

## Options: Interstate Resource Center for Independent Living Volume MMXX, No. 1, Spring 2020



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## The Promises Made and the Promises Kept as We Ponder the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act

On July 26, 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) with bipartisan support was signed into law by then President George H. W. Bush. In the audience were many people with disabilities including Jay Johnson the founder of Options Resource Center for Independent Living and Nate Allgaard, past Options Board member. The ADA disability Civil Rights era began for many with a promise.

The promise made on that day was for full integration and access for people with disabilities into the communities in which they live and a vow to not discriminate. People with disabilities would be able to go to the theater, take the bus or a train, communicate, go to the same mainstream K-12 school, college or

university, hunt, swim, golf, work, vote, fish, camp, buy goods, attend a concert or sporting event and travel, just like everyone else. Physical changes were to be made so people with mobility limitations who may use wheelchairs, walkers or other devices could access their world. Other accommodations were required for people with vision or hearing loss.

ADA Guidelines were developed which require new buildings for businesses, cities, states and other organizations except churches, tribes and private clubs to be physically accessible for people with disabilities.

**ADA/CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

## Thief River Falls Office Closes

In preparation for the new budget year Options' Board and Executive Staff found themselves having to identify where to make cuts in order to make up for budget shortfalls in our Minnesota budget starting October 1st of the current fiscal year. To do this it was decided we would have to close the Thief River Falls Office, our longest standing outreach office. Based on cost and staffing considerations this was found to be the most logical choice. Last winter it was hoped the Minnesota Legislature would increase funding for its eight Centers for Independent Living but this was not realized.

**STAFF/CONTINUED ON PAGE 5**

## Options Services

- Independent Living Skills Training
- Individual and Systems Advocacy
- Information and Referral
- Community Education and Outreach
- Transition/Diversion Services
- Youth Transition Services
- Accessibility Services
- Assistive Technology
- Equipment Loan

## ADA/Continued from Cover

Jay Johnson, while advocating for the removal of steps from a newly built access route from a parking lot to local businesses, was asked by the mayor if he expected to be able to go everywhere. He did. Private and public buildings built before 1990 are expected to put in ramps, accessible parking and other changes to make their services accessible as they were affordable. Cities were required to put together a plan on how to make their programs and services accessible including putting in curb ramps and accessible sidewalks. Other guidelines required information to be provided so people who are blind or deaf can access the information or take part in a meeting such as a city hall meeting. Some of the requirements called for information in braille, large print or other formats for people with vision loss or the providing of interpreters or captioning for people who are deaf.

Another law, the Fair Housing Amendment Act, was passed requiring most multi-family housing newly built after March 13, 1991, to have basic accessibility for people with disabilities.

Some organizations, businesses, employers, cities/states have kept some of these promises. Many more people with disabilities have been able to access the goods and services in their communities, attended college or universities, find work, participate in their communities. Ramps have been



Photo of the historic signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act on July 26th, 1990 in Washington, D.C. Left to right, sitting: Evan Kemp, President George H.W. Bush, Justin Dart. Left to right, standing: Rev. Harold Wilke, Swift Parrino. On the top-right is a written note by Justin Dart (right), famous disability advocate and friend of Options, which reads: "To my Options colleagues - I appreciate your leadership for equality! Justin Dart"

built, curb ramps installed, doors widened, lifts or elevators installed, interpreters provided and accessible parking provided.

We also see many times where the accessibility requirements are forgotten. A new convenience store or playground is built with a curb around it, preventing people who use a wheelchair from entering the store or playground. Many towns and cities still have not put in the proper curb ramps. We have even seen some towns put in new curbs, instead of curb ramps, oblivious to their requirements. Some employers are unaware of how to accommodate a person with a disability and may not hire the person. Some bars/ restaurants have only high tables, leaving people who use wheelchairs with the lap view when out with

friends. Accessible fishing piers many times have a sandy, grassy or muddy approach, lacking a way for a person using a mobility aid from getting from the parking area to the pier.

The promise made for people with disabilities to be able to go (just about) everywhere and do (just about) everything has not been fulfilled. Unemployment rates for people with disabilities who want to work are still extremely high, some unemployment or under employment estimates are around 70%. Much more work and advocacy is needed in order for people with disabilities to have the basic access and respect they are due. Options continues to fight for true integration at the highest level. We ask for your help.

