



# 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](http://www.smilescil.org)

March 2023

## Adaptive bicycle EXPO

**Friday, March 31  
2-5 p.m.**

**Kato Moving & Storage  
417 Poplar St.**

(come to the garage doors  
on the left side of the building)



**During this FREE event, come  
to learn more about and try adaptive  
bikes, and learn SMILES' plans for  
bicycling activities this summer.**

**For information, contact Howard,  
Anna or Jenn at (507) 345-7139.**

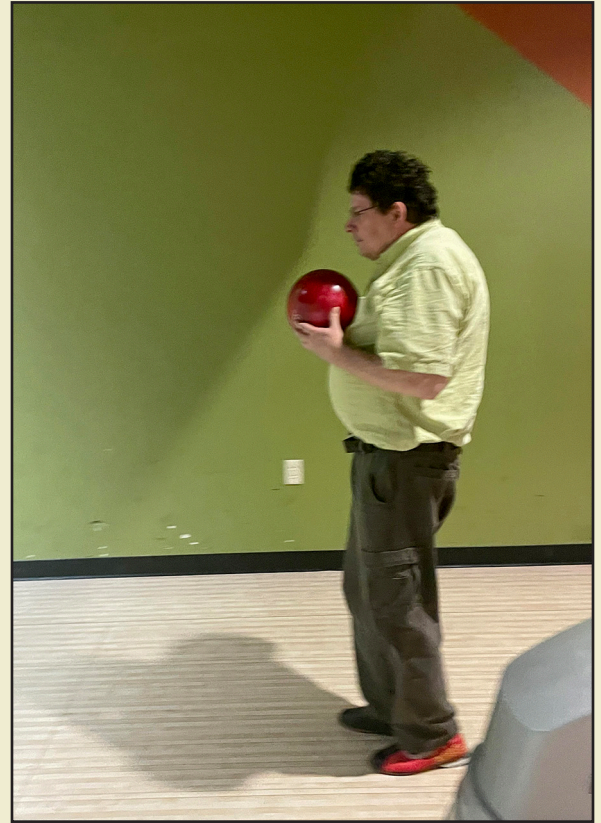
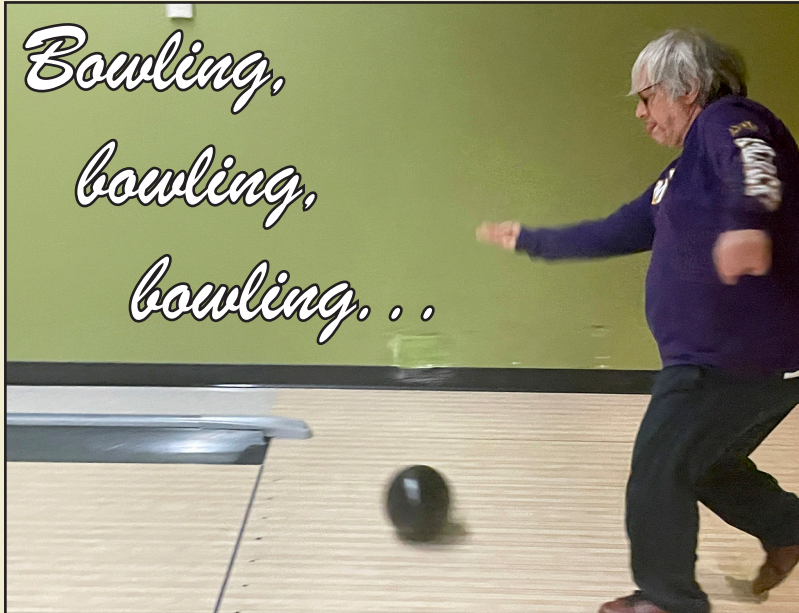
### Expo to lead to regular biking events

SMILES staff has been collaborating with a variety of bicycling groups and organizations to initiate an Adaptive Bicycle Expo and other opportunities to people with disabilities.

The March 31 expo at Kato Moving & Storage will bring in examples of different bicycles to allow consumers to try them out inside to see if certain types work best for them. Once a survey has been completed, SMILES will work to purchase a "lending library" of bicycles that can be used for regular group rides on Greater Mankato trails and, eventually, to participate in the Mankato River Ramble on Oct. 8.

The goal is to make sure everyone who wants to is able to take full advantage of the miles of urban and rural trails that wind through Greater Mankato. Help us spread the word!





Three SMILES consumers enjoyed getting out and bowling at the WowZone on one of the Mondays in October as part of the activity program. They are (clockwise from the upper left): Jim, Andrew and Steve. Although they wanted to do their best, it was all for fun. Bowling has continued just about every Monday (no bowling on holidays) since then.

