2014 Annual Report

Our Mission
Their Moments

MSS

Midwest Special Services, Inc.

Life isn't perfect. But there are perfect moments.

The year 2014 was a landmark for Midwest Special Services in that we turned 65 years old. On November 1, we had a wonderful 65th Anniversary Celebrate! event that was held at the University of St. Thomas Student Center to cap off the year.

Preparing for the Celebrate! event gave us an opportunity to reflect on our work over the past 65 years. As staff pored over photos and documents collected from our past, we began to relive wonderful moments that we had shared with our clients. I can vividly recall many times when clients sought me out to share the news that they had gotten their first paying job in the community. Their excitement was indescribable. I can still feel the emotion that I experienced when I watched clients swell with pride as we hung their beautiful paintings in the hallway so that everyone could appreciate them. You could watch their confidence grow. I don't know who was more excited — the clients or me! And I remember catching the eyes of a client who was nonverbal who, with a single look, communicated his appreciation to a staff person who had treated him gently and with respect.

Our staff is blessed to have shared so many exceptional moments with our clients over the years. Each time we experience one of these moments we are reminded of our mission to support our clients so they can reach their dreams. In this report, you will read about a few of the thousands of "mission moments" we were fortunate enough to share with our clients over the past year.

At our Celebrate! event, we announced that in order to be most successful, we will need the financial support of the people who know us and our clients. This is a new venture for us. For many years, we have depended almost exclusively on government funding sources. These government sources are being stretched these days and it is difficult to do what we need to do with only their help. Therefore, as an agency, we will be reaching out to the community for additional support. We hope we can count on all of you to help us as we help our clients.

The needs and desires of our clients are many and varied, and responding to them will require us to "think outside the box" and to be very creative. We have a wonderful group of staff members who can do just that. This makes for exciting times as we move past our 65th Anniversary into the future of our agency.

Thank you for your continued support.

Lyth J. Hartz
President

Our Vision

Through the advocacy and person-centered services provided by MSS, our clients will be regarded as full, vital and contributing members of society.

Our Mission

The mission of MSS is to serve adults with disabilities by supporting them in the achievement of their full potential and as vital and contributing members of the community.

2014 by the numbers

2	Consecutive "Exemplary" CARF ratings for our Creative Arts Program
6	Locations
7	Programs
11	Consecutive three-year CARF accreditations
44	Clients who found jobs found in the community in 2014
85	The oldest person served in 2014
96%	Overall stakeholder satisfaction rating
98%	Stakeholders who thought they were treated with respect and dignity
667	Adults with intellectual and physical disabilities served in 2014
735	eTrac® licenses sold
8,982	Hours spent engaged in our communities as volunteers and citizens
32,404	Hours worked through our community-based employment program

"You guys are great. You do so much for me and the other clients at MSS. You guys listen and let us say our views even if you don't always agree with them. You're respectful and supportive. For that, I thank you. We all do."

— Alex Junge, proudly supported by the MSS Team in St. Paul

It only takes
a moment to
change a life.

Who we serve

Midwest Special Services (MSS) has supported adults with disabilities for over 65 years. It's our mission to help them experience life to the fullest through creative expression, meaningful work, increased independence, social activities and community involvement.

At MSS, we believe that every person, regardless of age, ability or gender, brings special talents, interests and goals to their experiences at MSS. In 2014, MSS served 667 adults with disabilities who ranged in age from 18 to 85. While the majority of the people we serve have intellectual or developmental disabilities, we also support adults living with mental health issues, significant medical and physical disabilities, traumatic brain injuries and other challenges.

Where we are

MSS serves adults with intellectual and physical disabilities through six locations in the Twin Cities metro area: St. Paul, Eagan, Apple Valley, Brooklyn Park, Shoreview and Oakdale.

We also offer specialized programs that support the unique needs of adults with autism at our Eagan and Brooklyn Park locations and our award-winning Creative Arts program is thriving at our expanded arts and performance center in Eagan. Of course, autism services and facilitated creative arts opportunities are available at all locations.

