



# WHAT IS THE MINNESOTA STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL?

The Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council (MNSILC) is a council made up of Minnesota citizens recruited from around the state and representing various ethnicity groups, ages, disabilities, and backgrounds. Members are appointed by the Governor to serve a one-, two- or three-year term. MNSILC is federally funded as authorized under Title VII of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. More than 51 percent of MNSILC members identify as having a disability.

The main responsibilities of MNSILC are to develop, monitor, review and evaluate a State Plan for Independent Living. MNSILC promotes the services of the eight centers for independent living and State Services for the Blind, which together constitute the Minnesota Independent Living Network (MNILNET).

More information about MNSILC, including how to apply to serve on the council, visit the MNSILC website at [www.mn.gov/deed/silc](http://www.mn.gov/deed/silc).

The MNILNET can be found on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/MNILNET](http://www.facebook.com/MNILNET).

## MNSILC Mission

The mission is to influence positive, impactful change alongside Minnesotans with disabilities in coordination with the Minnesota Independent Living Network. The Minnesota Independent Living Network is intended to refer to the entire independent living community including individuals with disabilities, the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council (MNSILC), the eight Minnesota Centers for Independent Living (CILs), the Minnesota Department of Employment and Development/Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) and State Services for the Blind (SSB).

## MNSILC Vision

The Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council has a vision that the independent living philosophy is fully integrated into communities and systems throughout Minnesota and that individuals with disabilities have every opportunity to be self-directed, to live a lifestyle of their choice, free from discrimination and to thrive as members of inclusive and diverse communities.

*From curb cuts to the realization of the full meaning of the American with Disabilities Act to making online technology accessible for all, CILs remains at the forefront of this commitment. We are as relevant to the ongoing quest to secure disability rights and justice as we were in 1973 when the Rehabilitation Act: particularly Title V, Sections 501, 503, and 504, was passed. The Rehab Act prohibits discrimination in federal programs and services and all other programs or services receiving federal funding.*



The word cloud on the front cover represents words that people with disabilities shared with us to describe independent living.

## MNSILC Members

Brian Baker

Robyn Block

Paulo Matheus Carvalho  
Chaves de Castro

Joseph Dailey

Bonnie Danberry

Rosalie Eisenreich

David Fenley

Deborah Gleason

Lisa Harvey

Haley Kimmet

Mary Koep

Karen Larson

Stephen Larson

Gloria LaFriniere

Ed Lecher

Linda Lingen

Larry Lura

Dr. Mohamed Mourssi-Alfash

Anita Olson

Tom Reed

Judy Sanders

Julia Washenberger

Brad Westerlund

# LETTER FROM THE MNSILC CHAIR

## Annual report on independent living programs and services

Welcome to the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council's (MNSILC) annual report on independent living programs and services.

MNSILC members are appointed by the Governor and they, along with the eight Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and other important stakeholders, form the Minnesota Independent Living Network (MNILNET). Members are tasked with statewide planning for services to people with disabilities.

The eight CILs in Minnesota provide direct services to people of all ages and disabilities. While each CIL has services unique to its area, all eight are mandated to provide five core services. Those services are advocacy, information and referral, independent living skills, peer support and mentoring, and transition.

This year MNSILC focused on getting teens and young adults involved with the council or committees. We conducted an art contest for youth! Included in this report is the art and information on the young man who submitted winning art. We continue to recruit youth and young adults to serve on committees.

We are recruiting new members to serve on the council. Two members of the council wrote articles about their experiences on the council, and you can read those articles on the next two pages of this report. We invite anyone interested in the independent living movement to serve on the council. Please apply at [mn.gov/deed/silc](https://mn.gov/deed/silc).

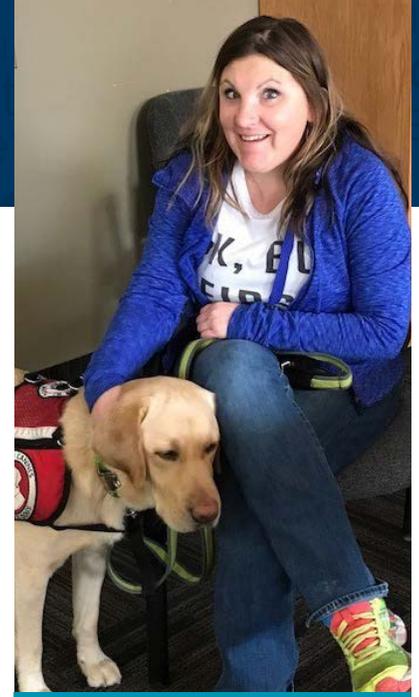
We spent many months working on a conference focused on equity and inclusion. We contacted speakers, set up time for the event, arranged food and entertainment. At the last minute we ended up going virtual because COVID numbers were on the rise again.

We promoted the work of the emergency services for the CILs, as they were frontline workers during COVID and provided services and support to people in need.

During the next year MNSILC will be reviewing the State Plan for Independent Living and asking for your feedback. Watch the MNSILC website for an announcement about a public hearing.

Gratefully,

*Robyn Block*



*Robyn Block, MNSILC Chair*

# SERVING ON THE MINNESOTA INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL

The Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council (MNSILC) is actively looking for Minnesota citizens who are interested in serving on the council. On these two pages you can read testimonials from current and former members of MNSILC. Our hope is that, by learning from their experiences, others will be motivated to apply for membership on this important council. Our members come from all around the state and represent various ethnicity groups, ages, disabilities, and backgrounds. Each member is appointed by the Governor to serve a up to two consecutive three-year terms. The main responsibilities of MNSILC are to develop, monitor, review, and evaluate a State Plan for Independent Living.

