

**STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
Canad Inns, Grand Forks & Virtual
May 2 - 3, 2024**

Call to Order: Brittney Hogan called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. A quorum was present.

Roll Call:

Members Present: Pete Yung, Nancy Lundon, Robyn Soiseth, Ali Brown, Brittney Hogan, Shannon Cook, Scott Burlingame, Joe Yasenchack

Members Absent: Jan Beddes, Hope Wolbert, Angie Bosch, Emma-Leigh Miller, Ben Wolf Necklace

Non-Council Members Present: Aimee Volk, Cindy Gabbert, Randy Sorensen, Royce Schultze, Cody Kurtz

Approval of the May 2024 Agenda: Nancy Lundon made a motion to amend the agenda to move the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) approval to today (May 2, 2024) and then, accept the agenda, Robyn Soiseth seconded the motion. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

Approval of February 2024 Minutes: Scott Burlingame made a motion to approve the February 2024 SILC minutes as presented, Nancy Lundon seconded the motion. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

Correspondence – Brittney Hogan:

The SILC State Plan for Independent Living was posted for public comment for about a month. We also hosted an in-person and virtual option on April 12th. Public comment was out until 5:00 p.m. on April 19th. We did not get any comments.

Vote on State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) – Brittney Hogan:

Discussion was held on the SPIL as it was out for public comment for about a month. There were no comments submitted.

Scott Burlingame made a motion to accept and submit the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) as presented, Shannon Cook seconded the motion to approve. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

Treasurer's Report – Shannon Cook:

Reviewed the Treasurer's Report.

Robyn Soiseth made a motion to accept the Treasure's Report as presented, Pete Yung seconded the motion to approve. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

Vote on a New Treasurer – Brittney Hogan:

Nominations and discussions were held.

Peter Yung was nominated and accepted the nomination. **Robyn Soiseth made a motion to have Peter Yung as the Treasurer, Shannon Cook seconded the motion. Motion passed by unanimous decision.**

Independent Living Legislation – Randy Sorensen:

Centers for Independent Living history and when they started. Some resources say that universities started them some say the civil rights movement but mostly they talk about Ed Roberts starting the paradigm.

Three pots of money were set aside to provide services. Part B was to provide services to the designated state entity (like vocational rehabilitation) in which they can provide IL services. Then there are the older individuals who are blind. Part C is to IL centers provided through grant awards.

Dakota Center for Independent Living was the first center for independent living. When they first opened, they were called HIT, Inc. There were 1.5 full-time equivalents (FTEs) to provide independent living services.

In North Dakota, the state dollars are lower than the federal dollars. The federal entity regulates the standards and assurances. In 1986, there was a disconnect where services were being offered differently in each state. In North Dakota, we were more sophisticated at the time we established quadrants and established who would provide services to certain places. When legislation was first written it was under the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and in 2016 we went to the Administration for Community Living (ACL).

Randy discussed legislation and regulations.

Personal Assistant Services – Daniall Deis:

North Dakota QSP Hub is a resource center for agency and individual Qualified Service Professionals (QSPs) throughout ND. The goal is to create a network that provides support, educational tools, and training opportunities to walk QSPs and QSP agencies through all stages of the QSP process. There are now three resource facilitators, one senior project coordinator, and one director. They are funded through the Money Follows the Person grant.

They provide support to QSPs such as getting started, enrollment, service authorizations, electronic verification, and much more. They typically provide support through direct phone calls, email, virtual meetings, quick video guides/documents, or group meeting opportunities.

Call volume has significantly increased from 10-12 calls per day to about 32 calls per day. Call-back time is within one to two days. Due to the increase, they have hired three additional staff to provide timely services.

They have updated their website to make it more user-friendly. They are organized by the step the QSP is in (enrollment phase, approved phase, training, and self-directing), quick video guides, step-by-step documents/library, direct links and resources, and clear descriptions for each link/video. They

have started a training and events calendar. They have Alzheimer's Association events, age-friendly health case webinars, training and events pertinent to QSPs, Money Follows the Person (MFP) training, and recruitment opportunities.

