

50 RISE YEARS 1971-2021 REPORTER

FALL 2021 VOL. 45, NO. 03



COVER STORY

FARM LESSONS - Chris Barnier spent summer days outside exploring farm life. Learn about our trips to 21 Roots Farm (*page 2*).

Cover Photo: Nicole Conti

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



We are celebrating our 50th year of service to the community this year! It is a wonderful milestone for us, filled with so many memorable stories of the people we are proud to serve at Rise. Our Rise picnic last month kicked off a year of celebratory events. It was a fabulous afternoon with more than 500 friends attending! Seeing so many smiling faces after such a long time being apart due to the COVID-19 pandemic made the picnic especially memorable. The food, entertaining music and activities were enjoyed by all. We are thankful to our wonderful sponsors for their support of the picnic.

I also invite you to our annual Celebrate Rise Gala, Thursday, November 4 where we will highlight our history and celebrate the accomplishments of the people we serve, team members and our business and community partners. At this time, we are planning an in-person event. We are monitoring our community COVID-19 case numbers and official safety recommendations as the gala nears and will be updating people with any important changes. We also have a plan to live stream the event so people may participate remotely. It is sure to be a wonderful evening celebrating Rise. We hope you can join us in person or online!

Lynn Noren
Rise President & CEO

WHO WE ARE

Rise unlocks potential and opens doors to success for people with disabilities or other challenges through creative solutions and customized support. We envision a progressive, supportive, and collaborative environment that fosters meaningful growth and provides opportunities to live a life filled with purpose.

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STAFF

Kathy Klang

Chair, Rise Board of Directors

Lynn Noren

President & CEO

Noel McCormick

Vice President of Advancement

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Communications and Volunteer Manager; Editor

SUBMISSIONS

We love a good story. Share your photos and accomplishments with us! Your submission to kbartnick@rise.org may appear in an upcoming Rise Reporter, be featured on Rise's social media sites or both! We can't wait to hear from you!

JOIN US FOR OUR 10TH
ANNUAL FUNDRAISING GALA
Recognizing Our 50th Anniversary

CELEBRATE

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2021 • 5:00–8:30 P.M.
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If you are interested in learning more about sponsorship
opportunities, please contact Tom Brinker at **763-792-2450**
or tbrinker@rise.org



LIFE SKILLS ON THE FARM

Rise Crystal and Coon Rapids groups learn lessons outside the city.



Taylor Berkness milks a goat at 21 Roots Farm in Washington County.

IT HAPPENS LIKE clockwork. Thursday mornings in June and July a white Rise van turns down a gravel road leading to 21 Roots Farm in Washington County with people ready to spend time on the farm.

“We learn about agriculture, how their food is made. We learn how to farm and to meet new friends,” said Rise program manager Samantha Trebtoske.

This program with Rise and 21 Roots Farm shares an agriculture-related experience with weekly

lessons focused on different farm functions and animals.

Three weeks into the session, the group is learning about one of their favorite animals, the goat.

“*It’s an opportunity a lot of people don’t get, and that’s the coolest part of it!*”

They talk about milk production, what goats eat and the environment they need to survive. Later

they will feed chickens before a gardening lesson about how earthworms contribute to healthy soil and plant growth.

“We want people to have an experience and try things outside of their comfort zone,” said the farm’s co-founder Brittany Wiitala. “If you watch people come week after week, you’ll see changes. For example, many people are apprehensive around animals if they didn’t grow up with pets. At first they’ll just touch the goat and by the next week they’re feeding it!”



THE FARM'S FOUNDATION

Creating a unique learning experience for Rise and many others near the Twin Cities Metro is the mission of Wiitala and her crew. The farm's nature and agriculture-based programs were built to help people with disabilities connect with animals and each other, developing purpose and creating community.

This living agriculture lab also opens people to new ideas and prepares them for opportunities, that might lead to future occupations and the development of transferrable life skills.

This is the first summer Rise has made the drive to the country for this pilot project.

