



Minnesota

# Statewide Independent Living Council

2015 Annual Report ■ October 1, 2014 — September 30, 2015



## Letter From the Chair

**M**y experience on the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council (MNSILC) has been an incredible journey. I've had a wonderful council to work with and appreciate all of their hard work, especially in the past year to advance the independent living philosophy in the State of Minnesota.

As my term comes to an end, I am encouraged to see Olmstead implementation developing. We've spent many hours listening or responding to information requests from the Olmstead Implementation Office (OIO) regarding how the state will continue to promote the independent living philosophy.

MNSILC met in Mahanomen, where we learned about two Centers for Independent Living (CILs), FREEDOM and OPTIONS, and the many challenges and successes the centers experience. Each center is mandated to provide five core services: information and referral, peer mentoring, independent living skills training, advocacy, and transition. Transition is the newest, officially added with the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014.

WIOA has been a large part of our work this year. We sent representatives to the SILC Congress, the National Council on Independent Living (NICL) conference, and the Association of Programs for

Rural Independent Living (APRIL) conference to learn about the new law. WIOA reauthorizes the 1973 Rehabilitation Act. It enhances our council duties and provides clarifications in the law. We developed a revised information page about MNSILC, with more details about the council's charge.

The Home Access Committee composed a new card with information on resources for home accessibility. There will be changes in our website to provide basic information on home accessibility and additional resources. The cards will be distributed by the Centers for Independent Living.

The council recognized that a large population of Minnesota will be aging. One result of this so-called "gray tsunami" is that our partner, State Services for the Blind, expects more people to request services than ever before. I am proud that our council has recognized this situation and supported SSB with additional funding to provide some of the centers with training and low vision kits.

Our council is beginning to prepare the next State Plan for Independent Living 2017-2019. Because our world is ever-changing, we recognized the need to change our mission and vision statements as we prepare our new state plan.



*Heidi Johnson, Chair of the MNSILC, shares her thoughts on being a part of MNSILC and chairing the council.*

It has been a great honor to have served on this council. As my own level of independence changed, my personal experiences and those of people around me have opened my eyes to how far we have come and how far we have to go in the field of independent living for people with disabilities. We must not rest or presume our job is done. Our job to promote independent living philosophy and the work of the council and Centers for Independent Living will always continue.

I am grateful for this incredible learning experience. I want to thank all of the members of this terrific council, all past council members, and those who will come in the future. Thank you to the Centers who provide such incredible services and supports to the people with disabilities in their communities. It takes all of us to ensure strong, stable communities where people with disabilities are included and able to choose how they live.

# MNSILC Strategic Goals and Highlights

The Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council believes strongly in its responsibility to support the efforts of the Independent Living (IL) program throughout the state. Every three years MNSILC is responsible for writing the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) along with the Centers for Independent Living (CILs), DEED/VRS, and State Services for the Blind (SSB). The three strategic goals from the current SPIL (2014-16) guide us as we fulfill our responsibilities.

- The IL program is informed of, and advises on, the needs of people with disabilities in Minnesota.
- Minnesotans have access to IL services statewide.
- The IL program operates effectively and efficiently.

MNSILC took steps toward each of these goals in 2015. We maintain active and ongoing communications with Centers for Independent Living throughout the state. Representatives from one or

more CILs have participated on MNSILC's Network of Centers, Outreach, and Home Accessibility committees as well as on the Professional Development Conference Task Force. CIL Executive Directors are also taking an active role in our SPIL development for 2017-19.

Through communication with CILs and other partners, MNSILC stayed informed of the issues facing people with disabilities throughout the state and maintained an active presence as we saw the approval of the Olmstead Plan. We know that more direction and input will be needed as the plan is implemented.

With the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA),

we have been an active voice for CILs and people with disabilities, and we will continue to be through its realization.

Members of MNSILC visited with state and federal legislators during the year, communicating needs of people with disabilities, needs for additional funding for the Centers for Independent Living, and concerns of the council.