You'll also find the people we serve, and the MSS staff that support them, working at local businesses throughout the Twin Cities area, volunteering with local organizations, attending community events, and showcasing their talents and creativity.

What we do

At MSS, we see possibilities — and abilities — in every person who enters our doors. We believe that, with a little creativity, we have unlimited opportunities to help each client make the most of his or her unique abilities, talents and interests. Our mission is to find ways to help them achieve their dreams.

MSS provides services in five primary areas: Vocational Services, Autism Support, Creative Arts, Day Training and Habilitation (DT&H) and CARES, a program for older individuals with disabilities. We also offer opportunities for caregivers to share their stories and learn from each other, MSS staff and other experts.

Day Training & Habilitation Programs

At MSS, we believe that each person is an individual with unique interests, abilities and goals. It's our job to help them find their strengths and develop a unique strategy that makes the most of them. In 2014, 68 adults with intellectual and physical disabilities accessed our DT&H programs for ongoing support, physical care, self-care and independent living skills training, employment assessments, creative arts and social opportunities. DT&H participants also receive training in self-advocacy, communication and interpersonal skills.

Charming. Sincere. Funny. Inspirational. However, of all the words that people use to describe Randy, the one he likes best is "artist."

After years of struggling to find a program that was a good fit, Randy checked out MSS in early 2015 in search of a supportive environment that would allow him to focus on doing what he loves — creating striking photorealistic paintings and drawings and connecting with the people around him. He decided to give MSS a try and quickly realized he had found the right place.

In the short time that Randy has been with MSS, he's made the most of the arts-focused environment at our Eagan location. With the support of MSS staff, Randy has finally found a safe place where he can be himself and process the thoughts and emotions that sometimes overwhelm him. He's thriving as a person and an artist, with a growing portfolio and growing recognition in the local arts community. In fact, he was one of two local artists chosen to display their work at the new CHS Field gallery during the opening game of the St. Paul Saints.

Randy is a passionate ambassador for MSS and eagerly shares his art and experiences with MSS with newcomers and visitors. And we're passionate about Randy's success.

It only takes
a moment
for inspiration
to strike.

It only takes
a moment
for horizons
to expand.

Like many people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), Ryan struggles with transitions. In 2012, Ryan experienced a series of life transitions that would overwhelm even the strongest soul! Fortunately, MSS was there to help smooth the way.

For Ryan, who struggles with ASD, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and social anxieties, graduating from high school in June 2012 meant leaving behind the safety, structure and routines that had shaped his life for 21 years. That fall, he enrolled in the specialized Autism program at our Brooklyn Park location. Then, in February 2013, he moved from his parents' home into a group home with several other young men.

With the support of his MSS team, Ryan is thriving in his new life. He's eagerly exploring his interests in art and music and has had several pieces of his artwork displayed at MSS art shows. Ryan has also discovered a passion for the performing arts. In 2013, Ryan wrote and had a starring role in the *MSS Movie* and a role in the *The Art of Working*, an MSS co-production with Upstream Arts that focuses on cultivating the important soft skills needed to obtain and maintain employment.

With new skills and confidence, Ryan's horizons have now expanded to include a job in the community.

Ryan is proud to be writing the script for his own life.
We're proud to be his stage crew.

Autism Program

We understand that Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) affect each person differently and require an individualized response that reflects each person's unique challenges. MSS Autism staff members focus on helping adults with ASD develop daily living skills, social skills and anxiety management techniques in a safe, supportive, environment. In 2014, more than 26 adults with ASD participated in our nationally recognized Autism program. Autism support services are available at all MSS locations, including specialized centers in Eagan and Brooklyn Park.

Vocational Services

Meaningful employment means something different to each person that we support. In 2014, MSS supported the employment dreams of more than 250 individuals, including 44 who found competitive jobs in the community. MSS also offered employment opportunities for clients who were interested in working but preferred or required more structure and support. More than 220 individuals worked on one of 33 MSS mobile work crews and many others worked in our 350,000 square foot fulfillment center and recycling program.