"It is an opportunity a lot of people don't get, and that's the coolest part of it. Many people aren't able to come to a farm like this and learn," said Trebtoske. "This is also a chance for people served to learn about different employment opportunities – whether it be farming, a farmers market or a greenhouse."

CREATING LASTING MEMORIES

The group has become close. The animals they see each week are now friends too, especially the goats.

"I like Rosie [the goat], and I like milking the goats," said Taylor Berkness.

There are laughs and some silliness at the farm each week. But



The group shares what they've learned between lessons.

the experience is more than just a day out in the fields. It is a time to try something new while making memories.

"People in our program come the next day and chat with peers

about what they've done and what animals they saw. It gives them a good topic of conversation which isn't always easy, and it's great for them to be able to share such a fun experience," Trebtoske said. ▼



Cathy Packard takes over the tractor seat.



Kristi Quammen makes animal treats.

Samantha Trebtoske

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT RISE



courtesy photo

Dan Newman,
new Rise Board of Directors member

DAN NEWMAN, LONGTIME HUMAN SERVICES LEADER JOINS RISE BOARD OF DIRECTORS »

Rise welcomes Dan Newman to our Board of Directors.

Newman is a MN human services and housing leader and organizer of change initiatives. He has worked extensively in non-profits, community-based organizations, government and private business.

Recently retired from Minnesota's Department of Human Services, he looks forward to continuing working to improve supports for people with disabilities.



RISE JOINS MOUNDS VIEW COMMUNITY FESTIVAL »

Rise joined the Mounds View Festival in the Park parade August 21, 2021 in celebration of our 50th Anniversary. Pictured: (left to right) Lori Clauson, program manager; Rise President and CEO Lynn Noren; Kathy Klang, Rise Board chair; Ashley Klingbeil, former team member; and Rachel Smith, Rise Board member.

“Rise is a committed and creative organization at the forefront of providing person-centered community-based supports for people who have disabilities,” Newman said.

A resident of Aitkin, Minn., Newman holds a master's in public administration from the Harvard Kennedy School.



courtesy photo

REEDY SELECTED FOR STATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE »

Robert Reedy, Rise Senior Director of Vocational Services, was recently named to a new 3-year term to the Department of Employment and Economic Development's VRS Community Partners Committee.

The Committee provides strategic advice and consultation to DEED/VRS on topics and issues affecting the state and services to Minnesotans with disabilities.

Reedy's term began in September and runs through 2024.



A SUMMER OF CELEBRATION

MORE THAN 500 PEOPLE JOINED US TO KICK OFF OUR 50TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR AUGUST 2, 2021 AT AQUATORE PARK IN BLAINE. HIGHLIGHTS BELOW. FIND MORE ON OUR FACEBOOK PAGE.



**SPECIAL THANKS
TO OUR ALL SPONSORS »**
Including: Crystal Lions Club
and VFW 494

Photos: Brian Tanning



archive photos

RISE
CELEBRATES

50 YEARS

OF SERVICE AND SUPPORT

RISE'S HAS ALWAYS focused on the future. That attitude is connected to our identity, contributing to our success as a leader among our peers in Minnesota and Wisconsin and across the nation. Our leadership team, board and team members have created a culture where we work hard to push boundaries and remove barriers. And our pioneering individualized approach supports those we serve, who are on their own journeys working to reach goals to develop new skills, find work in the community and enrich their lives.

As we celebrate 50 years of connecting people with services and supports, we revisit the work done so far and remember those who have helped us make great achievements.

THE BEGINNING

50 years ago, many Minnesotans who had disabilities lived in state institutions or specialized schools. The state's laws provided special education to students who had disabilities. Support ended once they turned 18 and their options were limited. Because of that, people with disabilities and their families rarely planned futures filled with careers or community life.

In the early 1970s, Chester and Gladys Tollefson, wanted more for their son Loring. "There was the institution at Cambridge, but we thought Loring was better physically than to be involved in Cambridge sitting and doing nothing. I thought, there's things he can do!" Tollefson said

He went to work rallying Anoka County business leaders, policymakers and social service and human services leaders to help create solutions. It was a collaborative effort based on an idea that people who have disabilities deserve the same opportunities as everyone else.

