

Many bills in the hopper for session

It's been a fast start for the 2023 Minnesota Legislature, and disability community advocates are rushing to keep their issues at the forefront.

Typically the first weeks of session are spent on committee organization and informational hearings. That is still true, and still needed with almost 30 percent of state lawmakers stepping in for the first time. But lawmakers have already taken a deep dive into key issues ranging from taxes, legalization of marijuana, paid family leave and abortion rights.

Gov. Tim Walz began releasing pieces of his proposed budget in January. One big issue is that of Minnesota's workforce, including the workforce for people with disabilities and elders. Much attention is being paid to the personal care attendant and home care workforce shortage, which has become catastrophic and even fatal in some cases.

One family testifying on that issue is the family of Dennis "Denny" Prothero. Prothero died in December after months of inadequate care, which led to amputations and health issues. His family members had to struggle to provide care, without adequate training and support.

As of mid-January more than 2,000 bills had been dropped into the hopper for consideration. That number of bills is typical what legislators see in an entire regular session. That could be indicative of a commitment to many accomplishments this session, but it could also put more roadblocks in the way of disability community issues.

An issue disability community leaders have noted is that it has been taking longer than usual to get bills jacketed and on their way. (The jacket usually contains the bill number, names or signatures of the bill's authors, and a dated tracking of the bill's progress through both chambers of the legislature. Jackets are needed for bills to move ahead.)

Advocates with legislative proposals are being reminded to follow up with House and Senate authors to make sure that bills are moving ahead in a timely manner. The first deadline for committee action on bills is Friday, March 10.

Rallies and resources

As more in-person activities return to the capitol, it's time to get involved. The 2023 Disability Advocacy Week is February 13-17, with the theme of Love. Liberation. Belonging.

Monday, February 13 is a virtual learning event, where advocates can join leaders, lobbyists, and policymakers - all people with disabilities - to learn effective advocacy strategies. The tips and tools they share can help participants get ready for meetings with elected officials.

The event is 6-7:15 p.m. ASL and CART will be provided. It will be on Zoom and registration is required. Register at shorturl.at/DFRT6

Tuesday, February 14 is the rally day. Event co-hosts will share information about their policy priorities this session, and

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Activists including Rick Cardenas, center, celebrated when the skyway tower opened in 2014.

Double homicide closes link to St. Paul downtown skyway

Stout chains and padlocks on the doors told the story. St. Paul's downtown skyway tower remained inaccessible through January. People with disabilities have to trek at least a block away for elevator access, which is closed during overnight hours.

The skyway tower, which was at the center of a high-profile accessibility battle a decade ago, was closed in late December. It will remain closed until physical changes can be made to the structure. Both the tower building and a portion of the adjoining skyway connection to the Alliance Bank Center and St. Paul Athletic Club buildings are owned and operated by Metro Transit.

That means people with disabilities who rely on the tower elevator must travel to the bank building to use the elevator there.

The skyway and its elevator are lifelines for people with disabilities who

live and work downtown. It is adjacent to the Green Line light rail Central Station, and to major bus stops.

The tower closed in the wake of a mid-December shooting, in which two men died. St. Paul and Metro Transit Police departments said safety changes need to be made in the skyway tower and connecting skyways before it can reopen.

One issue is that people loiter and use the windows as a lookout. Many windows will be covered to deter that behavior. Interim Metro Transit Police Chief Rick Gates described the longtime situation as a "perch" where people who commit crimes can watch out for potential victims.

In the meantime, Metro Transit has brought in private security guards to help them patrol the skyways. More cameras to add to the ones already in the area, and even an intercom system are being

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SEIU Healthcare pay pact lauded but will it be enough?

Pay increases should be coming for direct support workers, who provide care to Minnesotans with disabilities. But will those wage increases be enough?

Debate has flared on social media over the SEIU Healthcare Minnesota & Iowa announcement that starting wages could rise from \$15.25 to \$20 per hour by 2025 for new workers. Experienced staff could see additional wage increases.

The 31 percent increase is seen as way to bring new workers to a field where they are desperately needed. Union leaders, people with disabilities and their family members applauded the negotiated contracts, which goes to union members, then the Minnesota Legislature and Gov. Tim Walz for approvals. If the contract is signed by Walz, it goes into effect July 1.

The pact would cover more than 20,000 caregivers across the state. Walz praised the measure, calling it "historic." The contract would cover between one-fourth to one-third of the state's home care providers.

The broader industry of roughly 100,000 personal care and home health aides has been strained to the limit. More people with disabilities and elders need services but cannot hire staff.

The agreement includes a historic wage increase, raising wages for new workers from \$15.25 to \$20 by 2025.



Caregivers could see wages increase if a new agreement wins approval.

The agreement also takes important steps toward professionalizing home care in Minnesota, establishing a wage scale to provide higher pay based on experience in the field for the first time and ensuring that all new caregivers entering the workforce receive a high-quality orientation.

But is the proposed wage increase

enough, in light of a general labor shortage where even fast food workers can make more than \$20 per hour? Members of a Facebook group called Waiver Reimagine Minnesota DHS Disability RIGHTS Issues have debated the proposed increase. One poster, Kathy K Dub, has a child with disabilities. She

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EDITORIAL

Look at ways Minnesota can reduce barriers to higher education

Barriers to higher education and meaningful employment are a sad fact of life for too many of us with disabilities. Some of us who are still working missed out on the era when individualized education programs or IEPs were introduced. We older workers had to struggle without services and supports for our education.

Too many of us, of all ages, still cope with workplace stereotypes and discrimination. We look at our working lives and wonder what else there could be or could have been. That is true for people with all types of disabilities and not just those of us who remember some pretty blatant discrimination over the years.

It is as if we can never get ahead. Or as a parent we know said recently, we live in a world that has very little time for those who struggle.

It was striking to listen to a young speaker at the recent Minnesota Council on Disability legislative update, who spoke of his desire to get an education beyond what high school can offer. He spoke of the barriers faced and of how higher education may be just a wish at this point. Many of us at the virtual meeting could relate to wanting what could be a life-changing experience.

There are also those of us who would simply like to take a college class once in a while. Maybe we are young and would like an overview of what college would be like. Or maybe there is a topic that piques an interest. Low-income working people with disabilities often find that even taking a single course can be financially out of reach.

Bills before the 2023 Minnesota Legislature could change that. And we

It was striking to listen to a young speaker at the recent Minnesota Council on Disability legislative update, who spoke of his desire to get an education beyond what high school can offer. He spoke of the barriers faced and of how higher education may just be a wish at this point. Many of us...could relate to wanting what could be a life-changing experience.

say it's about time.

Many efforts are aimed toward inclusion and we'd urge our community members to get involved with the issues that meet their needs. From trying to ensure that parents with disabilities are fully included in their children's IEP processes to calling out schools personnel for withholding recess to not be a form of punishment ... there's plenty to get behind and speak out about.

We'd like to focus on higher education. One bill would expand the access to college discount program. Currently Minnesotans ages 62 and older can take college courses at a rate of \$25 to \$75 per class at any school in the Minnesota state system. The change sought is to expand access to those college credit rates to

any individual who accesses disability services. That is meant to open a door to postsecondary education to more people.

The second education-related change sought is tied into a larger package of accessibility needs. The bill language focused on higher education calls for inclusive higher education statewide. At this time, capacity for and access to higher education for students with intellectual disabilities statewide is very limited.

The intent is to provide technical assistance and grant funding to public colleges and universities throughout Minnesota, to launch or enhance higher education initiatives.

Currently only a few schools offer such programs. Results have been challenging

to track. The Bethel University Inclusive Learning and Development (BUILD) program was launched to high praise several years ago. The BUILD program is touted as an inclusive two-year certificate program where students learn to live as independently as possible, maintain meaningful employment and value lifelong learning.

BUILD has been lauded as one of a few such programs in Minnesota to give students with intellectual disabilities a chance to experience college life. But in late 2018 Bethel was sued by the parents of one former BUILD student, who claimed that their student was discriminated against.

BUILD has evolved over the years but that case illustrated the challenges of providing a truly inclusive higher education. Bethel leadership admitted that the student in the legal case hadn't received the educational experience he and his family had envisioned.

That's why the promise of higher education has to be approached carefully. We know too many people, of all abilities, who never were able to get that well-paying job and meaningful career even with a degree or degrees. A degree is not a golden ticket.

We'd also like to see a focus on the trades for people with disabilities when that can be considered. Not everyone needs a four-year degree or that educational experience. Jobs in the trades can pay well and offer opportunities for advancement.

But we applaud efforts to open educational opportunities to all. It's way overdue.



HISTORY NOTE

Minnesota North Stars were champions to these hockey players

Special Olympics of Minnesota celebrates 50 years of sports competition and camaraderie in 2023. The program opened its doors as an accredited program of the Special Olympics in 1973, providing fun and competition for people with developmental disabilities.

Today Special Olympics Minnesota offers five annual statewide competitions, six regional competitions, almost 100 area events, training programs for 3,300 coaches and opportunities for 14,000 volunteers. Athletes can also take part in its Healthy Athletes and Athlete Leadership Programs. With 17 sports, there is certainly something for everyone.

