



# INDEPENDENTLY SPEAKING

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**Removing Barriers,  
Promoting Choices.  
— MCIL mission statement**

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**From Executive Director Jesse Bethke Gomez**

## Our urgent need to address Minnesota's PCA crisis

Now more than ever there is a sense of urgency to address Minnesota's PCA crisis. Metropolitan Center for Independent Living is continuing to contribute to solving the crisis. This past year, MCIL Board Chairperson Jeff Bangsberg and I served on a Direct Care Workforce Group in providing input on the creation of the Direct Care Workforce Report to address Long Term Services and Supports in addressing the direct care worker shortage. The Olmstead Sub-Cabinet accepted the Report in March of 2018. I had volunteered as a technical writer among a five person writing team, working with the Direct Care Work Group that produced the report.

Jeff Bangsberg and I also served on the Workgroup that was requested to help provide input for an implementation plan, which was accepted by the Olmstead Sub-cabinet at their July 2018 meeting.

We are pleased to share with you that an implementation plan developed by the Minnesota Department of Human Services and the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, based in part, upon the two previous reports mentioned above, was accepted by the Olmstead Sub-Cabinet at their December 2018 meeting. So where do we go from here?

Metropolitan Center for Independent Living is now part of a coalition that is seeking to establish a PCA rate framework. Our efforts are based upon the first recommendation of the Olmstead Direct Care Report and the July 2018 Direct Care Implementation Plan. In essence, we are seeking the adoption of the following PCA rate framework:

1. Establish a data-driven rate reimbursement framework
  2. Increase wages for PCAs and the Qualified Professionals who supervise them
  3. Increase the enhanced rate for individuals with the highest support needs
  4. Consistently collect statewide service provider data.
- Joining MCIL in this drive for PCA rate reform includes The ARC of Minnesota, Disability Law Center of Legal Aid, Minnesota First Provider Alliance, and Minnesota Homecare Association.

Jeff Bangsberg, Chairperson of the Board of Directors for Metropolitan Center for Independent Living, states: *"We need to reform the reimbursement rate structure for Personal Care Assistants, so that inflation is factored into state budget forecasts for PCA services. This will ensure automatic*



*Jesse Bethke Gomez*

*cost of living increases for both the Traditional and PCA Choice programs. We are grateful to have a large coalition joining us in this effort."*

Throughout 2019, we plan to continue to keep you informed on events in creating lasting change for good! ■



*Jeff Bangsberg, MCIL Board Chair spoke at the 2019 MN CCD Legislative Kick-off with Melissa Haley, MN CCD Board Member*

# PCA Reform Coalition seeks changes to address public health crisis

By Andre Best

Members of the PCA Reform Coalition are passionate about changing laws affecting Minnesota's Personal Care Assistance (PCA) program. The group consists of disability advocates, PCA agencies, and other human services providers in Minnesota. They propose several changes to Minnesota law that would increase reimbursement rates for personal care workers to reflect the difficulty of the work and the cost of providing the service, as well as creating a system of accountability within the industry to ensure the highest quality of care.

A PCA is the direct support staff person who provides medical and health-related services is often, the first protection against skin breakdown, also assistance with activities of daily living, and assistance with instrumental activities daily, such as personal hygiene and grooming, breathing supports, dressing, transferring, continence-related tasks, preparing food and feeding, maintaining a safe, clean environment, in the individual's home or workplace.

The service is critical in supporting the independence and inclusion of Minnesotans with disabilities and older adults, but The Olmstead Report on Recommendations to Expand, Diversify, and Improve Minnesota's Direct Care and Support Workforce highlights the many challenging aspects of working in this profession. For instance, the prominent perception is of a low-wage, dead-end job that is difficult, unreliable and sometimes dangerous. In addition, according to PCA Reform Coalition data, there has been very little change in rates since 2008. The rate of change since October 1, 2008 has been 1.642 percent.

This impression is not lost on the recipients of care. "It is disheartening to see fast food workers being paid better than my caregivers. For example, my full-time caregiver has more than 30 years of experience and is paid \$11.27 per hour. Her salary has increased only 77 cents per hour in the past 10 years," said Carla, a Minnesotan with a disability.