For more information about MNSILC, including how to apply to serve on the council, visit the MNSILC website at [www.mn.gov/deed/silc](http://www.mn.gov/deed/silc).



## Why I served on MNSILC

*To be part of this dynamic effort on behalf of people with disabilities throughout Minnesota has been a highlight of my life*

By Linda Lingen  
Former Council Member

When I retired from my position at State Services for the Blind, I felt the need to stay connected to the area that I was most passionate about – Independent Living. I immediately sent in my information to the Secretary of State’s office and was appointed for my first three-year term on the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council (MNSILC).

Since joining the council in 2017, I have been part of many accomplishments. One of the most significant accomplishments is the establishment of the Independent Living Network which includes the MNSILC, the Centers for Independent Living across the state of Minnesota, and DEED Vocational Rehabilitation Services and State Services for the Blind.

I am also proud to say I have been part of the leadership team as vice chairperson of the council. This team has assisted in creating State Plans for Independent Living that include all the Centers, the MNSILC, and the DEED-Vocational Rehabilitation Services and State Services for the Blind, as well as other interested community organizations.

As a council we have also been able to develop and implement some of the most creative annual reports on the work of the council and the Independent Living Network. These annual reports have been distributed to all federal, state, and local government officials, as well as to interested community partners. One of the best of these yearly reports was the 2020 report which talked about how the Centers coped during the time of COVID. There were many creative solutions to working during this time, and these were highlighted in this annual report.

To be part of this dynamic effort on behalf of people with disabilities throughout Minnesota has been a highlight of my life. If you want to be part of making dignity, choice, and freedom for people with disabilities throughout Minnesota, I strongly encourage you to apply for a position on the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council.



## My perspective about being a MNSILC member

*The mission fits so perfectly with my personal mission of advancing the independent living movement forward*

By Deborah Gleason  
Council Member

### Why I applied

For a long time, I had been looking for a way to get more involved in advocacy for individuals living with disabilities. I have had life-long low vision and been blessed to have family, friends, and support to live a pretty full life. I want to help make sure that is true for as many people as possible. I was perusing possible openings for councils and the Statewide Independent Living Council just jumped at me. I honestly thought it was in bold vs. the others. I LOVE the term “independent living” and submitted my application as fast as I could.

### What I have enjoyed about serving

There may not be enough room for this answer, but I’ll pick the highlights. First is the people – both on and associated with the council. They’re full of passion, willing to learn, and share a commitment to making a difference. Second is the mission: it fits so perfectly with my personal mission of advancing the independent living movement forward. Third is what I have learned. My goodness, I thought I understood independent living, had a good grasp of what individuals living with disabilities dealt with on a daily basis. I knew so little and am thrilled to be part of a group that openly shares and allows to ask discovery questions. Lastly is feeling like I make an impact, that my actions make a difference.

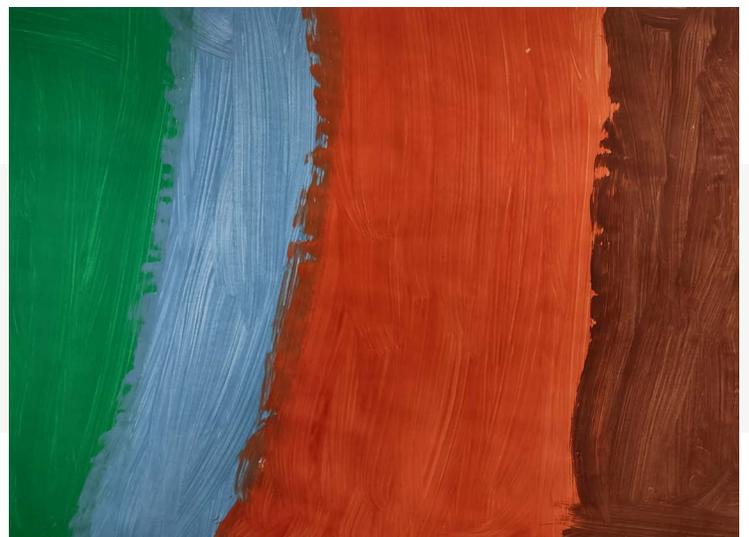
### Why should others apply

If you care about independent living and want to keep it moving forward, please apply. If you want to learn more about independent living and disability ins and outs, apply. If you want to be part of a group that has passion and will welcome you in like an old friend, apply. If you want to have a laugh while making a difference, well that happens a lot too...so apply already.

**ART  
CONTEST  
WINNER**

**Erroll Hughes wins youth  
competition to depict  
independent living**

By Judy Sanders, MNSILC Council Member



Looking for a way to involve youth in independent living, the MNSILC Outreach Committee conducted an art contest for youth to submit art that expressed their view of independent living.

Meet Erroll Hughes, winner of the MNSILC's first ever art contest for youth. MNSILC Council Member Judy Sanders met with LuAnn Ross, a teacher who had told Erroll about the contest. She also met with Erroll's mother, Jennifer Hughes, and learned that Erroll is on the autism spectrum. As a child he did not like lights or coloring with crayons. But as he grew older, he discovered that he enjoyed drawing and now appreciates lights, colors, music, and painting. Erroll enjoyed working with Play Doh. It was painting that helped him relax and get through the day.

