

**STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
Holiday Inn Express, Minot & Virtual
Nov. 7 - 8, 2024**

Call to Order: Brittney Hogan called the meeting to order at 1:08 p.m. A quorum was present.

Roll Call:

Members Present: Ben Wolf Necklace, Nancy Lundon, Chelsy Sondrol, Brittney Hogan, Warren Granfor, Angie Bosch, Peter Yung, Scott Burlingame, Leon Dietrich, Hope Wolbert, Ali Brown, Joe Yasenchack, Shannon Bozovsky

Members Absent: Robyn Soiseth, Jan Beddes, Emma Leigh Miller

Non-Council Members Present: Aimee Volk, Royce Schulte, Cody Kurtz, Jim Fleming, Cody Kurtz

Approval of the November 2024 Agenda: Scott Burlingame, made a motion to approve the agenda as presented, Leon Dietrich seconded the motion. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

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

Correspondence – Brittney Hogan:

The State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) was officially approved for FFY 2025-2027. This was updated on the SILC website.

We will be working on completing the PPR with a due date of Jan. 31, 2025.

Treasurer's Report – Peter Yung:

Reviewed the Treasurer's Report.

Hope Wolbert made a motion to accept the Treasure's Report as presented, Warren Granfor seconded the motion to approve. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

Workforce Development Council – Pat Bertagnolli:

Pat presented on working throughout the state for Job Service of ND. To keep in-state jobs, it is good to present to students. 42% of jobs require a bachelor's degree or higher. He stated that a positive way to talk to students is to say that about 60% of jobs do not require a bachelor's degree or higher.

ND has the highest employment rate in the nation. The main problems are maintaining a labor force and keeping people in ND. When he was working in Watford City, he would ask his employees why their family (spouse and kids) didn't move with them. He realized this was a way to get families to move and retain employees.

He shared his “secret sauce” strategy for recruiting by doing 30-60-90 day check-ins. Creating a more personal base of questions such as “how is your family, was your paycheck accurate, how are you integrating in the community, do you have others that would like to work with us?”.

It is important to look at aligning work, school, and community. Strengthen relationships in the schools, get to know the future workforce (develop relationships with students), etc. He talked about programs that have been started and the influence it has had on communities.

There are several programs that he shared. They are partnering with Bismarck State College on a grant for the Career View XR virtual reality platform focusing on In-Demand jobs that they got through the Disability Innovation Funds (DIF).

Work-based learning in which they have four webinars on jobs.nd.gov. They have a job placement pilot program for individuals who are coming out of corrections. They have a podcast and host multiple job fairs.

Engage, Invite, Inspired – Be the Solution.

Workforce Solutions in Minot, ND – Mark Lyman, Minot Chamber EDC:

Their vision is to be the go-to organization for the business community to drive key initiatives that build and strengthen the economy. They have five key pillars: economic development, community development, workforce development, member-investor services, and military support.

It is valuable to be part of your local chambers. There is a website that was developed for new talent portal to attract newcomers through the Minot WayFinders Talent Portal www.magicinminot.com. [Find the Good Life Community Champions](#) and you will be matched with a person who can help you find job opportunities. ND Department of Commerce [Regional Workforce Impact Program](#) to provide grants for challenges and barriers to employment.

Roundtable - How to Solve Workforce Issues:

We engaged in an in-depth discussion about workforce dynamics, focusing on how each of our roles intersects with workforce development. Topics included supporting justice-involved individuals, employee retention strategies, and fostering a positive work environment.

For employee retention, we explored ways to highlight strengths and build on positive aspects within our teams. Suggestions included implementing initiatives such as job shadowing, hosting job fairs, and creating a culture of care where employees feel valued, connected, and supported. The importance of nurturing a family-like atmosphere—where team members are regularly asked about their well-being—was emphasized.

Additionally, we discussed marketing strategies and shared success stories to enhance our outreach efforts and community impact.

Committee Breakouts

Friday, Nov. 8, 2024

Call to Order: Brittney Hogan called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. A quorum was present.

