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[Person-Centered Culture and Practice Website](#)

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Welcome

Best Life was created by Washington County Community Services staff to promote the use of equitable, person-centered best practices as we support people to live their best lives. We will spotlight success stories, share artwork and talents, provide education about language and goals, and offer resources. It is meant to be uplifting, supportive, and available for all people, families, providers, and staff.

The theme of this issue: **Accessibility.**

Spotlight:

Bode Leick: Elevator Installation



Bode Leick

An interview with Bode and his mom, sharing his story about accessibility.

Tell us a little bit about Bode:

Bode was born on December 30, 2014. Immediately after Bode was born, his breathing levels were not 100% so he was taken to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). An echocardiogram (ECHO) on his heart showed Bode had an abnormal heart murmur and interrupted aortic arch. On December 31, 2014, Bode was taken by ambulance to Children's Hospital in Minneapolis. He had open heart surgery seven days later. During the seven weeks Bode was in the hospital, several other tests, x-rays, computed tomography (CT) scans, and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans were completed. One x-ray showed that Bode's large intestine was malrotated so genetics became involved. On January 6, 2015, the geneticist met with Chad and me to explain Bode was born with a rare genetic syndrome called, "Emmanuel Syndrome" which includes brain delay and low muscle tone.

From the minute Bode was born, life has been a battle for us. During one appointment at Gillette Children's Hospital, the specialists told me that Bode had hip dysplasia, craniosynostosis, and torticollis. He had cranial reconstruction surgery when he was nine months old and was in the hospital over his first birthday for severe dehydration. Bode also had to wear a cranial cap and a hip brace. To this day, he continues to wear orthotic feet braces.

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Bode's life revolves around therapy. He has been going to [land and aquatic] physical therapy at Gillette Children's in St. Paul for almost eight years. Also, he has been going to Kids' Abilities in Hugo for speech therapy and occupational therapy. Besides private therapies, Bode is in third grade at Otter Lake Elementary School where he has therapy on a daily basis.

Hippotherapy (horse back riding), t-ball through East Metro Miracle League, swim lessons, and music exploration are other activities Bode participates in throughout the year.

What are Bode's interests and hobbies? What is important to Bode?

One nurse in the Children's NICU commented that, "Bode isn't any ordinary kid." She was right, he's not. Bode makes you appreciate all the little things in your life. He is a hard worker but is the sweetest child who has a unique effect on everyone he encounters. Bode has a warmth to him that you can feel, gives the best hugs and snuggles, and will look at you with his beautiful, blue eyes. For those who know Bode, he instantly finds a place in your heart.

Bode is very passionate about traveling, music, and swimming. His best talent is he can make anything into a drum! He loves playing with his toys, dancing to live music, puppies, playing with friends and family, and watching videos on YouTube Kids.



Bode's therapy room.

What barriers have you encountered in spaces without accessible options?

Our family lived in a split-level house in Hugo for the first six years of Bode's life. It was difficult living there because Bode requires 24-hour attention. We had issues getting him and his wheelchair into the house because there was not anyway we could put in a ramp. We either parked the

wheelchair in the garage or we had to lift it into the house during the winter. When the wheelchair was stored in the home, it was not used and placed in the basement because it was difficult wheeling it on carpet.

Once we carried him into the house, we had to lift and carry him everywhere; up and down the stairs, to and from each room. Again, he could not use his gait trainer (walker) in the house because the main living space was carpeted and it was hard carrying Bode and his gait trainer up and down the stairs.

Finally, there was not any space for Bode's equipment. When we found out Bode was special needs, we wanted to do everything we could to help him walk. We tried working with him at home, but we determined we needed different equipment and a designated space for us to work with Bode.

During 2020, Chad and I concluded that our home was not appropriate for Bode's present and future needs. We built our new one-level home in

Hugo that is more suitable for Bode's needs. The basement was unfinished so we could build a sensory playroom. The playroom will be a sensory-safe environment for Bode to increase: engagement and participation in play, regulation and calming, socialization, and functional therapeutic activities he is learning from school and outpatient therapy.

What are ways you have help accessing things in your day-to-day activities?

Life is just easier now. We use the vertical plank lift (VPL) in the garage to get him and his wheelchair/gait trainer in and out of the home. The telecab (elevator) has been so

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great to get him downstairs when he wants to go downstairs to play with toys or we go out to the park. Eventually, the telecab will be a part of the sensory playroom so he can be more independent. Bode loves playing with his toys so it will be a great space to play in and get stronger muscles. One day, we are hoping he will walk on his own. For me, I no longer have issues with my hips, back, or knees throbbing in pain at night.

How have accessibility and/or modifications changed your world?

The modifications and the home accessibility have changed our lives both presently and will forever change our lives for the future. We built this home for Bode as his “forever home.” Because of his disability, Bode will be our “forever baby.” He is growing, getting taller and heavier. Chad and I are growing older and getting weaker. We can’t lift him forever. The accessibility and modifications will help Bode become more independent over time. They will also help us maneuver him around the house safely without lifting him and having the chance of us hurting ourselves by doing so.

