



“KNOW ME
FOR MY
ABILITIES,
NOT MY
DISABILITY”

“INCLUDE US IN DISCUSSIONS THAT AFFECT US”

“NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US”

“DON'T CALL US PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES . . . WE HAVE DIFFERENT ABILITIES!” - EDWARD BARBANELL

Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council **2023 ANNUAL REPORT**

October 1, 2022 – September 30, 2023



**“ WE NEED TO BREAK
DOWN THE STIGMA
OUR CULTURE AND
SOCIETY HAVE WHEN
TALKING ABOUT
ISSUES RELATED
TO DISABILITIES. ”**

**“ I AM
DIFFERENT,
NOT LESS. ”**

– Dr. Temple Grandin

**“ KNOW YOUR
LIMITS, BUT
NEVER STOP
TRYING TO
BREAK THEM. ”**

– Kyle Maynard

WHAT IS THE MINNESOTA STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL?

The Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council (MNSILC) are 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% 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 and promote 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, wherein 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 www.mn.gov/deed/silc.

MNSILC MISSION

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

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 (DSE) and State Services for the Blind (SSB). The MNILNET can be found on Facebook at www.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.

The entire SPIL can be found in the reports tab on the MNSILC website at www.mn.gov/deed/silc

MNSILC MEMBERS

Brian Baker

Robyn Block

Paulo Matheus Carvalho

Chaves de Castro

Joseph Dailey

Monique Doward

Rosalie Eisenreich

David Fenley

Deborah Gleason

KiloMarie Granda

Lisa Harvey

Haley Kimmet

Karen Larson

Stephen Larson

Ed Lecher

Larry Lura

Dr. Mohamed Mourssi-Alfash

Tom Reed

Judy Sanders

Jacob Schuller

Brad Westerlund

A LETTER FROM THE MNSILC CHAIR



Pictured above is Robyn Block and her service dog Ziggy

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. This year five new members were appointed: Jennifer Clement, Monique Doward, KiloMarie Granda, Crystal Hellekson and Jacob Schuller. Council members along with the eight Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and other important stakeholders form the Minnesota Independent Living Network (MNILNET) and are tasked with creating the three-year state plan for independent living.

The eight Centers for Independent Living (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 held meetings at the Southwest Center for Independent Living (SWCIL) and Independent Life Styles, Inc. Center for Independent Living (ILICIL) It was a great to meet with the staff, hear their consumer stories and learn what consumers in their area need. Our goal is to continue to visit centers and learn more.

In July 2023, Minnesota had 28 representatives from MNSILC, Southeastern Minnesota Center for Independent Living (SEMCIL), Metropolitan Center for Independent Living (MCIL), Southern Minnesota Independent Living Enterprise and Services (SMILES), Southwestern Center for Independent Living (SWCIL), and Options Interstate Resource Center in attendance at the National Council on Independent Living Council Conference in Washington DC. They participated in a march to the Capitol, one of the first since the pandemic. The group was able to visit with Minnesota Representatives and Senators to share information about independent living.

We have additional new members joining the council soon and look forward to their perspectives. We are continuing to recruit new members. Please apply at the [Secretary of State Website](#).

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

In January 2024 new officers will be elected. Deborah Gleason will become chair; Rosalie Eisenreich, Vice Chair; Crystal Hellekson, Secretary; and Judy Sanders, Parliamentarian. Stephen Larson will return as Treasurer.

It has been my honor to serve as chair of MNSILC for two years. While my term on the council ended January 2, 2024, I plan to remain active on the Advocacy and Outreach Committees and the SPIL Planning Committee.

I look forward to continuing to work with the council and the CILs and promoting independent living services and supports.

Gratefully,

Robyn Block

MNSILC Chair



Pictured above is Mark Perkio holding his CDL permit

EMPOWERING ABILITIES & NAVIGATING SUBMINIMUM WAGE CHALLENGES

In our commitment to fostering inclusivity, our organization has dedicated itself to addressing the subminimum wage/14c issue and advocating for the fair employment of individuals with disabilities. This year's focus revolves around the various services we offer to support this cause, highlighting success stories that epitomize the triumphs of our dedicated individuals.

In our eighth year, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) initiative stands as a cornerstone, empowering individuals through Career Counseling, Information and Referral (CCI&R) services. We conduct annual interviews with those earning subminimum wages, defined as anything below the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour. These discussions create ongoing opportunities for community-integrated employment, allowing individuals to pursue their aspirations independently. Importantly, during these interviews, we empower individuals by reinforcing that their employment goals are personal decisions, free from external influence, ensuring autonomy in their career choices. Following these sessions, we provide referrals to Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) and actively participate in team meetings to advocate for individuals with their entire care team present.

