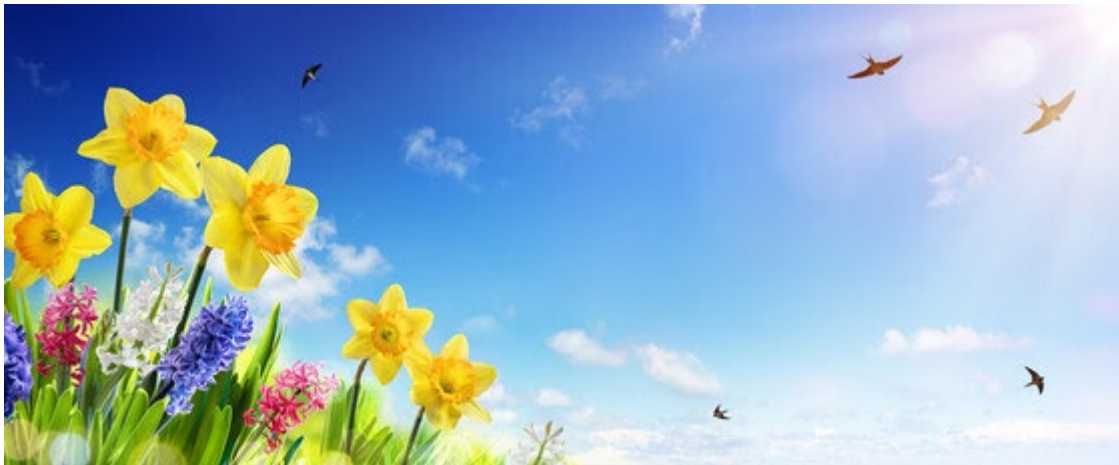


Social Security Advocacy Services Newsletter

March/April 2023

Social Security Advocacy Services (SSAS) is dedicated to assisting Minnesotans with the Social Security disability benefits process so they can secure stable housing, live in dignity, and achieve their highest potential.



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Social Security Advocacy Services team member spotlight

The SSAS team expanded its services to Minnesotan's who are deaf, hard of hearing, and Deafblind in December 2022 when we hired Mai Vang.

As the American Sign Language (ASL) Social Security lead specialist, Mai will provide Social Security advocacy services to the deaf and hard of hearing community in Minnesota to help answer their questions regarding their Social Security benefits. Mai hopes that her position will fill in a gap within the accessible services at DHS for those who use ASL as their main communication method. Mai comes to DHS after three years working for ThinkSelf Adult Basic Education and Advocacy, a deaf-led organization, supporting and providing independent living skills to deaf adults. Even before that, Mai's experience working with Deaf Mentor Family Services within Lutheran Social Services made her realize she wanted to get into human services as her career.



Mai is currently a board member for United Hmong with Disabilities, a newly established national organization that focuses on educating the Hmong community about disabilities. Mai is also on the Minnesota Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf advisory committee that focuses on how to improve American Sign Language interpreting in Minnesota.

When not working, Mai likes to cheer for her kid when he's playing hockey or baseball. She enjoys spending time with her family and their dog, Coke, visiting state parks to hike, dining in new restaurants, and taking road trips to visit cities. One of Mai's goals is to visit all state parks in Minnesota.

Contact Mai at Mai.Vang1@state.mn.us or by videophone at 612-470-1072 with any ASL questions or client needs.

Grantee spotlight

This section of our newsletter spotlights a Department of Human Services-contracted Social Security Advocacy Services grantee in hopes of fostering partnerships and open communication among all grantees.



Agency Name: Disability Partners

Contact information: 651-633-4882; info@disabilitypartners.net

Website: www.disabilitypartners.net

Service provided:

Disability Partners is a small law firm located in St. Paul who serves clients throughout the metro area and statewide. Their attorneys and diverse staff help people at all stages of the Social Security disability process from initial application to representing clients at hearing, the Appeals Council, and also in Federal District court.

Disability Partners has two attorneys, Asha Sharma who has been representing clients for 18 years, and Paul McGrath, who has represented clients for ten years. With a tougher climate than ever for clients with disabilities, they are assertive in how they represent their clients, especially at the hearing level where they appear before administrative law judges.

Disability Partners welcomes the opportunity to work with fellow Social Security Advocacy Services colleagues. Feel free to reach out to them if you have questions or wish to refer clients who are at the hearing, Appeals Council, or Federal District court levels.

Contract spotlight: Sending client data securely

It is critical that emails containing client data (client name, date of birth, social security numbers, etc.) are sent to DHS staff encrypted. Sending client data securely can be found in your contract under Clause 10 - *Information and Security* and the subsequent Attachment A – *Data Sharing Agreement and Business Associate Agreement Terms and Conditions*. Clause C4 under encryption states, “Grantee must use encryption to store, transport or transmit Protected Information and must not use unencrypted email to transmit Protected Information”. If you have any questions, contact the Operations Manager, Shawn Tobias, at Shawn.Tobias@state.mn.us or call 651-431-6158.



It is very important that you are aware of all the services and deliverables within your agency's contract with the Department of Human Services. **Note:** If you do not have a copy of your agency's current contract, please contact your assigned coordinator for a copy.

SSAS invoice approval summary

February 2023

- A total of 87 invoices submitted by 11 grantees were approved.
- 67 were initial applications/reconsiderations, 15 were at the ALJ hearing level, 2 were at the Appeals Council level, and 3 were continuing disability reviews.

March 2023

- A total of 118 invoices submitted by 16 grantees were approved.
- 87 were initial applications/reconsiderations, 24 was at the ALJ hearing level, 2 were at the Appeals Council level, 4 were continuing disability reviews, and 1 was a continuing disability review at the ALJ level.

