

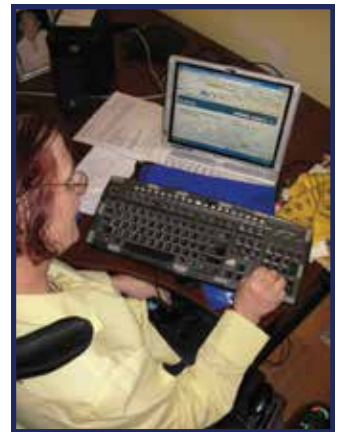


50 Years of Hiawatha Homes Road Trip!

March 2026

A **very** early morning start. A big bus. Boxes of sandwiches and bottles of water. Wheelchairs and walkers. Blankets and pillows. And a lot of enthusiasm!

On March 24, more than 20 Hiawatha Homes team members, friends, family members, volunteers and individuals we support made the trip to St. Paul to attend the Association of Residential Resources in Minnesota's (ARRM) 2026 Disability Day at the Capitol. This annual event provides an opportunity to advocate and share stories of our individuals with our local legislators. The day started with a rousing group rally in the capitol rotunda. Afterwards, we met in a small group with Senators Liz Bolden and Carla Nelson, as well as Representatives Tina Liebling and Kim Hicks.



Hulet Sherry (pictured above) was a very effective advocate for disability services and Hiawatha Homes.

Minnesota has long been a leader in the provision of disability services, but it did not start out that way. Like other states, Minnesota relied on custodial institutions in rural area, which typically provided minimal housing and assistance with daily cares. Individuals were not provided with educational opportunities, but as able contributed free labor to help offset the institutional costs. Facilities were often crowded, dirty, and poorly staffed. Individuals had little opportunity to interact with family, friends or community members outside of the institution.

The first impetus for change occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, when parents began to organize and demand better conditions and opportunities for their children, much like the parents who established Hiawatha Homes. In 1950, the first national parents conference was held in Minneapolis. Minnesota Governor Luther Youngdahl, the featured speaker, noted that the disabled child, **"has the same rights that children everywhere have. He has the same right to happiness, the same right to play, the right to companionship, the right to be respected, the right to develop to the fullest extent within his capacities, and the right to love and affection..."**

The advocacy of those pioneering parents and officials were part of a societal shift in attitudes towards the treatment of individuals with disabilities. Acts such as the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (1081), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) have affirmed the rights of disabled individuals to safe and humane living conditions, community-based alternatives for care, and accessible services. Of particular importance, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act authorized the home and community based waiver program, allowing states to provide care and services to individuals in residential homes rather than an institutional setting.



Rep. Brad Finstad visited Hiawatha Homes in August 2025



2026 Disability Services Day at the Capitol

Advocacy is a core Hiawatha Homes organizational value. Individuals we support and their family and friends are encouraged to advocate for their rights in ways that are comfortable for them. As an organization, Hiawatha Homes leaders meet regularly with legislators and government officials to remind them of service and funding needs.

Cindy Ostrowski, CEO of Hiawatha Homes, has testified at the Minnesota House and Senate committees on behalf of individuals with disabilities and the programs that support them, as well as for equitable wages for our invaluable Direct Support Professionals. Hiawatha Homes won the 2019 Nonprofit Award for Mission (Advocacy) by the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits. Hiawatha Homes belongs to ARRM, a nonprofit organization which advocates on behalf of individuals with disabilities. Services for people living with disabilities in Minnesota are chronically underfunded. Hiawatha Homes receives 95% of its funding from federal and state programs, funding that is especially at risk during economic difficulties.

During the last legislative session, the legislature approved \$1 BILLION in reductions to waiver disability services funding and in this current session, Governor Walz has proposed an additional \$400 MILLION in cuts.

As a result, community residential programs such as Hiawatha Homes must provide increasingly complex care with already insufficient resources and threats to further reduce funding.

The voice of their constituents is important to legislators. We encourage **you to advocate** for individuals with disabilities by contacting your respective senators and representatives and encourage their support of disability services. For more information about how you can support Hiawatha Homes, please visit hiawathahomes.org/50.

Minnesota United States Senators

Senator Amy Klobuchar: <https://www.klobuchar.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/email-amy>

Senator Tina Smith: <https://www.smith.senate.gov/share-your-opinion/>

Minnesota United States House of Representatives:

Representative Brad Finstad (1st Congressional District): <https://finstad.house.gov/contact>

Minnesota Governor's Office:

Governor Tim Walz: <https://mn.gov/governor/connect/contact-us/contact-form.jsp>

Minnesota State Senators:

Senator Carla Nelson (District 24): sen.carla.nelson@mnsenate.gov

Senator Liz Bolden (District 25): sen.liz.boldon@mnsenate.gov

Minnesota State Representatives

Representative Duane Quam (District 24A): rep.duane.quam@house.mn.gov

Representative Tina Liebling (District 24B): rep.tina.liebling@house.mn.gov

Representative Kim Hicks (District 25A): rep.kim.hicks@house.mn.gov

Representative Andy Smith (District 25B): rep.andy.smith@house.mn.gov

I want to support 50 more years!

Consider becoming a monthly donor where \$50 a month supports Hiawatha Homes for years to come.

Mail to: 1820 Valkyrie Drive NW, Rochester, MN 55901

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