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CE+HD COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
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FYI

ICI INSTITUTE *on*
COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

Ensuring that all children, youth, and adults with disabilities, and those receiving educational supports, are valued by and contribute to their communities of choice.

MARCH 2021

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FEATURED STORIES



Shaping Justice: ICI's Self-Advocate Advisory Committee

It began as a way to help shape a new, federally-funded website dedicated to self-advocacy, but the Institute's Self-Advocate Advisory Committee (SAAC) didn't stop there.

Since 2019, the committee has reviewed research study questions to test whether people with intellectual disabilities may have difficulty understanding them, for example. Members have flagged photos in draft brochures that send the wrong message, or lack diversity. They have warned investigators when surveys asked too many questions, when print materials used a too-small typeface, or when a brochure headline used language that struck them as inappropriate. They helped recruit a person with disabilities to join the Minnesota Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (MNLEND) fellowship program.

Meeting this month via video conference call, they reviewed a quiz about the history of disability justice that will eventually be given to caregivers of people with disabilities as part of a training session. The goal: furthering caregivers' understanding of the hard-fought right to self-determination that people with disabilities have earned.

"The committee has given high-quality, critical feedback on the pieces they have reviewed for ICI," said [Katrina Simons](#), a community program specialist who organizes SAAC meetings and serves as a liaison between the committee and ICI. "Some self-advocacy groups focus on teaching the skills involved in speaking out, which is an extremely important mission. Our goal is to use the committee's talents to directly inform policy and training as it is being written."

Heidi Myhre (pictured), a committee member who has been active in both the Self-Advocacy Movement and in policy work with the Institute and other organizations, emphasized the importance of having people with different types of abilities and disabilities review research and training projects.

"We have to make sure we explain things in different ways and to give people the opportunity and time to process," she said. "This work helps us tell our story in a way that everyone can understand."

The Institute's Research and Training Center on Community Living operates the [Self-Advocacy Online](#) website under a grant from federal agencies, including the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research. It was that project that sparked the idea for the committee, said [John Smith](#), a coordinator at ICI.

"The SAO website is intended to share interesting and useful information with people who have a range of intellectual ability, so the need for input from self-

advocates became evident as we began thinking about the best ways to share our research," Smith said. "Rather than making assumptions about making data understandable for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, we formed a group that would review content developed by ICI's staff and suggest ways to make the language more plain and more relevant to people's lives." The content developed for Self-Advocacy Online goes beyond plain language and often incorporate graphics, video, and animation to illustrate key ideas.

The committee, supported in part by a federal grant to Self Advocates Becoming Empowered, currently has 10 members, including three from outside Minnesota who also serve in national self-advocacy organizations.

"It's not a common thing that a university would ask our opinion on their work," Teresa Moore, a committee member and director of the [Self Advocacy Resource & Technical Assistance Center](#), said after the recent meeting. "It's a matter of respect."

In addition to Myhre and Moore, committee members include [Cliff Poetz](#), Joe Meadours, Thomas Robinson, Katie McDermott, Eva Reed, Eric McVay, Jocey Brown, and Jason Billehus.

Moore routinely shares traditional advocacy news with SAAC members, and takes their concerns back to national groups. Not surprisingly, much of the conversation today centers on the pandemic.

"In a lot of places, even though states are opening up, people with disabilities are having difficulty getting their rights acknowledged," she said. "We hear stories about family members controlling activities to only doctor's appointments, with no participation in the community. We need to keep talking about this."



Research Day Features ICI Autism Work

The Institute's work in autism prevalence and the critical age at diagnosis are highlighted at this month's College of Education and Human Development [Research Day](#).

The virtual event features short videos that will accompany each poster. Visitors are encouraged to leave feedback and questions for presenters through the end of March. On March 23, a [live panel](#) will discuss the intersection of social justice and research. There will also be a Three-Minute Thesis competition and a presentation of CEHD's World Challenge 2020 winners.

[Libby Hallas](#), an ICI project coordinator who manages the Minnesota-Autism and Developmental Disability Monitoring (MN-ADDMM) Network Project, presents two posters. Hallas is pictured at left during a previous (in-person) CEHD Research Day.

The first covers autism spectrum disorder prevalence data reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, noting differences across racial and ethnic population groups that require further study.

"Continuing to expand our surveillance area across racial and ethnic groups will give us more precise data," Hallas said. "There is a need to further understand the

possible reasons for disparities, including the issue of access to diagnostic services.”

