January through March 2017 saw the continued implementation of Minnesota’s Olmstead Plan and significant accomplishments toward people with disabilities living, learning, working and enjoying life in the most integrated setting. Highlights include:

**New services proposed to help people with disabilities find paying jobs in community**

In Minnesota, 50 percent of people with intellectual disabilities and 40 percent of people with physical disabilities who are unemployed want to work, according to recent surveys.

This year Gov. Mark Dayton has proposed new employment services to ensure more Minnesotans with disabilities can seek, retain and maintain paying jobs of their choice in the community.

On February 23, Human Services Commissioner Emily Piper visited Just Paws Pet Salon in Lilydale to highlight that many Minnesotans with disabilities already are working in competitively paying jobs they have found or created. Disability employment service providers like Kaposia often play a key role in the process.

“Competitive employment is not only personally rewarding but can be a way out of poverty for people with disabilities, which is good for people and good for Minnesota,” said Piper. “Reforming employment services will mean more people with disabilities will find work in the community. Not everyone will choose to work for pay but everyone will have opportunities to explore what they would like to do.”

Jessica Knoepfler had a lifelong dream of working with dogs, but after completing grooming school, had difficulty keeping up with the pace at big-box grooming salons. Kaposia worked with Jessica, who struggles with short-term memory, to locate an employer that would accommodate her needs.

Human Services Commissioner Emily Piper, left, poses with Winston the dog, center, and Jessica Knoepfler, right, at Just Paws Pet Salon in Lilydale Thursday, Feb. 23.
When the owner decided to close the business, Knoepfler’s parents bought Just Paws, where she now has another employee and continues to receive support from her Kaposia job coach.

Little Canada-based Kaposia’s service offerings include a customized employment service to help individuals find jobs, supported employment to provide training and support once a job is found and retirement services to help older adults with disabilities remain active in their communities in their interest areas.

“Our niche is helping people find jobs that fit their skills, interests and passions, which also helps an employer to increase the value of their company,” said Jon Alexander, chief executive officer of Kaposia. “All of this is accomplished with individualized planning, discovering the right job in the community and providing the right training and support for both the person and the employer.”

DHS is working with stakeholders to redefine services the state and federal government pay for to ensure that people have experiences and options to make informed choices about employment.

Employment service providers like Kaposia are critical, Piper said, to moving services toward greater choice for people with disabilities and to raising expectations that working-age Minnesotans with disabilities can achieve competitive, integrated employment.

Information about the HCBS rule

In March 2017, DHS sent out the first of a series of letters to people receiving home and community-based services (HCBS) to give them information about the service changes that are underway, specifically, person-centered practices and the HCBS rule. DHS also sent letters to providers to give the information and tools related to the HCBS rule.

Minnesota opens new savings plan for people with disabilities

Minnesotans with disabilities and their families can save for goods and services to improve their lives under the new Minnesota ABLE (Achieving a Better Life Experience) Plan, which opened this month.

ABLE accounts can be set up for people who have a disability prior to the age of 26. The plan allows a maximum of $14,000 a year, to a total maximum of $100,000, to be contributed to an account for an individual before the individual’s public benefits are affected.

Participants can choose to put their money into what operates as a regular checking account or into one of six investment options.

The Minnesota ABLE Plan has several features:

- ABLE accounts are not limited to people with disabilities on public programs. The accounts are exempt from eligibility consideration if people are on Medical Assistance, Supplemental Security Income or other public programs. Currently, people with disabilities may lose eligibility for public benefits once they reach $2,000 in savings.
- Earnings on accounts and distributions for qualified expenses are not counted as taxable income.
- Minnesota ABLE Plan accounts can be opened online at mn.savewithable.com. Parents of eligible minor children may open an account for their child.
- Any person can contribute to an ABLE account. Contributions can be made by check, through an employer’s payroll direct deposit, or directly from another checking or savings account.