It's hard to believe that years ago, it was unheard of for people with any type of disabilities to enjoy sports as competitors. The Special Olympics have their roots in the Kennedy family's work on behalf of people with developmental disabilities, which began in the 1950s and 1960s. Eunice Kennedy Shriver was an early proponent of sports and activities

for people with disabilities, even holding a summer day camp and sports activities in her home's backyard.

Shriver was the driving force behind her brother President John F. Kennedy's White House panel on people with intellectual disabilities, and also led the work of her family's Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation. The foundation is named for the family's eldest brother, who was killed in World War II.

The first major Special Olympics event was held in 1968 at Soldier Field in Chicago, with 1,000 young athletes with developmental disabilities. The Kennedy Foundation and Chicago Park District sponsored the event, with 85 groups from 25 states competing.

Special Olympics competitions in Minnesota started a few years before the formation of Special Olympics Minnesota itself. We find some of the first newspaper references in the late 1960s. The early statewide sponsor was the Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC)

Minnesota, working with the Kennedy Foundation. Some of the first state meets were held at Macalester College in St. Paul. The state had seven regions for athletes to compete in.

Some early athletes had "stars" in their eyes. In 1969, the Minnesota North Stars professional hockey team joined with the 11 other National Hockey League teams to launch an event at the Canadian Special Olympics.

The North Stars generously financed a trip for a Minnesota floor hockey team to compete in Toronto that June. Minnesota's team would be chosen after a team tournament held at St. Louis Park High School. Pictures show boys wearing what looked like basketball uniforms and tennis shoes, playing with a small hoop or ring rather than a puck. The sport was more akin to ringette than floor hockey. No one wore helmets or protective gear.

It was an all-Owatonna final as the A team beat the B team from that community. Other teams were from

Glen Lake and St. Louis Park. A 15-member all-tournament team was chosen to go to Canada.

North Stars Center Ray Cullen was named team coach, assisted by Owatonna coach Paul Heidbrecht. The Minnesota team won three games and lost one in Canada. The North Stars provided uniforms, equipment and for other team needs. The team sponsored by the Montreal Canadiens won the first Special Olympics floor hockey title.

The North Stars continued to sponsor floor hockey teams for the Canadian Special Olympics for several more years.

Read more about the Special Olympics at <https://www.specialolympics.org/about/history>

The History Note is a monthly column produced in cooperation with the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. Past History Notes and other disability history may be found at www.mnddc.org

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FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Health officials extend community outreach to help those most impacted



A health worker vaccinated a patient at a mobile clinic.

COVID-19 continues to be a major health threat, especially for Minnesotans with disabilities. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) has contracted with 48 community partners to help those most impacted by COVID-19 get vaccinated, improve health and recover from the effects of the disease. The contracts extend MDH's existing pandemic work with COVID-19 Community Coordinators. The community coordinators serve communities hit hardest by COVID-19, including communities of color, American Indian communities, LGBTQ communities and Minnesotans with disabilities. This round includes the largest number of community coordinators since the project started in October 2020. To continue to serve each of these communities in ways that meet diverse community needs, MDH has contracted with the community groups through June 2024. The COVID-19 Community Coordinators will work on testing access and increasing vaccination rates while also addressing other health needs of community members. There was strong interest in working

as community coordinators. During the selection process, MDH received more than 100 applications. Applicants could apply for a narrower charge of focusing on vaccines and testing or take a broader approach to help their communities recover from some of the harm done by COVID-19. In the end, 85 percent of the 48 selected contractors opted for the approach of assisting with COVID-19 recovery. In addition, most of these are also doing vaccine and testing work. "To recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, Minnesotans are having to address worsened physical health due to long COVID and chronic diseases and the impacts of the pandemic on education, financial stability and mental health," said Minnesota Commissioner of Health Dr. Brooke Cunningham. "These community partners will be working to strengthen their communities and connect people to resources while also addressing the immediate impacts of COVID-19." COVID-19 Community Coordinators can answer questions about topics such as COVID-19 testing and vaccination, food support, health care and mental



AccessNorth is one of the community resource providers.

health resources, housing and rental assistance, and employment resources. COVID-19 Community Coordinators draw on community strengths and trusted community networks to support Minnesotans who need COVID-19 information specific to their communities, including in their native languages. Those affected by COVID-19 looking for support or resources can connect with a community partner using the online tool to search for outreach groups by cultural community, language, county and more. The online search tool can be found at COVID-19 Community Coordinator Search, at <https://covidcommunitycoordinators.web.health.state.mn.us/>. The helpful search tool provides organization names and contact information, as well as cultural communities served, other communities served, languages available and other detail. Tabs at the page right side can be clicked for organization hours, phone numbers, addresses, online contacts and more. COVID-19 community coordinators support Minnesotans who need

COVID-19 information specific to their communities, including in their languages. Coordinators help community members find and get critical resources to deal with health concerns as well as employment, food access, housing, child care, and legal rights. They can answer questions about where to get tested, where vaccines can be found, how to get a vaccine, and so much more. Communities were involved with the selection process that included more than 50 reviewers, including community leaders, representatives from local governments and state staff. MDH made final funding decisions based upon these community recommendations and all applicants were notified of their status. To learn more and find a community partner, visit COVID-19 Community Coordinators at <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/equity/funding/cc.html>. MDH continues to provide an array of services for Minnesotans facing COVID-19. Weekly situation updates, information about exposures and quarantine periods, and more details are available at <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html>

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considered. City and Metro Transit leaders will look at the situation on a regular basis. A timeline hasn't been announced for completing changes and reopening the tower. Metro Transit released a statement, saying, "In conjunction with the City of St. Paul, we have decided to temporarily close the building at 46 5th St. E., which connects the skyway and street level near the METRO Green Line's Central Station effective Tuesday, December 27. We are temporarily closing this facility so we can work alongside the City of St. Paul and its police department to make physical and operational public safety improvements at this location. "We recognize the importance of maintaining access to transit, as well as all the other surrounding amenities,

and will work closely with our partners to re-open soon. Elevator access to the skyway will continue to be available daily from 6 a.m. to midnight at Alliance Bank Center. Outside of normal business hours, guard access is required." At a virtual town hall meeting days before Christmas, City Council Member Rebecca Noecker said, "We're here because last week in a horrific event, two young men lost their lives." Noecker and other city leaders have heard many complaints about skyway conditions, both at the meeting after the shooting and at other meetings. Skyway users, including several people with disabilities, said they are concerned about a lack of safety in the skyways prior to the murders. They said a growing number of people use drugs, consume alcohol, urinate and defecate in the skyways and in stairwells. Some skyway users have been crime victims. One speaker described

downtown St. Paul recently as "almost a dystopian, lawless, chaotic place where hordes of individuals congregate freely using drugs." Several downtown residents with disabilities contacted *Access Press*. Many moved downtown in recent years for what they considered to be safe and accessible housing, convenient to shopping and good transit. But many now feel afraid and don't want their names used because they fear being victimized. A big frustration is how many people with disabilities, including the late Rick Cardenas, fought for the tower. Central Station is on the block at fifth and Cedar streets. It wasn't originally considered when the Green Line and its stations were being planned. Groundbreaking for the tower, which cost more than \$1 million, occurred in summer 2013 after a high-profile campaign to get some kind of elevator

connection built. At the time the tower was built, it was estimated that more than 9,000 people with disabilities were living in downtown St. Paul within a few block of Green Line light rail. Of the downtown light rail stations, Green Line was the most heavily used by disabled transit riders, with about 2,000 boardings per day. The numbers are based on a study done almost a decade ago by the now-defunct District Councils Collaborative, a group that monitored light rail construction. But the tower has become a spot for loitering and crime. At one point it was being locked at 9 p.m., which drew protests from downtown residents. Read about the tower's opening celebration in 2014, at <https://accesspress.org/cardenas-honored-tower-provides-access-to-light-rail-line/>

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FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Bipartisan federal effort will continue safety tracking program

by Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minnesota)

For so many people, a break from routine can be stressful, especially for people living with dementia or a developmental disability, such as Down syndrome or autism. Those moments of anxiety or commotion can result in them wandering away from safety.

Forty-nine percent of children with autism have wandered from safe supervision, and 60 percent of people living with dementia will wander at least once. In Minnesota, we have seen these stories come to tragic ends.

In 2015, Hamza Elmi, a 6-year-old boy with autism wandered away from his family's home in St. Cloud. His disappearance launched a search that brought together police officers, reporters and community members. Sadly, the next morning Hamza's body was found in the Mississippi River just blocks from his home. As John Bodette of the St. Cloud Times put it at the time, "Our entire community has lost a son."

Two years later, in 2017, the Duluth community was devastated by the loss of Mary and Ron Tarnowski, who had been married for 59 years. Decades earlier, Mary had suffered a stroke, and Ron took up responsibilities as her caregiver. But as he grew older and began to show signs of early-stage dementia, that work became harder for him to manage. One afternoon Ron and Mary drove away from their



Sen. Amy Klobuchar

Duluth home with no cell phone. Days later, following a prolonged search, their car was recovered in a swampy area 30 miles away. Neither of them survived.