In 2015, MNSILC also wrote and distributed a comprehensive needs assessment survey. CILs and other community partners participated in disseminating information across the state. Through the input gathered we will be even better equipped to communicate the needs and issues of people with disabilities from across the state to legislators. This information will also help us strengthen the position of CILs in the community and assist them in gaining additional funding from federal and state funding sources.



*Council member, Brian Wagner, updates SILC Congress on progress of MNSILC in January 2015 in San Diego, CA*



## Ageing Eyes Initiative

One in three persons over the age of 74 experience uncorrectable vision loss. This number is anticipated to reach more than 25,000 in Minnesota during the next four years. It's not just statistics. Across the state the number of seniors served by State Services for the Blind (SSB) is steadily increasing.

In FFY 15, MNSILC invited SSB to a meeting to learn about challenges in their service delivery system. As baby boomers reach retirement age in increasingly large numbers, SSB will be strained to continue to meet the needs of older Minnesotans with vision challenges. They designed a pilot project to broaden their reach to seniors with vision loss. MNSILC provided funding to SSB that would allow them to purchase kits and connect with Centers for Independent Living (CILs) to provide training on serving seniors with low vision needs.

In May and September, **OPTIONS**, **FREEDOM**, and **Access North** staff were trained as community partners in this pilot project. Trained CIL staff received a kit that includes a variety of low vision aids and devices such as large-button phones, large-print calendars and playing cards, 3X LED magnifiers, glasses for managing glare and brightness, signature guides, and more.

The Aging Eyes initiative is now beginning to roll out statewide. Resources worth more than \$2,100 have already been provided to seniors seen by community partners in their homes. Through the work of CILs and other community partners, seniors receive simple tools that help ease the transition of vision loss, learn skills and strategies for remaining safe at home, and gain knowledge of resources should their vision loss needs exceed the capacity of community partners.

In May the council had an opportunity to view the contents of the kit and hear about the successful training with staff from both **OPTIONS** and **FREEDOM**.

"This is an extremely important service to people with visual impairments as

the adaptive equipment is available at no cost. As a community partner, it is very rewarding to see the smiles and hear the positive comments," said Annie, a CIL specialist at **OPTIONS**.

The initiative's goals were clearly being met when a senior, on receiving a check-writing guide, commented: "Oh, I remember seeing one of those a long time ago. I've been looking for one for years." The senior went on to say that she will feel more comfortable with writing checks.

SSB plans a rapid expansion of the Aging Eyes Initiative in 2016. In the future other CILs and community partners will receive training. More information is available by contacting [aging.eyes@state.mn.us](mailto:aging.eyes@state.mn.us) or by calling 651-539-2276.



*Kits like this are available to Centers for Independent Living for their work with people experiencing limited vision through a collaboration between State Services for the Blind and MNSILC*

# Learning Opportunities for the Council

## **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) became law on July 22, 2014. WIOA supersedes the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and amends the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Wagner-Peyser Act, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (United States Department of Labor - Employment and Training Administration). Congress passed the Act by a wide bipartisan majority; it is the first legislative reform of the public workforce system in 15 years. Members of MNSILC reviewed guidance issues as we await the rule-making drafts and can offer comment on the drafts.

Among many changes, WIOA transfers the Independent Living Services and Centers for Independent Living programs from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) of the U.S. Department of Education to the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research and the Assistive Technology Act programs also moved to ACL.

MNSILC is authorized under Title VII of the Rehabilitation Act, so our federal oversight and direction changed with those transfers. The proposed rule for Independent Living (IL) programs was published in the federal register and we look forward to commenting on the rules and having them



*Heidi Johnson, MNSILC chair, speaks to council members and CIL staff during the MNSILC annual visit to CILs in May 2015.*

finalized for direction. This is a challenge as we develop and implement the next Statewide Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) for 2017-2019.

### **MNSILC Visit with OPTIONS and FREEDOM**

MNSILC members were privileged to have the opportunity to visit with two Centers for Independent Living this year: **FREEDOM** and **OPTIONS**. Both serve portions of northwest Minnesota and portions of eastern North Dakota.