LuAnn explained how Erroll began by using markers on a white board, then progressed to using paper. At first, he created his art in only one section of the paper using only one color. Soon he expanded to using the full sheet of paper and multiple colors and his art began to look like landscapes.

Erroll likes pop and rock music, as well as other musical genres. Judy learned that Erroll's family are musicians and play gigs on weekends and during the pandemic they sang on video chats.

Distance learning was difficult for Erroll. He likes personal interaction. Erroll appreciates being back in school where he filled a wall with all his paintings. At the end of the school year all his artwork was sent home. Erroll switched schools so he no longer has LuAnn Ross as a teacher. His new school has incorporated art into his school day.

LuAnn explained she likes to give students a voice and a chance to experience life. Her students are in a self-contained classroom, but she gives them a choice in what they do during the day. They learn that their opinions and choices matter.

The Hughes family used the services at SMILES Center for Independent Living, where they received help navigating the various financial bureaucracies they encountered.

Erroll's artwork was submitted to the Waseca County Fair. He won a second-place ribbon and a cash prize. Jennifer acknowledged Erroll's favorite fair food is mini-doughnuts.

Thank you, LuAnn, for sharing Erroll's art with MNSILC.  
Congratulations to Erroll, LuAnn, and his family for Erroll's success.



*Pictured here is an example of a successful “tub cut” bath modification.*

## INVESTING IN DEVELOPMENT HOME ACCESS RAMP AND MODIFICATION PROGRAM

Access North is celebrating over 37 years of service for the people of northeastern Minnesota. Our 10 counties represent a catchment area of over 27,000 square miles, with offices in Hibbing, Duluth, Brainerd, and Walker.

Access North has a robust home access ramp program. Since its inception, we have installed over 1,800 home access ramps onto homes in northeastern Minnesota, about 90 ramps each year. Over the past few years, we have enhanced our collaboration with the Department of Corrections (DOC). The inclusion of the Challenge Incarceration Program (CIP) has been a wonderful addition to our program. CIP provides inmates the opportunity to participate in community work projects like our ramp program and shorten their sentences with successful participation. The Togo Correctional Facility brings inmates to our carpentry shop in Hibbing to manufacture ramp modules on-site. A ramp module is a section of prefabricated ramp or landing that is built in various lengths and widths. We also work with the Correctional Facility in Willow River. We bring lumber to Willow River, and they manufacture ramp modules. Our experiences with the CIP program have been very rewarding. The inmates are hard-working, respectful, and very organized. The CIP program is a tremendous example of restorative justice in practice.

Access North is also investing in the growth and development of our home modification program. The home modification program is complementary to our ramp program because it’s essential that people have accessibility beyond the threshold of the home to successfully age in place. We know that the existing housing stock across Minnesota is largely inaccessible and that a growing number of seniors are now retiring into this inaccessible housing stock at an alarming rate (referred to as the “silver tsunami”). Access North is now a general contractor and can manage construction projects in private homes for the enhancement of accessibility. Improving home accessibility can allow people to remain safe in their home and successfully age in place. Home modifications that improve accessibility within the home like a walk in/roll in shower, tub cuts, widened doorways, creating a main floor laundry room, or improving kitchen access can improve a person’s ability to remain in their home another five to seven years and prevent premature nursing home placement.

A “tub cut” is a unique modification that requires the removal of the side of a bathtub to allow a person a more accessible entrance into the tub. When combined with a shower chair, some strategically placed grab bars and a hand-held shower head, a tub cut can allow for a more accessible entrance into a shower at 10 percent of the cost of a typical walk-n shower. Tub cuts can easily be installed for cast iron, steel, fiberglass, or plastic tubs. A tub cut is a great alternative when funding is limited or when space within the bathroom is limited and does not allow for the construction of a typical walk-in shower.

Access North recently received a DEED capital grant to build a new carpentry shop on our Hibbing campus to support our growing home modification work. It also has a workforce development component providing internships and work experiences for high school and technical college students as well as job training participants. The college carpentry students of Minnesota North are building the carpentry shop and participating in home modification projects in consumer homes. We hope to involve electrical and plumbing students in the future as well.





## WHAT PEOPLE ARE LEARNING

Freedom Resource Center offers Independent Living (IL) Skills Training as a core service to youth and adults. This may include instruction to develop independent living skills such as preparing for the permit, communication skills, coping skills, financial management, social skills, and household management. It may also include education and training necessary for living in the community and participating in community activities.

Ed Roberts, father of the independent living movement, said, “Independent Living is a psychological idea much more than a physical concept. I’m paralyzed from the neck down, but I am completely in control of my own life. I make decisions about what I want. And when you begin to believe that it is very empowering and powerful.”

One of the most popular IL Skills Trainings with our adult consumers is our Living Well series, facilitated by our Independent Living Advocates. Topics include effective communication skills, executive functioning strategies, goal and decision-making skills, information about reasonable accommodations, and many others. Group classes are available, as well as one-on-one time with an Advocate or Peer Mentor. Whether virtual, group settings, or one-on-one, our class formats allow consumers to work on increasing their independence skills.

Youth are the future of the independent living movement. Our Center works with youth in person at our local offices, at schools, and virtually. Freedom Resource Center is a Community Partner with Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS). Our staff provide IL Skills Training and Pre-Employment Transition Services (ETS) through a contract with VRS. Specific IL Skill services are designed and provided to individuals with significant disabilities, and many are specifically designed for youth to promote self-awareness and self-esteem, to develop advocacy and personal empowerment skills, and to explore career options.