New tip sheet for SSAS payment system

All users of the Social Security Advocacy Services (SSAS) payment system can manage account information as needed. In the manage your account section, users can update their profile, email address, and password. Follow this step-by-step [tip sheet](#) on how to make these changes.

If you have additional questions, please contact the SSAS system administrator Ty Morris at ty.morris@state.mn.us or call 651-431-6271.

SSAS survey results

In January 2023, the SSAS team asked grantees for feedback about how effectively we issued our last request for proposal (RFP), negotiated insurance and contracts, onboarded SSAS grantees, and provided technical assistance (TA) meetings. We received 41 responses out of 186 which was a 22% response rate. A huge "Thank You!" to all who responded. Please review the [full summary](#) for more details of what we heard.



Here are some highlights:

- 95% of respondents found the RFP application format easy to understand and complete.

- 58% of respondents were satisfied with their onboarding experience by their SSAS coordinator
- 47% of respondents were extremely satisfied using the SSAS payment system

As advocates, you are on the front lines doing caring and complex SSA work. We appreciate you! Our vision is to assist people with the Social Security disability process so they can live in dignity and achieve their highest potential. In some cases, this is a life-saving benefit. The more effectively we can support you, the better access people have to this service.

New SOAR local lead



KJ Johnson completed the SSDI/SSI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) Leadership Academy in Tucson, AZ in February. In this training, SOAR leaders were given in-depth instruction about implementing and supporting SOAR programs, as well as guidance and resources for providing SOAR technical training at the local level. KJ is now the SOAR local lead for Ramsey County.

In this new role, they are available to other SOAR providers for technical assistance regarding Social Security disability claims. They can also provide training to other SSAS grantees who would like more information or are interested in implementing the SOAR model. Providers do not have to be within Ramsey County to reach out for training.

KJ is the Veteran SOAR supervisor for the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs and a member of the state's Social Security Advocacy Committee. Prior to this position, they worked for the Social Security Administration for eight years, where they were a claims specialist and claims technical expert in both Retirement, Survivors, and Disability Insurance benefits and Supplemental Security Income.

KJ can be reached at kelsy.johnson@state.mn.us.

SAMHSA new funding opportunity

SAMHSA Announces \$15.84 Million in Treatment Assistance for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

SAMHSA's Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) is now accepting applications for a new funding opportunity called: Treatment for Individuals with Serious Mental Illness (SMI), Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED), or Co-Occurring Disorders (CODs) Experiencing Homelessness.

The purpose of this program is to provide comprehensive, coordinated, and evidenced-based services for individuals, youth, and families with a serious mental illness, serious emotional disturbance, or co-occurring disorder who are experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of

homelessness (e.g., people exiting jail or prison without a place to live). One of the grant's supported activities is connecting program participants to enrollment resources for health insurance, Medicaid, and mainstream benefits such as SSI/SSDI. Applications are due by Friday, May 05, 2023. [Access full details of the funding announcement and application materials.](#)

Work History Report training

On Thursday, April 27, 2023 from 2-3:30 p.m. Asha Sharma and Paul McGrath from Disability Partners will be presenting on ***How to Complete the Work History Report***. This training will include a brief overview of the Social Security Administration's 5-step sequential evaluation process and how this report is used at step 4 of the evaluation process. They will also discuss composite jobs, changes in the job assignments within the same employment, and unsuccessful work attempts.

This will be a great training for those who are just starting out or for those who would like a refresher training.

Here is the [link](#) to register for this training. This training will not be recorded.

Social Security Advocacy Services team trainings

Technical Assistance (TA) bi-monthly sessions

On the third **THURSDAY** in odd months from 1:30 to 3 p.m., the Social Security Advocacy Services team offers trainings and opportunities for Q&A to our contracted Social Security advocates.



Our next technical assistance training will be **Thursday, May 18, 2023**. John Petroskas, Policy Specialist with the Department of Human Services, will present on *Minnesota's Homeless Population*. This presentation will provide an overview of the homeless population in Minnesota including why people become homeless, services available for them, and effective ways to engage with the homeless community. You can register for this technical assistance session at this [link](#).

If you are interested in presenting at an upcoming TA session on any topic related to Social Security advocacy services, please contact Tony Reynero at antonio.reynero@state.mn.us

Social Security Administration updates



Annual report

The Social Security Board of Trustees recently released its annual report on the financial status of the Social Security Trust funds. For further information, read the Social Security Administration [press release](#).

National disability forum

On Wed. April 19 from noon to 2:00 p.m., the Social Security Administration will be hosting a virtual national disability forum on the topic: *Focusing on Aspects of Childhood Disability and Childhood SSI Part 1*. This is a listen and view only forum. To participate in the forum, you must register by Mon. April 17. This [link](#) will provide you with further information about the forum and how to register.

Telehealth consultative examinations

In an [emergency message](#) dated 4/4/2023, the Social Security Administration announced changes in the policy and procedures for telehealth consultative examinations conducted after the final day of the COVID-19 public health emergency, May 11, 2023. These changes include general guidelines, types of examinations, agreements and requirements.

Program Operations Manual System (POMS) recent changes

Effective 4/5/2023, multiple updates were made in sections DI 28010 Continuing Disability Review Cases regarding medical improvement and related medical issues. This [link](#) provides you with details of all the changes.

Social Security Advocacy Services resources

Additional resources can be found at the Minnesota Department of Human Services webpage [Social Security Advocacy Services: Policies and procedures for contracted grantees](#).