For years, the Missing Alzheimer's Disease Patient Alert Program has been incredibly successful in reuniting wandering people with dementia with



Sen. Chuck Grassley

their families. That's why in 2017 I led a bipartisan bill with Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) to increase funding and broaden the scope of this program to support wandering children with developmental disabilities — it's now called the Missing Americans Alert Program.

Our bill also included funding to educate

caregivers on how to prevent wandering and equip law enforcement with the tools needed to recover missing loved ones, including potentially lifesaving tracking equipment like transmitter bracelets. The legislation was named Kevin and Avonte's Law, in honor of two boys who died as a result of wandering incidents.

This vital program was set to expire, so Sen. Grassley and I knew we had to act. I am proud to announce that we were able to extend it through 2027 with the Kevin and Avonte's Law Reauthorization Act, which was passed as part of the National Defense Authorization Act. We couldn't have gotten this done without the incredible work of a broad coalition of disability and patient advocates who came together to support this legislation.

For law enforcement, this means a higher chance of reuniting families. For caregivers, this means lifesaving training on wandering prevention. For loved ones, this means peace of mind. And for people living with disabilities, this means living in a country with better resources to keep them safe.

In the year ahead, I look forward to continuing to work with our state's disability communities to make sure that every Minnesotan with disabilities is able to live a safe and healthy life.

Democrat Amy Klobuchar is a U.S. senator from Minnesota. This is reprinted from the Albert Lea Tribune.

We welcome your letters and commentary

Access Press welcomes letters to the editor and commentary pieces from readers, on topics of interest to Minnesota's disability community. Letters should be no more than 500 words, with 750 words per commentary. Ask the editors if more space is needed.

Letters and guest commentaries must be signed by the authors or authors. With letters, a writer's hometown is published but not a street address. Please send contact information, in the form of a phone number or email, in case the editor has questions about a letter or commentary. Contact information isn't published unless the writer specifically requests that the newspaper do so.

Pictures of the author or content subject matter can be published with a guest commentary but aren't required.

Access Press asks that letters and guest commentaries be specifically written for the newspaper. Letters must have a focus on disability issues and ideally, a focus on those issues as they affect Minnesotans. Form letters will not be published.

Here's an important reminder during an election year. Because *Access Press* is a non-profit publication and must follow regulations on political partisanship, political endorsement letters are not published. That is true for candidates' endorsements as well as for ballot questions.

Before making a submission, writers are always encouraged to contact the newspaper to discuss ideas or to ask questions about From Our Community submissions, at 651-644-2133 or access@accesspress.org.

Let the newspaper staff know if accommodations are needed to submit a letter or commentary, and we will help you.

Letters and commentaries reflect the view of the authors and not the views of the staff and board of directors of *Access Press*.

Deadline for the print edition of the newspaper is the 15th of each month, with publication the following month.

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participants will make posters centered on the event theme of "Love. Liberation. Belonging."

Check-in and preparation are between 9:30-10:30 a.m. in the Minnesota Department of Transportation cafeteria. The March & Roll to the Capitol is 10:30 to 11:30 a.m., followed by an 11 a.m. rally. After the rally ends at 11:45 a.m., participants can meet with their legislators.

Participants are urged to plan ahead and make appointments in advance to meet their lawmakers.

ASL and CART will be provided that day.

Wednesday, February 15 through Friday, February 17, everyone is asked to follow along on sponsors' social media accounts for information about more virtual grassroots actions to round out the week. Visit <https://www.disability.state.mn.us/events-and-outreach/community-outreach/2023-disability-advocacy-week/> or the Facebook event at <https://www.facebook.com/events/826546891781813/>

Several groups are organizing Disability Advocacy Week, so check in with groups to see if there are specific activities or meetings to attend.

February 17 is also the deadline to register for the 2023 Disability Services Day at the capitol, which is led by the coalitions of ARRM and MOHR. This year's Disability Services Day is Tuesday, March 28.

Register at shorturl.at/fkKM7

An ongoing activity is Wednesdays at the Capitol, led by the Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (MNCCD). This was previously known as Tuesdays at the Capitol.

Meet with MNCCD at 10-11 a.m. every Wednesday in the Department of Transportation Cafeteria. Share policy priorities, give updates, and energize

advocates to take action. Questions or want more information about Wednesdays at the Capitol? Email Project Coordinator Bridget Carter at bcarter@mnccd.org

Another useful resource is the Minnesota Council on Disability bill tracker page, which has a wealth of information on disability-related legislation. Go to <https://www.disability.state.mn.us/about-our-public-policy/bill-tracking/>

Make the news!

Receiving an award? Joining a board?
Moving to new space? Winning a race?
Filling a top post? Send us your "boast!"
Marking a key date?

Please don't be late!

Access Press welcomes submissions for the People and Places pages. Submissions are due by the 15th of each month.

Questions?

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Governor's budget plan includes help for care workers, education changes

Gov. Tim Walz and Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan began unveiling parts of their two-year budget in mid-January, focusing on the state's \$17.6 billion budget surplus and the ways it could be used to better the lives of Minnesotans.

One interesting idea Walz has raised is that creating a new Department of Children, Youth and Families. It would be separate from the state's Department of Education. A new department could take over some programs that are now under the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS).

The notion of a split of DHS is nothing new but how a split and a new department could potentially affect younger Minnesotans with disabilities and their families isn't clear. Legislators from both parties have criticized DHS over the years, saying it is too large and unwieldy.

Of course many disabled Minnesotans and their family members have their eyes upon workforce issues. Walz has already indicated that he supports the SEIU Healthcare Minnesota & Iowa contract proposal unveiled earlier in January. (See related story.) But the Walz proposal also targets workers with disabilities and their job needs, as well as the needs of caregivers.

Funding the SEIU contract proposal is seen as a way of providing a historic wage increase, providing incentives for new and veteran workers, and creating an orientation program that provides a foundation of the supports available to those entering into and continuing in the home health care worker profession.

Higher rates and other system changes in the budget will stabilize and expand the long-term care workforce, making it easier for people with disabilities to find and hire direct support workers to meet essential daily needs. The One Minnesota Budget increases rates for services, increases inflationary updates for waiver disability providers, and raises hourly limits for parents and spouses who are paid to provide community-first and consumer-directed community supports.

Yet another proposal is for two permanent grant programs. These would address Minnesota's long-term care workforce shortage by expanding the depth and diversity of the workforce while improving recruitment and retention. Ongoing funding would support provider capacity grants for rural and underserved communities, where the healthcare shortage has been extremely critical. Another new grant program would be focused on recruiting and retaining new Americans for vital long-term care positions.

A \$30 million investment is recommended in the next biennium for what is called the Drive for 5 Workforce Fund. It is focused on five of the most needed occupational categories in the state with high-growth jobs and family-sustaining wages.

The five focus areas are technology, caring professions, education, manufacturing and trades. The Drive for 5 Workforce Fund is meant to produce a pipeline of workers who are skilled and prepared to enter high-growth and high-wage employment, in areas and begin to address Minnesota's high job vacancy rate.

What's unique about Drive for 5 Fund in the context of Minnesotans with disabilities is that it not only focuses on an area of need for home care and support, it also focused on disabled persons who wish to be in or advance in the workforce. It centers on populations that face the biggest barriers to employment: people of color, people with disabilities, and those facing other barriers.

Often during the workforce shortage, there has been frustration that people with disabilities are overlooked as potential workers. Walz and Flanagan recommend creating a Minnesota Reasonable Accommodation Program, which will reimburse small- to mid-sized Minnesota employers for expenses tied to providing reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities. The Reasonable Accommodation Program is promoted as a critical tool to help Minnesota employers create disability-inclusive workplaces.

The budget includes a comprehensive package of investments and policy



Governor Tim Walz

reforms to increase wages and create more inclusive workplaces for people with disabilities. Potential benefits also include addressing workforce shortages and increasing workforce participation by people with disabilities. These changes will align the state's disability service system with Employment First laws, while renewing Minnesota's commitment to competitive and integrated employment for people with disabilities.

While the direct care workforce issues are foremost for people with disabilities, workforce issues are a problem statewide in many sectors. Strengthening the state economy and dealing with the workforce as a whole are other issues Walz is focusing on

The centerpiece of the workforce and economic issues is paid family and medical leave, something that has been sought for many years by labor and some business groups. Other business groups question the costs and whether it could eventually be funded through payroll deduction programs. At \$669 million it is the largest piece of the budget section aimed at economy and workforce needs. The paid family leave proposal was announced at Unity Café, a restaurant on St. Paul's Rice Street just north of the capitol. Unity Cafe owner Chernó "CJ" Jome works two other jobs in addition to running his small café. He sustained a disabling back injury in an accident but doesn't have options to take time off for treatment. Short-term disability would not be enough to cover his needs.

Jome is a member of the Mainstreet Alliance, a progressive small-business owners group that has long called for the paid leave program. Members have argued in the past that small business owners and employees have struggled to work with injuries that in some cases have led to permanent disabilities.

The current paid leave would offer up to 12 weeks of partially paid time off for family reasons such as a new child or a seriously or terminally ill family member. It would also provide up to 12 weeks of medical leave. Department of Employment and Economic Development Commissioner Steve Grove has indicated that the program could be covered through payroll taxes shared by employers and employees.