This slow rate of wage increases has exacerbated the direct support workforce crisis within the PCA program. And, while staffing shortages are a cross-sector crisis affecting businesses and industries, the stakes for Minnesotans with disabilities are literally life and death. Some Minnesotans with disabilities have died in their homes due to the PCA staffing shortage - demonstrating the significant public health crisis faced today. Others have been forced to transition into more costly congregate settings in order to receive the support they need - despite their ability to live independently with just a little bit of help.

Despite being one of the most cost-effective ways of supporting seniors and individuals with disabilities living and working in their communities, PCA services have never been reimbursed by the state in a way that reflects the actual costs of providing care. Past attempts to remedy this disparity have failed due to absence of hard data to determine and explain what the reimbursement rate should be. That is why the PCA Reform Coalition hopes to work with the Minnesota legislature to establish a cost-based, data-driven methodology for calculating fee-for-services PCA rates.

The proposed rate-setting framework uses Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) information to establish a wage that is competitive with other jobs requiring similar skills, and then adds a competitive work force factor to bring wages more in line with other jobs that require similar education, training, and experience as PCA staff.

It's crucial to address both the reimburse rate and wage issues to contribute to solving the PCA workforce shortage crisis. Minnesota must assure that we can attract and retain job seekers to the role of a PCA. To do so will reduce the current PCA job gap which number in the thousands of unfilled job openings. Most importantly, people with disabilities who rely on PCAs to live the lives they lead will be assured the continued quality of life they seek and enjoy, and have the right to enjoy with a sustained PCA workforce.

**Continued on next page**

**A rate increase and framework will:**

- Help ensure the long-term sustainability of the PCA program by increasing PCA and supervisor wages.
- Help alleviate the workforce shortage to ensure that more Minnesotans with disabilities can hire and retain high-quality PCA staff.
- Help provider agencies cover costs for which they currently don't receive reimbursement.

In addition to a higher rate of pay, a plan is being drafted to create a system of accountability for the personal care industry to ensure that all PCA agency providers are operating in a way to safeguard public funds, while also ensuring high quality services. The PCA Reform Coalition seeks to implement greater enrollment standards and financial reporting for PCA providers to improve the quality of care and maintain integrity within the program. Cur-

rently, the requirements to enroll as a provider are minimal. There is no requirement that providers demonstrate business competence or have the financial stability to administer this program.

**Greater provider standards will:**

- Reduce and prevent fraud, waste and abuse.
- Help ensure recipients are receiving quality services.

In the end, this legislation is critical to address the public health crisis currently impacting Minnesotans with disabilities and older adults in our communities. According to the Olmstead Report, if nothing changes by 2030, the current crisis is expected to deepen, based on a significant drop in the prime working-age population of Minnesota residents. (Permission granted by *Access Press* to reprint this article.) ■

## Bemidji named the “Best MN town” for 2018

Our Disability HUB MN Bemidji staff posed in front of the #onlyinmn sign after *Minnesota Monthly* named Bemidji the “Best MN town” for 2018.

*Pictured at right are Kristen Zemek, Marcus Macleod, Christine Ojeda, Heather Appel and Timothy Norton.*



*ADA Minnesota provides you and your organization with assistance to implement the Americans with Disabilities Act.*

**It provides the following services:**

- Technical assistance & information about what the ADA covers & what is required for compliance.
- Education, trainings & presentations
- Publications with information on employment, accessibility, reasonable accommodations & more.
- Connections to a network of local & national agencies.
- Resources on accessible information & electronic technology in education centers.

**Contact us! We can help.**

**ADA Minnesota**

530 Robert Street North; St. Paul, MN 55101

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[www.adaminnesota.org](http://www.adaminnesota.org)

[cindy@mciil-mn.org](mailto:cindy@mciil-mn.org)

# Everyone wins: Keys to effective staff management

By Michelle Vrieze, PAS Staffing Specialist

Oftentimes, that which is the best thing about a situation can also be the most challenging. In PCA Choice agencies, for example, consumers enjoy the idea of being the boss, and managing their needs independently. At the same time, learning how to negotiate this role can be difficult, even to the most experienced.

