



# **Caregiver Respite Services Grants**

## **Progress Report**

January 2026

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Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 3.197, requires the disclosure of the cost to prepare this report. The estimated cost of preparing this report is \$4,346.

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# I. Legislation

## 256.9756 CAREGIVER RESPITE SERVICES GRANTS.

**Subdivision 1. Caregiver respite services grant program established.** The Minnesota Board on Aging must establish a caregiver respite services grant program to increase the availability of respite services for family caregivers of people with dementia and older adults and to provide information, education, and training to respite caregivers and volunteers regarding caring for people with dementia. From the money made available for this purpose, the board must award grants on a competitive basis to respite service providers, giving priority to areas of the state where there is a high need of respite services.

**Subd. 2. Eligible uses.** Grant recipients awarded grant money under this section must use a portion of the grant award as determined by the board to provide free or subsidized respite services for family caregivers of people with dementia and older adults.

**Subd. 3. Report.** By January 15, 2026, the board shall submit a progress report about the caregiver respite services grants in this section to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees and divisions with jurisdiction over human services finance and policy. The progress report must include metrics of the use of grant program money. This subdivision expires upon submission of the report. The board shall notify the revisor of statutes when the report is submitted.

# II. Introduction

Minnesota Statutes 2023, Section 256.975, directed the Minnesota Board on Aging (MBA) to establish a Caregiver Respite Services Grant program with a one-time \$1,800,000 appropriation. An additional one-time \$2,000,000 sum was appropriated in May 2024, for a total of \$3,800,000 in competitive grant funds for the program.

This bi-partisan legislation recognized and elevated critical issues around the availability, suitability, and cost of respite services for family and friends caregiving for a person with dementia. According to the 2022 National Strategy to Support Family Caregivers<sup>1</sup>, gaps in the availability of and access to respite can be significant, adding to the stress and burden of unpaid caregivers. Respite care is often costly, and with limited availability in many communities, caregivers are frequently left with responsibility for the bulk of the expenses. Additional concerns related to quality of respite care and cultural awareness are also cited as barriers to respite use.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/RAISE\\_SRG/NatlStrategyToSupportFamilyCaregivers.pdf](https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/RAISE_SRG/NatlStrategyToSupportFamilyCaregivers.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> ACL, 2022. [Review of Respite Models for Family Caregivers of Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia](#)

The \$3,800,000 one-time appropriation was added to the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2025 Regional and Local Dementia Grant Program operated by the MBA. Established in 2015 by the Legislature with an annual appropriation of \$750,000, the Regional and Local Dementia Grant Program is a competitive program focusing on dementia and its impact on individuals, families, and communities. Core focus or priority areas set forth in the enabling legislation encompass:

1. Increase awareness of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias;
2. Promote the benefits of screening for early identification of dementias;
3. Increase the rate of cognitive testing in the population at risk for dementias; and
4. Connect family, friends and neighbors caregiving to education, support and resources.

With the availability of new, one-time legislative funds, a fifth category or focus area was added to the SFY 2025 Request for Proposals (RFP) that aligned with the legislation's intent:

*5. Projects that increase the availability of respite services for family caregivers of people with dementia and older adults and to provide information, education, and training to respite caregivers and volunteers regarding caring for people with dementia.*

In the MBA RFP, respite services were defined as short-term care services provided to a person when their primary caregiver is absent or needs a break. Older adults with dementia served by the funding were to be at least 60 years old. Eligible forms of respite included in-home, out-of-home (non-facility and facility-based), and self-directed respite.

In keeping with the statute's directive to "...use a portion of the grant award as determined by the board to provide free or subsidized respite services," applicants developed a sliding fee schedule for respite services provided.

To meet the legislation's intent to "...provide information, education, and training to respite caregivers and volunteers regarding caring for people with dementia," MBA recommended that projects incorporate the evidence-based REST (Respite Education and Support Tools) program to ensure staff and volunteers had adequate and consistent knowledge about the provision of respite services for persons with memory loss.

In its SFY 2025 funding guidelines, MBA strongly encouraged respite applicants to build into their budget request support for project staff or volunteers to take a two-day REST "Train the Trainer" workshop. Offered by master REST trainers, the MBA funding guidelines included a directive for applicants to implement REST in their organizations and home communities. In partnership with Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota and its Master REST Trainers, three REST trainings were held in SFY 2025 (additional information is in OUTCOMES, below).

## **Purpose of Report**

This progress report is meant to provide short descriptions of the 27 organizations receiving one-time respite and respite education support grants awarded through the SFY 2025 Regional and Local Dementia Grant Program. It covers the range and type of respite services funded

and progress toward stated outputs for projects completing their work during SFY 2025. Additionally, first-hand observations and accounts from both project staff and family and friends caregiving are shared here, as gleaned through grant progress reports submitted by funded organizations.