## Absentee Voting

It is an election year once again and Options wants to make sure voting is accessible for everybody. One of the most accessible avenues to vote is by absentee balloting. You can find complete rules and information on both Minnesota and North Dakota. You can request an absentee ballot by mail in standard or alternative formats or fill out a ballot online in North Dakota at 800-352-0867, [www.Vote.ND.gov](http://www.Vote.ND.gov) or Minnesota at 877-600-8683, [www.sos.state.mn.us/elections-voting/](http://www.sos.state.mn.us/elections-voting/)

# Accessing the Outdoors

With spring and summer coming up it is time to think about accessing the outdoors. For people with disabilities on a limited income the costs of a fishing license and state park may be out of reach. Both MN and ND has some offsets for people with disabilities please see below. If you are wondering where you can go with your fishing license in the immediate area you can view descriptions of various fishing elements at

[www.optionsoutdoors.org](http://www.optionsoutdoors.org)

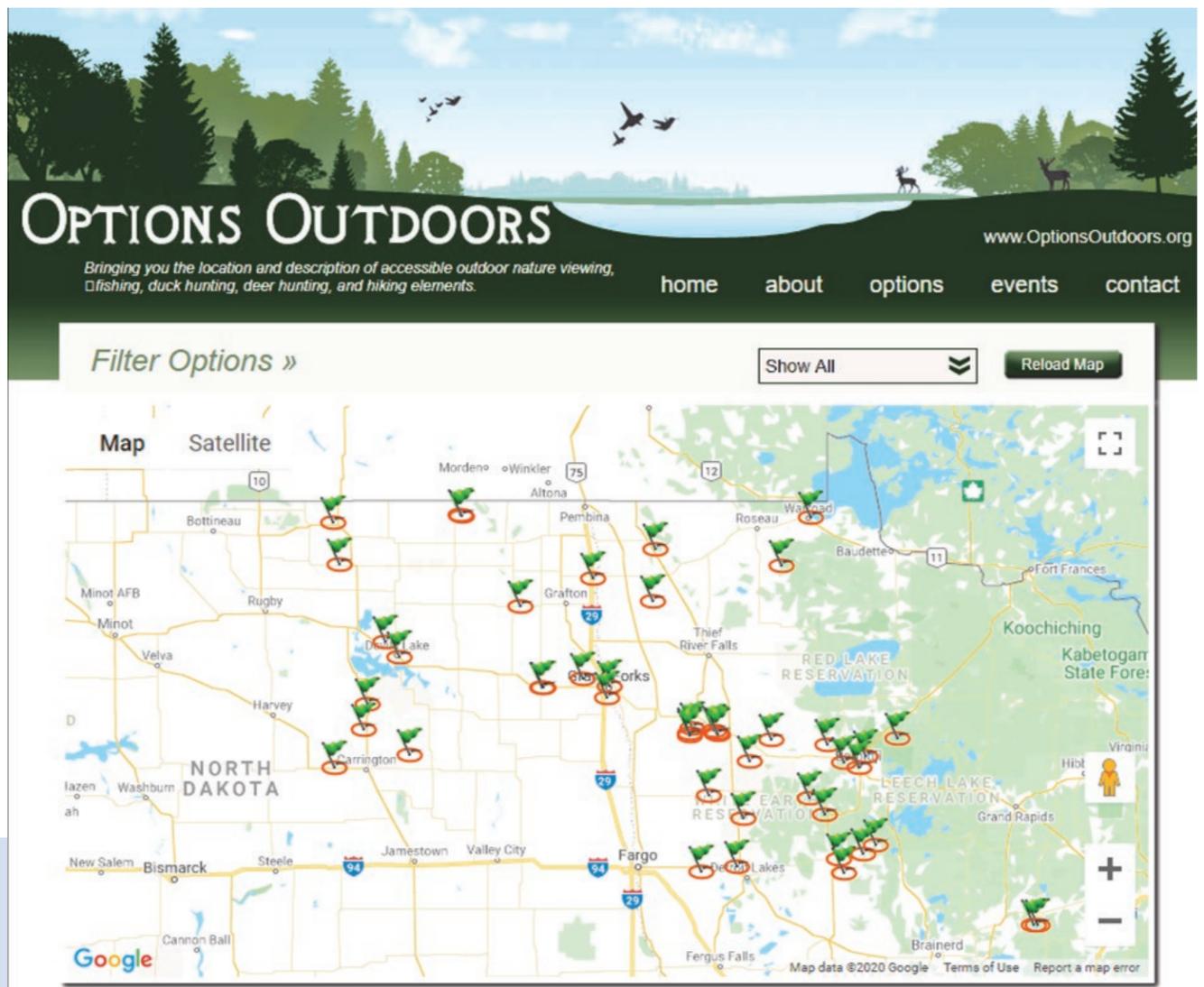
## Minnesota Offers Fishing Licenses: Exemptions and fishing licenses issued without a fee

