

# Centerpieces

a publication of

**Southwestern Center for  
Independent Living (SWCIL)**

*Serving People with Disabilities in Southwestern Minnesota*

## Consumer Success Story—Say Paw's Life Changed

by Ruth Hubbling



Photo of Say & July Paw

Say Paw lived like so many others in her community, with her husband and two children on a small acreage near Fulda, MN. She worked part-time for Walmart, taking care of the house and kids while her husband, July, was on the road four to five days a week as a truck driver. But in October 2020 their lives took a sudden, drastic change forever when Say had a severe stroke.

Say and her husband are fairly recent immigrants from Myanmar, from which they escaped and were living in a refugee camp in Thailand before immigrating. They have moved several times within the U.S. before settling down in Southwest Minnesota. Say gained her citizenship in June 2020, and says

that if they were still in a refugee camp in Thailand she would not have survived her stroke, since the hospital there would have been several hours' drive from the camp.

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## Consumer Success Story—Say Paw's Life Changed ... Cont'd

The morning of the stroke, July woke to the sound of his wife screaming and called 911. The brain bleed covered half of her brain. Prior to this she had complained of headaches and had trouble sleeping, with one trip to the emergency room. The stroke followed a year later.

For the first two weeks in the hospital in Sioux Falls, Say was non-responsive. After surgery, when she became conscious, she could remember when she was a child, but didn't remember her husband or her own children. And when Covid-19 hit, July and the kids were not allowed to visit her.

In the months that followed, she was transferred from the hospital to a rehabilitation center in Lincoln, Nebraska, to develop the physical and occupational skills that would help her return home, including all of the normal self-care she was doing for herself before the stroke. While July was able to visit her two to three times per week, the kids didn't see her until she came home.

At this time Say was not able to work, but not only that, July had to stop his work to take care of her, and he also had to learn how to do many of the things to help her. They also had to have a ramp built to make it easier for Say's wheelchair to get in and out of the house.

Fortunately, Say and July had help from their family to take care of the kids and help out financially. They also had help from SWCIL in the form of guidance with paperwork, bills, and Social Security Income.

Now, while Say and July still face plenty of challenges, Say is able to use her left hand and can sometimes dress herself. She can put the brace on her right foot but needs a little help putting the sling on her right arm. She is able to get up and walk around with and without a cane, and is able to use the bathroom independently, but still needs help while bathing. And while adjusting to these challenges isn't easy, they are thankful for the help they received that helped make the transition easier.



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

## Transitioning Beyond Subminimum Wages by Ted S.

For many years now there has been a growing movement across the country to end subminimum wages for people with disabilities. In many cases this movement not only recognizes the need to compensate individuals fairly, it seeks to place them in a competitive, integrated work setting in the community rather than in a single facility designed strictly to employ people with disabilities.

Much progress has been made in this respect in recent years, even in the Marshall community. For decades now Advance Opportunities has provided quality work opportunities for people with disabilities, but since 2014 it has been gradually helping to place many of its employees in jobs within the community rather than only at its facility. In fact, in 2021 Advance paid its last subminimum wage, though some of its employees still work at its facility.

The CEO of this nonprofit, Elizabeth Schear, says part of the challenge of transitioning individuals into jobs within the community has to do with trying to change the traditional view that most people generally have of people with disabilities, namely that they are not expected to work. If they do, it has been the norm for decades that they be housed in a single facility and in many cases paid subminimum wages.



Advance Opportunities logo

In 2021 the Minnesota Legislature set up the Task Force on Eliminating Subminimum Wages, whose task has been to “draft a plan to prepare state agencies, people with disabilities, their families, advocates and providers in

case subminimum wage goes away in the future.”<sup>1</sup> As part of this, they have been tasked with identifying the following: 1) benefits to the state in eliminating subminimum wages; 2) barriers to eliminating subminimum wages and potential solutions; 3) ongoing funding and resource strategies; 4) strategies to increase wages and improve work opportunities; and 5) a plan to evaluate, measure and track progress. The task force must also engage and educate people who would be affected and advise DHS on plans for limiting subminimum wages in the disability waivers.<sup>2</sup>

*Continued on page 4...*

## Subminimum Wages ... Continued ... by Ted S.

This State-appointed task force submitted the full report of its recommendations to the MN Legislature in February 2023, which will help employers, nonprofits, and other stakeholders to know better how to move forward with their own transitions of individuals into customized employment or to help advocate in that regard, including potential funding sources.

