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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

CE+HD COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
+ HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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.

May 2025

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Featured Stories

Impact



Lonely?
You're not alone.

Disability and Loneliness: New *Impact*

The new issue of [Impact magazine](#) explores the global loneliness epidemic through a disability lens.

Articles in the issue explore the latest [loneliness research](#), promising programs tackling both loneliness and isolation in people with disabilities, and personal stories from individuals and families who share what loneliness looks like to them.

Editors tapped to lead the issue were [Sarah Hall](#), a research associate at the Institute on Community Integration whose work centers on social belonging for people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD); Zach Rossetti, associate professor at Boston University's Wheelock College of Education and Human Development; and Shelby Richardi, a person with lived disability experience who has collaborated on friendship and belonging research projects with Rossetti.

"When we first started talking about the issue, it was difficult for me because I kept thinking about it in terms of social inclusion, but we really need to dig into loneliness itself and learn how people with disabilities experience it," Hall said. "We need to intentionally find out what people want and what they're missing" in their relationships.

The topic does conjure negative feelings, Rossetti said, but they must be addressed in the field.

"Despite lots of great things happening, there is a lot of social isolation and loneliness in communities," he said, noting articles on how loneliness particularly affects people with disabilities during [transition from school to adult life](#), and later at [retirement age](#). "There are roots of problems leading to loneliness in our separate education systems for students with disabilities, and in general, much of society is still inaccessible in different ways to people with disabilities. It's quite scary to think about the number of people who are experiencing loneliness, and just having a disability is a key risk factor."

The rising use of social media and hours spent with various forms of technology are explored in the issue.

Learn more about the [new *Impact on loneliness*](#).



Rally for Disability Rights, Services

U.S. Senator Tina Smith, state lawmakers, and disability rights advocates recently rallied support for the [Institute on Community Integration](#) and other organizations that were formed decades ago under federal legislation to protect the freedom and access to community living of people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD).

The May 3 Rally to Protect Disability Funding, [covered by local media](#), was sponsored by [The Arc Minnesota](#) as a statewide call to action in response to drastic proposed budget cuts to critical programs and services. In addition to the Institute and other University Centers of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, the measures could eliminate or diminish many other organizations supporting people with developmental disabilities.

Advocates also worry that proposed deep cuts in federal Medicaid spending will threaten home and community-based (HCBS) services that millions of people with disabilities directly rely on for basic living expenses.

"We will not stand by while support for you is dismantled," Senator Tina Smith told the crowd of people with disabilities and advocates. "People with disabilities deserve a safe place to live independently. The opportunity to work and to contribute to your community, to be politically and civically engaged, that is your right. Those are all of our rights in this country. This isn't a left or right issue; this is

about what *is* right. There is a lot of power gathered here today, and I have seen that when we join together, we can get the change that we need."

Smith, a DFL party member, thanked the Republican legislators who attended the rally for their bipartisan support of issues important to people with disabilities.

Minnesota State Senator Jim Abeler, a Republican from Anoka, reiterated his support for measures to protect both state and federal disability funding, leading the crowd in loud chants.

ICI Director [Amy Hewitt](#), an invited speaker, said the proposed federal dismantling of disability services would wipe out critical supports for people with disabilities and the infrastructure that allows them to live independently. This includes University Centers of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, including ICI; the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities; The Minnesota Disability Law Center, and federally designated projects of national significance that drive innovation and vital research on community living.

[Learn more about the rally.](#)



MNLEND Research Day

How can a successful disability justice initiative scale up? What do autistic students say they need most in school? In the quest to reach more families with

resources for early intervention around developmental delays, can barber shops help?

These were just a few of the research questions presented in the Minnesota Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (MNLEND) program's first research poster event, held April 24 at the Institute on Community Integration. Fellows created posters representing the projects they developed over the course of their experience that seek to address concerns community members have raised. Much like other professional research poster sessions, they gave short pitches about their work to each other and to attendees at the event.

"These projects are designed intentionally to engage the community in the work LEND fellows are doing," ICI Director [Amy Hewitt](#) said. "The fellows are doing work in which the community has identified a need, while they are acquiring interdisciplinary training for the longer term in their careers. And they get experience tying all this work together in a professional presentation."

ICI is a lead partner for the [MNLEND program](#), but it spans more than 16 disciplines across the University of Minnesota, including the departments of educational psychology and pediatrics, and speech language and hearing sciences. The program also [recruits](#) community fellows from a variety of fields, forming a cohort for an academic year. Many fellows combine the experience with their studies in occupational or physical therapy, dentistry, pediatrics, education, and many other fields. Since 2009, MNLEND has trained more than 600 fellows, many of whom have taken on leadership roles in the field of neurodevelopmental and other disabilities.