All Centers for Independent Living provide five core services: Information and Referral, Peer Mentoring, Independent Living Skills, Advocacy (both individual and systems) and Transition (a new core service required by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act). Each Center also provides unique approaches as determined by their communities.

**OPTIONS** and **FREEDOM** described their provision of core services and discussed the services and issues that affect them. Both face challenges unique to meeting the services and support needs of individuals in rural

areas, such as distance, cost and time allocation, and weather. Adequate, stable, and consistent funding with cost of living increases continues to be an issue for all Centers. **FREEDOM** is additionally challenged as the newest of the Centers receiving the least funding.

Both Centers also commented on accessibility. It can be difficult to get contractors to work in their areas. They struggle with high demand to ensure that individuals have good access to their homes and communities. All of the Centers see increasing need for accessibility in homes in their communities.

**FREEDOM** is unique in their inclusion of creative activities for their community. Artistic activities as well as mindfulness meditation are a part of the opportunities available through **FREEDOM**.

A feature at **OPTIONS** is their outdoors recreation emphasis. Their website, *optionsoutdoors.org*, helps to locate accessible opportunities for outdoor participation and tools. **OPTIONS** hosts an annual deer hunt among other activities.

## My Nursing Facility Experience

I fell in my home on April 8, 2015, requiring surgery to repair my broken hip. I was released to a nursing facility in Moorhead on April 14 for recovery and rehabilitation and told I would be able to go home in about a month. After about a month, I fell in the shower but did not re-injure myself. I gained weight and was left in a wheel chair all the time. Nobody at the nursing home knew when I could go home.

Someone recommended I call **OPTIONS** at their East Grand Forks office. It was the best call I've ever made. A gentleman called me back and I could just tell...things were going to change for me. I learned to advocate for myself to achieve the goal of moving back to my own home. Things moved slowly at first. The staff person spoke with me about my lack of strength from sitting in a wheel chair so long. He got me into physical therapy and scheduled discharge planning meetings. He also got Norman County Social Services involved, which included assessments, and opened communication with a social worker at the nursing facility about future discharge. I also got the prerequisites done for the Community Alternatives for Disabled Individuals, or CADI, waiver. I hadn't applied for Social Security, so my medical records were sent to the State Medical Review Team where I was determined to have a disability.

Things really began to move when we called the Regional Ombudsman for Long Term Care, and she called the social worker from the nursing facility. There was a physical and occupational therapy (PT/OT) evaluation at my home and we determined that I would need a platform cane, a commode, a walker upstairs and downstairs, a shower bench with a sliding seat, and a bed frame. **OPTIONS** had already dropped off a platform cane and a walker for me at the nursing home. The staff person met us at my house that day, and had the rest of the equipment in his car. This was good because there is kind of a Catch-22 in Minnesota that you cannot get funding on the CADI waiver until you are discharged from the nursing facility, and you can't get discharged from the nursing facility until you have the durable medical equipment in the home. **OPTIONS** loaned me the equipment.

I was discharged June 30 to go home. On July 9 I tripped over my cat. They took me in for x-rays. They came back negative, but I was unable to get around in my house. I again was back in the nursing facility. I was unable to put weight on my right side for a couple weeks. **OPTIONS** again came to see me and we made an appointment to call Social Security to do a phone application on August 3. I continued to get stronger and was about ready to go home on September 30. **OPTIONS** advised me to call Social

Security and tell them I was going home from the nursing facility and they could reach me on my home number.

There was no quality of life in the nursing facility. Room lights and bells went off all the time and people wouldn't answer the call light for sometimes an hour. It seemed like they were always short of staff. On two separate occasions I alerted the staff that a gal across the hall had fallen, I didn't even know how long she had been lying there. Meals were usually cold, milk was warm, and coffee was cold. The hallways smelled terrible. People had no control what time they went to bed or got up in the morning. I was so happy to leave this place and go back to my own home.

Once I was back in my own home, I put a bell on my cat's collar so I wouldn't trip again. I've been home since the end of September. **OPTIONS** helped me identify how to live successfully in my home and arranged for services to come to me. I get meals delivered every two weeks. I wear a life line around my neck. A personal care attendant helps me take showers, and I have four hours of homemaker services every week.

