

RAMSEY COUNTY

History

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Fall 2015

Volume 50, Number 3

Building Through
the Crash

*St. Paul's New Directions in
the 1930s*

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Finding A Way. Together.

ALLY People Solutions: 50 Years of Service
to Individuals and the Community

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Photo collage and images used from ALLY People Solutions 50th Anniversary Groovy Gala 1965–2015.

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THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON DECEMBER 20, 2007:

The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations
to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program
of presenting, publishing and preserving.

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and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon*

A Message from the Editorial Board

In this issue, we are pleased to publish Eileen McCormack's inspiring history of ALLY People Solutions, a St. Paul organization that assists and advocates for people with developmental challenges. It began with a dedicated group of parents who sought an alternative to institutional care for their children in the 1950s and has now grown into a comprehensive program that partners with businesses, who hire participants for jobs in a competitive workplace. We also share Jim Stolpestad's fascinating history of St. Paul city planning and development in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s. The spurt of development taking place then reflected the ideas of the City Beautiful movement that originated with the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. St. Paul created a city planning board in 1918, and despite the Great Depression, prior approval of bonding and new government programs allowed construction of some of St. Paul's iconic projects, including the makeover of an outmoded Third Street into the spacious avenue now known as Kellogg Boulevard. Finally, check out our new RCHS website. It is easier to read and navigate, with links to synopses of all of the magazine articles since we began publishing in 1964.

Anne Cowie
Chair, Editorial Board

Finding A Way. Together.

ALLY People Solutions: 50 Years of Service to Individuals and the Community

Eileen R. McCormack

Born of a parent's heart. ALLY People Solutions is building on the wonderful legacy of its founders, never forgetting the mission to see each person as a unique individual worthy of respect and deserving opportunities to live life to the fullest.¹

ALLY People Solutions has a fifty-year history of supporting people with disabilities. This nonprofit got its start in 1965 when a small group of parents opened a day activity center (DAC) in St. Paul for their adult children with intellectual disabilities so that they might have social interaction with their peers. Over the next fifty years, that small initial effort has grown into today's ALLY People Solutions and ALLY Business Solutions. ALLY now serves 270 people at their two University Avenue facilities and branches on White Bear Avenue and in Vadnais Heights.

Today adults with intellectual, physical, and mental health challenges participate in life skills programs and employment training thanks to ALLY. The goal for people who come to ALLY is to live a productive, meaningful life. The goal for staff at ALLY is to provide the services and support that will enable people to achieve their dreams. As Bob Brick, CEO and President of ALLY notes,

Throughout our history state hospitals were really the primary place for people with intellectual disabilities to go. I've often chatted with parents who have told me that the advice their medical doctor gave them upon the birth of their child with a disability was to turn over custody to the state and forget about the child and that was, as you can imagine, a very excruciating decision for parents.

They wanted their children with disabilities to have the same rights and opportunities as their children who didn't have disabilities. So some parents ignored that advice, but education services were often not very great and often quite segregated. So

parents got together and really started forming organizations like ALLY.

Our organization, [which] was one of the first of this type in the state, started as a pilot project. A group of moms organized and ultimately received some government dollars and these volunteer moms started offering what was then called a day activity center service. It was primarily recreational and social based at first with a little bit of employment training. From families throughout the state, many organizations like this started and that's how a lot of services for people with disabilities became a reality.²

Parents who chose to raise their children at home rather than being confined in a state hospital understood that as they reached adulthood their children needed more than the education provided by schools. Although these parents began a day activity center primarily to fill a need for recreation and sociability for their children, these same parents recognized that their sons and daughters were capable of much more than society thought possible for people with intellectual disabilities. An understanding emerged that sociability was important, but they saw this as only the first step toward their children becoming contributing members of their communities. Today ALLY People Solutions carries the work forward with its mission:

ALLY People Solutions advances the career and life goals of people with disabilities.

It uses these approaches to accomplish the mission:

—Assisting people in choosing and advocating for their life and career path with individualized, person-centered services.



State institution living conditions. Photo from the archives of and used by permission of the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities.

—Providing opportunities for work in inclusive, community settings with a dynamic and flexible approach to services.

—Linking people to volunteer or recreational options through innovative partnerships and natural supports in the community.³

To better understand the achievements of both people with disabilities and the organizations such as ALLY, we need to understand the history of what came before 1965 and what has happened since. This brief account will mainly focus on the situation in Minnesota and the impact that federal legislation and national judicial decisions have had on our state's programs.

Institutional Treatment

Those who have been involved with the very difficult work of reversing decades of how people with intellectual disabilities were viewed by others, and how they viewed themselves, have traveled a long

and winding road. Looking at photographs from the late 1940s (and sadly much later) that show people in state hospitals, whose purpose was to care for those deemed unable to function in society, one would think these images came from institutions that operated hundreds of years ago. Inconceivable as it may seem, they were in fact taken during the lifetimes of adults living today.

The conditions in these institutions were deplorable and they were kept hidden from general view. Until these images and media reports began surfacing, the general public was largely unaware of the inhumane treatment of people with disabilities. In Minnesota, a series of articles in the Minneapolis newspaper by Geri Joseph led to the start of the public conversation on improving conditions.⁴

Colleen Wieck, executive director of the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities (MNDDC), remembers:

... she [Joseph] had spent ten days on site at institutions and when you look back at her news articles you see that people were naked, no shoes, being fed for pennies a day, being locked up, having one toilet for maybe under a hundred people, working on the farm to keep the institution going. People in strait jackets. People milling around ... those images just come right off the page and you realize how far we've come.⁵

The people confined were totally isolated from a society that, if they thought of them at all, thought of them as incurable and unproductive; sometimes pitied, but mostly just forgotten.

