



Minnesota Statewide  
Independent Living Council

# 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

October 1, 2024 - September 30, 2025



# WHAT IS THE MINNESOTA STATEWIDE Independent Living Council?



*A social worker talking with a client about Medicaid service.  
Photo credit: Access North*

The Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council (MNSILC) are Minnesota citizens recruited from around the state and representing various ethnic 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% of MNSILC members identify as having a disability.

MNSILC is responsible for creating, monitoring, reviewing and evaluating a State Plan for Independent Living and promoting the services of the eight centers for independent living. Centers for Independent Living (CILs) are community-based, cross-disability, non-profit organizations that are designed and operated by people with disabilities. CILs are unique in that they operate according to a strict philosophy of consumer control. People with all types of disabilities directly govern and staff the organization. Centers for Independent Living provide: Peer Support, Information and Referral, Individual and Systems Advocacy, Independent Living Skills Training, and Transition.

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

The 2024-2027 State Plan for Independent Living can be found on the MNSILC website at [mn.gov/deed/silc](https://mn.gov/deed/silc).

# ABOUT US

## MNSILC Mission

The mission is to influence positive, impactful change alongside Minnesotans with disabilities in coordination with the Minnesota Independent Living Network (MNILNET).

### Minnesota Independent Living Network

The **Minnesota Independent Living Network** refers 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 (DSE), State Services for the Blind (SSB) and the Minnesota Council on Disability. The MNILNET can be found on Facebook at [facebook.com/MNILNET](https://facebook.com/MNILNET).

### 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.

### 2025 MNSILC Members

Robyn Block  
Jennifer Clement  
Joseph Dailey  
Monique Doward  
Deborah Gleason  
KiloMarie Granda  
Meghan Hanson  
Jacob Knaffla  
Frances Lane  
Stephen Larson  
Kelly Lemke  
Linda Lingen  
Amy McClellan  
Jacob Schuller  
Bethany Schwer  
Michele Severson  
April Smith  
Rand Stenhjem  
Dr. Morris Thompson  
Dr. Brian Valentini  
Brad Westerlund



*Robyn Block and service dog Ziggy.*

## MESSAGE FROM THE MNSILC Chair

**Robyn BLOCK**

### **Letter from the MNSILC Chair**

Welcome to the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council's (MNSILC) 2025 annual report on independent living programs and services.

The eight Centers for Independent Living (CILs) in Minnesota provide direct care services to people of all ages and disabilities. While CILs have services unique to their 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 services.

We had a busy 2025. We sent two members to the Charting of the C's conference where we learned that many educators, consumers and families were under the impression that the CILs are group homes. CILs are not group homes. We came up with a new tag line "Freedom not facilities, independent living starts with you." As we promote the tag line, we hope everyone will understand the CILs are about independence, not group homes.

We sent board members to the April conference, SILC Congress and the NICL Conference. Everyone shared new information on a wide range of topics from transportation, PCA/HHA, waivers, and so much more. We are taking all the information and looking into how we can make an impact. Members from several CILs and a MNSILC council member visited with the Minnesota congressional delegation during the NCIL Conference. They shared position papers drafted by the Advocacy Committee.

The MNSILC Advocacy Committee develops position papers to share with members of Minnesota's Congressional Delegation, state legislators, and the public. The committee includes representatives from the MNSILC Council, Minnesota's Centers for Independent Living, and members of the public with disabilities. In the past, position papers highlighted the perspectives of the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council and the

# LETTER

Minnesota Centers for Independent Living on key issues such as broadband access, transportation, direct care workforce shortages, and the work of the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Network.

The key issues in 2025 were:

- Accessible Transportation – Transportation Access is Essential.
- Protecting the Promise: Opposing Cuts to Developmental Disabilities Act Funding.
- Service Animals and the ADA.
- Employment for All: Employment matters. Pass it on.
- Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Network, June 2025.
- New position papers for this year.

The Advocacy Committee worked on a survey of dentists statewide. Briefly the survey indicated a lot of dentists do not take medical assistance, some are a year out for scheduling appointments and or do not take new patients. The full summary report will be out in 2026.

We had board members represent MNSILC at the Lyon County fair, the Kandiyohi County fair and the Minnesota State Fair. Volunteers had the opportunity to meet, talk to, and listen to people with disabilities about the issues they are facing in their communities.

The Outreach Committee conducted a civil rights survey to gather information about the civil rights experiences of persons with disabilities in areas such as education, employment, housing, healthcare, transportation, and public life. This data will help inform advocacy, policy development, and accessibility improvements. A summary of the survey will be provided this year. The Outreach Committee consists of MNSILC Council members and CIL staff members. The purpose of the Outreach Committee is to recruit new council members and create and share information about the independent living philosophy.

The Outreach Committee developed a position description for MNSILC to hire an intern to help with writing position papers, create posts for social media, and other creative writing. The position opening will be posted in February.