## III. Outcomes

### A. Funded Projects

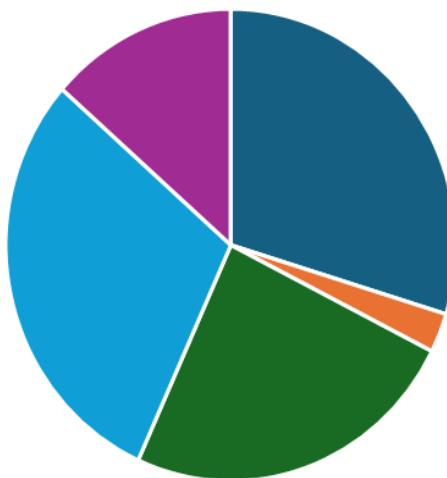
Opening on January 4, 2024, the SFY 2025 Regional and Local Dementia Grant round attracted 63 proposals totaling nearly \$6,300,000 in requested grant dollars. With the additional legislative appropriation of \$3,800,000 intended for provision of respite services and/or respite education, MBA was able to fund 27 respite projects for a total of \$3,623,141. The majority of funded respite projects requested a 24-month grant period; others that initially requested 12-month funding period ultimately received extensions for 15- or 18-month projects.

Organization Name	City	Amount
A Home for the Day	St. Cloud	\$40,160
Age Well Arrowhead Inc.	Duluth	\$250,000
Benedictine Living Community - Rochester	Rochester	\$233,824
Breath of Life Adult Day Service	Brainerd	\$50,000
CAPIUSA	Brooklyn Center	\$179,376
Central MN Dementia Community Action Network	St. Cloud	\$120,000
Centro Tyrone Guzman	Minneapolis	\$49,970
Cherished Services, Inc.	Fridley	\$49,696
Community Partners - Living at Home Program	Two Harbors	\$113,800
DARTS	West St. Paul	\$194,845
Family Service Rochester	Rochester	\$131,527
Holistic Array of Authentic Services (HAAS), LLC	Golden Valley	\$49,999
Horizon Health	Pierz	\$49,986
Koochiching Aging Options	International Falls	\$39,206
Lighthouse Center for Vital Living	Duluth	\$80,381
Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota	St. Paul	\$140,175
Metropolitan Community Services	Hopkins	\$212,600
North East Seniors for Better Living	St. Paul	\$48,492
Northwoods Interfaith Caregivers	Bemidji	\$141,483
Renaissance Adult Day Care, Inc.	Coon Rapids	\$245,960
SEWA-AIFW, Inc.	Brooklyn Center	\$264,338
Tri-Community Living At Home Block Nurse Program	Newfolden	\$49,983
Volunteer Services of Carlton County, Inc.	Carlton	\$250,000

Volunteers of America of MN and WI	Edina	\$481,098
Wadena County Public Health Department	Wadena	\$50,000
Walker West Music Academy	St. Paul	\$82,667
Western Prairie Human Services	Glenwood	\$23,575

## B. Types of Respite Projects Funded\*

\* Organizations may offer more than one type of respite



- Out of Home Respite (11)
- Out of Home Respite - Overnight (1)
- In-Home Respite (9)
- Respite Capacity & Awareness Building - Culturally Specific (11)
- Capacity & Awareness Buildng - Rural (5)
- Self-Directed Respite (0)

## C. Characteristics of Funded Projects

- Projects reached residents of four economically disadvantaged counties (Aitkin, Clearwater, Todd and Wadena, as defined in 2025 by the Minnesota Department of Administration)
- Four projects are centered in “frontier counties,” defined by very low population density (Lake, Koochiching, Marshall and Aitkin)
- Seven projects are conducted by or operated by entities serving culturally specific groups (CAPIUSA, Centro Tyrone Guzman, Cherished Services, Inc., Holistic Array of

Authentic Services, Renaissance Adult Day Care, Inc., SEWA-AIFW, and Walker West Music Academy)

- Four projects represent for-profit entities (A Home for the Day, Cherished Services, Inc., Holistic Array of Services, and Renaissance Adult Day Care Inc.)
- Two projects are Minnesota county-affiliated
- Seventeen projects are conducted by non-profit organizations
- No organizations submitted proposals for self-directed respite services

## IV. Caregiver Respite Grants Awarded

The descriptions of projects funded are below, organized by four regional service areas, with brief reports on project work as of July and September 2025.

### A. Northern Minnesota

*Aitkin, Becker, Beltrami, Carlton, Clay, Clearwater, Cook, Douglas, Grant, Hubbard, Itasca, Kittson, Koochiching, Lake, Lake of the Woods, Mahnomen, Marshall, Norman, Otter Tail, Pennington, Polk, Pope, Red Lake, Roseau, Stevens, St. Louis, Traverse and Wilkin Counties.*

**Age Well Arrowhead**, Duluth, \$250,000. Funding will support the hiring of 10 or more REST-certified respite care providers to increase the availability of in-home respite for dementia caregivers in the greater Duluth area (24-month project).