Kris Lee, a teacher from Underwood shared this about Marie Fouquette, Independent Living Advocate in our Fergus Falls office: “My student looks forward to working with you! There are times when students dread having to work with adults in one-on-one situations. You have opened her mind as far as looking at exploring more options that could be in her future.”

Another educator, Emily Thompson shared: “Freedom has been an extraordinary resource for my students! As a special education teacher, I truly appreciated the resources and skills that Freedom Resource Center provided for my students. [Freedom Advocates] came into my classroom to teach lessons for development of life skills such as filling out applications, tips for a successful interview, professionalism in the workplace, and dealing with unique situations that may arise once they are in the field of work. I was grateful to work with Freedom within my classroom to assist students in gaining independent living and work skills. The services that Freedom has to offer are truly amazing, and I would highly recommend them as a resource for people of all abilities to aid in the development of independence and success!”

As classes wind down for the school year, one student attendee had this to share about participating in the Living Well series of classes with Merri Christlieb, Independent Living Advocate in the Fargo office: “I’ve learned how to look for a job I like. I would tell others that it’s a good idea to take the class. I like meeting new people in the class and taking the class with others.”

If you are interested in learning more or participating in Independent Living Skills Classes offered by Freedom Resource Center, please reach out to your local office.



*Pictured here is Chuck, a recipient of the Representative Payee Program*

## ACCESSING TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGING BENEFITS AND FINANCES

At Independent Lifestyles we have been busy ensuring that people with disabilities have a voice and supporting them as they advocate their need for inclusion and equality across systems and services. We have worked with DHS on a grant that will offer technology for individuals with a disability, so they don't get left further behind with inadequate access to technology and remote services. During the pandemic, and, as we work our way out of the pandemic it has become apparent that people with disabilities face huge barriers regarding access to technology. As technology and remote services are becoming the new "norm" Independent Lifestyles Inc., in partnership with DHS, hope to bridge this gap by assisting people to gain access to the technology and the employment options they need to keep up with the advancing economy.

Another highlight is our Representative Payee Program, which assists individuals in managing their Social Security benefits, ensuring their basic needs (food, shelter, utilities, medical needs etc.) are met. We can hold checking accounts and send payments directly to landlords and vendors to ensure housing, medications, and utility payments are stable, so individuals can feel good about their financial situations and work towards financial stability as well as gaining stability in other areas of their lives. Once someone has food, shelter, clothing, and the medical care they need, they then can begin to set goals and feel confident in their abilities.

At Independent Lifestyles Inc., we also ensure that individuals have enough money for food and personal needs throughout the month. We started providing Representative Payee Services 25 years ago with a handful of consumers. At that time our consumers were coming to us, telling us what a problem they were facing trying to find good payee services. As a community driven organization, we felt compelled to research and see if this was a service that would fit our mission and best serve our consumers. We discovered the huge need for organization payees and so we partnered with our local Social Security and applied to be an organizational payee. We get to assist people to learn about their benefits, why they get them, and how to keep them, as well as working towards becoming independent from these services. We also assist our clients in stabilizing their finances and creating budgets for their everyday expenses.

In 2012, we partnered with Central MN United Way, and received funding for this program. Each year our program continues to grow, and we are now serving about 950 customers. We look forward to working with many more individuals to meet their financial goals and stabilize their finances. And we are excited about the upcoming year and furthering our mission of "Maximizing Independence" for our consumers and communities.

## TRANSITIONAL SERVICES HELP INDIVIDUALS MOVE INTO THEIR OWN HOME

By Catherine Cejda

Few things are as expensive and time consuming as moving. Yet, for many of the consumers at Metropolitan Center for Independent Living (MCIL), moving represents more than a change of address. It represents a months- or years-long goal of living independently in their own homes. MCIL's team providing the waived Minnesota Department of Human Services program and Transitional Services seeks to empower our consumers to achieve this goal by arranging to pay deposits, setting up movers, and purchasing household goods and furniture. This service helps allay two main moving obstacles (finances and logistics) to achieve the goal of independence.

The individuals we work with often lack the basic financial resources needed to live independently. Security deposits can drain a monthly budget, and movers only add to the expense. Additionally, people moving from institutional settings often need to leave furniture behind. The mounting expenses can turn an ideally seamless move into a nightmare. Transitional Services program eases that burden by providing a line of funding for most aspects of the move. The amount spent can't exceed \$3,000 total, yet the difference that amount makes in the lives of our clients is immeasurable. Several of MCIL's clients have sighed in relief upon learning that their deposit is paid for or that they will be reimbursed for furniture costs. Financing a move is a big obstacle, but logistics is an equally pressing issue.

Moves operate on a strict timetable, and circumstances can change rapidly. Consumers who have been waiting months for a place can be approved in the blink of an eye. Transitional Services help ease that strain by taking on some of that scheduling burden. Consumers can select their move date without worrying about cold calling moving companies until they find someone available. MCIL's staff can navigate through the maze of furniture stores and online sellers to find the best deals. Consumers still have control over what items are selected and when deliveries take place. However, now they are free to focus on the bigger picture of the move, while leaving the details to us. That bigger picture is the most important part of transitional services.

Thus far, I have discussed the financial and logistical help Transitional Services provides. The circumstances of each consumer are different. Some are coming into a new home after periods of not having access to independent housing, using the program to make a new start. Some are moving into the next house of many. Some are moving up a few floors in the same building. Others are moving across the Twin Cities. The one common aspect is that our consumers are moving into their own home. A place where they can lock the door, control who comes and goes, and hopefully feel safe and at peace for years or decades to come. We only work with each consumer for a brief time, but the benefits of Transitional Services can last a lifetime.