My term on SILC has terminated. It has been very rewarding serving as chair and being a part of MNSILC. I will remain on a committee so I can help and learn at the same time.

In partnership,

*Robyn Block* | MNSILC Chair

## ACCESS NORTH

# How Changes in Medicaid Will Impact People with Disabilities - How CILs Can Help

Medicaid is a critical lifeline for people with disabilities across Minnesota, providing access to health care and Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) that support independent living. Recent and upcoming changes to Medicaid policy may significantly impact individuals who rely on these services, and Centers for Independent Living (CILs) play an essential role in helping people navigate these shifts.

### What's Changing in Minnesota

As Minnesota responds to federal Medicaid policy changes, individuals may be required to reapply or renew Medicaid eligibility every six months, rather than annually. While intended to ensure program integrity, more frequent renewals increase the risk of coverage gaps, especially for people with disabilities who may face barriers related to paperwork, technology, literacy, or access to assistance.

At the same time, the federal Medicaid match rate is expected to decrease, meaning the federal government will contribute a smaller share of funding. This reduction may result in less overall funding for HCBS, which could directly impact the number of service hours people receive.

### Real-Life Impact on People with Disabilities

For many individuals, HCBS hours are not optional, they are essential. A reduction in service hours could mean going from 10 hours of support per day to just 4, forcing people to make impossible choices. Daily living activities such as bathing, meal preparation, housekeeping, or getting to medical appointments may be delayed, reduced, or skipped altogether. These changes threaten health, safety, dignity, and the ability to live independently in the community.

Without adequate support, individuals may face increased isolation, health complications, or even risk institutionalization which results in outcomes that run counter to the goals of independent living and the Olmstead decision.



Individuals holding signs at a rally.

### How Centers for Independent Living Can Help

CILs are uniquely positioned to support people with disabilities during times of policy change. Through benefits counseling, one-on-one assistance, advocacy, and peer support, CILs help individuals understand new requirements, complete renewals on time, and address service reductions.

CILs also elevate consumer voices by identifying systemic barriers and advocating for policies that protect access to services. By working in partnership with state agencies, community organizations, and the Statewide Independent Living Council, CILs help ensure that Medicaid changes do not leave people behind. To get connected with your local CIL please visit [macil.org](http://macil.org) or contact the MN Statewide Independent Living Council at 612-518-1497.

### Moving Forward

As Medicaid policies evolve, it is essential that people with disabilities receive accurate information, accessible support, and meaningful opportunities to advocate for their needs. CILs remain committed to empowering individuals, promoting independent living, and ensuring that policy changes do not undermine the right of people with disabilities to live full, self-directed lives in their communities.

## Michelle's Path to Independence

When Michelle first walked through the doors of Freedom Resource Center's (FRC) Fergus Falls office, she was quite unsure, but hopeful. A close family friend came with her, someone who had always looked out for her and her family over the years.

She talked about what she'd been struggling with, the things she wanted for herself but couldn't quite reach on her own. "I tried by myself, but I wasn't getting anywhere," Michelle said.

It wasn't that she lacked motivation. It was that the world around her often felt too big, too fast, and too far away. But here, someone listened. Really listened. And that's where things began to change.

Michelle's first goal was to feel connected again. To be part of something. When she learned about Freedom In Action (FIA), our monthly social activities, she decided to give one a try. That December, she attended a concert at the Fergus Falls Center for the Arts, where Mandy Harvey, a singer who is deaf, performed. It was the first time Michelle had gone to a social event without her family since she graduated high school in 2006.

"It felt good," she said. "It was exciting!"

That simple step showing up, being there, opened a door. Soon, Michelle joined more Freedom In Action events. At first, she sat quietly, taking it all in. Then, at our holiday meal, something shifted.

"I was nervous at first," she said. "But then I got comfortable. Eating and chatting seems to help." And it did. Month after month, Michelle kept coming back. She hasn't missed one in two years.

"The overall feeling at FRC has helped me be more interactive in my life," she shared. "And I think it could help others, too."

It wasn't just social skills she was rebuilding; it was confidence.

Michelle began learning everyday life skills, things that helped her feel more capable in her own home. With her advocate, she learned to cook using whatever was available in our office.

They made vegetable tacos in the microwave, not exactly gourmet, but a start. Michelle laughed as she remembered: "They weren't too bad," she said surprising even herself, since vegetables weren't usually her favorite.

She started trying new things: pizza, potatoes, brownies. Then, another consumer donated an air fryer and toaster oven to her. Another skill she practiced at Freedom.

"I've been doing a lot more cleaning at home," Michelle said. "I learned cleaning skills here and use those skills at home."

Little by little, she built habits that added up to independence. She began riding the bus on her own, setting up rides herself, finding confidence in the small routines of daily life. She even found her voice in community discussions, speaking up at a listening session about transportation.

"It felt really good to be a part of it where people listened to me," she said.

When Michelle looks back now, she sees a different person than the one who first walked through our doors.