Age Well maintained its goal of engaging ten respite workers who are offering in-home respite for 28 individuals with memory loss and their family and friend caregivers. Staff members for Age Well attended the REST master trainer workshop offered by MBA and Lutheran Social Service of MN; as of September 2025, Age Well staff has offered one REST community training for local volunteers and professional staff.

**Community Partners Living at Home Program**, Two Harbors, \$114,000. The project will offer dementia education and awareness programming for the community and offer family and friend caregivers of persons with dementia engagement and respite support options to reduce isolation (24-month project).

Community Partners has implemented Reading2Connect, a dementia-specific reading-aloud program for persons with memory loss offered in home on a one-to-one basis in four homes and at the Two Harbors Public Library in small group sessions (held bi-weekly). Additionally, 105 community members with memory loss and their care

partners are also participating in weekly sessions of the dementia-friendly Victory Chorus.

**Koochiching Aging Options**, International Falls, \$39,000. Serving all of Koochiching County, grant funds will continue supporting the Dementia Friendly initiative; offer one-to-one support and resource navigation for dementia caregivers; and increase the Connect Café and Memory Café attendance (15-month project).

Thirty-six sessions of Memory Café and Memory Connect were offered, reaching 198 persons with memory loss and/or their family or friend caregiver. Forty-six caregivers attended a mid-summer mini retreat featuring entertainment and a luncheon.

**Lighthouse Center for Vital Living**, Duluth, \$80,000. This project will leverage expertise in adaptive technologies and occupational therapies to connect family and friend caregivers with assistive technology, caregiver resources and cognitive screening (24-month project).

With its focus on adaptive technologies for persons with vision loss, Lighthouse has reached 60 individuals and families with memory loss and vision issues (as of June 2025). Using the Cognitive Performance Test (CPT), an evidence-based functional assessment, Lighthouse staff provide tailored resources and referrals to individuals and families. In year two, staff will explore offering one or more evidence-based interventions for dementia caregivers (e.g., Powerful Tools for Caregivers).

**Northwoods Caregivers**, Bemidji, \$141,000. Grant funds will increase the availability of affordable respite and other supportive services to family and friend caregivers of persons with dementia in multiple northwestern Minnesota counties and Tribal areas (24-month project).

Five bi-monthly support groups for dementia caregivers are being offered at Red Lake, Leech Lake, and White Earth reservations and in Bemidji. Memory Cafés, an evidence-informed activity for dementia caregivers and their care recipient, are being held two Saturdays a month at Bemidji Adult Day Service. Average attendance at Memory Café is about 10 with hopes of attracting more with a refreshed marketing effort.

**Tri-Community Living at Home Program**, Newfolden, \$50,000. Serving far northwestern Minnesota, grant funds will enable the expansion of dementia capability services and caregiving support by piloting a Memory Café model; creating and distributing "Caregiving to Go" kits for dementia caregivers; and obtaining advanced staff training in dementia care and innovation (18-month project).

Grant funds supported professional development for project staff to identify and tailor evidence-based and evidence-informed interventions for persons with memory loss and their family and friends caregiving. One such intervention, Memory Café, has been piloted with three sessions attracting 40 unique attendees. A lending library (books, videos, safety and accessibility equipment) is in place to meet the evolving needs of persons with memory loss and their caregivers; as of September 2025, 33 families have accessed the lending library resources.

**Volunteer Services of Carlton County**, Carlton, \$250,000. Funding will support 2,500 hours of respite service through the DayBreak Group Respite in Carlton and St. Louis counties and explore adding another group respite program for caregivers in Pine County (24-month project).

As of September 2025, 36 caregivers have received 1,300+ hours of out-of-home respite and 460 hours of Memory Café (an evidence-informed intervention for both caregiver and care recipient), both offered at Volunteer Service's site. Based on quarterly surveys completed by family and friend caregivers, more than 95% report that the out of home respite and Memory Cafes are "...helping me provide care longer to my loved one."

## **B. Central Minnesota**

*Benton, Cass, Chisago, Crow Wing, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Pine, Sherburne, Stearns, Todd, Wadena, and Wright Counties.*

**A Home for the Day Adult Day Center**, St. Cloud, \$40,000. Grant funds will support adult day respite services and community outings, dementia education for family and friend caregivers, and dementia education for staff, including REST respite training (12-month project).

Serving the Greater St. Cloud area, this adult day program used grant funds to offer advanced dementia care training, including REST training, to its professional staff and to family and friend caregivers of attendees (three workshops and a day long retreat held for the latter). Five "day away" field trips for caregivers and their care recipient (assisted by volunteers) were held, including travel to the Twin Cities for a baseball game and community theatre production.

**Breath of Life Adult Day Service**, Brainerd, \$50,000. Grant funds will support bridge funding for adult day respite services for persons with dementia and their family and friend caregivers (15-month project).

Grant funds supported 'bridging' sponsorships for 35 families awaiting start of waivered adult day services or extended the hours or days for those paying privately but on limited incomes.

