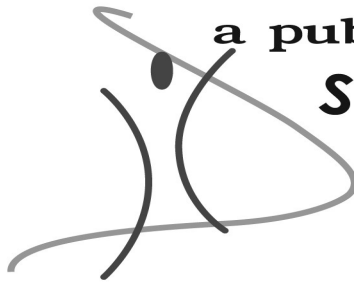


# Centerpieces

a publication of

## Southwestern Center for Independent Living (SWCIL)

Serving People with Disabilities in Southwestern Minnesota



### 2023 NCIL National Conference



SWCIL staff and others at US Capitol

As it does every year, the National Council for Independent Living once again held its national conference in Washington, D.C., in July, 2023. This year SWCIL sent eight of its staff and one member of its board to be a part of this experience.

During these few days attendees got the opportunity to participate in a number of large and small

group gatherings, including breakout sessions of various types related to helping participants to be better equipped to advocate for people with disabilities with regard to independent living.

In addition to these sessions, the group from SWCIL also met with staff and representatives from the offices of two US MN senators and two House members to offer education on Centers for Independent Living, including services CIL's offer and the needs and gaps in service facing the disability community.

#### Winter Issue 2024

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## NCIL Conference ... Continued



SWCIL staff marching

The group from SWCIL also participated in a march to the US Capitol that included more than 700 people. The purpose of this event was to promote integration into community settings, as well as advocating for disability rights, including freedom from institutionalization.

Former Executive Director and current SWCIL Ramp Crew Lead Steve Thovson commented that attending the conference reminded him of the crucial importance of productive teamwork in achieving significant outcomes and changes for people with disabilities. He also said it reminded him of the importance of “boots on the ground working with consumers on what they want to accomplish to improve their lives in SW Minnesota,” and how that is crucial to

SWCIL’s success.

Independent Living Program Manager Sherry Olson commented: “Marching down Pennsylvania Avenue was so energizing and moving. To see over 700 people bringing awareness to CIL’s dedication and the needs of people with disabilities.” She also added, “I also enjoyed being able to network with staff from other CIL’s and hear about their programs and staffing. Getting information from outside agencies on different AT [Assistive Technology] items and social media.”



SWCIL staff holding signs for the march



# How a SWCIL Suitcase Ramp Made My Summer

by Ted Stamp



Living room/deck of house on Lake Minnetonka



Example of SWCIL suitcase ramp

The summer of 2023 was another great one for me, especially getting out in the nice weather nearly every day and enjoying activities with family and friends. But the daytrip I took with a high school friend of mine to his rental place on Lake Minnetonka proved to be the surprise highlight of the year.

More importantly, the enjoyment of this trip would have been substantially less if I hadn't had easy access to a suitcase ramp available through SWCIL. All it took was filling out a brief application and paying the \$50 rental fee and we were off to what turned out to be a much more enjoyable eight hours than we could have anticipated. This arrangement was made additionally convenient by the fact that SWCIL's new Ramp Program Manager delivered the ramp to my home and picked it up when we were finished.

*Continued on page 4...*

## SWCIL Suitcase Ramp ... Continued



Ted fishing on dock with friend

So how did this simple device make such a difference in my summer? Firstly and most importantly, it allowed me to get into the rental property in which they were staying, which had two steps at either entrance. SWCIL has either six or eight-foot portable ramps to address such obstacles, and the six-foot ramp proved sufficient in this case. These ramps are lightweight (about fifty pounds) and are made easy to carry by a convenient fold-down handle on top. By unlatching a small piece of Velcro that keeps the ramp folded together, it unfolds to double in length and width. Then it's just a matter of arranging it so that it is stable, and suddenly the access obstacle you face is overcome!

This gave access to a gorgeous rental space that was like something out of *Lifestyles of the*

*Rich and Famous*. Not only was the interior unlike anything I have ever seen or experienced firsthand, and maybe never will again, the view from the deck was breathtaking! In fact, the walls of the living room on two sides were a series of sliding glass doors that could all be simultaneously slid open to connect with the large patio, which looked down onto just one of the calm, beautiful bays of Lake Minnetonka.

But not only did I have access to this beautiful house and patio overlooking the Lake, where we enjoyed a great barbecue and conversation, but SWCIL's portable suitcase ramp made it possible for me to cross a slightly downhill section of a neighbor's garden that I could not have navigated without the ramp. This allowed me access to the beach and dock where we spent time savoring the beauty even more closely, laughing as we watched the little sunfish and crappies repeatedly strike our line as we pulled them up one after the other, even as we watched and listened to the loons and geese.

I could say much more about this time together with my friends, but this short article should illustrate clearly enough how much difference a portable suitcase ramp can make in enabling greater independent living opportunities in the life of a person with physical limitations like mine. For more information about renting these ramps from SWCIL, whether temporarily or long-term, contact the SWCIL office.



## Meet New SWCIL Staff Members



New staff Samantha Wolff

Hello! My name is Samantha Wolff. I grew up in Balaton, graduated from TMB in 2014, and now live in Tyler with my husband, stepdaughter, and newborn son. I have worked with individuals with disabilities for about 8 years in group home, in-home, and nursing home settings. I am excited to bring care and compassion to the other side of things and encourage independent living as an Independent Living Specialist for SWCIL.