Broadband expansion, something many Greater Minnesota people with disabilities consider crucial for education and employment, is also part of this proposed budget. Broadband expansion is eyed for a \$276 million statewide expansion.

Yet another focus is education, which was a theme during Walz's campaign for governor and his inaugural speech. He has unveiled a \$12 billion, four-year education budget. He is calling for more money for public schools as well as tax credits for families of young children.

He announced his education and families budget at Adams Spanish Immersion Elementary School in St. Paul. Walz has proposed a refundable child tax credit of \$1,000 per child younger than 18, and older students with special needs. This would be for families making less

than \$50,000 per year. The maximum credit would be \$3,000.

The governor also wishes to increase the state's child care credit to allow families making less than \$200,000 to receive up to \$4,000 for one child, \$8,000 for two children and up to \$10,500 for three to help them with day care costs.

Increasing the state's general education fund, more money for school counselors and mental health needs, more funding for nurses and social workers, and free breakfasts and lunch for all students are also part of the Walz education budget. It's all part of his administration's focus to end child poverty.

Marijuana could see changes

Minnesota's 243-plus page marijuana legalization bill has dropped and started its process through toward possible approval. People with disabilities who use marijuana for medical treatment are watching the bill closely. If passed it will bring changes as to how they are served.

If passed, the bill requires that a new state agency be formed, with more than a dozen other state agencies involved in various related regulatory processes. Having everything go into place could take several months if not more than a year or so.

Everything from setting up a new state agency to licensing producers and growing crops would have to happen. That would be followed by processing, testing and distribution. That timeline could be sped up if the state's two current medical marijuana growers would be allowed to produce recreational crops as an interim step.

The hemp-based edibles program approved by state lawmakers in 2022 would have to become part of an expanded legalization. One criticism of that program is that it was passed last year without a lot of regulatory legislation.

What's proposed is a new state agency, the Office of Cannabis Management. Its authority would expand to taking over the existing medical cannabis program from the Department of Health and hemp-based edibles regulation from the state Board of Pharmacy.

Before medical cannabis was approved, some people with disabilities grew their own marijuana for personal use. Pending legislation would make this practice legal with limits on how much is produced and kept in their homes, with limits on how much could be shared.

Pros and cons have been cited to ending the existing medical program and placing it in the new Office of Cannabis Management. The two companies, LeafLine and Green Goods, are currently under contract to produce marijuana and tinctures, vapes and flower containing THC and sell them to approved patients. Their contracts would expire July 1, 2024. LeafLine has already sent letters to state lawmakers questioning the constitutionality of a residency requirement for producers in the new legislation.

Some people with disabilities have spoken out in favor of changes, with one argument being that legalizing marijuana will make products less costly. Another is the years of waiting for some disabilities to be added to the program. But others note that with a 21-year-old age limit for legal marijuana, children with seizure disorders are still left out of being able to use marijuana for treatment.

Editor Jane McClure prepared the legislative coverage for this issue.



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Elliot Park Apartments	Minneapolis	612-338-3106	2 BR
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Hanover Townhomes	St. Paul	651-292-8497	1 BR
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Village Apartments	Hopkins	952-938-5787	1 & 2 BR
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Raspberry Ridge	Hopkins	952-933-3260	1 BR
Slater Square Apartments	Minneapolis	612-340-1264	EFF & 1BR
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Trinity Apartments	Minneapolis	612-721-2252	1 BR (sr)
Unity Place	Brooklyn Center	763-560-7563	2 BR
Vadnais Highlands	Vadnais Heights	651-653-0640	3 BR
Visitation Place		651-647-2550	1, 2 & 3 BR
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PEOPLE & PLACES



New book is celebrated for its refreshing, insightful look at autism

The new book *I Will Die On This Hill: Autistic Adults, Autism Parents, and the Children Who Deserve a Better World* invites autistic adults, parents, care providers, and community members to work toward building a more accepting and inclusive community for disabled children now and throughout life. The book's release was celebrated in January at an event at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis.

Minnesotan Jules Edwards and Meghan Ashburn, a resident of Virginia, coauthored the book. It was released by Jessica Kingsley Publishing.

Ashburn is a former teacher and works as an educational consultant. Edwards is an Indigenous disability justice advocate and consultant, and was recently appointed to serve on the National Institutes of Health Autism Centers of Excellence advisory board.

Ashburn and Edwards' new release shares the authors' collective wisdom gained through years of parenting and advocating for disability justice. The authors were inspired to write the book they wish had been given when their children were first diagnosed. *I Will Die On This Hill* challenges the dominant narratives surrounding autism and invites readers to take action.

Their book promises a refreshing look at caring for autistic children, and provides dynamic insights into creating a better world for the estimated 1 in 44 children diagnosed with autism. With a focus on intersectionality, the



Meghan Ashburn and Jules Edwards celebrated their new book.

book features eleven additional autistic contributors throughout, including nonspeaking/AAC users and BIPOC autistic advocates from around the world.

The book has garnered positive reviews. "*I Will Die On This Hill* is such a gift for all of us who have been clueless and way too speculative and assuming about

autism," said Marcie Alvis Walker, creator of the website Black Coffee with White Friends. "Ashburn and Edwards' honest and unsentimental book will make you a better human being and, therefore, a better neighbor, better educator, better family member to autistic adults, autism parents, and the children who need us all to do

better."

Dr. Mona Delahooke, author of *Beyond Behaviors*, said, "This is the book I've been waiting for to recommend to parents and all childhood providers." Educators, professionals, physicians, and care workers will all gain new insights into supporting autistic children.

Edwards is an Anishinaabe woman from Onigamiinsing (Little Portage). Jules is a writer, gardener, accountant and disability justice advocate. She's passionate about improving child safety and disability policy.

Her background includes a 2020-21 Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities fellowship, 2021-22 Association of University Centers on Disabilities National Training Director Council fellowship, and being a 2022-23 Wilder Foundation Community Equity Program cohort member.

Some of her roles include co-founding Minnesota Autistic Alliance, working board member for the Minnesota Ombudsman for American Indian Families, and Chairperson of the Minnesota Autism Council.

Learn more about Edwards at <https://autistictyping.com/i-will-die-on-this-hill>

Ashburn is the mother of twins with autism. She is a graduate of the partners in policymaking course and is an activist in her home state of Virginia. Read more about her and her work at <https://notanautismmom.com/about/>

Playground bid gets national focus

Students at Glen Lake Elementary School in Hopkins got a big boost in their efforts to build an inclusive playground, thanks to being featured on CBS TV's *On the Road* news feature segment.

Glen Lake has a lot of students with physical disabilities, but no wheelchair merry-go-round, swings or any adaptive playground equipment, which really bothered the students in Betsy Julien's fifth grade class.

"It just didn't seem fair that some kids were just left out," Wyatt Feucht said.

"They didn't look happy, and recess is about having fun," said Rhys Riley.

So one day the students asked Julien why they couldn't just buy the equipment themselves.

"I said, 'Do you know how much that costs?! It costs a lot of money,'" Julien said.

The students were undeterred at the thought of raising \$300,000. They started collecting spare change, then held a bake

sale, printed flyers and went door to door. Then they began cold-calling businesses and even got restaurants to donate a portion of their profits. This went on for months — until recently, when they finally hit their goal, with support from the Glen Lake Parent Teacher Organization.

Riley says it was overwhelming to know that their hard work finally led to a more inclusive playground. As for the students who'll benefit, they seemed to appreciate the effort almost more than the result.

"First time I set foot on this playground I'm probably going to start crying from seeing the effort that all the school has made," said John Buettner, who uses a wheelchair.

After raising \$300,000, the class set a new goal. They now hope to buy adaptive playground equipment for other schools in the Hopkins district. They are raising \$900,000. Learn more at <https://www.glenlakept.org/glen-lake-accessibility-project>



A sketch of the new accessible playground.

PAY PACT

From page 1

recounted having a recent hire quit after one shift, because the caregiving tasks were too difficult. Describing the many tasks care workers provide, she said, no one is coming in at \$20 an hour to do the myriad of caregiver tasks.

"Nobody is coming in 2023 for \$20 per hour to help adult men & women with disabilities to live quality, happy, lives," Dub said. "Nobody. The wage goes up to \$20 in 2025. Nobody will come today for \$20 in 2023. The work 'is too hard' The work is 'more than I can manage'."

Others disagree and praised the tentative agreement.

Tavona Johnson is a veteran home care worker from Austin, who served on the bargaining team. "Winning a wage scale makes me feel recognized, seen, heard, and shown some respect and appreciation for my chosen profession as a homecare worker by compensating me for my dedication in a way that is meaningful and can actually cause positive change in my life. I feel that together with the big wage floor increase, this new wage scale means that home care workers will be able to protect our own dignity and integrity by having the option to work our way out of poverty and maybe not having to work multiple jobs any more to make ends meet," Johnson said.