Rita has been a valued employee at our St. Paul location for over 28 years. Some days, Rita worked on fulfillment projects. On others, she supported our St. Paul programs by washing dishes — her favorite job — and other important tasks.

Over the years, MSS staff regularly nudged Rita to join an MSS work crew to find out what it would be like to work in the community. Nervous about new situations, Rita always politely refused. A pattern emerged: Nudge, refuse, nudge, refuse.

In April 2014, something changed. Rita said "yes." Bolstered by assurances that Denise, an MSS job coach, would be with her every step of the way, Rita decided the time was right to join a work crew. Rita was relieved to discover that she wasn't expected to do things perfectly the first time and, with Denise's guidance, quickly learned new job responsibilities.

Today, Rita is a valued member of the MSS work crews. While dishwashing and cleaning remain her favorite activities, she's becoming more open to other new experiences and has tried out other jobs. She's now working in the community at least twice a week. Rita's work ethic hasn't gone unnoticed and, after just a few short months, she has quickly become the go-to person when a crew needs more workers. Can community employment be far behind?

Rita is proud of her accomplishments.
And we're proud of her courage to try to new things.

It only takes
a moment
to make
a change.

It only takes
a moment to
stop and smell
the roses.

Since coming to MSS in the spring of 2013, Alex has evolved into something of a Renaissance man. An artist, actor, poet and writer, his accomplishments include playing a major creative role on MSS' movie project, *Sleeping Between Worlds*. The feature-length film will debut in December 2015 and will be entered into the Reelabilities Film Festival. Alex also has written many poems, including "The Spiny Buffalo Fern," which reflects his other passion — gardening.

When MSS asked for new programming ideas, Alex lobbied to expand the MSS gardening program. The result: A community garden called the "Garden of Peas, Love, and Happiness," as well as a hydroponic gardening experiment.

Alex also turned his passion for plants into community employment earlier this year when he stopped at a local florist to purchase an orchid. Alex is very social and enjoys talking about his passion. His outgoing personality paid off when Alex began talking with the shop's owner. She was so impressed with his extensive knowledge of plants that she asked if he'd be interested in working at the shop. With employment supports from MSS, he began working several hours a day, two days a week. This schedule later increased to five days a week.

Alex has blossomed into a young man who gets things done. We're proud to have nurtured the seed.

Creative Arts Program

Our Creative Arts program continues to earn national honors, including being recognized as "Exemplary" by CARF in 2014. This is the second time that CARF has highlighted the program as an exceptional practice. The MSS Creative Arts program encourages artistic expression by allowing participants to explore the visual arts, digital arts and theater arts. In 2014, more than 125 MSS clients participated in arts programming at all six locations, including our new studio and performance space at our Eagan facility.

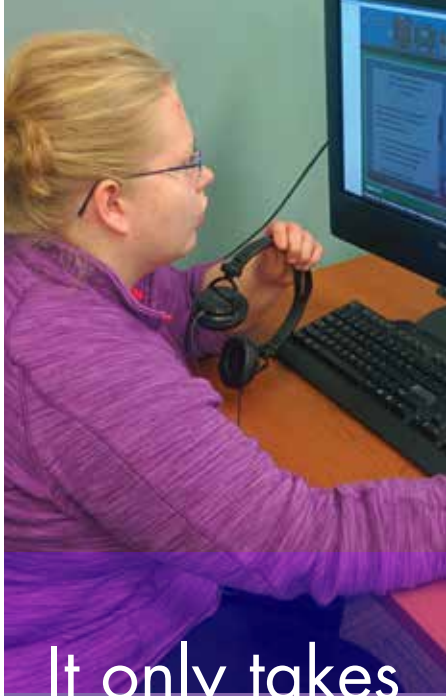
eTrac®

***eTrac* is an innovative online curriculum created by MSS to teach critical job search and job retention skills to individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment. Unlike traditional job search training programs, *eTrac* focuses on the unique job search and employment challenges encountered by people with disabilities. Nearly 700 organizations purchased *eTrac* licenses through the end of 2014.**

A job means something different to everyone. For Hannah, it means independence.

