

REACHING INDEPENDENCE

Hannah Champions Disability Rights and a Future of Inclusion

One of the newest people CCRI supports is also an outspoken advocate for disability rights and services. Hannah Papenfuss has been with CCRI since July of 2024 and has already appeared on local television, in the newspaper, and she's spoken to legislators at the Minnesota State Capitol about the importance of maintaining full funding for disability waiver services.

"It's been really important for me to speak out—especially because while my housemates can communicate, they might not be taken as seriously because of the nature of their disability," Hannah explains.

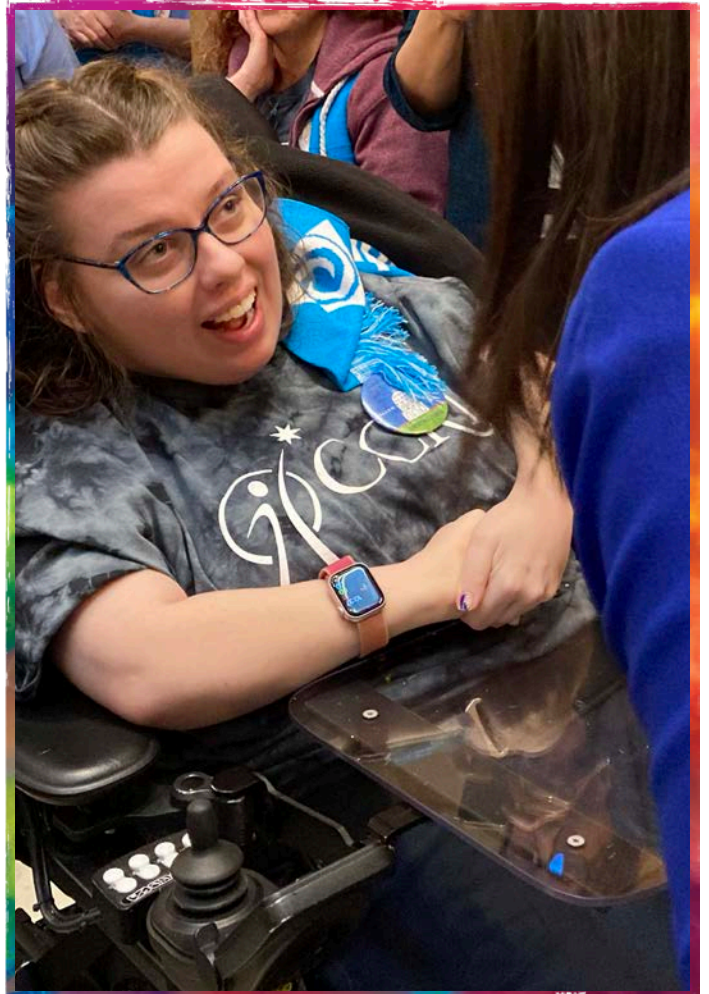
Hannah, who has always lived with her parents, decided to move into a CCRI-supported home because as her parents age, she wanted to prepare for her future on her terms. The 26-year-old currently works at Concordia College and is earning her master's degree in disability services in higher education through City University of New York. She wants to do disability advocacy work at a university or nonprofit organization and is considering pursuing a law degree.

Hannah says that because she couldn't physically do a lot for herself, she learned early on how important it was to use her voice to advocate for herself.

"Disability is not the tragedy everyone makes it out to be, but there are definitely barriers and hurdles that you have to deal with that other people don't, and it makes your life more complicated," she notes.

While Hannah has educated others—including future teachers and nurses—on disability considerations, she hadn't done much political activism until recently. Not only did Hannah speak out when Minnesota legislators visited CCRI to learn about our concerns, but she also shared her worries over looming budget cuts during Disability Services Day at the Capitol.

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A Future of Inclusion continued...

Hannah's mission is to ensure others have equal access to the care and resources they need, and she uses her personal experiences to engage and inform others.

"Even if it's a small action like sending an email, it can make a difference," she remarks.

Inspired by Judy Heumann, an influential disability rights activist who was pivotal in securing the passage of Section 504, Hannah's dedication is rooted in a deep understanding of the importance of equality and representation for individuals with disabilities, and she isn't afraid to challenge perceptions.

