

# Lifeworks

## LIFEPURSUIITS

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Pictured: Brett Nelson, Lifeworks associate at Lunds & Byerlys.



# Lifeworks

*A nonprofit serving people with disabilities*

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Lifeworks is a nonprofit organization founded in 1965 by parents of children with disabilities. Through Fiscal Support, Employment, and Day Services - as well as through partnerships with nearly 300 businesses - Lifeworks provides support to 2,500 individuals with disabilities and their families throughout the Twin Cities and greater Mankato area.

## LIFEWORKS STAFF MEMBERS EARN ALL-STAR ADVOCATE AWARDS FROM MNCCD

At the 2017 legislative wrap-up session hosted by the Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, Lifeworks staff members Phillip Conley Jr. and Lookman Lasisi were honored with All-Star Advocate awards!

Conley Jr. and Lasisi were recognized for their outstanding work in support of self-advocates from Lifeworks Apple Valley.

This is the third year in a row that Lifeworks representatives have been honored with awards for their tireless work at the Capitol!

In 2015, Lifeworks staff member Lori Noland was honored for her efforts as the leader of the Lifeworks Brooklyn Park self-advocacy group, and in 2016, the members of that group were honored for their consistent presence at the Capitol.

See photos from the event at [flickr.com/lifeworksmn](http://flickr.com/lifeworksmn)



# IN RESPONSE TO OLMSTEAD, EMPLOYMENT-FIRST MANDATE, LIFEWORCS ANSWERS WITH COMMUNITY PILOT PROGRAM

In June 1999, a United States Supreme Court ruling that would become known as “Olmstead” was handed down, requiring states to eliminate unnecessary segregation of people with disabilities and ensure they are receiving services in the most integrated setting possible. But it wasn’t until a decade later, at the behest of President Obama, that the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice began enforcing the Olmstead ruling in earnest, eventually requiring each state to develop a plan to meet its requirements.

“It may have taken more than 10 years for the federal government to start enforcing Olmstead, but Lifeworks was ahead of the curve,” said Lifeworks Vice President of Services Mary Lenertz. “Lifeworks was founded on the belief that being included in the community benefits the greater community as much as it benefits people with disabilities.”

In addition to Olmstead, the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act was signed into law by President Obama in 2014, mandating an employment-first approach to providing services to people with disabilities. For Lifeworks, Olmstead and WIOA, along with an array of other directives emphasizing person-centered, integrated service delivery models, have only reinforced and validated the work the organization has been doing for more than 50 years.

“Lifeworks didn’t need a government mandate to figure out that people with disabilities benefit from working in the community,” said Lifeworks Vice President of Employment Services Kim Mueller. “Community employment has been our focus for over three decades.”

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS HELP MAKE NEW CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM A SUCCESS

In January 2016, Lifeworks launched a new community-based small group career development program. Though the program is considerably more expensive to operate, the results speak for themselves. By offering smaller group sizes, more one-on-one staff support, and job shadowing opportunities throughout the community, the pilot proved to be far more impactful than traditional center-based programs that utilize a classroom model. And participants were able to find a job that fits their skills and interests – paying a competitive wage – much more quickly. On top of that, early data



Niko Winjum benefited from the Lifeworks small group career development program and is now directly hired at the Eagan YMCA.



indicates a reduced reliance on government funds in the long-term, with an annual savings potential of up to \$15,000 per person in the years after they’ve found a job.

Without the support of Mark Geldernick and Lori Koutsky of Securian Financial Group, the Lifeworks small group career development pilot might not have launched. Geldernick, who serves as second vice president of law for Securian, is also the chair of the Lifeworks advocacy group at the organization.

“I worked with our facilities folks to see if we could find a location,” Geldernick said.

Finding a space for the program was just the tip of the iceberg. After it began, the advocacy group helped job seekers set up job tours, served as career mentors, and connected them to other people in their network.

“There’s a lot of people here that really support Lifeworks, which is great,” Geldernick said. “Of course, the entire advocate team.”

In addition to the group at Securian in St. Paul, Lifeworks launched small group career development programs in Apple Valley (in partnership with Uponsor), Golden Valley (in partnership with ABM), Hastings (in partnership with City Hall and BreakAway Arts), and Richfield (in partnership with Best Buy) that have all found similar success. An expansion of the program to the Mankato area took place earlier this year, giving Lifeworks a total of six small group career development programs – with plans to expand in the coming years.

