

Legislative Engagement Opportunities

People with disabilities represent the largest minority group in the country. You can help Minnesotans with disabilities live connected and engaged lives by supporting legislation this session.



Please consider connecting with your legislators this session to share your thoughts, stories and experiences.

MRCI engages with MOHR, ARRM and ANCOR to monitor state and federal legislation. Here are some of the themes that could be addressed with your local legislator:

- ° **Increase access to quality disability services** for those Minnesotans with disabilities.
- ° **Move forward – not backward**, as the governor’s proposed cuts would to address the workforce shortage and better support Minnesotans with disabilities.

As a friend of MRCI, you will be a valuable voice in the legislative process this session. Please share your stories because you have seen first-hand the impact at home, at work and in the community.

It's what
people can do
that matters!
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Spring 2025



Fareway Meat and Grocery in Fairmont Honored with MRCI Community Impact Award

For over a decade, Fareway in Fairmont has been a shining example of inclusivity and support for individuals with disabilities. Their commitment to providing meaningful employment opportunities and fostering a welcoming workplace has earned them the MRCI Community Impact Award, which was presented to them on March 6th.

Fareway has consistently demonstrated a willingness to go above and beyond to support MRCI clients. They have provided jobs to individuals with disabilities for more than ten years, offering not just employment but a workplace that prioritizes growth, understanding, and success. Their dedication extends beyond hiring—Fareway has served as a training ground for MRCI’s Bridge and Track programs, offering hands-on experience for participants exploring career opportunities. Additionally, they have hosted high school work programs, allowing students with disabilities to gain real-world job skills in a supportive environment.



MRCI staff members have expressed deep appreciation for Fareway’s ongoing efforts. Kris Simpson, MRCI Employment Coordinator, shared that Fareway has always been willing to provide opportunities for clients through employment, training, and job tours, accommodating schedules and offering chances for improvement before making tough decisions. Ashley Lombard, MRCI Employment Specialist, echoed these sentiments, highlighting Fareway’s flexibility with training, scheduling, and accommodations to support client success. She added that many clients specifically request to apply at Fareway because of the friendly staff and positive work environment.

The management team at Fareway shares the same appreciation for MRCI, enjoying the opportunity to provide business tours for MRCI classes, help participants explore job opportunities, and introduce them to workplace expectations. They are also committed to making reasonable accommodations that support job retention and satisfaction. Mike Fink, Fareway Grocery Manager, expressed his gratitude for the collaboration, saying, “It’s an honor to work with such talented individuals in the MRCI office and the great workers they line up for us to learn about our business.”

MRCI is proud to recognize Fareway with this award and celebrate their ongoing commitment to making a difference in the lives of individuals with disabilities. Their efforts not only transform the lives of their employees but also set an inspiring example for other businesses in the community.



To provide innovative and genuine opportunities
for individuals with disabilities or disadvantages
at home, at work and in the community.

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800.829.7110

Making an Impact: MRCI Volunteers at Project Lunchbox



The room is alive with energy as MRCI volunteers gather at Project Lunchbox, swiftly unpacking cases of food and sorting them into designated totes. Their mission of Project Lunchbox is simple: to ensure children in PreK-8th grade who qualify for free or reduced lunch in the New Ulm District School District have access to meals over the weekend. MRCI has proudly partnered in this effort, providing hands-on support to help fight food insecurity in the community.

The connection between MRCI and United Way of Brown County actually began before covid. It was rekindled in 2022 when there was an opportunity to volunteer again. Now, 8 to 10 individuals in day services, accompanied by staff, volunteer twice a year—or more when needed. Whether breaking down boxes, replenishing stock, or packing weekend meal bags, their dedication shines through.

For MRCI volunteers, this isn't just another day of service—it's a chance to give back in a meaningful way. Mike Kastner, a dedicated volunteer, shares, "I like unpacking the cases of food and putting them into boxes, and I like that we are helping kids." Fellow volunteer Tammy Suess adds, "I like that we are volunteering to help kids. I like to help kids." Their enthusiasm fills the space as they work side by side, joking with friends and embracing their shared purpose.

The impact of their work reaches far beyond the walls of the facility. "Volunteering at Project Lunchbox is a meaningful way for us to support United Way programs and help those in need," says Sarah Riess, MRCI Day Service Coordinator. "It also provides a valuable opportunity to learn about community partnerships and the importance of giving back. Through this experience, we gain a deeper understanding of Project Lunchbox's mission and the number of children and families it serves in Brown County."



The appreciation from United Way of Brown County is evident. Sandra, United Way Executive Director, shares, "The United Way of the Brown County Area's mission is to connect people with resources, and a large part of those connections come from our volunteer contacts. MRCI has always been so supportive of our programming, and any time we can partner with them is a win for both MRCI and the United Way!" Irene, Project Lunchbox Facilitator, adds, "We were able to partner up with MRCI to help unpack one of our monthly delivery days. It was so much fun having them help us unpack and put away over 1,000 lbs of food! Lots of laughs were had and so many smiles!"

As the final boxes are packed and the work is done, the volunteers take pride in their efforts, knowing their contributions will make a difference for local children. MRCI is grateful for the opportunity to support Project Lunchbox and looks forward to continuing this partnership—one meal at a time.



Balancing Passion and Purpose



For James Willmert, a love of sports has always been more than a hobby—it's a way of life. Whether he's keeping track of stats or soaking in the excitement of a ballgame, his passion for athletics is infectious. However, finding a job that accommodated his partial blindness while aligning with his love for sports was no easy task. That's where MRCI stepped in, helping James carve out a path that blends purpose with joy.

James's journey with MRCI began with a challenge: he needed work that fit his skills, provided independence, and worked around his favorite summer job with the Mankato MoonDogs baseball team. "MRCI really helped me find jobs that are perfect for me," James shares. "Hannah Bo helped me find my summer job with the MoonDogs. I love that job, but I knew I needed to get another job for the rest of the year. Now that Hannah helped me get this job on campus, I can have the summers off and still work with the MoonDogs."

In the summer, James thrives in his role with the MoonDogs, embracing the energy of the ballpark. Walker Regier, General Manager for the MoonDogs, shares, "We were glad to have James as a ticket taker this past season! He did a great job and was really friendly to our fans as they entered the ballpark for each game." When the season ends, his focus shifts to his role as part of the Centennial Student Union (CSU) dining crew at Mankato State University, where he works three days a week. On the other two weekdays, James participates in MRCI's Day Service Program, which helps him stay active and connected.

Finding this balance wasn't easy. Hannah, James's Employment Specialist, recalls their year-long journey. "We tried one job, but it wasn't a good fit, so we started over. The MoonDogs job came at the perfect time—it was such a great match for James. He loves sports and being part of the ballgame atmosphere. When summer ended, we worked to find a position that fit his skills and schedule. When the CSU dining crew job came up, I knew it was a perfect fit. He'd have summers off for the MoonDogs and work the rest of the year at a job he enjoys."

At the CSU, James's commitment and initiative stand out. His supervisor, Jena, has nothing but praise. "James has been doing a great job. When he finishes his tasks, he asks me or another manager what else he can do to help. He's always proactive."

Despite the barriers posed by his partial blindness, James's determination shines. MRCI's support and James's persistence have allowed him to flourish in roles that not only meet his needs but also bring him happiness. "I'm grateful for their help," James says with a smile. "Now I have jobs that I love—and I still get to spend my summers at the ballpark."