When Hannah enrolled at our Oakdale Center in November 2014, she made it clear that getting a job in the community was her top priority. Within a few days, she was enrolled in *eTrac* and well on her way to achieving that goal. After graduating from *eTrac* in December, Hannah began implementing what she'd learned about searching for jobs. Her MSS counselor helped her with resumé writing, finding job openings, applications and practice interviews. But it was Hannah's preparation and work ethic that landed her a job working as a dietary aide 2-3 days a week at a local nursing home just a few weeks later. Since then, she's steadily increased her hours and now can be found working 5 days a week.

Hannah is working hard to become independent. And we're working hard to support her dream.



It only takes a moment for a career to begin.

CARES Program

MSS is committed to serving the needs of all adults with disabilities, including older adults who prefer a more relaxed environment. In 2014, more than 30 individuals with developmental disabilities or significant health issues participated in CARES (Continuing Achievement for Retirees and Seniors). CARES staff is trained to deal with issues that many people with disabilities face as they age, including Alzheimer's Disease and dementia. CARES participants can choose to participate in planned activities, volunteer opportunities, exercise programs, or simply relax and socialize.

Kim loves to talk about the latest Vikings or Twins game with her friends at CARES, a program for older or retired adults with disabilities. This friendly, outgoing sports fan is a far cry from the quiet, isolated and disengaged woman who enrolled in CARES in 2006 after moving from the MSS Employment Program due to early-onset Alzheimer's. While change is often difficult for people with Development Disabilities, Kim's transition was further complicated by memory challenges.

Although it took some time, CARES staff eventually coaxed Kim out of her shell. Today, Kim is very social and engaged in her surroundings, often seeking out peers and staff to chat or play cards. And, with increased activity and mental stimulation, her memory has improved to the point where she's able to take attendance every day — her favorite responsibility.

Kim loves to share her passion for sports. And we're delighted to cheer her on.

"It only takes a moment for the spark to return."

It only takes a moment to know you belong.

Caregiver Connections

"This group has been a godsend to me. For far too many years I was looking for a support group for parents of adults with developmental disabilities to no avail. Through networking I've finally found exactly what I've needed — support and information from others (including occasional speakers). Support from people who truly understand. I am so lucky to have found this group — more so, these wonderful, compassionate, caring people."

— Nancy C.

Caregivers play a critical role in the life of an adult with intellectual and physical disabilities. There's no question that caregiving can be rewarding. There's also no question that these responsibilities can be isolating, exhausting, confusing, overwhelming, even frightening at times.

While support groups and resources abound for parents of children with disabilities, few exist to support the people who care for adults with disabilities. MSS responded to this challenge by creating Caregiver Connections. Caregiver Connections provides a forum for caregivers, family members and friends to share experiences and learn about the unique issues and challenges that come with caring for an adult with disabilities, such as aging, benefits, employment, independent living, community inclusion, legal rights, relationships and sexuality.

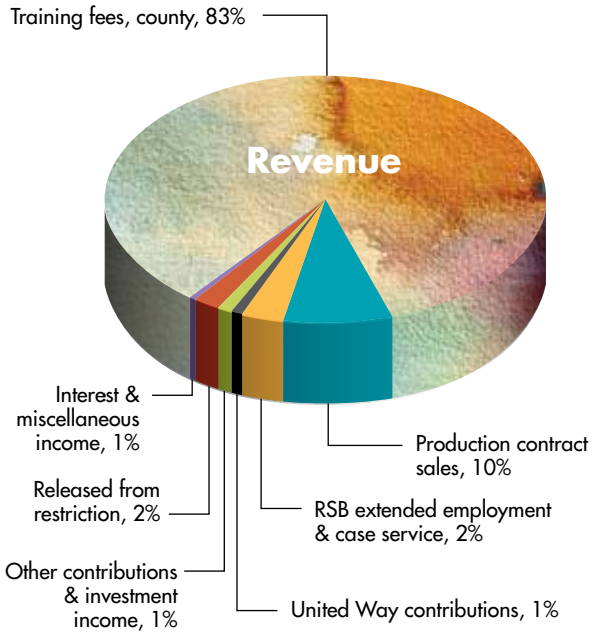
Caregivers sometimes feel isolated and overwhelmed. We're honored to help lighten the load.

