

Newsletter

Summer 2025



***"The longer I live,
the more beautiful
life becomes."***

Frank Lloyd Wright

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In 2025, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) celebrates its 35th anniversary. This landmark civil rights law, signed into effect in 1990, prohibits discrimination based on disability. I was able to join a local celebration called Disability Pride, held on July 26th (actual original signing date) held at Boundless, the accessible indoor playground operated by the Southeastern Minnesota Center for Independent Living (SEMCIL). The anniversary was celebrated with a variety of activities during the month of July with presentations including a History of Disability Supports panel, a Lived Experience panel, and a Community Conversation about What Happens Next! Other neat features of the Disability Pride event included an art market featuring artists with disabilities, connecting to local resources/disability culture and of course, food, games, music and more.



Reflecting on the 2025 legislative session, I am grateful for the advocacy and connections our grantee agencies initiated with area lawmakers regarding the **continued need for nutritious meals and supportive services for older adults in our region.**

The Minnesota Association of Area Agencies on Aging (m4a) and its members were active at the Capitol in this legislative session advocating for the



health and well-being of older adults. One of the key strategies was to strengthen the **Senior Meals & Services Coalition**, a group of 50+ organizations from across the state. Coalition members raised awareness and gained support from their local legislators. Members shared information one-on-one with legislators about how these programs impact their communities, and several testified at committee hearings. **The Health and Human Services bill signed into law includes a small amount of new funding for senior meals.** The legislation allocated \$250K in SFY 26; \$250K in SFY 27; \$751K; in SFY28 and \$752K in SFY 29. The request for additional funding for support services was not approved.

Although the Coalition did not get everything we were hoping for, we were able to start building a solid foundation for next session.

Someone recently asked me, “How was your summer?” I replied, “It’s not over yet right, I have more stuff to fit in!” Between the thick mugginess and smoke, the bursts of fun things peered through—like Miracle field games, trips to Duluth, Twins Games, and food and fun with our wonderful neighbors.

Laurie Brownell, Executive Director





(Left) **SEMAAA Board Chair Marie Hlava** poses for a photo at the **Minnesota Rural Health Conference**, held this June. The annual conference gathers more than 500 rural health professionals, advocates, and policymakers from across the state to explore the challenges and opportunities shaping rural health today.

Hosted by the Minnesota Department of Health and partner organizations, the two-day event offers valuable opportunities to **exchange ideas, learn from peers, and stay current on rural health trends, innovations, and solutions** — all with the shared goal of building healthier, more resilient communities across Greater Minnesota.

Southeastern Minnesota AREA AGENCY on AGING

(Right) **SEMAAA volunteers** were proud to take part in Rochester's **Disability Pride Celebration** this July — a vibrant, fully accessible event honoring disability identity, community, and the 35th anniversary of the ADA. Attendees enjoyed music, art, games, and local resources in a welcoming, inclusive space designed for all.





Protect Yourself from Scams and Fraud

Scammers are always finding new ways to trick people. Staying informed and cautious can help keep you safe. It seems there is a new type of scam every day. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) reports 12.5 billion was lost last year. These criminals try to trick people into giving them money, personal information, or access to their bank accounts. Understanding common scams and knowing what to look out for can help you stay safe.

How to spot a scam

1. **Pressure to act fast**

Scammers want you to feel rushed. If someone demands immediate payment or personal information, it's likely a scam. Take your time and don't feel pressured.

2. **Request for personal information**

Legitimate companies, banks, and government agencies will never ask for your personal information (like your Social Security number, Medicare number or bank account details) over the phone, email, or text.

3. **Unfamiliar phone numbers or email addresses**

Check where the message is coming from. Scammers often use numbers or email addresses that look odd or unfamiliar.

4. **Too good to be true offers**

If something seems too good to be true, like winning a contest you didn't enter or getting a deal that seems "amazing," it might be a scam.

How to protect yourself

1. **Hang up or don't respond**

If a caller or message seems suspicious, don't feel bad about hanging up or not replying. Scammers count on people being polite, but it's okay to protect yourself.



2. Ask questions

If someone says they're calling from a company or organization, ask the caller for their name, the company they work for, and a callback number. Often, scammers will hang up when questioned.

3. Never send money or gift cards

Scammers may ask for money to be sent through gift cards, crypto currency or wire transfers. Legitimate businesses and government agencies don't ask for payment this way.

4. Talk to someone you trust

If you're not sure about a message or call, talk it over with a friend, family member, or someone you trust before you do anything.

What to do if you're targeted

1. Report the scam

Let authorities know. You can report scams to your local police, the FTC, or the Senior LinkAge Line.