The second poster notes disparities in children's ages when they are first identified as being on the autism spectrum. Children who are only identified through services at school start to receive intervention far later than those seen in both school and clinical settings. Racial disparities were also noted.

“This was a network-wide project that our Minnesota team led, and it highlights the importance of early intervention. If the first comprehensive evaluation doesn’t happen until a child is school-aged, an important window may have been missed,” Hallas said. “We’re looking forward to sharing this work, and to seeing what other researchers across the college are submitting.”

Elevating Positive Behavior Support and Strategies

A student disrupts class. An argument erupts in a household where family members have been isolated during the pandemic. A toddler in an early childhood education center cries loudly when it’s time to leave the playground.

Rather than dealing with these common flashpoints after they happen, a burgeoning area of expertise in behavioral and biomedical science aims to prevent them.

On several fronts, the Institute on Community Integration and partner organizations are combining positive behavior support (PBS) and person-centered thinking practices to increase families’ quality of life.

This month, for example, ICI staff members will share key insights at “The Expanding World of PBS: Science, Values, and Vision,” a virtual [conference](#) now in its 18th year.

Positive behavior support is a set of research-based strategies for increasing quality of life and decreasing interfering behavior. Instead of focusing on interventions for one person, the framework uses a continuum of proactive strategies to teach a range of skills, from de-escalating intense one-on-one situations to building good social relationships within an organization. This creates environments that are positive and



predictable. They also work alongside person-centered planning techniques, which involve designing activities that are both tailored for and important to an individual.

As the PBS framework has grown in use by early childhood centers, schools, residential, employment, and other community settings, there is a tendency to focus on the most intense situations involving people with disabilities, said [Jessica Simacek](#), manager of the ICI Telehealth Laboratory and a specialist in supporting children with developmental disabilities. This is a common misunderstanding about the framework, she said.

“In reality, it’s intended to be a model to support everybody in a given setting. On a universal level, that means creating a supportive environment for the staff, students, and families at a school, for example. We’re not stepping in to just stop an interfering behavior. We’re building a proactive, positive, data-based approach to improve the quality of life for everyone in that setting.”

At this month’s virtual conference, ICI’s [Rachel Freeman](#) (pictured), director of state initiatives and a leader in the area of PBS, will discuss ways to implement a three-tiered PBS model in home, community, and work settings. The tiers represent the range of behavior intervention and support, from creating a broad set of expectations for everyone in a given setting to more individualized responses to specific behaviors. She will also present some of the Institute’s work with the state of Maryland to create a technical assistance infrastructure for implementing PBS in organizations supporting people with IDD in residential and employment settings.

[Eileen Klemm](#), program director for ICI’s [Check & Connect](#) dropout prevention program; former ICI Director [David Johnson](#); and [Nicole Duchelle](#), an ICI education program specialist, will also present the Institute’s work at the conference.

Check & Connect also is featured this month in a webinar series hosted by the National Center on Intensive Intervention and the Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. The [series](#) focuses on supporting secondary students with intensive needs during the pandemic.

ICI also is part of a community of practice, the Minnesota Positive Behavior Support Network, which has been hosting a [series](#) of PBS forums for people across the lifespan. And under an award from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, ICI is creating a series of eight online training [modules](#) supporting providers of person-centered practices and PBS in home and community-based settings.

“One of our colleagues used an analogy recently of a fire station when talking about these strategies,” said Freeman. “We’re giving people tools and resources so they

don't have to be putting out fires all the time. Instead, we are preventing fires from occurring in the first place."



LEND an Ear: On-Demand Disability Training

Fellows from the Institute on Community Integration are contributing to a [podcast series](#) that delivers on-the-go training and insight to child welfare workers. The current and former fellows are from ICI's [Minnesota Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities](#) (MNLEND) program, an interdisciplinary leadership training program that brings together more than 16 disciplines across the University of Minnesota.

Jenny Tessmer (MNLEND, 2019–20) created two of the podcasts, which focus specifically on helping workers better understand disability issues within their

caseloads. The first featured an interview with Derjaun Strons (MNLEND, 2017–18), who works in child protection services for Hennepin County.

“Every child welfare agency should educate their workers [about disability],” Strons says on the podcast. “I wanted [the LEND training] as a tool in my toolbox.”

Tessmer also interviewed Gail Meyer, a longtime foster parent, about her experiences trying to get services for children with a variety of diagnoses, including fetal alcohol syndrome.