Highlights include:

- A \$3.75 (25 percent) wage increase to \$19 per hour for all workers in 2024
- An additional increase to \$20 per hour (a 31 percent increase over the current wage floor) in 2025
- The establishment for the first time of a wage scale rewarding home care workers for their years of experience, bringing long-time caregivers up to as much as \$22.50 per hour (a 48 percent increase over the current wage floor) in 2025

- A one-time \$1,000 retention bonus for any worker who has provided home care for six months or longer, beginning in July 2023
- A long overdue professionalization of the home care workforce through the establishment of an orientation program for new caregivers

Lauren Thompson, a home care client who was on the bargaining team, emphasized the importance of the contract for people who rely on home care services. "As someone who receives

home care services, I am relieved and hopeful with this deal. I have been part of previous bargaining teams and the wage increases are at a level we have

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PEOPLE & PLACES



Barbara Kleist

ICI's Kleist to be honored at national conference in June

The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) has announced that Barbara Kleist will receive AAIDD's Policy Award for 2023 for her outstanding contributions to the field. The award will be presented to her at the 147th AAIDD Annual Meeting in Pittsburgh in June.

Kleist is the program director for entrepreneurial and development programs at the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration. She received her M.Ed. in recreation park and leisure studies from the University of Minnesota and her J.D. from Hamline University School of Law.

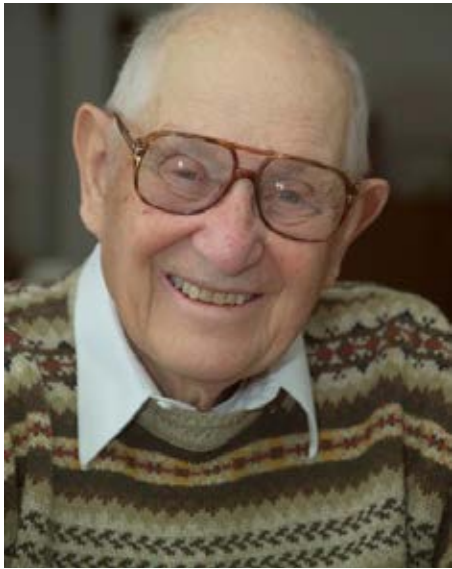
Kleist is co-director of DirectCourse—

online curricula for life in community. Her work focuses on state and federal projects to improve community services for children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. Her current projects include leading training and technical assistance efforts in federal and state policy development focused on identifying best practices for improving direct support workforce stability across long-term services and supports and Medicaid funded systems.

She is currently a member of the Minnesota Disability Law Center Advisory Committee, WINGS MN, and the Learning Community for Person Centered Practices, and chair of the Legal

Process and Advocacy Network of the American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD).

Kleist is a licensed attorney with Minnesota State Bar with 30 years of experience providing counsel and support to self-advocates and family members on a variety of topics including conflict resolution, access to home- and community-based services and supports, alternatives to guardianship, supported decision making and person-centered practices. Her relationship with a sibling provides the foundation for Kleist's commitment to the civil and human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



Cyril Keller



Louis Keller

Two Minnesota brothers remembered for their invention, placed in hall

Sixteen innovation pioneers will be honored as part of the 50th class of National Inventors Hall of Fame inductees. In partnership with the United States Patent and Trademark Office, the hall of fame will honor these winners in a ceremony in October.

The hall is in Alexandria, Virginia. The October event is not only the "Greatest Celebration of American Innovation," it will also mark the hall's 50th anniversary. Fifty years ago the first honoree was Thomas Edison.

Two members of the hall's Class of 2023 have Minnesota ties. The late Cyril and Louis Keller played key roles in launching the compact equipment

industry in the late 1950s and early 1960s with their invention of the world's first compact loader, which became the Bobcat skid-steer loader. What the Kellers likely didn't expect at the time was that their invention would be used by some farmers, ranchers and tradespeople with disabilities as a unique combination work and mobility device.

Other honorees worked on a wide range of items, including medical devices, gene-editing systems, wheelchair technology and the COVID-19 vaccines. For biographies of each inductee, visit <https://www.invent.org/inductees/new-inductees>.

Duluth's Lighthouse center to move

The Lighthouse Center for Vital Living will move this summer into a more central, visible location in Duluth's downtown. The disability support services nonprofit will leave its West Duluth location and reopen at 309 W. First St.

Mary Junnila, executive director of the Lighthouse, told the *Duluth News-Tribune* that the move has been serendipitous for the organization. The Lighthouse's current location was sold to a New York investment group last December, so the Lighthouse was no longer able to depend on rental income from other building tenants. In addition, Junnila said the organization's assistive technology library was growing too large for the 8,000-square-foot space to contain.

The Lighthouse's new building was donated to them by Landsmenn Energy Service, founders of Lake Superior Consulting. The building used to house Lake Superior Consulting until the engineering firm moved. Junnila said the 1908 building was recently remodeled, so

it's in good shape for them to take it over. The main expense will be making the three-story building handicap accessible and adapt the space for training rooms, including a wheelchair-accessible kitchen.

A grant from the Minnesota Department of Human Services will be a big help with that. A \$350,000 Live Well at Home grant will go toward renovations at the donated building -- specifically to install an elevator. Junnila expects the Lighthouse will use the first two floors of the 12,600-squarefoot building, and is considering renting out the third floor. The nonprofit expects to be in the new building in June.

"With our adjustment to blindness services, it's great to be downtown near the DTA and the skywalk systems," Junnila said. "A big part of what we do in that division is help people to use public transportation, and to be right in the center of that is really important."

She also looks forward to the opportunity to increase awareness for the assistive technology services

the Lighthouse provides. Assistive technology encapsulates many different things to help a person complete a task or function independently.

Junnila said the assistive technology branch of the organization has become their biggest customer market, and it's grown exponentially since the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, people became more isolated and needed more help at home. In addition, the number of people who are elderly and/or disabled continues to increase. Junnila said their services have grown alongside those needs.

The Lighthouse works with elderly adults and people with disabilities of all ages to help them learn skills, including digital literacy classes, adjustment to blindness programming and occupational therapy. The center does onsite occupational therapy and travels to clients' homes. Junnila said oftentimes, therapists can help clients identify any assistive technology they could benefit from and helps them master using it.

Another grant from the Minnesota

Department of Human Services, a \$642,000 Tech for Connectivity award, will help people who are older or have a disability to access technology. The grant will go toward getting people internet access, cell phones, or other devices and teach them how to use them for communication, medical appointments and job applications.

New book focuses on disabilities

The Way We Play, a new children's picture book by University of Minnesota medical student Hugh Burke and his friend Kylie Donohue, a student in Chicago, is about accepting and appreciating diversity of all types. The book was recently featured in the *Star Tribune*.

"Each animal brings different skill sets and weaknesses to the table," said Burke, a 25-year-old Eden Prairie native and second-year medical student.

The book is about accepting and even

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REGIONAL NEWS



Group homes' closure challenged

New Hope city leaders are being accused of violating state law, months after they voted to shut down two group homes. A civil lawsuit was filed against the city January 11 in Hennepin County District Court. It alleges the city discriminated against people with diagnosed mental health disabilities and other disabilities when it revoked the rental licenses of their group homes. An emergency injunction is also being sought to allow one home to remain open.

The homes are licensed and regulated by the state's health department as assisted living facilities. But police began citing residents for "disorderly behavior" earlier this year after responding to incidents including a drug overdose death, a disturbance at the home where a resident threw a cup at a window, and a situation where police were called after a resident made unwelcome comments to a neighbor.

"These people are going to be homeless," said Matt Kezhaya, the attorney representing the group homes. "It's a lot of harm that happens from these decisions."

The city's decision, first reported by KSTP TV 5 INVESTIGATES in December, has drawn public outcry from disability rights and mental health advocates. It's also been referred to as a "loophole" by state lawmakers, who question the city's authority.

The lawsuit argues the city violated the Minnesota Human Rights Act, which prohibits disability discrimination in housing. "It's the targeting and exiling of people because of characteristics that people don't like," Kezhaya said. "The intent was to get these people out of the city limits, and they executed on it."

At a recent City Council meeting, Mayor Kathi Hemken



read a lengthy memo addressing the controversy. She cited safety concerns for home residents and neighbors as reasons to shut the homes down. "The City of New Hope recognizes the importance the more than 60 group homes within our city have in providing safe and accessible housing for individuals with disabilities," it began. "We stand firmly against discrimination of any kind and recognize the value of all community members."

(Source: KSTP-TV)

according to the VA. State and federal funds are responsible for most of the project costs, but the Montevideo project was made possible by support from local governments as well. Along with the Williams family's contribution, the City of Montevideo and Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Swift and Yellow Medicine counties also contributed funding for a total local contribution of more than \$7 million.

At this point, the Veterans Administration has received 86 applications for residency, according to Shellito. Some of the applicants are currently in skilled nursing homes, and some are in their own homes but want to be sure they are on the waiting list. To qualify, veterans must be honorably discharged and have served 181 consecutive days on active duty, unless discharged earlier because of disability incurred in the line of duty. Residents must also have a certified medical or clinical need, according to Bormann. Spouses of eligible veterans also qualify for admission.

Along with recruiting workers, the VA and Montevideo city officials are working with the Montevideo schools and other educational institutions to provide opportunities for students and other community members to explore career opportunities in long-term care.

(Source: West Central Tribune)

Online schools are closing

An online education boom followed the COVID-19 pandemic, as the number of schools offering virtual education in Minnesota nearly doubled from 37 in the fall of 2020 to 71 this year. But consolidation has started as the pandemic wanes — especially for online elementary and middle schools — limiting the options for families who want their children to continue learning online, and pushing more to look to other districts. That can be a challenge for families with disabled children who have thrived in online classrooms.