As of October 2023, significant progress has been made, with only five of the original fifteen sites utilizing WIOA CCI&R services. This shift away from the 14C certificate underscores their commitment to paying employees minimum wage or higher, fostering a more inclusive and equitable work environment. Remarkably, the community of Duluth has eliminated all subminimum wages, marking a substantial achievement.

Our employment services also include Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), aimed at preparing individuals for the workforce. By equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge, we lay the foundation for their success. One shining example is Mark Perkio, a VRS consumer, whose determination, and hard work led to his success in obtaining a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) permit.

Mark's journey reflects the impact of our services, as we provided targeted assistance in preparing for the Knowledge Test, Airbrakes Test, and Combination Test. The collaborative effort resulted in Mark passing all required tests, paving the way for him to embark on the next phase of his CDL training.

Mark's success story continues beyond obtaining his CDL permit. With our continued support, he excelled in the pre-trip inspection, showcasing his commitment to safety and proficiency. Mark's journey culminated in passing his CDL road test on the first attempt, now holding a CDL license and quickly securing employment in his desired field.

Through our dedication and success stories like Mark's, we emphasize the transformative power of providing equal opportunities for everyone, regardless of ability.

Submitted by:

Jacob Knaffla, Independent Living Lead Coordinator & Amber Pittman, Independent Living Coordinator

Access North Center for Independent Living of Northeastern Minnesota

FREEDOM COMES IN MANY WAYS

AN INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN GERDES

Can you tell me what brought you to Freedom Resource Center and what your life was like at that time?

I originally came to Freedom Resource Center for some assistance in having my sister removed as my guardian. I had no idea how to do this and didn't know about court proceedings or where to go for help. One of my neighbors told me about Freedom Resource Center so I came here. At that time in my life, I knew for my own well-being that I had to learn about my options, as I was under so much stress with how things were set up.

What is one of the particular moments that stands out to you?

All of the doors that have opened up for me that I never knew about! Before Freedom Resource Center, I pretty much didn't socialize outside of my apartment building. Since coming to Freedom Resource Center, I have been given information about other organizations in the area. One of them is A Place 2 Belong; where I am now a member and I volunteer there 4 -5 days per week. I went through a food safety program and am now certified to prepare meals at A Place 2 Belong, which I enjoy greatly. Through Freedom Resource Center, I was able to go to The Minnesota Twins game. This was my first time ever going to a professional ballgame and it was a blast! I will never forget this day from riding on a coach bus, the delicious food, and of course the game. I also like all of the Freedom In Action events and look forward to what is happening the next month.

Why do you continue to support Freedom?

Since coming here, I have learned so much about the services in our area. However, I have learned so much about myself and all of the things that I can do. Since my brain injury many years ago, I was told that I would not be able to do certain things; such as manage my own finances, choose where I live and who I can socialize with, at times I became very depressed and frustrated. Now, I know that I can advocate for myself and others and that we can choose to do things in our lives as we also have voices, thoughts, and feelings that we are allowed to share. Freedom Resource Center is a good place, I have received a tremendous amount of support and I always feel welcome here. I have encouraged many people to talk to someone at Freedom Resource Center, because I know that they will get the help or support that they are looking for. I encourage everyone that if you don't know about Freedom Resource Center, then go down there and see all of the services that they provide to so many.



Pictured above is Kevin Gerdes



MAXIMIZING INDEPENDENCE

Maximizing Independence is our mission at Independent Lifestyles, Inc. A Center for Independent Living (ILICIL). The phrase is the foundation of our work across programs. ILICIL has had a fast-moving year supporting people with disabilities and ensuring they have a voice, equality and equity across systems and services.

Independent Lifestyles' IL24 program has been a highlight at the agency. The program offers a "One-Stop Shop" for independent living and enhances choice and integrated living for our consumers. Since IL24's inception in 2017, ILICIL has supported several consumers in graduating from community residential settings or maintaining their current level of independence by providing 24 hour on-call support, virtual mental health check-ins and various virtual Aid to Daily Living (ADL) reminders to prevent future crises.

Our Independent Living Program continues to support the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Within the last year, the team completed 975 interviews, at 13 different employment sites, with people with disabilities to inquire about job satisfaction and their desire to have more integrated employment. We participated in 228 "Yes" meetings to assist the individuals in advocating for their employment goals outside of a workshop setting. In the 2022–2023-year, three employment sites dropped their 14C License!

Finally, Independent Lifestyles, Inc. continues to head many opportunities funded through grant work. Highlights include the completion of six major accessibility projects for individuals that are ineligible for Medical Assistance. These projects varied from installing several feet of grab bars and railings to roof renovations to bathroom overhauls (HCBS Access). The agency has also supported over 100 individuals in accessing internet, technology devices and individualized technology trainings (HCBS Technology). These opportunities have allowed our community members to Live Their Best Lives.

