigate and understand complex medical concerns, coordinate care, and advocate for patient healthcare needs. They help with application support, medication drop-off, etc. Medicaid expansion or Next Blue insurance to qualify for services through Arkos.

The nurse practitioner completes an in-the-home, virtual, or in the office, they can help with documenting medical conditions and mental health visits post-hospital visit.

The quality coordinator can do wellness testing in the home, A1C, blood pressure, and FIT testing (colorectal).

What makes Arkos different? They meet the patient in person where they are: home, shelter, library, café, churches, etc.

What Arkos is not? They do not do home health (dressing changes, infusions, etc.), housing services, long-term care management, replacement for primary care, plan coverage – insurance questions, discharge planners, transportation services, and an ask-a-nurse.

They have four vans in the state (one in each quadrant of the state). They serve urban and rural areas. The primary purpose is to engage members. They participate in a lot of community events.

Why utilize Arkos Health? They are trying to minimize emergency room visits, assist with complex disease management, transition of care-ed, hospital, skilled nursing facility, rehabilitation, etc.

For more information, you can email CSCND@ARKOSHEALTH.COM or 701-237-1228.

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 – Royce Schultze: Ali Brown and Leon Dietrich have been submitted to the Governor's Office for reappointment. Joe Yasenchack (1st term), Hope Wolbert (1st term) and Robyn Soiseth (untermmed) are coming up on 6/30/2025 in which they can all be retermmed. Nancy Lunden has her 2nd term coming up on 6/30/2025. McKenna Thrush has submitted her application. Gillian Plenty Chief would like to reapply since her one year will be done on 3/31/2025 in which she would take over for Jan Beddes.

Internal Affairs – Nancy Lunden: Worked on the objectives, indicators, and State Plan for Independent Living.

External Affairs – Angie Bosch: Worked on the objectives, indicators, and State Plan for Independent Living.

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) – Robyn Soiseth: The Minot regional administrator gave an update that the region is fully staffed, and they scored high for their Gallup Poll. They do not have any staff in Devils Lake right now due to housing issues. There was one appeal that has gone to the Supreme Court. They elected a new chair at their meeting.

Committee on Aging – Royce Schultze: There is a memory café in Jamestown, which has had about eight to 10 people attending the meetings. They bring speakers in for additional engagement and education. There is a program through the Housing and Finance agency to build slab-on-grade homes in rural communities so seniors can stay in their community.

Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) services are increasing and will be asking for a \$68 million increase in the budget, and this is the first time more money has been put into HCBS (including SNAP, SPED, Expanded SPED, etc.) compared to nursing facilities.

Aging is asking for \$5.28 million to fund the Transition and Diversion Pilot Program (TDPP). They would like consumers to testify about services they receive through TDPP. Year four of the settlement agreement ended and Aging Services has to have a new implementation plan for year five which they are working on. They are seeking a member for the Bismarck region (Region 7).

Three focus points for the committee for the next year are to invite a Building Association member to talk about housing for seniors, review the Aging and Disability Resource Link (ADRL) services, and how to connect services to adult foster care/medical acuity.

Olmstead Commission – Scott Burlingame: No report

NASILC – Leon Dietrich: No report.

APRIL – Aimee Volk: Met on Feb. 4th and discussed how other states SILC are looking at the state CIL surveys. Colorado has a subcommittee that looked at the CIL surveys and collectively they decided as a state to have a similar survey with the same questions, so it is easier to analyze the data. Yearly they look at the data and the subcommittee analyses data.

Several states have members attending the SILC Congress Conference in March. Discussions were held on the uncertainty of the independent living grant under the new administration.

Public Comment: No Comment.

The next SILC meeting will be May 1-2, 2025, in Grand Forks, ND, and will have the virtual option.

Nancy Lundon made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Robyn Soiseth seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 11:15 a.m.

Freedom - ND SILC Director's Report – February 2025

Fargo - News

We will work with Tell Well, a local company, on website design, social media, and branding.