**Central Minnesota Dementia Community Action Network**, St. Cloud, \$120,000. Funding will support comprehensive dementia education, screening and service navigation, dementia awareness education, and respite services for persons with dementia and their family-friend caregivers in Stearns, Benton and Wadena counties (12-month project).

Grant funds supported three, six week sessions of evidence based intervention, Powerful Tools for Caregivers tailored for caregivers of persons with memory loss that attracted 29 attendees; expansion of respite availability during support groups in three communities (Wadena, Staples, Long Prairie); and respite during the organization's Fall conference on dementia caregiving. Funding to offer respite during support groups and

the annual conference was “a game changer for us,” resulting in larger and more consistent attendance at all support groups and the conference.

**Horizon Health**, Pierz, \$50,000. Serving primarily Morrison County, this effort will continue respite-focused outings for people with memory loss and their family or friend caregivers and expand this successful model into Todd County, an area lacking in dementia-specific services (24-month project).

As of September 2025, Horizon Health was serving 304 dementia caregivers through three support groups in Pierz, Little Falls, and Brainerd. Uptake on the planned new support group in Todd County has been challenging. Twenty-five outings – short trips to local sites for persons with memory loss and their family and friend caregivers – have been offered, and 30 tailored “sensory kits” have been placed in three regional libraries with nearly 100 discrete uses of the kits. Additionally, 107 persons (including area Emergency Medical Technicians) have gone through a dementia simulation experience using the Dementia Live curriculum.

**Wadena County Public Health**, Wadena, \$50,000. In collaboration with area community-based partners and health care systems, Wadena Public Health is providing dementia education and resources to residents. Additionally, family and friends caregiving for a person with dementia are receiving specialized assistance and referral, including information about respite (24-month project).

Working with area health systems and county care managers, resources and a referral protocol around dementia education and area supportive services is in place. Powerful Tools for Caregivers, an evidence-based intervention, has been offered twice but without sufficient uptake. A third Powerful Tools course is planned that will offer respite at Astera Health Hospital in Wadena.

**Western Prairie Human Services**, \$24,000, Glenwood. Grant funds will enable this provider to offer a volunteer-powered Memory Makers group respite program in two locations (24-month project).

Despite loss of staff due to funding cuts, remaining staff at Western Prairie moved forward with creation and distribution of seven Memory Maker Activity Kits (sensory and other engagement for persons with memory, plus caregiving tips). Efforts to restart the Memory Makers Group Respite is another focus, with significant activity planning, recruitment of a site in Glenwood, and training of a pool of dementia-capable respite volunteers. As of September 2025, there was not sufficient demand to schedule regular group respite sessions.

## **C. Metropolitan**

*Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington Counties.*

**CAPI USA**, Brooklyn Center, \$179,000. Continued development of the Hmong Folk Chorus will provide socialization and caregiver respite for Hmong-speaking elders in the Twin Cities metro (24-month project).

CAPI's dementia-friendly Hmong Folk Chorus continues to confront ingrained cultural and family taboos around memory loss that impact involvement in the bi-monthly meeting of the Chorus. As of September 2025, the Chorus was attracting a stable number of 10-12 participants. However, more than 500 community and family members attended seven choral performances of the choir, including a capstone chorus performance at CAPI's annual gala. The chorus staff coordinator also provides dementia education sessions, including call-in question and answer opportunities, on Hmong Broadcast Radio 106.7 FM.

**Centro Tyrone Guzman**, Minneapolis, \$50,000. Centro will create a new evidence-informed dementia awareness and care curriculum for the Spanish-speaking community. The project is in partnership with the University of Minnesota Center for Healthy Aging and Innovation (18-month project).

The finalized dementia awareness curriculum, Cuidadores con Amor, includes eight sessions that encompass caregiver wellness, dementia risk and incidence in older adults, and culturally grounded strategies for supporting elder Latine community members with memory loss and their family and friends caregiving. The final product was printed in fall 2025 and serves as a key resource for Centro's new volunteer-powered respite program.

**Cherished Services**, Fridley, \$50,000. Cherished Services will provide culturally tailored dementia capability training to professional and family and friend caregivers of persons with memory loss in the East African community. The organization will also pilot CareConnect, a multi-language scheduling application (12-month project).

Sixteen East African families confronting memory loss received in home respite services by East African professional care staff that received culturally specific dementia capability training by the applicant. Dementia capable training was offered to a total of 25 professional staff, and four community workshops about dementia and dementia care were held at trusted community sites in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood.

**DARTS**, West St. Paul, \$195,000. DARTS will build on its two group dementia-capable respite locations, adding a third Breathing Space location in Dakota County to meet the needs of caregivers currently on wait lists for respite (24-month project).

More than 1,100 hours of out-of-home, largely volunteer-powered respite has been offered at two DARTS' sites, and a third site launched in late summer 2025 in Apple Valley. DARTS continues to explore needs in Dakota County for a respite program serving Spanish speakers.

