

RISE REPORTER

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OUR ADVOCACY ISSUE

From waiver-funded services pay to mental health, this is a busy year at Minnesota's Capitol. Find the full legislative wrap-up on page 3.



PLUS:
Celebrating 30 YEARS of support at the Minnesota Employment Center.



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

It's almost Spring!!

It seems all of us here in the Midwest have such anticipation for the change of this season, especially this year. This winter has been challenging for many of us, especially for our transportation services team at Rise. Despite the challenges, our team has done a fantastic job providing safe transportation to almost 1,000 people daily in Minnesota and Western Wisconsin. Although transportation services are a critical component to the community and work success of people we support, many think of them as a "behind the scenes" service. They have certainly been tested these past few months, and I am incredibly grateful for our dedicated drivers and DSPs who provide transportation services each day, regardless of the weather!

Rise has been active in advocacy at the Minnesota Legislature, with crucial funding decisions being made this spring as well. We are unlike other businesses because our revenues depend on the legislature's actions. This is a budget year in Minnesota, and the legislature is making key decisions now on bills that address disability services funding and mental health services.

We've been sharing our story with legislators, primarily focusing on the significant workforce challenges that Rise and all disability services providers face. Our funding resources are primarily based on data that doesn't represent the rapidly inflating wage growth all businesses have faced in the past few years. At Rise alone, our hiring pay rates for Direct Support Professionals have risen over 25% in the past two years, well above any inflationary adjustments in our state funding. And challenges in hiring have also meant long and persistent waiting lists for many of our programs.

We need the legislature to increase the funding available to help with these workforce challenges. You can help us with these advocacy efforts by connecting with your legislators. There is a summary of key legislative initiatives later in this issue. Watch for emails and updates from Rise on social media that share tools for you to get involved in advocating this session. We hope you will join us in connecting with your legislators, urging them to support disability services programs and fund this session's critical disability and mental health bills.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynn Noren".

Lynn Noren
Rise President & CEO

WHO WE ARE

Rise unlocks potential and opens doors to success for people with disabilities or other challenges through creative solutions and customized support. We envision a progressive, supportive, and collaborative environment that fosters meaningful growth and provides opportunities to live a life filled with purpose.



Rise IN THE NEWS

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STAFF

- Kathy Klang**
Chair, Rise Board of Directors
- Lynn Noren**
President & CEO
- Noel McCormick**
Vice President of Advancement
- Kelly Bartnick**
Communications and Volunteer Manager; Editor

SUBMISSIONS

We love a good story. Share your photos and accomplishments with us! Your submission to kbartnick@rise.org may appear in an upcoming Rise Reporter, be featured on Rise's social media sites or both! We can't wait to hear from you!



WCCO TV & ABC NEWSPAPERS - JAN. 27
CBS Minnesota's Adam Duxter visited Rise as we celebrated our founder, Chester Tollefson's 100th Birthday
FIND THE STORY AT
WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/@WCCO

CAPITOL TV - FEB. 10
Jill Anderson, mother of Colton Anderson, who is served by Rise, testified on behalf of The Best Life Alliance legislation.



FIND THE STORY AT
YOUTUBE.COM/@RISEINC4563



photo: Tom Lindfors/Star-Observer

RISE NEW RICHMOND NAMED NONPROFIT OF THE YEAR

Congratulations to our New Richmond team for their community commitment, which earned them a nonprofit of the year award by the New Richmond Chamber of Commerce in February. Pictured (L-R) are Board Chairman Matt Tuinstra, Jake Peterson, Program Supervisor Michelle Andrews, Program Director John Watters and Program Supervisor Katie McNamara.



WHAT'S WITH ALL THESE BILLS?

Explaining policy changes proposed during this year's MN Legislative Session.

Keeping up with news at the Capitol feels like a full-time job. This is an incredibly hectic year in St. Paul.

Because the Legislature must approve a budget before going home this year, and due to the state's enormous budget surplus, many important funding bills are currently being debated in both the House and the Senate. We are currently watching six important bills as they move through budget discussions.