More students attend online schools than before the pandemic, but online elementary school classrooms aren't as full as they were at COVID's height. Dipping enrollment has led many districts that opened virtual schools to close programs. Edina, for example, has enough students to sustain an online high school program, but the school board voted January 9 to phase out the online elementary school after next year.

As smaller programs move toward closure, students who will stay online are sorting themselves into the remaining online schools, with longstanding virtual schools like Minnesota Virtual Academy and bigger programs like New Code Academy emerging as some of the dominant players.

"You need a critical mass of population in order to sustain a program," said John Weisser of New Code Academy, and a critical mass of per-pupil funding from the state and sending districts. Weisser said New Code Academy costs about as much to operate as an in-person school.

Real-time instruction, like livestreamed lessons with the chance to ask questions

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North Memorial settles federal lawsuit

North Memorial Health has agreed to pay \$180,000 to settle a federal lawsuit brought by a woman who said she was refused a job as a greeter at its hospital in Robbinsdale because she is deaf.

Kaylah Vogt, of Maple Grove, and the health care system reached their settlement in U.S. District Court in Minneapolis under what is called a consent decree. That means North Memorial makes no admission of wrongdoing but agrees to make the payout and take other actions spelled out in the suit that address rights protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

"Unfortunately, some employers continue to discriminate against deaf applicants based on myths, fears and stereotypes about their ability to do the job because of their disability," said Gregory Gochanour, regional attorney in Chicago for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which sued on Vogt's behalf.

Julianne Bowman, district director for the EEOC in Chicago, said, "The consent decree's requirement of training for managers and supervisors involved in hiring decisions on the provisions against discrimination is critical to eliminating discrimination against disabled applicants."

Vogt, 26, is a student at the University of Minnesota's College of Continuing and Professional Studies. In an article she described how she was seemingly hired and then fired in 2020. She uses hearing aids, which allow her to hear people speaking. She can communicate verbally and through use of American Sign Language.

"After I self-identified as an individual with deafness and requested a reasonable accommodation, I was fired instantly without their further attempt to work with me. ... Ultimately, it affected my career choices and how I navigate the world," she said.

Since then, she founded Healing Signs, a nonprofit whose mission is to provide mental health services for the deaf and hard of hearing.

In a court filing denying the allegations, North Memorial highlighted the challenges greeters were having at the time because of the pandemic and the need for "strong listening and verbal communication skills while interacting with individuals experiencing stress/grief." The filing also contended that greeters "needed to communicate quickly and succinctly with visitors regarding visitor policy, assess visitors' understanding and compliance, and troubleshoot [while] communication was significantly hindered by COVID-necessitated face masks."

One day after the settlement was reached, North Memorial said in a statement: "We recognize that our [hiring] processes in place for temporary roles may have been compromised during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we understand Ms. Vogt's disappointment in the decisions that were made at that time. ... We have reviewed specific practices following this case and will continue to strive to ensure our customers, our current, past and future team members, and our providers feel valued and respected."

The consent decree places a number of disability anti-discrimination and reasonable accommodation policies to all applicants and employees hired to work at North Memorial Health, whether they are hired by North Memorial directly or through a staffing firm. The \$180,000 payment covers \$75,000 in compensatory damages, about \$44,000 in back pay and roughly \$61,000 to pay attorney's fees.

(Source: Star Tribune)

Veterans Home winning praise

Although it is still far from complete, Jim Williams had only one word to describe the Veterans Administration skilled nursing home that will be ready for its first residents this year.

"Wow," said Williams as he left the Montevideo facility during a visit. He took part in a tour hosted that day by Minnesota Department of Veterans Administration Commissioner Larry Shellito and his staff, along with the project's contractor, Knutson

Construction. The home will meet a need for older veterans and veterans with disabilities.

Construction on the 72-bed skilled nursing facility is 66 percent complete, according to Shellito. He and Ashley Bormann, the newly appointed administrator for the home, said they anticipate welcoming the first residents in early September.

Like others on the tour, Williams said he was surprised by the size of the facility now taking shape. The building area includes 95,513 gross square feet on a 13.4-acre site on Montevideo's east side. It consists of four connected wings. Each will hold two "neighborhoods" and four "households" of 18 residents. The design is aimed at providing a more homelike atmosphere, according to state officials.

The Montevideo home is one of three under construction at this time; the other two are in Preston and Bemidji.

Jim Williams' late brother, Vietnam veteran Steve, had included a \$3 million bequest from his estate to the Montevideo project in his will after learning about the plans for the home from his brother. The nursing home project budget is \$58,266,161, with construction representing \$47,519,260 of that amount,

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REGIONAL NEWS



Judge Donovan Frank

Hearing is postponed to May

A federal class action lawsuit involving Minnesotans with disabilities who live or have lived in corporate adult foster care or group homes is continuing. A fairness hearing in the case of Murphy versus Harpstead was set for early January, but has now been postponed to May 12. The case is being heard in U.S. District Court in St. Paul before Judge Donovan Frank.

The hearing was delayed after the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) admitted that it failed to mail notice to a number of Minnesotans with disabilities who were entitled to receive notice of the settlement agreement. New notices were to be sent by mid-January.

A series of deadlines in the case are starting to kick in, including one for people filing objections. Objections are due by March 21. About half a dozen objections have already been filed.

The case began in 2017. Tenner Murphy is the Murphy in the case and is one of the plaintiffs. Harpstead is DHS Commissioner Jodi Harpstead. DHS itself is a defendant, and several counties' human services departments and ARRM are involved as interested or amicus parties. The Minnesota Disability Law Center is handling the case for the plaintiffs.

Plaintiffs in the case contend that corporate adult foster care and

group homes cause isolation and segregation. They want access to various individualized housing services available under disability waivers, for more integrated housing options.

The extension of time allows for more objections to be filed by those involved in the case. Some objections are being raised by people with disabilities who have been forced into group homes or congregate living after living on their own for several years. Others may be at risk for placement.

REGIONAL NEWS

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and get answers, tends to be more appealing to a lot of families than schools that lean more on prerecorded videos and workbooks, Cullison said.

Bloomington seems to have enough students to sustain New Code Academy's online program at all grade levels, Weisser said.

And as more districts pull back from online learning, he said, about half of New Code's 200 elementary and middle school students are logging in from across Minnesota, from neighboring metro cities to as far away as St. Cloud.

Minnesota Virtual Academy — which is run by Houston Public Schools in Houston — is one of Minnesota's oldest online schools, and has partnerships with districts that do not have their own online programs. About 1,800 students from across Minnesota attend, including about 450 in elementary school.

(Source: Star Tribune)

Rochester group homes close

Several Rochester group homes are closing their doors after the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) revoked their licenses. The Crawford Home LLC in January notified employees and residents, according to KTTC TV.

DHS has been looking into the group home since 2019. In March 2019, an inspector with DHS issued a licensing review. The inspection documented 16 citations including mishandling of

paperwork and not having proper training for employees.

A few weeks later, the state issued a noncompliance order. According to state documents Crawford House leaders failed to send in evidence that they had fixed the issues found in the licensing review.

In June of 2020, there was a maltreatment investigation into the group home. One of the residents left the facility and staff members failed to look for her until the next day. The resident was later found unconscious and taken to a hospital for a possible seizure and drug overdose. The state was not able to determine if neglect occurred in this incident.

Because of this, Crawford House conducted an internal review and employees were retrained on the resident's specific plan.

It wasn't until November 2021 when the state issued a license revocation of the LLC. One of the owners of the group home had a previous license revoked from the group home Helen's Home on September 8 of 2021.

According to state statute, if an individual's license is revoked, they cannot be granted another license within five years.

The leaders appealed but it wasn't taken to court until May 2022. The final hearing took place in late 2022 where the state decided to revoke the license, ceasing all operation. Residents were given until early January to find more housing.

Crawford House leadership declined comment to KTTC-TV.

(Source: KTTC-TV)

Mobile crisis system delayed

Minnesota's mobile crisis system for responding to people suffering from mental health emergencies has been thrown into uncertainty, due to bureaucratic delays at the state agency responsible for overseeing the service.

Across the state, local agencies that respond to people experiencing suicidal thoughts and other mental health crises are warning of disrupted services because the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) has failed to deliver tens of millions of dollars in grant contracts that help cover the cost of the life-saving program.

Mental health providers say the timely delivery of grant contracts is critical. Without them, they can't pay for round-the-clock call centers and mobile crisis teams that travel to homes, schools, hospitals and elsewhere to provide counseling and nonviolent conflict resolution.

The mobile teams operate in every county and fill a crucial gap in the health care system, coming to the aid of those who often are too incapacitated by mental illness to visit a clinic or seek professional help. They also reduce burdens on local law enforcement, which often isn't equipped to handle mental health emergencies.

Yet crisis responders have been operating in financial limbo since late December when the Behavioral Health Division at DHS notified them of delays in completing their contracts. The agency noted that drafts of their grant contracts would not be ready until the end of

January — which providers say is more than a month late.