"I've improved a lot," she said. "Definitely better now than I was. I'm getting out so much more. I've learned a lot and the skills I've learned have been sticking."

She paused for a moment before adding something simple, but powerful:

"I felt nervous and anxious when I first came in... but I felt hopeful when I left. Like it was the ideal thing to do and it was."

Michelle didn't need anyone to change her life for her; she just needed a place to begin again. Someone to walk beside her, listen, and remind her that she could do it.



*Michelle gained confidence by participating in activities at Freedom Resources.*

## INDEPENDENT LIFESTYLES, INC. A CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING (ILICIL)

# Bright Light Creations: Breaking Barriers and Building Futures

Independent Lifestyles is thrilled to introduce our new Bright Light Creations program! This innovative initiative is breaking down barriers for individuals with disabilities by offering truly inclusive workplace experiences that empower participants to learn, grow, and thrive. Bright Light Creations is more than a print and laser engraving shop — it is a space where ability is redefined, confidence is built, and futures are transformed.

### Addressing the Employment Gap in Central Minnesota

Across Central Minnesota, thousands of adults with disabilities face significant challenges in accessing competitive employment. Unemployment rates are more than twice as high for workers with a disability as compared to those with no disability in MN. Bright Light Creations exists to change this story, offering hands-on, meaningful employment in a supportive, inclusive environment.

(Source: [mn.gov/deed/newscenter/publications/trends/september-2023/disability.jsp](https://mn.gov/deed/newscenter/publications/trends/september-2023/disability.jsp))

### Hands-On Skills, Real Impact

Participants gain real-world skills in production, design, laser engraving, printing, quality control, and customer service — all within a peer-supported, integrated workplace. Importantly, individuals with disabilities are not only employees, but also leaders and mentors within the shop and organization. They help train new participants, guide workflow, and contribute to the creative and operational decisions that make Bright Light Creations successful.

### Voices That Inspire

The impact of this approach is best captured in the words of one of our team members:

“The opportunity this program has given me has truly been life-altering — and I mean that in every sense. Learning has never come easily for me, and I live with high anxiety. Finding and keeping a job had always felt out of reach. Since joining Bright Light Creations, everything has changed. I’ve gained confidence through learning new skills, trying new things, and being supported every step of the way. For the first time, I feel like I’m exactly where I’m supposed to be — and that changes every part of my life.”

Bright Light Creations is helping participants discover their strengths, build confidence, and achieve competitive, integrated employment. By partnering with local businesses for engraving, printing, and branded products, the program not only provides valuable job experience, but also showcases how social responsibility and inclusivity can intersect with high-quality work.

### Join the Movement

Independent Lifestyles and Bright Light Creations are proud to demonstrate how Centers for Independent Living can engage people with disabilities as employees, leaders, mentors, and decision-makers. Together, we are creating a model for inclusive workplaces in Central Minnesota — one that celebrates talent, fosters independence, and builds stronger, more connected communities.

### Bright Light Creations is now open and taking orders!

Visit our website and contact us at [brightlightcreations.org](http://brightlightcreations.org). Your order will help break down barriers and create meaningful employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

### Think Again initiative

Independent Lifestyles would also like to highlight our “Think Again” initiative, an exciting campaign designed to redefine the face of ability in how our communities perceive ability. For too long, outdated stereotypes have shaped the way people think about disability—but it’s time for a change. Through our powerful video [youtu.be/Z-Z5HinD3ys](https://youtu.be/Z-Z5HinD3ys) and interactive Think Again kits, we are inviting people to challenge assumptions, broaden perspectives, and see the incredible strengths, talents, and contributions of individuals with disabilities. This campaign is about more than awareness—it’s about transformation. By sparking meaningful conversations and reframing what disability really means, “Think Again” helps create a world where everyone is recognized for their abilities, not their barriers. Join us in this movement to redefine the face of ability and inspire communities to think differently, act inclusively, and embrace the full potential of all people.

We launched our video in September 2025 and have been dispersing our Kits to members in the communities. To get a kit and help challenge stereotypes please visit our website at [independentlifestyles.org/think-again](http://independentlifestyles.org/think-again) (limited supplies available).



Staff working on creating items.



T-shirt design.



Baseball cap with a logo.

## **METROPOLITAN CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING (MCIL)**

# The Seven Life Sustaining Dimensions Advancing Independent Living at MCIL

by Kelly Krantz, Director of Independent Living

For Advocates on the front lines at Metropolitan Center for Independent Living (MCIL), it was starting to feel like times were harder than ever for the people reaching out for assistance. Long gone were the days when requests were resolved simply and quickly. It seemed like many people they were serving were in distress on many fronts, needing information about basic needs and in really dire circumstances.

This probably sounds familiar to anyone who works in human services, especially those of us at the Centers. The question started to come up of whether there was a better way to determine what exactly people needed, and the best way that we could support them once we understood the needs.

