

FEBRUARY 2025



# Soaring

## AN URGENT CALL TO ACTION FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Our direct care staff are responsible for assuring the safety and wellbeing of the people we serve every single day. This is a common tagline to describe our services; you've probably read it a thousand times, but these are powerful words and big expectations.

In every single house we have, we serve individuals with complex medical conditions, fragile physical health, and complex psychological challenges. Many of these individuals have a history of trauma and neglect and have varied behavioral challenges. Our staff must ensure that they are safe and cared for every hour of every day. In my opinion, this is important and valuable work.

Every year we meet with and tell our stories to the people that serve us, our Representatives and Senators. We have made some real nonpartisan progress in the past few years, allowing our industry to make strides toward a livable wage for the people doing this important work.

This year, **the Governor's proposed budget would result in a big setback** in the progress we've made. For example, the plan to cut and cap our inflationary adjustment to just 2% could send us back to the height of the staffing crisis that we have just begun to recover from. Over four years we could be looking at 600 million dollars in cuts to disability waiver rates with this proposed budget.

Our starting pay for a direct care staff is \$19.75. Two years ago, it was \$17.50. We feel really proud of this progress, and we sincerely appreciate the support we've received in the past from the Governor and the legislative body. While \$19.75 is better, it's not great, and it's not where we want to stall out. We all know what the price of food and housing is these days. **Those increases do not cap at 2%.**

In addition to attracting people to this work, we want to keep them. A turnover rate of 45% does not contribute to good service. We've had many situations where the ability of long-term staff to notice even a subtle change in health or mood, especially in our elderly and nonverbal clients, has spurred them to take action that has been life-saving to the clients we serve. **Ensuring a living wage is not unreasonable.**

*...Continued on next page*

**Empowering Abilities. Nurturing Spirits. Caring for Life.**

Safety and health is just the foundation of our vision of service, but without that strong foundation, we are weak. On top of that lie our core values of learning, growth, choice, fellowship, integrity, and respect...**\$19.75 to deliver all of that.**

**Please contact your legislators**, and let them know you oppose these cuts to disability services. For further details on how to let your voice be heard please visit the advocacy page on our website at <https://wingspanlife.org/support/advocacy/>. There's a button that will help you easily find your legislators. Two minutes of your time to make a call or send a quick message can make a difference.

## SPOKEN WORD CLASS RESUMES IN FEBRUARY



Did you know that Wingspan was the first provider to offer a Spoken Word and Poetry residency for people with developmental disabilities? Our clients are always up for a challenge. Our Rock the Mic class was such a huge success that we cannot wait for our second residency to begin on Valentine's Day. Spoken word Artist Desdamona is a teaching artist with Compas.org, and we're excited to work with her again. Her process is one of providing inspiration, guidance and scaffolding in the art form of Spoken Word and Hip-Hop. Des has worked in over 300 schools throughout the Midwest and France and has led workshops and residencies in correctional institutions

throughout the U.S. including Shakopee Women's Prison and Stillwater Prison. We want to thank Lead DSP Natt Jaleiba from Harmony House for being an inspiration behind this project from the beginning. Natt recognized the therapeutic properties of writing and speaking and was confident this program would be beneficial. We're delighted that he can join us for phase two. We are grateful to the Minnesota State Arts Board for providing a grant that will cover this enrichment program and several others this year.

Harmony House has also recently started Karaoke Night for clients to perform a song, spoken word, or comedy on Friday nights at our office. We cannot wait to be awestruck. Stay tuned!