Roll Call:

Members Present: Scott Burlingame, Brittney Hogan, Angie Bosch, Warren Granfor, Peter Yung, Shannon Bozovsky, Ali Brown, Nancy Lundon, Leon Dietrich, Hope Wolbert, Ben Wolf Necklace, Chelsy Sondrol

Members Absent: Robyn Soiseth, Jan Beddes, Emma Leigh Miller, Joe Yasenchack

Non-Committee Members: Aimee Volk, Royce Schultze, Cody Kurtz, Jana Johnson, Jim Fleming

Workforce Development Vocational Rehabilitation – Robyn Throlson:

Robyn thoroughly discussed the history of Vocational Rehabilitation. She reviewed the guidance and Rehab Act of 1973 and the Rehab Act of 1973, as amended. She reviewed what the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is and the changes that occurred as a result. She reviewed the major changes due to WIOA, and transition services (job exploration, work-based learning, and counseling for post-secondary education). Last year VR served over 2,000 students. VR is committed to working with employers and businesses to meet their workforce needs at no cost.

For FY 2023, North Dakota VR placed 737 individuals into employment. Prior to VR services, they earned an average of \$323.20 per week, and after VR services, they earned an average of \$627.00 per week. 4505 individuals received training and other services.

Barriers to employment was identified primarily as the lack of transportation, mental health challenges, and lack of natural support.

Robyn talked about what is on the horizon. There is a proposed rule of phasing out subminimum wage throughout the state. Artificial intelligence (AI) and what it looks like for participants but those are things to look for updates with.

Quarterly Director's Report:

Angie for Freedom.: See attached.

Royce for Dakota Center for Independent Living: See attached.

Scott for Independence, Inc.: See attached.

Randy for Options: See attached.

APRIL Conference Update – Shannon Bozovsky:

One seminar focused on a new website (<https://ruraloutreach.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/outreach-training/section-1-get-learning/>) that was from Montana focusing on rural outreach. Another seminar focused on community resource mapping. The conference really focused on boots on the ground. Agribility does not have a chapter in North Dakota but they spoke on mental health, burnout, and isolation for caregivers for those in the ag fields.

Committee Reports:

Governance Committee – Royce Schultze:

- Reappointments: Leon Dietrich 3/31/2025 and Ali Brown 3/31/2025
- Reappointments: Robyn Soiseth 6/30/2025 and Joe Yasenchack 6/30/2025

Nancy's 2nd term is up 6/30/2025 in quadrant 2. There is a replacement for Jan Beddes.

Internal Affairs – Nancy Ludson: On GRID.

External Affairs – Angie Bosch: On GRID.

State Rehabilitation Council: No report.

Committee on Aging – Royce Schultze: No report.

Olmstead Commission – Scott Burlingame: In Sept. it was reorganized, and they are reappointed.

NASILC: No report.

Public Comment: Leon Dietrich stated that there is a Legislative Training at 1601 E Century Ave in Bismarck on Dec. 17th.

The next SILC meeting will be Feb. 6-7, 2025, in Bismarck, ND and will have the virtual option.

Scott Burlingame made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Pete Yung seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 a.m.

ND SILC Director's Report – November 2024 - Freedom

Fargo News

An Attorney from the Department of Justice, District of North Dakota Fargo office along with the Subject Matter Expert working with the State of North Dakota through the MFP settlement agreement process, met with our staff on September 10, 2024; to discuss the work our Center is doing in North Dakota to help people move from a nursing home back into the community.

Freedom's 20th employee joined the team on Monday, September 16. Rebecca (Becky) Almer was hired as an Independent Living Advocate/Transition Coordinator and will work in North Dakota.

Protection and Advocacy in North Dakota brought an accessible voting machine for September's Freedom in Action. They were back with the machine later in the month for our all-staff meeting.

A retreat was held on Monday, October 28 for our staff. Freedom has not held this type of staff retreat for almost a decade. We have so many new staff members that it was a nice way to get to know each other better.

Consumer Story

From Katelyn Vilmo, Independent Living Advocate, Fargo office

There's a consumer who has been working with FRC since January 2018. She's been struggling with communication issues between Schneider Law, SSA (Social Security Administration), VR (Vocational Rehabilitation), and ND WSI (North Dakota Workforce Safety and Insurance - workman's comp). These communication issues resulted in her being told that SSA was made aware of her WSI payments, but she later found out they were not made aware. This resulted in her having an overpayment with both WSI and SSA. She's been struggling with this since the time she came to FRC. She started addressing it with me again this year. Things escalated to the point where SSA is now withholding some funds and she's experiencing a great deal of financial stress. Schneider Law told me they can't help with this because they won't get paid for it. We contacted Reitan Law after finding out that Ficek Law can't help. Reitan Law usually charges a retainer fee if a law firm was previously involved with SSA cases. An Attorney at Reitan Law did see the email exchanges that Schneider Law and I had regarding their denial of services. Due to that, the attorney at Reitan Law was expressing a great interest in helping this consumer due to the barriers put in place.