EMPLOYMENT AND DAY SERVICES

Minnesota disability providers, including Rise, are again asking legislators to change budget formulas that determine Direct Support Professionals wage increases. These bills are known as the Best Life Alliance legislation. We also advocated for these changes to the disability waiver rate system (DWRS) last year but were unsuccessful when legislators went home without approving any additional disability services investments.



Issue #1: STRENGTHEN THE DISABILITY WAIVER RATE SYSTEM (DWRS)

About: Employment and Day services programs are funded by the state's Medicaid DWRS reimbursement, meaning staff pay rates are largely controlled by legislative action. The current DWRS uses wage data that is out of date, making it extremely challenging to hire and retain workers because wages are not competitive. This results in individuals with disabilities being left out of the workforce and unable to access day supports because providers cannot hire enough staff to support them. The Best Life Alliance legislation proposes adjustments to the DWRS focused on using more current economic data for updates to reimbursement rates. This will allow providers to offer more competitive wages and benefits, in turn helping more Minnesotans to access services.

Numbers to watch: House File 999 | Senate File 1015

Issue #2: STRENGTHEN THE EXTENDED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

About: The MN Department of Employment and Economic Development oversees a critical disability employment support service called Extended Employment. This disability employment support program helps Minnesotans to reach their competitive employment goals. The proposed MOHR Extended Employment legislation would increase the sustainability of the Extended Employment program by adjusting the reimbursement rate to be more responsive to current market trends and therefore increasing access to this important service.

Numbers to watch: House File 1501 | Senate File 1271

(continued on next page)

Similar legislation would adjust reimbursement rates to Minnesota's Extended Employment program, a critical disability employment support service, making the program sustainable. You might hear this bill referred to as the EE bill.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

From job placement and support programs to housing assistance, rehabilitative mental health services and supports, and even a statewide suicide and crisis lifeline, we support a variety of critical funding that prioritizes mental health assistance.

Editor's Note: We are also monitoring the Wisconsin Legislature this session, and will update you with any appropriate and notable news and action alerts as they happen.

Issue #3: INDIVIDUAL PLACEMENT AND SUPPORTS (IPS) FUNDING

About: The previous budget provided one-time funding. If those funds expire, current IPS grants will be cut by 27%, which is almost \$1 million per year. That means 350 people will lose IPS services, and Rise IPS programs will also be affected. A proposed budget increase to \$9 million would preserve services for the 350 Minnesotans in danger of losing them and allow an additional 325 Minnesotans IPS access, providing more employment supports to Minnesotans with serious mental illness.

Numbers to watch: House File 1697 | Senate File 1779

Issue #4: ARMHS FUNDING SUPPORT

About: Because rates for mental health services are low, mental health providers are significantly underpaid compared to other providers with the same level of education, preparation, expertise, and training requirements. A rate increase is especially important during this time of high mental health needs. Rise provides adult rehabilitative mental health services (ARMHS), housing, and employment supports to some of our most vulnerable citizens. Our ARMHS program provides services in nine counties across Central Minnesota and in Anoka County. There are so few ARMHS providers in these areas that our waitlists are long. More funding would allow us to hire staff and grow our own program, AND encourage other people to enter the profession, reducing waitlists for this critical service.

Numbers to watch: House File 1683 | Senate File 1615

Issue #5: BRIDGES RENTAL ASSISTANCE SUPPORT

About: The Bridges Rental Assistance program is a vital component of the spectrum of housing resources for people with mental illness. Many people with mental illness in our communities are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless upon discharge from an institution. Those who are homeless often experience worsening mental health symptoms creating a cycle of mental health crisis, institutionalization and then homelessness again. Bridges funding helps to stop this cycle and allows people to move toward health and self-sufficiency.

Numbers to watch: House File 1696 | Senate File 1603

Issue #6:**988 SUICIDE AND CRISIS
LIFELINE FUNDING SUPPORT****About:**

People with mental illness regularly depend on the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Without this critical service, many more people will suffer and potentially die by suicide. The Suicide and Crisis Lifeline also preserves emergency resources for those in the greatest danger by de-escalating over 95% of situations on the phone or via text.

Building capacity for the 988 Lifeline centers by initiating a telecom fee is a critical step toward addressing mental health and crisis response needs in Minnesota and reducing the engagement of 911 response and law enforcement in mental health crisis.