*MCIL Transitional Services staff can help ease the burden of moving and living more independently.*



## PROVIDING ASSISTANCE FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LIVING INDEPENDENTLY

Options staff began working with an individual diagnosed with learning disabilities and ADHD. Our client faced many difficulties in education and had experienced abuse as a child. His mother requested help to sign him up for SSI (supplemental security income). The individual also agreed to work with Vocational Rehabilitation Services to assist with Career Counseling and maybe find a part-time job. We

helped him get approved for SSI, found him a job at the local grocery store, and helped him get his own apartment. But employment issues, including workplace bullying, caused him to move back in with his parents.

Our client wanted to obtain a driver's license, and by working closely with his support staff he was able to both obtain a driver's license and find a new job. He worked diligently at his new employment but was unable to maintain it.

Our client regularly participates in the Options recreational group and uses his time there to cheer up the other members, making them feel welcomed and included. Options staff along with the client typically get together and find fun things to do in the community.

The obstacles and challenges he faced led him to start working with Behavioral Health Professionals for mental health issues of depression and PTSD. He also continued working with Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Career Counseling and with Options Staff. He has worked very hard on his goals to get his life back together. During this time, he also recovered from a serious ATV accident.

Recently, our client called his Options staff to share the wonderful news of a new job which pays him \$2 an hour more than his previous employment. He also shared that his new employer offered him an assistant manager position. Our client was unsure if he should take that next step with his employer, but he has made great strides. He is no longer receiving SSI benefits. He is working full time and has become self-sufficient and is determined to succeed and to advocate for others who are going through difficult times. Living independently and working various jobs has brought joy and a sense of pride to our client – the result of being determined, setting goals, and working closely with his Options resource staff.

**“ He is working full time and has become self-sufficient and is determined to succeed and to advocate for others who are going through difficult times. Living independently and working various jobs has brought joy and a sense of pride . . . ”**

## USING TECHNOLOGY TO REMOVE BARRIERS AND GAIN INDEPENDENCE

SEMCIL opened the doors to our assistive technology lab in 2019 to support our clients with varying disabilities. Our assistive technology lab aims to educate our community and champion the aspirations of people with disabilities by removing barriers. We offer a variety of vision, mobility, computer and related peripherals, blind and low vision, and daily living devices as well as tours (in-person and virtual) and demonstrations so individuals can find out if a device meets their needs. We offer education and support during the entire process.

Following the conclusion of a device exploration, SEMCIL helps individuals explore their resources and navigate the steps to obtain the technology to increase, improve, or maintain their independence.

SEMCIL's Assistive Technology Specialist provides assessments to determine AT solutions to address the needs and abilities of an individual. During a past assessment, a gentleman with Multiple Sclerosis needed a left-handed gaming controller that would allow him to utilize the mouse and keyboard functions on one device, as he no longer had the use of his upper right extremities. This gentleman uses his computer to not only play video games, but to socialize, connect with community providers, buy groceries, pay bills, and communicate with friends and family. During research and outreach, the Assistive Technology Specialist connected with Able Gamers, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving and enabling accessibility to video gaming. Able Gamers helped this gentleman to explore his needs. In addition, they donated accessible gaming devices so SEMCIL could provide demonstrations or offer short-term loans. Through a series of outreach to Able Gamers and an Occupational Therapist/Assistive Technology Professional with adaptive gaming experience, we were able to successfully get the appropriate assistive technology into this gentleman's hands. Below is a brief letter our consumer sent SEMCIL after receiving the gaming equipment.



Noah, Jonah and Bradley pictured above.



"Hello Chanell. I just wanted to give you an update. I was 99% successful on making my thumb stick mouse mod. I have been playing Thief Gold and loving it! I am sending you 2 pics. 1st is the thumb stick mouse mod, second is the micro switches you let me have which is what I use for left and right clicks. Thank you for that."



Al with Hunter and his PCA Sandy.

During the entire process, Able Gamers and our Assistive Technology Specialist discussed gaming and SEMCIL's interest in raising awareness and increasing access to adaptive gaming devices. Able Gamers happily donated several devices that will enable SEMCIL to provide demonstrations, offer short-term loans and host accessible gaming nights to provide education and create opportunities for people with disabilities. One of SEMCIL's board members has joined the mission and taken a lead in learning about adaptive equipment and various modifications.

SEMCIL recently hosted its first Adaptive Gaming Night and Informational Class. There were 23 gamers and 50 people who attended. The success of the event attracted people from across Rochester and various other parts of the United States such as New York, and CIL in Wisconsin. SEMCIL continues to advocate and work closely with our clients to meet their needs.



*Group discusses accessible sidewalks*

## EMPOWERING THROUGH ADVOCACY, ACTIVITIES, AND ASSISTANCE

SMILES Center for Independent Living has once again been interacting with consumers in a much more personal, face-to-face way this past year. We have been looking to empower our consumers through advocacy, activities, and client assistance.

Advocacy efforts saw results when the Citizens for Accessibility (CFA) group at the residential Gus Johnson Plaza met with city engineers to express concerns about pedestrian safety at a busy intersection right outside their door. While the busy north-west North Fourth Street had a stop sign, the east-west Washington Street did not. Traffic heading toward the main thoroughfare of North Riverfront Drive went several blocks without traffic controls. And the liquor store across from Gus Johnson, with several delivery trucks each week, decreased driver visibility to a dangerous level.