We could easily get lost in how the administrative practices of these institutions could function as they did and treat people as they did. For the purposes of telling ALLY's story, however, this narrative will provide an overview of the activism that was most often led by families of children with intellectual disabilities.

This Parent Movement began in the late 1940s. It is the single most important, and most enduring, activist force behind the progress against discrimination. Parents recognized that there was more to do in addition to pressing for laws that would provide funding for intellectually disabled individuals to receive education,

training, and integration into their communities. The general public also needed to be educated to understand both the present conditions of institutional and sheltered life for their children and how to push for change. This is where media, public officials, courts, and the medical and social science communities were instrumental as participants in the work of the Parent Movement. Organizations, like ALLY, anti-discrimination lawsuits and court decisions, ensuing lawmaker involvement and eventually new legislation, and government departments, such as the MNDDC, have slowly changed the lives of countless Americans.

In September 1950, ninety parents met in Minneapolis for the first national convention of the National Association of Parents and Friends of Mentally Retarded Children (which later became the Association for Retarded Children or ARC). Minnesota Governor Luther Youngdahl, in his keynote address to the convention, spoke of the rights that should be given to all citizens regardless of disabilities. Youngdahl's speech did not result in much immediate change; however his participation began a political dialogue that was taken up by subsequent state governors.

Despite Governor Youngdahl's advocacy, the methods of patient treatment at state hospitals continued to include seclusion and restraints, and the overall living conditions did not improve for decades. For those who were institutionalized, their circumstances continued to deteriorate and the time lag for them to move out of a facility to an alternative environment was often many, many years. The MNDDC website states:

By 1960, approximately 200,000 people with intellectual disabilities lived in state hospitals in the United States. Yet, their care was grossly underfunded. In 1964, the per diem rate for a person living in an institution was \$5.57, about one-half of the daily amount allotted to tend animals in a zoo.

Change Begins

During these years, many people across the United States slowly grew more aware of issues relating to the "inalienable rights" of all citizens. In the 1950s

the civil rights movement was beginning to get noticed and it, and legal decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), set the stage for the increased activism of the following decades. By 1960, more than a decade had passed since the Parent Movement got its start. The Parent Movement was becoming well-established and continued its activism, including parents independently starting day activity centers as a place for their family members to have socialization, physical activity, and the beginnings of employment training.

Members of the Saint Paul ARC had the same focus as did their counterparts nationally during the 1950s. Parents lobbied for better living conditions at state hospitals. Fund raising and volunteer solicitation were also important and Wieck comments on that effort in Minnesota:

The parents reached out to a well-known personality, Cedric Adams, who was a WCCO radio personality as well as a newspaper columnist, and it was through Cedric Adams who appealed to the general public ... We need gifts, we need money, [and] we need to improve living conditions. Along with that came the first bill of rights for people and the first volunteer services office because government [officials] knew they weren't going to [be able to] hire enough staff so they decided to create a volunteer services office that would bring people into [state hospitals] to improve the conditions.⁶

During this time, there were few educational facilities for children with intellectual disabilities. "A Study of Public School Children with Severe Mental Retardation," which was completed by the Minnesota Department of Education in October 1953, focused on three schools (two in Saint Paul and one in Minneapolis) and it reported:

Minnesota, along with several other states, has recently authorized public school classes for severely retarded children. These classes [in St. Paul] were started in 1934 as a WPA project, but were taken over by the St. Paul Board of Education in 1937. They have been in operation continuously since 1934. There have been several classes organized in other parts of Minnesota very recently.⁷

Reading this 97-page report is difficult

One Parent's Account of Her Daughter's Experience in the 1950s

Crowley school in St. Paul was one of the schools specifically mentioned in the 1953 report. Sandy Klas shares her experience finding educational facilities for her daughter with intellectual disabilities who attended Crowley School and Christ Child School in the 1950s and 1960s.

Our first daughter, Frances [born in 1951], was very slow in developing. So in those days there were no services. [I took her to] our family doctor, he was a general practitioner and he knew all about little kids and big kids and middle-size kids. So he said, "Sandy, I don't know of anywhere to take her," but he said, "You might take her to see the psychiatrist for the public and parochial schools in St. Paul. Maybe he will know something." By then Frances was probably three.

She wasn't walking yet so I dressed her all up and took her to his office and sat her in a chair and he asked me a few questions, not many. He looked at her. Then he said . . . I tell this because it's exactly what happened . . . he said, "How many normal children at home, dear?" That's '50s language, "Dear." I told him and he said, "If I were you, I'd put this pretty little girl in a place where they'll take care of her. You go home and take care of the children who need you." And I said, as young as I was, I said, "Hell will freeze over before I do that," and I picked up my kid and walked out. That was the end of that. I knew one thing: it was a long road ahead and there was nowhere to go. So I thought, I can't be the first person I know in this boat. There has to be other people like me. So I put an ad in the St. Paul newspaper and three women answered the ad and said they had started ARC St. Paul. [We] talked about where to put [our children] in school and who can teach them.

In those days teachers weren't certified [or trained for special educa-



Frances Klas. Photo used by permission of the Klas Family.

tion]. There was no training. In finding things, I found out about Crowley School in West St. Paul. I walked in there and this building had been condemned already and it was in terrible condition. When I walked out of there I thought this is not going to happen to me or to anyone else. [Frances was enrolled at Crowley and Klas became very active in the PTA.] Fortunately women just ahead of me already had started to fight. They were pioneers. We banded our funny little group together and just went after them. [She and other parent activists lobbied the superintendent of schools, at his office in City Hall. Not receiving a response, the group decided he needed to be replaced and eventually he was.] Every one of us [five mothers] had A DAY.