"Just because our lives are different doesn't mean they're worse," Hannah explains. "We can live full, meaningful lives with the right support."

She also likes showing others that it's okay to ask questions, even if it feels awkward.

"I actually love when kids come up to me and ask, 'What's wrong with you?'" she notes. "It's a chance to educate them and have a real conversation. I'd much rather engage in that dialogue than leave people wondering."

For Hannah, her work is not just about policy changes—it's about personal connection, understanding, and the belief that everyone deserves a voice.



IN THIS TOGETHER

Advocating for Disability Services

When Representative Heather Keeler told the packed rotunda in the Minnesota state capitol building that her team and the Human Services Committee are committed to making sure the state budget is not balanced on the backs of people with disabilities, the voices of CCRI clients cheered loud and proud.



One of those voices belonged to one of the people CCRI supports, Ashley Martz, who told Valley News Live, "CCRI means a lot to me because I rely on them."

After participating in the Disability Services Day at the Capitol rally in St. Paul in March, we shared our stories with senators Rob Kupec and Paul Utke, who told us disability services are the wrong place to look for possible budget cuts.

A couple months prior, CCRI held a legislative listening session in our offices where clients, guardians, staff, and other supporters shared their heartfelt reasons why CCRI services matter and the impact the governor's proposed cuts to disability services waivers could make with Keeler and representatives Kim Hicks and Brion Curran.

We made our voices heard, but we cannot stop

there. As of the printing of this newsletter, the House and Senate omnibus bills were passed off the floor. The last stop for each bill before their final vote is conference committee, where a small group of legislators meet to discuss the differences in each version of the bill and produce one final bill that will go to a wider floor vote. Some proposals are very damaging to our service system—including cuts that would greatly impact the support we provide at CCRI.



To make sure our legislators know how important it is to fund disability services appropriately, visit www.armm.org/advocacy, click the "Active Action Alerts" button, and share your concerns.



CREATIVE CARE

CCRI Team Members Nominated for ARRM Cares Award

Twelve outstanding CCRI team members have been nominated for the prestigious ARRM Cares Award, recognizing their exceptional dedication, compassion, and creativity in supporting people with disabilities. These DSPs go above and beyond in building meaningful relationships, championing independence, and bringing joy to the lives of those they support. Their work reflects the best of CCRI's mission—and we're proud to celebrate their incredible impact. Here are six of our nominees. We'll share the other six in our third-quarter newsletter.



Allen Jang, 24 years of service

Allen is the kind of DSP who leans in when things get tough. He's the person you can count on—steady in a crisis, thoughtful in the day-to-day, and deeply committed to the people he supports. His work isn't just about routines—it's about connection. Knowing Kevin loves zebras, Allen didn't just take him to the zoo—he uploaded photos from the trip to a digital frame so Kev could revisit the memory every day. When another client faced serious health issues, Allen took action—adjusting meals, coaching staff, and helping the client feel better, inside and out. Allen leads by showing up—with heart, humility, and unwavering dedication.



Angela Linden, 20 years of service

For decades, Angela has brought compassion, stability, and joy to the lives of the four men she supports—who feel more like family than clients. She works 43-hour shifts, fully embracing her role as “house mom” by sharing everything from breakfast routines to late-night Monopoly games. She once arranged a surprise visit to a radio station, where the DJ hosted a pretend live show just for them—a memory they still talk about. Whether helping them grieve the loss of parents, giving someone the chance he needed to become an award-winning Special Olympics athlete, or taking late-night Target runs together, Angela makes sure “her guys’” world is full of meaningful moments.



Kayla Flach, 17 years of service

From college student to seasoned DSP, Kayla has spent years building strong, lasting relationships with the people she supports. Even while working full-time as a speech-language pathologist, she continues her DSP role because of the genuine connections she's formed. Kayla doesn't just accompany clients to activities—she joins in, making every moment meaningful. Whether it's working out, catching a game, or enjoying a concert or “girls' night out,” she creates shared experiences that build trust and joy. Her creativity, advocacy, and person-centered approach make her a powerful force for inclusion, growth, and connection in our community.

