

ANNUAL REPORT

2016



Your Policy, Training and Technical Resource

The Minnesota State Council on Disability made major strides in 2016. With the help of funding from the State Legislature, we expanded our outreach around the Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility. Working with Chambers of Commerce around the State, we held a series of trainings with small business owners around the State.

1. ADA Chamber trainings around the State

MSCOD provides technical assistance and education on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and accessibility concerns across Minnesota. For decades, MSCOD's capacity to provide this service has been limited to less than one person. The recent spate in lawsuits has increased Minnesotan businesses' demand for the services MSCOD provides. This year, MSCOD received one-time funding to increase capacity and provide outreach around the state to any entity who wants to learn more about meeting their obligations under the ADA. We have done webinars, and presented in places like Austin and White Bear Lake. This outreach has generated excitement among businesses and other organizations who, until now, were largely unaware of how the ADA affected them. Businesses are more than willing to make their facilities accessible to people with disabilities and comply with the ADA; they just did not know where to find the tools to do so.

This year has seen a dramatic rise in the number of businesses who utilized MSCOD to remove barriers that keep people with disabilities from buying goods and services. Removing barriers and meeting ADA obligations is the best way to avoid lawsuits. MSCOD is happy to assist anyone who would like more information on the ADA and barrier removal. This is a public service that is good for the disability community and businesses alike.

2. 26th Anniversary ADA Celebration

Last July, MSCOD and Minnesotans from around the State gathered at the Minnesota History Center to celebrate the 26th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The event featured a keynote address by Ken Rodgers, Chair of the Minneapolis Advisory Committee on People with Disabilities. Additionally, there was a lively panel discussion, featuring Mai Thor, Outreach Coordinator with the Metropolitan Council, Char Diamond Coal, producer and curator of the disability art series ZagZum, Fardowsa Ali, an advocate for Somali immigrants with disabilities, and MSCOD Councilmember Carlos Vazquez. The panel discussed the issue of diversity within the disability community.

Finally, Angelique Lele, Miss Wheelchair Minnesota, and the dance troupe Young Dance performed and provided dance instruction for audience members of all abilities. Our annual ADA celebrations continue to serve as a wonderful opportunity for the disability community to gather together to celebrate the progress of the disability movement, learn about new issues affecting the disability community and remind ourselves what is at stake for Minnesotans with disabilities, if the movement does not continue to progress.

3. Partnership with Rajoqab

Early in 2016 MSCOD was contacted by and met with the Somali disability advocacy group Rajoqab (Hope in Action). Rajoqab, MSCOD, and many other stakeholders met to discuss opportunities available to help people with disabilities further participate in Minnesotan society. Rajoqab consists of people from all over Minnesota of various ages and disabilities. Here at MSCOD we consider it our responsibility to connect people with disabilities, especially those who have been marginalized, to the supports they need. It became quite clear in talking with the group members they are intelligent and skilled individuals who have been relegated to periphery of society both in their countries of origin and in Minnesota. These individuals are unique because they are recent immigrants of African heritage, who have disabilities, and are in many cases at an economic disadvantage compared to other Minnesotans.

Rajoqab told MSCOD that they do not want a hand out, what they want is a chance to become part of Minnesotan society. How long will we continue to relegate people with disabilities, immigrants, and those with African heritage to

the periphery of society? MSCOD views this group of skilled, motivated, organized individuals as an opportunity to move the dial on a problem Minnesota has been talking about for far too long.

4. 2016 State Fair booth

August brought yet another successful year at the State Fair. MSCOD continues to be one of the most popular booths in the Education building, bringing in people from around the State, seeking more information about disability policy and services. We were joined by a number of important guests, as well.

Commissioners from the Departments of Administration, Education, Commerce, Labor and Industry, Higher Education, Human Services, Health and Human Rights visited the booth, along with Secretary of State Steve Simon and the Governor's Chief of Staff, Jaime Tincher. As always, we are grateful for each official's willingness to give their time to share information about the services their departments provide for people with disabilities.

We continued to expand the cultural element of our booth, as well. Visitors had the opportunity to write their own disability haikus, listen to live music, meet both the current and former Miss Wheelchair Minnesota and pick up posters of incredible art, done by Minnesotan artists with disabilities. The MSCOD State Fair booth continues to be a space for Minnesotans with disabilities can gather, get informed and celebrate disability culture.

5. Legislative preview

2016 Legislative Forum

December brought another successful Legislative Forum. Members of the disability community gathered together at the Department of Human Services to hear presentations on issues ranging from Medical Assistance spenddown reform, to self-driving cars, Olmstead Reform and the PCA workforce shortage.

Additionally, Senator Jim Abeler, incoming chair of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee, and Claire Wilson, Assistant Commissioner of Community Supports Administration at the Department of Human Services, shared their perspective on the coming session.

2017 Legislative Platform

- Funding for accessibility outreach and engagement

In the 2016 session, working in partnership with the Department of Labor and Industry, MSCOD received a one-time appropriation for ADA outreach and education. MSCOD hopes for additional funds to continue the tremendous engagement underway with stakeholders around the State on issues of physical and digital access.

- Technical fix for the State Access Code

Currently, the State of Minnesota's Building Code accessibility guidelines state that State-owned facilities built or remodeled after July 1, 1963 are required to meet the accessibility requirements in place *at the time of construction or remodeling*. If they choose to remodel, they must come into full accessibility compliance, but they are not required to remodel, solely for the purpose of becoming accessible. This does not conform to federal requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act, which state that all public accommodations must be accessible. While the change would not add any obligations that the State is not already subject to under the ADA, MSCOD proposes removing this language from the State Building Code to preclude any confusion about what the State's obligations are for accessibility.

- Disability plates legislation

Currently, after a person with a disability turns 18 and is no longer a minor, their name must be on the title for a vehicle, in order for it to qualify for disability parking plates. This poses a challenge for the caretakers of adults with disabilities. MSCOD is seeking to remove this requirement from statute to ensure all caretakers have access to disability plates.

2016 Legislative Wins

- Barrier Removal bill

Working in tandem with the Chamber of Commerce and numerous disability advocacy groups, MSCOD successfully ushered through the passage of new legislation surrounding barrier removal for ADA compliance. The law shifts the focus to finding proactive, collaborative solutions to help small business owners meet their obligations under the ADA. The law also set guidelines for demand letters to ensure that they focus on barrier removal and do not deprive business owners of resources while leaving barriers in place.

- One-time funds for ADA outreach

In conjunction with the barrier removal legislation, MSCOD received funds to partner with the Department of Labor and Industry to engage and educate business owners about meeting their obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The funds have been directed towards conducting trainings around the State that are equipping business owners with the expertise necessary to provide greater access for customers with disabilities.

- Funding for other disability initiatives

Several other disability organizations received additional funds from the Legislature, as well. The Olmstead Implementation office received an additional \$148,000 for capacity building and community engagement. Both State Services for the Blind and the State's Centers for Independent living received \$1,000,000, with an additional \$500,000 apiece added to their respective base appropriation going forward. Finally, the Legislature set aside \$2.5 million in grant funding for day training and habilitation services who work to align with Minnesota's Olmstead Plan.