My day was Tuesday. The elevator operators knew us. So this particular day I walked in and I still remember walking in. There were two desks right there. Of course I've got Frances. This one guy said to the other guy, . . . "Harry, she's back." And I said, "Yes I am and I'm going to come back so get used to it."

The good news is that the children and the teachers, at last moved to a brand new building. At Crowley School . . . I loved those people . . . they just taught kids, which I thought was wonderful because there was no money for them and no training. But theirs was, "Honey, you know, Valentine's Day is coming up. Wouldn't you like to make some Valentines?" "Oh, I would." That was their approach. All about social skills, which I felt was excellent.

During this time I'd been hearing about the Christ Child School where there was Sister Anne Marie, she was in a wheelchair. She was a St. Joseph nun and she started Christ Child School and she was as tough as all get out, but those kids could do a whole lot. Boy, did she teach those kids. I was watching that over there and thinking that is interesting to me. The teachers at Crowley School had a different method. There was water in the basement and they were just doing what they could do. But what Sister Anna Marie Meyers was doing was showing the abacus. It was a totally different approach to education and both systems were good, but I wanted Frances to have both systems because I thought . . . they weren't similar, but they were both good enough to teach these children. So I was PTA president at Crowley, but I put Frances in school over at Christ Child School.⁸

Christ Child School, 1950–1977

Christ Child School was a private school, opened in a house at 2078 Summit Avenue in St. Paul in 1950, for children with disabilities. It was founded and operated by Sister Anna Marie Meyers, a Sister of Saint Joseph of Carondelet. Because there were so few options for children with intellectual and physical disabilities the enrollment was at its maximum on opening day. Richard Lilly, a board member, raised funds for the initial site as well as a new building constructed in 1955. After 1957 Christ Child School was under the auspices of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis; however operating funds came mainly from Lilly and other private donors. In 1960 a nearby house at Cleveland and Summit Avenues was acquired for programs for students ages 16–21. Teaching skills for independent living was the goal of this program that subsequently became an occupational training center. Christ Child School closed in 1977 after IDEA legislation resulted in the implementation of special education programs in the Saint Paul Public Schools. The Merriam Park DAC leased space in the school

and continued its work-training programs there until 1985. In 2005 the school building was razed to make way for a new University of Saint Thomas building.⁹



Christ Child School in St. Paul. All photos accompanying this article are from the archives of ALLY People Solutions and are used with permission.

due to both the language used and the general assumptions regarding the life prospects for children with intellectual disabilities that it contains. It includes, however, studies done at special education schools in other parts of the country in the areas of life skills, socialization, and academics. This report, which showed children often had promising results in the small steps these programs were implementing, came more than twenty years before the 1975 passage of the federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act, later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA]. In 1956 the Minnesota Association for Retarded Children (now the ARC of Minnesota) hired Jerry Walsh as director of their organization. Walsh, along with John Holahan, prepared a “Blue Print” to communicate how citizens might create a system for getting people with disabilities out of state hospitals and into their communities. Colleen Wieck described the document in this way,

... [I]f you look at this blueprint, you can see [the] thinking about the flow through of the system. In the lower right corner, you can see that the two men thought there ought to be private day schools that included both work and day activity. There ought to be day

activities for those who cannot work and they should have fun and then there could be work activities, segregated work, vocational rehabilitation, and regular work. So you can see the beginnings of how the system was created or formed.¹⁰

Due to public awareness, both from organized group activism and the public unrest that resulted in a government response, the 1960s and '70s were a time when Americans were forced to recognize and confront areas of discrimination that were present in their world.

Although gender and race issues gained the most public notice, once people began thinking about the other inequities in society, many came to the realization that although “all people are *created equal*” is the cornerstone of our democracy; not all people were *treated equal*. In 1961 President John F. Kennedy appointed a Panel on Mental Retardation that began making recommendations on research, resources, treatment and care, education and employment training, legal protection, and the development of federal, state and local programs. The panel’s final report, which was issued in January 1963, concluded:

When dealing with mental retardation, the law must combat many years of general

ignorance, prejudice and superstition. Only when these are defeated can the law consolidate the gains in knowledge which have been made in our time.¹¹

Those active in the movement were also very concerned about the “thinking” of the general public. In Minnesota, the majority of children and adults with intellectual disabilities were living in state hospitals. Prior to the late nineteenth century, these individuals would have lived at home, but in the 1880s when the State School for the Feeble-Minded was built in Faribault, the movement to institutionalize people with intellectual disabilities got its start. By 1961 there were more than 6,500 people with intellectual disabilities in Minnesota institutions and 900 more on a waiting list. In 1962 the Minnesota Association for Retarded Children and the Minnesota Department of Human Services asked 900 state households/individuals their opinion regarding various issues concerning people with intellectual disabilities. Colleen Wieck gives an overview of that poll and compares it to a recent one:

... The overwhelming majority of Minnesotans believed in institutions [in 1962]. That was the only thing they knew. They didn’t think about schools and when they

were asked about the individuals themselves who had an intellectual disability, they said they really didn't know anything about causes, they didn't know what kind of employee or neighbor such a person might be. They felt such folks with intellectual disabilities should live normal lives just as long as they didn't vote, drink, get married or have children, drive cars or use regular hospitals. And so it was atypical for all of these things.