What MCIL ended up developing could be a platform for other providers to serve their communities in an accessible and culturally competent manner: The Seven Life Sustaining Dimensions Advancing Independent Living for Families Children, Adults with Disabilities & Older Adults. Staff at MCIL developed a tool that serves as both a needs assessment and Independent Living Plan, educating the incoming interested party about all the areas in which MCIL can offer Information and Referral, Advocacy, and/or IL Skill Training.

Someone in crisis may have been contacting us worrying about affordable housing, but now they know that we could also advise them on nutritious, affordable food and connecting with affordable healthcare. Their MCIL Advocate can mindfully create a plan to tackle these needs alongside the person in a way that respects their priorities and individual considerations. This tool is fully accessible and is hosted on our website.

What are the Seven Life Sustaining Dimensions? We grouped needs into seven categories that we saw as the major areas needed for individuals and families to be stable and vibrant. They include:

- Nutritious, Affordable Food.
- Human Services Benefits and Long-Term Services & Supports.
- Education, IDEA, IEP and Soft Skills.
- Community Connectedness, Civic Participation & Transportation.
- Affordable Integrated Accessible Housing.
- Employment Benefits Reasonable Accommodations, ADA, Civil Rights.
- Affordable Healthcare, Behavioral Health & Public Health.

If MCIL can support a person to achieve their goals in any area that a person thinks might be lacking, we are contributing towards their economic stability, social connectedness, and vibrancy in a way that truly advances their independence. The 7 categories are inclusive of all core services for a Center for Independent Living.

Staff really like using this tool with people because they didn't like thinking that there were things we might have been able to do for someone but that went undone only for lack of understanding of our scope of knowledge and resources. Now when Advocates use this tool, it opens new conversations and consumers get more needs met than they might have otherwise. It makes the needs assessment and IL Planning portion of our intake process simple and clear, and importantly, people in crisis are able to get more out of their work with us than they might have otherwise.

## The Seven Life Sustaining Dimensions of Advancing Independent Living\*



\*MCIL framework for assisting people and addressing structural barriers

MCIL also uses this framework to address structural barriers in society that impede independent living. For instance, in our work in assisting people with Long COVID, early on we evidenced that Long COVID could destabilize life sustaining dimensions for a person diagnosed with Long COVID, such as in the areas of employment and housing, which the agency works to address those areas for an individual.

At the same time, the 7 Life Sustaining Dimensions model has allowed MCIL to work with the Minnesota Department of Health on our survey work to learn of the impact of Long Covid on the stability of the lives of survey recipients from within the disability communities. Our effort is to increase the best practices of public health in assisting people with disabilities with Long COVID.

## OPTIONS INTERSTATE RESOURCE CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

# A Change in Direction

### Driver Assistance

In rural Minnesota public transportation is much more limited than in a community with set hourly bus routes and curb-to-curb service. The best options if possible, is for people to drive themselves. For many, simply assessing whether or not they can drive has not been easy.

Because of this, Options has recently expanded its ability to assist people with disabilities when seeking to operate their own automobile. As part of our skills instruction efforts staff have assisted people in learning the written portion of their driving test, but had not been able to directly assist people with the behind-the-wheel portion of their training.

This has changed, due to a one-time funding award from the Minnesota Legislature, Options was able to purchase a driving simulator. The driving simulator is a very sophisticated computerized device that can be adapted with hand controls and will simulate a multitude of driving conditions, providing people a chance to practice without actually getting behind the wheel of an automobile.

Not only does this provide a safe place for people with physical disabilities to work on the physical aspects of driving, but it has also enabled people who are too anxious to try driving. In fact, most of the users to date have been people who have been hesitant to drive due to the anxiety of driving.

Because people can practice removed from the possibility of getting into an accident, participants find it helps make the next step when actually getting behind the wheel less stressful.



*Individual using a driving simulator.*

## **SOUTHEAST MINNESOTA CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING (SEMCIL)**

# Assistive Technology and Home Modification Services

Centers for Independent Living are not truly about service(s), they represent the promise and idea of human equality, opportunity, and dignity. Centers for Independent Living are not centers as they are understood; they are organizations that hold living an independent, self-determined life at the center of all that they do.

SEMCIL attempts to uphold that promise in all the services provided; examples are many, some are highlighted below. The examples focus on the Assistive Technology and Home Modification services that SEMCIL offers. Each is designed to assist people in staying in their homes, making daily tasks easier, and helping to give people the tools and access to live independently.

### **Access**

This past summer, SEMCIL's Access team supported a family seeking home modifications to reduce their child's risk of injury while showering and moving around the house. The parents shared that their child often banged their head on the shower walls, as well as along the hallways and staircase.

The Access team toured the home, discussed strategies the family had tried in the past, and researched potential solutions. Together with a contractor, they developed a plan: replace the bathtub with a walk-in shower for easier access, and line the shower walls with removable waterproof padding, secured by Velcro. For the hallways and stairs, decorative cork board was chosen to soften impacts while blending into the home.