I was home about a week and Social Security called and said I would be receiving benefits and a back payment. Both have been received.

**THANK YOU, Centers for Independent Living!**

*Jodie*

## Welcome Home Gerald

Gerald has lived and worked in Duluth for most of his life. Before going to a local rehabilitation center, he had rented an apartment and participated in a variety of community events. Unfortunately, Gerald had a significant fall in his apartment, which would require a year of extensive therapy to regain mobility with assistance of a wheel chair. During the recovery, Gerald decided to give up his apartment, as he no longer felt safe living independently. To help develop a discharge plan the nursing home social worker contacted Access North to provide nursing home relocation services (NHR). Gerald met with Steve, a NHR specialist to discuss his needs and wants in his discharge plan. With Steve's assistance, Gerald was able to identify and prioritize his housing preferences. By creating a variety of plan options, he was able to advocate his preferences to his support team during his discharge planning meeting. It was determined that Gerald wanted to live in a place where he had privacy, access to public transportation, and access to homemaking services.

With the support of Access North, Gerald began to search for housing options that fit his preferences. After many phone calls to inquire about facility availability, he scheduled several tours and screenings. Gerald and Steve toured facilities and met staff. Many facilities did not meet Gerald's minimum requirements. Others had a waiting list extending out months or years. Gerald was becoming discouraged and was tempted to discharge against medical advice if he had to stay in the nursing home any longer. Gerald and Steve collected more housing resources to keep moving forward with his discharge plan. Steve contacted a residential assisted living provider that was slightly out of the downtown area but on the bus line, and approached Gerald with this option.



*Thanks to assistance from Access North, Gerald was able to locate a home of his choice in a safe place.*

After a tour and meeting the staff, Gerald decided this would become his home. He was happy to move to this residential setting in which he had the freedom of living independently but with the safety of 24-hour in-home care. Steve then coordinated the move, packed, and assisted Gerald in getting settled.

After the move Gerald said, "I am getting the assistance I need and most importantly I have my independence back." He is very happy living in his new home. This is but one example of the numerous hours of coordination and persistence it takes to successfully provide nursing home relocation services. Access North is committed to supporting the people in northern Minnesota to remain in their homes and communities and would like to thank Gerald for sharing his success story with the people of Minnesota.



## Anita's Journey

I had hit rock bottom. After burning down my home in Ohio, and alienating my whole family, I knew I needed to get help. I had struggled with mental illness and chemical dependency for years and I had no control over my life. The alcohol and drug abuse triggered my depression and bi-polar disease. I decided to move to Minnesota to get the services I so desperately needed. I entered treatment nine years ago and have not looked back. I have gotten the help I needed for my mental illness and have been sober for three-and-a-half years. I can honestly say Minnesota has afforded me everything.

While in recovery, I realized I wanted to do more with my life. I stayed in school for eight years and got my Associates degree from Minneapolis Community and Technical College and continued on to get my Bachelors of Science degree in Human Services from Metropolitan State University. My goal was to work with people who were going through what I have been through and work in the chemical dependency field. I always say, "I want to give back what was so freely given to me." I would tell people not to give up, stay in school, and keep going.

After I finished school I needed to find a job. I called the WorkForce Center and was very lucky to be referred to Melody who works for the Metropolitan Center for



*Anita receives the "Ed Roberts Spirit of Independence Award" from Jesse Bethke Gomez, executive director of the Metropolitan Center for Independent Living (MCIL) at their annual banquet. With hard work and assistance from MCIL, Anita completed a college degree and located a job that she loves.*

Independent Living as an Independent Living Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist. In one word, Melody is an angel; she never gave up on me. Her services really helped me to get my job. We worked on my resume and revised it many times. She helped me with mock interviews so I would be prepared. I was scared at first but we practiced a lot until I was comfortable. The best part of working with Melody is the boost she gave me. She encouraged me to stay positive. As an addict I was always told I was a loser, but Melody never gave up on me, even when I was late. She knew that deep down inside I wanted it and she wanted to help me get it. When I worked with Mel I almost forgot about my disabilities, she was so supportive. I got the best services from her and the WorkForce Center staff. I would like to send all my friends there, as they would love it.