MFP/TDPP Updates

The **North Dakota Transition and Diversion Services Pilot Project** or **TDPP** had **53** referrals from July through September. From these referrals TDPP assisted **40** consumers with successful transitions during this quarter.

Money Follows the Person (MFP) has had **33** referrals from July through September with **20** successful transitions to the community of their choice. The state administration team we work with for transition continues to be amazed at the number of transitions Freedom Resource Center is doing in the state.

MFP- Fargo highlights from our IL Advocate/Transition Coordinator: Irina Schanilec

I have been busy with over 27 MFP consumers on my caseload and have been assigned two more new referrals in the past week. I am happy that another IL Advocate was hired to take on some of the new referrals coming in. I am looking forward to working with her! I was asked by HERO, who is another local non-profit agency we partner with very often on transitions, to do a testimonial for their annual fundraiser. I participated in a video testimonial and was invited to represent Freedom in

person at their event. I also participate in the FM Coalition of Senior Service Providers every other month.

This month I have two transitions who have waited over a year in long term facilities to finally transition. One in particular, I started working with in August 2023. She is only in her 40's and has been living in a SNF (skilled nursing facility) since an accident several years ago which caused her disabilities. She had many barriers to transition including communication barriers (she is nearly non-verbal), rental history, criminal record and zero income due to Social Security withholding her payments. She also wanted to meet some therapy goals prior to transition (such as having her feeding tube removed, which she has since accomplished). She strongly desired to live with her daughter and granddaughter, and getting all family on the same page and being able to assist them separately (since the other two individuals in the household are not MFP eligible) has been challenging and taken many long months. Our MFP team has been instrumental in addressing these barriers one at a time, and making this transition happen, and even some of the other IL advocates in Fargo have pitched in.

Our MFP team was able to get the consumer's past due debt cleared and contacted the States Attorney to get her warrants cancelled. We found out her income was being withheld due to misinformation; SS was treating her case on the premise that she was incarcerated this whole time, which was false. I assisted the consumer with filling out reconsideration forms and getting them submitted along with proof from the several institutions she had been residing in during this time. After all the work to address these barriers, the consumer was denied her apartment application at Goldmark due to the past eviction, which was still on her record. No appeal was accepted. She started considering an agency foster home as an alternative, which would have meant not being able to live with her daughter and granddaughter.

Last month MFP assisted the consumer to apply for another apartment with ABT Properties. Although she was again denied, we worked on an appeal by writing several letters and making several calls and her appeal went through, she was accepted! I assisted the consumer write an appeal letter on her own behalf, in which she talked about her accident that changed her life; she stated is ready to turn her life around wants to be close to her daughter and granddaughter, and feels she is too young to live in the nursing home forever. The apartment is a 3-bedroom for all three individuals, and it is accessible for her. To say she is happy about this outcome is an understatement. Her smile and happiness when talking of their new place, lights up the whole room. She is very excited to finally get to live with her "girls".

TDPP (ADRL) - Fargo highlights from our IL Advocate/Transition Coordinator: Gibb Sheets
There have been a ton of transitions lately. One week we had 5 or 6 different people moving to new places that were more accessible for them. One of the more memorable moves was helping someone move out of the Bethany Towers into some senior living apartments in Fargo. This man was a minister his entire life and was just under the work credits to get SSI. We helped find him a nice quiet apartment that was spacious and on the 1st floor. We then assisted him with setting up services to reduce his monthly costs. We worked to get him SNAP benefits, LIHEAP (to reduce his electrical bill), and get him signed up to get a housing voucher. He said eventually he would like to work a little bit to get that last quarter of work, but for now he is very happy at his current place and was very glad to get out of Bethany Towers where he barely had any room to live. He seemed a bit lost working the system and I was happy to help him work to get the right services in place so he can live a more independent life within the community.