They are continuing to work on recruitment and retention opportunities. They have a realistic job preview video targeted towards students. They also participate in the Scrubs Academy. For retention, they are working on getting an exit survey created.

Introduction to In-Patient Rehabilitation – Altru Rehabilitation Hospital, an affiliate of Encompass Health: Jessica Stewart, Jen Jahner, Nicole

Encompass Health is the largest owner and operator of inpatient in the United States. Grand Forks had a seven to ten-bed census when they opened and are now at a 38-bed census. There are 40 beds on two levels of the Altru Rehabilitation Hospital. They have a state-of-the-art facility. They are one of four rehabilitations in North Dakota.

They have physician specialties (physiatrist, neurologist, internal medicine, infectious disease, nephrology, tele psych, therapies, etc.) on staff. They serve complex situations such as dialysis, wound care, oxygen, prosthesis training, peg tubes, tracheostomy, NG tubes, etc.

For this facility, patients do not have to come directly from a hospital. The patient would need to meet with a physician at least three times. There is a minimum of three hours of therapy (at least two therapies) of 15 hours over seven days. In 2023, they served 769 patients. 64.58% of the patients were admitted under the approved diagnoses. They averaged 3.15 hours of therapy a day. The average length of stay is 12.51 days.

Committee Breakouts

Friday, May 3, 2024

Call to Order: Brittney Hogan called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. A quorum was present.

Roll Call:

Members Present: Peter Yung, Nancy Lundon, Chelsy Sondrol, Joe Yasenchack, Robyn Soiseth, Brittney Hogan, Scott Burlingame, Ali Brown, Leon Dietrich

Members Absent: Angie Bosch, Jan Beddes, Shannon Cook, Hope Wolbert, Ben Wolf Necklace

Non-Committee Members: Aimee Volk, Randy Sorensen, Cindy Gabbert, Royce Schultze,

Communications for Social Media – Aimee Volk:

Aimee discussed the SILC utilizing social media and what they would need to consider. For the SILC to use social media they would not be able to use the Health and Human Services Logo. They would need to discern how and who would be responsible for this task.

Discussion was held on the different platforms and the audience that subscribes to them.

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: We have two new board members. We need two members for Quadrant IV (Dickinson and Bismarck areas).

Internal Affairs – Nancy Lundon: No report.

External Affairs – Angie Bosch: No report.

State Rehabilitation Council: No report.

Traumatic Brain Injury Council – Shannon Cook: No report.

Committee on Aging – Royce Schultze: No report.

Olmstead Commission – Scott Burlingame: No report.

NASILC: No report.

Public Comment: No Comment.

The next SILC meeting will be August 1-2, 2024, in Fargo, ND and will have the virtual option.

Nancy Lundon made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Leon Dietrich seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 10:49 a.m.

Freedom - ND SILC Director's Report – May 2024

MFP/TDPP Updates

The ADRL program has a new name. It is the North Dakota Transition and Diversion Services Pilot Project or **TDPP**. This program has been incredibly busy in the first quarter of 2024 with **76** referrals. From the 76 referrals Fargo assisted with **25** transitions. One of the Fargo transitions had been referred to the program in January of 2023 and was finally able to find housing with the barriers she had. She transitioned into her apartment in February 2024. There were also **2** transitions in Lisbon from the TDPP program and **2** transitions in Jamestown!

Money Follows the Person (MFP) has had **31** referrals since January 1 of those **15** in Fargo, **1** in Wahpeton, **13** in Lisbon and **2** in Jamestown. Transitions for the first quarter (and counting) are **6** for Fargo, **1** for Wahpeton, **2** for Jamestown, and **1** for Lisbon.

Luke Boucher began employment with Freedom on Monday, March 18 as an Independent Living Advocate Transition Coordinator who will work with TDPP (formerly ADRL). On Monday, we had our 20th employee, Mahri Schumacher, start in a new position. She will work with MFP and TDPP.

