

Increasing Access and Opportunity through Disability Inclusion

SF4030 and HF4075

The Problem:

People with disabilities want to, and should be able to, access our communities; however, not all community spaces and places are ready for people with disabilities.

Our society is responsible for disabling people. If spaces were set up and constructed in an accessible way for people with disabilities, those individuals would not be restricted from full participation in our communities.

According to a 2022 NIH study, “People with disabilities were significantly more likely than their non-disabled peers to report loneliness, low social support and social isolation and to report exposure to low social connectedness on more than one indicator.” They are 3 times as likely to feel as though they have low social support, and 4 times as likely to feel that they are not supported in their community.

People with disabilities represent the largest minority group in Minnesota and remain the only minority group that anyone can join at any point in their lives. Nearly 12% of Minnesotans have a disability and 22% of those citizens have intersectional identities and 42% are 65 or older that further compound the common barriers to access and opportunity. Barriers including language, transportation, economic stability, cultural and racial bias, and social isolation have prevented full participation in community and resulted in people with disabilities with intersectional identities being left behind by the disability benefit system.

Instances of exclusion are far too common. Groups of Lifeworks clients have been turned away from community centers and questioned when they are at coffee shops. People with disabilities have been terminated from their jobs due to the lack of accommodations. Individuals have been openly mocked by coworkers because of their disability. These real-life examples have a common thread: individuals, communities, and businesses are not educated on disability inclusion.

Why Disability Inclusion?

- Most spaces, places, and systems are not created for people with disabilities.
- People with disabilities must have equitable access to workplaces, communities, and services.
- Through disability inclusion trainings, we are helping build communities, workplaces, and systems that are radically inclusive of people with disabilities.

The Solution

Evidence shows that disability inclusion trainings are catalysts for real change and make the world more welcoming to people with disabilities. Lifeworks has seen firsthand how education

on disability inclusion can unlock opportunities for people with disabilities that were previously unattainable.

In three months, Lifeworks trained over 300 people and one business began hiring people with disabilities as soon as two weeks after their education session. Collectively participants reported 54% growth in their comfort level in supporting colleagues or neighbors with disabilities and 31% increase in their knowledge of disability inclusion. The results are promising, but to achieve an inclusive Minnesota for all people with disabilities Minnesota needs to invest in these efforts.

With \$3,000,000 in legislative support, we will launch a 3-year statewide disability inclusion initiative to:

- Train and educate people with disabilities to increase knowledge of available resources and so they can advocate for access and opportunities.
- Bring disability inclusion training to parents, guardians, and families of people with disabilities so they understand the disability service system and are better equipped with the tools to see beyond preconceived barriers.
- Provide education to current and prospective employers of people with disabilities because workplaces that fully include people with disabilities see two times more economic profit and higher productivity than businesses that do not engage in disability inclusion.
- Build capacity for culturally specific services and support led by rural, immigrant, and BIPOC entrepreneurs and business owners, honoring people with disabilities and older adults with intersectional identities who have historically been left behind by existing systems.
- Launch a statewide “disability inclusive” assessment and associated technology solution for businesses and other community spaces so citizens with disabilities know that they will be welcomed, physical spaces will be accessible, and interactions will be free from discrimination.

Lifeworks will use funds to build out our disability inclusion division, including coaches and trainers to connect with thousands of people with disabilities, families, businesses, and community organizations statewide. We will invest in community outreach staff who are culturally affirming to begin conversations around disability and start people on a path toward the services and resources available across Minnesota.

Additionally, we would develop an innovative web-based or mobile tool that allows people with disabilities to choose “disability friendly” businesses in their communities – from coffee shops to concert venues to ride share services to employers to doctor offices. This assessment tool will go beyond current ADA standards and include aspects of disability that are not currently considered.

With this ambitious work, Minnesota will see more people with disabilities and older adults access the services for which they qualify and decrease the bias and stigma that creates barriers across all our communities.