

## Self-Directed Service News

### Consumer-Directed Community Supports (CDCS)

CDCS Orientation sessions on a virtual platform (TEAMS - online) will be offered the second Wednesday, quarterly. Sessions will be offered in the morning and evening.

*CDCS participants are expected to attend only one session within 30 days of starting on or 30 days after starting on the CDCS program.*

Please talk with your case manager about signing up for the CDCS Orientation.

You will be sent a training packet by your case manager.

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Community Services  
AA&D Division  
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[Community Services  
Disabilities Website](#)

## Welcome to Our Winter Newsletter

Winter is a season to slow down, reflect, and a great time to try those new indoor activities you've been wanting to explore. In this edition, we're sharing indoor sensory-friendly events and helpful resources to help you stay engaged.

Here are some tips to make the most of the season:

- Try new activities like crafting, baking, or indoor gardening for gentle sensory stimulation.
- Keep a few green plants indoors to brighten your space and lift your mood.
- Explore seasonal traditions from different cultures to celebrate and connect.
- Create a small winter comfort kit with snacks, a water bottle, cozy socks, and calming items.
- Plan ahead for events to avoid last-minute stress when the weather limits mobility.

## Introducing The CALM Compass

Supporting a neurodiverse child can be both deeply rewarding and incredibly challenging.

Many families share that they want clear tools to understand their child's behaviors, reduce daily stress, and create calmer routines at home, and that's exactly why The CALM Compass was created.



The CALM Compass is an online program for parents and caregivers of autistic or neurodiverse children. It was created with more than 35 years of clinical experience and is designed to help families interpret behaviors, communicate more effectively, and support regulation in a way that strengthens connection rather than conflict.

The program is organized into four core pillars you may have seen me talk about before:

- **Connect:** How to slow down, build trust, and strengthen the relationship foundation your child depends on.
- **Articulate:** Understanding what behaviors communicate and learning how to respond calmly and clearly.
- **Lift:** Reducing stressors, supporting sensory needs, and building predictability into daily routines.
- **Move:** Step-by-step strategies to support communication, flexibility, and independence.

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A training link will be sent for the CDCS Orientation Session.

*If you do not have a case manager but have questions about CDCS, [email CSAAD-CDCS program](#).*

### 2026 CDCS Orientation quarterly sessions:

#### Wednesdays:

10 a.m.-Noon and 6-8 p.m.

- **January 14**
- **April 18**
- **July 8**
- **October 14**

#### CDCS Update:

Did you know the Department of Human Services (DHS) designed a learning module “CDCS: Is It Right For You” for people on waivers or Alternative Care (AC) who are interested in learning about CDCS. [View the module on the DHS website.](#)

CDCS updated this learning module to align with the unbundling policy changes that were implemented in February 2025.

The DHS-5788A-CDCS Community Support Plan (CSP) will be fully integrated and required for CDCS plans February 1, 2026.

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Mitch Leppicello, LICSW

Visit [The CALM Compass website](#) for more information.

Each module includes short videos, real-life examples, and practical strategies you can use immediately at home, in the community, or during moments of stress. Families often tell me they begin seeing positive changes quickly because they feel more equipped, more confident, and more aligned with how their child experiences the world.

A key part of the CALM Compass approach is supporting the *whole family system*. When parents and caregivers have consistent, easy-to-use tools, children feel safer and more understood.

If you’re looking for a resource that reduces overwhelm, increases connection, and gives you a clear path forward, The CALM Compass was created with you in mind. I would be honored to support your family on this journey.

## Valley Friendship Club

Valley Friendship Club (VFC) helps build friendships, create connections, and enhance the lives of individuals with disabilities.



This winter, VFC has a full calendar of exciting events—including a formal Valentine’s Day dance, ice fishing, theater outings, music jam sessions, cooking classes, movie and karaoke nights, community meet-ups, fitness classes, and game nights.

Membership is free, and events are low-cost.

Visit the [Valley Friendship Club website](#) for more information.