With everyone's help I now work at Transformation House, a chemical dependency sober house. I love working there and feel like I am helping others. I am learning new things every day and am glad Melody taught me administrative skills. It had been so long since I had a paycheck that I could barely remember how to read one. The whole process has been very rewarding.

In October I was given the MCIL Ed Roberts Spirit of Independence Living Award. I was so honored to be recognized for my hard work. The award represents to me another success for those of us with disabilities by working on it one day at a time. For people with disabilities there is nothing you can't do. In a million years I never would have thought I would be where I am today. My words of advice are, "don't give up, give in." I would not be where I am without everyone's help.

# About the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council

The Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council is authorized under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Members are appointed by the governor to provide guidance to Minnesota's Independent Living Program. The council's main responsibilities are to develop, monitor, review, and evaluate a State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL). For more information on the Council, including how to join, see the MNSILC website at [mn.gov/deed/silc](http://mn.gov/deed/silc).



*Back Row: Randy Sorensen, William Rudolph, William Negaard. Middle Row: Ann Meyer (Notetaker), Brad Westerlund, Mitzi Mellot, Heidi Johnson, Cynthia Moore, Don Brunette (CIL Director for Access North). Front Row: Larry Lura, Mickey Kyler, Brian Wagner, Heather Allyn, and Rose Ann Faber.*

## ***Vision of the Statewide Independent Living Council***

By the year 2020 Minnesota will be providing a comprehensive range of independent living services which empowers persons with disabilities to live as independently as possible.

## ***Mission of the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council***

The Minnesota SILC shall advance the philosophy of independent living, maximizing the choices, leadership, empowerment, independence and productivity of persons with disabilities, and promote the integration and full inclusion of persons with disabilities into American society.

### ***Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council Roster***

Heather Allyn	William Negaard
Connie Lee Berg	Suzanne Renfroe
Rose Ann Faber	Sharla Scullen
Heidi Johnson	Jeff Thompson
Michele Kyler	Brad Westerlund
Linda Lingen	Shelly Pflaum
Larry Lura	William Rudolph
Mitzi Mellott	Randy Sorensen
Mark Mertens	Brian Wagner
Cynthia Moore	Joan Willshire



## Collaboration

The Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council works collaboratively with our partners in the State of Minnesota. Key partners in addressing the independent living needs of Minnesotans with disabilities are the eight Centers for Independent Living: Access North Center for Independent Living of Northeastern Minnesota (Access North), Freedom Resource Center for Independent Living (FREEDOM), Independent Lifestyles Inc. Center for Independent Living (ILICIL), Metropolitan Center for Independent Living (MCIL), Options Resource Center for Independent Living (OPTIONS), Southeastern Minnesota Center for

Independent Living (SEMCIL), Southern Minnesota Independent Living Enterprises and Services (SMILES) and Southwestern Center for Independent Living (SWCIL).

The council also collaborates with Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development — Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DEED/VRS) and State Services for the Blind (SSB). These two entities serve as our Federal Designated State Units.

MNSILC holds a strong value for working collaboratively to enhance the ability of Minnesotans with disabilities to live lives of choice. During this past year we have worked with Institute on Community