2. Protect your accounts

If you think a scammer has your personal information, contact your bank or credit card company. They can help you secure your accounts.

3. Share with others

By sharing your experience, you can help others avoid the same scam.

This information was taken from the Senior LinkAge Line website. An informative video can be found at: <https://mn.gov/senior-linkage-line/older-adults/fraud/>

**If you need assistance with this or any other issues,
call the Senior LinkAge Line at 800-333-2433.**



Family Service Rochester is currently offering weekly **in-home or telehealth therapy sessions** for seniors aged 60 or older in Southeastern Minnesota. Services are provided by a licensed clinical counselor who is in-network with Medicare.

Additionally, through a grant from Meals on Wheels of America and The Home Depot Foundation, **Family Service Rochester is supporting aging veterans with critical home modifications to help them maintain independence and safety in their homes.** Past projects have included wheelchair ramps, grab bars, railings, stair lifts, walk-in showers, and window replacements.

**For more information about either program,
please contact Jessica at (507) 218-3272**





Dementia Friends Minnesota

A Program of TRELLIS™



Top: Three Rivers staff become Dementia Friends. **Middle & Bottom:** Stewartville Dementia Friends

Helping Seniors Stay Safe at Home:

Goodhue County Habitat for Humanity's Aging in Place Program

As our population ages, the need for safe, affordable housing becomes increasingly critical, especially for those on limited incomes. Goodhue County Habitat for Humanity (GCHFH) is committed to being part of the solution. By expanding its services, the organization is helping more community members stay safe and secure in their homes.

For over 25 years, GCHFH's main goal has been helping lower-income families achieve homeownership. Thanks to the dedication of volunteers and community partners, the volunteer-based nonprofit has built homes for 55 families across Goodhue County. That number continues to grow by four to five new homes each year through its Home Construction program.

But GCHFH's mission doesn't stop there. Through its **Home Revitalization** program, the organization helps current homeowners stay safely and affordably in their homes. This

initiative includes three key components: **Aging in Place (AIP)**, **Critical Home Repair (CHR)**, and **A Brush With Kindness (ABWK)**.

Of these, the **Aging in Place** program has become a top priority.

Although GCHFH has been helping existing homeowners through AIP and CHR projects for years, capacity was limited. On average, only six projects were completed annually due to funding and staffing constraints. The need for assistance, however, has far outpaced those numbers.

To expand the program, GCHFH leaned into the power of collaboration. They connected with other Habitat affiliates to discuss their accomplishments, worked with Dan Conway of the Southeastern Minnesota Area Agency on Aging (SEMAAA) to gain additional insight, and applied for a **Live Well at Home grant** from the Minnesota Department of Human Services. That persistence paid off, and GCHFH was awarded a two-year grant to expand its Aging in Place efforts.

This funding supported the hire of a dedicated Construction Manager for AIP projects and the purchase of a work vehicle, fully stocked with tools and ready to travel across Goodhue County. The goal is to complete **at least 15 AIP projects each year and more than 25 total Home Revitalization projects annually.**



Local partnerships continue to play a vital role. Kurt Keena of the Red Wing Housing and Redevelopment Authority helped secure a \$90,000 annual commitment from the City of Red Wing to fund repairs for owner-occupied homes. Discussions are also underway with the Southeastern Minnesota Multi-County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (SEMMCHRA) to **expand support throughout the rest of the Goodhue County**. GCHFH continues to develop the programs to be efficient and effective. To make the program more sustainable, a sliding fee scale has been developed, allowing homeowners to contribute to the cost of repairs when possible.



Community referrals are growing, thanks to outreach through Goodhue County Health & Human Services and new connections with local organizations. Dan Conway at SEMAAA helped GCHFH connect with Mayo Clinic and the Red Wing Fire Department, opening the door for more potential referrals. GCHFH reviews each application to assess needs and determine the best path forward. Occupational therapy input is included when needed, and subcontractors are brought in for specialized work.

GCHFH staff are also pursuing **Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS)** credentials. This training includes functional assessments and holistic approaches to home safety. The organization will soon be **Housing Plus certified** through

Habitat for Humanity International, further strengthening its ability to serve the community.

Most Aging in Place projects involve essential safety improvements such as **ramp installations** or **converting tubs to walk-in showers**. This is not a handyman service, but rather a focused effort to address **critical home modifications** that allow older adults to live more safely and independently.

With strong community ties and a commitment to innovation, GCHFH is helping ensure that **aging in place is not just possible, but practical, affordable, and dignified**.

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SEMAAA Staff

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