TDPP (ADRL) - Fargo highlights from our IL Advocate/Transition Coordinator: Luke Boucher
I have been working at Freedom Resource Center for 6 months now. In my short time here, I've navigated some difficult situations. Most of my transitions have been routine. However, each has had

its own unique challenges.

My consumer was in and out of facilities for the majority of 2024. He came back to his apartment in Fargo for only 10 days before he had an accident. He ended up back at a rehab facility. I received the referral for him and worked for 2 months to coordinate his move to a new apartment. He was involved but found it difficult to do much of anything from the rehab facility. He had many requests and concerns which led to a difficult list to manage. We found him a two-bedroom apartment that met the cost of his one-bedroom section 8 voucher. He started to feel excited but also nervous. The week of his transition was my most challenging week with Freedom Resource Center. There were dozens of things that needed to be juggled. From specific items to grab, to a mistreated cat, to a surprise squatter roommate. The consumer was also juggling the costs of his rehab facility and just trying to get as much done from his there as he could. Eventually the day came and he moved in. Over the course of the past several weeks since he moved, he's told me how much he loves his new place. He loves to sit outside on the balcony and play his guitar. He's even expressed interest in becoming a peer mentor with Freedom.

None of the things I achieved for this transition would have been made possible without the amazing team here. Merri was vital in helping me navigate the complex details of this case. The other advocates stepped in to help make it all manageable as well. Through this experience and the others I've had here at FRC I've grown both personally and professionally more than any other experience.

Jamestown

Jamestown Highlights from our IL Advocate Ashley Gabehart

The fall school year has already started. I was able to attend a couple IEP meetings for the returning transition class students in Valley City. This year I will be starting my second full year of involvement with the transition class with students ages 18-21. We will be starting with learning Money Smart this year. Budgeting has been a subject that has been difficult for the students to learn so going through this curriculum with them will be beneficial. Over the summer I was able to teach Living Well 101 to a small group here at the Jamestown office. There is a Living Well 102 class currently going on Thursday afternoons at the Jamestown office. Teaching independent living skill classes has been so fun and rewarding. I have had some interest in individuals wanting help studying for their permit test and I have one active consumer in Valley City currently working on that as a goal. Last month the subject of the Young Adult Gatherings in Jamestown and Valley City was game night. We played a round of Trouble, and everyone had a good time. As always, I enjoy working with and building relationships with consumers, walk-ins, other professionals, and the community.

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

The past few months have been busy. One of the consumers that I have been working with is a young man that has not been able to leave their home independently. His mother and her fiancé had to carry his wheelchair and then him down the stairs of the home for him to go anywhere. They needed a ramp to assist him with being independent. I applied for the Rehab Accessibility Program Project Certification grant, and he was approved. They paid \$5000 toward the final cost of the ramp and the Transition and Diversion Pilot Project will pay the remaining portion. The addition of the ramp has made it much easier for him and his family to enjoy going places and they are so appreciative. Next Day Access is not finished yet. The family reached out and said that the young man isn't able to access the backyard because the sidewalk is covered so they are returning to correct this.

I have also been busy with young consumers who are moving out of parents' or grandparents' homes into their own apartments that qualify for the Transition and Diversion Pilot Project. It is always exciting to assist young people in diverting and being able to be independent.

At the end of last month, I also experienced my first loss of a consumer I had worked with for over a year. I started in May of last year and received his referral in July. He was a difficult gentleman that pushed people away as a defense mechanism but once I showed that I could be trusted, he shared with me his horrible hurtful life story. I am so thankful that Freedom Resource Center, Julie (housing facilitator) and I were able to be a part of the last year with him. We all showed him that he was deserving of kindness and deserving of a roof over his head that wasn't in an institution. I'm so proud to work here.

Lisbon

Kristine Green – IL Advocate: This month marks my one year with Freedom. I have transitioned 14 consumers over the past year, and it has been a joy watching each of them flourish in their new environments. I believe my aha moments are the looks of excitement on their faces when I can do home visits. I currently have Consumers in Lisbon, Sheldon, Ellendale, Ashley, Alice, Milnor, Oakes, Lehr, Rutland, and Fort Ransom.