ILICIL is excited to continue to expand programming and looks forward to continuing to be a community partner to further our mission of "Maximizing Independence" for our consumers and communities.



The staff from ILICIL are pictured above

THE IMPORTANT WORK OF THE COVID COMMUNITY COORDINATORS

The Covid Community Coordinator (CCC) team here at the Metropolitan Center for Independent Living (MCIL) has been working with the Minnesota Department of Health to encourage safety and better health outcomes for adults with disabilities. The CCC team has been promoting and signing individuals up for a statewide in-home vaccination program, allowing people who are homebound and might not otherwise get doses of vaccines to stay protected. They have also delivered over 3,000 in home tests to individuals, sheltered work environments, and congregate housing settings. Personal Protective Equipment kits including KN95 masks, hand sanitizers, and gloves have been sent to individuals, as well as large scale donations to agencies that work with individuals with disabilities across Minnesota.

MCIL has hosted or partnered on several webinars intended to combat misinformation about Covid and related topics. A member of the team represents MCIL in a Long Covid workgroup looking to expand knowledge and awareness regarding this emerging health issue. While all these efforts continue, the group also is ramping up work related the health recovery in the disability community. We know that isolation and worse health outcomes were and continue to be a hallmark of being a disabled individual in the time of Covid, and we continue to seek new and more effective ways to address these discrepancies.



Pictured above is Adrienne Wilcox staffing a booth



Pictured above are the 2023 Minnesota Delegation NCIL

2023 CONFERENCE & ADVOCACY DELEGATION

The National Council on Independent Living’s 2023 Conference was held in Washington DC this past July hosted under the theme, Indivisible. Minnesota showed up with a robust delegation of 26 individuals, representing six organizations including Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council, Options Interstate Resources Incorporated, Southeastern Minnesota Center for Independent Living, Southern Minnesota Center for Independent Living Enterprise and Services, Southwestern Minnesota Center for Independent Living, and Minnesota Disability Law Center. Together, the delegation attended conference sessions, networked with centers for independent living centers (CILs) across the country, and rallied for the first time since 2019 as we marched to the Capitol complex.

Following the rally our delegation split into teams to meet with and educate our federal legislators and their staff. The delegation met with all seven federal representative office staff with a direct meeting with Representative Brad Finstad and his director of policy, Ryan Altman. The Minnesota delegation also met with Senator Amy Klobuchar’s office and Senator Tina Smith’s office. Options Interstate Resources Incorporated serves a part of North Dakota and also held three meetings with their constituents’ federal legislators. The delegation educated legislators and their staff on key issues selected by the CILs and Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council including broadband access, transportation accessibility, and the direct care workforce shortages occurring in home and community-based settings.

The 2023 “Indivisible Conference” offered a wide selection of sessions throughout the week that made it accessible for newcomers of the Independent Living Network to attend foundational sessions to support direct core services and learn more about the Independent Living philosophy. Markedly, however, the sessions, keynote speakers, and session leaders were a mix of Independent Living network staff as well as organizers and activists from prominent organizations to support and encourage our network to engage in our grassroots advocacy on a larger scale and to do so with other communities experiencing marginalization on the same issues. Sessions included organizing exercises from the staff of New Disabled South, Guardianship basics and advocacy from Tom Odlin, Thomas Earle and Misty Dion, and Rebecca Cokley of the Ford Foundation.

We are looking forward to the
2024 NCIL Conference
from July 22 through July 25th!

BETTER SERVE MEMBERS OF THE CHIPPEWA COMMUNITY

Nation’s 121 Vocational Rehabilitation Program Options has been able to have a staff person hold weekly office hours at the service complex located in Naytahwaush, Minnesota. This has enabled Options to better serve members of the Chippewa Community. Jessie Smith, Options’ staff person who provides services, grew up on a reservation and speaks Anishinaabe so can provide culturally appropriate services. This year Jessie’s work was recognized by the Minnesota Council on Disabilities who gave him an Exceptional Advocate Award. Jessie was nominated by Sheri Snetsinger of White Earth Human Services who wrote in her nomination:

“I would like to nominate my good friend and fellow advocate, Jesse Smith, for the 2023 Exceptional Advocate Award.

I’ve known and worked with Jesse since 2016. At the time, I was new to our White Earth Tribal Vocational Rehab program. Within our community, I had often heard Jesse’s name as someone people could go to for guidance while applying for Social Security Disability. He was also known as the go-to guy for help finding donated adaptive furniture to assist with everyday comfort and mobility. Jesse actually works for Options Resource Center for Independent Living with locations in Grand Forks, Roseau, Thief River Falls, Crookston, Bemidji and northeastern North Dakota. Options is a great agency that has a wide range of independent living services and resources.