Fargo highlights from our IL Advocate/Peer Mentoring Specialist: Katelyn Vilmo

A consumer who sought out independent living skills training in the spring of 2022 has achieved milestone goals in recent months. The consumer was first referred to us from Free Through Recovery and she was unsure of her goals. She was teary eyed throughout the first appointment and struggled to organize the list of tasks she hoped to accomplish. With time, she began to work on the skills learned during the appointments. She eventually bought a planner and began to sort through what she needed to accomplish. She ended up not meeting with her advocate for around a year, before coming back. She had made considerable progress with her goals in her time away from FRC. She wanted to touch up on some skills to get back to where she wanted to be with her goals. She eventually applied for some jobs and hesitated to accept a job offer. After we worked on decision-making skills and she had time to reflect, she accepted the job position. She is now a supervisor at American Airlines at the Fargo Airport and doesn't need to schedule as many appointments.

Fargo highlights from our IL Advocate: Sarah Weisser

A 17-year-old young lady's father came in and met with two advocates about a situation that had happened on the van she rode to school. Her arm got shut in the door of the van and it broke her crutch that she used to get around. Her father was upset because he felt that his daughter was not being heard and his concerns were being dismissed. After doing some checking and asking the family what outcome they wanted. They stated they wanted to be heard, for the bus company to acknowledge what happened, to come up with a plan so it would not happen again and to get more than 2 minutes for the young lady to get from her front door to the bus. After Freedom Resource Center's advocate started looking into the incident it became clear that this should be turned over to North Dakota Protection and Advocacy for a more thorough investigation. Staff from Protection and Advocacy spoke to the young lady and handled the complaint. The other part was to address the bus company's policy that the students that used the special needs transportation were only given two minutes to get out to the bus or van. With having a physical disability that affects the student's mobility she was missing the bus a lot or getting left due to not making it out in time. This advocate and the father requested and received an IEP meeting to discuss getting an accommodation for an extra 3 minutes (total 5 minutes) to get to the vehicle. Plus, get assistance to the vehicle, if needed,

when it is icy. The IEP team agreed that these were reasonable accommodations and needed for her safety. A transportation accommodation was filled out by the school's case manager. Then given to the bus company and the family is happy and she has the safety measures in place.

Jamestown Highlights from our IL Advocate/Transition Coordinator: Keeta Smith

The previous couple of months I have been working to transition a consumer that had been waiting to go home for over three years. There were many meetings and many times the move date had to be pushed back due to equipment not arriving due to being on backorder. The gentleman was so understanding and epically patient. He finally transitioned into his apartment but unfortunately, had to return to the nursing facility two weeks later due to insufficient QSP's for his morning and evening cares. The hunt resumes to find him staff who will be able to assist him in his apartment. One February transition had been referred to FRC in 2022. He loves being back in his own apartment and is very happy. I had a consumer who needed to push his transition back because he came down with covid and was not able to transition as planned. Another March transition needed a fully accessible apartment with proper adaptive equipment. He's a wheelchair user and was struggling with falls in his old apartment and feared he'd face institutionalization if an apartment wasn't found. The transition team was able to help him find an apartment and get equipment in place. He was very happy in his new place, for about one week. Services fell apart with the QSP agency, complaints were filed, and he went to swing bed for a short time and is now back in the nursing home. This was a challenging time for our staff, HCBS staff, but most importantly for the individual who has waited so long for QSP support to help him live independently. HCBS is searching for a new QSP agency, but to date no new agency has been found to support this consumer in his home.

Lisbon highlights from our IL Advocate: Kristine Green

I am going on my seventh month now with Freedom. I have been very busy here in the Lisbon Office and have enjoyed going out to meet with new consumers. I currently have consumers in the Lisbon, Oakes, Ellendale, Forman, Enderlin, Wishek, and Napoleon areas. One consumer who is currently in Lisbon and has been working with MFP since 2022 will be transitioning to his own apartment in the Fargo area next week. How exciting for him! I also have a consumer in Wishek who will soon be transitioning back to her home in Bismarck, so it has been fun getting to know and work with the staff from Dakota CIL. What joy it brings to their lives to be able to live independently. I also had my first "heartache" when my first consumer I had signed up, decided to terminate MFP services. This is a gentleman that I went to see almost every Thursday since September has had some struggles. I have missed the smile I see every time I walk into his room, and I hope someday he will be able to return. This position can touch your heart (in both good and sad ways). I have learned a great deal in these past seven months, and I look forward to learning new things every day.