SMILES Center for Independent Living explained the situation to the city engineering staff. As a result, an immediate recommendation went to the Mankato City Council and the busy intersection became a four-way stop within weeks. Advocacy works.

Listening to what consumers say they want has led to the return of social activity planning and the addition of Representative Payee services. Their success proves the value and importance of information sharing and referral recommendations.

After learning that people were ready to get together again, a recently hired staff member has re-energized the activities calendar for consumers. Beginning in September, she coordinated a calendar with events and activities happening nearly every weekday of the month, from bowling on Mondays to occasional bingo and trivia nights, community events and presentations, and even preview performances at the university's theatrical productions. The Stroke & Brain Injury Support group has also started having in-person meetings again. The Neurodiversity Support Groups target different ages to help assure participants feel safe and free to share at regular gatherings.

SMILES now has a staff person assigned to provide Representative Payee services to more than 150 consumers. It came to our attention that consumers had few options for this assistance, so we began even before we received reimbursement for our work. She works with consumers to help manage Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) funds, so they have enough each month to cover their expenses. Consumers can realize their independence when this consumer-guided level of assistance is provided. SMILES continues to advocate and work closely with our consumers to ensure that they get the services they need to live independently in their respected communities.

## PARTNERING TO IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN ACCESSIBILITY

For the last decade or so, SWCIL has been performing annual pedestrian accessibility assessments of Marshall’s main intersections – there are currently 16 – as well as sidewalks and bike paths. This involves assessing the condition of any related signage, pedestrian ramps (i.e., curb cuts), and the working condition of the buttons and audio/visual signals that aid safe crossing of the street. If any need fixing or if large cracks, branches, or other debris obstruct any of the walkways, these findings are shared with the city and the Minnesota Department of Transportation, who implement improvements as soon as their busy construction schedule allows.

Recently, Marshall also installed several pedestrian refuge islands with Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB) signage and Dynamic Speed Feedback as well as School Zone Speed Limit signage. All the added improvements aim to facilitate safer crossing conditions for pedestrians near school zones.

The city has always been very receptive to receiving feedback and responsive in implementing needed changes. This partnership between the City and SWCIL benefits both the community at large and the disability population, encouraging the expansion of independent living beyond the home.



*Pedestrian crossing signs were placed at intersections thanks to advocacy from SWCIL.*

## ADAPTIVE SERVICES AND TRAINING ASSISTANCE TRULY MAKE A DIFFERENCE

By Judy Messina, SSB service recipient

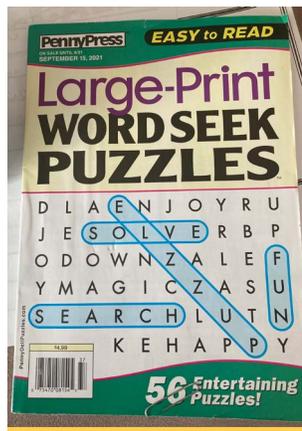
I am currently receiving services from the State Services for the Blind (SSB) Senior Unit, and I am so incredibly grateful for the services and help that I have received. I've always had low vision but had noticed a further decrease, which was my reason for contacting SSB to help me with some training and services that would allow me to function as independently as possible.

Some of the things that I have been working on include tips for labeling things in my kitchen and around my house, such as clothing and shoes. I have really appreciated the various ways I have been able to access information through talking apps, Braille labels, and Way Around talking tags. The ability to find what I am looking for in my own home has made me feel more confident in living independently.