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

A consumer and his wife have been coming to FRC since 2017. In that time, they experienced homelessness. The few times housing was obtained, barriers arose that prevented them from maintaining housing. In the last year, they have been more consistent in their appointments at FRC. They have been making efforts to maintain communication despite not having a phone. Due to the consistency and dedication toward their goals, they have been able to maintain their working relationship with FRC, Southeast Human Service Center (SEHSC), and now NIAM Brain Injury Services. With the collaboration between the agencies, they have been able to find housing. There are now steps being made toward obtaining further services to help maintain the housing. With the goal of finding housing being accomplished, they both have expressed an interest in continuing to work with FRC to address other goals.

MFP & TDPP- Program highlights - from our Assistant Program Director Merri Christlieb

At the end of the 2024 calendar year both MFP and TDPP assisted 225 consumers to either transition to an apartment in the community or receive assistance to be diverted from a higher level of care.

MFP Highlights/Consumer stories - from our IL Advocate/Transition Coordinator: Tricia McNamee

As a Transition Coordinator, I am working with a wide age range of consumers, from infants up to 88 years old. The consumers are all being referred under the Money Follows the Person (MFP) for transition services.

Consumers on the younger end typically also receive services through the ND Developmental Disabilities Services and have a Developmental Disabilities Program Manager (DDPM) on their team. All the ND State Departments and Freedom are collaborating to improve the process for Transition Services for our Consumers. The infants are usually transitioning out of a NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) or PICU (Pediatric Intensive Care Unit) and most had been admitted since birth due to needing higher level of care initially. With the help of all team members and collaboration of departments, these infants and their families are being connected to needed services and equipment/items for a successful transition into the community.

Consumers on the higher age range are typically transitioning out of a Skilled Nursing Facility (or Extended Hospital stay) back into the community. Some Consumers are needing assistance with obtaining needed equipment or additional services for a safe transition to their current home. Other Consumers are needing assistance finding/securing new accessible/affordable housing. Either due to the current home no longer meeting needs, or due to not having housing prior to admission.

I am currently working with a woman who is still in the facility with chronic conditions, previously unhoused. Consumer was referred to Freedom under Money Follows the Person (MFP). Consumer wants to move back into the community, preferably with daughter and grandkids who are also unhoused. Consumer decided to stay in Fargo and find her own accessible/affordable housing as that

is where she doctors, Consumer was approved for an apartment at the new Prairie Ridge (55+ apartments), where Consumer's family would be able to visit. MFP has already approved all needed items for setting up the apartment for consumer, including rental assistance and electrical deposits until voucher is approved, Consumer was in tears and extremely excited about all the help and opportunity to return to the community.

TDPP – Highlights/Consumer Stories - from our IL Advocate/Transition Coordinator: Luke Boucher
A consumer of mine was in an assisted living facility that she disliked. Her family would occasionally take advantage of her financially and that put her in a bad spot with her facility. She was able to pay off her debt quickly and the TDPP grant was able to assist her moving out into the community. She is now thriving in her new apartment as she can host events for the other residents to participate with.

TDPP – Highlights/Consumer Stories - from IL Advocate/Transition Coordinator: Gibb Sheets
Recently I worked with a consumer who was located in Mountain, ND. She was quite a way away from the Fargo area but really wanted to be closer to her daughter. We got everything worked out so that she could get moved to Casselton, where she now has a lovely little apartment to herself. She has been seeing her daughter much more now and seems quite happy. The most rewarding part was being able to get her a new bed. She has been sleeping on an air mattress for over 12 years, and there is nothing better than being able to help make a change like that in someone's life.