## SMILES has job openings now

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

## MARCH 2023



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3	4
5	6 BOWLING AT WOW ZONE 4-5:30pm	7 PUZZLES WITH FRIENDS 4-5:30pm	8 LINCOLN COMMUNITY CENTER SELF-GUIDED TOUR 2-3:30PM	9 VOLUNTEER AT FOCP & LUNCH 11:30-1:30PM ~ MERELY PLAYERS THEATRE PLAY, "THE NERD" 7pm	10 MAV ARTS STUDIO SHOWCASE AT CARNEGIE ART CENTER 1-2:30PM	11
12	13 BOWLING AT WOW ZONE 4-5:30pm	14 BAKING COOKIES 4-5:30pm	15 VOLUNTEER AT CONNECTIONS SHELTER	16 PAINTING CLASS 4-5:30pm	17 PIZZA & MOVIE 5-7PM "Land of the	18

Find the current recreational calendar on the SMILES website: <https://smilescil.org/events/>



# PEOPLE POWER

Gus Johnson residents zoom through stop-sign approval



Photos by Pat Christman

Gus Johnson Plaza residents Monica Stensby and Emil Ficek (left) and Georganne Kramer (right) credit Jenn Jones of SMILES, second from right, for their success in persuading city officials to slow down traffic outside of the apartment building, which is dedicated to people who are older or have disabilities.

## Dodging traffic tough for older folks

By Mark Fischenich  
mfischenich@markofpress.com

Residents of Gus Johnson Plaza said they couldn't get any momentum a decade ago for their effort to add stop signs to the intersection outside their Mankato apartment building.

Municipal staff seemed unyielding when a fix was requested. A visit to a City Council meeting turned into a dead end. The road just seemed to be closed to making any changes at Fourth and Washington streets.

But for Gus Johnson residents such as Monica Stensby and Georganne Kramer, the worrying never stopped.

Their seven-story home has just over 100 units dedicated to people with disabilities and/or a birth date going back further than 62 years. Stensby and Kramer are mobile, but they were concerned about their neighbors inside their building and out who weren't always adept at dodging speeding vehicles.

The problem grew with changes in traffic controls 13 years ago that left drivers on Washington Street

without stop signs as they crossed Fourth and Broad streets.

Stensby remembers trying unsuccessfully to persuade a Gus Johnson resident to watch for cars when crossing Washington after getting off the city bus. Focusing on traffic just wasn't the man's style.

"He focuses on looking (around) and not where traffic is all the time," she said. "I was worried about him."

For Kramer, it was anxiety about not only Gus Johnson residents but also residents of the even larger River Bluff Apartments a block to the east, kids and families living throughout the neighborhood, bikers and skateboarders zipping down the Washington Street hill.

The intersection at Washington



More than 200 pedestrians a day make their way through the intersection of Fourth and Washington streets. A park, a playground, a convenience store and a liquor store are among the attractions that bring walkers to the crossroads.

and Broad is a neighborhood crossroads to numerous destinations including the playground at Washington Park, nearby churches, the neighborhood convenience store, Joseph's Liquor, and the shops and eating places in Old Town. The 2009 change, which accompanied

Please see SIGNS, Page A2

## SIGNS: Intersection dangerous for older folks, those with disabilities

Continued from Page A1

a switch of Broad from one-way traffic to two-way, added stop signs on Broad but removed them from Washington.

"We didn't like the change right away," Kramer said of the removal of the Washington Street stop signs.

She figures it was about four years ago that she and Richard Reisford made a request for a four-way stop at a City Council meeting, but nothing happened. It remained a topic of discussion at Gus Johnson even as the years flew by. Then came this summer when everything changed with remarkable speed.

starting a formal petition for a four-way stop and approached Jenn Jones for advice. Jones is the advocacy manager for SMILES Center for Independent Living and helps coordinate Citizens For Accessibility meetings, including one at Gus Johnson.

Jones asked SMILES Community Education Manager Mike Lagerquist to make some inquiries about the petition process. City Clerk Renae Kopschke told Lagerquist that Assistant City Engineer Michael McCarty would be the go-to guy for that information.

McCarty called Lagerquist even before Lagerquist could call McCarty. And McCarty explained there isn't really a petition process for traffic regulation

changes. The group could work to get on a City Council agenda, but the issue would just get referred back to the Public Works Department anyway.

McCarty offered a shortcut. "He agreed to speak to the CFA meeting at Gus Johnson on July 26," Lagerquist said.

The residents made their case that night, and by the time Lagerquist left the meeting, Associate Civil Engineer Jon Nelson was already standing at the intersection, watching traffic and taking notes. A formal traffic count immediately followed with cameras placed at the intersection to allow a tally of walkers, bikers and wheelchair users.

looked at the pedestrian traffic (previously)," Jones said. "That's when they saw there was a need."

"It was just a couple of days after (the meeting) when we got notice that the intersection would become a four-way stop," Lagerquist added.

There are good reasons that cities don't routinely put stop signs up to slow down traffic, McCarty said. Studies have shown that excessive numbers of stop signs — particularly when they're not warranted by obvious safety issues — prompt drivers to be less vigilant about actually obeying the signs.

The Gus Johnson case, though, was different. "We had an extreme amount of pedestrian traffic ... maybe 200 people

using that intersection a day," he said.

With the numbers in hand, McCarty steered the request down a couple of bureaucratic pathways — an Aug. 9 meeting of the Traffic Advisory Committee and an Aug. 22 City Council meeting. Almost immediately after council approval, the new stop signs went up, topped by orange flags.