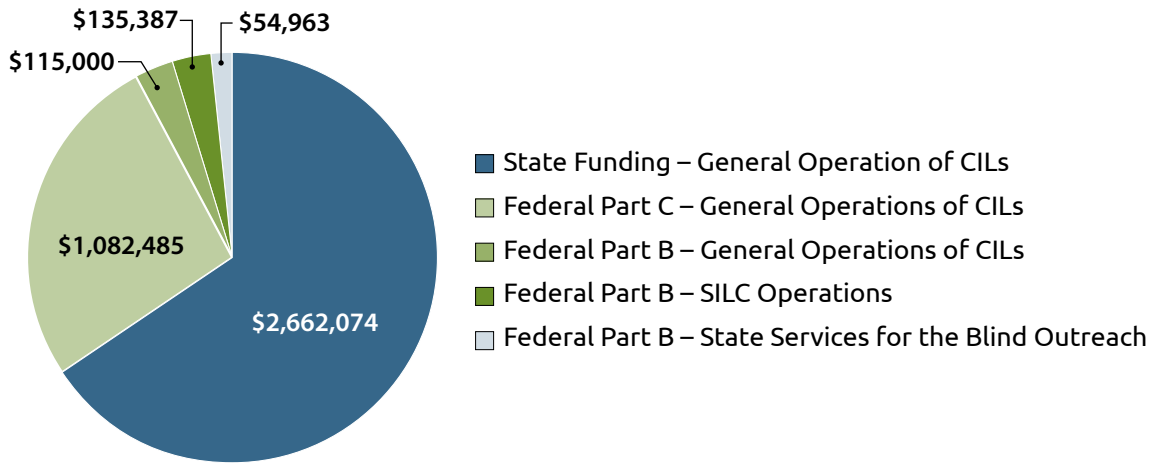
Integration to enhance the council's work developing a new state plan with our partners. We have also worked with the Minnesota State Council on Disability, the State Rehabilitation Council-General and the State Rehabilitation Council-Blind.

As the council began a comprehensive needs survey this year, many entities and individuals (too numerous to mention), worked with us to help get the word out about the survey. We extend our thanks to all of them and hope the future brings us more opportunities to connect and collaborate.



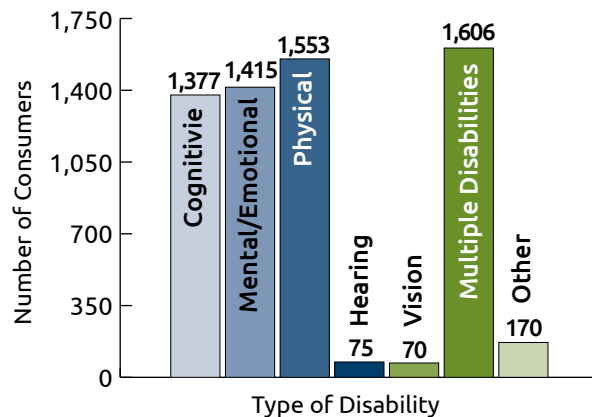
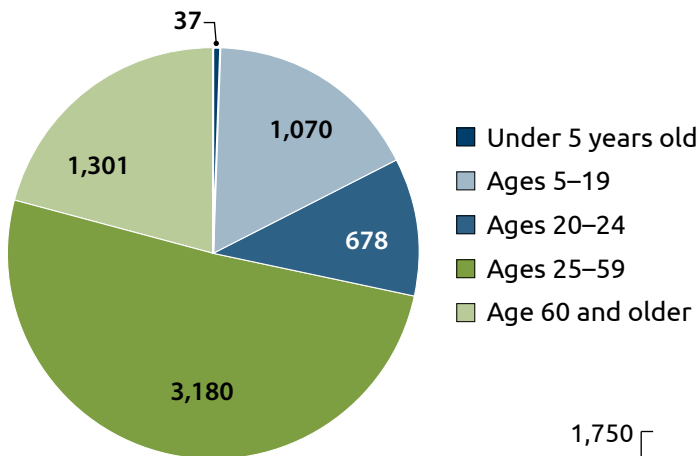
*Suzanne Renfroe, one of two MNSILC members attending SILC Congress 2015, listens to a presentation.*