Jamestown - Highlights/Consumer stories - from our IL Advocate Ashley Gabehart
The transition class is still working on the Money Smart program this year. Students seem to like going through the material as it is financial information geared towards their age group which is helping them prepare for entering adulthood. In a couple of weeks when Money Smart finishes, we will be going through the IL Skills Class: Safe and Healthy Relationships. For community IL Skills Classes Jamestown finished its Living Well 102 class. I am currently teaching Decluttering and Organizing Your Life from the Inside Out to a large group in Jamestown as well as an individual in Valley City. I have been starting to teach more IL classes in both Jamestown and Valley City. Teaching the classes has become one of my favorite parts of my job. I am still working with a couple of consumers in Valley City on studying for their driver's license test, they are getting close to being comfortable enough with the material to take their tests. There have been a couple of transition class students that have also recently opened new goals to study for their permit tests. The Young Adult Gatherings have been going well, we have a solid group in Jamestown that are coming and are working on getting more to attend in Valley City. Freedom in Action events in Jamestown have been well attended in the last couple months, recently we have done gratitude jars, where participants decorated their own gratitude jar and came up with at least 10 things they are grateful for, as well as decorating holiday cards where participants all got blank holiday cards that they got to decorate. Overall, the Jamestown office has been busy with events in both Jamestown and Valley City with more to come. As always, I enjoy working with consumers, teaching skills and classes, and building relationships with walk-ins, consumers, other professionals, and the community.

Lisbon - Highlights/Consumer Stories - from IL Advocate/Transition Coordinator: Kristine Green
I currently have 20 Consumers that I am working with, which are in Oakes, Ellendale, LaMoure, Fort Ransom, Wishek, Milnor, Edgeley, Rutland, and Lisbon.

Back in September, a Consumer I had within the TDPP Program needed an extension, and this was granted. The consumer was successfully discharged from the program as of January 1st. Together we were able to set up some extra services, which included counseling through Telehealth, and Home Health, and her doctor also made a house call. Although the consumer was discharged from

the TDPP Program, I have kept her on as a Consumer. This Consumer had a very large sigh of relief and cried for quite a while. It was a bright light when she realized she would not lose me, and more importantly the amazing services we are able to provide here. This Consumer has very little to no supports in her life, and does not drive, so when she found out I still can come to her home when needed and she could still contact me when needed I could see the relief she felt. Since this time, she continues to email, calls me her Angel, and always is very grateful for any insight I may have for her.

Wahpeton Highlights/Consumer Stories - from our IL Advocate/Transition Coordinator: Raegan Klosterman

October was my busiest month yet. I joined the Border States Aging alliance group for monthly meetings to learn about other services in the area that serve the elderly and/or community members with disabilities. I have seen an increase in consumers asking me to attend IEP meetings in both Wilkin and Richland counties.

I have a consumer success story that is in the works:

I am currently working with an elderly man who speaks primarily Chinese. He is living in a non-accessible house, causing him to fall frequently. He was referred to me through the Transition and Diversion Pilot Project Program (TDPP). He was approved for an accessible unit and will be transitioning this month. The current household furnishings he has are all broken and in poor shape. He is looking forward to having some updated furniture. He is especially excited to sleep on a comfortable bed.

Accessibility Projects/Updates - from our IL Advocate/Accessibility Specialist: Jen Erickson

- Accessibility survey/report for Community Action in Jamestown
- Accessibility survey for City of Streeeter
- A ramp was installed in January in Fargo at rental property.
- Partnering with 2 High Plains Fair Housing staff to provide advocacy/information with/to consumer and property manager on housing barrier (unclear fees that have been accumulating over time)
- Exploring home modification funding with consumer and Fargo advocate seeking materials and labor for deck, ramp and possible foundation work.
- Information/initial consultation with parents on school entrance access barrier

Event Updates -from our Office Coordinator: Wanda Lokhorst

- Giving Hearts Day 2/13/25! Check out our Facebook and Instagram if you haven't. Many of our staff are getting pied in the face!
- Luncheon will be on May 8th at the Avalon Event Center from 12-1 pm. Kirstin Keely has agreed to emcee for us again along with Dixie Duncan as our Sign Language Interpreter
- We are trial-testing a couple of different silent auction online sites to help with ease of accessibility. If you have suggestions on platforms we could try- please let me know.
- We are in the early stages of putting together the Freedom Resource Fair. This will be along with the celebration of the 35th Anniversary of the ADA in July. Please follow our Facebook & Instagram for more details.

