

The STAR Newsletter

Adult Foster Care (AFC) Issue

New Contact Information



Please keep us informed of any changes to your email address and home/cell phone numbers.

Contact your licensor directly with updates.

Adult Foster Care Licensing Team's Mission

To enrich the lives of adults by promoting safe and quality licensed care.



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Housing Support Contracts

The Housing Support (room and board – formerly Group Residential Housing [GRH]) rate is going up to \$1,192 starting July 1. This rate is set each year by the state. These state funds help cover the cost of rent, food, utilities, household supplies, maintenance, cleaning, and trash collection. Individuals in placement are eligible for this support based on their income and assets.

Providers must have a contract with the county in order to receive Housing Support funding. New contracts for 2025 to 2026 are currently being sent out. If you have a person who is eligible for Housing Support, you must complete and return the contract. Housing Support payments may stop if you fail to return the contract when due.

Emails regarding housing support may come from Bethany Edgar, Rebecca Conroy, or comsvs-contracts@washingtoncountymn.gov. Double check your spam folder if you do not receive communication about these contracts. *Please review the contracts thoroughly as they list the required items that housing support is intended to cover.* Contact your licensor with any questions!

Attention: Public Email Changes and DHS Survey

Last fall, we let providers know that as of 2025, adult foster care (AFC) license holders' email addresses will become public data. The Department of Human Services (DHS) issued a survey to all license holders on May 15 with the subject line "Survey to collect public email address." *Please take a moment to respond to this survey and check your spam folder if you cannot find the email in your inbox.*

You may want to create a separate email address solely for AFC information if you do not want the current email address on file shared publicly. This email address will be used for DHS communications, so you need to check your inbox regularly.

Inform your licensor of any contact information changes.

July Provider Training Group

On July 22, the Adult Foster Care team will host a "Take Charge of Your Paperwork" training. If you find yourself struggling to stay organized with paperwork or unable to locate certain policies, we can help!

This is hands-on training where providers are expected to bring their files and supplies from home. We recommend bringing three ring binders, dividers, pens/markers, and a 3-hole punch. We will have some limited supplies available for use.

Keep an eye on your email for the official training invitation with more details.

Upcoming County Building Closures

Heads up! Washington County buildings and offices will be closed on the following dates in observance of:

- Juneteenth (June 19)
- Independence Day (July 4)
- Labor Day (Sept. 1)

Celebrating Disability Pride

When the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990, Disability Pride started to be celebrated around the world. Disability Pride allows people to feel empowered and embrace their whole selves within a supportive community.

In 2022, Governor Walz declared July as Disability Pride Month in Minnesota ([Disability Pride Month Proclamation](#)). This declaration acknowledges the contributions and intersectional identities of those

with disabilities, as well as the history of discrimination this population has faced.

Advocating Change Together (ACT) has held annual disability pride celebrations since 2023 on the Minnesota State Capital front lawn. Hundreds gather to hear inspiring speakers, listen to live music, and enjoy eats from local food vendors. The 3rd Annual ACT Disability Pride Festival will be on July 17.

[Check out the ACT website for future updates.](#)

Washington County Park Equity and Accessibility



The Washington County Parks and Recreation team has been working to make these beautiful spaces more accessible for everyone who wants to enjoy them. Parks are an important part of healthy and happy communities, but certain groups, like those with low-income, individuals with disabilities, and people of color, face barriers in accessing green spaces. Park equity means expanding park access and recreational opportunity for people of all races, ethnicities, incomes, abilities, and national origins. Learn more about accessibility features and community outreach programs:

Accessible Beach Chair

Only available at Square Lake Park.

Another mobility device visitors can use in Washington County Parks includes the accessible beach chair. This beach chair is outfitted with inflatable wheels which make for smooth maneuvering through sand and water. Guests who are interested in using the chair should have a companion to push the chair and can request the chair through on-site lifeguards any day of the week. The beach chair is available Noon-8 p.m. at no cost to the user.

All-terrain Wheelchair

Only available at Lake Elmo Park Reserve (LEPR) and Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park (CGRP).