In both my personal role as a recipient of PCA services, and in my professional role as a Staffing Specialist for MCIL, I have found several components are needed for successful and effective staff management.

- Establish clear expectations and a schedule from the start. If this happens initially, it often saves confusion later. Perhaps checklists and calendars would be useful. If you need flexibility from your direct support professional, be clear about that.
- Allow questions. Establish an environment where the DSP is not afraid to ask questions when it comes to your needs. You are an expert in your own care, and your DSP needs information in order to do his or her job in the manner you prefer.
- Give feedback regularly. Remember to try to balance the positive with the negative. Offer up something your DSP does well, and follow up with the area where improvement is needed.

- Remember the Golden Rule. Model the attitude you would like to see from your DSP. If you value flexibility in scheduling, be sensitive when your DSP needs the same.
- Stay on top of the administrative stuff. Do you have enough timesheets? Do you need another box of gloves? Set aside time at the end of your DSP's shift to verify that his or her timesheet is filled out correctly.
- ***Above all, put a backup plan in place so you always have staff coverage. The MCIL PAS department strives to provide the best support to you. However, as a PCA Choice consumer, you are responsible for having a plan b ready to implement when the need arises.***

All of us here at MCIL are honored that you have chosen us as your service provider. Managing your staff can be challenging, but it is a key element in our Choice model.

As always, reach out to us if we can be of assistance. Our main phone number is 651-646-8342. ■

## MCIL 2018 Board Roster

- Board Chair ..... Jeff Bangsberg
- Vice Chair ..... Carolyn Sampson
- Secretary ..... Beth Fondell
- Treasurer ..... Brandon Miller
- Members at Large ..... Tim Benjamin, Todd Kemery, David Sherwood-Gabrielson and Deb Tomkins
- Ex-Officio ..... Jesse Bethke Gomez



**Your best life, your way.**

**Disability Hub MN** is a free statewide resource network that helps people with disabilities and their families solve problems, navigate the system, and plan their futures. Our team knows the ins and outs of community resources and government programs, and has years of experience helping people fit them all together. With a Disability Hub MN operations center at MCIL, Options Counselors are available via a toll-free number, website live chat options, email or personal meetings at community events.

# Welcome our new staff members

**KERIA ABBADULLA**

I am from Ethiopia, I grew up in Saint Paul, Minnesota and currently live in Little Canada. I speak Oromo and English. Prior to joining the case management team here at MCIL, I worked in the group home field as a direct support professional. I have a Bachelor's degree in social work from the University of Minnesota, Duluth. I am passionate about working with people from all walks of life and meeting them where they are. One of my goals is to improve the quality of life for my clients by connecting them with community-based services using a person-centered approach. Outside of work, I enjoy spending time with my family and friends, hiking, cooking, reading and exploring the outdoors.

**ERIK ANDERSEN**

I am the new IL/VR Specialist at the North Minneapolis Workforce Center. Before coming to MCIL, I worked as a training assistant at Achieve Services Inc., a day training and habilitation program for adults with disabilities that focuses on fulfilling goals related to employment and independence. Before that, I graduated from culinary school and worked in several restaurants around the North Metro. While my career choice has changed, I do still enjoy cooking and spending my days off with my wife. I am very passionate about helping and serving people and love to find ways to allow people to become the best version of themselves they can be. I look forward to being a part of the team!

**ALLISON BECKER**

I am the new IL/VR Specialist at the Fairview St. Paul Workforce Center. I graduated from Minnesota State University Moorhead with a BA in Psychology. I have experience working with adults with disabilities as a PCA/ Direct Support Staff in the community and at a day program. Most recently, I worked as an Employment Specialist at ProAct, Inc., where I was fortunate to be part of the "Way to Work" pilot project, an effort with VRS to rapidly engage individuals who wanted to explore competitive employment in the community. I enjoyed incorporating customized employment and seeing the impact that working has on people's ability to reach their goals and dreams. I'm excited to learn the IL/VR role, and to continue working with Vocational Rehabilitation.