**Holistic Array of Authentic Services (HAAS)**, Golden Valley, \$50,000. Funds will support culturally responsive dementia education and awareness, as well as respite education and support to older Oromo and Ethiopian adults and their family and friend caregivers in greater Minneapolis (15-month project).

Working with faith communities, this culturally specific home care agency provided three tailored dementia awareness and education workshops; offered one-on-one caregiver education to 11 family caregivers caring for a person with dementia; and developed four short dementia education videos (in Ormo, Somali, Amharic and English) with Oromo Diaspora Media that have received 100,000+ views in the US and abroad.

**Metropolitan Community Services**, Hopkins, \$213,000. The grant project will enable an Alzheimer's disease and related diseases awareness and caregiver support effort for Russian, Ukrainian and Uzbek-speaking persons and families in the Twin Cities (24-month project).

Grantee staff at this home health provider developed and launched a dementia-specific education and awareness social media campaign on Facebook aimed at Russian and Ukrainian speaking families; as of September 2025, the page has 98 followers. A closed, moderated Facebook user group for family and friends caregiving is also available. Additionally, five Russian-speaking families are being served with in-home respite services.

**North East Seniors for Better Living**, St. Paul, \$48,000. This project offers new, onsite respite programming for family and friend caregivers of persons with dementia living in the Greater East Side of St. Paul (12-month project).

This Living at Home Program serving the Greater East Side of St. Paul offered 96 hours of Memory Café that reached 335 family and friend caregivers and care recipients with memory loss (duplicated). Project leaders had hoped for greater uptake of this new service, reporting that stigma around memory loss impacted attendance.

**Renaissance Adult Day Care**, Coon Rapids, \$246,000. Funding will support an after-hours dementia-specific caregiver support group for families, enhanced staff training with cognitive therapies (including sensory and reminiscence therapies) and outreach to the area's Ukrainian/Russian population (24-month project).

Grantee staff have deepened knowledge and use of dementia-specific activities (sensory stimulation, musical and reminiscence therapy) for attendees that include a large number of Russian speaking older adults. Although delayed due to complications of acquiring and licensing a new site in Coon Rapids, the planned caregiver support groups, with onsite respite care offered, will begin in Winter 2026. Extended evening and/or Saturday hours are planned at the new site, too, in response to demand.

**SEWA-AIFW**, Brooklyn Center, \$264,000. Funds will help provide support for South Asians with dementia in the metro area while offering resources to their family and friend caregivers

through support groups, practical education, cognitive screening and testing, and the piloting of a culturally tailored model of respite services (24-month project).

As of July 2025, 340 older South Asians participated in brain health and other culturally tailored dementia risk reduction education. Through three monthly community health clinics offered at area temples, more than 500 dementia screenings have been implemented. In year two of this project, SEWA staff is focusing on developing a culturally specific in-home respite model.

**Volunteers of America-Minnesota and Wisconsin**, Minneapolis, \$481,000. The project will pilot a culturally specific, holistic model of dementia care and serve 126 caregivers, mostly African American, with long-term support services in Minnesota. Volunteers will be trained using REST to provide care to 96 people with dementia over the two-year grant period (24-month project).

A culturally - and dementia-specific volunteer program has been created for provision of in-home respite services. As of September 2025, 8 community volunteers – many of them former recipients of the agency's respite offerings – have been trained and placed with families needing respite. Six community health workers also provide in home respite.

Grantee staff are also piloting its new Healthy Living Lifestyle Reset (HLLR) Program, a structured curricula and resource program designed to support caregivers, care partners, and families in managing the health -- including known dementia risk factors -- while improving their quality of life as they care for loved ones.

**Walker West Music Academy**, St. Paul, \$83,000. Twenty new caregivers and the people they provide care for will be enrolled in the acclaimed Amazing Grace Dementia Chorus. Family and friend caregiver choir participants will also receive tailored dementia-friendly tools and tactics from a music therapist (24-month project).

As of June 2025, this dementia chorus had exceeded its goal of 46 regular attendees who participate in the chorus and received culturally specific dementia and brain health education. Year two activities will focus on integrating the services of a music therapist who will offer caregivers monthly sessions on integrating music-related interventions into everyday activities.

## **D. Southern Minnesota**

*Big Stone, Blue Earth, Brown, Chippewa, Cottonwood, Dodge, Faribault, Fillmore, Freeborn, Goodhue, Houston, Jackson, Kandiyohi, Lac qui Parle, Le Sueur, Lincoln, Lyon, Martin, McLeod, Meeker, Mower, Murray, Nicollet, Nobles, Olmsted, Pipestone, Redwood, Renville, Rice, Rock, Sibley, Steele, Swift, Wabasha, Waseca, Watonwan, Winona, and Yellow Medicine Counties.*

**Family Service Rochester**, Rochester, \$132,000. Grant funds will support continuing work to place dementia care specialists in senior centers and health care clinics to help caregivers

identify and secure services and expand a pool of volunteer respite providers (24-month project).