I have been working with a TDPP Consumer who was set to terminate (as their 90 days were up) and I went to see this Consumer last week. We went through a lot of things while I was there and I realized she needed to visit with her Housing Facilitator, and HCBS Case Manager about some things and needed a few extra things from me as well. I requested to extend her time through TDPP and was granted that. I also reached out to her Housing Facilitator and HCBS Case Manager. On Monday of this week, I received a call from this Consumer thanking me, and she stated if she needs anything done, she knows just who to call now. This Consumer told me I was just like Gold and couldn't thank me enough. This is why I love my job!

Wahpeton

Raegan Klosterman – IL Advocate: I have been working at Freedom Resource Center for about five months now and have been loving every second of it! I have been gaining so much knowledge ever since I started working here and continue to learn every day. Much of my time I spend on the TDPP and MFP programs. I enjoy these programs and have really learned how to interact with consumers professionally but also compassionately. I have also really gotten to know all my team members throughout the state who help with transitions, whether that be Housing and Community Based Services, Housing Facilitators, or the Administrative Staff. My most favorite thing that I think I get to do daily, is create relationships with the businesses in Wahpeton/Breckenridge. I have formed a great (professional) relationship with the owners of Slims Home Furnishings in Breckenridge, where I purchase the majority of my furniture for consumers. They love the work we do and are happy to help every time I walk into the store and give great discounts.

I am also learning the realm of advocacy, especially with IEP meetings. I have attended a few of these IEP meetings with the school staff involved. I have done much research on laws and rights within the school system for individuals with disabilities and continue to learn how to do the best advocacy I can for them.

Quote from one of Raegan's TDPP Consumers: "I can't say enough. You guys have done so much and gone above and beyond for me. I've had many people treat me wrong in the past and you guys have been blessings. I'm proud of the work you guys do."

Event Updates

Wanda Lokhorst – Office Coordinator: We celebrated our 35th Anniversary on Thursday, September 19th. Angie went on KFGO with Tyler on Monday to talk about the event. The day of the event, we

had 100+ people show up in support. We were able to do the ribbon cutting outside with all the fun happening indoors. Those who helped cut the ribbon were Draisey, Angie, Cindy, Leigh, Joyce, Michelle, and Wanda. We had 3 giveaways. Winners were Marco Bose Bluetooth Speaker—Kyra Kainz, 4 Tubing Tickets to Detroit Mountain—Sheila Fowler, and the Discovery Flight—Jeff Knoll. Each winner was called to let them know of their winnings. We had a full conference room of people playing BINGO. Seemed to really be a hit and people enjoyed winning the gift cards. Overall, the event went great, with lots of great conversations and new relationships built.

The next events we will be planning for are Giving Heart's Day (February 13th, 2025), the Appreciation Luncheon (May 8th, 2025), and the Resource Fair (July 2025) this event was put on hold temporarily but plan to start back up with plans again in October.

ND Accessibility Projects/Updates

Jen Erickson – IL Advocate/Accessibility Specialist: Voting poll site surveys wrapped up August 30th. 18 site reviews in 8 counties with a majority of them at Community Centers/Halls and Courthouses. Compliance issues with slope/cross-slope of exterior paths of travel (sidewalks) exceeding 2% standard and absence of proper parking signage and paint (particularly in very small/rural communities). Many auditors/election officials expressing receptiveness toward identifying and implementing access solutions for election day.

Dakota Director's Report – November 2024

Staff Vacancies

IL Advocate Dickinson

Community Education

Staff continue doing Understanding Your Disability Series. Topics were combing the brain chatter,

Set up informational booths at Veterans Stand Down, Parkinson's Conference and Project Service Connect.

Held our Annual Health and Wellness Fair at TouchMark. There were 11 vendors including Gateway Pharmacy, Bismarck Cancer Center, Missouri Slope in Homecare, Parkinson's Association, Brain Injury Network, NoDak Med Alert, and P & A. Approximately 88 people attended.

Staff attended and set up a booth at the annual Vocational Rehabilitation Conference

Staff gave a presentation on the History of Independent Living and DCIL services and programs at the 2024 ND LGBTQIA2S+ Summit.

Staff participated in a panel for Project A.C.E (Action, Commitment, Education) and talked about MFP and TDPP programs.

Technical Assistance

Staff completed 28 accessibility surveys of polling sites.