## Sensory-Friendly Events

- Bell Museum**  
 Check out upcoming dates for January and February on the [University of Minnesota - Bell Museum website](#).
- Children's Theatre Company**  
 Check out upcoming performances for 2026 on the [Children's Theatre Company website](#).
- Sensory Friendly Mornings at Como Zoo**  
 Check out upcoming dates for January, February, and March on the [Como Park Zoo website](#).
- The Walker Art Center**  
 Sensory Friendly Sunday is a monthly event. Check out upcoming dates on the [Walker Art Center website](#).
- We Rock The Spectrum Kid's Gym**  
 Check out the [We Rock The Spectrum Kid's Gym website](#) for more information.

## Upcoming Washington County Events

- The Resource Fair for Multilingual Families**  
**Monday, February 23** | 4-7 p.m.  
 Washington County Cottage Grove Service Center
- Memory Café** hosted by Family Means  
 Memory Café is a welcoming space for those with memory loss and their caregivers to connect and find support.  
**Second Tuesday of each month.**  
 R.H. Stafford Library  
[View more information on the Washington County Library Events Calendar.](#)

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## The COLE Foundation

### *Helping Children Move, Grow, and Play*

The COLE Foundation (The Children's Organization of Lending Equipment), located in Woodbury, is a Minnesota-based nonprofit dedicated to helping children with special needs get the adaptive equipment they need so they can move, grow, and play. The foundation was created by President and Founder Colleen Peterson after navigating her own journey as the parent of a child with a rare chromosomal disorder and discovering how difficult it can be for families to obtain essential mobility and therapeutic equipment. Long wait times, limited insurance coverage, and high costs often leave families without the supports their children need to thrive.

The COLE Foundation serves families throughout Minnesota and surrounding areas by lending adaptive equipment free of charge, with optional donations welcomed. The lending library includes walkers and gait trainers, standers, adaptive strollers and wheelchairs, seating and positioning systems, and bath/shower equipment. This equipment library model allows families to try items, meet changing developmental needs, and fill critical gaps when insurance denies or delays coverage.

The COLE Foundation is 100% volunteer-run, has zero paid staff, and is funded entirely through private donors, with no federal or state funds ever received. Families may request equipment by completing the online Request for Equipment Form on the foundation's website.

### **Wheels for Freedom Annual Fundraiser**

Each summer, supporters come together for Wheels for Freedom – a motorcycle ride helping special needs kids get their wheels to freedom. The event raises funds to provide adaptive mobility equipment for children who need it most. The fourth annual Wheels for Freedom Motorcycle Ride will be:

### **July 10**

No Name Saloon (the foundation's base bar)  
 Prescott, Wisconsin

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## AA&D Connect Newsletter Committee Members

- **Lori Butler**  
Social services supervisor
- **Erin Livingston**  
Senior social worker
- **Chor Her**  
Social worker
- **Whitney Lee**  
Social worker
- **Txing Vang**  
Senior planner

## Contact Us for Article Submissions:

For questions or to submit articles, contact:

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[Email Txing](mailto:Txing)

## Sign Up for this Newsletter

Sign up to receive this newsletter via email or text using our [Notify Me system web page](#).

If you have a change to your email address, make sure to update the Notify Me system so you continue receiving your newsletters.

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To learn more, request equipment, or support the mission, visit [The COLE Foundation website](#) or [email The COLE Foundation](#) for more information.



## Help The COLE Foundation continue to Reach Kids Like Myles, Connor and Hannah

*"My son suffered a traumatic brain injury from a car accident that took the life of his brother and father. Because of the COLE Foundation, Myles can continue therapy at home with his Gaiter-Trainer. Thank you for helping our family smile again." - Myles' Mom*

*"Thank you COLE Foundation for the adaptive bike! Now we get to enjoy family walks that allow Connor to ride a bike just like his big brother in a fun and safe way." - Connor's Mom*

*"Thank you so much for letting me use this walker so I can use my legs again. My old walker broke and will take 6 months and \$1250 to fix it. Because of the COLE Foundation, I can keep dancing with my friends." - Hannah's Mom*



*Together we are changing the lives of children with special needs.*



*Providing Children with Special Needs  
the Equipment They Need to Move, Grow & Play*