This self-propelled wheelchair, with lever-driven wheels and mountain bike tires, allows users to navigate the park with ease at no extra cost. The chair can also be pushed by a trail companion. *It is free to use and only available upon request.* Call the park office to confirm availability. (LEPR: 651-430-8370 | CGRP: 651-430-8226.)

Nordic Rocks Sit Ski

Only available at Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park.

This adaptive sit ski gives users the ability to ski independently or with the help of another.

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With a seat width of 12.5 inches, users can sit while propelling themselves with adjustable ski poles, or a friend can use a push bar to guide them.

- \$5 to rent for three hours.
- Available when conditions allow daily, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
- Available upon request.

Call the park office to confirm availability at 651-430-8226.

[Lake Elmo Park Reserve Swim Pond Play Area](#)

The former Swim Pond Play Area playground, built in 1988, is being replaced with a nature- and animal-themed play space designed for everyone, including those with physical or sensory disabilities. The new equipment was shaped by community feedback from over 160 people and includes custom features. With improved accessibility, seating, shade structures, and better bike parking, this upgraded area will serve both children and caretakers. It also includes better connections between the Swim Pond and Play Area for easier access

[St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park Hilltop Playground](#)

Installed in 1999, the former playground at St. Croix Bluffs is also getting a major upgrade. Parks staff worked with Valley Friendship Club to make sure the new design includes sensory-friendly equipment and quiet spaces for individuals with sensory sensitivities. The new setup

balances modern play with mature oak trees providing natural shade.

Featured programs

Availability of these programs vary throughout the year.

- Kayaking program.
- Learn to ride a bicycle.
- Free family outdoor time.
- Snowshoe program.
- Partnerships with local organizations.

[BIPOC Connect](#)

Connect is a Washington County Parks series of free get-togethers in the parks for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and allies. These get-togethers offer a chance to connect to the outdoors, try new recreational activities, and meet new friends. This is a safe and open event to all BIPOC and allies.

[Trails at Your Pace](#)

Trails in Washington County Parks identified as short and easy to use, making it more accessible for all people to get out and enjoy a walk.

Translation services

Posters and flyers for programs and events could be available in other languages. If you are interested in any programs and events to be translated in another language, please [email to Parks Equity Coordinator Elena Schewe](#) or call 651-430-4300.

Vehicle permits (\$7 daily | \$30 annual) are required to visit Washington County parks. *However, no permit is needed on specific days including the first non-holiday Tuesday of each month and the second Saturday in June (National Get Outdoors Day).*

You can keep up with upcoming Washington County programming by viewing : [Washington County Parks - Programs and Events web page](#).

Article adapted from: [Equity in Parks and Recreation | Washington County, MN - Official Website](#) and [Staying in Touch 2025 Quarter 2 \(PDF\)](#).

Choking and Aspiration Hazards

Since July 2019, the Office of Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities (OMHDD) has received 111 reports of choking related to food.

Back blows and abdominal thrusts (Heimlich maneuver) were performed in most instances. The majority of people

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who choked had a history of choking and/or aspiration, and many had specific dietary orders to help them eat safely. Several people died when staff stepped away for a brief moment to help another person or to grab something. Many others died due to eating food that was not prepared according to the ordered consistency (like pureed or cut-up).

Did you know?

- 18% of all choking incidents reported to OMHDD since 2019 involved peanut butter. Not all reported cases included the food that caused the choking event. Of all cases where it was known what the food was, over 30% involved peanut butter.
- 62% of choking incidents reported to OMHDD involved people with a diagnosis of developmental disabilities, 8% involved people with a substance use disorder, and 26% involved people with a diagnosed mental illness.
- Two out of three choking events reported to OMHDD involved men, and the average age at the time of choking was 59 years of age, with a range of 26 to 82.
- Pneumonitis, or inflammation of lung tissue caused by irritants, often results from choking events or dysphagia, and it is the second leading cause of death among people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).
- The third leading cause of death among people with IDD is choking, and people with IDD are 32 times more likely than people without IDD to die from choking and/or pneumonitis.