February 7, 2025 - Dakota Director's Report

Staff Vacancies

- IL Advocate Dickinson
- 2 IL Advocates Bismarck
- MFP/TDPP

Community Education

- Staff set up a booth at the Disability Awareness Day at the capital
- Cross Disability Panel for 2 classes at BSC
- Technical Assistance
- 3 calls for 504 assessments
- Driver's Permit
 - Standing Rock
 - Ft Yates High School- 5 Students received their driver's permit and 1 got their license
 - Bismarck - Legacy High -1 student received their Drivers Permit
 - Century -0 students received their permit
 - Bismarck High- 4 students received their permit
 - South Central- 0 Students received their permit 1 got their license
 - Renew Ed - 0 students received their license or permit. This is a brand-new school for DCIL in Mandan.
 - Mandan High-1 student who did not want to get a driver's permit ended up taking her test during Christmas break because she said we gave her so much confidence. Permit to be determined.

These are recent inquiries that DCIL will contact for the next school year.

Youth Works

Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch

Life Ed

Feb. 2025 - Directors Report-Independence, Inc. Scott Burlingame, Executive Director

Individual Services

A 47-year-old male with a restricted license has gone through life the past 11 years without a license, this individual has faced many barriers due to his license being restricted. Multiple charges with law enforcement led to incarceration, lost employment, missed opportunities, and time lost with his children. He went to Municipal Court in his jail uniform and was greeted by Independence, Inc. staff with a smile and genuine concern to help him with his barriers. Upon release, this gentleman reached out to Independence, Inc. seeking their invitation for guidance and support. His first step was to pay off his fines, which he did. Then he was assisted with calling multiple insurance agencies to find the quote that would be fusible for his tight budget, the quote was found, and also assisted with his paperwork and submitting his paperwork. The next step was to assist him with lifting the hold he had a restricted license from 11 years ago in another state, multiple calls were made and many conversations, documents were downloaded and submitted, and the hold was lifted. All through this process he was defeated and wanted to give up. Independence, Inc. staff was able to motivate and encourage him to keep one foot in front of the other. He then reached his last steps to take the written exam and drivers test over and pay his reinstatement fee. This consumer officially has his driver's license and is so proud of his achievement. He now gets to show up for his children and drive them to school. He now gets to apply for the job he always wanted but didn't qualify because he didn't have a driver's license. It's the little wins that matter the most and should always be recognized.

A 74-year-old man needed assistance with being able to access his tub. He was living with his brother and was approved through the program, through Independence Inc. The contractor was ready to move forward with the project, but personal things happened with his brother, where he had to move out immediately. With the help of Independence Inc., HCBS, and other organizations, he was able to get into a hotel for a month. During that time Housing was able to find a place for him to live and Independence, Inc. was able to use the grant to fully furnish his place. He is very happy with his new arrangement.

A 40-year-old gentleman who is an amputee has been working with Independence, Inc. for over a year to get an accessible ramp built onto his home. After searching for a contractor in his rural area and with assistance from the RAP Grant and TDPP, his ramp is scheduled to be built within the next month (weather permitting). He and his family are grateful for all the work to get us to this point.

A 60-year-old gentleman who previously worked with Independence Inc, was referred again when he ended back in the nursing home. Independence, Inc. and MFP assisted with getting him a specialized wheelchair that was not covered by insurance, so he is able to drive himself again.

A 74-year-old man was referred to Independence, Inc. from a nursing home and was approved for the Money Follows the Person grant. He had been in the nursing home for a year, due to having a stroke. When he had the stroke, the doctors didn't think he would live, let alone have much brain function after. His significant other came and sat by him every day he was in the nursing home. His health improved and with the help of Independence, Inc. and organizations, a fully accessible unit was found

for him and his significant other. They moved to Grand Forks to be close to family. They were very excited and grateful for the help.