I'm from the small town of New York Mills, MN, and enjoy city life in Minneapolis! My hobbies include anything true crime, indoor rock climbing, attempting Pinterest projects, baking, and lots of walks with my dogs Stella and Luna.

**JACK BREZNY**

I live in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Before joining the case management team here at MCIL, I worked as an Independent Living Skills Counselor. I have a Master's degree in sociology and I am passionate about helping people of all backgrounds. One of my main goals is teaching my clients to advocate for themselves, while taking a person-centered approach to the way in which I deliver care. In my personal life, I enjoy reading science fiction and fantasy, making music (I play several instruments), and hiking. ■

***Independently Speaking***  
**is also available in alternative formats.**  
**Contact MCIL for details.**

# MCIL workshops, classes and events

MCIL offers a variety of classes for people with disabilities. They usually run during the day anywhere from 1 to 3 hours depending on the class.

**All events are free and accessible.**

**Location:** MCIL, 530 Robert Street N., St. Paul, MN 55101

We are located on the bus line, so please check bus schedules for exact drop off locations. Or call Metro Transit for trip planning assistance.

**Please RSVP** at least 2 days **PRIOR** to activity. Unless otherwise specified, all activities will be held at MCIL. If you are interested in learning more about these and other events, please visit our website at [www.mcil-mn.org](http://www.mcil-mn.org) or RSVP at 651-646-8342.

- Interpreter or alternative formatted materials must be requested at least two weeks prior to the scheduled activity.
- Classes will be cancelled if less than two people are registered.
- Check our website [www.mcil-mn.org](http://www.mcil-mn.org) for the E-Calendar or come in and get the *most current* calendar of events at our front desk.
- Meeting dates are subject to change due to weather or unforeseen problems.

MCIL events attempt to be scent-free: Please remember to avoid wearing scented personal and hygiene items such as soaps, deodorants, shampoos, hair gels, lotions, “natural” fragrances and cologne/shaving products to MCIL events. This way everyone can have equal access to the services provided by MCIL. The Staff and Consumers Thank You!

## **Community Connections (formally Civic Engagement Program)**

**Tuesdays: 1-3pm  
Thursdays: 10-noon**

Would you like to be more connected to your community but not sure how? Do you want to find and pursue meaningful opportunities where you can use your passions and skills to make a difference in the lives of others? Would it help to sharpen your community leadership, advocacy skills and learn how to develop effective relationships within your community? If so, stop in and talk with Tiffany Ostrom to learn how you can receive individualized training and pursue your goals and passions in your community.

## **Drivers Education**

**Noon-2:00pm • Tuesdays  
January 8, 15, 22, and 29  
February 5, 12, 19 and 26  
March 5, 12, 19 and 26**

*This is a four part series.*

*\*Must attend all four sessions to complete material.*

This class runs as a study session to learn the laws and regulations of driving in Minnesota, in preparation to obtain a driving permit. We will breakdown the Minnesota Driver's Education manual, including practice quizzes, review videos, and use flash cards to cover the material in the driver's manual.

## **GLBTQ group**

**11:00am-1:00pm • Saturdays  
January 12, February 9 and March 9**

*Please note that the new time for the  
GLBTQ meeting has changed to the second  
Saturday of each month, from 11:00am-1:00pm.*

This program is intended for GLBTG people with disabilities. Learn about issues facing disabled GLBTQ people, as well as resources that are available in your community. Dinner will be served. For questions about location, stop in and talk with Nick.

# January 2019



## MCIL Independent Living Calendar

Please **RSVP** at least 2 days before event

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		01 CLOSED	02	03 • Community Connections 10a-12p	04 • DSP Onboarding 1-2:30p	05 • GLBTQ Group 11a-1p
06	07 • DSP Onboarding 9-10:30a	08 • Drivers Ed (1 of 4) 12p-2p • Community Connections 1-3p	09	10 • Community Connections 10a-12p • DSP Orientation 1-3p	11 • DSP Onboarding 1-2:30p	12
13	14 • DSP Onboarding 9-10:30a	15 • Drivers Ed (2 of 4) 12p-2p • Community Connections 1-3p	16	17 • Community Connections 10a-12p	18 • DSP Onboarding 1-2:30p	19
20	21 CLOSED	22 • Drivers Ed (3 of 4) 12p-2p • Community Connections 1-3p	23	24 • Community Connections 10a-12p • DSP Orientation 1-3p	25 • DSP Onboarding 1-2:30p	26
27	28 • DSP Onboarding 9-10:30a	29 • Drivers Ed (4 of 4) 12p-2p • Community Connections 1-3p	30	31 • Community Connections 10a-12p	1 • DSP Onboarding 1-2:30p	2