As a result, crisis responders have been put in the extraordinary position of having to provide a safety net service without contracts or assurances they will be paid.

"It's frustrating and disheartening because this is a vital service that we can't just shut off," said Ashley Kjos, chief executive of Woodland Centers, a Willmar nonprofit that provides mobile crisis services in seven counties. "It's not like we can say, 'Sorry, we don't have a contract so we can't take your calls.' We are their lifeline."

DHS officials declined a Star Tribune request for an interview. But in written statements, assistant commissioner Eric Grumdahl said the contract delays stem from leadership transitions, staff turnover and a shift in contract management processes. He said mobile crisis providers can continue to provide services, though they won't be paid until grant contracts are finalized. The agency doesn't expect delays in payments to providers because the contracts should be ready by the time first-quarter invoices are received, he said.

Grumdahl, who oversees the Behavioral Health Division, said the contract delays are related to the rollout of a new contract management system — "a one-time transitional impact" — that will streamline contract renewals across the agency. Crisis responders say they have been kept in the dark about the reasons for the contract delays, which have already caused service disruptions.

(Source: Star Tribune)

PEOPLE AND PLACES

From page 7

appreciating diversity, in this case not primarily ethnic or racial diversity but diversity of skills. The book's young animals — who represent human children at play — observe without judging their classmates' varying levels of abilities.

"We see the hippo falling and getting up and he's kind of laughing and modeling a lighthearted spirit," Burke said. "He's realizing, 'This may not be my thing but that's OK.'"

Or as the book's teacher, Ms. Owl, puts it when she calls the class back inside after recess, "We're special and different in what we can do, and from each of our friends, we learn something new. No matter how tall or how fast or how slow, when we play with each other we find ways to grow."

Burke, who wants to become a

pediatric or adolescent psychiatrist someday, hopes the book will form a connection with his future patients, whose skills may vary due to neurodivergent conditions such as autism.

His book may serve as a lesson for children who might be tempted to treat others differently because of their abilities. Research shows that kids with autism are more likely to be bullied. But Burke also wants to combat ableism, or lack of sensitivity toward people with disabilities, at every level. He belongs to a club in which medical students practice working with neurodiverse youth in a way that emphasizes individual kids' needs rather than demanding that they conform to others' expectations.

Burke has earmarked proceeds from the book and all future rights to Open Hearts Big Dreams.

who has cared for her disabled son for the last seven years, also supports the agreement. "One of the things that is so important to me is knowing I can hand off this work to someone who will be caring for my son when I can't do the work any longer. This isn't just a job for so many of us. Raising wages and making this a real career gives me hope that I'll be able to get help and more people will

ProAct plans new centers

Three years ago, ProAct decided to identify space at its Eagan location for the buildout of an autism center as its GiveMN campaign. It was a successful move and allowed the nonprofit to raise enough funds for the project.

While the COVID-19 pandemic slowed the project down, ProAct leaders haven't given up. In 2023, the buildout will become a reality, with a separate space available to participants on the autism spectrum in Eagan. The specifics of the project are slowly taking shape. ProAct has asked Nancy Sweet, its leading individual donor, to help identify items such as colors and furnishings for the space.

With work on the autism center taking shape, ProAct has announced its plans for leisure centers. The first will be in Eagan, with the two additional Minnesota programming sites to follow.

ProAct team members have identified

want to do this important work. This can and should be a beautiful career, but that has gotten lost because of the miserably low wages. . . . It's a relief to me, as a mother and a family caregiver, that we now have a path to bring other people in who choose to do this work. These gains are worth all the hard work we had to put in to get here."

a lack of appropriate programming space for aging participants and those with chronic and changing disabilities. Although the goal for most participants is to focus on programming which allows for movement and changes throughout their programming day, a group of participants desire a lower-paced service day where they can start with a cup of coffee among friends, watch the news, movies and perhaps a movie in the community, as desired.

It is anticipated that the leisure center project will be completed in 2024.

Reach our valued readers!

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For updates, go to the Facebook site Minnesota Radio Talking Book.

Audio information about the daily book listings is on the National Federation for the Blind (NFB) Newsline. Register for NFB Newsline by calling 651-539-1424. The NFB-NEWSLINE service provides access to more than 500 magazines and newspapers. To learn more, visit www.nfb.org/programs-services/nfb-newsline

Donate to the State Services for the Blind at mn.gov/deed/ssbdonate

The sampling published monthly in Access Press doesn’t represent the full array of programming.

Chautauqua*

Monday – Friday 6 a.m.

The Song of the Cell, nonfiction by Siddhartha Mukherjee, 2022. An

exploration of medicine and our radical new ability to manipulate cells. Read by Yelva Lynfield. 22 broadcasts; begins Mon, Feb. 13.

Past is Prologue*

Monday – Friday 11 a.m.

The Turning Point: 1851, nonfiction by Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, 2022. A close look at a formative year for one of the greatest literary personalities ever to have lived: Charles Dickens. Read by Charles Gould. 12 broadcasts; begins Mon, Feb. 6.

A Woman’s War Too, nonfiction by Virginia M. Wright-Peterson, 2020. A history of Minnesota women contributing to the war effort of WWII. Read by Jan Anderson. 10 broadcasts; begins Wed, Feb. 22.

Bookworm*

Monday – Friday 12 p.m.

Brood, fiction by Jackie Polzin, 2021. An insightful meditation on life and longing, centered on keeping a small brood of chickens in Minnesota. Read by Eileen Barratt. Six broadcasts; begins Mon, Feb. 13.

Mouth To Mouth (rebroadcast), fiction by Antoine Wilson, 2022. A successful art dealer confesses the story of his meteoric rise in this sly, suspenseful novel. Read by John Schmidt. Six broadcasts; begins Tue, Feb. 21.

The Writer’s Voice*

Monday – Friday 1 p.m.

Putting the Rabbit in the Hat, nonfiction by Brian Cox, 2021. The incredible rags-to-riches story of acclaimed actor Brian Cox, best known as Succession’s Logan Roy, from a troubled, working-class upbringing in Scotland to a prolific career across theatre, film and television. Read by Jim Ahrens. 10 broadcasts; begins Wed, Feb. 1. – L

Fear and Loving in South Minneapolis, nonfiction by Jim Walsh, 2020. A veteran Twin Cities journalist and raconteur summons the life of the city after reporting and recording its stories for more than 30 years. Read by John Schmidt. 10 broadcasts; begins Wed, Feb. 15.

Choice Reading*

Monday – Friday 2 p.m.

The Poet’s House, fiction by Jean Thompson, 2022. A warm and witty story of a young woman who gets swept up in the rivalries and love affairs of a dramatic group of writers. Read by Holly Sylvester. 10 broadcasts; begins Thu, Feb. 2. – L

Wildcat (rebroadcast), fiction by Amelia Morris, 2022. An uproariously funny, surprisingly touching story of one woman’s journey through motherhood and female friendship, in a society that plays fast and loose with information. Read by Karen Ray. Nine broadcasts; begins Thu, Feb. 16.

Afternoon Report*

Monday – Friday 4 p.m.

The Avoidable War, nonfiction by Kevin Rudd, 2022. The former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd offers insight, gloom, and counsel for America in navigating a future with China. Read by John Potts. 19 broadcasts; begins Thu, Feb. 12.

Night Journey*

Monday – Friday 7 p.m.

Radium, fiction by John Enger, 2022. Two brothers from western Minnesota go on the run. Read by Tom Speich. 13 broadcasts; begins Mon, Feb. 6. – L

Insurrection, fiction by Tom Combs, 2021. A story of domestic terror, critical care medicine, and everyday people facing unimaginable conflict. Read by Mike Tierney. 12 broadcasts; begins Thu, Feb. 23. – L, G

Off the Shelf*

Monday – Friday 8 p.m.

The Lioness, fiction by Chris Bohjalian, 2022. A luxurious African safari turns deadly for a Hollywood starlet and her entourage in this riveting historical thriller. Read by Jack Rossmann. 11 broadcasts; begins Mon, Feb. 13.

Good Night Owl*

Monday – Friday 10 p.m.

City On Fire, fiction by Don Winslow, 2022. A contemporary gangland masterpiece in the tradition of The Godfather, Casino and Goodfellas. Read

All times listed are Central Standard Time.

Abbreviations V – violent content R – racial epithets L – strong language S – sexual situation G – gory descriptions

by Jim Gregorich. 10 broadcasts; begins Mon, Feb. 6. – L

The Temps, fiction by Andrew Young, 2022. They’re underemployed, underpaid and trying to survive the end of the world while trapped inside an office complex—an epic exploration of survival and human connection in the digital age. Read by John Gunter. 11 broadcasts; begins Mon, Feb. 20. – L

RTB After Hours*

Monday – Friday 11 p.m.

How to Deceive a Duke, fiction by Samara Parish, 2022. A historical romance set in Regency England about a rebellious female chemist and her highborn lover, the Duke of Wildeforde. Read by Laura Young. 12 broadcasts; begins Wed, Feb. 8. – L, S

After Francesco, fiction by Brian Malloy, 2021. A universal story of love and loss set in New York City and Minneapolis at the peak of the AIDS crisis. Read by Brenda Powell. 11 broadcasts; begins Mon, Feb. 27. – L, S

Weekend Program Books

Your Personal World, 1 p.m. Sat, presents *Inspired* by Matt Richtel, read by Beverly Burchett.