Once I began working with – and referring clients and community members to – Jesse, I really started to understand and appreciate how much he does for everyone he meets and works with. Immediately, he begins to visit with whomever he’s serving. His attitude is always positive and confident. You know that you can confide in him your history, background, and current struggles. You sense immediately that he’ll go to bat for you. He’s available in-person or over the phone to help you to navigate all the current life obstacles you’re facing. On the rare occasion that Jesse doesn’t have a solid answer for your questions, he’s quick to get back to you. Jesse travels miles upon miles each week to serve not only White Earth Reservation, which is 3 counties in northwestern Minnesota, he also serves greater northwestern Minnesota from Grand Forks to his office in Bemidji.

It’s been an honor learning from Jesse and serving our community members with him. He takes the time to fully understand their situation and provide guidance and support. He helps them to find their voices in order to advocate for themselves and/or their families. He is respectful and courteous.”

Following in his father’s footsteps is Keenan Smith who is presently participating in The Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities, Partners in Policymaking Class on advocacy and leadership. Keenan became interested in advocacy and policy issues by accompanying Options at a day at the Capital event this past Legislative Session where he was able to talk with his Legislators by highlighting the services he had received through his local Center, Options. Options assisted Keenan with the skills necessary to lead his own Individual Education Plan (IEP) Meetings, learning about disability rights, and preparing for his driver’s test. Keenan has passed his driver’s test and looks forward to graduating from both high school and Partners in Policy Making Class this Spring.



Pictured above are Keenan Smith and Jessie Smith



Pictured above are staff from Options

DETERMINED TO HELP PEOPLE

Staff from the Southeast Minnesota Center for Independent Living (SEMCIL) shared their experiences in successfully helping a person find employment, another to apply for college and another person improve personal skills to acquire a volunteer position.

EMPLOYMENT

Independent Living staff (IL) met with a walk-in consumer that was looking for options to assist them in finding employment. The barrier as stated to the IL was that he was not being considered for positions due to his wheelchair. After some conversation, the IL was able to discuss other barriers that may be keeping him from securing the employment he wanted. The consumer and IL contacted Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS) and left a message and the IL looked at his resume. An email was sent to the consumer about local employers that may meet both his wage expectation and ability level. The consumer contacted the IL a week later and stated he secured employment.

GOING TO COLLEGE

SEMCIL staff received a referral from VRS for a woman who had attended college over ten years ago but was unable to complete her coursework due to life circumstances. Recently, she had experienced significant mental health challenges that caused her to leave her job as a paraprofessional. At this time, she has been out of the workforce for about four years and is hoping to get back to a place where she can have a job that she is passionate about. After working with VRS, she determined that finishing her degree would allow her to get back into the workforce in a way that is meaningful for her. We met on several occasions to complete her Free Applications for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). She would frequently talk about how she believed she could probably fill out the FAFSA application on her own but that her anxiety caused her to worry about whether she was doing it correctly. She was very thankful to have another set of eyes on the application to troubleshoot confusing questions. Happily, her FAFSA was quickly approved, and now we are scheduled to work on her application for entry into Rochester Community Technical College (RCTC) so she can complete the journey she started over ten years ago.

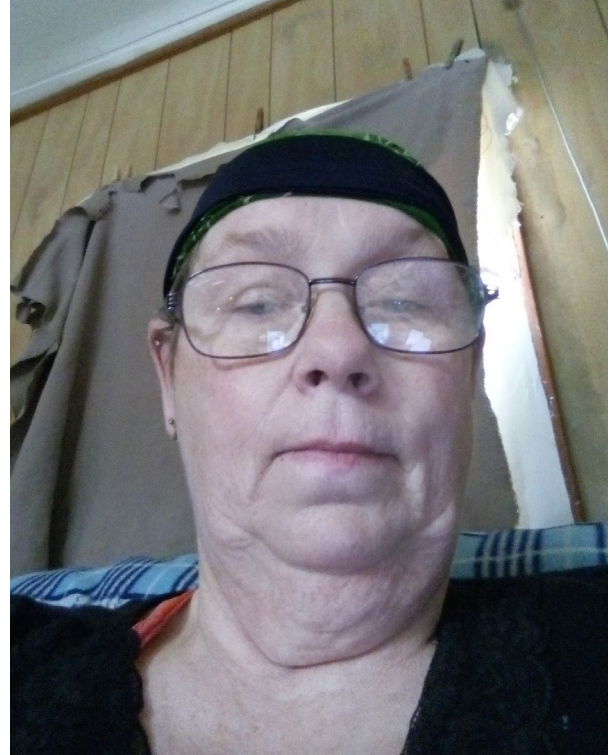


Pictured above are staff from SEMCIL

SECURING A VOLUNTEERING POSITION

When I first met my consumer, it was clear that she was reserved and hesitant to engage in our social coaching sessions. She participated well in our activities and showed enthusiasm, but her nervousness and difficulty grasping the materials were apparent. In our initial meeting, she was absent, citing a fishing trip with her husband as the reason, without prior notice. This pattern of prioritizing other activities over responsibilities was a recurring issue at that time. She was simultaneously receiving support from two other agencies in her quest to secure employment. My role was to focus on social coaching and the journey would prove to be transformative.