Fifty years later our council did [a new poll] and you can see the dramatic contrast in public opinion. . . . Minnesota attitudes have changed and Minnesotans are now proud to know and very respectful toward employers that hire people with disabilities. It's completely different and that shift is because of nonprofits such as ALLY and the ARC . . . and, of course, . . . people with disabilities growing up in neighborhoods, going to school, etc. . . .¹²

Medicaid funding for services and supports for people with intellectual disabilities was made available in the 1970s. In order to capture those federal dollars, the state hospitals for patients with mental illness at Willmar, Saint Peter and Fergus Falls opened units for people with intellectual disabilities. Faribault and Cambridge state hospitals also received that funding. Even though the institutions now had additional funds, the activists knew that conditions remained unacceptable and therefore the closing of state hospitals remained the goal. Before people could begin to leave institutions, sufficient community alternatives needed to be built to comply with Medicaid guidelines. These were larger Intermediate Care Facilities with on-site nursing services.

In 1972 a media expose produced by ABC News and Geraldo Rivera shed light on the conditions at the Willowbrook State School in New York. It showed a state hospital that housed people with intellectual disabilities in overcrowded conditions, rife with neglect and abuse. This influential investigation, along with the continuing Parent Movement's activism in the areas of judicial action and self-advocacy efforts, kept the issues of people with intellectual disabilities, if not on the front page, at least in the news.¹³

Public opinion was also affected by the published works of psychiatrists, psychologists, social service professionals, and the reporting by the media. Perhaps the most influential writing during this time was *The Principle of Normalization in Human Services*, a book written by Professor Wolf Wolfensburger. His theory was that people with intellectual disabilities had the same right to a normal, everyday life as everyone else. They had the same right to community living and activities, education, and work opportunities.¹⁴

In the early 1980s a Federal Medicaid program allowed states to use Medicaid funds to develop a pay-for-services model in small group homes (4–5 residents), without on-site nursing services. These smaller residences, in neighborhoods, meant increased community involvement for the residents. All of this activity resulted in the last child leaving the Minnesota state hospital system in 1987 and the last adult in 2000.¹⁵

The Merriam Park Day Activity Center

In 1961 newly elected Governor Elmer L. Andersen listened to the Parent Movement's call for government support. Governor Andersen set in motion a pilot project for four funded day activity programs. ALLY's precursor, Merriam Park DAC, started in 1965 and provided a place for adult children living at home to have recreational activities and sociali-

zation. This center, begun by parents, opened in rooms at Christ Child School. ALLY was progressive from its beginning in serving and supporting adults with disabilities in the community where they lived.

Pearl Hipp, one of ALLY's founders, had seven children, four of whom had intellectual disabilities. Her husband died while the children were still young. Hipp was a tireless advocate for people with disabilities and worked to move people out of state hospitals and into their communities. Her activism and innovative approach to educational support of learning and independence for people with intellectual disabilities was critical to the success of ALLY from the beginning. She was instrumental in setting up the programs both at Merriam Park Community Center and when the DAC moved to the Midway Area. She was a constant advocate; she openly shared her work with her family and friends whether gathered around her dining room table or out in the community. She was a fundraiser and negotiator; she hosted events and recruited family members to help out with DAC activities. She remained an active force on ALLY's Board until shortly before her death in 2011. When interviewed, Charlie Hipp, Pearl's son, gave a personal account of how the changes his mother worked so hard to bring about effected the lives of his siblings:

I have four brothers and sisters in the [ALLY] program. Kathy and Bobby are older and Johnny and Rosie are younger [than I]. My



Merriam Park Day Activity Center was housed in the Merriam Park Community Center at 2000 St. Anthony Avenue.



Pearl Hipp, right, talking with a guest at an MTS event.

brothers and sisters went [to Christ Child School] when they were almost babies and young children. I do remember my oldest brother, Bobby, being up at Cambridge State Hospital. I remember driving up there to see him on a regular basis and so I was able to see the transition from that environment and watch him blossom into the person he has become. It was incredibly drastic. When in the state hospital, he looked dull. He became healthier and he was vibrant after he came to the group home and to ALLY. John was always full of energy and had a passion for life and I think that blossomed at ALLY. And Rosie and Kathy when they started living together, it was like a family. I think when they got involved in ALLY, they were healthier, happier. I watched this happen.¹⁶

The parents at Merriam Park DAC realized that socialization was only the beginning for their adult children. Acquiring living skills and job skills were the next steps to earning a wage and living independently. In 1970, due to a growing number of participants, paid staff, and volunteers, the DAC moved some programs to a separate location at Merriam Park Community Center. The space at Christ Child School expanded and was used for employment training until 1985.

In 1975 Harold Kerner became the Executive Director at Merriam Park DAC. Previously he had served as the

executive director of United Cerebral Palsy DAC. He had a passion for people with disabilities and advocating for their rights and quality of life to which they were entitled. Kerner's strong activism in the political area, particularly his skill at lobbying for legislation, funding, and services, was important experience he brought to his new position. During his fifteen-year leadership at the Merriam Park DAC, both services and the participants served continued to increase. Lyth Hartz, president of Midwest Special Services, who knew and worked with Kerner for decades, says:

In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s and mid-1980s the United States led the world in the development of services for people with intellectual disabilities. Minnesota led the United States in the development of these services. ALLY (then Merriam Park DAC) under the leadership of Harold Kerner led Minnesota's effort. Therefore, it could be said, that ALLY led the world in the development of services for people with intellectual disabilities. Harold was a great national leader and a mentor to many.¹⁷

For a firsthand look at the Merriam Park DAC during this time, we turn to long-time ALLY board member, Mickey Michlitsch, who was a teacher during those early years:

I started in 1975 as a teacher and back in those days we only had thirty-nine participants and five teachers . . . and our main purpose was to provide leisure activities for folks that lived in group homes or lived at home with their parents, people that did not go out to work.