Wahpeton highlights

Raegan Klosterman started employment as an Independent Living Advocate Transition Coordinator for our Wahpeton office. We are extremely excited to have her join the team. On her second day of employment, she traveled with our crew to attend the ND Aging Symposium.

ND Accessibility Projects

from our IL Advocate/Accessibility Specialist: Jen Erickson

- Outreach meeting with Nathan Svihovec – Gov. appointed Commissioner for ND Department of Labor and Human Rights- I provided information on core services and other work of Access Specialist role. Discussed Nathan facilitating possible training/presentation for staff re: his role and perhaps trends in types of complaints being filed.

- ND Assistive Consumer Advisory Council quarterly meeting – we were able to hear from the Executive Director of ATAP (Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs – <https://ataporg.org/> - AT Act reauthorized in 2022; this association represents interests for designated AT organizations in all 50 states as well as US territories when it comes to legislative and funding priorities. She praised Jeannie and Sen. Cramer for their commitment to getting AT into the hands of those who need it and for being leaders in the country.
- ND Housing Finance Agency Public Meeting – Freedom was a host site – very good comments and contributions from satellite sites throughout the state, and those who attended at our site were also very engaged. We gathered comments about ways that property developers can make apartments more accessible – examples included but not limited to appliances, structural elements (showers et al), storage spaces, laundry facilities, etc.
- Two recent ramp assessment reviews conducted– we’ve had a couple of recent take downs; one installation and another one scheduled to go up in the next two weeks.
- A variety of consumer housing needs/issues pending related to parking, path of travel accessibility, and furniture acquisition.
- There are conversations pending with Fargo Public Schools regarding surveillance cameras during transport to/from school. Currently, buses have cameras installed whereas vans that transport students with disabilities and students who are homeless do not. Initiated a preliminary conversation with the transportation coordinator for FPS to inquire further and express concern about the potential inequity students with disabilities and those who are homeless face not having access to surveillance footage when incidents occur during transport. It was uncertain if Valley Bus leases or owns the vans. They moved to vans due to shortage of CDL drivers, as stated. It’s not clear how long vans will be used. Sarah’s done some great work related to reasonable accommodations for a student who needs more time to get to the van and it’s my understanding the driver wait time has been increased from 2 to 5 minutes as a reasonable accommodation, but Sarah would be able to add/clarify. Incident related to this student prompted broader discussion of surveillance on vans.

Event Updates - from our Office Coordinator: Wanda Lokhorst

Appreciation Luncheon: Only 15 Days Away! You are invited!

It will be held on May 16th from 12-1:00 or 1:30 at the Avalon. Our **Emcee is Kerstin Kealy** (WDAY news anchor). Tanya Stoll and Tricia McNamee will help with taking pictures. We are working on getting consumer testimonials to share. We have names in mind, we just need to connect. We continue to work on getting financial support from donors/partners to help fund the event. Silent Auction will be online starting at noon on May 13th. All bidding will be done through the same app/website as we have used for previous events.

35th Anniversary: 2024 is Freedom’s 35th year anniversary. We are looking to host a Resource Fair. Still working on a venue. We will invite partners we work with regularly first to give them the first choice of space. We would also like Berts Equipment and Hope Inc. to bring some sports equipment for people to try out, and other resources people may not know about, etc. This will also be a way to celebrate the Anniversary of the ADA. The event date is still TBD. Will potentially do a ribbon cutting during this time.

Dakota CIL – Director’s Report May 2024

Community Education

Monthly Series Understanding Your Disability The concept behind this is to show that you are not alone, and others have the same disabilities. This is offered both in person and virtual. The average is five people in person and 20 virtual.

