



# Center for Independent Living

*Our mission is to support people with disabilities  
to realize their full potential.*

Fairmont, Mankato and New Ulm  
(507) 345-7139  
www.smilescil.org

October 2022



Mankato Free Press reporter Mark Fischenich talks with members of the Gus Johnson Citizens for Accessibility (CFA) group at the corner of North Fourth and Washington streets. They are (left to right): Monica Stensby, Emil Flicek, Jenn Johnson, SMILES staff, and Georganne Kramer.

## Gus Johnson CFA action helps improve intersection

Gus Johnson residents who attended the first CFA meeting of the year pointed out safety concerns they have with the business at the Fourth-Washington Street intersection. Many residents are in wheelchairs or have walkers, they said, and having a stop sign on Fourth only can make the intersection difficult to cross. In addition, large trucks load product to the liquor store at the corner, often blocking the stop sign.

After hearing residents' concerns and surveying traffic counts and accident records, McCarty's office recommended to the Mankato City Council making it a four-way stop. These recommendations were followed and a second set of stop signs installed. CFAs are coordinated by Jenn Jones, who coordinates Advocacy efforts. The Gus Johnson CFA meets the fourth Tuesday at 1 pm. Contact Jenn at [jjones@smilescil.org](mailto:jjones@smilescil.org)

## SMILES efforts get coverage in Fairmont

*(From the Fairmont Sentinel, July 28, 2022)*

FAIRMONT- Fairmont Citizens for Accessibility (CFA) held their second meeting of the year on Thursday. The primary topic of the meeting was accessible transportation.

These meetings were held regularly before the pandemic, but were suspended for several years due to COVID-19. Regular meetings resumed last June and the group now plans to meet on

the fourth Thursday of every month at 1 pm at the American Legion in downtown Fairmont.



The Martin County Courthouse in Fairmont.

The goal of the organization is to improve accessibility for people with disabilities by eliminating architectural barriers through awareness, education and teamwork.

The meeting was hosted by the SMILES Center for Independent Living, a Mankato based nonprofit which provides assistance to people living with disabilities and facilitates advocacy.

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# Fairmont CFA group talks transportation

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Jenn Jones is advocacy manager for SMILES and chaired Thursday's meeting.

"CFA has continuous meetings to bring up issues that we could bring to (bodies like) city council. Maybe there's sidewalks that aren't accessible, maybe there's buildings with inaccessible doors. It's a variety of whatever citizens here feel are barriers and we can try and bring that to city council or fix that in any way we can," said Jones.

The meeting had roughly a dozen attendees which were a mixture of Fairmont residents and representatives of local or regional organizations that promote accessibility.

The meeting was opened by Peter Engstrom, a Fairmont resident seeking support for a revival of the Fairmont Human Rights Commission. Engstrom noted that in the past two years the director of SMILES wrote a letter encouraging the reactivation of the commission and stated he was looking for individuals interested in either supporting the commission or serving as a member.

Following Engstrom's presentation was a discussion about accessible transportation. Access to reliable transportation is essential for everyone but unfortunately people with disabilities may have fewer options available.

"People with certain disabilities and barriers don't have the means to drive and get themselves places. There's a shortage of staff in group homes so maybe people in a group home aren't able to get places because there is not enough staff to drive them. Guardians may not necessarily feel safe letting them go independently to places so they're not able to take themselves on

their own. (Transportation) just helps promote independence for people and that is what we want to push," said Jones.

Currently Fairmont has several transportation options for people with disabilities, including but not limited to Prairie Lakes Public Transit (PLT), cabs and transit options provided by work programs and group homes. However, these services may not be able to serve all of an individual's transportation needs.

PLT Operations Manager Stacy Struck was present at the meeting to hear residents' concerns and answer questions about using public transit. All of PLT's buses are equipped with lifts and its service area covers all of Martin County. Overall residents' interactions with public transit were largely positive.

Most of the barriers residents encountered were before they were able to board public transit. Many residents were unfamiliar with PLT and how it operates. Some experienced difficulties requesting and then boarding a ride while others had questions about fares and transit coverage.

Guardians were also uncertain whether or not individuals in their care should ride PLT independently.

In response to these concerns the CFA and PLT plan to hold an event sometime in September where residents can learn more about PLT's services and have an opportunity to try boarding and disembarking from a bus in a secure environment. Both organizations also want to hear more about transportation from people with disabilities and guardians of people with disabilities.

***(Note: This article was edited to fit the space. Some longer quotes were not included.)***



## Tech and cheese



Consumers came to the SMILES office to learn tech safety and stuck around to make grilled cheese sandwiches during a living skills lesson.