We were given three rooms in the basement and that's where we were for a few years until they built an addition onto the [Merriam Park] Community Center [in 1978] and we moved upstairs to a new [space] that was built for us, facing the park. It contained 3 classrooms, 2 locker rooms, and staff offices for 8. It had "independent living" training space (kitchen, dining room, bathroom, living room, and bedroom).

When we moved upstairs things started to change, the County was more involved and they said we needed to have more active programming for the participants. The state expected that we have objectives and goals for each participant, and that was great. So we started additional work training and a lot of the employment projects we got [were done] right at the Merriam Park DAC.¹⁸

With increased government funding from State sources and from Ramsey County, the process for identifying people who needed DAC services became formalized. As the population of those needing services grew, the number of DACs increased. Initially it was the county that worked directly with the DACs to serve people living in their county. Normally a family member would contact the county to request services for a person. If the person was determined eligible for services, the county assigned an employee to work with the family to identify a program to best fit the person's individual needs.

Merriam Park DAC Becomes Midway Training Services

By 1985, the number of participants in the Merriam Park DAC had increased to sixty-five and they were forced to move to a larger space. Both the programs at the DAC and the work programs still being operated at Christ Child School relocated to the Ashton Building at 1549 University Avenue in the Midway area of St. Paul. In 1985, the organization became independent of the Merriam Park Community

Center and changed its name to Midway Training Services (MTS), a separate corporation. The MTS board of directors included Jean Bell, Dr. Harriet Burns, Lois Chambers, Milt Conrath, Tom FitzGibbon, Louis Furlong, Pearl Hipp, Betty Hubbard, Janet Huizenga, Brad A. Johnson, Dr. Charles Keffer, Harold Kerner, Mickey Michlitsch, Dr. David Paulson, Jan Quast, Dr. Tom Tommet, Irene Young, and Mary Ward.

At the time of the move, Michlitsch remembers:

The employment part was more active, but we were also known for having participants who were senior citizens. We had people that worked out in the community on projects and usually they would go in groups. There would be a staff trainer [and] five or six workers and we had jobs at a window company and other companies, like machine companies, and direct mailing companies. There was [also] work that we did right at the Center. At that point we became known for working with people who had behavior challenges. So we hired staff trained in that area. . . . Our expertise in working with people who had behavior challenges was very helpful to Ramsey County which was bringing people back home from the state hospitals.¹⁹

The employment programs included training for both jobs done on-site and at area businesses. Jobs in the 1980s were often filled on an employer need basis; if, for example, the employer had a janitor position open, then someone was trained and placed in that janitor job. There was not much of what has become known now as “discovery” going on at first. “Discovery” is finding out what individuals want to do; what their skills, talents and interests are. Staff then link program participants to businesses seeking employees with those skills and interests.

In 1990 President George W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). It prohibited discrimination against people with disabilities and mandated they had the same rights to employment and access to public facilities as other citizens. In 1999 the United States Supreme Court issued a decision in *Olmstead vs. L.C.* that upheld the ADA and confirmed that people should not be



MTS when it was located at 720 Vandalia Street, St. Paul.

placed in institutions if they can live in and be part of a community setting and do not oppose community-based treatments. As stated in the *Olmstead* decision,

Confinement in an institution severely diminishes everyday life activities of individuals, including family relations, social contacts, work options, economic independence, educational advancement, and cultural enrichment.²⁰

Throughout the 1990s, MTS increased its focus on supported employment in integrated work environments. Barbara Kale succeeded Harold Kerner as MTS Director in 1989. She would serve in that position until 2005. Under her leadership, there was a period of accelerated growth in numbers of participants and employment activities. Employment and volunteer training became more refined and individually focused. MTS identified companies, organizations, and community groups that had jobs to do or needed volunteer help and matched them with the interests and skills of participants. Employment options ranged from on-site to supported community jobs to independent jobs. Those who worked in business settings had higher earnings and significantly more community interactions than people working in the MTS branches.

MTS Grows and Moves

At the same time, the Ashton Building on University Avenue was showing its age; it was overcrowded with close to 100 MTS participants. The building with its three floors and small, ancient elevator had limited accessibility options. In 1993 the MTS board decided to move its operations to a location that would work better for its growing numbers of staff and participants and increasing employment activities. They moved to 720 Vandalia Street, still in the Midway area. MTS later added additional space at 760 Vandalia Street and a branch location at Hillcrest Shopping Center.

Although employment and volunteer services training were expanding, the core MTS programs were then, and remain, extremely important and active. New people were coming to MTS for services; adults who had recently left state hospitals (in 1991 there were still 1,100 people institutionalized), those who recently completed their schooling, and others who were out in the community, on their own, for the first time. Senior services, recreational and cultural activities, social and life skills development, and psychological services and therapies remained an important focus of what MTS offered program participants. Knowing how important mobility and access are for participants, transportation was al-



An ALLY participant working on a digital imaging job for a county agency.

ways a service offered by MTS. Vans furnish rides from home to University Avenue and branch sites, volunteer and recreational activities, and job sites.

More and more participants began taking advantage of the programs that MTS had to offer. With the leadership development approach in *University Avenue Clean Team* and *Chore Services* for example, participants are trained in the use of equipment, safety procedures, and how to work in a crew. They are given the opportunity to advance to managing the crew and advance further to individual employment in the community. Along the way, they learn not only the hard skills needed to complete the jobs, but also soft skills such as interpersonal effectiveness, accountability, and taking initiatives that make them successful in their work life.