Rise opened August 2, 1971 in a remodeled garage once used for the local telephone company. Two trainers served four people: Robert Lehn, Ted Brown, Kathleen Schuldt and Bruce Johnson. By the end of that year, we served 22 people.

EARLY YEARS

Building a human services agency from the ground up was not easy. While Rise had the support of dedicated hardworking, smart

and motivated professionals, by 1975, we struggled to stay open. A leadership change in 1976 put us on a new path when the board of directors hired John Barrett as executive director. Barret brought on Don Lavin and the duo made major advancements in business systems, services, customized vocational evaluation and skill training programs and job placement services.

Barrett's vision for Rise included growth. Work programs continued to expand and change. During this time our vocational skill training programs with community businesses were developed, initially offering specialized training in housekeeping, food service and laundry. Job placement specialists soon followed. The successful approach to customize services based on the needs of both persons served and employers is a strategy we continue to implement today.

Supports grew in the 1980s to include specialized employment services for people experiencing mental illness. In addition, services were offered to people who were injured at work, partnering with companies in the area. Expanding demand for production work also fueled our first major building project in Spring Lake Park, a 14,000 square foot production floor, office space, lunchroom and warehouse space still used today.

continued on page 8

1971

- Articles of incorporation signed May 21
- Rise opens August 2 serving four people
- Leon Olson named executive director

1973

- Work activity training begins
- Work component at Anoka County DAC developed
- Remodel complete: New office and production spaces

1974

- Rise purchases Spring Lake Park building leased since 1971
- 10,000 sq. addition: Warehouse, office space and lunchroom

1976

- John Barret hired as executive director; Don Lavin named program manger
- Vocational Evaluation programs developed

1977

- Community-based skill training programs begin
- Job placement services begin

1979

- Community-based supported employment positions begin
- Supported employment begins for people with mental disabilities (1980)

1981

- Spring Lake Park addition and remodel complete: 14,000 sq. ft production area complete

1983

- Supported employment begins in Hennepin County for people who have mental health disabilities
- School-to-work program developed with Anoka Co.

- Anoka Co. Independent living skills program begins
- N.E. Minneapolis office opens
- CBTE expands to Hennepin Co.

1984

1985

- Menninger Foundation of Topeka selects Rise to establish area's first transitional employment program

- Vice President George Bush recognizes occupational skills training program

1986

1987

- Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind program begins
- Blaine women's transitional homes open

- McKinney grant funds men's transitional housing
- MN Mainstream is nation's first placement program for professionals with mental health disabilities

1989

1992

- Annual giving program begins
- Supported employment for people with traumatic brain injuries implemented
- Creative partnership program created in Faribault

- MN Employment Center starts
- MN Milestones launches for Anoka-Hennepin students who have behavioral disabilities
- Employment Innovations brings Rise to Chisago Co.

1993

1996

- Pathways career planning and job placement program supports refugees who have mental health disabilities

WELSH VS. NOOT

A celebrated Minnesota Supreme Court ruling in 1980 began the systematic dismantling of the state's institutional system. *Welsh v. Noot* was originally an effort to improve staffing and living conditions at the state's hospitals. However, the ruling also meant organizations like Rise would work more closely with the communities, families and state agencies in new ways. Rise supports changed and expanded again, and as a pioneer in person-centered services, Rise was ready to support more people during what became a time of significant growth, leading to new job and life-enrichment opportunities for people who had disabilities and other challenges.

Throughout the years we added housing and immigrant-focused programs, grew our vocational, production, life enrichment and support programs and expanded to new locations. By the mid-1990s, Rise supported more than 1800 people annually. That number has nearly doubled, and today we serve more than 3,400 people each year.

LEADERSHIP CHANGE

John Barrett retired in 2012 after more than 36 years leading Rise. His successor, Lynn Noren, was appointed President in 2013





archive photo

following a successful Rise career that began as an intern in 1979. Today she directs more than 300 full- and part-time team members.