- Permanent angling license issued to any Minnesota resident over age 16 who is developmentally disabled or a veteran with a 100% service-connected disability. Available only from the DNR License Center.
- Annual angling and/or spearing license may be issued to Minnesota residents who are:
  - Blind
  - Disabled and receiving a supplemental income (SSI, SSD, SSDI)
  - Receiving worker's compensation for total and permanent disability
  - A foreign exchange student attending school in Minnesota.
  - Ward of the Commissioner of Human Services
  - A resident of a state institution that has an approved application

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/regulations/fishing/exemptions.html>

## Discounted state park permits

If your vehicle has been issued Minnesota accessible parking



license plates or a rear-view mirror hang tag, or if you have a Federal Access Pass, you can get a twelve dollar annual vehicle permit with proof of disability and proof of vehicle ownership.

Active military personnel, and their dependents, in any branch or unit of the United States Armed Forces, veterans with a service-related disability, and Purple Heart recipients are now eligible to receive a free year-round vehicle permit, providing unlimited access to all 75 Minnesota state parks and recreation areas.

Permits may be purchased:

- **In person** at any state park, the DNR License Center (500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul), or metro REI stores.
- **By phone** with a call to the DNR Information Center, toll free at 1-888-MINNDNR (646-6367).

## Discounted Camping Rates

For Minnesota residents with physical disabilities (permit issued by the State or Federal Access Pass holders), half-priced camping is available Sunday through Thursday nights. This

discounted fee applies to drive-in, backpack, walk-in, and other rustic or remote campsites. It does not apply to any lodging, group sites, or other facilities.

You will need proof of disability, and you can get the reduced camping rate whether you make your reservation online, over the phone, or in person at the park.

## North Dakota Offers Fishing Licenses: Licenses issued with a minimal fee

- Totally or Permanently Disabled Fishing License (proof of disability required) - \$5
- Veteran with a 50 percent service-related disability - \$5

## Park Passes

Disabled Veterans and POWs: ND veterans with a 50 percent or greater service-related disability and former POWs are eligible for a **free annual lifetime pass**. All other ND veterans with service-related disabilities may purchase an annual permit for \$28. Requires a current VA proof of disability or ND DAV/ POW license plates.

# Coronavirus (COVID-19) Recommendations for People with Disabilities using Personal Attendant Services

Used with permission from the Center for Disability Rights, Inc, a Center for Independent Living based in New York State, some parts were edited due to our space constraints and differences in attendant care programming.

1. Ensure you have sufficient back up attendants in case your regular attendants cannot work due to the illness affecting someone in their family or themselves. If you use a provider call and ask what their backup plans are in the event of a widespread outbreak. If it seems inadequate think about people you may call to help you and how you can start preparing now.
2. Ensure that you have the ability to get assistance if an attendant does not show up for work. They may not be able to get to you and you may need to make sure your needs are met. Start a checklist of possible resources from other providers which may be able to serve you, as well as family and friends who may be able to help for free in an emergency. Brainstorm with your provider to see if emergency fill in staff you identify could be paid by your provider.
3. Have at least a week of non-perishable food in your home at any given time. If you need help, check with local grocers to see if you can order by phone or online and have it delivered to your home or have picked up. If financially unable seek out assistance from local organizations or food banks to build up stock.
4. Stock up on other important supplies. Bowel and bladder care items in addition to cleaning, toiletries, and other supplies.

These are similar supplies which are recommended to possess in a natural disaster scenario.