Staff was interviewed by a student in the NDSU Architectural Program. The student was designing an accessible home in a competition sponsored by AARP and Miller Windows. She was looking for information on features that made living day-to-day life and inconvenience and accessible features that staff is currently using.

Success Stories/Comments

A consumer would like everyone who has helped him to know that if it wasn't for this program he would never have been able to move to a place that he felt safe and comfortable. He truly feels that this program has helped him get his life and health back on track.

Everything is going great! I got approved for financial assistance, all of my unpaid bills are covered 100%!

I just wanted to share this with you and say thanks for all your help. It means so much to me that you take the time to help me and others.

Keep doing what you're doing and be proud of what you do. You make a world of difference.

A consumer who had a stroke a few years ago and has not been able to take care of herself since. She received a new bed with an adjustable base, lift recliner, shower chair, shower head, toilet riser, and other adaptive equipment to help her throughout her home. She was ecstatic when the furniture company arrived, and she got to sign the delivery papers herself with her signature stamper that was purchased for her. She has not been able to write her name since the stroke and she said it felt great to be able to do it herself again. She is very thankful for the help she has received and grateful that her new items will give her some of her independence back.

I just watched an IL Advocate work with an elderly lady who is a new consumer. This consumer needed help filling out Medicare/Medicaid forms. The IL Advocate had me call A transition coordinator up to help answer questions and help with the process. I watched AHHHHMAZING teamwork to make this woman feel at ease, and it was such a great process to witness!

We have some true earth angels working here ❤️

Options Interstate Resource Center for Independent Living - Directors Report for Nov. 2024

North Dakota Centers for Independent Living in collaboration with the North Dakota Protection and Advocacy Program participated in surveying various voting sites in North Dakota. As part of this effort Options evaluated 16 sites throughout its North Dakota Service area. Independence CIL coordinated the Centers' efforts by acting as the liaison between the Centers and P&A.

Options Access Specialist continued Options work with Hampton Estates by conducting evaluations of its apartment buildings in Fargo and Grand Forks. These are based on a lawsuit against Hampton Estates for disability discrimination. Options' role is to assess those features that were found out of compliance to ensure after renovation they fulfilled the court order to bring them into compliance with the Fair Housing Act accessibility codes.

The Harvey Post Office's accessibility was evaluated by the Accessibility Specialist and found to have various features out of compliance including its ramp and entrance thresholds. The information collected will be used as a basis to file a complaint with the United States Access Board in the next quarter.

A local pharmacy with multiple locations was evaluated in Harvey at the request of a consumer having trouble entering one of the locations. The evaluation found the store's entrance is out of compliance due to the exterior alcove size of the entrance approach. Options is awaiting direction from the Consumer on whether a complaint will be filed or a letter written.

A local Realtor Agent contacted Options to donate a 30' aluminum ramp from a home being sold. The ramp was disassembled and is in storage awaiting a party to decide if they would like it for their Senior Parent.

Options Access Specialist evaluated 10 homes to provide the occupants with access information regarding their residences. When a referral is received the Access Specialist will define the issues with the parties, provide an access evaluation, and go over what is found with the family while determining if further assistance is needed in the area of funding, applications to funders, how to identify a contractor, bidding processes, etc. The features commonly evaluated include the need for a ramp, the entrances, bathroom features, kitchen, and the homes routes of travel.

Options continues to provide individuals in need with durable medical equipment and other access items such as Hoyer lifts, electric mobility devices, and other donated items. Options assisted over 100 people in fulfilling their needs through the program.

Options has continued to provide outreach to various referral sources and has been part of various outreach events designed to raise the public's awareness of Options services. The events have been community-wide events involving many not-for-profit providers, school transition events, single disability events, and pointed outreach to residential facilities or disability service providers. Many of the events are designed to reach unserved/underserved populations.

In July Options had advocated that the North Dakota Outdoor Heritage Funding Applications include assurances that the grantee will fulfill any access requirements related to the project, to possibly go farther and require grantees to fulfill the requirements for Outdoor Developed Areas and for Public Rights of Way. Since this request was emailed no response has been received so Options plans on

emailing each of the Committee Members individually. Options had evaluated some of the projects that received funding found within its service areas and found many instances of non-compliance to the access code.