## LIFEWORCS ENSURES COMPETITIVE WAGE FOR ALL, FORGOES SUB-MINIMUM WAGE CERTIFICATE

To better align with the organization’s goals of promoting inclusion, self-direction, and independence for people with disabilities, Lifeworks chose to become one of just a handful of disability service providers statewide without a special wage certificate, which allows for workers to potentially be paid below minimum wage. As of March 1, 2017 all workers served by Lifeworks are being paid at or above minimum wage.

“Our team at Lifeworks believes that inclusion comes from being treated the same, rather than differently than colleagues and co-workers,” Mueller said. Additionally, the special wage certificate placed restrictions on workers; removing the certificate allows them to perform a wider variety of tasks as business needs dictate.

With the small group career development program continuing to help job seekers begin and advance in their careers and all Lifeworks associates earning a competitive wage, 2017 has been another year of strong growth for Lifeworks and the people with disabilities that we serve.

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Did you know? DHS has expanded their criteria to access the CDCS Exception funding for employment services. If you are hoping to expand your employment options, work more hours, or improve your employment situation, the CDCS Exception might be right for you. Talk to your case manager to explore accessing the CDCS Exception today!



## LIFEWORKS TEAMS UP WITH ADLER GRADUATE SCHOOL FOR SPRING ART SHOW

What started at the beginning of 2017 as a partnership between students at Adler Graduate School and Lifeworks artists culminated in a lively spring art show on May 26.

“It was so rewarding,” said Amy Miller, one of the student instructors from Adler. “Everybody was so sweet. I think it was a great group.”

Ranging from masks and paintings to clay sculptures and murals, participants showed off their broad range of talents. For Adler students, it was a chance to gain real-world experience. For the participants from Lifeworks, what made the experience with Adler unique was the ability to work in an art studio and learn from mentors in virtually a 1-to-1 ratio.

“They enjoyed painting, drawing, they enjoyed doing the clay, they enjoyed doing the masks, pretty much everything art wise. Just being able to sit there, and learn something new, it’s a great thing,” said Lifeworks Service Facilitator Dia Thao.

In 2018, Lifeworks and Adler hope to collaborate once again to bring together a new group of art therapy students and people with disabilities.

See additional photos at [flickr.com/lifeworksmn](https://www.flickr.com/photos/lifeworksmn)



## BUILDING ON SUCCESS OF WOMEN’S GROUP, MEN’S GROUP A POSITIVE INFLUENCE AT LIFEWORKS APPLE VALLEY

As festive music from the Dropkick Murphys fills the room, Lifeworks men’s group leader Chris Olson enthusiastically greets everyone with a smile and a handshake.

“Self-esteem is really just how you feel about yourself,” Olson said after kicking off one of the monthly sessions at Lifeworks Apple Valley.

By delving into topics like self-esteem, men’s group participants get a chance to discuss their personal life experiences and receive advice from their peers. The inclusive, open environment is what keeps people coming back month after month.

“I see our male [participants] going to staff with their concerns more, which I think is them feeling more comfortable, valued, and that their feelings are valid and welcome,” said Raquel Sidie-Wagner, site manager at Lifeworks Apple Valley. “It seems like it has improved some of the peer relationships as well.”

Following in the footsteps of a similar women’s group called “The Power of Me” that was introduced in previous years, the men’s group at Lifeworks Apple Valley has been far more popular than anyone could have imagined. Now in its second year, the monthly group bonding sessions regularly draw 40-50 men to participate in discussions that range in topic from courage and change to respect and dignity.

The result? A powerful coalescence of inclusion, discussion, music, openness, positive influences, and male bonding.

Pictured: Men’s group leader Chris Olson talks with a small group of participants.

## LIFEWORKS ANNUAL CELEBRATION RAISES \$475,000 IN SUPPORT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The 2017 Lifeworks Annual Celebration was the start of a new era for the organization, as President and CEO Jeff Brown served as emcee after joining the Lifeworks family in January. Presented by Atomic Data, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, and Carlson Commercial, this year’s celebration of people with disabilities and the individuals and businesses who support them raised a total of \$475,000!

The support we received from our community was overwhelming, and we are so grateful to everyone who made a contribution!

We are especially grateful to: Atomic Data CEO Jim Wolford, who donated two auction items that raised a total of \$21,250, in addition to being a Presenting Sponsor and personal donor; an anonymous Lifeworks family who donated \$25,000; and longtime Lifeworks supporters Michael and Pat Houston, whose \$10,000 matching challenge allowed donors of \$250 and below to double the impact of their gift.