“There were very few programs like Rise when I started. The best part and the luckiest part for me is that I got to be part of a rapidly growing time developing new services. We were trying new things all the time and what we learned changed all the time,” Noren said. “In the future I hope everything looks totally different. I hope we continue to be scrappy and push the boundaries of what’s possible for people.”

Noren established a new leadership team. In 2015, Rise joined with four other agencies, the Department of Human Services and the University of Minnesota in a groundbreaking training program on person-centered thinking. Person-centered thinking

continued on page 10

1997

- Community Integration program expands to Anoka; new building constructed
- Central MN Works begins in St. Cloud

- Crystal building completed
- Welfare-to-Work begins
- Employment Innovations expands to Cambridge
- Custom futures launches w/Anoka County

1999

2002

- Four transitional housing units open in Anoka County.
- Somali Employment Solutions begins in Hennepin Co.
- Rise expands to Kanabec, Mille Lacs and Isanti Counties.

- St. Cloud Workforce Solutions program begins
- MN Employment Center begins supports for people who are DeafBlind
- ARMHS certification received

2003

2004

- Rise takes on Courage Center programs in Golden Valley
- Healthcare training program begins at Anoka - Hennepin Technical College

- ARMHS job supports begin
- Employment Innovations launches community support programming in collaboration with Chisago County Behavioral Health Services