The parents were thrilled with these ideas and expressed their gratitude for the thoughtful collaboration that made their child's environment safer and more supportive.

### **Assistive Technology**

An individual recently visited SEMCIL's Assistive Technology Lab with their foster parent, hoping to find a one-handed keyboard or other devices to support

schoolwork and writing. They also expressed interest in adaptive gaming, so staff shared details about an upcoming event.

Although SEMCIL no longer had a one-handed keyboard available, staff created an MN AT4All account for the individual and showed them how to connect with other AT libraries to have one shipped directly to their home. During the conversation, the individual also shared a desire to strengthen their weaker hand to prevent further muscle atrophy. Staff introduced them to MagnaCuffs, which can assist with using the weaker hand during meals. Though hesitant at first, they decided to try the device while waiting for the one-handed keyboard.

When they returned for the adaptive gaming event, they reported how much they enjoyed using the MagnaCuffs and how helpful it was to explore solutions beyond their original request. Now, they regularly attend adaptive gaming events and enjoy socializing with peers.

### **Youth and Young Adult services:**

- ILC worked with consumer on enrolling and registering for classes at Minnesota State College Southeast. Consumer successfully completed the registration and online requirements to start college during the fall semester with ILC's assistance. ILC and consumer also completed the student portion of the FASFA form. Consumer is prepared to attend the welding program in the fall.
- Consumer completed the summer classes on money management, ready to work, and driver's permit. Consumer attended all class meetings and did very well on all of the class assignments. Consumer shared that they are excited to start their job search and feel more prepared for work and handling their paychecks than before attending the classes. Student missed passing the permit test by one question but is planning on retaking the permit test soon.

## SOUTHERN MINNESOTA INDEPENDENT LIVING ENTERPRISE AND SERVICES (SMILES)

# How Centers for Independent Living Can Help When Someone Loses Access to Medicaid-Funded Services

When individuals lose access to Medicaid-funded community services and supports—whether through eligibility changes, administrative issues, or system gaps—the impact can be immediate and profound. Centers for Independent Living (CILs) play a critical role in ensuring people are not left without the assistance they need to remain safe, independent, and part of their community.

**1. Navigation and Advocacy Support:** CILs provide one-on-one assistance to help individuals understand what happened, what options remain, and how to regain or replace lost services. This can include:

- Helping people appeal Medicaid decisions or navigate reinstatement.
- Connecting them with advocates who understand disability rights and state Medicaid processes.
- Supporting individuals in communicating with county workers, managed care organizations, and state agencies.

**2. Independent Living Skills and Problem-Solving:** CIL staff can help individuals adapt to changes in support by:

- Teaching or reinforcing independent living skills such as household management, scheduling, or safety planning.
- Helping people identify alternative resources or creative solutions to fill gaps.

**3. Short-Term Assistance and Service Coordination:**

While CILs are not long-term care providers, they can:

- Offer short-term support, such as information, peer mentoring, or emergency planning.
- Coordinate with other organizations to bridge gaps in transportation, housing, equipment, or basic needs.
- Provide access to CIL-based programs such as ramp construction, assistive technology, or peer support groups.

**4. Connection to Community Resources:** CILs maintain extensive knowledge of community-based supports and can connect individuals to:

- County-funded or donor-supported services
- Nonprofit organizations offering personal assistance, transportation, or equipment
- Sliding-scale or charitable programs
- Volunteers, faith-based groups, and local mutual-aid networks

**5. Systems Change and Policy Advocacy:** Beyond helping individuals, CILs advocate at the local and state levels to address systemic issues that cause people to lose essential services. This includes:

- Collaborating with partners to strengthen community-based service delivery
- Educating policymakers on the real-world consequences of service reductions
- Promoting disability rights and the principles of community integration

**6. Peer Mentoring** Losing essential services can be **frightening and overwhelming**. CILs provide:

- Peer support from people who have lived experience with disability
- Emotional reassurance during transitions
- Guidance on rebuilding confidence and independence

**In essence:**

CILs are designed to ensure that **no one faces disability-related challenges alone**, especially during moments when formal systems fall short. By offering advocacy, information, skills training, community connections, and compassionate support, CILs help people regain stability, preserve independence, and continue participating fully in community life.



*Individuals working in a kitchen.*

## **SOUTHWESTERN CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING (SWCIL)**

# Hunt, Ramps and Intersections and Sidewalks

Among the many services and events SWCIL makes possible each year within its ten-county service area, consider just three from 2025.

SWCIL entered uncharted territory this year by hosting its very first accessible deer hunt at Camden State Park for two days at the end of October. This event offered a meaningful opportunity for individuals with disabilities to participate fully in a specialized experience that removed common barriers to participation by providing adaptive support, accessible facilities, and one-on-one mentorship. One participant remarked, “I’ve been waiting for something like this my entire life.”

Participants were paired with experienced volunteer mentors who provided individualized pre-hunt support in safety, technique, and field skills, providing participants with valuable experience in scouting, spotting, targeting, and sighting-in and safely discharging their firearm.