As of June 2025, 12 dementia caregivers received 1,233 hours of in-home respite, provided mostly by area volunteers trained through a custom respite curriculum developed by the grantee. Family Service also successfully launched a partnership with Winona State University Nursing School resulting in 12 advanced nursing students per quarter trained in providing respite to persons with memory loss.

**Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota**, Minneapolis. \$140,000. In partnership with Olmsted Medical Center in Rochester, grant funds will support in-home, dementia-specific respite for up to 100 caregivers in eight southeastern Minnesota counties (24-month project).

Through this collaboration between a home and community based provider (Lutheran Social Service of MN) and a local health care clinic (Olmsted Medical Center's Active Aging Clinic), 60+ persons with memory loss and their family and friends caregiving have access to screening and additional testing, caregiver support groups, caregiver coaching, and referral to additional supportive services. In year two, efforts will center on developing a volunteer-powered, in-home respite service using the evidence-based REST curriculum.

**Madonna Towers - Benedictine Living Community**, Rochester, \$234,000. Project staff will take advanced dementia capability training and certification. Grant funds also support a sliding-scale overnight respite option for Rochester-area family and friend caregivers of people with dementia (24-month project).

As of September 2025, Madonna Towers has been able to offer sliding-fee, extended overnight respite stay to 11 families. Key Madonna Towers assisted living and memory care staff are enrolling in advanced dementia education training supported by grant funds. A new dementia-specific support group, offered twice a month in collaboration with the Alzheimer's Association, is serving approximately 5-8 caregivers per session.

## **V. Respite Education: Expanding Respite Resources**

To meet the Legislation's directive to "...provide information, education, and training to respite caregivers and volunteers regarding caring for people with dementia," the MBA respite grants included options for grantee organizations to attend REST, a nationally recognized, evidence-based train-the-trainer course. Attendees of the two-day workshop return to their home communities and train local volunteers and professional staff in offering dementia-capable respite services to family and friends caregiving. MBA, in partnership with Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, offered three REST, workshops in SFY2025 (two in St. Paul and one in

Duluth). Efforts funded here are based on the 15 counties identified in 2021<sup>3</sup> as having no respite services, with a focus on restoring capacity that declined during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

Eighteen individuals representing the following eight grantee organizations attended a REST Train-the-Trainer workshop.

- Age Well Arrowhead, Duluth
- A Home for the Day Adult Day Care Center, St. Cloud
- Central MN Dementia Care Action Network (D-CAN), St. Cloud
- Community Partners, Two Harbors
- Lighthouse Center for Vital Living, Duluth
- North East Seniors for Better Living, St. Paul
- Volunteers of America – Minnesota, Minneapolis

Additionally, several SFY 2025 respite grantees are planning on attending a new, hybrid REST training workshop to be offered in late January 2026.

## VI. Impact on Minnesotans Caregiving

The positive impact of the Caregiver Respite Service Grant Program has been communicated to the MBA through quarterly narrative reports. The following comments reflect selected activities and impact from July 1, 2024 to September 30, 2025.

Numerous grantees shared how being able to offer, expand, or enhance a respite service is helping preserve the health and wellbeing of the primary family or friend caregiving. Having respite available, even for a short time, can combat the social isolation often resulting from caregiving, particularly dementia caregiving.

*As a result of receiving in-home respite services supported by the Dementia Grant, several of our caregivers have reported the services they receive from Age Well Arrowhead have allowed them to maintain and increase their health and well-being and to continue to provide care to their loved one. As one of the caregivers reported, she is now able to attend church regularly which is something she was unable to do for several years. She has become more active in her church and is able to volunteer for church events. (Age Well Arrowhead, Duluth)*

*Both [of our] programs provide respite opportunities for caregivers who use the time to run errands, engage with the program if desired, have time to pursue their own interests, or simply have a moment of quiet time within their home knowing that their loved ones are under the care and supervision of an experienced volunteer. Providing respite support prevents burnout and enables caregivers to give care longer. (Volunteer Services of Carlton County, Carlton)*

Several projects reported that staff act as "eyes on" for dementia caregivers in their program; as such, they are in a position to note changes in the health or status of the caregiver.

*Through its wellness calls and checks, staff found that a charter member of our program was experiencing increasing memory loss in the face of serving as caregiver to other family members. Church members and community nurses are now aware and helping with resources.* (Walker West Music Academy, St. Paul)

Caregiver Respite Grants are supporting several arts-based interventions for caregivers and/or their care recipient that allow time away and/or engagement in activities that are cultural touchstones. With a focus on preserving Hmong folk tunes and songs, CAPI's Hmong Folk Choir serves this role.