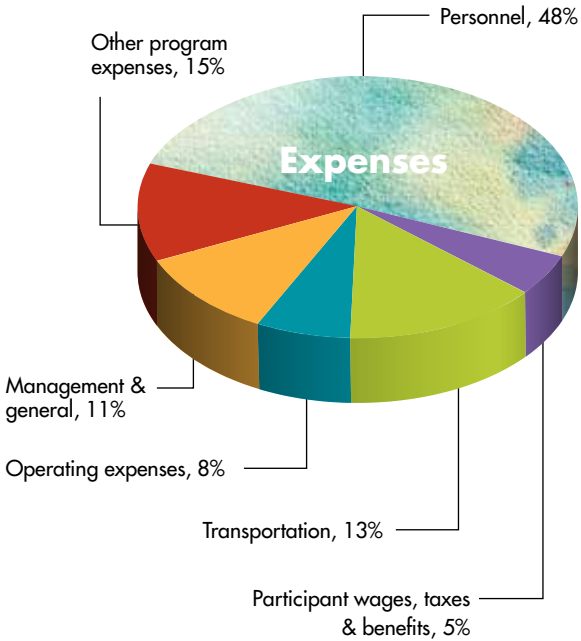
Celebrate! 2014

MSS had a lot to celebrate in 2014 — thousands of client successes...new programs and locations...65 years of service...a renewed energy and commitment to our mission. And celebrate we did!

On November 1, 2014, nearly 200 MSS friends and supporters gathered to Celebrate! Thanks to the generosity of attendees and a bidding frenzy at the auction, MSS raised more than $32,000, including more than $25,000 that was earmarked specifically for iPads and other user-friendly technology. The event was so well-received that plans are already underway for the 2015 event. Mark your calendars to join us on October 24 for Celebrate! 2015.

Financial Highlights





Statement of Unrestricted Activities

Year ending December 31, 2014

Revenue	2014 Agency
Training fees, county	$9,874,157
Production contract sales	1,122,918
RSB extended employment & case service	230,965
United Way contributions	106,920
Other contributions & investment income	117,967
Released from restriction	286,044
Interest & miscellaneous income	145,488
Total revenue	**$11,884,459**
Expenses	
Personnel	$5,713,818
Participant wages, taxes & benefits	561,519
Transportation	1,557,934
Operating expenses	914,156
Management & general	1,297,852
Other program expenses	1,864,668
Total expenses	**$11,909,947**
Net Operating	**$ (25,488)**
Unrestricted – Non-Operating	
Impairment of asset held for envestment	$ –
Other contributions (special event)	48,173
Trust & endowment investment income (loss)	8,670
Net non-operating	**$ 56,843**

Statement of Financial Position

Year ending December 31, 2014

Assets	2013
Cash & investments	$ 617,839
Accounts receivable & prepaid expenses	1,206,830
Land, building & equipment, net of depreciation	2,486,317
Intangible assets	369,951
O'Neil Endowment Fund	1,123,545
Total assets	**$ 5,804,482**
Liabilities and Net Assets	
Liabilities	
Current liabilities	$1,087,740
Long-term liabilities	328,055
Total liabilities	**$ 1,415,795**
Net Assets	
Unrestricted:	
Undesignated	$3,206,317
Board designated for O'Neil Endowment Fund	–
Temporarily restricted	412,064
Permanently restricted	770,306
Total net assets	**$ 4,388,687**
Total liabilities and net assets	**$ 5,804,482**

2014 Donors

Midwest Special Services would like to thank everyone — clients, staff, volunteers, donors and business partners — who contributed to our success in 2014.

We sincerely apologize for any errors or omissions in our list of donors and funders. Please call 651.793.4126 with any corrections.

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It only takes a moment to say "I'm in!"

Our mission is to help the people we serve experience memorable, meaningful moments. Your financial support helps to make that happen. Can we count on you?

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