“This project really aligned with my passion and my career,” said Tessmer, now a mental health therapist with Family Enhancement Center in Minneapolis who works with clients referred through the Hennepin County child protection services unit.

The series is part of a broad training initiative created by the University of Minnesota’s Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW).

“Child welfare workers have to be experts in child development, domestic violence, substance abuse, maltreatment, disabilities, and so many other issues. Most days are overwhelming,” said Traci LaLiberte, executive director of CASCW. “We’re always thinking about ways to reach them in a better format. And because social workers spend a lot of time in the car going to investigations, and going to court, we started to think about capitalizing on that time with some training in manageable chunks that could be accessed on their phones.”

The result is a wide-ranging series of podcasts, helping social workers navigate the challenges of the pandemic, and learn more about research, policy, and practice topics.

MNLEND fellows in this year’s cohort are working on future disability-focused podcasts LaLiberte said.

“One will be focused on trauma and how child welfare workers need to understand the additional layers involved when working with kids with neurodevelopmental disabilities who have also experienced trauma,” she said. Others explore different cultural views of disability and how that impacts the child welfare process.

“It’s about getting people in the field to talk about what they are doing and what their challenges are, so others can learn from them,” she said.

SOCIAL MEDIA SPOTLIGHT



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA TWIN CITIES

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Masonic Institute for the Developing Brain



Featured on [ICI's Facebook](#) page in March 2021

In October 2021, the Institute on Community Integration will move down the road from our location on the UMN Twin Cities campus to the new Masonic Institute for the Developing Brain (MIDB). ICI Director Amy Hewitt discusses ICI's role in MIDB and this unique opportunity to bring together health care, education, and community human service, supporting people with developmental and neurodevelopmental disabilities in all aspects of their life, throughout their life.

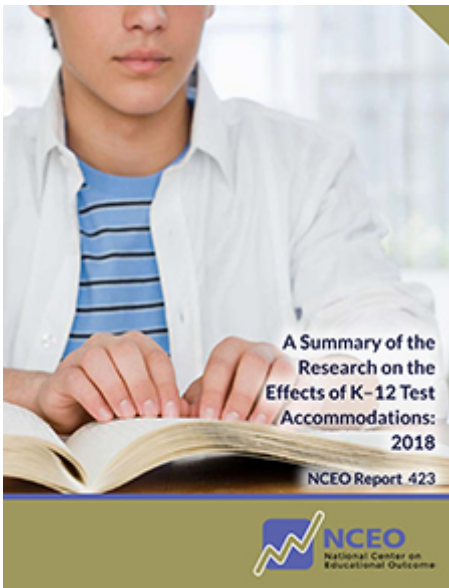
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NEW RELEASES

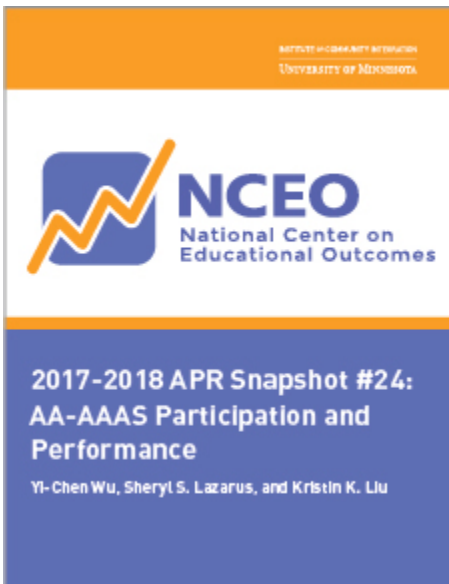
NCEO Report 423: A Summary of the Research on the Effects of K–12 Test Accommodations: 2018

Authors: [Chris Rogers](#), [Sheryl Lazarus](#), and [Martha L Thurlow](#)

The purpose of [this report](#) is to present a synthesis of the research on test accommodations for U.S. elementary and secondary students (K–12) published in



2018. The academic literature described here encompasses empirical studies of performance comparability, investigations into accommodations use, implementation practices, and perceptions of the effectiveness of accommodations. During 2018, 11 research studies were published on the topic of testing accommodations in the U.S. elementary and secondary education system. Published by ICI's National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO).



NCEO APR Snapshot Briefs 22 and 24

These are two of the latest issues from an [NCEO series of briefs](#) that provide snapshots of the participation and performance of special education students in statewide assessments used for Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) accountability using federally-submitted data.