In 2005 Barbara Kale retired from MTS and Mickey Michlitsch served as the organization's interim director until a new director was hired. During this period of transition, digital imaging services began to grow for MTS and this part of the business soon proved to be a very successful initiative. The digital imaging work had begun in 2000–2002 with a partnership with the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. Again we go to Wieck for specifics:

I became involved with Midway Training Services, probably 2000-2001-2002, and the

issue was that we had Y2K going on and people were talking about losing all their computer services and we were also at that time converting a lot of records to digital approaches or digital formats and we were trying to build our website. We're going to do it digitally.

So I became involved with Midway Training Services because we were experimenting with document imaging. We brought workers into this very room [the MNDDC office] and we had it set up as a document imaging site. We brought in people who had never touched a computer, never saw a computer and couldn't read. We wanted to see if it works. There's a principle . . . if it works with a person with the most significant disability, [then] it works with anybody. And we proved it. At that time there was an employee from Midway Training Services who said, "I want to try that." So he bought what they call a multifunctional device and he said let's see if our folks can do scanning. And of course they can do it better than he could. They had figured it out and they had pressed on and they were doing scanning work.

So we [at MNDDC] turned to Midway Training Services for help after we had done the first experimentation and we were delivering boxes of files. We went over to the Minnesota Historical Society and began copying every piece of paper dating back to the 1800s on disability and we sent it to

Midway Training Services. We'd send it all over and they did all of the work. Then we were able to convince the State of Minnesota to create master contracts and ALLY [the successor to MTS] has been on the master contract for document imaging ever since. So we've been having a campaign of why aren't other state government entities doing what we did? Why aren't they converting their records? Why aren't they employing [people] with intellectual disabilities? First of all, they are faster and quality is higher because the people actually care about doing a good job and I can't say enough good things.²¹

More Growth; Another Move

After fifteen years in the Vandalia sites, once again in order to relieve overcrowding, improve services and reach out to areas beyond Saint Paul's Midway (and in many cases closer to where people receiving services lived), MTS relocated. In July 2007, the Hillcrest site remained in place and the Vandalia operations were moved to:

- *Menlo Park Office Building at 1246 University Avenue*
- *1953 University Avenue, which became the MTS Digital Imaging Business*
- *The Paul and Sheila Wellstone Community Center in West Saint Paul*
- *380 Oak Grove Parkway in Vadnais Heights.*²²

In 2007 Bob Brick was hired as president and CEO of MTS. Brick had extensive experience working as an advocate in the disability world. His work with public policy issues, developing laws affecting people with various disabilities, and helping families access and improve services for their children gave him an ideal background for his new position. John Hoffman also joined the staff in 2007 as the Director of Sales and Marketing. Prior to digital imaging projects coming to MTS, it had a couple dozen small contracts involving business support work and mailings, both on- and off-site. Digital imaging projects changed the way this part of MTS employment services environment operated. When he was interviewed, Hoffman gave an overview of MTS's work with law firms:

VOLUNTEER WORK (2015)

Twin Cities East Metro Meals on Wheels • Keystone Community Services
Sharing and Caring Hands • Vadnais Heights Fire Department • Books for Africa
Maplewood Historical Society • Episcopal Homes • Midway Spirit Garden Midway
YMCA Community Garden

PARTICIPANTS

LYNNE BOESEL

Lynne Boesel began attending ALLY in 1994. Lynne is very ambitious and loves working! In her career she worked, from 1972 until 2004, in the kitchen and cafeteria at Episcopal Homes. After coming to ALLY, Lynne also worked as an Associate at Wal-Mart. Lynne is now 70 and retired a couple of years ago. She loves bowling and joining in community events with ALLY fellow program participants.

Retirement, however, just wasn't the same as working; so she took up volunteering. Today Lynne is an active volunteer at the Vadnais Heights Fire Department and with the Meals on Wheels program. She states that volunteering makes her feel good about herself and important to others.

And that love of work? Its back! Lynne now works part-time at the ALLY Vadnais Heights Branch for a packaging customer. She loves earning money to pay for her retirement activities.

ALLY is pleased to have had Lynne part of its organization for twenty-one years. She has given to ALLY and ALLY has given to Lynne by offering her a range of services that allow her to be active and valued.

ROGER YOUNG

Roger Young started at ALLY People Solutions in 1972, when he was twenty-one years old. He is very outgoing, and people are attracted to his dynamic personality. Roger had a career in the restaurant business working sixteen years at two local restaurants (Chi Chi's and Taco Bell). His supervisors often described Roger as a great ambassador because he knew every customer, visited with each, and made them feel important.

Roger is now retired and participates in retirement focused activities at ALLY. In particular he enjoys coming to the branch and hanging out with friends. ALLY participation is a strong family value in the Young family. His mother, Irene, became a Board member shortly after Roger joined ALLY and remained on the Board until her passing. Roger's brother, Allen, took up the torch and was a Board member for several years. Relationships matter at ALLY and it has been very fortunate to have been a major part of Roger's life for 43 years and counting!



Lynne takes time to relax after a day of volunteering.



Roger Young working at a local Taco Bell. Photo used by permission of the Young Family.

Seed money was given to the company to look at doing digital imaging or archiving of paper [documents]. The Governor's Developmental Disability Council had done a study of 600 businesses in Cleveland showing the history of how you get people with disabilities involved with the digital imaging and archiving. They had found that along the whole spectrum of digital imaging businesses from doc prep to the editing side of it, people with disabilities did just as well, if not better. The data was there. Then it was just a matter of taking the data and putting that plan into practice.