5. Identify a way to make sure you can get your medications in a timely manner. This may mean having friends or family assist you or using a pharmacy delivery service.
6. Plan for your pets. There may be difficulties in getting pet food or your pets may need someone to take care of them if you are hospitalized.
7. Have your attendants wash their hands and use hand sanitizer when they arrive at your home and each time prior to touching or feeding you.
8. Regularly clean, sanitize and disinfect surfaces that are touched in your home to prevent the spread of infection. Have your attendant do this each time they arrive.
9. Use disinfecting wipes on items that are frequently touched. These include your telephone, doorknobs, your refrigerator handle, your wheelchair controls, lifting device controls and remote controls. Place wipes near the items that should be regularly cleaned as a que for you and your attendants.
10. Have your attendant take extra steps to avoid possibly infecting you by wearing a surgical mask if someone close to your attendant like a member of their household becomes sick. You both should be extra vigilant about cleanliness.
11. If your attendant becomes sick, urge them to seek medical care and utilize your backup attendants.
12. Take immediate steps to avoid infecting your attendants if you, one of your attendants, or a member of your household begins to feel sick. Protecting their health supports your own independence. Ensure everyone washes their hands and uses hand sanitizer regularly. As a person with a disability, it may be difficult for you

to cover a cough or sneeze, so we encourage you to wear a surgical mask if you are sneezing or coughing. It is important to use a surgical mask correctly. The following link explains how to properly use one.

<https://www.sfcddcp.org/communicable-disease/healthy-habits/how-to-put-on-and-remove-a-face-mask/>

13. If someone in your household becomes sick, take steps to avoid infecting other people. If possible, have them stay in a separate room of your home to get well. Regularly clean, sanitize and disinfect shared spaces, particularly the bathroom to avoid spreading the infection.

14. If you become sick, seek medical care immediately. As people with disabilities we are at greater risk from illnesses like these.

15. If you cannot be supported at home, contact your doctor and notify Options so we can make sure you are able to get back home when your situation is resolved. Many of us know people with disabilities who have been institutionalized when they sought medical care, so some people are reluctant to seek medical support.

## Additional Resources:

What You Need to Know About Coronavirus Disease 2019 COVID  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet.pdf>

What to Do If You Are Sick With Coronavirus Disease 2019 COVID  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/sick-with-2019-nCoV-fact-sheet.pdf>

North Dakota Resources  
<https://www.health.nd.gov/diseases-conditions/coronavirus>

Minnesota Resources  
<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index>

You do not have to put your health and life at risk to preserve your freedom. Just call Options to help.

# Office Closes/ Continued from Cover

The Federal Government has built cost of living allowances as part of our funding so inflation does not have an adverse effect but our state funding has no such protections. Almost each state legislative session you will see Centers having to advocate for at the minimum inflationary increases so we can maintain previous service levels.

Last year as well as in years past Options has appreciated people within our service area being beside us advocating for increased funding, but our efforts have failed more often than not. Without funding increases at the very least to keep up with inflation we had to close our office and lay off our employee, Roxanne. Currently we find ourselves evaluating if it is possible to make up for this loss. Do we set up waiting lists, prioritize a particular

service type, change Option service paradigm? It makes us very sad to have to close Options' branch office in the Thief River Falls area due to a decrease in funding; especially considering the needs of people with disabilities in the Thief River Falls area as well as throughout our entire service area. This type of cut ripples across Options as a whole.

This last Minnesota Legislative Session we were very close to increased funding for Centers for Independent Living in a large part due to your help, Thank you. Our Minnesota Representatives increased our funding while our Minnesota Senators did not, which again resulted in no increase in funding levels.

When some of our elected officials do not see the benefits of Independent Living, it always frustrates our Board and Staff. When you factor the societal costs saved through living in the community compared to living in an institution and the costs we



save as we recirculate durable medical equipment we more than make up for the investment in State funds appropriated to our program. This does not even consider the intrinsic value of the program for people with disabilities.

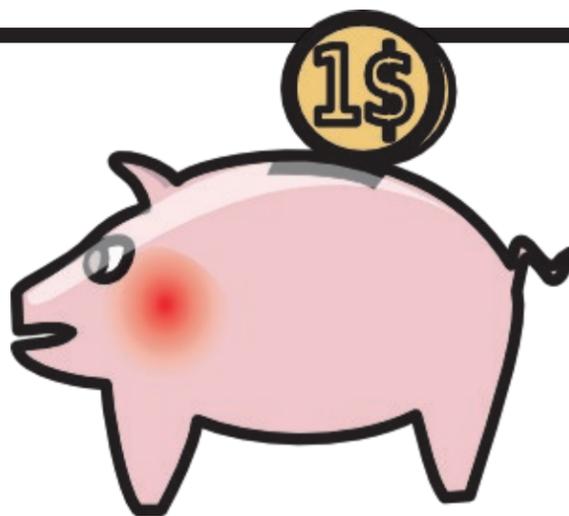
For the people who have used our Thief River Falls Office these past twenty-four years, speaking on behalf of our Board and Staff, we are sorry. For all our Minnesota Residents please contact your Minnesota Legislators and advocate for increase funding because we are doing it again this current Minnesota Legislative Session.