The playroom’s equipment will help Bode in so many ways! The equipment will help Bode seek proprioceptive (deep pressure) and vestibular input to help regulate

throughout his days. The tools/equipment within the sensory playroom space will help in the areas of academic and social participation. The tools/equipment will also promote strength, attention, and fine motor coordination. Some of the tools/equipment we purchased were a platform swing, floor matting, a sensory table, a wall mirror with a balance bar, textured tiles, and a vibration plate.

What do you want others to know about accessible options and modifications?

My advice to others in the same situation would be to talk to your social worker about your family members’ needs. When talking to them, discuss short-term and long-term needs. You don’t know all of your options until you ask. The social workers and county employees are so knowledgeable about accessible options/modifications as well as the process to get the accessibility you need for your home. Also, it will seem like a very overwhelming project but there are amazing companies to help you along the way. The process itself can be a lot at times but there are not a lot of “hoops to jump through” and it is well worth it in the end!

Interview coordinated by: Caitlin McNamara, Supervisor

Spotlight:

William Krispin

Tell us about yourself:

My name is Will Krispin and I am nine years old and in the 4th grade. I am a paraplegic due to a cancer I had when I was just four months old, so I can only get around using a wheelchair. I love to play foosball and ping pong with my family, wheelchair basketball, swim, and throw the football around.

What are your interests and hobbies?

I LOVE to play video games with my friends. I have them come over to my house to play or we can play online together and talk over our headsets.



Will Krispin

What is important to you?

My family; my mom, dad, and older sister.

What barriers have you encountered in spaces without accessible options?

The biggest thing is stairs. I can't go over to friends' houses as everyone has stairs at their house and that doesn't work for me as I am in a wheelchair. Even just going up to their front door to ring the doorbell to see if they can play.

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What are ways you have help accessing things in your day-to-day activities? How have accessibility and/or modifications changed your world?

A couple of years ago, my mom and dad had a lift put in our garage so I can go in and out of our house without help. It's really nice as I can just go out and play with my friends whenever I want.

What do you want others to know about accessible options and modifications?

They help me get around and be more independent.

Interview coordinated by: Abbi Nash, Social Worker



Equal Access is Important!

Inclusive playgrounds for children of all ages and abilities:

- [Lake Elmo Elementary School Playground](#), Lake Elmo
- [Lions Volunteer Park](#), Hugo
- [Madison's Place](#), Woodbury
- [Woodridge Park](#), Cottage Grove

[Track Chairs web page](#) on the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' website.

Written by: Chantelle Heifort-Adams, Social Worker

Are you curious to know about park equity and initiatives in Washington County?

[Visit the Equity in Parks and Recreation web page](#) on the Washington County website.

The All-Terrain Track Chair Program has brought adaptive mobility devices to eight additional Minnesota state parks. [Visit the All-Terrain](#)



Provider Spotlight:

*The COLE (Children’s Organization of Lending Equipment) Foundation:
Making a Difference Lending Adaptive Equipment*



Since its inception, The COLE Foundation has grown significantly. The lending library of adaptive equipment has grown exponentially to where a new warehouse is needed to store all the donated adaptive equipment. More than 80 children with accessibility needs in Minnesota/Wisconsin have been able to now walk, sit, stand, bike, or even take a bath safely. The awareness of the Foundation has also reached hospitals, physical therapy/ occupational therapy (PT/OT) programs, and various schools.

This past year was the first-large scale fundraiser, Wheels for Freedom Motorcycle Rally & Ride, raising over \$15,000 to help support The COLE Foundation’s mission. With the help of local volunteers and Colleen at the helm, The COLE Foundation

hopes to continue to grow and help more children with disabilities reach their maximum potential.

COLE Foundation: Coordinating the lending of equipment for accessibility and inclusion.

The COLE Foundation began out of a mother’s necessity she found when caring for her child with accessibility needs. About three years ago, Colleen Peterson noticed there was a fundamental need in her community that was lacking. After years of first-hand experience with her son with accessibility needs, she saw there was no option for renting or securing necessary adaptive equipment while insurance claims were being processed. Let alone if insurance would even cover multiple adaptive equipment for one child with accessibility needs in a family. Colleen dove into the details on how to create her own non-profit to help other families like hers be able to have this basic need met.

The COLE Foundation’s mission is to connect costly adaptive equipment from children with disabilities who outgrow the equipment to other children who need it. Private donors help bridge the gap to fill requests of needed adapted equipment otherwise not obtained through donations. The loaned equipment can be used up to six months at a time.



COLE Foundation accepting a donation.

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For more information, visit [The COLE Foundation website](#).