Numbers to watch:

House File 1566
Senate File 2588



How can **YOU** help?

- *Reach out*
 - *Share your story with legislators.*
 - *Sign up for email alerts at rise.org*
 - **TAKE ACTION**
when called upon
- 

***Not into politics?
There is more than one way to be an advocate!***

Now signing up volunteers
for the spring and summer months.

Email volunteers@rise.org



30 YEARS



Minnesota Employment Center

Rise's Minnesota Employment Center supports people who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing in school-to-career transition, career exploration, and career planning leading to competitive and supported employment. Our programs feature:

- Job placement, coaching, job-seeking skills, work evaluations, job try-outs, and job shadowing.
- Individualized career planning and goal setting.
- Job retention and career support.
- Occupational communication support and education.
- Job placement, follow-up, coaching, and job-seeking skills for transition-aged youth throughout the state.
- Resume development and other supports.

Han Burrell's work piles up in the dish room of Concordia College's dining services in Moorhead, Minn. That's the nature of his job, which requires him to keep the dishes clean for approximately 1,900 students six days a week.

"I enjoy my work," Burrell said through an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter.

Because Han is Deaf, work conversations with his managers and coworkers often happen through handwritten notes and text messages. It's a scenario repeated across Minnesota's Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing workforce. But Han isn't alone. His Minnesota Employment Center (MEC) Occupational Communications Specialist Becca Hinckley supports him.

"When you work with MEC, we

don't just work with individuals, but the companies too. We have the resources and connections to ensure that placement or follow-

"We don't just support individuals, but the company too. We have resources to ensure that placement or follow-up services go smoothly..."

up services go smoothly for all parties," Hinckley said.

Hinckley, who is also fluent in ASL, is based in the Fargo-Moorhead area. She is one of 14 MEC team members providing employment support services to Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing people across Minnesota. In 2022 MEC supported 185 employers

and Minnesotans who worked to discover new skills, explored career opportunities, and found meaningful employment.

Hinckley began working with Burrell in 2018 and checks in with him daily. Supports include ensuring interpreters are present at work events, working on transportation to work, and explaining his benefits and schedule changes. She has also facilitated Deaf culture training with Burrell's team and set up supports which allow him to work independently.

Three decades of support

We are celebrating MEC's 30th Anniversary in 2023. The program began because people referred to Rise's Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) job programs were having difficulty maintaining

(Continued from page 6).

employment. “Communication issues or another concern would pop up, and people would quit. Then they would come back to VRS and start again. It became a cycle, and we realized there was a need for a program with a specific goal to support job stability in the Deaf community,” said MEC program manager Sheila Ritter.

In 2015 MEC expanded outside the Twin Cities Metro. Growth was slow, and many local organizations were skeptical that

Han Burrell
working at
Concordia
College in
Moorhead,
Minn.



courtesy photo

the new support services from MEC would last because other programs had not.

“Supporting people in rural areas is very different from urban areas,” Ritter said. “Up until that point, there hadn’t been a person-to-person connection with people. We’ve been fortunate to have many long-term team members, like Becca, who have provided stability.”

Hinckley, who has been with Rise for six years, continues to devote work time to educating employers while supporting the people she serves. “Most employers I have encountered have never worked with a Deaf, DeafBlind, or Hard of Hearing person. They depend on me for education about Deaf culture. There is also a lack of interpreters in our area, which can

cause delays during the interview and onboarding period, and that’s frustrating,” she said.

New services on the way

MEC is continuing to change and grow to offer more person-centered support. In the summer of 2021, the St. Paul office relocated as a result of a new partnership with ThinkSelf, a Deaf-led adult support organization that provides education, literacy expansion, goal-setting and workforce readiness. Future initiatives will bring support programs in line with statewide changes that blend VRS services and waiver funding

Those plans are still being formed, but eventually could lead to additional growth, including more people to support, new funding mechanisms and likely more team members too. Robert Reedy,

senior director of vocational services at Rise, says figuring out how many people could eventually be served is difficult because state data is currently unavailable.