Living with Parkinson’s a husband and wife presented their experiences living with Parkinson’s. After realizing he only had one life to live, the husband put together a bucket list. They went skydiving, white-water rafting, and mountain climbing in the Rocky Mountains.

Eating Disorders talked about anorexia, bulimia, eating more during holidays because of depression, boredom, and trigger words such as fat, pig out,

Social Security discussed the differences between SSDI and SSI, Medicare and Medicaid, and the qualifications to be eligible for these programs.

Understanding Brain Injuries talked about the different types of brain injuries, how brain injuries are acquired, the hyperbaric chamber, and the benefits of support groups.

For the July ADA event, we will have a Walk for Walkers and Wheelies, bake sale, silent auction, 50-50 raffle, and wellness fair at the AmVets.

Working on Budgeting Basics Class

Staff has been setting up Assistive Technology booths at 5 locations, including Kidder County, McLean County, and Emmons County.

Working with ten students with IEPs

SUCCESS STORIES

This is a story of circumstances that seemed to be beyond any possibility of ending well but did end with a great success 😊. My name is Geordan Traver and starting about January of 2020 my health condition rapidly changed. I lost my ability to work and safely drive a vehicle, and at the same time I lost all income and began falling into debt from medical expenses. It was suggested that I move from rural North Dakota to a city with a hospital so I could receive immediate medical attention in an emergency situation. I used all of my resources to follow this advice and chose Dickinson ND as my new home. During this time, I felt that things were hopeless and began to call and ask around about how to deal with my current circumstances. I was immediately directed to DCIL in downtown Dickinson as one of the possibilities for assistance.

I can honestly say that I believe DCIL changed the outcome of my story, and I can’t imagine how things would be today if I hadn’t received their help. At the very first meeting I was given several options to help me stay independent and cover those monthly expenses that we all have. My case worker didn’t just direct me to online applications but took the time to fill out those applications and follow up with conference calls for the status as needed. I don’t think I would have filled out any of those applications because my vision loss would not allow, and I was intimidated by the complex Government format for these types of things. Because of the assistance from DCIL and the caring staff members, today I have monthly income. They helped me with a small grant to provide an eye

care computer monitor that gives me the ability to order groceries for delivery each week. Without this specialized monitor, I would have no access to online communication or services, including my medical-related emails.

I recently had to make those confusing decisions about Medicare Parts A, B, C, and D. The thing that I appreciate about DCIL is they assisted me with the areas of need that they could effectively help, including some of the basic Medicare coverage. Beyond that, they have a network of alliances that are extremely knowledgeable, tried and proven. I had the pleasure of meeting one of these representatives with the organization known as Angel Advocates in late February. My DCIL case worker provided me with transportation and attended the meeting with me. The outcome of this meeting was beyond what I could have hoped for. I left the meeting with little to no questions as to what would be best for me and my circumstances when it came to Medicare coverage.

During a year and a half of dark, depressing, and unsure times for me, DCIL became a path of hope. Each time that I would meet with the staff and caseworker there was laughter and something good. I noticed when I left those meetings I always felt better, had hope, and a reason to smile.

There is another story about DCIL helping with my hobby/craft workspace area, but if I try to tell all of the things I want to, this will become a book. I can't say enough good things about DCIL and their dedicated, caring, compassionate staff but I can say they changed my life.

An individual came to the Dickinson DCIL office for help with his Birth Certificate, photo Identification card, and Social Security card. He had recently located here from Alabama and had lost everything, including his wallet with all his cards, in a tornado. This process took us on a journey through many different agencies alone, just trying to get connected to the correct office to get his birth certificate first.

Once we had that, we could then move on to acquiring his photo ID card from ND. Last, we got a copy of his Social Security card, and he now has a job.

There were 26 MFP Transitions, 7 TDPP Transitions, and 44 TDPP Diversions.

Directors Report - Independence, Inc. – May 2, 2024
Scott Burlingame, Executive Director

Staffing Concerns

Independence, Inc. has suffered an unsustainable amount of turnover over the past two years. As we sit, 11 of our 17 staff have been there for less than two years. Many of those jobs have turned over more than once. This has crippled our ability to do anything other than provide basic services, and even with that, we have a delay in when we can meet with people. We've dedicated significant time to the hiring and training processes, limiting our ability to provide services beyond basic supervision.