Hi, my name is Jordan Glad, and I was born and raised in the Southwest region of Minnesota. As the former program director of an adult foster care facility, I have worked with individuals with disabilities for over 11 years. I earned my Associates of Applied Science degree in Human Services in 2018, and I also served as a volunteer emergency medical responder on the ambulance service of my community (Clarkfield) for over four years. At SWCIL I am working in the capacity of a Consumer Directed Community Supports (CDCS) Support Planner and Independent Living Specialist. In these positions I greatly enjoy the opportunity to work with individuals, their families, case management, and financial management services, and I am grateful for the relationships built every day.



New staff Jordan Glad



**Find us on Facebook and Like our page to keep up with all the latest SWCIL news and events.**

## Reevaluating Subminimum Wage Employment by Ted Stamp

For years now disability advocates have sought to reduce and eventually eliminate the practice of paying people with disabilities less than minimum wage, and recently the push for this has increased and found overwhelming success.

According to a recent article on the news site Disability Scoop,<sup>1</sup> the US Department of Labor is planning to launch a comprehensive review of the Section 14(c) program, which since the 1930s has allowed employers to receive certificates from the Department allowing them to pay workers with disabilities less than the federal minimum wage (\$7.25/hr).

This new call for a moratorium on Section 14(c) comes as a result of more than a dozen disability organizations joining together to ask for a transition from this antiquated way of employing people with disabilities to a competitive, integrated model. This would look to prioritize moving disabled employees from facilities that strictly employ people with disabilities to jobs at other businesses or organizations within their community that pay higher wages.

Not only are many individuals with disabilities eager and capable for this welcome change, but for those who are for whatever reasons reluctant to do so there is often adequate training and support available to help prepare them, whether offered through their new employer or through an outside organization providing a job coach or peer mentor.

Advocates point out that not only have 16 states already banned the practice of issuing Section 14(c) certificates, but apparently this type of employment has been on the decline for some time. According to the above article, a Government Accountability Office Report from early 2023 revealed that between 2010 and 2019 the number of workers with disabilities earning subminimum wages dropped from 296,000 to 122,000. Even more surprisingly, the Department of Labor reports that as of September that number has plummeted below 43,000.

Clearly these numbers reflect a coming change that is imminent, and not only in the best interest of people with disabilities who desire to work, but also in the interest of the employers and communities that employ them.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.disabilityscoop.com/2023/10/02/labor-department-scrutinizing-subminimum-wage-employment/30571/>

If you have poems, personal successes, letters to the editor or questions for our readers, send your submissions to: Ted at SWCIL 109 S. 5th Street, Suite 700, Marshall, MN 56258, or call the office at 507.532.2221, ext. 101.

## **Upcoming SWCIL Events**

**RSVP: 507.532.2221, ext. 111 OR 800.422.1485 (MN Relay, dial 711)  
rsvp@swcil.com OR message us on Facebook  
All live events are smoke and fragrance free  
Reasonable Accommodations upon request**

**To receive flyers by email, contact [rsvp@swcil.com](mailto:rsvp@swcil.com)  
Friends & family are welcome and encouraged to attend!**

## **2024 Social Rec/Community Ed Events**

**Updates will be posted on [swcil.com](http://swcil.com) and SWCIL's Facebook page**

**January 9, 2024 - 1:00-2:00 pm OR January 10 - 5:00-6:00 pm  
Words Matter Webinar - Disability Etiquette, Person-First Language**

**OUR MISSION STATEMENT:** SWCIL is dedicated to working with and responding to the ever changing needs of persons with disabilities in Southwestern Minnesota to promote societal acceptance, inclusion, and equal access for all persons with disabilities.

Southwestern Center for Independent Living (SWCIL) is a community-based, non-profit organization serving people with all disability types in the ten counties of southwestern Minnesota through: \*Individual and Systems Advocacy \*Cross-disability Peer Counseling \*Information and Referral \*Independent Living Skills Training and \*Public Education. All of SWCIL's programs and services are consumer controlled with an emphasis on improving the quality of life for all people with disabilities. SWCIL's aim is to provide education and awareness to promote inclusion, acceptance and equal access in society for all people with disabilities.

For more information about SWCIL programs and services, please contact us at:  
109 South 5th Street, Suite 700—Marshall, MN 56258 Phone: (507) 532-2221 or  
(800) 422-1485 (For MN Relay, dial 711) or fax (507) 532-2222.

Southwestern Center for Independent Living  
109 South 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 700  
Marshall, MN 56258-1268  
Phone: 507-532-2221 or 800-422-1485 (For MN Relay, dial 711)

Website: <http://www.swcil.com>  
E-mail: [swcil@swcil.com](mailto:swcil@swcil.com)  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/SWCILMarshallMN](http://www.facebook.com/SWCILMarshallMN)  
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Angela Algood, IL Specialist/CDCS Support Planner  
Annette Swanson, Grants & Financial Manager  
Ashley Reynaga, Community Activities & I&R Specialist  
David Haen, Ramp Program Manager  
Harry Remley, Peer Mentor  
Jordan Glad, CDCS Support Planner/IL Specialist  
Kristina Tollefson, IL Program Support  
Linda Halbur, LSW, CDCS Program Manager, Veteran's PM  
Melissa Doherty, Executive Director  
Rachel Thalacker, IL Specialist/CDCS Support Planner  
Ruth Hubbling, IL Specialist  
Samantha Wolff, IL Specialist  
Sharlett Glidden, IL Specialist  
Sherry Olson, IL Program Manager  
Steve Thovson, Ramp Crew Lead  
Ted Stamp, IL Advocate