Written by: Colleen Carstensen and Jennifer Kroells of the COLE Foundation

Article coordinated by: Chantelle Heifort-Adams, Social Worker



Our Words Matter

To people supporting someone in living their best life: by following best practices with person-centered language, we show we are taking care with the words we use when talking *with* others, when talking *about* others, and/or when

writing about others. Together, using person-centered language, we can help foster inclusivity for people who experience barriers each day because of varying abilities. Below are some examples:

Best Practices	vs. Historical Language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specify the person’s diagnosis: “ _____ is diagnosed with muscular dystrophy.” Accessible parking “ _____ is/is not accessible.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handicapped (Handicapped Parking, Handicapped Accessible)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specify the person’s diagnosis: “ _____ is diagnosed with paraplegia.” Person has a disability or people with disabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disabled
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Much of the language utilized in statute and policy refers to a person’s access to and right to live and work “in their preferred community.” Consider how the use of this language may further marginalize people with disabilities who have historically lived or do live in institutions. It can indicate that a person “gets” to go into the community where that is not even questioned for others. Do you say you want to do something “in the community”? It is likely you say specifically what you want to do, such as, “I want to get to Como Zoo” or “I am going to start working out at the Y” or “We hope to move to Forest Lake.” Be specific about what a person wants to do, where they want to go, where they want to live, or where they want to work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ... “in the community”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While the intent may be inclusive, consider that people or families may find this term offensive or confusing. Specify the person’s diagnosis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specially Abled
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “ _____ uses a wheelchair to get around.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wheelchair bound

For more guidance on person-centered best practices and the words we use, please see Washington County’s [Our Words Matter](#).

Coordinated by: Molly Henningsgard, Supervisor

North Hill Inclusive Playground Project

The North Hill Inclusive Playground Project is working on building a fully inclusive and accessible community playground in Stillwater, MN. This will be the first of its kind in our community!

In partnership, New Heights School and the Madison Claire Foundation have plans to build a community playground specifically designed to provide a safe space where children and adults of all abilities can play together! Our playground design includes adaptive pieces and rubber surface flooring, providing everyone



with access to play. Inclusive play areas allow everyone, regardless of their physical challenges, to actively engage in the community for enjoyment, socialization, healthy bodies, and imaginative fun.

For more information check out the [New Heights Playground Facebook page](#) or [email Christie Hogan](#).

Article coordinated by: Chantelle Heifort-Adams, Social Worker

Adult Changing Table Law

On May 24, 2023, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz signed into law a requirement that the Minnesota State Building Code include provisions for adult changing facilities in new building construction. Adults who have disabilities are unable to use infant changing tables when in public restrooms, often being forced to change on unclean, public restroom floors. This is a big win for a number of Minnesotans who advocated for the law and for the

promotion of accessibility and inclusivity for adults with disabilities!

The new law will go into effect in January of 2024 and public buildings like movie theaters, malls, and stadiums will be built with adult changing tables. There is also up to \$20,000 in incentives for existing businesses to update their restrooms, too.

Your Rights in the Workplace:

Reasonable Accommodations

As we celebrated disability employment this October, it was a fitting time to revisit disability rights in the workplace. Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) states that an employee with a disability has the right to perform their job with reasonable accommodations. Examples of reasonable accommodations include:

- job materials in alternative formats;
- accessible parking;
- service animals;
- equipment changes (such as accessible

- computer software);
- reorganization of job duties (like providing a task checklist); and
- reassignment in some situations.

Another commonly requested workplace accommodation is a flexible schedule or the ability to work from home (full time, part time, or as needed). The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has affirmed that working from home is a reasonable accommodation under the ADA. However, despite the COVID-19 pandemic

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showing that it is a workable solution (for people with and without disabilities), many employees struggle to get this accommodation.

As an employee with a disability, you have the right to the reasonable accommodation process. It is important to note that this process is protected by both federal and Minnesota state regulations, applying to employers with fifteen or more employees.

When an employee discloses a disability to ask for an accommodation, the employer must begin an interactive process or a conversation to determine the most effective accommodation.

After the accommodation is in place, the employer and employee should continue communicating to determine if the accommodation is working or if adjustments need to be made. If the employer denies an accommodation request, they must present a reason for denying it.

We recommend that all parties involved—employee and employer—document the reasonable accommodation process.

In summary, it is an employee's right to request an accommodation for a disability. Reasonable accommodations are protected by law, and they are not dependent simply on the kindness or generosity of the employer.

For more information, visit the [Employee Rights web page](#) on the [Minnesota Council on Disability website](#).

The ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act):

A Brief Overview

The ADA is a **landmark civil rights law** that protects people with disabilities from discrimination in various aspects of life.

- The ADA was signed by President George H.W. Bush in 1990, after years of advocacy and activism by the disability rights movement.
- The ADA **covers five areas**: employment, state and local government, public accommodations, telecommunications, and transportation.
- The ADA **requires reasonable accommodations**, such as ramps, sign language interpreters, or modified work schedules, for people with disabilities who are otherwise qualified.
- The ADA is enforced by several federal agencies, such as the Department of Justice, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and the Department of Transportation.
- The ADA has been **amended and updated** over the years, most notably in 2008, to clarify the definition of disability and expand the coverage of the law.

For more information, visit the [Guide to Disability Rights Laws web page](#) on the [ADA.gov website](#).

Information from the [Minnesota Council on Disability \(MCD\) website](#).

More Information to Check Out

- [Minnesota Department of Human Services Person-Centered Practices Overview](#)
- [Washington County Person-Centered Culture and Practice](#)
- [What does person-centered mean for me? An introduction. \(DHS-6803\)](#)

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