

NEWSLETTER

Winter 2025

Happy New Year! As the new year begins, we start the year with the 69th Legislative Assembly, which convened on Tuesday, January 7, 2025. We will provide more information as it pertains to our work, and pass this information along to you in the event you want to attend a committee meeting, and so you will be aware and informed.

The North Dakota Federation of Families has some new faces in our office. We are pleased to introduce you to Penny Nygaard and Katie McNamara. Both of these individuals are Parent Coordinators each assigned to a different region in North Dakota. The Parent Coordinators provide the following advocacy services, and system navigation:



Penny Nygaard provides parent coordinator services to the Devils Lake region, which encompasses six counties in and around Devils Lake. In her adult life she has worked as a waitress, as a Nanny, as a DSP i.e. direct support professional, as a Foster parent for Ramsey county, as a case manager for Salvation Army, as an Attendant care worker and then as the Attendant Care Coordinator, as a houseparent in a domestic violence shelter, as a certified advocate for SAAF, as a Case investigator for Covid response for the ND Health and Human services, as a hotline worker, as a lead for school and childcare teams, she also worked at ND Rent help. Penny has also worked as a Life enrichment assistant in a skilled nursing home. Almost all her life experience has entailed working with people who needed assistance with daily living skills or support in other avenues of their life. Penny really enjoys helping people in areas of their lives where they need someone to support them in the search for services. She has an associate's degree in Developmental Disabilities. Penny has lived experience working with the schools to get the accommodations her daughter needed to succeed. She also had a foster child that had FASD, Cerebral Palsy, and required tube feeding.



Katie McNamara provides parent coordinator services to the Bismarck region. This encompasses 10 counties in and around the Bismarck-Mandan area. Katie has always had a passion for helping others, especially those with disabilities. She worked as a Direct Support Professional for 7 years, mostly working with families. Through that job she learned just how important support is needed for families. The majority of her experience is firsthand. Not only growing up with two brothers with disabilities, she is also a parent of three children, two of whom have disabilities. Navigating the special education system as a parent has really opened her eyes to the difficulties that still exist as well as what amazing

Parent Coordinator Contact Information for:

Penny Nygaard Phone: 701-989-1138 or email at pnnygaard@ndffcmh.com.

Katie McNamara Phone: 701-989-1255 or email at kmcnamara@ndffcmh.com.

growth happens with collaboration. Working with her advocate really empowered her to feel confident in her abilities to advocate for her family's needs. It also inspired her to help other families see their own ability to speak up and feel heard.

Legislative Working Committees in North Dakota

Who is involved with Legislative Working Committees?

Legislative Working Committees are "the pipeline" for people with disabilities, family members, and advocates to network and receive information about disabilities-related legislation. Legislative Working Committees are not "owned" by any one group but are supported by many individuals and organizations that care about people with disabilities.

What's the purpose of Legislative Working Committees?

The goal of Legislative Working Committees is to educate people with disabilities, family members, and advocates about the Legislative process, disability-related Legislation, and the protocol for communicating with State Senators and Representatives.

Do Legislative Working Committees meet virtually?

Virtual Legislative Working Group is hosted weekly during the legislative session and as needed during the interim. To attend these virtual meetings, click [here](#).

Do Legislative Working Committees meet in-person?

Bismarck Legislative Working Group is hosted in-person each week during the session and as needed during the interim. They meet every Saturday morning at the Bismarck Public Library from 10:00 AM to Noon.

How can I get involved?

Contact us to sign-up for email updates and meeting invitations at 701-255-3692 or 701-222-3310, 1-800-472-2670; ND RELAY 711 TTY. Other links include: www.ndpanda.org or panda_intake@nd.gov



NACAC — HELPING KIDS SURVIVE AND THRIVE IN WINTER

North Dakota presents many challenges during the winter, but maintaining the mental health of ourselves and our family members in colder and darker days can be a challenge. The North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) ran an article that we think is filled with good ideas.

Here are some excerpts from that article:

“Winter Blues — Because people with mood disorders, learning disabilities, and sensory processing issues are often highly sensitive to change and transitions, the decrease in daylight hours, colder weather, breaks in routine, and high emotions around the holidays can cause children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs), sensory processing disorder, depression, anxiety, and other challenges to face additional symptoms and obstacles.