If you are interested in more information about the outcomes of this task force, a summary report can be found at (or search “Task Force on Eliminating Subminimum Wages legislative report”):

[https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET\\_DYNAMIC\\_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=MNDHS-062106](https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=MNDHS-062106).

Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> <https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/news-initiatives-reports-workgroups/long-term-services-and-supports/task-force-on-eliminating-subminimum-wages/>

<sup>2</sup> Same as above.



Pictures of umbrellas with rain falling

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. 107.

**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.

## Potential Promise for the MA-EPD Program ... by Ted S.

Since 2001 Minnesota's Medical Assistance for Employed Persons with Disabilities (MA-EPD) program has been a great help for many people with disabilities, enabling them to maintain employment without the fear of losing necessary benefits. Last June an article in this newsletter detailed many of the benefits of the program. The purpose of this article is to provide a brief update on legislation currently being proposed (HF 1384/SF 1272) to greatly improve the program for its participants.

The first thing this bill will do is mandate that all enrollees on medical assistance who indicate that they have a disability must be informed of the MA-EPD program when they are initially enrolled, and also annually thereafter. Another thing it does, which is really the key thing, is to eliminate the current \$20,000 asset limit, as well as the monthly premiums. Actually, while many participants will no longer pay monthly premiums, others will pay less than before, as determined by a sliding scale in accord with the percentage of one's income to the federal poverty rate.

Medicare premiums would also be reimbursable for all MA-EPD participants if these bills pass. Also, the renewal process for the program will only take place annually instead of every six months, and those who have fallen off the program due to inability to pay premiums or for other reasons will have the opportunity to be reenrolled in the program without penalty.

This bill addresses important issues, such as high premiums and low asset limits, which not only discourage people from working, they make it harder for people who already have low incomes to save money and invest in their futures. Low asset limits keep many in continual fear of losing their healthcare benefits and services if they save too much money (rather than spending it down to stay under the allowed limit).

For more information, visit the website for the MN legislature ([www.leg.mn.gov](http://www.leg.mn.gov)).

The source for the above information is a flyer published by the Arc of MN ([www.arcminnesota.com](http://www.arcminnesota.com)).



Pictures of grass, flowers, butterflies

## What are Social Stories? ... by Ted S.

Social Stories are brief narratives in pictorial form that highlight certain everyday experiences or problems people face with the goal of making such information as understandable as possible for individuals with autism. More than informing them, though, the stories are intended to teach them how to deal with or overcome such experiences, as opposed to being overwhelmed by them.

For example, a Social Story might teach proper behavior in certain public social settings as opposed to private, the importance of good manners and habits of self-care, understanding their own and others' behavior and emotions, or how to communicate and interact with others appropriately and effectively. Specific examples might include How to be a good friend, or What to expect at the dentist or doctor office.

This concept of teaching was developed by child pediatrician Dr. Carol Gray in the early 1990s, who has published several books on the subject since then. As you can imagine, there is an almost endless number of potential Social Stories that have been and have yet to be written, and nearly anyone can create one.

According to the website for Autism Parenting

Magazine, a helpful Social Story includes the following elements: 1) a specific goal that targets the desired behavior; 2) well-researched information that is accurate, relevant, and interesting to the reader; 3) descriptive, encouraging content that answers the basic questions of who, what, where, when, and how.

If you would like to order a free guide with more information on Social Stories for autistic children, see the following web link, which was the source for much of the information in this article:

Amy Tobik, *Social Stories for Kids with Autism – The Ultimate Guide*, Jan. 27, 2023, <https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/social-stories-for-autistic-children/>



Photo of social story example

## **Upcoming SWCIL Events**

**RSVP: 507.532.2221, ext. 111 OR 800.422.1485 (MN Relay, dial 711)**

**swcil@swcil.com OR message us on Facebook**

**All live events are smoke and fragrance free**

**Reasonable Accommodations upon request**

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

## **2023 Social Rec Events**

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

### **COMMUNITY EDUCATION:**

**Eating Healthy on a Budget – Tuesday, April 18 – 4:00-5:30 p.m. (Zoom)**

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.

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Facebook: [www.facebook.com/SWCILMarshallMN](http://www.facebook.com/SWCILMarshallMN)  
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