So I came in at a time when MTS had just started looking at expanding digital imaging services. We didn't have a real focus on how to do it, how to maintain it, but I came in and started to really look to see how are we paying people to do what and how do you know you're making money in order to keep this program alive? Where's your tracking system? There was a law firm, the Johnson-Condon law firm at the time, which is now O'Meara, Leer, Wagner and Kohl, and they had some boxes in storage and they were one of the first to partner with us. We ended up, at the end of a five-six year project, [digitizing] about 13 million images for them. And we evolved.

The business model evolved to where it is right now because of that work, and we found one niche in the legal field. We also do work for state and local government agencies, school districts, and other paper-intensive businesses. We've been able to build a pretty good book of clients that like [our work] and that have come back to us.²³

In 2012 MTS began a new collaboration with Dakota County where it provides office support services to its Northern and Western Services Centers.

MTS Becomes ALLY

2013 was a year of evolution and change for MTS. It began with a name change for the organization. Midway Training Services became ALLY People Solutions. The name change reaffirmed the focus of the organization from the beginning; being an ally for families and participants seeking services that provide assistance and support. In 2013 the digital imaging site at 1953 University Avenue moved to its present location at

1885 University Avenue and the branch at the Wellstone Center merged with it. This location now serves the Business Solutions branch of ALLY. In this larger space, ALLY also offers arts and cultural opportunities, as well as health and wellness programs. Musical instruments and art supplies are available for participants. Art and music classes are offered by local cultural organizations. When participants are not working, they can express themselves through the arts and take part in building sessions with certified Personal Empowerment facilitators.²⁴

ALLY Today

ALLY made another major change affecting its program participants. After six straight years of earning record setting wages and success in expanding employment opportunities, in 2013 ALLY decided to not renew a Department of Labor Special Minimum Wage Certificate. This certificate enables businesses to pay persons with disabilities less than the minimum wage, based on productivity. ALLY's decision ensures that all program participants are paid the minimum wage or more for their work, regardless of where it is performed or the type of work. This action demonstrates ALLY's commitment to program participants and business partners.

Finally, in 2013, ALLY hired its first Director of Development and Communications, Erika Schwichtenberg, whose goal it is to fill the gap between government funding and the increasing costs of delivering programs of excellence at the four ALLY branch locations and its satellites in Dakota County.

In addition, ALLY has undertaken several communication initiatives such as electronic and paper newsletters and social media. They offer great vehicles for ALLY to communicate to the public its mission to advance the career and life goals of people with disabilities. As a consequence, a truly qualified workforce and ranks of talented employees are contributors to our community. In the words of ALLY's Erika Schwichtenberg,

It is a pleasure to connect with community members who are truly dedicated to supporting persons of all abilities. ALLY has several



Ribbon cutting ceremony at ALLY's Business Solutions branch at 1885 University Avenue, St. Paul.

business partnerships and service organization advocates such as the Midway Chamber of Commerce, the St. Paul Area Chambers of Commerce, St. Paul Sunrise Rotary, Midway Lions Club, the Midway YMCA, and Twin Cities Rise! These entities link us to future business customers, they volunteer for ALLY to help us extend our human resources in serving program participants, and they contribute financially to our organization. Many of them are truly ambassadors for ALLY. They communicate effectively to other organizations and persons with whom they do business the value of hiring and supporting adults with disabilities. We honor and hold in great esteem these individuals and organizations who extend our mission.²⁵

As with many movements to remedy social and political inequities, changes have not always occurred quickly. The incremental steps forward were all victories. In the case of public misunderstanding of what people are capable of accomplishing and discriminatory practices against people with intellectual disabilities, those victories are celebrated. They served as an impetus to keep mov-

ing toward the final goal of full participation and inclusion in society. That is still the goal; for all people to be identified as PEOPLE FIRST. To be identified by their abilities and not their disabilities. Stephen R. Howe Jr., managing partner at Ernst and Young LLP, writes in a tribute to the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act:

We know that exceptional people come from different generations and ethnicities, speak different languages and have different spiritual beliefs and sexual orientations. We also know that each one of us comes with differing physical, cognitive and mental health abilities. . . . The challenges for all businesses is to find the best people and help them tap into their full talents to create exceptional value for the organization and career success for themselves. At EY [Ernst & Young, LLP] we like to say we don't have a single person with disabilities. Instead, around the world we have 190,000 people with diverse abilities.²⁶

ALLY continues to work toward that ultimate goal. Today it employs about

seventy staff members who aid individuals and families in discovering the services that are available to them and opportunities that best fit goals, skills, and desires of program participants. Discovering how to personalize services to reach those inborn skills and talents, those “diverse abilities”, is the goal. Program participants continue to set records in wages earned. They volunteered over 1,200 hours in 2014. They are pursuing artistic talents and they are contributing to the success of ALLY’s business partners. They are being hired by businesses for competitive jobs. They are



Mikhail, back, fishing with his brother. Photo used with the permission of Mikhail’s family.

Business Solutions services while 142 earned income through contracted internal jobs.²⁷

ALLY People Solutions has had fifty years of success as an organization. They have often been ahead of accepted methods of integrating those with intellectual disabilities into society. But ALLY staff would be the first to acknowledge that it is the individual participants that have carried the effort forward to becoming fully contributing members of their communities. ALLY has provided the structure and support, however it is the people who have done the hard work to make their own lives not just useful, but joyful as well. As shared in prose by Mikhail:

Summer Thoughts

*I had a nice Memorial Day. I went shopping at Best Buy.
I had an ice cream cone at Cold Stone Creamery.
I hung around with my friend Richard and we went for a walk.
I’m waiting for the water to warm up so that I can go swimming.
I look forward to fishing.*

*The Advocate,
June 2015*

... or as expressed by Chanpraney in poetry:

The Bird

*The bird is one of the creatures of flight
When it spreads its wings and flies
It represents freedom
Free from the stress and constraints of life
The most gentle of creatures
As gentle as a light summer breeze*

*The Advocate,
June 2015*



Chanpraney playing keyboard at ALLY’s 2014 fundraising luncheon—another talent he shares with his colleagues and friends at ALLY.