Individual Services

We assisted a 78-year-old female obtain her own apartment and transition her out of the nursing home. We got her furniture, assistive technology such as a shower chair and toilet bars, and all household items. She had been in the nursing home for a year and didn't think she'd be able to ever live on her own.

We assisted a 66-year-old female obtain income by assisting her with applying for Social Security Disability Insurance and Social Security Income and successfully being applicable for the program. We also assisted her in finding shelter and this consumer was provided counseling and support from survivors with similar lived situations.

We assisted a 26-year-old female apply for the college program she wanted to attend and she was accepted. We reached out to the local Access Services Office and successfully obtained accommodations for her first semester. To financially support her dream of attending college we assisted her with applying for FAFSA and online grants to assist her in her journey. She will be attending college in the Fall of 2024. We also assisted her with applying and obtaining health care coverage and SNAP through North Dakota Health and Human Services.

A 66-year-old man just began receiving retirement benefits after being without an income for several years and in a nearly fatal accident. This man is very grateful for this as he can now pay his bills and is able to get his Medicare back active, resulting in him being able to seek the medical attention that he desires.

So far this year we have had 40 transitions and 19 diversions from placement.

As we are wrapping up our 12th year providing the Building and Encouraging Youth Opportunities in North Dakota (BEYOND) program in local schools. This is a 15 week, interactive training program designed to prepare students with disabilities for adulthood. Every year, we have some inspiring and interesting responses to the end of the year surveys, so I thought I would share a few with you.

What did you learn in the BEYOND Youth Transition Program taught by Independence, Inc.?

- I'm a good person
- How to talk and interact with other people
- To not be afraid to tell people about my disability
- I've learned to be more social and interact with others better ever since I started going to Social Group.
- Apartment Tenant Responsibilities, Disability Awareness and Asking for Accommodations, Keeping a Budget.

- Some main things I learned is the requirements to show up for a job interview like what to wear or some ideas on how to live when I move out etc.
- stuff I already knew

Is there anything else you would like to say about the BEYOND Youth Transition Program?

- It's very helpful! And I'm glad to be a part of it 😊. Thank you for being awesome!!!
- It is an awesome program
- I would like to say this program has helped me a lot.
- Good program to talk about future careers.
- I wish I could've gotten the chance to do my homework without being interrupted more...
- I love it and it is a great program that breaks up my week.

Barriers:

A 42-year-old woman has been receiving services from Independence, Inc. for about a month now. Since working with staff, she has been attempting to get employment and housing. Due to her background barriers, she continues to come to a wall despite continuous efforts and multiple attempts.

A 26-year-old female experienced difficulties with finding proper resources to support her dream of attending college as well as being supported financially while attending.

A 66-year-old female who was experiencing homelessness and leaving a violent domestic violence situation needed assistance finding shelter and income.

A 69-year-old female that we previously assisted getting out of the nursing home, subsequently needed to return to regain strength. She returned in October and was finally able to do a home trial this week. Unfortunately, the providers that were contracted to take care of her were not trained on a hooyer lift or how to administer oxygen. She had to return to the nursing home due to safety concerns and will likely not be able to return to the community as no other providers can meet her needs.

IL Peer Collaborative

Our team has been working with the University of Montana and the Rural Institute for Inclusive Communities to teach a series of Independent Living Skills classes, to evaluate the effectiveness of workshop content created for consumers to help them feel more comfortable with technology, increase peer connections, and reduce social isolation. The topics include Your Supports, Knowing Yourself, Self-Talk, Relating to Others, and Successful Conversations.

Community Services

Youth Group

In collaboration with a group from Minot State University, we have begun the process of a youth led leadership group out of our office. This is our first youth group in about 7 years, and we are excited to see what they will be doing.