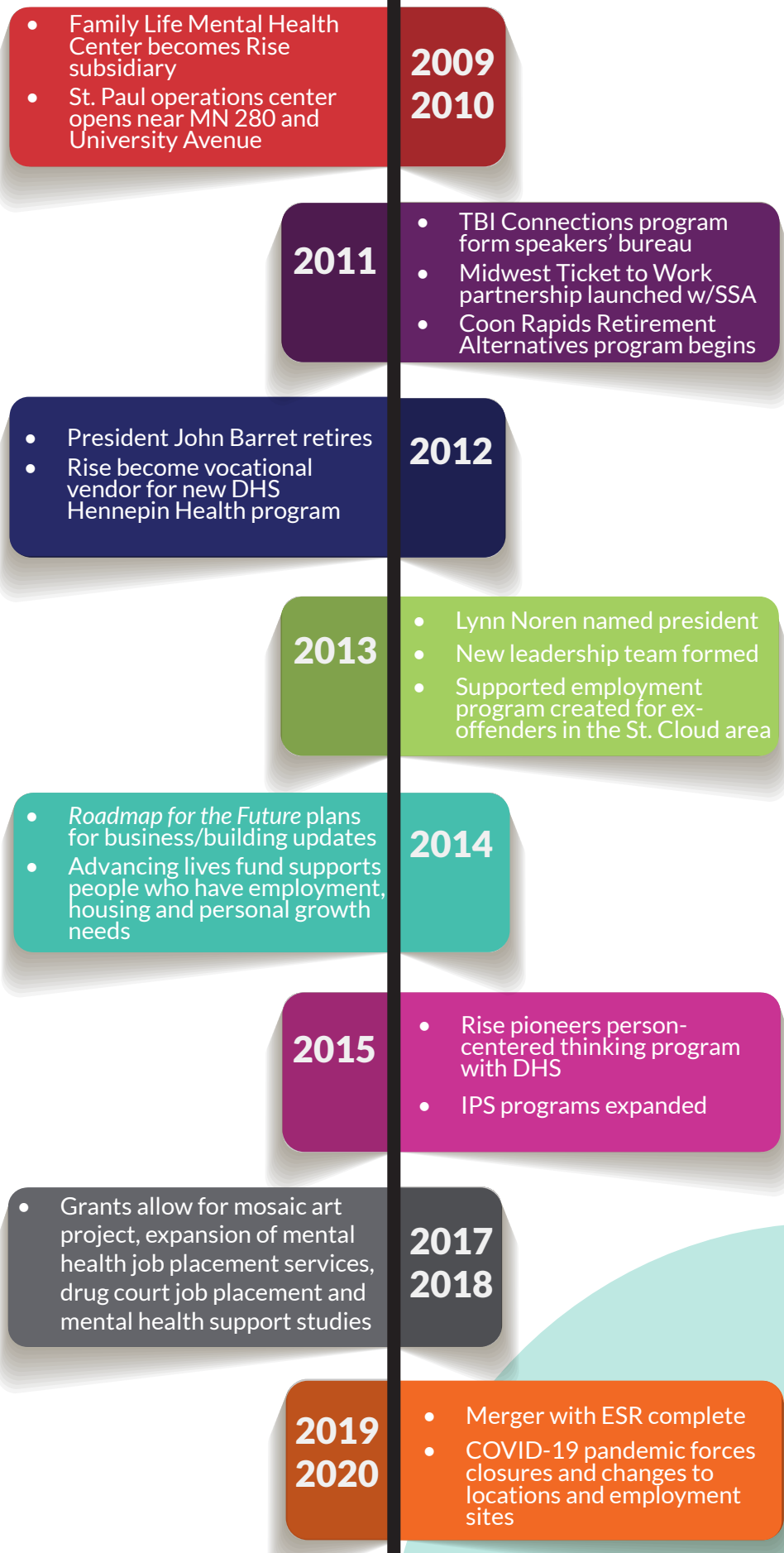
2005

2006

- Rise participates in nation wide mental health treatment study
- Twin Cities Business names Rise as a “Small Business Success Story” for 2006.

- MEC job placement staff train Minnesotans to support people who are Deaf, DeafBlind & Hard of Hearing
- Michael’s Closet opens at Spring Lake Park

2007



encourages person-centered practices and systems to support people as they live how they want to live instead of being forced into a specific program model. Noren also led Rise through significant expansions, including a merger with ESR, which was completed in 2018.

PANDEMIC AND THE FUTURE

Rise faced one of our most significant challenges in early 2020 when the global pandemic forced the closure of several programs and locations, cutting off services for many of the people we serve.

We have continued our mission by revising services to meet the changing needs of people who have disabilities, who were greatly affected by the pandemic. This includes implementing remote service models, housing and mental health supports and lending extra support to people continuing to work in the community as essential workers.

As we continue to recover from the pandemic's long-lasting effects, we are currently adding staff to support people as they return to services at our 26 locations in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

After 50 years and more than 35,000 people served, we have much to celebrate at Rise. While we look forward to future progress, we also remember our unchanged mission—to support those who ask, serve as an advocate for people who have disabilities and contribute to a community where everyone has an opportunity to succeed. ▼



NAVIGATING THE JOB MARKET

NICK ISKIERKA IS ready to make plans. After spending time trying to meet his most basic needs like supporting family and finding shelter and work, Iskierka is focusing on the opportunities ahead.

He came to Rise three years ago after being denied Social Security Disability benefits. Because he was homeless and sleeping in a shelter, he didn't understand the process and wasn't able to appeal, even though he met program qualifications.

He joined Rise's Supported Employment Demonstration (SED) pilot program, a project funded by the Social Security Administration that connect people who are denied benefits with employment consultants, health professionals, and care managers who help them meet their goals.

"A lot of times I needed help, and Rise came through," Iskierka said. "I made it through situations I would not have been able to navigate."

Finding work and housing has been challenging due to his criminal background.

While participating in an IT training program, he realized he wanted to connect more with people instead of working behind a desk. That led to an interview and hiring as shelter supervisor at Mary Hall, a Ramsey County Homeless Shelter.

"If I could be in a setting where I could help someone complete a goal or get something they need,



Nick Iskierka is part of Rise's Supported Employment Demonstration (SED) pilot program.

that's great," he said.

Iskierka was staying at a different shelter when he started working at Mary Hall, which has made him a valuable resource for residents also experiencing homelessness.

"He's very hard working. To see where he's come from and see how far he's come is amazing," said Tate Wegleitner, a Rise employment consultant who recently worked with Iskierka.

