



Stevens County Developmental Achievement Center

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Spring is here whether we can feel it or not. Spring has been much like the world we have been living in for some time now, full of uncertainty and change. One day it is sunny and 80 degrees, the next pouring rain, then snow, then wind, then sun and 60s. Still, the grass is turning green, and we are still here doing what we can to support people in their daily lives.

As the pandemic shifts more to the rearview mirror, the challenges and opportunities in the path ahead are many. The pandemic has taught us a lot. It reminded us how important human connection is. The genuine concern about the wellbeing of others in our DAC family has been palpable. We are a community, and we care about each other. The governor's response to COVID-19 continues to dictate the way in which we can provide services. Presently we are operating a pod style of service. That is, those receiving services at the DAC remain in the same pod with the same people throughout the day. Limiting individuals entering and leaving groups is a mitigation strategy to reduce the spread of COVID-19. We are patiently waiting for a turn to the dial, allowing us to operate more freely.

Our service continues to be unbundled by the Minnesota Department of Human Services. Community employment has been tracked separately since 2019 and this year our non-vocational program and center-based work program is transitioning to being separately tracked. Keeping track of it all (in 15-minute increments) is challenging. Planning service units also presents a challenge as we are used to people moving freely between the different parts of our program as they choose from day to day. Now we need to make sure they have the service they want authorized when they decide they want to give something new a try on any given day.

At the legislature, this is a budget year, but this session has been anything but a normal budget session. Much of the work has been done remotely, even disability day at the Capitol was held virtually. Our asks include making rates for employment exploration service more adequate and sustainable, as well as making remote service delivery a permanent option for people. Also, we hope one-time federal funds coming to Minnesota for Home and Community Based Services are used to help providers emerge from the pandemic, boost their workforce and be ready to navigate the winds of change ahead.

We have endured a great deal and the challenges ahead can seem daunting at times. If you are reading this, you are part of our family and we care about you. The rounds of relief funds and the generous financial gifts we have received have allowed us to continue to operate through the pandemic. Thanks to all of you who helped us through one of our greatest times of need.

Alethea Koehler, *Executive Director*

Stevens County DAC