Learn more about [MNLEND Research Day](#).

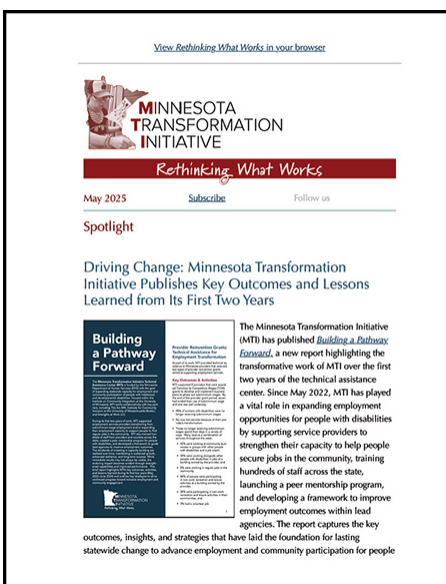
Social Media Spotlight



Recently featured on ICI's Facebook page

"This is not a political matter. It's a matter of priorities." – Sen. Jim Abler, one of several lawmakers committed to bipartisanship around funding disability services and programs. Thanks to [Minnesota Public Radio](#) for covering this event. <https://z.umn.edu/ag7a>

New Releases



Rethinking What Works: May 2025

Editor: [Danielle C Mahoehey](#)

This monthly newsletter from ICI's Minnesota Transformation Initiative (MTI) shares upcoming trainings, featured resources, and stories from across the state about supporting people with disabilities in finding and keeping jobs. It supports MTI's objective to build capacity for competitive, integrated employment in Minnesota. The [May 2025 issue of Rethinking What Works](#) spotlights *Building a Pathway Forward*, a new report highlighting the

transformative work of MTI over the first two years of the technical assistance center. The newsletter also features resources and upcoming trainings.



RISP Data Byte: "Medicaid-Funded Services for People With IDD Shift From Institutions to Home and Community-Based Services Between 1982 and 2020"

Authors: [Sheryl A. Larson](#) and [Jon Neidorf](#)

The [May 2025 Data Byte](#) notes that since 1982, the number of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) receiving services in community settings has surged, while those in Medicaid-funded IDD institutions have been cut in half. Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) prove far more cost-effective than institutional care in Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (ICF/IID). We should continue increasing access to community-based services, enabling transitions for those in ICF/IID who desire it. Addressing the shortage of direct support workers is crucial to fulfilling service commitments for all. Part of the *RISP Data Bytes* series.

Journal Articles Published

[Simacek, J. J.](#), Riegelman, A., Gunderson, J., [Worthley, E.](#), [Dimian, A. E.](#), Chaxiong, P., & Wolff, J. J. (2025). Examining behavioral interventions for infancy and early toddlerhood: A systematic review of intervention effects, parameters, and participants. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-025-06804-0>

Miralles-Cardona, C., Cardona-Moltó, M.-C., [Tichá, R.](#), & [Abery, B. H.](#) (2025). Prepared to ensure quality education for all? A comparative study of pre-service teachers' self-efficacy for inclusion in Spain and the United States. *Education Sciences*, 15(5), 535. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15050535>

Lahti Anderson, L., & [Pettingell, S.](#) (2025). Caregiver mental health: A review of

research findings. *National Leadership Consortium on Developmental Disabilities Bulletin*, 23–

24. <https://natleadership.org/bulletin/NLCDDBulletinEdition14April2025.pdf>

Events and Announcements



Art for All: "In Response"

May 1–Summer 2025

Art for All Gallery

Blythe Brenden-Mann Foundation Community Center

Masonic Institute for the Developing Brain

2025 E. River Parkway, Minneapolis

Each piece in [*In Response*](#) reflects the personal story of someone who has experienced inpatient psychiatric care. Through interviews and visual storytelling, Minnesota-based artist Virginia Townsend offers a compassionate and unflinching look at life inside the mental health system—capturing its hardships and moments of resilience. Her art is influenced by her disability and complex post-traumatic stress disorder. Townsend's drawings and paintings give shape to the often invisible realities of trauma, grounded in a practice of survival, self-advocacy, and creative community.

This exhibition is funded by grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board and the National Endowment for the Arts.