- [APR Snapshot Brief 22: State Assessment Participation and Performance of Students](#)

[Receiving Special Education Services](#). Using data for the 2017-18 school year, NCEO presents information on participation and performance in reading and mathematics statewide assessments administered to students in grades 3-8 and high school. Grade 8 data are highlighted in this snapshot report.

- [APR Snapshot Brief 24: 2017-2018 AA-AAAS Participation and Performance](#). An Alternate Assessment based on Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (AA-AAAS) has been developed by each state to measure the academic achievement of students with significant cognitive disabilities. This report summarizes AA-AAAS data used for ESEA accountability. Using data for the 2017-2018 school year, NCEO presents information on the number of students participating in the AA-AAAS and the performance of those students.



TIES Distance Learning Series, articles 28, 29, and 30

These are three of the latest articles from the [TIES Distance Learning Series](#). This series from ICI's TIES Center provides a framework for supporting all students, including those with significant cognitive disabilities to actively interact with others, engage with classmates, learn grade-level general education curriculum and other essential skills, and participate in routines and transitions.

- [DL #28: Not letting LRE slide: Ensuring inclusive education during COVID.](#) During COVID, how can teams prioritize the least restrictive environment and inclusive education? How do we assure that we are teaching students with significant cognitive disabilities in the least restrictive environment possible during distance learning and as we return to various in-person delivery models? Considering three questions at key decision points regarding instructional models can raise the awareness of the impact of a team's decision on a student.
- [DL #29: Collaboration in the Trenches: Lessons Learned about Inclusive Technology During COVID.](#) In this DL post, the specific collaborative activities to support continued use of assistive and educational technology during distance learning are explored. Lessons for teachers and leaders from the work in Loudoun County, Virginia are listed.
- [DL #30: An Example of UDL and Online Collaboration.](#) "What does it look like?" has always been one of the biggest questions about including students with significant cognitive disabilities. This post is one example of how a middle school in Carroll County, MD moved their UDL lesson planning process online as a result of COVID. It includes the process and examples of the actual work.



Health and Wellness Blog Post

Author: Cliff Poetz

Among other things, Cliff Poetz is a Community Liaison at ICI, a founding member of People First Minnesota, and a blogger. [In this blog post](#), he urges self-advocates to schedule an annual check-up with the doctor, get vaccinated against COVID-19, and exercise regularly. Outdoor exercise has become impractical for many because of the pandemic and cold weather, but self-advocates can discuss suitable workouts at home with their doctors or therapists. Finally, the pandemic has stressed both body and mind, so Poetz also reminds self-advocates to take care of their mental health. Posted on ICI's Self-Advocacy Online. View other Self-Advocacy blogs at selfadvocacyonline.org.



RTC-OM Case Studies Series

Three case studies were conducted to describe three different home and community-based services (HCBS) outcome measurement programs. These case studies provide information about the implementation of each of the programs, including interviewer training and how the programs ensure fidelity as well as the benefits

and challenges of each of the measurement programs. Leadership of service agencies and related organizations and their measurement and evaluation staff are welcome to use this information to identify the factors that should be considered when choosing or designing an HCBS outcomes measurement program for their purposes. Published by ICI's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on HCBS Outcome Measurement (RTC-OM).

- [Case Study 1: Implementing a Measurement Program: National Core Indicators — In-Person Survey \(NCI-IPS\)](#).
- [Case Study 2: Implementing a Measurement Program: Personal Outcome Measures® \(POM\)](#).
- [Case Study 3: Implementing a Measurement Program: Independent Monitoring for Quality \(IM4Q\)](#).

Journal Articles Published

[Smith, J.](#) (2021). [Policy priorities for the intellectual and developmental disabilities community](#). Published in Healthcare Policy Priorities for the Biden Administration, a Special Feature issue of *Journal of Health Care Finance*, 47.

Matthias, C., LaVelle, J., [Johnson, D. R.](#), [Wu, Y.-C.](#), & [Thurlow, M. L.](#) (2021). [Exploring predictors of bullying and victimization of students with autism spectrum disorder \(ASD\): Findings from NLTS 2012](#). *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND EVENTS



Moving Mountains Award

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Applications for 2021 Moving Mountains Awards due March 31

The National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP), ICI's Research and Training Center on Community Living (RTC-CL), and the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR) are seeking nominations for the 2021 Moving Mountains Award. The purpose of this award is to recognize organizations using leading practices in direct support staff workforce development that result in improved outcomes for the people being supported. Organizations applying are required to illustrate how their direct support workforce practices and philosophy align with the principles of NADSP.