Her stated goal was to enhance her understanding of verbal and nonverbal communication, social cues, and interpreting the intentions of coworkers and supervisors. In our subsequent meeting, she not only showed up but also advocated for herself by requesting physical copies of materials for further practice at home. Diligently completing her homework, she displayed a strong passion for learning the concepts I presented. She eagerly embraced quizzes to test her comprehension, seeking to understand both the literal meaning and underlying implications of the materials.



Pictured above is a SEMCIL consumer

During one session, she candidly shared that she had been let go from her previous job due to communication issues with a coworker. We engaged in a constructive dialogue about the incident, exploring alternative approaches she could have taken. In the following meeting, we delved into role-playing scenarios involving facial expressions. Though initially challenged by replicating facial cues and identifying emotions, she persevered, actively striving to improve her expressive abilities. We also practiced handling passive-aggressive situations, and her ability to communicate and she respectfully demonstrated her dedication to practicing these skills at home.

In a subsequent meeting, she informed me of a mock interview she had undertaken through her employment agency, and it was apparent that her consistent practice had paid off, as she described the interview as a success. Our sessions continued to cover topics such as communication styles, active listening, effective hearing, and delivering clear messages. It was during one of these meetings that she excitedly shared news of securing a volunteer position at her church's Vacation Bible School. She expressed that she had been applying the skills we have worked on, and the experience was off to a promising start.

Due to personal matters and her busy schedule, there was a considerable gap before our final meeting. However, the transformation in her was remarkable. She proudly revealed that she maintained her volunteer position throughout the entire summer. I was genuinely thrilled to witness her progress, and her newfound happiness was palpable. Beyond her volunteer work, she had successfully reconnected with her estranged children, a testament to her dedication to becoming an effective communicator and a respectful coworker.

While her current employment status remains unclear to me, I am very confident that she has the skills and determination to secure and maintain a job, just as she demonstrated with her remarkable performance at Vacation Bible School.

WORKING TOWARDS GOALS & INDEPENDENT LIVING

The WIOA or the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act, is a regulation under federal law that provides choices to individuals who are earning less than minimum wage. SMILES Center For Independent Living has strong advocates for this program that are helping consumers have more choices for higher paying job opportunities.

Jenn Jones of SMILES, said about the program, *“We work with each consumer to work toward their goals and for independent living. Most of them love their jobs and it helps to get them out in the community.”*

SMILES is contracted through DEED (Department of Employment and Economic Development) to help these clients through job coaching, which includes interviews and references to help meet the individuals where they are at.

For SMILES, this includes working with various counties in the region, including Brown, Watonwan, Le Sueur, Waseca, Sibley and McLeod.

Jones said one of the biggest challenges is transportation to jobs, especially in the rural areas.

“It is a work in progress,” she said. *“But it is part of what we do to help find them the right fit at the right place.”*

SMILES has been fortunate to work with companies who help employ our consumers, including Enterprise in Madelia, and Jobs Plus in the Waseca and Steele County areas.

These companies, among others, provide employment opportunities to help our consumers gain the independent living skills they need to earn a wage and go out into the community.

The WIOA program seeks to help them receive a high wage for the jobs they are qualified for. Part of SMILES’ process is to advocate and help establish these jobs, while putting the needs and goals of the clients first.

Jones said she and her team meet with the clients and employers to discuss a work plan, and to see what the needs and expectations are for both parties.

Now with the WIOA, Jones said they can advocate for higher wages, which in turn will help the consumers reach their goal of independent living, should that be a job or a goal that the client desires.

Through teamwork, advocacy, and listening to the needs and wants of the consumers, this program is just another way that SMILES and all centers for independent living can make a difference in the lives of those they serve.



Pictured above are staff from SMILES

SECURING EMPLOYMENT

Nicky Schlender is proud to work as a customer service representative at St. Paul-based Ecolab.