What's next? His position may be wrapping up later this year, but Iskierka plans to build on his experience. Having found a more permanent living arrangement, he has plans to eventually take real estate courses, get his license, and work with renters and home buyers who are rejected due to their past, just like

he was.

Future goals include opening other businesses to support his two young daughters, ages 2 and 12.

"My goal is to just be able to live. Comfortably. I want to have things set up where I can have my kids be alright and set up for their future. And I want to be able to move freely," he said.

This is the third and final year of the SED pilot at Rise. This end of the program does not mean fewer work opportunities though. Wegleitner says work is available, and Rise representatives can connect people to jobs that will meet their goals.

"If you match a person served with the right employment consultant, you can do great things," said Wegleitner. ▼

A NEW PARTNERSHIP

OUR RISE MINNESOTA EMPLOYMENT CENTER PARTNERS WITH ST. PAUL-BASED THINKSELF TO EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR MINNESOTA'S DEAF COMMUNITY.

PEOPLE IN MINNESOTA who are Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing now have easier access to job search and support services.

Rise's Minnesota Employment Center has formed a new partnership with St. Paul-based ThinkSelf.

MEC supports hundreds of Deaf, DeafBlind and hard of hearing people as they discover new skills, explore career opportunities and find meaningful employment. MEC team members are fluent in ASL and build long-term relationships, helping employers create workplace accommodations and providing workers with ongoing support after they are hired. The team also assists workers as they seek out career advancement opportunities.

"This is an exciting partnership," said Rise President and CEO Lynn Noren, "ThinkSelf is a Deaf-led organization with a mission and values that closely align with ours at Rise. We know there will be

tremendous benefits to us collaborating together."

This new arrangement will allow MEC and ThinkSelf to create deeper relationships and share knowledge as we both work to expand services and advocate for greater opportunities for Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing people in Minnesota.

"At ThinkSelf, we work with Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing people through our adult education program by providing support with literacy expansion, goal-setting and workforce read-

iness. Rise's job market expertise and support network will help those we serve accomplish their career goals," said ThinkSelf Executive Director Aaron Gutzke.

The new arrangement began in July. It replaces Rise's previous partnership between St. Paul-based Lifetrack and the Minnesota Employment Center. All Rise MEC staff located at Lifetrack have moved to new spaces near University Ave. and Raymond Ave. W. in Paul, MN. ▼



Minnesota
Employment
Center



ThinkSelf
Minnesota Deaf Adult
Education & Advocacy

Don't miss a moment. **Follow Rise online!**



courtesy photos





courtesy photo

“IN A GREAT SPOT” AFTER MEC SUPPORTS

Amy Lilyquist feels positive about her future following a job location change and some support from her MEC advocate.

AMY LILYQUIST believes Minnesota Employment Center (MEC) Supports rescued her career. She is currently a housekeeper at Healthcare Services Group where she enjoys cleaning and connecting with residents living at the Estates at Bloomington.

Her introduction to housekeeping happened through a job placement from a different support provider. Five months into her

position, she was referred to ongoing MEC job supports, which she believes have contributed to her success.

“I was not sure what I wanted to do. I was feeling depressed because I couldn’t work with children anymore,” Lilyquist said. “MEC helped me to gain confidence working independently. They supported me in learning my tasks and made sure I understood [my manager’s] expectations of me.”

She has leaned on her MEC employment consultant, Austin Beatty, while facing work challenges and changing work duties which heightened stress and anxiety levels. She says Beatty’s support

guided her through the uncertainty. He worked with management, arranging a transfer to a new location, where Lilyquist feels more supported.

“Austin helped me learn how not to rush through the work, so I was able to accomplish everything I needed to. We did additional training and he advocated on my behalf to managers who didn’t understand my barriers,” she said.

The location change has brought a renewed mindset. With a supportive team cheering her on, Lilyquist believes she’s landed in a great spot.

“My manager says I smile more, I laugh more and the residents love me,” she says. “I agree!”



Highlights at:

[facebook.com/Rise.Incorporated](https://www.facebook.com/Rise.Incorporated)

[instagram.com/rise.mn](https://www.instagram.com/rise.mn)



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