Beyond the hunt itself, the experience fostered a sense of belonging and mutual support among participants, demonstrating the power of intentional, inclusive outdoor programming to create meaningful experiences that have a lasting impact. Having thus empowered participants with new skills, confidence, and a renewed connection to the outdoors, the event laid the groundwork for a growing community-based model that will guide future accessible hunting opportunities and continued efforts to make outdoor recreation like this open to and accessible for all.

Another significant program central to SWCIL’s mission to enable individuals with disabilities to live as independently as possible within their community is its ramp program. Over the last fiscal year SWCIL rented out 16 temporary



*Wooden ramp leading to the front of a house.*

(aluminum) ramps and built 8 permanent (wooden) ones. Eight other ramps (of both kinds) remain to be built or installed, while multiple assessments for still more remain. Thanks to increasing word-of-mouth, this program continues to thrive and expand, keeping SWCIL busy meeting this ongoing demand.

One example from this year demonstrates the importance of this program. When SWCIL installed a temporary ramp for an individual that enabled him to move back into the comfort of his own home, he realized the convenience and necessity of the ramp to allow him to continue living at home. After he worked with a case manager to get qualified for a waiver, SWCIL took down his temporary ramp and replaced it with a permanent wooden one. Without this, the individual could have been forced to sell his home and relocate.

Another service SWCIL provides its local community each year is an accessibility assessment of its stoplight intersections and sidewalks. For more than a decade now SWCIL has maintained a mutually beneficial relationship with its local Public Works department and with the MN DOT, both of which have invited SWCIL to offer annual accessibility feedback concerning public infrastructure affecting pedestrian traffic. This includes suggesting repair or replacement of damaged sidewalks or truncated domes (i.e. curb cuts), or of the signage or general working condition of various aspects of the Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS) present at every intersection with traffic lights. Buttons and audible or visual countdowns or warnings that worked the previous year often don't work the following year, and without someone alerting these authorities to such problems, they persist until someone reports them. This proactive approach also provides feedback to the local accessible transit provider (Community Transit of UCAP) concerning the general upkeep of their multiple route bus shelters in Marshall, or other obstacles affecting access to the bus stops.

Beyond these offerings, in 2025 SWCIL worked with 473 consumers who chose their own independent living goals. SWCIL offers consumer-directed learning, advocacy, and supports in achieving these goals without creating dependence on SWCIL services.



*Visual and audio street crossing sign at an intersection.*

## STATE SERVICES FOR THE BLIND (SSB)

# Mary Armstrong – Building a Business, Building a Life

With forty years in the field, Mary Armstrong, a small business owner in the Business Enterprises Program (BEP), has experienced a lot of ups and downs and seen a lot of changes. Still, the program, which was launched by act of Congress nearly 90 years ago, giving blind and low vision entrepreneurs the opportunity to operate vending businesses on state and federal properties, is on she believes in. “Personally,” she reflects, “I hope it sticks around. It’s smaller than it used to be. There has been more consolidation in order to create viable businesses that can generate a decent income. But it’s a good opportunity, and I would recommend it.”

Mary got started in the program working for other vendors, but soon enough she was able to successfully bid her own business. She first worked in several state office building before acquiring the business at Minneapolis Community and Technical College (now Minneapolis College) in 1991. “It wasn’t a desirable location,” Mary remembers, “because there wasn’t any storage space, but you had to just be willing to do the work.” In 2014, she took over the business at St Paul College, which she still runs today.

Before the pandemic shutdown, Mary hired staff to help with the work. Now, especially with the advances in technology, she finds it easy to manage the business solo. She uses a number of technology hacks to accomplish parts of her work. Now to read text, especially small print like the expiration dates on packaging, she uses the AI feature in the Be Me Eyes app or simply opens the camera on her iPhone which she’s configured to identify text. Along with her phone, Mary uses her Olympus Voice Recorder to record sales.

In recent years, Mary has had to negotiate the complications of physical disabilities and chronic illness, which can sometimes now make hauling and stocking the products more difficult. As a good, long, for-decade career, she sees that retirement might be in the near future. Certainly, she already has a busy life beyond work, including spending important time babysitting her grandchild and continuing to work out, take long walks, and maintain her health.