Summing up her experiences there, Nicky says, *“Working at Ecolab feels really awesome.”*

For Nicky, finding a good position, like the one she has now at Ecolab has been a long process. *“It was really challenging,”* Nicky says of her long search for a good job, *“Hiring managers would often go into assumption-mode about what they thought a blind person could or couldn’t do. It was often impossible to overcome that.”*

With an Associate Degree in Applied Science and Broadcasting, a strong work ethic, experience in a variety of settings, and marketable skills, Nicky has experienced stretches of unemployment and even longer stretches of under-employment. When she successfully landed the position at Ecolab, for Nicky, it marked the transition out of work at a subminimum wage to competitive employment.

For three years Nicky worked alongside other Minnesotans with disabilities doing piece work. Though Nicky enjoyed working with her hands at all the various projects she was assigned, working for cents on the dollar was extremely difficult. *“You feel kind of degraded,”* she said, *“You know that you are worth more than this.”*

Nicky worked with SSB and Ecolab in securing her position. SSB connected Ecolab with a programmer who wrote code so that the screen reading software Nicky uses worked with the software used at Ecolab. SSB’s employment specialists met with Ecolab management and helped ensure a smooth transition. *“Ecolab is terrific to work with,”* says Business Relations Specialist Dave Smith, *“They’ve purchased accommodations and have always been very receptive.”*

In addition to her work at Ecolab, Nicky is the president of the United Blind of Minnesota, and in her spare time she collects trivia. Reflecting on her own experience with sub-minimum wages Nicky recognizes the complexities of the system. *“In the end,”* she says, *“What matters is that we are all worth the same.”*



OUTCOMES & SUCCESSES

The Southwestern Center for Independent Living (SWCIL) offers employment related Independent Living (IL) services that range from job readiness to securing and maintaining competitive, community-based employment. Among the most common requests are employment related soft-skills training and career exploration. The following are examples of employment related outcomes and individual consumer successes during the past year:



Pictured above are staff from SWCIL

CONSUMER SUCCESSES

- **Improved Communication Skills:** A 46-year-old man struggled with interpersonal relationships and communication, with anger outbursts and inappropriate responses when in some conflicts or difficult situations. Working with SWCIL staff this individual: identified past conflicts, developed scripts to use in conversations, and practiced these with role-play; secured employment; and successfully requested information needed from his last employer, filed his taxes, and applied for other benefit programs.
- **Obtained Employment:** A transition age adult with multiple disabilities about to graduate high school was not sure what he wanted to do for a career/job after school. With assistance from SWCIL he was able to explore different careers and the training he would need. He decided that he wanted to work at Walmart after graduation but didn't have the skills needed to complete an interview. With assistance from SWCIL he was able to learn the skills needed to succeed during an interview. He applied for a position at Walmart, completed the interview process, was offered, and accepted a full-time position.
- **Financial Management Skills:** A middle-aged man with multiple disabilities was struggling with his finances and sought help with budgeting skills. With assistance from SWCIL he learned how to create and maintain a budget. He realized that if he was going to get out of debt, he needed to cancel a lot of his subscriptions. Struggling with figuring out how to cancel certain subscriptions, SWCIL provided resources with instructions to assist him with the task. SWCIL also provided financial management resources he could utilize to help him maintain his budget, and he started using the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) program through his work, utilizing their budgeting services. With SWCIL's assistance he was able to start paying off past due bills and felt that he was back on the right track with budgeting.
- **Received MN Driver's Permit:** A young man had been meeting with SWCIL staff since March 2022 working on learning Minnesota driving laws and rules needed to obtain his driver's permit. He had great dedication, working with SWCIL staff before or after school, and during the summer months. Once he knew the information, he worked on test taking skills to overcome his testing anxiety. He passed the permit test on his sixth try and was excited to report his success.

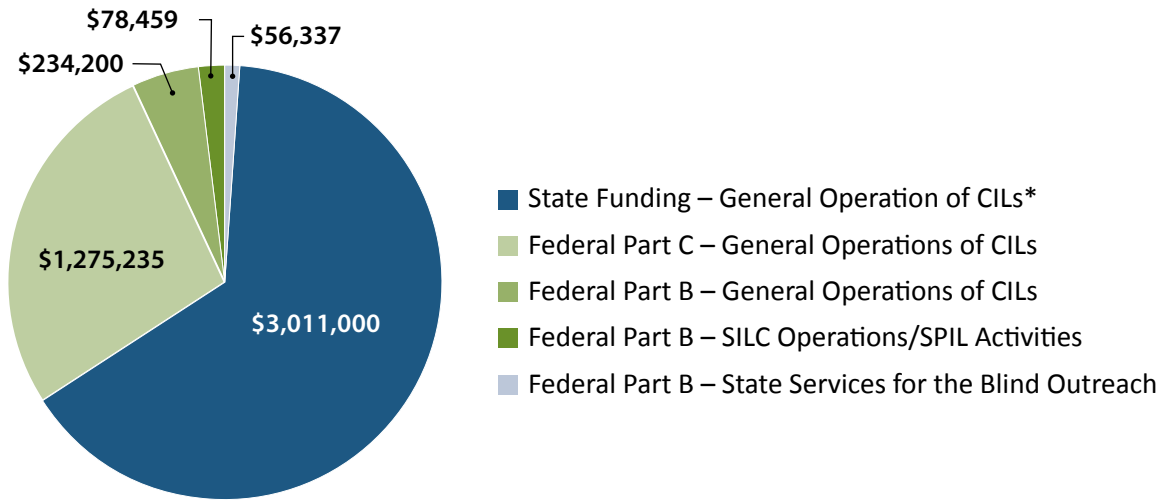
Last year, a total of 33 SWCIL consumers set consumer-directed employment-related goals, with 22 consumers achieving their goals and 8 remaining in progress at the end of the year.