## Activities calendars on SMILES website

SMILES has again begun posting a calendar of activities on its website at [smilescil.org](https://smilescil.org). It includes a variety of events and activities that are available to clients of SMILES, taking place at our offices, 709 S. Front St., or throughout the community. <https://smilescil.org/events/>

In September, these activities included Hitting the Trails (walking at different locations around the Greater Mankato area), bowling at the Wow-Zone, Slow Flow Yoga, Sip and Paint Fall Scene, Mystery Bingo & Soda Floats, and much more.

Space is limited, so registration is required. Registration closes one week prior to the event. For more information or to register, contact Anna at [ajohnson@smilescil.org](mailto:ajohnson@smilescil.org) or call (507) 345-7139.



## We attended Pride Sept. 10

SMILES had a table at the South Central MN Pride event on Sept. 10. The goal was to connect with one of the communities that we don't always reach out to specifically. Although a little muddy at first, the day cleared up and the mud dried up, making for perfect conditions.



# SMILES expands its Rep Payee services

SMILES now has an employee who is assigned to work as a Representative Payee.

Representative Payee (Rep Payee) is program for individuals who have been informed by the Social Security Administration or Department of Veterans Affairs that they need to obtain an institutional payee/fiduciary or who need assistance managing their benefits. The Rep Payee keeps records of monthly benefits received and how that money is spent. Benefits are directly deposited into a Rep Payee account, and the Rep Payee works with the consumer to manage funds and ensure that needs and payment obligations are being met.

For assistance and to get the process started, please contact Tricia at [tgarza@smilescil.org](mailto:tgarza@smilescil.org) or (507) 345-7139.

## Neurodivergent Support Group

New support groups for those who are neurodivergent or care for someone who is neurodivergent.

We will have a support group for:

- Adults ages 18+,
- Youth ages 12-17,
- Parents/Guardians.

These groups are designed for individuals and caregivers who live with a neurodivergent diagnosis (ADHD, Autism, TS, etc.). The support groups will allow for people to gather and connect in meaningful ways with others who have a similar diagnosis.

**SMILES CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING**  
 Contact Anna at 507-345-7139 for more information or visit our website at: [www.smilescil.org](http://www.smilescil.org)

### October Support Group Dates

**Adults:** Wednesday, October 12  
6-7 pm

**Youth:** Tuesday, October 18  
5-6 pm

**Parents/Guardians:**  
Thursday, October 27  
6-7 pm

All group meetings will be held at  
SMILES—Mankato Office  
709 S. Front St., Suite 7  
Mankato, MN

*\*Please call Anna at SMILES (507-345-7139) to register*

October 2022						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2	Bowling 4:00-5:30 pm	3	4	5	6	7
		Making Greeting Cards for Birthdays 5:00-6:30 pm	Dating Safety Presentation & Pizza 5:30-7:00 pm	Indigenous Peoples Day, "Galther" Film at MNSU 3:45 pm	Mystery Bingo and Soda Floats 5:00-6:00 pm	8
9	Bowling 4:00-5:30 pm	10	11	12	13	14
		Holistic Wellness Group 5:30-6:30 pm	Neurodiversity Support Group for Adults (Ages 18+) 6:00-7:00 pm	Therapeutic Art 5:30-7:00 pm	Community Kindness Club 5:00-6:00 pm	15
16	Bowling 4:00-5:30 pm	17	18	19	20	21
		Neurodiversity Support Group for Youth (ages 12-17) 5:00-6:00 pm	MNSU Theatre "Richard III" 7:15 pm	Meditation with Nate Clark 5:30-7:00 pm	Game Night "Charades" and Popcorn 5:00-6:00 pm	22
23	Acupuncture Presentation 6:00-7:30 pm	24	25	26	27	28
		SMILES Annual Board Meeting 4:30-6:00 pm	Recreation Day in New Ulm 11-2:30 pm **see schedule	Neurodiversity Support Group for Parents/Guardians 6:00-7:00 pm	Recreation Day in Fairmont 11-2:30 pm **see schedule	29
30	31					
	Bowling 4:00-5:30 pm					

## SMILES has job openings now

The following jobs are available. For a complete job description, visit [smilescil.org/careers](http://smilescil.org/careers):

**Independent Living Skills Specialist**, Region 9 area, \$14.14-\$15.29/hour depending on experience and education.

**Independent Living Skills Trainer**, Region 9 area, \$11.96-\$12.95/hour.

**Personal Care Assistant**, in consumers' homes, Region 9 area, \$15.25/hour.

For more information about these positions, visit <https://smilescil.org/careers/>