Ascensus College Savings is the firm administering the Minnesota ABLE Plan. People who are interested in the Minnesota ABLE Plan may visit mn.savewithable.com or call 888-609-8872.

“Competitive employment is not only personally rewarding but can be a way out of poverty for people with disabilities, which is good for people and good for Minnesota”
— DHS Commissioner Emily Piper
Assistive technology cross-agency workgroup is starting at home

The Disability Services and Deaf and Hard of Hearing divisions are working to increase accessibility through assistive technology. DHS as well as State Services for the Blind, the Department of Employment and Economic Development and the Minnesota STAR program are part of a cross-agency workgroup initiative focused on promoting assistive technology as a tool that can lead to independence and overall increased quality of life.

In order to promote assistive technology, the workgroup decided to start at home and make sure that the State of Minnesota is a model employer in terms of accessibility. To increase use of assistive technology throughout Minnesota, the state first needs to walk the walk for accessibility standards and to examine what we as an employer do to improve.

The State improvement process will provide stakeholders such as human resources, hiring directors, MN.IT leadership, job seekers and current employers with key information about assistive technology in order to support the employment process. Key messages are that assistive technology is available, a possibility, not scary, not necessarily expensive and above all a reasonable accommodation. In order to get the message across, the workgroup is developing training for hiring supervisors and managers and developing onboarding materials to ensure the inclusion of information regarding assistive technology.

In partnership with the State of Minnesota improvement process initiative, the workgroup is updating and adding to the assistive technology resource guide, a handbook provided by the Minnesota Star program. The resource guide is intended to be a comprehensive and unifying guide on all things assistive technology, an educational tool and a point of reference for people looking for technology resources. The resource guide will increase education and decrease perceived barriers to assistive technology in employment, housing and community integration and maintain independence.

Introduction and guide to supported decision-making

DHS completed a series of videos, available to anyone, about supported decision-making. Audiences include people with disabilities, guardians, family members, educators, support planners and others. These are now available on YouTube.

Individuals, regardless of a disability, have the right to be involved and integrated into their community. Supportive decision making is an approach for reducing the need for restrictive proceedings where an individual's right to make choices is taken away.

As part of Minnesota's efforts to support person-centered planning, and services that promote choice and integration, DHS is pleased to present this video introduction, presented by Jonathan Martinis, senior director for law and policy at the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University.
Karli: loving the freedom

Karli Harguth is a young woman with a disability. In August 2009 she and her parents contacted The Arc of Minnesota in an effort to find a place of her own. Karli wanted a place where she could stay up late, cook her own food, have family and friends over and, most importantly, have a place where she could have her own privacy.

Housing Access Services staff from Arc Southeastern Minnesota met with Karli and her “circle of supports” to help figure out where she wanted to live and what it would take to make it happen.

The Arc Housing Access Services staff helped with many matters, such as meeting with the landlord, viewing the apartment, reviewing the lease agreement, applying for energy assistance and covering a rental deposit. Arc staff also helped Karli access the Minnesota Supplemental Aid (MSA) program along with Shelter Needy funds. "We even helped Karli with the actual process of moving her stuff and a few days later Karli had us over for a lovely lunch," says Melissa Evans, housing advocate at Arc Southeast.

Karli uses the Community Alternatives for Disabled Individuals (CADI) waiver program administered through the Department of Human Services for her supports and explored all the housing options in her area.

"I thought about group homes and didn't like the idea of someone watching over me every single minute and prompting me on things. ...I can do things for myself and when I need help I get what I need from my social worker, family or call Arc Housing Access Services if I need help with my place," says Karli. "I like the fact I'm not dependent on my parents and I've accomplished so much and I'm so proud of myself. ...I told people I could do this.”

See the video

For more information and the complete Olmstead Plan, visit mn.gov/dhs/op/
For accessible formats of this publication or additional equal access to human services, write to dsd.responsecenter@state.mn.us, call 651-431-4300, or use your preferred relay service. (ADA1 [9-15])