# February 2019



## MCIL Independent Living Calendar

Please **RSVP** at least 2 days before event

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					01 • DSP Onboarding 1-2:30p	02
03	04 • DSP Onboarding 9-10:30a	05 • Drivers Ed (1 of 4) 12p-2p • Community Connections 1-3p	06	07 • Community Connections 10a-12p • DSP Orientation 1-3p	08 • DSP Onboarding 1-2:30p	09 • GLBTQ Group 11a-1p
10	11 • DSP Onboarding 9-10:30a	12 • Drivers Ed (2 of 4) 12p-2p • Community Connections 1-3p	13	14 • Community Connections 10a-12p	15 • DSP Onboarding 1-2:30p	16
17	18 • DSP Onboarding 9-10:30a	19 • Drivers Ed (3 of 4) 12p-2p • Community Connections 1-3p	20	21 • Community Connections 10a-12p • DSP Orientation 1-3p	22 • DSP Onboarding 1-2:30p	23
24	25 • DSP Onboarding 9-10:30a	26 • Drivers Ed (4 of 4) 12p-2p • Community Connections 1-3p	27	28 • Community Connections 10a-12p	01 • DSP Onboarding 1-2:30p	02

RSVP Events: By calling MCIL at 651-646-8342 or Check our website [www.mcil-mn.org](http://www.mcil-mn.org) and click on "Classes Groups and Sessions" for updated information or to print this calendar. Please give 2 weeks notice if alternative format or other accommodations are needed. Events are free, accessible and mostly scent-free. Most events meet @ MCIL unless otherwise noted. MCIL is located at 530 N. Robert Street. St Paul, MN 55101.

# March 2019



## MCIL Independent Living Calendar

Please **RSVP** at least 2 days before event

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					01 • DSP Onboarding 1-2:30p	02
03	04 • DSP Onboarding 9-10:30a	05 • Drivers Ed (1 of 4)12p-2p • Community Connections 1-3p	06	07 • Community Connections 10a-12p • DSP Orientation 1-3p	08 • DSP Onboarding 1-2:30p	09 • GLBTQ Group 11a-1p
10	11 • DSP Onboarding 9-10:30a	12 • Drivers Ed (2 of 4)12p-2p • Community Connections 1-3p	13	14 • Community Connections 10a-12p	15 • DSP Onboarding 1-2:30p	16
17	18 • DSP Onboarding 9-10:30a	19 • Drivers Ed (3 of 4)12p-2p • Community Connections 1-3p	20	21 • Community Connections 10a-12p • DSP Orientation 1-3p	22 • DSP Onboarding 1-2:30p	23
24	25 • DSP Onboarding 9-10:30a	26 • Drivers Ed (4 of 4)12p-2p • Community Connections 1-3p	27	28 • Community Connections 10a-12p	29 • DSP Onboarding 1-2:30p	30

RSVP Events: By calling MCIL at 651-646-8342 or Check our website [www.mcil-mn.org](http://www.mcil-mn.org) and click on "Classes Groups and Sessions" for updated information or to print this calendar. Please give 2 weeks notice if alternative format or other accommodations are needed. Events are free, accessible and mostly scent-free. Most events meet @ MCIL unless otherwise noted. MCIL is located at 530 N. Robert Street. St Paul, MN 55101.



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- Indep. Living/Vocational Rehab
- Nursing Home Relocation
- Peer Mentoring
- Personal Care Assistance
- Ramp Project
- Technology
- Transition Services



Visit [www.mcil-mn.org](http://www.mcil-mn.org) or call  
651-646-8342 TODAY to find  
out all we have to offer!



**Metropolitan Center  
for Independent Living**