... or in his artworks by Tony:

also working in jobs with the support of job coaches and performing jobs for business partners at ALLY branches. They are involved in their community, are vital members of the workforce, and valued for their talents.

In 2013–2014, forty-one participants in ALLY programs had individual job placements where the business directly hired the individual. One hundred and six worked on Community Crews. Thirty-seven earned income through



Tony with his paintings during his 2015 solo exhibition at Vision Loss Resources in Minneapolis.

Support and training for life skills' enhancement and employment initiatives are the continuing focus for ALLY in the future. For people at ALLY, getting their story out is an important component of their strategic plan and mission. The "story" is that Mikail, Chanpraney, Tony, and others are ready, willing and able, and are taking their place in society by working in your company, or volunteering to help make everyone's life better, and fully sharing in the burdens and rewards of the communities where they live.

This is a great community organization that has been around for fifty years. We would like for people to say, "How can I help?"

- *Perhaps, if you work in a business that has an employee shortage, you should talk to us.*
- *It might be that you have some extra time to volunteer and would like to help.*
- *Or maybe you see that we do excellent work in the community and can give to help support our mission.*

We want to create interest and connections by telling our story, and gain recognition to help us increase both the scope of our work and the opportunities for ALLY Program Participants.

Bob Brick
President & CEO
ALLY People Solutions

Eileen R. McCormack thanks the following who agreed to be interviewed for this article and were available to answer many, many questions. Without their contributions this article would not have been possible: Lynne Boesel, an ALLY program participant; Bob Brick, President and CEO of ALLY; Shawn and Charlie Hipp, family members of Pearl Hipp, a founder of ALLY; John Hoffman, ALLY Director of Sales & Marketing and Minnesota State Senator; Alexandra "Sandy" Klas, recipient of the Saint Paul United Way "Outstanding Volunteer Award" (1981), longtime activist and ARC member, founder with her husband, Bob Klas, of the Tapemark Charity Pro-

*Am golf event; Mickey Michlitsch, ALLY Board member and volunteer; Erika Schwichtenberg, ALLY Director of Development and Communication; and Colleen Wieck, Ph.D., Executive Director of the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. The author also acknowledges the great help she received from the contextual material on the history of gaining intellectual disability rights that is in the webinar "The Fight for Civil Rights for People with Disabilities" and other materials contained on the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities website, <http://mn.gov/mnddc> accessed July-August 2015. Eileen McCormack is an independent contractor who has a Master of Liberal Studies in history, museum studies, and historic preservation from the University of Minnesota and collaborated with Biloine W. Young in publishing *The Dutiful Son*: Louis W. Hill (2010).*

Endnotes

1. From the ALLY People Solutions website, www.allypeoplesolutions.org, accessed June 2015.
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6. Wieck interview.
7. State of Minnesota, Department of Education, "A Study of Public School Children with Severe Mental Retardation," Saint Paul, October 1953.
8. Interview with Alexandra "Sandy" Klas, longtime activist and SPARC member, August 7, 2015.
9. Jane McClure, "Christ Child School Provided Early Education Option," www.accesspress.org, accessed August 14, 2015.
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12. Wieck interview.
13. The note at the beginning of the citations will point the reader to the MNDDC webinar that shows studies, papers, books, articles and media reports from the 1960s and 1970s that influenced not only public opinion, but also the entire thinking on issues surrounding people with developmental/intellectual disabilities.
14. Wolf Wolfensberger, *The Principle of Normalization in Human Services* (Toronto: National Institute on Mental Retardation, 1972).
15. Wieck interview. Wieck had the following comment to add regarding the closing of the state hospitals: "They did reopen a building at Cambridge, which then became the subject of a lawsuit in 2009. That's the same issues; restraint and seclusion. That was for people with intellectual disabilities. They opened it at the end of the '90s and the lawsuit began in 2009."
16. Author interview with Shawn and Charlie Hipp, July 31, 2015.
17. Author phone interview with Lyth Hartz, President at Midwest Special Services, St. Paul Minn., August 25, 2015.
18. Author interview with Mickey Michlitsch, former employee and Board member at Ally People Solutions, July 8, 2015 [hereinafter Michlitsch interview].
19. Michlitsch interview.
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24. Jan William, "Ally People Solutions brings solutions to the disabled while solving business needs too," *Midway Como Monitor*, December 2013.
25. Erika Schwichtenberg, Director of Development and Communication, ALLY People Solutions, September 8, 2015.
26. "Equal Access, Equal Opportunity: 25th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act" (Tampa: Faircount Media Group, 2015), 46.
27. Employment statistics from ALLY People Solutions records for fiscal year November 2013–November 2014.

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We are
your Ally.



Posters such as this one help spread the message that ALLY People Solutions is working to help those with intellectual disabilities. Poster reproduced from the archives of ALLY People Solutions and used with permission.

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This 1939 postcard shows the skyline of St. Paul from the Mississippi River following the completion of a period of major public and private construction in the city during the 1930s. For more on how St. Paul changed during the Great Depression, see page 16. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.