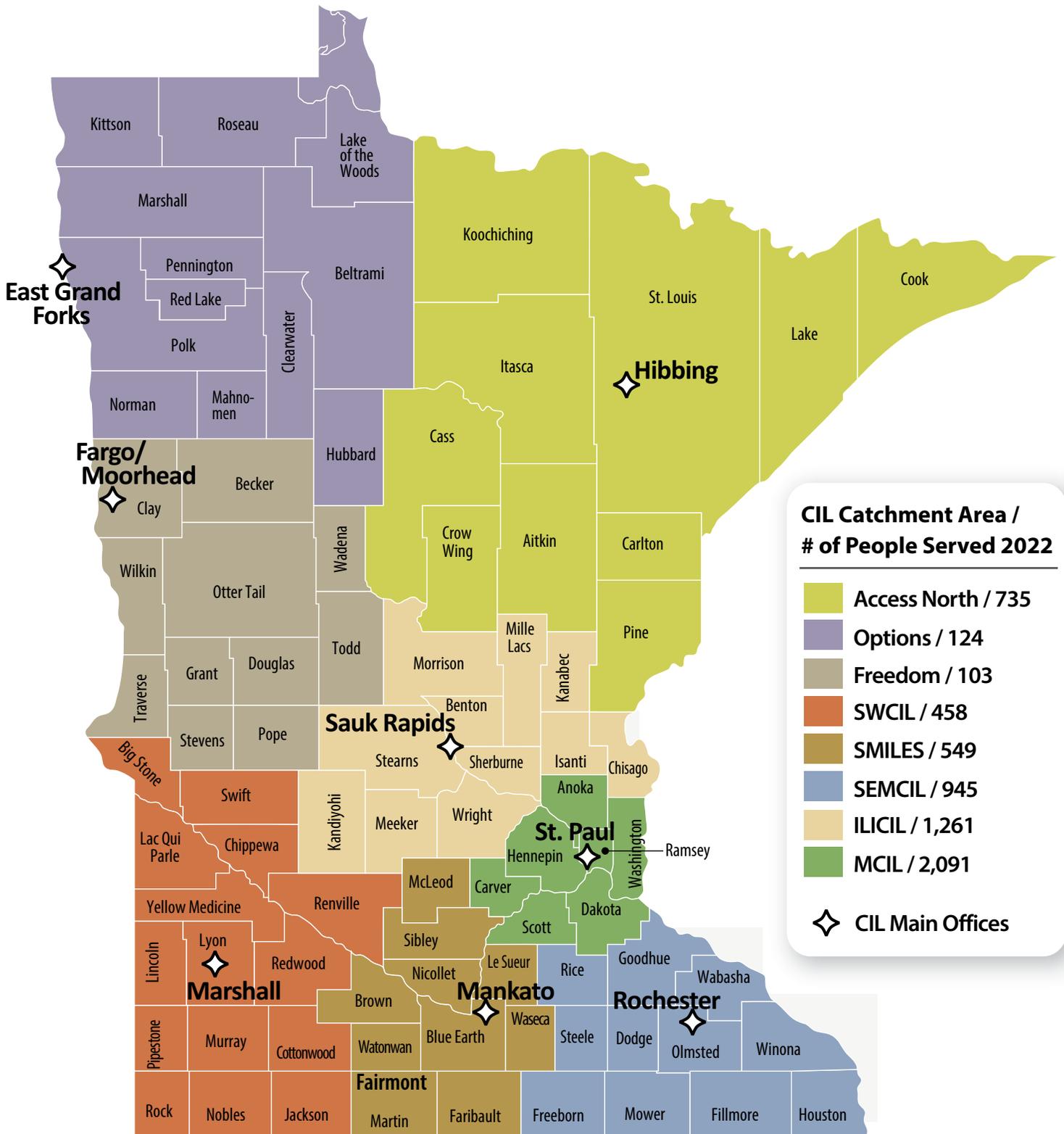
I have also been learning Braille to help not only with labeling things but having a system for keeping track of credit cards, health care cards, and other important personal information.

While working with SSB, I've also received some technology services that have been extremely helpful. I learned how to use an app for scanning some of my recipes which I now have stored on my iPhone. It is so nice to be able to have recipes on my phone that will allow me to access them with speech. I was glad to learn some things about attending Zoom meetings using speech commands and learning about some other helpful apps that make it easier to search the Web. There is so much to learn in adaptive technology which can be overwhelming at times but so very exciting and helpful once you learn how to use the technology.

Thanks so much to the SSB Senior Unit for all the help and resources I've been provided with. Your services and help truly make a difference.



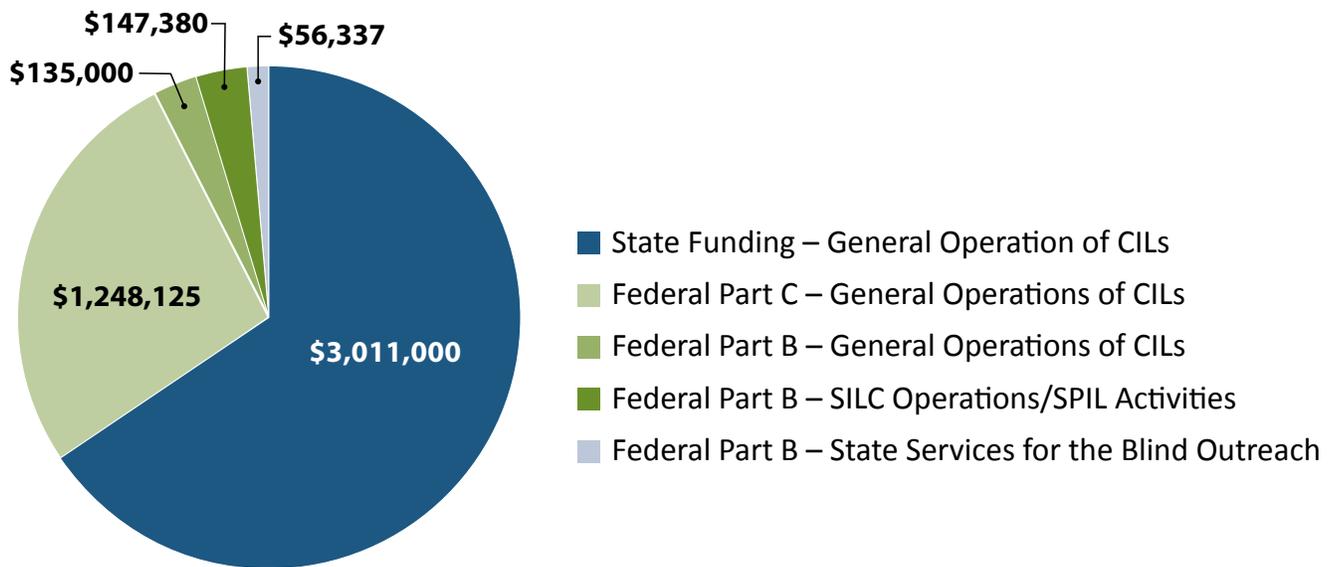
Examples of assistive technology available through SSB: a timer with a large dial, a large print word search puzzle, and a magnifying glass.