Five Years Later: Honoring the Memory of George Floyd

May 21

12:15–1 pm

Mayo Memorial Auditorium

Livestreamed at z.umn.edu/fiveyears

Join the University of Minnesota community for a time of reflection, remembrance, and connection as we mark the five-year anniversary of George Floyd's death. This moment sparked a global movement for racial justice. The event will feature reflections from community members, music, and a nine-minute and 29-second moment of silence.



ICI POLICY FORUM

DECLINING USE OF RESIDENTIAL SETTINGS OF SEVEN OR MORE PEOPLE WITH IDD

Wednesday, June 18, 2025 • 2-3:30 p.m. CT

Policy Forum: "Declining Use of Residential Settings of Seven or More People with IDD"

June 18

2-3:30 pm Central Time

This Policy Forum explores deinstitutionalization and is based on a recent [Policy Research Brief](#). The number of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) living in institutions has been declining for decades. However, many people with IDD still live in settings with seven or more people. The use of large group facilities varies widely across states, and many are not licensed or regulated. People live better in small settings than in institutions, so panelists will discuss downsizing or closing large institutions and limiting the use of nursing homes and psychiatric facilities to house people with IDD. The panelists will be Jackson DuFauchard (2023–2024 MNLEND), Laura Vegas (National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services), [Jon Neidorf](#), and [Sherri Larson](#). [Julie Bershadsky](#) will moderate the discussion. [Register for this Zoom webinar](#).



Schleien Scholarship Accepting Applications

The [Jason David Schleien Memorial Scholarship](#) offers up to \$3,000 to qualified students who actively promote the community inclusion of individuals with disabilities, disadvantaged youth, and other underserved populations. These activities could take place in the spring, summer or fall. Students must be enrolled full-time at the University of Minnesota's College of Education and Human Development and report their experiences to the Schleien family after completing the project. Applicants should submit a one-page proposal to ICI's [Nik Fernholz](#) outlining their interest in the stated examples of areas of study and working with the relevant populations. [Read more about this scholarship opportunity.](#)

Staff Updates

Jennifer Hall-Lande, Sandra Pettingell, and Libby Hallas. On April 3, [Hall-Lande](#) (pictured), [Pettingell](#), and Lynda Lahti Anderson presented "Promoting Health and Wellness for Direct Support Professionals" at the Art and Science of Health Promotion Annual Conference in Colorado Springs, Colorado. On April 9, Hall-Lande delivered the opening keynote, "Minnesota Autism Prevalence Data from the Minnesota Autism Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network in 2025," at the 2025 Minnesota Autism Symposium at the Minnesota Department of



Education in Roseville. On April 17, Hall-Lande delivered the same lecture as the opening plenary at the Autism Society of Minnesota's annual conference in Bloomington. On April 18, Hall-Lande, Amy Esler, and [Hallas](#) presented the same topic as a data release webinar. On April 15, the MN-ADDM team, led by Hall-Lande, released new Minnesota autism prevalence numbers.



Amy Hewitt, Jolene Thibedeau Boyd, and Michelle Smith. On April 8, [Hewitt](#) (pictured) and officials from ANCOR and the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals jointly presented the annual Moving Mountains Award at the ANCOR Connect '25 Conference in San Diego, California, to Life Unlimited, Inc. for their workforce initiative, "New Team Member Orientation (NTMO)." The Moving Mountains Award is presented annually to an organization that has demonstrated innovation and leadership around best practices in workforce development. On April 9, [Thibedeau Boyd](#) and [Smith](#) (the Moving Mountains Award coordinators) co-facilitated a breakout session on the NTMO initiative, where representatives from Life Unlimited, Inc. explained how they developed and implemented their initiative, including tracking their challenges, successes, and key workforce data.

Jessica Simacek and Andrea Castillo. On April 9, [Simacek](#) (pictured) presented "TeleOutreach Center and Telehealth to Improve Access to Care in Minnesota" at the Autism Symposium and Resource Fair at the Minnesota Department of Education in St. Paul. On April 18, Simacek and [Castillo](#) were among the presenters of "Understanding and Addressing Barriers to Accessing Early Support for Young Autistic Children and their Families in Minnesota" at the Autism Society



of Minnesota's annual conference in Bloomington. On April 22, Simacek co-presented "Building Provider Capacity to Support Children with Developmental and Behavioral Health Needs" at the gpTRAC Telehealth Conference in Bloomington, Minnesota. On April 25, she co-presented "Access to Pediatric Behavioral Health Care for Military-Connected Children and their Families" at the Military Mental Health Conference at Camp Ripley in Little Falls, Minnesota.