72-year old man assisted with transition out of the Nursing home. Connected to resources to stay in the community. Utilized grant funding to get a wheelchair so he could get around in the community. Working with PT to get strength back. He would like to get back to his favorite hobby of fishing in the summer!

45-Year old man assisted with securing housing; He had significant barriers. Independence, Inc. staff worked in collaboration with NDCPD to advocate for housing with property management. He has maintained his job in the community and was able to also assist his adult son with getting to ND.

We have had a school which we have provided our Building and Encouraging Youth Opportunities in North Dakota (BEYOND) program for several years and have not been able to yet this year. We had a student who went to the teacher (who was new) and advocated for us to return.

A 43-year-old male has been working with Independence, Inc. and the TDPP program to establish housing, with the goal of living independently within the community. This individual has been living with chronic pain after sustaining an injury, which caused him to become unemployed, and led to him losing his source of income. He also lost his home to a house fire at the beginning of 2024, and not long after had a stroke. This individual was living in a rural area, with very limited resources, and with the help of two CILs (Dakota CIL and Independence) was able to relocate to an area where more support services would be available to him. Independence, Inc. assisted with securing housing and getting the individual connected with in-home support services, as well as connecting him with Vocational Rehab, and resources within the community that would allow him to keep his pet cat, which was very important to him.

We assisted a 55-year-old female who came to us living in a camper and staying with friends. This female had several housing barriers. We assisted with her getting the correct documents so that she could get her license and then helped her find housing. She is now housed with her license and is able to feel safe so that she can work on her health.

Barriers

A barrier is an 18-year-old female who needs job coaching in order to keep her current job in rural ND but is unable to get one due to limited resources.

A 68-year-old gentleman has been working with Independence, Inc. for a year and a half trying to find a different place to live that is accessible, within his budget, and centrally located. Unfortunately, we have not been able to find him anything within his means, and continue to work on it.

Community Services

Point in Time Count: Independence, Inc. participated in the annual Point-In-Time (PIT) Count, an important initiative to document the number of people experiencing homelessness in our community. As a disability rights organization, we regularly work with individuals who have no stable housing and few options for shelter. Minot, unfortunately, does not have a homeless shelter, leaving many of the people who come to our agency with nowhere to go. By taking part in the PIT Count, we can help provide accurate data that highlights the urgent need for housing solutions in our region.

Through our work, we see firsthand how the lack of emergency shelters and housing programs impacts people with disabilities. Many of the individuals we serve are forced to couch surf, sleep in vehicles, or stay in unsafe conditions. The data collected during the PIT Count is shared with HUD and is crucial for determining funding and resources for homelessness programs. By participating, we not only document the crisis but also advocate for better policies and support systems to ensure that no one in our community is left without a place to call home.

A. Staffing Update

As of January 30, we have no open positions at Independence, Inc. Here are the last few people we have hired.

Tonya Parker serves as our Director of Community Relations. Tonya most recently worked at the Grant Oasis as the Director of Community Affairs, and prior to that, was the Director of Team Events and Meetings for Visit Minot. She is primarily responsible for telling the story of our organization to the public, providing systems advocacy, and outreach.

Kirstine Baker is a new Independent Living Advocate. She serves consumers in the area historically served by the Bottineau office; however, she is based out of Minot. She provides services remotely when possible and travels to the area as needed. Kirstine previously worked for six years at Legal Services of North Dakota as a Legal Assistant/Advocate in the Belcourt area.

Allisen Hall is an Independent Living Specialist. She comes to from the Ward County Human Service Zone. She will work primarily with adults on achieving their independent living goals. She will work to provide all of core services in the Minot area.

Tia Goforth is an Independent Living Specialist. With Tia, we truly think outside the box, as she has spent the past several years working at Roosevelt Park Zoo as a Zookeeper. However, before that, she worked at the Boys and Girls Ranch for several years and comes highly recommended by her former coworkers there (three of whom are now part of our team). Tia works as part of the adults and also serves as a part-time Youth Transition Specialist in the Minot area schools.