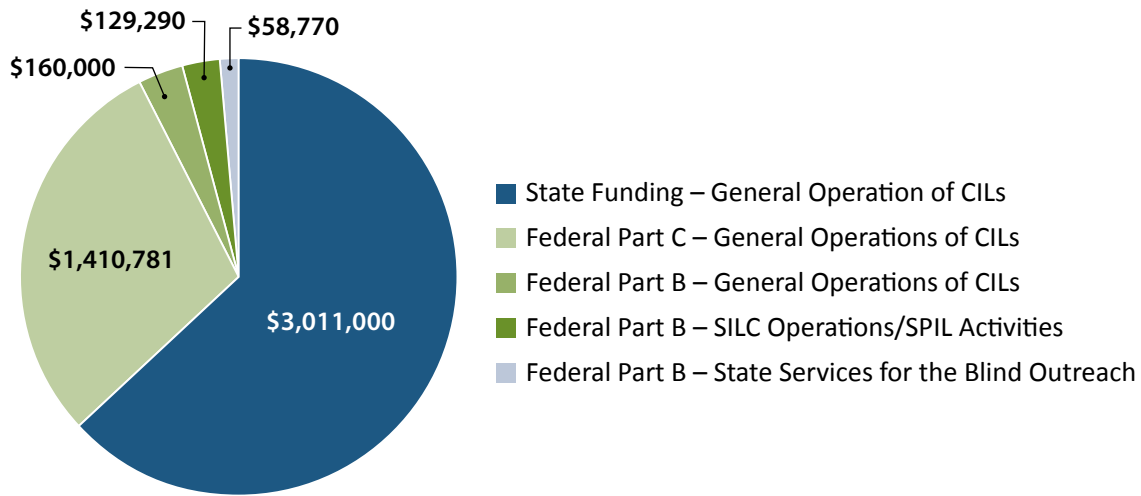


Individual standing in front of a cooler in a store.

# BY THE NUMBERS & MAP OF MINNESOTA

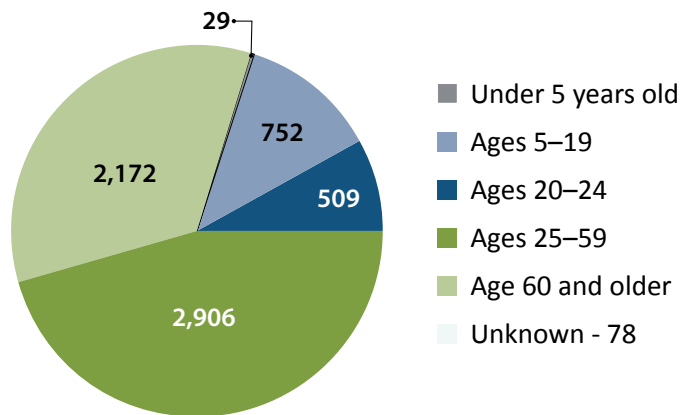
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## Independent Living Funding Distribution

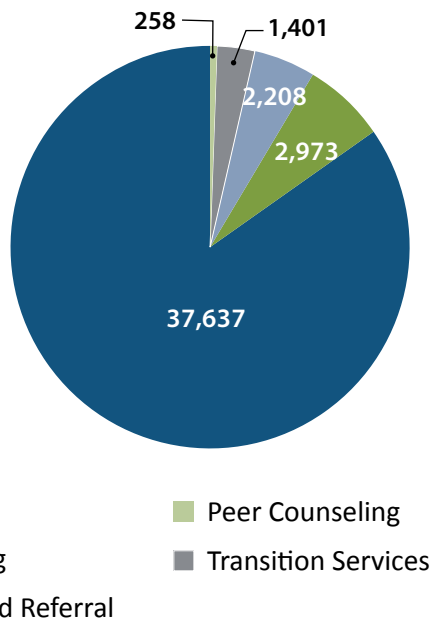


## Total Number of People Served by Centers for Independent Living

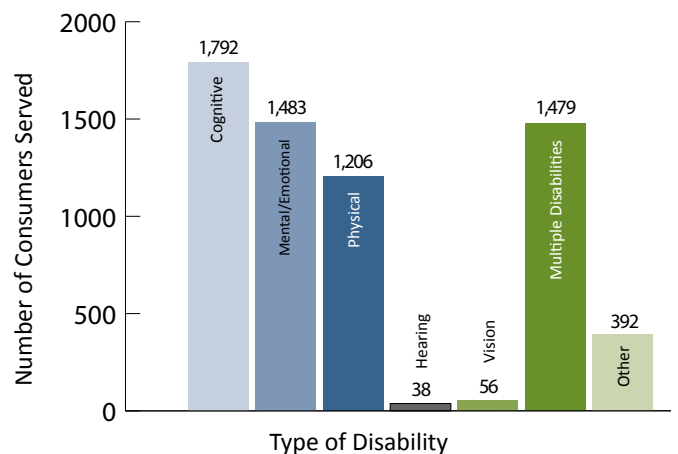
In FFY 2025, 6,446 individuals were served by Minnesota’s eight CILs. The total number of requested and received IL services during this reporting period was 48,427.