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

– Mahatma Gandhi

Candi Dunham, 15 years of service

Candi brings reliability, compassion, and creativity to her role as a DSP. Whether she's staying late to help someone settle into a new home, supporting a nonverbal client to order independently at a restaurant, or driving hours to a medical appointment so parents can stay present, Candi always puts the needs of others first. One standout moment? Helping Ashlin write a fake speeding ticket for her brother as a playful way to connect. It's these thoughtful touches—rooted in empathy and joy—that make Candi a vital part of the lives she helps shape.



Napoleon Gbalah, 7 years of service

Napoleon embodies professional integrity, going above and beyond to support those in his care. Known as the "House Dad of Site 32," he leads with compassion, reliability, and a deep sense of responsibility. When a client's father entered hospice, Napoleon immediately volunteered to make the overnight trip, ensuring a heartfelt final goodbye. His thoughtful actions—like bringing home the client's dad's recliner—reflect his commitment to meaningful, person-centered care. A trusted leader and advocate, Napoleon's dedication uplifts both his clients and colleagues, setting a powerful example of what true support looks like across our organization.



Lisa King, 18 months of service

For Lisa, supporting others isn't a job—it's a calling rooted in compassion, consistency, and a deep belief in the potential of every person she serves. Working every weekend from Saturday morning to Sunday night, she offers unwavering consistency for the women she supports—something they've come to count on. One small moment speaks volumes: when a client mentioned missing her sister, Lisa encouraged her to call and helped her prepare topics to talk about. Now, the sisters chat every week, their conversations full of joy and connection. From creating healthy routines to celebrating imaginary weddings, Lisa proves that when it comes to person-centered care, the little things really are the big things.



WHAT'S HAPPENING AT CCRI

Designer Purse Bingo

We so appreciate everyone who showed up for CCRI on April 29 to play bingo, try to win a designer handbag, and of course help us raise funds to help give the folks we support opportunities to live their best lives! If you missed it, you'll have another chance on July 15.



Bowling Tournament

The Randy and Grace Smebak Memorial Bowling Tournament was a fun night of bowling, prizes, and root beer floats—and a meaningful way to remember former CCRI client Randy Smebak and his mother. Randy's siblings have been sponsoring the tournament since 2015.



Volunteers

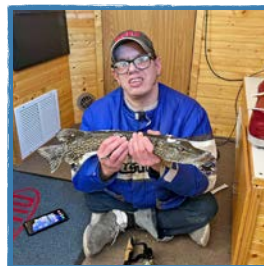
Volunteers with Edward Jones spent a couple of hours at CCRI learning about our organization, helping organize our prom dresses and jewelry, and playing games with some of the folks we support. While here, they also got to hear from Brad and Liz about what CCRI's prom means to them.





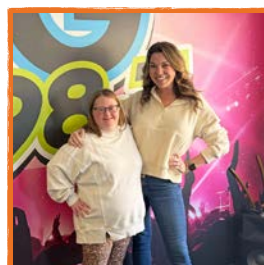
Crusaders

The FM Crusaders M.C. Bike Show live and silent auctions raised money to support our inclusive, accessible summer camp. And several of our clients had so much fun volunteering to help show off the auction items and sell raffle tickets.



Ice Fishing

Several of the folks we support had an unforgettable day out on the ice, thanks to our facilities manager, Jason Johnson! There were plenty of laughs, delicious snacks, a little hockey, and some great catches.



Giving Hearts Day

We were blown away by the support we received for Giving Hearts Day. And the people we support had a blast helping us with everything from radio ads and thank-you videos to Facebook posts and contests to help show the community why CCRI matters.



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SAVE THE DATES

Visit our Facebook page or [CCRIMoorhead.org/Community](https://www.ccrimoorhead.org/Community) for event details.

May 30 Fargo Marathon 5K

July 15 Designer Purse Bingo Fundraiser

July 29 Client Appreciation Picnic

September 7–13 DSP Week

October 8 CCRI Client Prom

October 9 Post-Prom Fundraiser

October 28 Candy Crawl at the FARGODOME

November 20 Give to the Max Day

December 2 Giving Tuesday