Talking about the process recently, the satisfaction of the Gus Johnson group was apparent on their faces. They loved the help from SMILES, the responsiveness of the city, the sense of empowerment, and — especially — their new four-way stop.

"I feel super more confident and safe at this intersection," Kramer said.

## Information from the SMILES Annual Report for 2021-2022

Information & Referral  
461

Independent Living Skills  
216

Ramps built  
41

Reached for Assistive Tech  
55

Provided PCA Services  
58

1,135 Hours of Peer Counseling

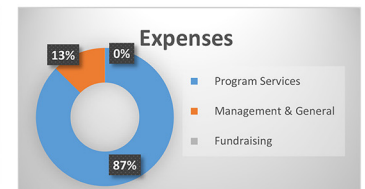
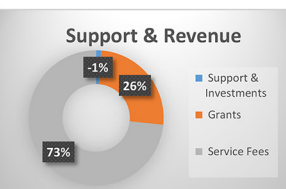
<https://smilescil.org>

### Statements of Activities

	2022	2021
<b>Support</b>		
Contributions from General Public	25,587	58,639
Foundations	13,900	13,611
<b>Revenues</b>		
Grant Revenues	562,708	1,040,503
Service Fees & Miscellaneous	1,624,815	1,367,533
Investments	(66,546)	85,012
<b>Total Support and Revenues</b>	<b>2,160,464</b>	<b>2,565,298</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Program Services	1,897,338	1,919,769
Management & General	273,153	290,500
Fundraising	743	7,237
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>2,171,234</b>	<b>2,217,506</b>
<b>Total Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>(10,770)</b>	<b>347,792</b>

### Statements of Financial Position

	2022	2021
<b>Current Assets</b>	<b>1,165,617</b>	<b>1,184,027</b>
<b>Property &amp; Equipment</b>	<b>60,220</b>	<b>68,522</b>
<b>Other Assets</b>	<b>8,530</b>	<b>7,968</b>
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>1,234,367</b>	<b>1,260,517</b>
<b>Current Liabilities</b>	<b>218,012</b>	<b>212,910</b>
<b>Long-Term Liabilities</b>	<b>58,565</b>	<b>79,047</b>
<b>Net Assets without Donor Restrictions</b>	<b>954,261</b>	<b>964,419</b>
<b>Net Assets with Donor Restrictions</b>	<b>3,529</b>	<b>4,141</b>
<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<b>1,234,367</b>	<b>1,260,517</b>





## This was a year of knowing and calculating personal risks

By Brian Koch, Board President,  
and Bonnie Danberry, Executive Director

2021-2022 was a year of returning from COVID and meeting people where they were most comfortable at a time of continued uncertainty. “Do I continue to isolate?” “Do I have to wear a mask when I go out?” “Can I expect support staff to wear a mask when they come into my home?” All of this while others were saying, “I’m ready to return to ‘normal.’ And I choose not to wear a mask, go out to eat or attend community events.”

Some SMILES consumers participated in adaptive water skiing opportunities, attended community events, and gathered together to watch the Minnesota State Mavericks play. Staff assisted those who were ready to do these things while providing information for personal safety. As with all people, people with disabilities must balance opportunities against risks. And like others, some got COVID and some did not.

This was a year of knowing and calculating risks, then making personal choices based on that knowledge. It involved daily choices to attend meetings or not, to go to social gatherings or not, to meet one-on-one or go virtual through “hybrid” meetings. Technology was both a helper and a hindrance.

As vaccines became more available, SMILES collaborated with local public health to get people vaccinated and to distribute home tests. We again opened our doors to visitors, welcomed staff back and offered hybrid meetings to anyone wishing to get involved while maintaining a distance.

Although things are improving, we are not fully back to normal. While we are returning to work, many people with disabilities have seen their jobs disappear as organizations have discontinued offering workshops or having crews go into the community. Competitive employment is hard to find for people who wish to work but still need some guidance and assistance to learn work skills.

## Many SMILES documents available now in Spanish language

Recognizing that we have changing demographics within our 10-county service area, SMILES has had many of our primarily documents translated into Spanish.

The documents that are available in both Word and PDF formats are the Intake Worksheet, Orientation Packet, Consent for Release of Private Information, Health Insur-

ance Portability and the Temporary Ramp Policy Acknowledgement. We continue to work to meet the needs of our consumers in written and electronic formats.



Marissa from the SMILES staff (right) poses with consumers Amy Jo and Stephanie after they walked the 5k on Friday of Mankato Marathon weekend last year. For Stephanie, this year represented a 20-minute improved time over last year. Congratulations!

Transportation to workshop settings and to distant crews is difficult to coordinate or nonexistent.

One thing that hasn’t returned to normal is our staffing ratio. The labor crisis is real, and we are feeling its effects. From not having a labor pool to draw from to delays for background checks, people are without needed services.

Each step in the pandemic has shed light on areas that still need improvement. As those areas surface, SMILES will continue to collaborate with community members and advocate for people with disabilities so they can participate fully in the community where they choose to live.