With lack of public transportation in rural Minnesota, securing a driver's license often means opening doors to employment opportunities. During the past year, 29 SWCIL consumers obtained their driver's permit and/or other necessary means to acquire driving independence.

In addition to these consumer services, SWCIL contracts with the MN Department of Employment and Economic Development – Vocational Rehabilitation Services (MN DEED-VRS) to provide career consultation and information and referral services to individuals receiving subminimum wages for work performed through community rehabilitation providers. Over the past year, **SWCIL provided 382 one-to-one career consultation sessions** and **participated in 31 team meetings**, facilitating opportunities for individuals to share about and pursue their own desires and goals related to employment.

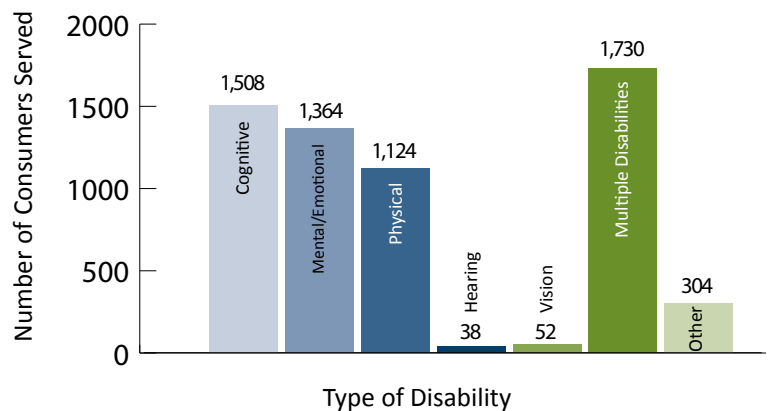
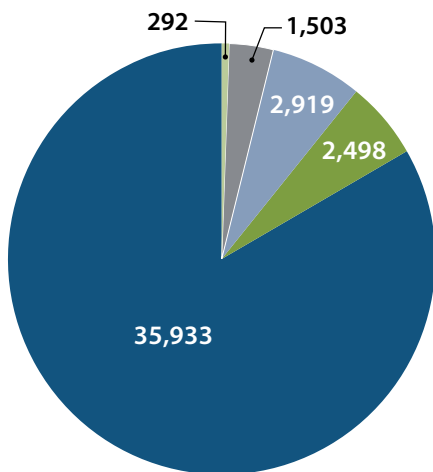
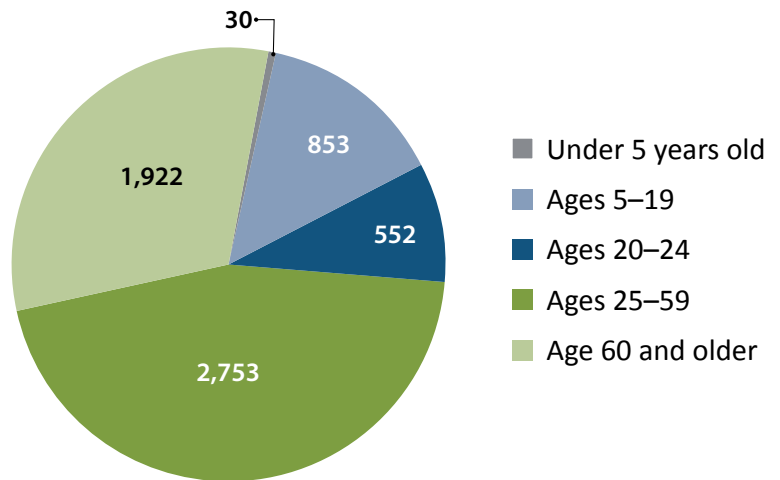
BY THE NUMBERS & MINNESOTA MAP