## Independent Living Funding Distribution

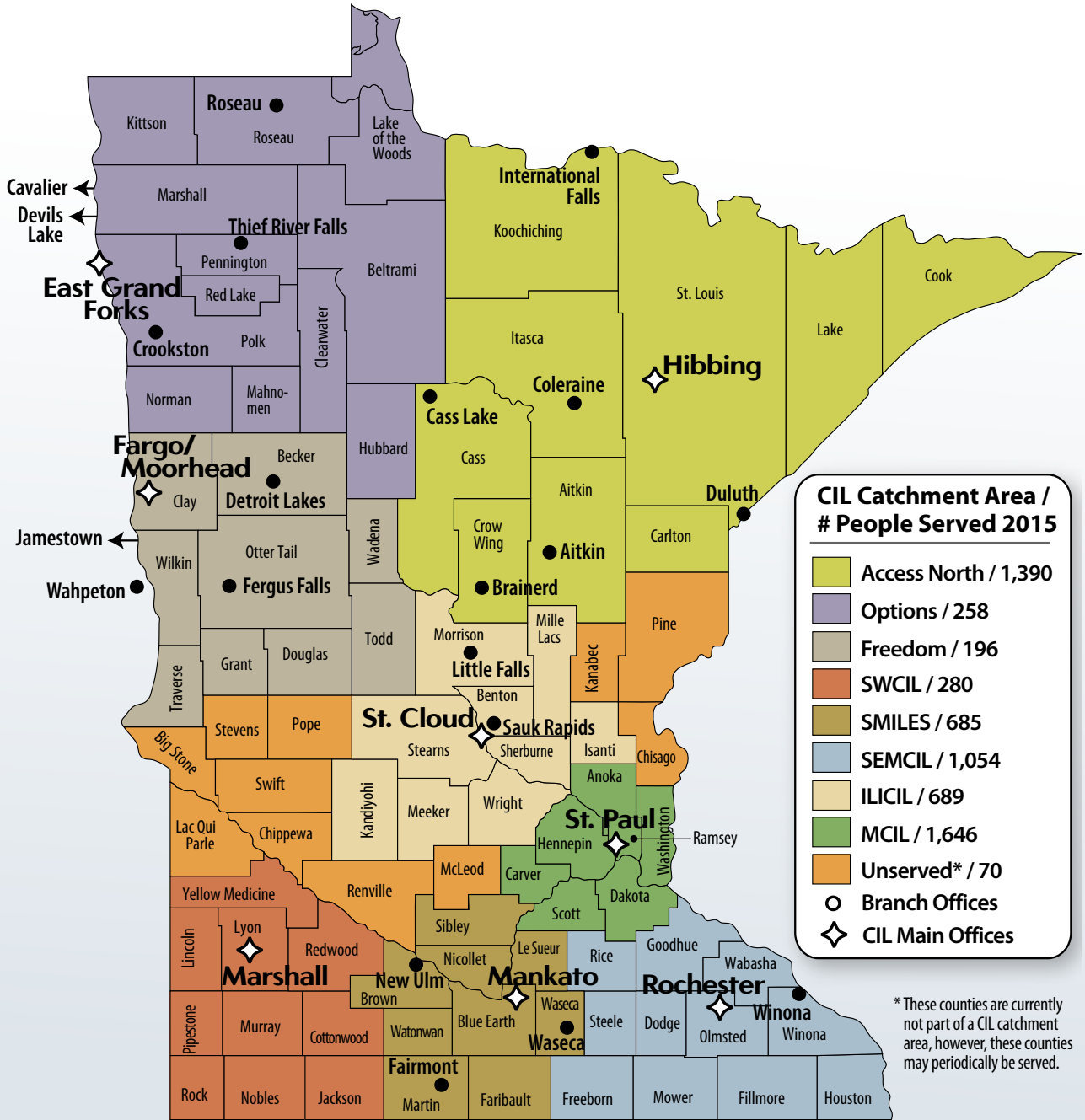


## Total Number of People Served by Centers for Independent Living

In FFY 2015, 6,266 individuals were served by Minnesota’s eight CILs which provided a total 66,688 received services, including the Independent Living (IL) core services.



# By the Numbers



For more information about the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council, go to: [mn.gov/deed/silc](http://mn.gov/deed/silc) or [mnsilc1215@gmail.com](mailto:mnsilc1215@gmail.com) or call: Pam Taylor, Coordinator at 612-518-1497

Upon request, this information can be made available in alternate formats for individuals with disabilities.

Contact: [Brad.Westerlund@state.mn.us](mailto:Brad.Westerlund@state.mn.us)

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