“Deaf people are underserved because there aren’t enough support people who are qualified to meet their needs,” Reedy said. “They haven’t always been able to receive services from someone who understands what it is like to work with someone who is Deaf, DeafBlind, or Hard of Hearing.”

Hinckley is one of those qualified people. She says providing specialize services to meet individuals’ needs is fulfilling.

“My favorite part of the job is watching the people we support land dream jobs and watching them grow and succeed,” she said. ▼



EXCELLENT LEADERS

FOUR TEAM MEMBERS WERE RECENTLY RECOGNIZED WITH EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP AWARDS RECOGNIZING THEIR OUTSTANDING ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS.



**MEGAN EDMONDS,
PROGRAM MANAGER,
CRYSTAL, MINN. »**

What Megan’s colleagues are saying:

Megan models a “can do” spirit and a willingness to do the hard work. She actively works towards becoming a better leader and ensures people served are cared for and respected. Megan gets genuinely excited about new ways to deliver services and has the wisdom to consider all angles. She encourages others to think outside the box and ensures her team feels heard and respected.

Megan’s notable 2022 Accomplishments:

- Megan oversaw the transformation of Rise’s Crystal program with determination and grace.
- She supported the Coon Rapids team when there was turnover and went above and beyond to ensure nothing was missed.
- Megan treats everyone as a valued member of the team and values their contributions



**KRYSTLE KLEVEN,
PROGRAM MANAGER,
CBTE & SENSORY PROGRAMS»**

What Krystle’s colleagues are saying:

Krystle focuses on the strengths of her team members and adapts roles to match them. She is an excellent communicator who is positive, actively listens, and promotes trust and respect. Krystle is focused on mentoring and supporting new supervisors so they can grow and maximize their potential. She is always ready to roll up her sleeves and work alongside supervisors and DSPs wherever she is needed.

Krystle’s notable 2022 Accomplishments:

- Krystle created a system to match DSPs and persons served with the best supervisor for them resulting in smooth operations and team cohesion.
- She was instrumental in developing a new SET opportunity for the Sensory program.
- Krystle prides herself in making sure the programming is purposeful and meaningful for the people we serve.



LILIAN NGUNGKPAN,
HUMAN RESOURCES
MANAGER »

What Lilian's colleagues are saying:

Lilian promotes trust and respect on the Human Resources team while coaching people to learn new things and stretch. She believes in people and empowers them to take on new roles and responsibilities. Lilian has an open-door policy and will always make room in her day to meet with anyone. She is a great listener who is there for support and guidance when her team members need her.

Lilian's notable 2022 Accomplishments:

- Lilian launched a new onboarding and orientation process, including quarterly orientation meetings.
- She has vast human resources knowledge and ensures Rise complies with all applicable laws and regulations.
- Lilian expects the best from herself and encourages and supports others to be their best too.



ANDY OWZAREK,
PROGRAM MANAGER,
COTTAGE GROVE, MINN. »

What Andy's colleagues are saying:

Andy embodies the saying, "If there is a will, there is a way!" He is a creative thinker – he comes up with new ideas AND suggestions on how to carry them out. Andy creates an environment for success and a culture of high performance – he leads by example. He listens, sets clear expectations, and then coaches people through challenges.

Andy's notable 2022 Accomplishments:

- Andy is a master at networking. His connections in Washington County are critical to Rise's success.
- He has a big heart and will do whatever it takes to help the people we serve to be successful.
- Andy celebrates successes with his team, so they know what a difference they make in people's lives.



Rise Main Office | 8406 Sunset Road NE | Spring Lake Park, MN 55432-1387

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Spring Cleaning?

Donate your gently worn winter outdoor gear!



Through April 4 at Northeast Bank locations in Minneapolis, New Brighton and Coon Rapids.



CLEANING OUT YOUR CLOSETS TO MAKE ROOM FOR SPRING? THINK OF RISE!

Bring your new and gently used laundered winter coats, gloves, hats, and scarves to any Northeast Bank branch through April 4.

Donations will restock our clothing donation program, Michael's closet for next winter, helping offset cost of necessary cold weather items for those who may not be able to afford them. Adult sizes only, please.

Did this issue arrive after the donation deadline? No problem! Drop off anytime at our Spring Lake Park location!