For the Younger Set, 11 a.m. Sun, presents *The Night When No One Had Sex* by Kalena Miller, read by Pat Kovel-Jarboe. – L, S

Poetic Reflections, noon Sun, presents *The Best Poems of Jane Kenyon* by Jane Kenyon, read by Mary Knatterud; followed by *Love and I* by Fanny Howe, read by Mary Knatterud.

The Great North, 4 p.m. Sun, presents *The Pride of Minnesota* by Thom Henninger, read by Jim Gregorich.

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■ ■ ■ ■ ENJOY!

Gala is Feb. 25

Can Do Canines hosts its annual Fetching Ball Gala on Sat, Feb. 25. This year's event will be held at the Radisson Blu Mall of America, with KARE 11 Reporter/Anchor Rena Sarigianopoulos serving as emcee. Enjoy an evening that celebrates the amazing human-assistance dog teams of Can Do Canines. Enjoy dinner, inspiring stories, games, and silent and live auctions—all benefitting the organization. Tickets now available. FFI: candocanines.org/fetchingball

Open Flow Forum

The Artists with Disabilities Alliance meets via Zoom 7-9 p.m. the first Thu of the month. Upcoming dates are Feb. 2 and March 7. Virtually join artists with disabilities and supporters to share visual art, writing, music, theater and artistic efforts or disability concerns. Facilitators are Tara Innmon, Kip Shane and Springboard for the Arts. The gatherings are fully accessible. Anyone needing special accommodations should contact Andy Sturdevant at host organization Springboard for the Arts. Funding is available for access needs. FFI: 651-294-0907, resources@springboardforthearts.org

Resources to Enjoy!

The Enjoy listings are for arts events as well as banquets, fundraisers and fun events by and for disability services organizations. Schedules may be subject to change. Some venues still may have mask and vaccine requirements. Please check with a venue or organization before making plans.

The Minnesota Access Alliance (MNA) provides an Accessible Arts & Culture Calendar for arts patrons who use



accessibility accommodations such as audio description, captioning, ASL interpreting and sensory-friendly accommodations. Link to more details at <https://calendar.mnaccess.org>. Be sure to check the listing or venue to find out its COVID-19 protocol and if an advance reservation is needed for the accessibility service.

Accessible events can be submitted to the MNA Calendar (and MinnesotaPlaylist.com). A list of other venues follows the event listings.

To receive a free monthly events calendar: email mactfactor@icloud.com and/or info@mnaccess.org. Ask for the entire events list or specific lists for ASL

Art for All

Art for All: The Stephanie Evelo Program for Art Inclusion at the University of Minnesota Institute for Community Integration connects artists with disabilities with organizations throughout the Twin Cities area. In the exhibition, 16 artists from Minnesota and Wisconsin will showcase their work in various media, including 3D installations, fiber, watercolor and photographs. The exhibit is Feb. 2 to March 30. at the Northrup King Building, 1500 Jackson St NE, Minneapolis. It is the largest art complex in Minnesota. Gallery hours: Thu 3–7 p.m. and Sat 12–4 p.m. Art for All features three events. At 6 p.m. Thu, Feb. 16, Alison Bergblom Johnson will speak on the topic of Disability Justice Through the Lens of Art and Supporting Non-disability-focused Galleries Curating Art by Artists with Disabilities. At 7-9 p.m. Sat, March 2, Cow Tipping Press will host a neurodiverse book release and author reading. At 4-7 p.m. Sat, March 30, there will be a closing reception and art market. Through exhibits and events, ICI's Art for All creates inclusive spaces for discussing, promoting, and selling the artists' work. FFI: <https://art.ici.umn.edu/>

interpreting, captioning, audio description, sensory-friendly accommodations or disability-related topics.

For other accessibility resources or upcoming webinars presented by MNA, sign up for emails at <https://mnaccess.org>

■ ■ ■ ■ OPPORTUNITIES



Ziad Nahas

Events

Attend research dinner

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Minnesota and the University of Minnesota Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences host the Annual Research Dinner Thu, Feb. 23, at Delta Hotels by Marriott Minneapolis Northeast. The event will feature leading researchers on the treatment of mental illnesses. Cost is \$60 and includes dinner and dessert. Participants can earn two social work CEUs for attending. "We are pleased to bring you the latest research from the University of Minnesota Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences," said Sue Abderholden, executive director of NAMI Minnesota. "University researchers will present their latest findings, introduce new studies that are underway, and answer your questions. Join us for an evening of information and hope."

Ziad Nahas, MD, professor and executive vice chair for the Department of Psychiatry, will present New Treatments for Severe Depression. Jenny Zick, MD/Ph.D., research resident, presents What's Old is New: Making Clozapine More Accessible for More Minnesotans with Severe Psychosis. Sophia Vinogradov, MD, chair for the Department of Psychiatry presents New Antipsychotic Medications Under Study. Saydra Wilson, MD, presents Psychiatry, M Health Fairview Mental Health & Addiction Services: Racial Disparities in Access to Neuromodulation Treatment.

Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Presentations are 6-8 p.m. Pre-registration required. FFI:

651-645-2948 or 1-888-NAMI-Helps, www.namimn.org or Eventbrite registration link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/nami-minnesota-and-the-university-of-minnesotas-annual-research-dinner-tickets-508219336717>

Ability Summit set

Microsoft holds a free online Ability Summit Microsoft Wed, March 8. Learn how communities and organizations can imagine, include and build an inclusive culture that will empower every person to achieve more. FFI: <https://twitter.com/MSFTEnable/status/1612925071575732234>

Can Do Canines open house

Can Do Canines will host an open house noon-2 p.m. Sat, March 4 at its campus 9at 440 Science Center Drive, New Hope. Potential clients, volunteers, or anyone who might be interested in supporting the organization can attend to learn how an assistance dog changes the life of a person with a disability. Through a self-guided tour, attendees will be able to watch a trainer working with an assistance dog, hear from a volunteer puppy raiser, talk with volunteer staff members, pose questions to client services coordinators about the application process, and meet graduate teams from each of the five types of areas Can Do Canines trains dogs: hearing, mobility, seizure, diabetes and childhood autism. Demonstrations will be held. FFI: www.candocanines.org

Children and families

PACER workshops sampling

PACER Center offers many useful free or low-cost workshops and other resources for families of children with any disabilities. Some in-person workshops are offered. Other workshops are online and livestreamed at this time. Advance registration is required for all workshops. At least 48 hours' notice is needed for interpretation. Check out website and link to the newsletter of statewide workshops that allows participants to pick and choose sessions designed for their needs.

Video game Access Part Two: PS4/PS5 is 1-2:15 p.m. Wed, Feb. 8 online. In part two of Video Game Access, you'll learn about devices, software, and accessibility features specific to gaming with PS4/PS5.

Minnesota Statewide Family Engagement Center : Tools and Resources for Students with Dyslexia is 6:30-7:45 p.m. Wed, Feb. 15 online. The workshop

will feature tools, apps and software to support students with dyslexia, from elementary school through college. Tools demonstrated will include text-to-speech, audiobooks, writing support and notetaking.

Video Game Access : Part Three: Switch/Virtual Reality is 1-2:15 p.m. Wed, Feb. 22 online. In this part three of Video Game Access, learn about devices, software, and accessibility features specific to gaming with Switch/Virtual Reality. FFI: PACER, 952-838-9000, 800-537-2237, www.pacer.org

Apply for Project KITE

PACER Center's Project KITE is a series of five free workshops that bring together education professionals and the parents of children with whom they work. Through collaborative trainings, teams learn about assistive technology designed to enhance learning and increase inclusion of students with disabilities. Workshops travel to settings.

Three separate teams with three members per team are needed to make a complete KITE training group. All three teams must be from similar geographic areas in Minnesota. Each single team is built around a focus child (aged 3-8) and consists of a parent of a child with special needs, a classroom teacher, and a related service provider working with the child. Each team member must apply individually. Applications for spring teams are due Fri, Feb. 24. FFI: Project KITE

Coordinator Elizabeth Barry, 952-838-9000, elizabeth.barry@pacer.org, www.pacer.org/stc/kite

Info & Assistance

Many classes available

NAMI Minnesota (National Alliance on Mental Illness) has set up a wide variety of free and in-person online mental health classes. Choices include Hope for Recovery, Transitions, Ending the Silence, Understanding Early Episode Psychosis for Families, In Our Own Voice, Family to Family, Positive Psychology, Creating Caring Communities, smoking cessation, a suicide prevention class called QPR – Question, Persuade and Refer, a special QPR class for Agricultural Communities and many more.

Be aware that on Feb. 1, NAMI Minnesota's Online Support Groups move to a new and improved platform, HeyPeers. HeyPeers provides a safe, easy to access environment exclusively designed for online support group meetings.

The classes and online support groups are designed for family members and caregivers, persons living with a mental illness, service providers, and also the general public. Find a complete listing of these classes and how to join in by going to namimn.org and clicking on "Classes" or go straight to <https://namimn.org/education-public-awareness/classes/scheduled/>.

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