Employee of the Quarter

As part of our efforts to highlighting the great work being done by our team, we will now be awarding an "Employee of the Quarter."

Alexis Waslawski has been selected as Employee of the Quarter for her outstanding contributions to Independence, Inc. She exemplifies the organization's mission through her dedication, professionalism, and commitment to empowering individuals with disabilities.

Alexis is known for her friendly demeanor, reliability, and strong teamwork skills. She consistently approaches her work with a positive attitude and takes initiative to ensure tasks are completed efficiently and accurately. Her ability to build rapport with consumers and establish trust has been instrumental in supporting their independence.

Since joining Independence, Inc., Alexis has played a key role in assisting 29 consumers in successfully transitioning to greater independence, with 28 additional individuals currently in

progress. She has worked with consumers ranging in age from 1.5 years old to 86 years old, demonstrating her ability to adapt her approach to meet the diverse needs of those we serve.

Alexis' contributions reflect her genuine desire to improve people's lives. She balances a professional work ethic with a lighthearted and approachable nature, making her a valued team member and a trusted advocate for the individuals she serves.

Her dedication to timeliness, accuracy, and consumer success makes her an excellent recipient of this recognition. Independence, Inc. is proud to acknowledge Alexis Waslawski as Employee of the Quarter for her exceptional service and commitment to our mission.

North Dakota SILC– Feb. 6, 2025 Service Report - Options

Options Direct Service Staff have been assisting students with their Individualized Education Plans and/or 504 Transition Plans as they move into adult roles post-high school. Along with the Options' staff person the Consumers will work on identifying apartments they can potentially live in and if need be learn about and make applications for housing assistance. In addition to the housing individual service needs are discussed so the transition is successful. Some of the services involve basic living skills such as budgeting, cooking, cleaning, and how to use public transportation, while others are disability dependent such as the use as a cell phone calendar as a memory aid. Options staff try to look at system barriers that affect various people with disabilities from the same group to see if they can make change, as young adults were being worked with it was noticed that some had problems with paying full fares for public transportation so it was worked out with the local transit provider that they would be able access vouchers that are ½ the price for a ride.

An example of these services is when Devils Lake High School contacted Options about helping a consumer transition from High School to living on his own. Options met with the consumer at the high school and signed him up for services. With Options' ongoing support over several months, the individual was able to move into his own apartment in October 2024! He is working on IL skills, such as cooking and cleaning. He is also working part-time at a local store and very much enjoys his newfound independence.

Options has been working with a Consumer with blindness secondary to a stroke who requested assistance in finding housing. Options assisted him in contacting housing to see if he qualified for assistance, which he did not, and then to locate an affordable apartment on the open market. Options staff assisted him in filling out apartment applications and viewing the various apartments. Due to this help, he was able to find and move into an apartment. The individual has stated that he feels like he is in a real home again and is very happy with the open floor plan of the apartment. The openness he finds easier as he learns how to Cane. In addition to the housing Options also assisted him with linking up with audiobooks. Through the program he can access an audio player and whatever listening material interests him as needed.

As one ages one's retirement often does not keep pace with inflation and increased property tax expenses. For people who want to remain living in the neighborhood and city where they have the most connections having the expendable income necessary to keep up with maintenance issues becomes very hard. Consequently, Option outreach staff commonly help people to identify the resources needed to keep their homes in a habitable condition. This was the case for an older couple who needed help identifying resources to repair their basement and replace the living room window. These repairs make it possible for the couple to remain in their home. In addition to making their home habitable Options staff also help them learn about and access the programs necessary, this same couple has learned about and is now using the Family Caregiver Support program.

Options has assisted a couple people with information about Emotional Support Animals and the processes for being able to access them. In one instance a person has acquired one and her employer has gone so far that he has let the individual bring the animal into the workplace above and beyond the requirements.

Each fall of the year some duties become cyclical such as helping people apply for the Homestead Tax Credit, the Primary Residence Property tax credit, LIHEAP, medical marijuana recertification, and reviewing and renewing their healthcare programs. Many people look to Centers as a resource in helping them understand the processes involved to remain eligible and to assist with getting their paperwork done. This is especially true for people with disabilities who can no longer access local representatives and do not have access to the Internet.