Independent Living Funding Distribution

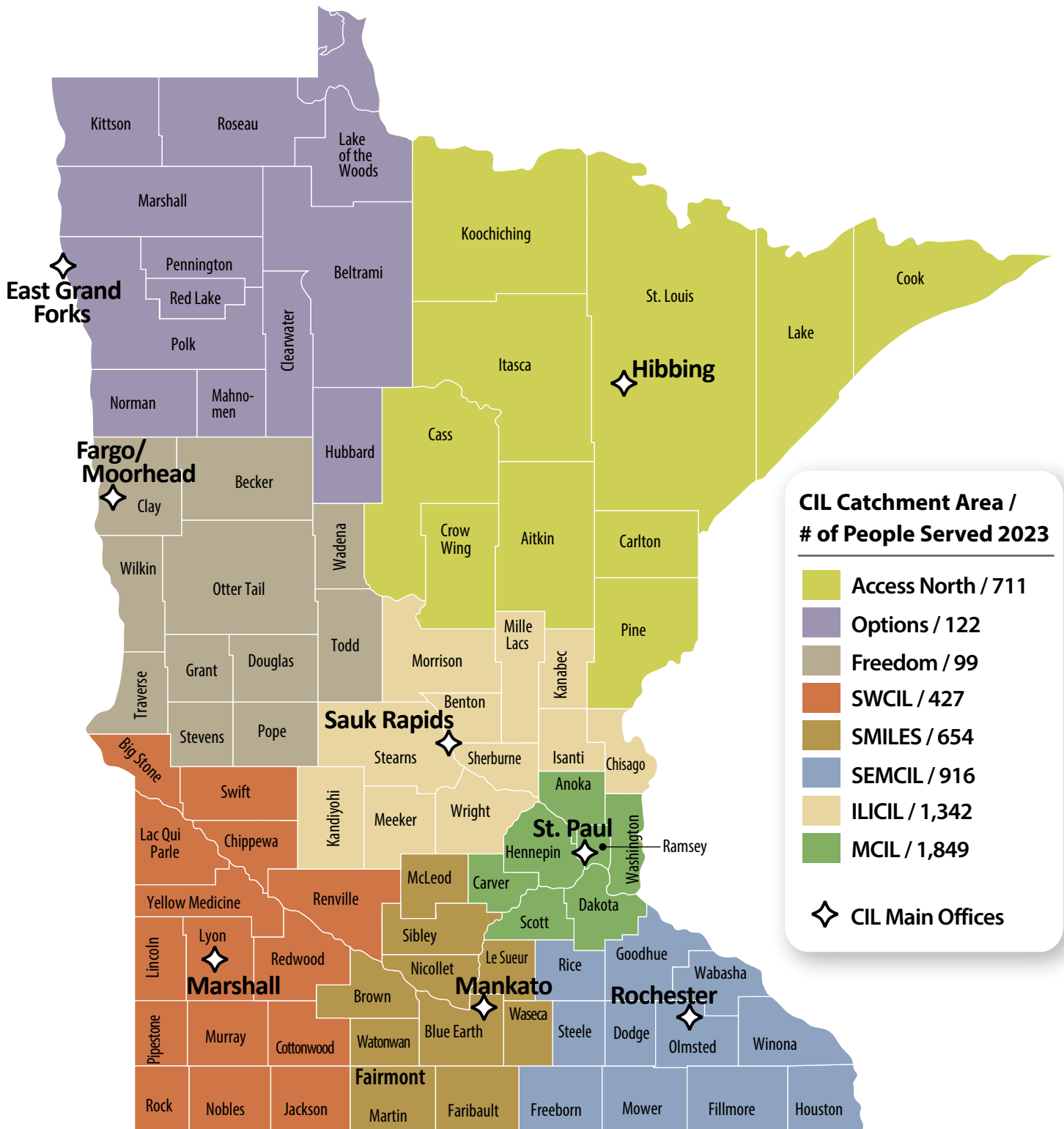


Total Number of People Served by Centers for Independent Living

In FFY 2023, 6,120 individuals were served by Minnesota’s eight CILs which provided a total 46,942 received services, including the Independent Living (IL) core services.



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



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
- Independent Living Research Utilization - ILRU
- National Association of Statewide Independent Living Councils – NASILC
- National Council on Independent Living - NCIL
- Department of Economic Development/Vocational Rehabilitation Services – DEED/VRS

- Minnesota Council on Disability - MCD
- Minnesota Department of Human Services - DHS
- Minnesota Department of Health
- Minnesota Governor Office, Tim Walz and LT Gov. Peggy Flanagan
- Minnesota Secretary of State
- Minnesota State Services for the Blind - SSB
- Olmstead Implementation Office - OIO
- 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 - NAMI
- National Federation of the Blind - NFB
- 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 or mnsilc1215@gmail.com or call: Jo Erbes, Coordinator at **612-518-1487** or **MN Relay at 711**.