# BY THE NUMBERS

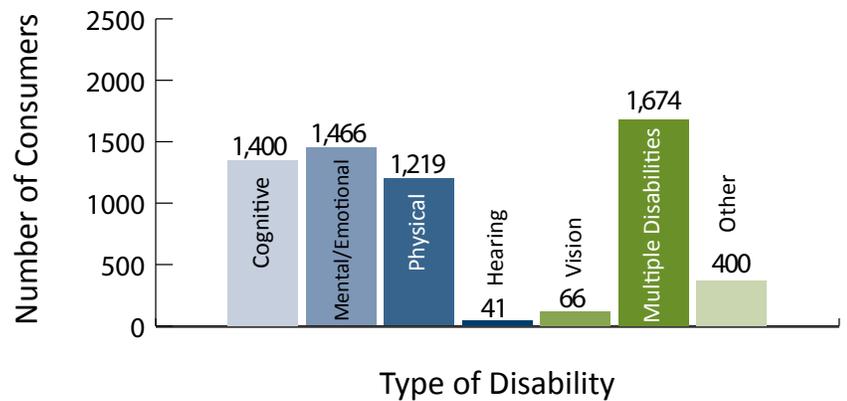
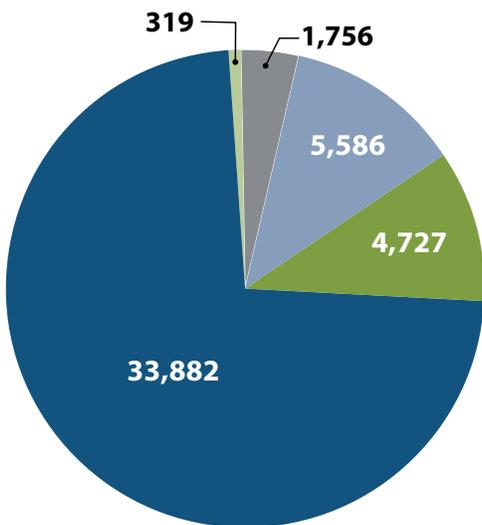
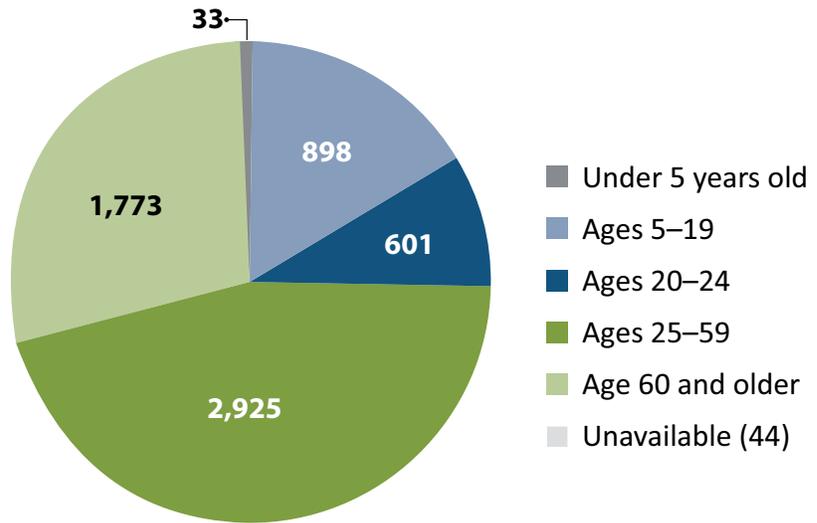
October 1, 2021 - September 30, 2022

## Independent Living Funding Distribution



## Total Number of People Served by Centers for Independent Living

In FFY 2022, 6,266 individuals were served by Minnesota's eight CILs which provided a total 50,578 services, including the Independent Living (IL) core services.



- Advocacy
- Information and Referral
- IL Skills Training
- Peer Counseling
- Transition Services

Over the past fifty years, the movement for disability rights, justice and independence has made the world a more humane and accessible place for those with and without disabilities. This has been a collaborative effort of MNSILC, the centers for independent living, other organizations and people with disabilities.

These partners have been instrumental in the work done by MNSILC:

#### Centers for Independent Living

- Access North Center for Independent Living
- FREEDOM Resource Center for Independent Living
- Independent Lifestyles, Inc. – A Center for Independent Living
- Metropolitan Center for Independent Living
- OPTIONS Interstate Resource Center for Independent Living
- Southern Minnesota Independent Living Enterprises and Services
- Southeast Center for Independent Living
- Southwestern Center for Independent Living

#### National and State Organizations

- Administration of Community Living - ACL
- Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living - APRIL

- National Association of Statewide Independent Living Councils - NASILC
- National Council on Independent Living - NCIL
- Department of Economic Development/Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- Minnesota Council on Disability
- Minnesota Governor Office, Tim Walz and LT Gov. Peggy Flanagan
- Minnesota Secretary of State
- Minnesota State Services for the Blind
- Olmstead Implementation Office
- State Rehabilitation Council – General
- State Rehabilitation Council – Blind

#### Other Organizations

- ADA Minnesota
- American Council of the Blind
- Arc Minnesota
- Disability Viewpoints
- Minnesota Brain Injury Association
- Minnesota Disability Law Center
- Minnesota National Alliance of Mental Illness
- National Federation of the Blind
- Rev Up MN



For more information about the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council or to request an alternative format go to: [mn.gov/deed/silc](https://mn.gov/deed/silc)

Contact Jo Erbes, Coordinator: **612-518-1487** or **MN Relay at 711**  
[mn.gov/deed/silc](https://mn.gov/deed/silc)

Follow us on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/MNILNET](https://www.facebook.com/MNILNET)