Foods that pose a high risk for choking

- Peanut butter, as well as other nut butters, especially when combined with dry foods like crackers or bread.
- Tough foods, like meats and pineapple.
- Sausages, including hot dogs.
- Firm vegetables and fruits.
- Hard or dry, crumbly foods like crackers or cornbread.
- Mixed-texture foods, like cereal with milk.
- Any foods that are not recommended as part of an ordered consistency.

Risk factors

- Dysphagia (difficulty swallowing).
- Eating fast, not chewing well, being distracted.
- Eating large bites or food-stuffing.

- Eating or taking medications while not sitting or standing upright.
- Loose, missing, or decaying teeth.
- Substance use.
- Pica (eating inedible objects).
- Neurological disorders like seizures and cerebral palsy.
- Diagnosis of IDD.
- History of choking, aspiration, or pneumonia.
- GERD (reflux).
- Food-seeking behaviors such as sneaking food.
- Some developmental syndromes, including Down syndrome and Prader-Willi syndrome.
- Structural differences like a high palate.
- Taking certain medications, including antipsychotics, benzodiazepines, antiepileptics, antihistamines, diuretics, narcotics, muscle relaxers, and anticholinergics.

Possible signs of choking

- Inability to speak.
- Inability to breathe.
- Lips turning blue, gray or pale face.
- High-pitched or no noise.
- Intense coughing.
- Drooling.
- Grabbing throat.
- Look of fear or panic.
- Redness in the face.
- Rushing away from the dining area during or immediately after the meal.

Possible signs of chronic aspiration

- Chronic coughing, both during meals and between meals.
- Wet/gurgly sounding voice.
- Chronic wheezing.
- Intermittent fever or elevated temperature.
- Intermittent shortness of breath.
- Frequent bouts of pneumonia.
- Recent hospitalization(s) for pneumonia.
- Unexplained tiredness (fatigue).
- Chronic chest congestion.
- Coughing and wheezing at night.

Recommendations from the Medical Review Subcommittee

1. Call 911 when someone is choking. *You do not need permission!*

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2. Start back blows and abdominal thrusts (following established guidelines) immediately when someone is not able to cough, breathe, or speak. *If they are able to cough, encourage them to keep coughing and do not administer back blows and abdominal thrusts.*
3. Anytime a choking episode requires intervention (i.e. back blows, abdominal thrusts, and/or CPR), the person should be seen by a healthcare provider to rule out aspiration, even if they appear to be fine.
4. Follow each person's individualized care plan and/or mealtime approach and reinforce safe eating habits (like taking small bites and eating slowly).
5. Follow "family style" eating practices when appropriate and encourage staff to remain at the table or nearby during mealtimes and 30 minutes after.
6. Allow plenty of time for meals and encourage people to stay upright and nearby for at least 30 minutes following a meal.
7. Consider cultural differences for both staff and individuals when working with foods a person may not be familiar with eating or preparing.
8. Post pictures of ordered food consistencies and sizes so all staff can easily understand the orders.
9. Choking interventions are part of standard first aid, and all staff should be trained on them. Use current recommended choking protocols developed by the Red Cross or similar organizations. These protocols do not currently include anti-choking devices, and the FDA advises against the use of these devices.
10. Anyone who shows signs and/or symptoms of chronic aspiration should see their primary care provider as soon as possible. Work with the primary care provider to get a swallow study ordered.
11. People who have provider orders for any kind of dysphagia diet, including liquidized, pureed, minced & moist, and soft & bitesized, should avoid eating nut butters, consistent with recommendations from the International Dysphagia Diet Standardization (IDDSI).
12. Develop person-centered mealtime protocols and incorporate client-specific considerations (e.g. modified diet orders, expectations for level of supervision, and best practices for interventions) related to choking risks in facility and individual care plans.
13. Provide regular, in-person, hands-on training opportunities for all staff, including upon hire, and include each client's specific mealtime protocols and diet-related considerations.
14. Check side effects of all medications ordered to evaluate for impact on swallowing. *Pay close attention to medications that can cause xerostomia (dry mouth).*

Article adapted from: Minnesota Office of Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities

Originally posted on: [OMHDD Choking Medical Alert](#)

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