Eileen Klemm. On April 16, [Klemm](#) presented "Aligning Pilot District Initiatives with Evidence-Based Strategies" at the Minnesota School Attendance Convening, which the Minnesota Department of Education, Minneapolis Public Schools, and Minnesota Alliance With Youth coordinated. Her presentation provided a framework and strategies for the 12 school district leadership teams as they implement strategies to improve attendance over the next two years.



Kristi Liu and Jessica Bowman. [Liu](#) (pictured standing) and [Bowman](#) consulted on inclusive education in Malaysia between April 18–24 with their collaborators from the Sultan Idris Education University and the Southeast Asian Minister of Education Organization Regional Centre for Special Educational Needs in Malaysia. That week, Liu and Bowman facilitated a secondary school team through the TIES Center's Features in Inclusive System of Education to identify the school's priorities for enhancing inclusive education for students with disabilities. On April 23, Bowman presented "Universal Design for Learning in the General Education Curriculum," and Liu presented "Inclusive Assessment: Ensuring Students with Disabilities Count." On April 25, Bowman presented "Inclusive Education and Mathematics," and Liu presented "Inclusive Education and Multilingual Learners with Disabilities."

Yi-Chen Wu, Mari Quanbeck, and Virginia Ressa. On April 24, [Wu](#) (pictured) and [Quanbeck](#) presented "Barriers and Challenges for Transitioning Students from AA-AAAS to General Assessments" at the National Council on Measurement in Education annual meeting in Denver, Colorado. On April 26, Quanbeck, [Ressa](#), and Martha Thurlow (NCEO Director Emeritus, Retired) presented "Research and Policy on Alternate Assessment Accommodations" at the American Education Research Association (AERA) annual meeting in Denver. Also, Ressa presented "Assistance Required: Using Assistive Technology to Access State Assessments" at AERA on April 26.



Gail Ghere, Jennifer Sommerness, and Darrell Peterson. [Ghere](#) (pictured) and [Sommerness](#) of ICI's [TIES Center](#) presented twice in April with the Office of the Superintendent of Washington State on the Comprehensive Inclusive Education in Washington resource. On April 22, they presented to parents and district staff in an event sponsored by the Family Engagement Collaborative. On April 24, they presented to special education directors and other district administrators at the Washington Council of Administrators of Special Education Lunch and

Learn. On April 30, Sommerness and Ghere presented to all district elementary paraprofessionals in the Stanwood-Camano School District in Washington State on "Elementary Paraprofessionals Supporting Inclusive Education." On April 30, Sommerness, Ghere, and [Peterson](#) provided workshops for elementary and secondary paraprofessionals in the Ferndale School District, Ferndale, Washington.

Update



"A Hope To Find": MNLEND Alum in the Spotlight

Coming off a tumultuous month in the autism community, the leader of a statewide advocacy organization is doubling down on inclusion.

In April, just as the Autism Society of Minnesota (AuSM) was holding its annual conference with hundreds of attendees, new data released by the [Minnesota-Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network \(MN-ADDN\)](#) at the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration showed that 1 in 28 (3.6%) 8-year-old children in the state has autism.

The rising prevalence nationwide sparked comments from federal officials about causes of autism and triggered heated debate about how public resources should be used to respond to the increase. April is also Autism Acceptance Month, a designated time for recognizing the experiences and identities of individuals with autism.

"Each year, April is an undertaking because of how much attention there is on the autism community," said Ellie Wilson ([MNLEND](#) 2010-11, pictured on television), AuSM's executive director. "It sometimes comes with a side effect of misinformation, but this year the additional volume of really problematic rhetoric was unfortunate."

Divisive statements about autism's cause and about autistic people with the most significant support needs do nothing to help those families, Wilson said. Massive proposed cuts to federal services complicate the picture even further.

[Learn more about Wilson.](#)

This email was sent to ICI staff and all building occupants of the Masonic Institute for the Developing Brain, our partners and colleagues by Institute on Community Integration, 2025 East River Parkway, Minneapolis, MN, 55414, USA. The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer.

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The University of Minnesota stands on *Miní Sóta Makhóche*, the rightful homelands of the *Dakhóta Oyáte*. ICI recognizes that the U.S. did not uphold its end of these land treaties. It is the current and continued displacement of the *Dakhóta Oyáte* that allows the University to remain today. At ICI, we affirm our commitment to address systemic racism, ableism and all other inequalities and forms of oppression to ensure inclusive communities.