[Applications are now being accepted for the 2021 Moving Mountains Award.](#) All applications must be submitted by March 31, 2021. Applications from statewide/regional initiatives, local organizations, and individuals are welcomed. Up to two awards are given each year. Finalists will be acknowledged at the ANCOR Conference in June. Award winners will be honored at the Reinventing Quality Conference in August. Winners will be notified in advance.



Accepting Applications for Jason David Schleien Scholarship

[The scholarship](#) will provide financial support for a minimum of one student annually to participate in a semester-long internship at Wilderness Inquiry or a similar organization. This \$3,000 internship could take place in the fall, spring or summer semester and will assist with the development and implementation of opportunities for individuals with disabilities, disadvantaged youth, and other underserved populations to participate in Wilderness Inquiry or a similar program. Students must be enrolled full-time at the University of Minnesota's College of Education and Human Development and participating in an approved internship. The scholarship deadline is May 1, 2021.

Seeking Participants with Disabilities for Research Study of New HCBS Outcome Measures

Getting services at home or in the community is important for people with disabilities and their providers. ICI's Research and Training Center on HCBS Outcome Measurement (RTC-OM) has developed measures on how well Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) help people with disabilities live the lives they want. RTC-OM researchers want to talk



to people with disabilities (via Zoom or in person) to make sure these measures provide information that improve services in ways that matter (e.g., social connectedness, meaningful activities). Participants must be 18 years or older, have a disability and receive services or supports for it, provide participation consent or assent (if not their own legal guardian), and be willing to take part in a 60–90 minute interview. Participants will be interviewed three times over a year period. Each participant will receive a \$10 gift card.

If you think some of the people you support might be interested or have questions about this work, please contact [Matt Roberts](#).

Recruiting Focus Groups of Family Caregivers of People with IDD

Family and Individual Needs for Disability Supports (FINDS) Survey

ICI researchers are seeking family members of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) who provide regular supports, as well as people who work with family caregivers and may have special insight into health, financial, and other outcomes for caregivers. Information from this national survey, [last conducted in 2017](#), will be used to create data briefs and reports to share with policymakers and others who decide on services and supports. Focus groups will be held online in early summer via video conference and last 60–90 minutes. Participants will receive \$25 gift cards. Interested individuals can contact [Dr. Lynda Lahti Anderson](#).



Seeking Service Provider Organizations for Research Studies

Workforce

ICI's Research and Training Center on Community Living (RTC-CL) is seeking interested provider organizations that serve adults with IDD to take part in a study to evaluate training approaches and interventions for direct support professionals

(DSPs) and supervisors. The study aims to find out which training approaches (customized with technical assistance vs. standard protocol) and interventions (for staff recruitment, selection and retention) are more effective in reducing the turnover and vacancy rates among direct support staff and supervisors as well as improving staff job satisfaction, intent to stay on the job, and staff competencies.

The study would provide your organization with an opportunity for your staff (DSPs and supervisors) to be a part of an online training and technical assistance intended to improve the above-listed outcomes. All study activities (including data collection and training) have moved online because of the pandemic. Interested? Contact [Renáta Tichá](#).



Technology

RTC-CL is seeking interested provider organizations that serve adults with IDD to take part in a study to evaluate the use of smart living technologies (e.g., motion sensors, communication technologies, assistive technologies) on outcomes of adults with IDD. The study aims to find out what types of technologies are now being used to support people with IDD and how they improve the well-being, independence, self-determination, and social connectedness of adults with IDD.

The study would provide your organization with an opportunity to learn more about how smart living technologies support the people your organization serves. All study activities have moved online because of the pandemic.

Interested? Contact [Brian Abery](#).

Seeking Participants for Research Study on Autism

"Ecological Momentary Assessment of Leisure Activity"

Leisure participation is a key leading to physical and mental wellbeing, social inclusion, independence, self-worth, and quality of life. Researchers at the University of Minnesota are recruiting adults with autism who live alone or independently with roommates and have access to a computer or a smartphone to study the types and frequency of leisure activities they do in their free time. Those

enrolled may be compensated up to \$65 for participating in this study. To learn more or to enroll, please send an email to leisurestudy@umn.edu



STAFF UPDATES

MN-ADDM: On February 5, the [MN-ADDM project](#) submitted autism prevalence data for 2018—the most recent study year—to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). [Ryan Ferguson](#), [Courtney Higginbotham](#), and Susan Madden (who retired in January 2021) collected the data. The other MN ADDM team members are [Libby Hallas](#), [John Westerman](#), [Jennifer Hall-Lande](#), [Amy Esler](#), [Amy Hewitt](#), [Jenny Poynter](#), and Jeanette Sample. ICI's MN ADDM project began in 2015.