Disability Awareness in Schools

Empowering Disability Awareness: Independence, Inc. brings Disability Awareness to Local Elementary Schools

Independence, Inc. began its third consecutive school year offering Disability Awareness Programs in local schools. As advocates for inclusivity and understanding, Independence, Inc. has committed to fostering empathy and awareness among elementary aged youth, ensuring a more inclusive and supportive community for all.

In addition to the engaging sessions, Independence, Inc. will gift each participating school a copy of the inspirational book "Awesomely Emma. This heartwarming tale, aimed at children, beautifully illustrates the importance of embracing differences and celebrating individuality.

The program is designed to run for approximately 40 minutes, with the following objectives in mind:

- Help eliminate attitudinal barriers before they are established in 2nd-4th-grade classrooms.
- Understand appropriate communication strategies and etiquette when interacting with people with disabilities.
- Foster inclusion and reduce bullying at an early age.

The program will also help students to understand that while visible disabilities are apparent and can be easily observed, invisible disabilities may not be immediately noticeable.

Students will also be given the opportunity to participate in interactive activities to encourage questions about disabilities.

Options Service Summary – May 2024

Options staff continue to assist people in order for them to access programs and services designed to help them maintain their independence in addition to the provision of Options' Independent Living Services.

IL Staff are increasingly finding themselves providing services that used to be fulfilled by other human service staff prior to service providers providing services remotely. Staff have reported assisting people with disabilities in making applications for, or with maintenance paperwork for housing assistance, waived services, fuel assistance, food stamps, Medicaid, Social Security Disability Insurance, Supplemental Security Services, and with their Income Tax problems. This is for the most part to fulfill other outside program paperwork requirements. IL staff have assisted individuals in securing copies of lost identification cards, birth certificates, and social security beneficiary paperwork. Historic IL Services have included staff assisting consumers in understanding work incentives, studying for their driver's tests, identifying local primary care doctors, linking with local pharmacies, identifying recreation services, selling an old car and purchasing a newer car, and identifying local transportation providers.

For persons to remain within their home or to move to a new home staff have assisted individuals with their exterior entrances via railings or ramps, widening entrance doors, bathroom accessibility, and to access their basements by helping them get a stair lift. Often Options uses various staff to assist with home mods including the Access Specialist, Information and Referral Staff, and Direct Service Staff, and also link up people with several funding sources including Waivered Services, USDA, utility round-up programs, and outside granting sources. As part of the process staff teach people how to secure contractors and about the bidding process. Options has also assisted people in getting their own lift chairs, bath benches, walkers, crutches, canes, scooters, Hoyer lifts, commodes, raised toilet seats, and electric wheelchairs.

Two recreational groups are currently coordinated as part of Options Services, one with teaches cooking skills to participants and another that is art-focused. At the most recent art class participants painted planting pots and then planted flowers in them. One person attending the cooking class has reported that she now is able to microwave her own meals something she was scared to do previously. Before the class, she would only make sandwiches or eat food directly from the can

Last week CMS Staff from Region Eight, Denver, Co. reached out to Options so they could discuss any program concerns our staff have related to the Services in which North Dakota is responsible for that CMS provides, that meeting was held yesterday. This could not have happened at a more opportune time due to all the problems people with disabilities are experiencing now that North Dakota's Social Services have switched to remote work. Prior to the meeting Options staff met and documented all the problems we and the people have had while using remote workers. Options was also able to highlight unique policy and rule problems associated with changes in how people now use nursing facilities. Some rules were developed to keep people safe but are at the detriment of the way nursing facilities are used these days. One example is the rule for falls, nursing facilities are docked if a person falls so the rule results in nursing staff restricting one's rehabilitation by restricting their ability to walk. Another rule is a person cannot access reimbursements for durable medical

equipment they need once home unless they are out of the nursing facility so they have to find loaner or rental equipment before moving out. Unlike in years past, now nursing facilities are used to provide people the time they need to rehabilitate so are not looked at as long-term placements. This is reinforced through CMS's own MFP philosophy which is asking states to look at every resident of nursing facilities to see if they can move home. The rule restricting access to medical devices should be rethought.