

SEP 2025



Soaring

“FIRST THINGS FIRST”: REFLECTIONS FROM DEENA PETERSON

I am thankful for everyone who has so warmly welcomed me into Wingspan’s family. Since joining as the new Executive Director in May, I have enjoyed getting to know our Board and Executive team members, our Program Directors and Direct Support Professionals, our maintenance team and hardworking staff of the Plato office, many of our families and donors and, most of all, visiting our homes and meeting our wonderful clients.

One of the things that attracted me most to Wingspan, is the intentional focus on helping clients live their best life, truly putting our mission into action each and every day. I have experienced so many “firsts”—from attending my first Power of Love gala in May to my first annual formal dance with clients in June; observing the interaction with our wonderful teaching artists and reading the introspective verses clients wrote in the Spoken Word & Poetry book and watching them create beautiful drawings and paintings in our summer residency classes; joining in the fun of our annual August picnic and seeing how much clients enjoyed singing and dancing with “Elvis.”

I am looking forward to more “firsts” including attending my first Beer Choir on September 5th, and to walking Lake Bde Maka Ska for our Made in the Shade Fundraiser September 20th. Then on to my first Staff Appreciation Day in October and our Halloween Party; onto my first Glee Club concert in November and my first client holiday party in December. It is so easy to love a job that feels like more fun than work most days, surrounded by people who help make our clients shine like stars.

“Being a star just means you find your own special place and shine where you are”

— Dolly Parton



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MEET OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Our board members contribute time, expertise and financial gifts, and we are so grateful for their dedication. We'd like to express our sincere gratitude to Mary Anderson for her past three years of board service and wish her the best with her busy career. Mary will always be part of our Wingspan family. We have recently welcomed two new members to our board, and both have family members served.



Richard Justman, MD

Dick and his wife, Sue, have a son, JT, at Humble house and have a keen appreciation for the work of our Specialized Services Unit. Prior to retiring, Dick was a medical director of UnitedHealthcare where he was accountable for medical technology assessment, clinical support of pharmacy programs and clinical support of benefit administration. Dick had practiced pediatrics in Minneapolis for fifteen years before joining UnitedHealthcare. He has also served on numerous medical committees.



Michael Widdifield

Michael's nephew, Peter, lives at Fairview house. Michael, his wife Jennifer and many members of the extended Widdifield family are very involved with Peter and with Wingspan. In fact, Michael has joined him on stage several times for our Glee Club concerts. In addition to owning and managing several commercial and residential properties, Michael is an account manager for iSpine Clinics/Algos Health. He also currently serves as an Elder on the board of Grace Church in Eden Prairie.

HAPPINESS ON A STICK

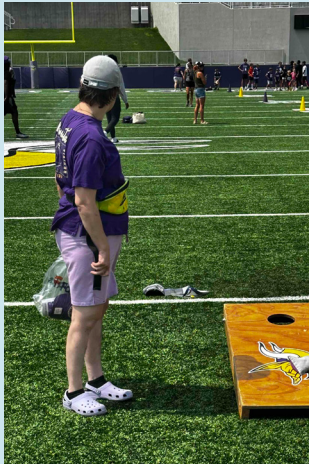
A huge thank you to our friends at the Minnesota State Fair for donating 195 tickets this year so that our clients and accompanying staff could go to this beloved festival of food and fun. Clients played games, listened to music, visited the animals and tried their favorite foods. We also thank our staff for getting our clients to and from the fair safely—there is a lot of effort and planning that goes into these outings.



WE HOPE TO SEE YOU AT MADE IN THE SHADE

There is still time to make a donation within your means! At 10am Saturday morning, September 20th, Lake Bde Maka Ska will be turned into a sea of nearly 800 beautiful green t-shirts as clients, staff, family and friends from Wingspan and six similar organizations gather for our annual 'Walk, Run, Roll.' Each organization raises its own fund through sponsorships and individual gifts, but shares the cost of related expenses to keep expenses down. The event always feels like a big family reunion. The food and entertainment are free.

You can designate your gift to a specific home or to our general fund to help with many different needs—from furniture and appliances to art, music and fun activities for clients. We are grateful for the many contributions that have come in already and thankful for our sponsors, including Our House of Minnesota, Mark & Tracy Mooney, Team Thames: John, Jan & Progeny, UCare, the Eickhoff Family, the Horberg family, the Larson Family, Bruce & Debbie Homan, Geritom, Lotus Pharmacy, Mahoney | CPAs and Advisors, the Hamer Family, the Landreville Family, David & Jessica Widdifield, and Michael and Jennifer Widdifield



WINGSPAN FANS HIT VIKINGS TRAINING CAMP

There are a lot of Vikings fans living in Wingspan homes, and thanks to an amazing gift of tickets by donor Mike Mooney, many got a chance to see their team prepare for the season at training camp this year! Clients enjoyed meeting mascot Viktor the Viking, playing yard games, learning about the team's history and of course watching their favorite players out on the practice field!

Mike Mooney has been a longtime supporter of Wingspan, and our resident Vikings fans couldn't be more grateful for his generous donations that give them the opportunity to attend team experiences, like the Vikings Draft Party, training camp, preseason games and ticket donations to our Power of Love Gala. Donations like Mike's put smiles on the faces of our clients and create lasting memories.



IOWA MINISTRY CO-OP RETURNS TO BEAUTIFY WINGSPAN YARDS

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After making a stunning difference beautifying the yards at four of Wingspan's group homes last summer, Iowa-based Cultivate Co-op returned to the Twin Cities and made us one of their service project hosts once again. On July 23rd, Middle schoolers from Iowa and Nebraska braved rain showers at our Aurora group home to weed the landscaping, trim plants, rake leaves and use teamwork to haul some mighty big branches! We were truly rained out of our outing at our County Road D group home in St. Paul, but both the sun and two more groups of students were out at our Woodbridge 17th home and County Road D the next day. Even with the rain-out, a total of 58 students and leaders spent a combined 148.5 hours transforming our group home yards.

Each yard beautification project included time for team leaders to call for a snack break and circle up with their students. I was given the opportunity to speak to each team and share Wingspan's mission and history, and I admired the group discussions that followed, touching on the importance of volunteerism, community and the tangible difference the students were making for Wingspan's clients and the staff who care for them. We're all deeply grateful to Cultivate Co-op for their continued partnership and to the students who traveled so far to help!

By Keller Karlstrom
Marketing & Community Engagement Specialist

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