Options has continued to work directly with people through the provision of Information and Referral Services and Direct Services. In the area of Direct Service Options has provided service to four hundred and twenty-six people. Of those served persons with physical disabilities were the largest group followed by persons with Mental Illness, Cognitive disabilities and Sensory disabilities. Caucasians were the largest group served followed by Native Americans, Hispanics, and African Americans. The largest service requested was Independent Living Skills. Of the almost fifteen thousand hours of Direct Service provided over 10% of the time was spent traveling to see Consumers.

**North Dakota SILC - Directors Report-Independence, Inc.
Scott Burlingame, Executive Director - 11/8/24**

Intro

This report marks a departure from previous ones. Instead of focusing solely on the “what” of our work, I want to take this opportunity to emphasize the “who” and the “why” behind our mission at Independence, Inc. We are at a pivotal moment in our history, a time of transition that calls us to reaffirm our core values and the reasons we exist.

Independence, Inc. has been more than a service provider; we have been advocates, allies, and a voice for individuals with disabilities, grounded in the principles of the Independent Living movement. Our work has always been about championing independence, choice, and dignity, and this commitment shapes not only our services but also our identity as a community-led organization.

As we navigate new challenges and shifts in funding, policies, and community needs, it’s crucial to revisit what drives us. Our recent strategic planning process was an opportunity to do just that. We listened to voices within and beyond our organization, examined the changing landscape, and identified ways to better align our actions with our philosophy of independent living.

Eligibility Changes to the Transition and Diversion Services Pilot Project

Centers for Independent Living (CILs) are deeply rooted in the Civil Rights movement, serving people of all ages and disabilities. We recognize that issues facing people with disabilities are sociological, political, cultural, and economic, and we are committed to challenging these barriers to create a more inclusive society.

Our legislative mandate requires us to serve individuals with all types of disabilities equally. However, as CILs, we are also required to engage in resource development to secure additional funding, which is why we offer programs like Money Follows the Person (MFP), Transition and Diversion Services Pilot Project (TDSPP), Free Through Recovery (FTR), Community Connect, Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), and others.

Occasionally, this dual mandate—serving all disabilities and securing external funding—leads to conflicts in our mission.

As of October 24, 2024, eligibility criteria for the TDPP changed. This program will now support transitions only for individuals leaving facilities such as nursing homes, basic care facilities, assisted living facilities, medical hospitals, Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities (ICF/IID), or other group home settings for developmental disabilities. Assistance for transitions from Substance Use Treatment, Mental Health Treatment, Sober Living or Recovery Housing, Transitional Living settings, Youth Treatment Facilities, Psychiatric Care Hospitals, Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities, Domestic Violence Shelters, etc. has been discontinued. This change reduces funding for people with disabilities transitioning from these types of facilities, limiting access to transition assistance and case management support.

While Adult and Aging Services has prioritized limited funding for their target populations, CILs still have a responsibility to address the needs of those no longer eligible under TDSPP. However, without a significant increase in core funding—unchanged for nearly a decade—meeting these needs will continue to be a challenge.

Strategic Plan and Objectives

Over the past few months, the staff and board of Independence, Inc. embarked on developing a new strategic plan. We dedicated significant time to examining the strengths and weaknesses of our community, as well as the internal opportunities and challenges we face as an organization. This collaborative effort included input from key stakeholders, community members, and staff to ensure we align with the needs of those we serve. After extensive discussion and thoughtful analysis, we established three core strategic objectives to guide our work moving forward:

1. Independence Inc. will be the preferred employer for those committed to empowering people with disabilities.
2. Independence Inc. will be the provider of choice for people with disabilities, driven by our commitment independent living philosophy and peer-led services.
3. Independence Inc. will increase awareness by telling the story of our impact, sharing the successes we achieve and highlighting the unique value of our organization.