Whitney Terrill and Rebecca Dosch Brown: On February 16, [Terrill](#) (pictured) and [Dosch Brown](#) led an interactive workshop, "What is Ableism Anyway? And What Can We Do About It?" for the local nonprofit Literacy MN's Social Justice Certificate. Over 95 attendees participated, including people from South America and Europe.

NCEO: On February 16 and 17, ICI's National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) assembled a panel of advisors to develop recommendations on how to validly measure what students with disabilities know and can do using interim

assessments. [Andrew Hinkle](#), [Sheryl Lazarus](#), [Kristin Liu](#), [Chris Rogers](#), [Kathy Strunk](#), and [Martha Thurlow](#) participated in the virtual meeting. On February 18, Lazarus was a panelist on “K-12 assessments for special populations in the time of COVID,” which was part of the National Council on Measurement in Education webinar series on COVID's impact on assessments.

Muna Khalif, Katrina Simons, Adele Dimian, and Jessica Simacek: On February 17, [Khalif](#), [Simons](#), [Dimian](#), and [Simacek](#) presented, "Introduction and overview of Positive Behavior Support," a training webinar for the Department of Human Services with State partners to over 50 virtual attendees.



Barb Kleist: On February 17, [Kleist](#) was interviewed for a podcast produced by Advocating Change Together (ACT) on the topic, “Planning the lives we want and deserve.” Kleist was asked how she became an advocate of empowering people with disabilities to make their own life choices and what role person-centered planning plays in getting people the supports they need to make this happen. ACT will share the podcast via social media at a future date.



Eileen Klemm and Ann Romine: On February 25, [Klemm](#) (pictured) and [Romine](#) were among the presenters on a National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII) webinar on Check & Connect implementation and mentoring in a virtual environment. NCII is a center within the American Institutes for Research. Attended by 280 participants, this webinar was the first in a series known as “Supporting students with intensive needs during the pandemic,” being sponsored by NCII.

MNLEND Fellows: On March 4, all of the 2020–2021 [MNLEND](#) Fellows participated in a virtual disability policy advocacy visit with two Minnesota state senators who are local disability policy champions. The fellows met with Senators Jim Abeler (District 35, Republican) and John A. Hoffman (District 36, DFL). The fellows shared their stories on numerous disability policy issues, ranging from special education to rate reform in the direct support workforce.

ALUMNI UPDATE



Mia Donley

Help for Hungry Families

Winning a state government award last month for getting a food assistance program up and running during the pandemic was an impressive achievement for Mia Donley, ([MNLEND](#), 2015–16). What makes it even more impressive was the timing.

Donley, a registered dietician who received a master's degree in public health from the University of Minnesota, joined the Colorado Department of Human Services in March 2020 as an education and outreach coordinator for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Just a few weeks later, Donley and a team of others from the DHS and the Education Department were tapped to issue Pandemic-EBT benefits to families of school-aged children who were not able to receive free or reduced-price lunches due to school closures. The electronic benefits were issued beginning in July.

Last month, Colorado Governor Jared Polis announced that the team, including Donley and colleagues Megan Hrdlicka and Max Young, won the Tom Clements Better Government Award for Outstanding Service. The award highlights the work of those who have elevated the performance of state government and strive to leave Colorado's government better than they found it, according to Polis.

In nominating the group, Office of Economic Security Director Ki'i Powell and Food and Energy Assistance Director Karla Maraccini praised the Pandemic-EBT program for "ensuring hundreds of thousands of Colorado children were food secure during the pandemic, going above and beyond their typical workload for months to get the program up and running."

Donley called the experience a crash course in crisis communication, listening skills, and benefits administration.

"We were building the plane as we were flying it, working with community partners to get the word out about the application and other details," she said. "There were a lot of lessons learned, and it brought me back to my time with MN-LEND, when I interviewed members of the Somali community who had children with autism and were trying to learn about possible resources. The frustration so many people feel as they try to access benefits is universal. Above all, listening to participants is so important."

As her team now prepares for a second round of the electronic benefits to be dispersed, she said, they will take what they've heard from those participants and use the information to improve the process.

"We have to respect the stress families are under now," she said. "If you have run out of resources, we are sometimes the only place where people can vent their frustration. And I share it. We have to get these families fed."

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