See photos, videos, and read a recap of the event at [lifeworks.org/news-events](http://lifeworks.org/news-events).

**SAVE THE DATE!** The 2018 Lifeworks Annual Celebration will take place on Thursday, April 26, 2018 at The Depot in Minneapolis.



Auctioneer Glen Fladeboe presides over the fund-a-need during the 2017 Lifeworks Annual Celebration.



Personal Achievement Award winner Maggie Erickson waves to the crowd after being honored onstage.



## LIFEWORKS SELF-ADVOCATES RALLY FOR WAGE INCREASES FOR DIRECT CARE WORKERS

In Minnesota today, there are more than 8,700 unfilled direct care jobs in disability services. And the workforce shortage is only getting worse. With wages averaging just \$12.32 per hour – and many earning less – finding and retaining staff for demanding, highly-skilled positions is a challenge for providers like Lifeworks across the state.

Because wages for direct care workers are directly tied to state reimbursement rates set by lawmakers, Lifeworks self-advocates are doing their part to make this critical need known at the state Capitol.

On March 14, Lifeworks was well-represented at the Day at the Capitol rally co-hosted by ARRM, a nonprofit association of more than 200 providers, businesses, and advocates, and MOHR, a disability services membership organization focused on advocacy and support.

The Lifeworks group joined an estimated crowd of 1,000 in the packed Capitol rotunda to hear from nonprofit leaders and lawmakers from both sides of the aisle.

“Thanks to all of you who represent the best in Minnesota,” said Rep. Matt Dean, R-Dellwood. “We

have a state with a big heart and we show that by the way we take care of each other.”

More than 160 rally participants also scheduled appointments to meet with legislators to further discuss the workforce shortage and the needs of the disability community.

Among those in attendance at the Capitol were the members of the Lifeworks Brooklyn Park self-advocacy group. The group, led by staff member Lori Noland, has earned a strong reputation as active participants during the legislative session. For the past three years, Noland has taught self-advocacy classes in Brooklyn Park and accompanied the group to St. Paul on Tuesdays so they can participate in advocacy efforts, meet with legislators, and make their voices heard.

“It’s very empowering to be able to educate them on what their choices are,” Noland said.

While the legislature failed to pass this year’s Best Life Alliance bill, self-advocates will continue to do their part to ensure much-needed wage increases come to the people who are there for them every day.

**“WE HAVE A STATE WITH A BIG HEART AND WE SHOW THAT BY THE WAY WE TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER”**

## LIFEWORKS ANNUAL AWARDS: GET YOUR NOMINATIONS READY!

**Nominations for the Lifeworks Annual Awards open in October 2017! Celebrate the success of the people with disabilities, advocates, staff, and employers in your life by nominating them for an Annual Award. Each of the five winners will be featured in a professionally produced video and honored on stage at the 2018 Lifeworks Annual Celebration in front of a crowd of 1,000 people!**

### SECURIAN EXECUTIVE MARK GELDERNICK JOINS LIFEWORKS BOARD

At the Annual Meeting of the Lifeworks Board of Directors on April 27, Lifeworks officially welcomed a new Board member: Mark Geldernick, second vice president – law at Securian Financial Group.

“Mark has been a strong advocate for Lifeworks for many years and we’re lucky to have him,” said Lifeworks Board Chair John Orner, vice president, treasurer, and chief investment officer at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota.

Geldernick has served in numerous, expanding roles at Securian since 2007 and currently serves as his division’s chief legal officer. He previously served on the board of directors for Wakota Federal Credit Union and Minnesota D.A.R.E.

Geldernick joins the Lifeworks Board of Directors as Al Woodward, former attorney with Stinson Leonard Street, retires after serving since 2005.

See the complete Lifeworks Board of Directors list at [lifeworks.org/board-of-directors](http://lifeworks.org/board-of-directors)

### LIFEWORKS BAND ROCK OF AGES PERFORMS AT MAKE MUSIC DAY CELEBRATION

On June 21, the city of Hastings hosted a citywide Make Music Day Celebration, and Lifeworks band Rock of Ages took full advantage!

The classic rock group performed for nearly an hour in front of a large crowd at Roadside Park, serenading them with hits from the ‘60s, ‘70s, and ‘80s.

From “Twist and Shout” and “Sharp Dressed Man” to an original song written by band member Josh Armstrong, Rock of Ages was at the top of their game!

See photos from their performance at [flickr.com/lifeworksmn](http://flickr.com/lifeworksmn)