Staff Report

Rather than asking my team members to give me success/barrier stories, I decided to ask them each what they like about working at Independence, Inc. Here are the answers I got:

- I find great fulfillment working at Independence, Inc. because I can assist individuals with disabilities in finding the resources they need and connecting with their community. It's rewarding to help them gain independence and live more freely.
- I like working for Independence, Inc. because it gives me the opportunity to reach a population in our community that tends to get overlooked. I love being able to assist people with getting involved in the community and see them continue to live independently. I have had the opportunity to help people when they no longer believe in themselves and are at the lowest they have ever been, then get jobs, roofs over their heads and start on the positive side of things.
- My favorite part of my job is building relationships with my students. They feel comfortable and confident around me and enjoy coming to my classes. In return, they participate in the lessons and learn important life skills like finding a job, a place to live, budgeting, and self-advocacy
- One of the things I love most about my work is the chance to help people find answers and develop solutions that make their lives better. It's fulfilling to take on barriers and find strategies to work through them. The learning never really stops, which keeps the work interesting. Working at Independence, Inc., also provides a unique sense of purpose as we are empowering people to navigate and shape their own lives. Our collaboration with different programs/agencies really help target those that sometimes don't think they have a voice, take control of their life.
- I like the fact that Independence, Inc. is a local nonprofit that is locally run by people with disabilities. This flexibility gives us the opportunity to be creative and innovative in meeting the unique needs of people with disabilities in our service area.
- I enjoy being able to help change people's lives. For some people they have never had help before and here we get to offer that help. I work with a great team that are very supportive of each other. It is a good environment.
- I really love helping out consumers start a new chapter in their life, whether it's coming from the nursing home or in their recovery. There are a lot of jobs that are thankless, but most of our consumers that we help are so thankful and appreciative and it's nice to know our work is valued.
- I enjoy my work as an Independent Living Advocate because I get the opportunity to help others. I am able to do things alongside the people we serve, as a support, rather than the guide - we work together to help the consumer achieve goals they have set forth themselves and encourage them to take the lead in achieving those goals. Being

in a position where I can work with someone to empower them when they oftentimes feel they are at their lowest points, or facing seemingly impossible barriers, is extremely rewarding - especially when we can see the shift in the consumer's sense of confidence and self-assurance at the end of their journey.

- I enjoy working at Independence, Inc. for a multitude of reasons; the flexibility, the teamwork, the positivity, etc. But, at the end of the day, it's the feel good, rewarding work we do that makes it such an enjoyable experience. Knowing we are able to help those in need is such a blessing.
- I am a woman in recovery and I once was a consumer for Independence, Inc. when I started my recovery journey. Independence helped me in so many ways to maintain a healthy lifestyle it's a big reason why my sobriety stuck after my many attempts at recovery from substance abuse and alcoholism. I enjoy working here at Independence, Inc. because we get to serve the community and I work side by side with people with disabilities just like me. I love the team work here and the friendly atmosphere of Independence, Inc.
- My entire life I was surrounded by people who suffered from mental health and addiction. As I grew into my teens and adulthood- instead of making a change or a difference, I soon became a part of the cycle. I wanted better, so I did better. I reached out and got the support and help I needed for myself and my son Independence Inc. does exactly that. They give the people we serve that choice, that motivation, that support and the resources to accomplish all of their goals. I am proud to be a part of this team and fulfill my passion in helping people.
- I love the impact our organization has on people with disabilities, regardless of what that disability may be. In a lot of cases when other agencies are pushing people away, we are working tirelessly to make sure they are getting the resources they need.
- I have been with Independence since 2012, I am proud of how we have developed programming and diversified our funding sources to assist people with all types of disabilities and ages. We begin by creating a youth program that is taught in approximately 23 schools. Students every year give great feedback on how this program has led them to feel prepared for their future, we also make students aware of our CIL and how we are always available to help them when they leave school, and have had multiple students reach out to us to work on their goals after they leave high school.
- Next, I am proud of the work we have done in the Free Through Recovery and Community Connect Programs to help people within their recovery journey, and who are part of the criminal justice system. There have been multiple success stories and we were able to help many people get on the right path in life through our programming. Lastly, I'm proud of the work CILs have done on a statewide level to transition people into their own homes from Nursing Homes, Substance use facilities and other facilities. Through our programming with MFP and TDPP we have served record numbers. We all have hard jobs, but our impact on the lives we make is why I continue to work at Independence, Inc.

Staffing Update

At one point in September, we had six openings (out of 17 positions). The reasons people left ranged from moving out of state, to health reason, to getting jobs elsewhere. At this point, we have hired two spots back, and we have another new person starting on Tuesday. We currently are looking for a full time Independent Living Specialist in Minot and Independent Living Advocate in Bottineau. Our Community Relations Specialist is open, however we are evaluating the future of that position.