*A choir member stated that their family does not know that they sing....yet they still attend the Hmong folk choir on Thursdays when they are able to. They have stated that the choir is the only place they can come to express themselves and talk to other people who are not in their household. This individual does take care of her husband who needs assistance 24/7. The choir is the only place where she can come to for a break.* (CAPI, Brooklyn Park)

Getting a break from the demands of daily caregiving can be critical in helping families assess what's best for the person they are caring and for the caregiver. In Rochester, a grantee piloting extended, overnight respite reports how an extend break can provide this needed time and space.

*One of the individuals who stayed with us had a family that was unsure where this individual was going to go afterwards. A respite stay at Madonna allowed the family not to be the primary caregiver for two weeks. During this time, they realized they were no longer able to meet their loved one's needs. We were able to work with the family and suggest options and provide resources on who to contact. We worked together to find an option for their loved one.* (Benedictine Living Community - Rochester Madonna Towers)

## **VII. Grantee Challenges and Observations**

Grantee reports also yield insights into the complexity surrounding design of respite, efforts to educate prospective users about it, and barriers to its uptake by family and friend caregivers. This complexity is reflected nationally in studies such as the recent *Caregiving in the US Report*. Released in July 2025, this study noted that while four in 10 caregivers indicate that respite services would be helpful, only 13 percent of all caregivers use respite services. The rate of interest in respite is even greater for those caring for a person with memory loss, yet the uptake on respite services is not much higher.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Respite time use among dementia caregivers. *Frontiers in Health Services*, vol. 28, no.5. doi:

Reasons for this disconnect include practical barriers (e.g., inflexible program design, lack of trained providers, and difficult application processes) as well as more subjective obstacles (lack of trust, shame around handing off care to someone else, or uncertainty about the quality of available respite services).<sup>5</sup>

Below are accounts from grantee organizations that mirror national findings, highlight common issues, and show how grantees are responding.

## **Stigma Around Memory Loss**

Stigmatization persists around memory loss and dementia, in both broader community and among families and persons who may be experiencing memory loss symptoms. A number of grantees shared how this impacts their program plans and ultimate reach.

*We came to discover that a number of our participants were early on in their experience of Memory loss but did not self-identify with the disease and were stigmatized by the idea of participating in a program meant for those with such a diagnosis.* (North East Seniors for Better Living, St. Paul)

*Because of the stigma, identifying as an individual with dementia can be difficult for the individual and caregiver alike, particularly in early stages of the disease as one adapts and adjusts to their new normal.* (Community Partners, Two Harbors)

## **Reluctance to Accept Respite Support**

Many grantees shared evidence of caregivers' reluctance to engage respite services. With reasons varying from personal preferences to cultural norms and expectations, many reported under-utilization of services offered.

*"[It is] ...challenging to actually get caregivers to recognize their role and to accept assistance in the form of respite or other caregiver support resources and options. Many are reluctant to accept help even in the face of health concerns impacting their ability to provide care."* (Age Well Arrowhead, Duluth)

*Self-identifying as a caregiver is a challenge for many of the individuals for whom we provide support. Many indicate that they cannot be a caregiver because their loved one is a spouse, sibling, or close relative... It is also not uncommon to encounter caregivers in a state of panic or crisis, before they reach out for support, reaching out only when the changes have become extreme or dangerous such as when someone leaves the house forgetting their address or how to get home, have been injured due to a fall, or boiled something on the stove that has burned beyond recognition.*

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<https://doi.org/10.3389/frhs.2025.1598518>

<sup>5</sup> Caregiving in the US Research Report. AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving, July 2025.

<https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/topics/lts/family-caregiving/caregiving-in-us-2025.doi.10.26419-2fppi.00373.001.pdf>

*Typically, it takes caregivers twelve to eighteen months between initial contact and formal request for support. Initiation is usually prompted by a crisis. (Community Partners, Two Harbors)*

## **Role of Language and Perception**

Several grantees related how care and sensitivity to language used to describe “respite” can help diminish stigma and negative perception.

*We have spoken with other partners who host Memory Cafes/Respite events and some have suggested changing the name from "respite" to "Coffee and Conversation" as there is still a stigma with the term Memory Cafe/Respite. We have two more events coming up next report period and we will provide a more creative approach to gather interest. (Northwoods Interfaith Caregivers, Bemidji)*

## **Culturally Specific Communities and Dementia Care Services**

Close to one-third of Caregiver Respite Grants made are supporting diverse organizations owned or operated by communities or color or who serve culturally specific communities. Many report that offering culturally informed education about dementia must go hand-in-hand with developing and then implementing respite services.

*There are significant cultural obstacles due to a particular mindset Russian/Ukrainian/Uzbek speaking communities that was passed on from generation to generation where the prejudice that it [memory loss] is shameful, very personal, and very sensitive subject that should not be discussed outside of the family circle. We have been having one on one conversations with people for whom it has been a significant barrier and have been educating that a support group is a safe place for families where they can find information and resources for themselves and their loved ones. (Metropolitan Community Services, Hopkins)*

*Significant challenges this quarter involved deeply rooted cultural stigma surrounding dementia and mental health in general within the target population—primarily East African immigrant communities. In many cases, dementia is misunderstood or not recognized as a medical condition. Instead, symptoms are often attributed to spiritual causes, aging "normally," or moral failing, making it difficult for caregivers and families to seek education or support or services. (Holistic Array of Authentic Services Home Health, Golden Valley)*

In the instance above, an initial focus on education about dementia and respite is de-stigmatizing memory loss while introducing culturally tailored, in-home respite services as acceptable in East African communities.

