

JUNE 2025



Soaring

MEET OUR NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Hello everyone! I'm Deena Peterson, and I'm thrilled to be joining you as the new Executive Director. I'm stepping into some big shoes, succeeding Therese Davis, and I'm really looking forward to the journey ahead.

While I'm new to the team, I'm not new to the field. For over 26 years, I've had the opportunity to work in various roles, from a Direct Support Professional to a Designated Coordinator, then a Designated Manager, and most recently, as an Executive Director at another Twin Cities agency. Each of these experiences has reinforced my passion for social services and my commitment to making a positive impact on people's lives. It's incredibly important to me to be part of an organization that truly values person-centered thinking and actions.

Although I'm originally from Willmar, Minnesota, I attended the University of St. Thomas, where I earned a degree in Geography. I realized that, while maps are fascinating, my true calling lies in connecting with people and contributing to their well-being.

Success of others, happiness, and meaningful relationships are what drives my work. Outside of work, my husband and our three kids are important to me. We love to travel, go to the cabin, and embark on spontaneous day trips. I also have a hard time sitting still! You can often find me working out, tackling long bike rides with friends, or participating in short triathlons.

I'm eager to get to know each of you, learn from your experiences and work together to continue the great work this team is doing. I'm excited to contribute my skills and embark on this new chapter with all of you.

"The only impossible journey is the one you never begin."

— Tony Robbins

Empowering Abilities. Nurturing Spirits. Caring for Life.

THE LONG MINNESOTA GOODBYE: HAPPY RETIREMENT, THERESE!



From the moment a tiny young woman with Down syndrome waived “Bye, honey!” as Therese left her job interview, her heart was hooked. Therese went home fervently hoping that she would get the job. Since that day in the spring of 1977, she’s been a steadfast advocate for the disability community. We’re so grateful for her leadership. Her legacy of love, advocacy and compassion will remain with us always.

On May 14th, nearly 275 staff, clients, family and friends gathered at the Hyland Chalet in Bloomington for Therese’s retirement party. We were joined by vocalists Patty Peterson and Erin Schwab along with a jazz trio directed by Sean Turner. The venue was beautifully decorated with flowers and photo collages, there were music videos with even more photos, we enjoyed wonderful food and beautiful cakes, and staff and friends had an opportunity to express their gratitude in tributes from the stage.

We celebrated again at our Power of Love Gala on May 20th, which was also Therese’s last official day. She began her farewell speech with a quote from AA Milne and *Winnie the Pooh*; “How lucky am I to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.” She continued, “Here I am, 48 years after taking a part-time job to help pay for my college tuition, knowing absolutely nothing of what I was getting into—saying goodbye to a place, saying goodbye to people who have been interwoven into my life and feel like a part of the very air that I breathe. The people of Wingspan have had a profound effect on my life and of who I am.” She then shared heartfelt stories about a few very special clients and expressed deep gratitude to Wingspan’s board and staff.

Before sharing words of wisdom from *The Velveteen Rabbit*, Therese closed her remarks with, “People understandably wonder, ‘How could anyone stay with one company for 48 years?’ Honestly, one year simply led to the next, each person completing my life in ways I may have never imagined. Teaching me, challenging me, loving me. I have been humbled by the life lessons I have learned from those we serve, and overwhelmed by the selflessness of the many staff, board members and donors who have continuously gone above and beyond to support our mission of helping people to live their best life. I’m grateful for those who refuse to give up on discovering who our clients really are inside. The truth is, we are all a work in progress.”

With gratitude for her leadership and steadfast dedication, we wish Therese the joy and happiness she so richly deserves.





BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR WITH WINGSPAN

Now's your chance to be a part of the official launch of Wingspan's Good Neighbor Program! We believe that our clients deserve to come home to a welcoming outdoor living space, just like their neighbors. As you might have experienced, however, homes, lawns and landscaping all require a lot of work and expense to maintain. While our direct service professionals provide round-the-clock care to the clients living in our group homes, we rely almost entirely on our amazing volunteers to keep our outdoor living spaces fresh and bright.

Our Good Neighbor sponsorship program was created to recognize those who support Wingspan's mission through volunteer projects or by empowering our volunteers and maintenance teams to make a greater impact through monetary and in-kind donations. The program is also here to forge connections with new individuals and businesses who might not know that there's a Wingspan home that could use a helping hand right down the road.



What difference will you make? Whether you're able to support our mission as a volunteer, or able to help us cover some of the costs of tools, gloves, mulch, sod, flowers, paint, lawn services and home maintenance by adopting one or more of our homes, you can make a world of difference for clients like those in our Glenpaul group home (pictured above).

Prefer to support or sponsor a home or simply support us through in-kind donations? Whether it's a gift card to a hardware store or garden center, donated flowers, a leaf blower or hedge trimmer, or making us your United Way charity of choice at your workplace, it can all be put to great use at our homes. We'd be happy to discuss any way that you prefer to give.

Visit our website's Good Neighbor Program page to view our sponsorship levels and learn about available marketing perks like the Good Neighbor window decal pictured above or a lawn sign with your logo on it at one of our sites. Fill out an application, or share it with your neighbors: <https://wingspanlife.org/support/goodneighbor/>

Contact our Marketing & Community Engagement Specialist, Keller Karlstrom, at kkarlstrom@wingspanlife.org if you have any questions about how you can help!



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OUR POWER OF LOVE GALA WAS A RECORD-BREAKING CELEBRATION

Our Wicked/Wizard of Oz-themed event was filled with music, fun videos and inspirational stories, and more as we celebrated our 52nd year of service. Generous sponsors and donors are helping us “defy gravity” with \$195,000 raised to help us meet critical needs and sustain our important programs. Special thanks to our trio of \$15,000 Presenting sponsors, Digital Mass, Geritom Medical, and UMB Bank—and to all who so generously gave. The Mystery Bags sold out within minutes, and the auction was our largest ever. The martini luge for our OZ-mopolitans was popular, as were the OZ-mocktails.

Thank you to: our event team at StageTime production, our emcee Erin Schwab and musicians Sean Turner and Emily Villano, D’Amico’s catering crew at the Metropolitan, our videographers at ThirtyStory, our sound engineer, Chris, the audio visual crew from AV For You, our staff and volunteers, our auction item donors, and our incredible birdhouse artists. Thank you all for partnering in our success!