For example, as the days get colder, they also get shorter. This change in duration and intensity of sunlight can cause shifts in our internal clocks and increase melatonin production, creating a number of additional symptoms for children with certain disabilities, including:

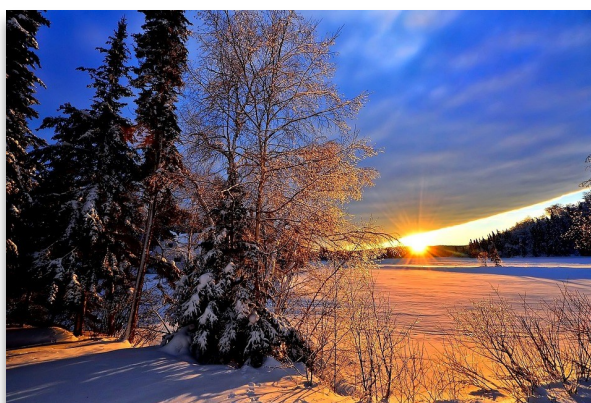
- Changes in circadian rhythm, resulting in struggles to fall asleep or wake up and feelings of lethargy throughout the day
- Feelings of unhappiness, irritability, depression, and anxiety
- Tendencies to withdraw from social events and activities
- Struggles with motivation and productivity”

“Finding Solutions”

Engage in high sensory or high energy indoor activities. A lot of winter blues come from feeling stuck indoors and being unable to burn off energy. Despite the cold weather, you can still create opportunities for play, growth, and making connections such as:

- Having dance breaks throughout the day
- Creating scavenger hunts
- Building forts, setting up tents, and creating miniature cities inside
- Visiting indoor parks and gyms for swimming, trampolining, ice-skating, or other activities
- Doing winter chores together—for children who are able, work like shoveling snow or ice can help burn energy and calm down kids with ADHD or sensory processing issues
- Playing with snow in a sink or bath tub
- Planning a “beach day” where you wear summer gear indoors, play games, and make burgers and hot dogs
- Re-arranging bedroom furniture or painting the walls
- Baking cookies

You can read more ideas from NACAC at <https://wearefamiliesrising.org/>





SYSTEM OF CARE WORK

The North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services System of Care work builds and expands community-based services and supports for children and youth with Serious Emotional Disturbances (SED) and their families. These services and support

include: Outpatient services, 24-hour Crisis Emergency Services, Intensive home-based outreach and case management; Intensive day treatment; Respite Care; Recovery support services; and prepare youth for adult mental health services, postsecondary education and entering the workforce.

PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY INFORMATION

Protection and Advocacy (P&A) is an independent state agency established in 1977 to advance the human and legal rights of people with disabilities. P&A strives to create an inclusive society that values everyone.

Information about the weekly, state-wide virtual updates on disability-related legislation hosted by P&A.

<https://www.ndpanda.org/events/legislative-working-group-virtual>

Information about the weekly, Bismarck in-person updates on disability-related legislation hosted by P&A.

<https://www.ndpanda.org/events/legislative-working-group-person>

The link below is very helpful for getting information about legislative updates (including a grid of disability-related information), policy, and community updates impacting the lives of people with disabilities and their families.

<https://www.ndpanda.org/pa-listserv>



MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY NETWORK — LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

The North Dakota Federation of Families is a member of Mental Health Advocacy Network (MHAN). MHAN are a collection of mental health advocacy organizations, ND Protection & Advocacy, and individuals with lived experience. MHAN advocates for a consumer/family driven mental health system of care that provides an array of service choices that are timely, responsive and effective. Our vision is for every North Dakotan to have access to the right service—whether it be preventative, treatment, or recovery; at the right time—when the service is needed; and at the right place—as near his or her home as possible. MHAN's priorities for the legislative session are placing heavy emphasis on improving the children's mental health system in North Dakota. MHAN has realized that while we are not done making improvements to the adult mental health system, the efforts over the last decade have created a solid foundation for further progress. It is now time to expend the same energy in creating a solid foundation for the North Dakota children's mental health system.

MHAN's priority issues for the legislative session are as follows:

1. Children's Mental Health Services
2. Cross-Disability Waiver & Mental Health
3. Family Support Organizations
4. Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics
5. Peer Support

6. Children's Crisis Stabilization Beds
7. Mobile Crisis Teams
8. Maintain IMD Exclusion
9. Supported Housing
10. New State Hospital



LEGISLATIVE UPCOMING CALENDAR

See the following website for the Legislative Calendar. <https://ndlegis.gov/assembly/69-2025/regular/members>

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Parent and Peer Support Training will be held April 1-3, 2025 at the Comfort Inn Suites in Mandan, ND. We encourage **you to apply** to attend this training session, by contacting Emilie Bahr at bahremilie@nd.gov, Emilie is also happy to answer any questions you may have.

DISABILITY AWARENESS DAY — JANUARY 29, 2025

Disability Awareness Day is being held at the North Dakota State Capitol in Bismarck on Wednesday, January 29th. This is an opportunity for you to meet your legislators as well as other organizations that work with people with disabilities.



Is located at 1720 Burnt Boat Drive, Suite 108, Bismarck, ND 58503
Phone: 701-222-3310