## **Serving Rural Areas**

Starting and sustaining a respite service can depend on the availability of other critical home and community based services. Gaps in local services that support and extend respite uptake were recounted by numerous grantees. Serving a large, Greater Minnesota area identified as a “frontier county,” this provider noted challenges particular to their region:

*We were struck again this quarter by a lack of services – how, for example, 4-U Home Health Care might help, say, with two hours of respite today and again on Thursday – but this does not help the caregiver who needs to be away for two days for an out-of-town medical procedure of their own. Especially noticeable is the lack of a dedicated memory care facility with openings for respite, daycare and long-term care to serve all of our service area.*

*We rely on referrals by other providers and continue to reach out to ensure they are aware of what we can offer. (Koochiching Aging Options, International Falls)*

Another project, also located in a frontier region, reported how the lack of transportation services on weekends and evenings was a key barrier for participants no longer driving or uncomfortable driving longer distances at night or in winter. While the organization maintains a robust volunteer driver pool, many of the volunteers are themselves older and reluctant to drive in these circumstances.

## **Challenges of Volunteer-Driven Respite**

The majority of programs supported through Caregiver Respite Services grant rely on volunteers for many services offered, including respite. Service expansion – though much needed – results in demand for more dementia capable volunteers. Absent sufficient volunteers, some programs are diverting staff to continue the service uninterrupted.

*With the introduction of weekly respite sessions at both locations, we've faced a significant increase in demand for volunteers. This summer, filling our Friday sessions became particularly challenging, as many of our volunteers were away at their cabins or on vacation.*

*Consequently, we had to rely on paid staff to cover 114 hours, in addition to the paid group respite facilitator. This situation highlighted the ongoing need for more volunteer support to meet our growing program demands. (DARTS, West St. Paul)*

## **Connecting Supply and Demand: Need for Robust Referral Networks**

As noted, while respite is universally identified by family and friends caregiving as a top need, the service can be under-utilized. Several grantees pointed to this imbalance, noting need to invest in local referral systems to sustain their efforts.

*One of the key challenges this quarter was identifying consistent sources for respite referrals. Early in the expansion process, it was unclear where referrals would originate, which created uncertainty in planning and service delivery. However, through the development of strategic partnerships, we have begun to see referrals come in.*

*Establishing these connections took time and coordination, but they are proving essential to the growth and sustainability of our respite services in Rochester. (Lutheran Social Service – Southern Minnesota)*

For a metro area provider, the effects of COVID disruptions linger and impact as they worked to re-launch a respite program serving both caregiver and person with memory loss.

*At the beginning of the program, our plan was to start our Memory Cafe program and offer it to the community at large. However, we found that much of the Alzheimer's and dementia network has broken down in the wake of Covid. Getting the word out and making our program appealing to people who do not think they need it has been our biggest challenge so far.*  
(North East Seniors for Better Living, St. Paul)

## **VIII. Moving Towards Sustainable Respite Services**

While the infusion of funds supporting Caregiver Respite Grants has enabled expansion, enhancement, and innovation across the state, the one-time nature of the funding can present sustainability challenges. Mindful of this, grantees are building toward sustainability and establishing partnerships to continue their services after grant funding ends.

In Rochester, grant funds are supporting a pilot effort for overnight, multi-day respite, a form of respite that is rare in dementia care and difficult to pay for. The project director reports that through "deeper relationships coming through this grant with the County case worker office, they were able to inform us that the County would reimburse \$300/day for a respite stay, if an individual is on EW (Elderly Waiver). After this grant program pilot ends, we can work with the County to set this up." (Benedictine – Madonna Towers, Rochester)

With respite expansion funds, an out-of-home respite provider has launched a new site to meet expressed demand in the more rural areas of their county. As part of their plan, they are looking to new revenue sources.

*We have begun exploring business sponsorship opportunities to help offset the costs of running our weekly respite programs. This partnership offers a great opportunity to showcase a business as a community supporter while helping us continue to provide valuable services. We are carefully analyzing what sort of benefits we could offer to the sponsoring agency without having clients feel uncomfortable with the sponsorship relationship.*

*We are also considering if a set fee for attending rather than a donation request is a viable option or if that would limit access to a much needed service for individuals on a limited income.* (DARTS, West St. Paul)

In Central Minnesota, an adult day program is leveraging the MBA funding received for bridging scholarships by launching a local individual giving and business sponsorship effort that can support families benefitting from adult day service but not on waivers or with limited ability to pay out of pocket. (Breath of Life Adult Day Services, Brainerd)