This grant is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

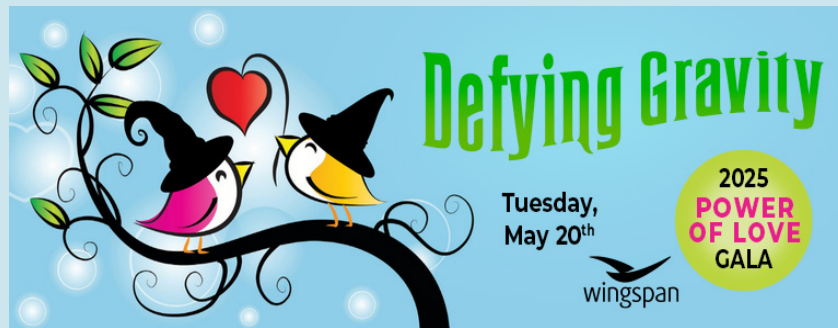


## WINGSPAN WELCOMES A NEW BOARD MEMBER

Lance J. Brock, CPA, is a Partner in assurance services and leads the Assurance Solutions Team at Mahoney, a CPA firm not far from our Plato campus. He has over 17 years of experience in public accounting. Lance's primary area of practice is providing audit and accounting services to clients in the real estate and not-for-profit industries, as well as employee benefit plans.

In April, Lance will become our new Treasurer, replacing Roz Allyson when she retires from Mahoney. We're so grateful to Roz for her support and wish her the very best. Lance is very excited to help Wingspan move its mission forward.





## OUR POWER OF LOVE GALA IS COMING UP SOON!

Defying gravity seems a particularly fitting theme this year. After all, we've been defying gravity for decades: "Staffing crisis and Covid and budget cuts, oh my!" With our mashup of nods to Wicked and Wizard of Oz, we promise another grand night of fun, surprises and inspiration. Whether you can join us in person or in spirit, we hope you'll support our biggest fundraiser of the year. Dress for the Emerald City and grab a complimentary "**OZ-mopolitan**" during the social hour while you bid on the auction.



This year's co-chairs are Bruce and Barb Smith. Bruce has served on our Board for many years and his brother, Mike, is one of our residents.

Back by popular demand is our emcee Erin Schwab who will encourage you sing along to "**Popular**" from Wicked. She'll be joined by vocalist Emily Villano and our Glee Club Music Director, Sean Turner. This wonderful trio participated in our Glee Club concert in November; we'll feature a concert clip at the gala.

Our silent auction will go live two weeks before the event, so you'll have plenty of time to find your must-have items and fabulous hand-painted bird houses. Thank you to our volunteer artists who are already hard at work. We are now accepting donations of gift cards, theme baskets and wines and spirits.



Special thanks to the sponsors who jumped onboard right away. We thank Presenting sponsors, Digital Mass, Inc. and Minnesota Bank and Trust for their \$15,000 level sponsorships. At \$6,000, our Diamond Plus level sponsors are John and Jan Thames. Our Diamond level sponsors are Christensen Group, the Eickhoff family, and South Robert Street Business Association at \$5,000. At the \$3,000 Ruby level we currently have Dual Citizen Brewing, Mark & Tracy Mooney, Jeff and Wendy Thames, and Wealth Enhancement Group. Our \$3,000 In-Kind Event Production Sponsor is Stagetime Productions. Thank you to Bill and Betsy Cook for their \$2,500 Sapphire sponsorship. We thank Kim and Tyler Wolff and Matrix Foundation for their sponsorships at the \$1,500 Gold level. Our Topaz level sponsor at \$1,000 is Graystone Morgan Stanley. At the \$600 Silver level, we thank the Friedman family. We welcome Myslajek Kemp & Spencer LTD as A \$500 first-time Social Hour sponsor along with Board Member Mary Anderson and Royal Star Furniture returning at that level. Thank you to Bronze sponsors Cady Business Technologies and MSI Metro Sales, Inc.

Sponsorships start at \$300 and individual tickets are just \$100. Call 651-888-3112 or contact Development Officer Darolyn Gray at [dgray@wingspanlife.org](mailto:dgray@wingspanlife.org).



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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- An urgent Call to Action by Therese Davis regarding the Governor's budget proposal. Raise your voice along with the growing number of providers and advocates who are pushing back against Governor Tim Waltz's proposed disability service changes. Trevor Turner, public policy director for the Minnesota Council on Disability, recently said, "When you don't have the automatic inflationary adjustment, then you're basically just balancing the budget on the backs of people with disabilities."
- A sneak preview of Power of Love Gala 2025 and current sponsors. Save the date: May 20, 2025
- Enrichment programming for 2025 kicks off with Spoken Word & Poetry class
- Wingspan welcomes a new Board member



**Join us May 20th for a  
"Wicked" good time!**