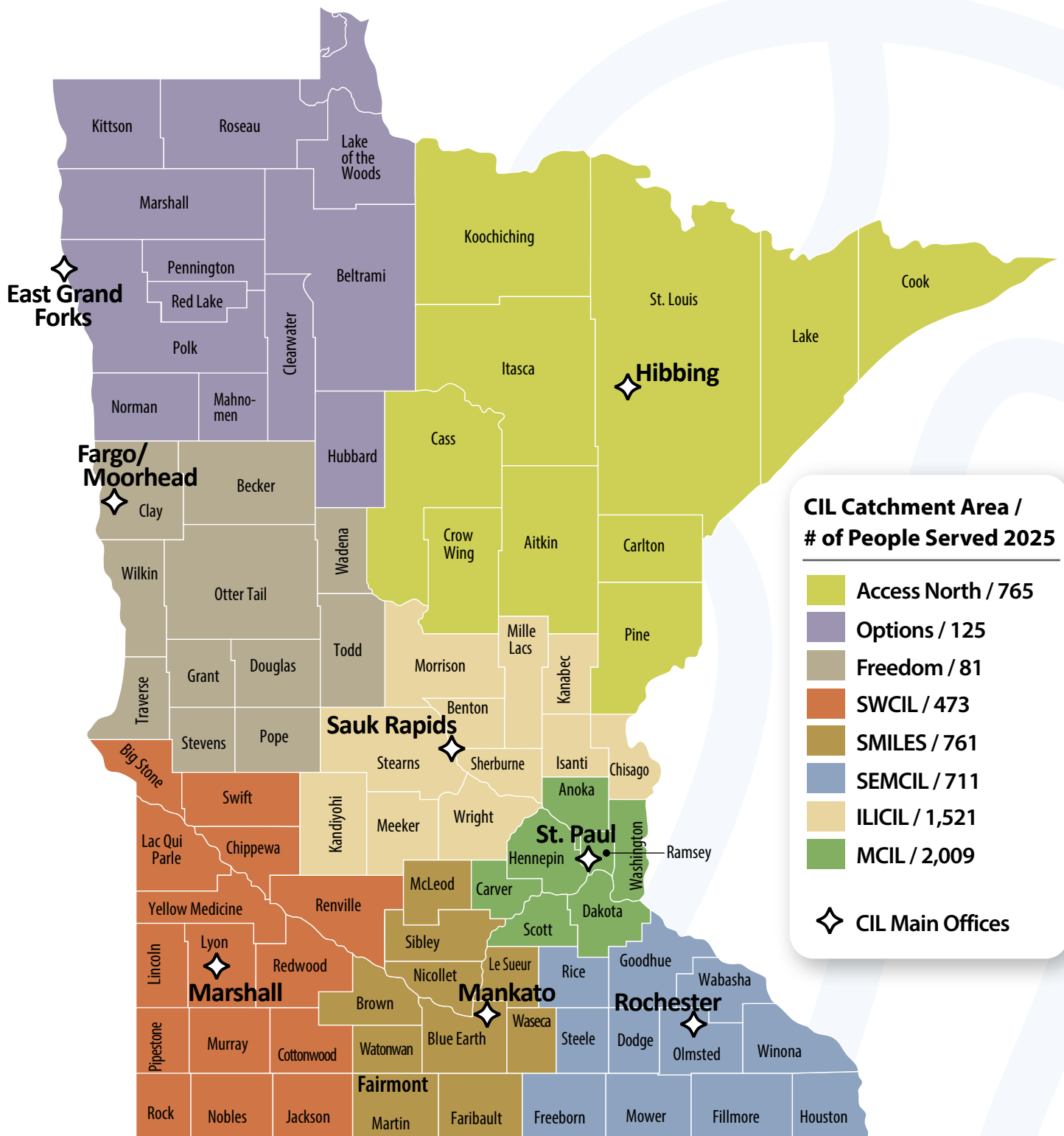
## Core Services



## People and Disabilities Served



# MAP OF MINNESOTA



MNSILC works with many partners to increase awareness about independent living. 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 - ILICIL
- Metropolitan Center for Independent Living - MCIL
- OPTIONS Interstate Resource Center for Independent Living
- Southern Minnesota Independent Living Enterprises and Services - SMILES
- Southeast Minnesota Center for Independent Living - SEMCIL
- Southwestern Center for Independent Living - SWCIL

### 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
- Charting the C's
- Minnesota Department of Economic Development/ Vocational Rehabilitation Services – DEED/VRS
- Minnesota Council on Disability - MCD
- Minnesota Department of Human Services - DHS

- Minnesota Department of Health – Hearing Loss
- Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities – Partners in Policy Making
- Minnesota Governor Office, Tim Walz and LT Gov. Peggy Flanagan
- Minnesota Secretary of State
- Minnesota STAR Program
- Minnesota State Services for the Blind - SSB
- Olmstead Implementation Office - OIO
- State Rehabilitation Council – General
- State Rehabilitation Council – Blind
- U of MN Institute on Community Integration

### 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 - NAMI
- National Federation of the Blind – NFB
- PACER Center
- Rev Up MN



For more information about the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council or to request the annual report in alternative format go to: [mn.gov/deed/silc](https://mn.gov/deed/silc) or [mnsilc1215@gmail.com](mailto:mnsilc1215@gmail.com) or call: Jo Erbes, Coordinator at **612-518-1487** or **MN Relay at 711**.