Options found that this year only 20% of the people served have access to the internet, this is a drop from 40% for the last few years. It is Options impression that greater numbers of people are having to drop their use of technology in order to feed themselves due to the inflation rates.

Options like all Centers in North Dakota assist people with disabilities who are in danger of having to go into institutional care and also assist people out of institutional care. Many of the people Options staff assists back into the community only have the clothes on their back and nothing else. To successfully move someone from institutional care staff have to help them with ensuring their medical needs will be met once moved, along with securing a place to live, and with setting up all the articles needed to make a house a home. This is not accomplished by simply making phone calls and coordinating others, it is accomplished through hard work. Each worker has to purchase along with the individual all the things needed and in almost all cases set up the apartment. In essence, they are purchase agents and movers, they arrange for cupboards to be full of food and that the person has the medications and services needed in their home. It is not an easy task. For persons who are in danger of institutionalization, they have to sit down with each person and identify what barriers there are inhibiting their independence. Once identified they work to fill the gaps whether it is service gaps or needed access improvements. Sometimes money is available through State ran programs and other times other sources have to be accessed such as rural development or granting sources such as rural round-up programs.

A Money Follow the Person referral was received by the staff on behalf of a person with an intellectual disability living in the Life Skills Center. This individual had goals of living independently and advancing their independent living skills. To accomplish the transition the staff person held team meetings to identify supports and advocated on behalf of the individual on their wants, goals, and needs. The staff person was able to assist the individual in applying for a housing voucher to sustain affordable housing and helped with locating integrated community-based housing in the community of the individual's choosing. To accomplish the goals team meetings were held to discuss assistive technology, furniture needs, personal skills, and care. Part of the process involved both assistive technology assessments and life skills assessments with recommendations on physical as well as cognitive accommodations to ensure as much as possible the individual would be successful. Once identified all the items were purchased and set up. In addition to the aforementioned, the individual needed groceries and linkages to community-based services. Of Options staff, not all the tasks are handled by the Transition coordinator other staff assist with putting together and to set up their apartment with household items. Lastly, the transition coordinator and individual formed an emergency backup plan for support. Through the facilitation held by Options MFP transition coordinator, this individual now lives independently in their own apartment with the skills and equipment to promote success. This individual will have follow-up from their transition coordinator for a year to help support their success and independence in the community.

This writer assisted an individual residing in a nursing facility to move into an apartment to live independently. The individual required an accessible and affordable apartment due to using an electric wheelchair for mobility and due to low income. With Options support, the individual successfully moved into an accessible, first-floor apartment. Options assisted this individual in obtaining Home and Community Based Services in the home to assist with various care such as bathing, grooming, cleaning, and meal preparation to ensure the individual's needs are met in the community. The individual requires durable medical equipment such as a Hoyer lift, hospital bed, and specialized bath bench. Due to the Money Follows the Person grant and Options services, the individual was able to obtain this equipment at no personal cost. The MFP grant also assisted in purchasing and setting up necessary furniture and household items before the transition as well as groceries to ensure success for the individual in the early days of transition. Options also assisted in advocating for a key-pad lock to be installed rather than a key lock due to the individual's limited mobility in the arms. The individual will continue to work with Options and the MFP grant as this writer assists the individual in obtaining a roll-in shower to replace the bathtub. This writer applied for funding through the North Dakota Housing and Finance Agency and will plan to utilize MFP funding to support the installation cost of a roll-in shower.

Options staff are currently working on starting a support group for parents of children with Autism. The support group is called POCA: Parents of Children with Autism. The first meeting is scheduled for March 19th. The group will define the format of the Support Group meetings once established but not various speakers are being sought out and scheduled which can provide participants with important information and resources. The meeting is being advertised through flyers and social media posts with the Community providing good feedback and excitement about the need for such a group. Options has two staff who have children with autism.