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## Pooled Trust Accounts

If you are a person with a disability you may be able to establish a Pooled Trust. The goal of a pooled trust is to improve the quality of life for an individual with a disability, while retaining eligibility for public benefits such as Medicaid, Housing, VA benefits, or SSI. It also allows an individual to access funds for expenses not covered by public benefits.

A self-funded or third party pooled trust can be established by an individual with a disability, the individual's parents, grandparents, legal guardian or a court. Pooled Trusts protect funds received from lump sum payments such as personal injury settlements, retroactive disability payments, savings or inheritances that would otherwise disqualify a person from receiving medical assistance, SSI, general assistance or other public benefit.



Pooled trusts are available in North Dakota and Minnesota. They are managed by non-profit organizations within each state.

Pooled Trust accounts preserve the financial assets of individuals with disabilities while preserving their eligibility for public benefits. Funds may only be used for services and expenses not covered by public benefits such as medical assistance.

Some examples of eligible expenses:

- Medical or dental expenses not covered by insurance such as hearing aids or eyeglasses.
- Internet and cell phone services
- Caregiver expense

- Social and recreational, including vacations
- Assistive technology
- Home modifications
- Transportation
- Some monthly bills
- Burial accounts

Third Party funded Pooled Trusts can be established by anyone other than the person with the disability. Funds can be added throughout the person's lifetime to pay for various expenses including leisure activities and vacations.

The trustee has total discretion over the funds and how they are to be used. Payments can be used to pay monthly bills; however payments cannot be made directly to the person with the disability.

These trusts are a perfect way for family and friends to provide financial gifts or an inheritance to individuals while protecting their benefit eligibility of other programs.

# SUPPORT GROUPS

There are many support groups spread across our service area with a large variety of topics, including diabetes, caregivers, Alzheimer's, dementia, mental health, parents, blindness and more.

At Options, we strive to stay current on all the support groups with their ever-changing times, locations and dates. If you are looking for support groups or other kinds of Peer Visiting in your area, please contact us at Options and we will explore the various support groups available to you and who to contact.

Help us keep the flame of independence alive for those we serve by donating to Options today. Options is a 501(C)3 Nonprofit.

Send Checks or Money to:

**Options Resource Center for Independent Living**  
318 3rd Street NW  
East Grand Forks, MN 56721

## Durable Medical Equipment Loan Program

At Options, we have a variety of durable medical equipment items available for a ninety (90) day loan period, free of charge.

Items include Bath Benches, Bath Chairs, Walkers, Crutches, Canes, Toilet Risers, Wheelchairs and more.

All of our equipment on hand has been donated to us at one time or another. Options relies on these and monetary donations to continue our Equipment Loan Program.

To reserve or donate equipment, contact Options.



## 2020 Census: Be Counted

Every ten years the Federal Government conducts a population count of the number of persons living in communities within the US. It counts every resident in the United States. This information is used to get a broader sense about the population in general. Data collected by the census helps determine the number of seats that each state will have in the U.S. House of Representatives. It is also used to distribute billions of federal dollars to local communities.

In March 2020, the Federal Census Bureau will be mailing a survey for people to fill out about their household. It will include detailed information on how to respond to the 2020 census either online, by phone or by mail. It is important to respond to and fill out the census in detail about each person living in your home. Each person counted in the census can bring about \$2000 federal funds into their community per year! This can be especially important for services to the elderly and for people with disabilities.

Federal funding is used to shape many different aspects of every community, no matter the size, or the location. Some of the ways money is spent in the communities are:

- Providing services for the elderly
- Healthcare- including programs such Medicaid, Medicare Part B, State Children's Health Insurance, and the prevention and treatment of substance abuse
- Education – including programs such as Head Start, Pell Grants, school lunches, rural education, adult education, and grants for preschool special education
- Infrastructure – including programs for highway planning and construction, Section 8 housing, federal transit, community development, and rural water and waste disposal systems

# Renters Rebates and Homestead Tax Credit

Are you 65 or older, or have a disability?

You may qualify for a homestead credit to reduce your property taxes or may be able to get a partial refund of the rent you pay. In ND you should contact your local assessor or the County Director of Tax Equalization. You can apply by calling 877-328-7088, press option 6 or visit [www.ND.gov/Tax/Homestead](http://www.ND.gov/Tax/Homestead)

In Minnesota, if you're a renter you should receive a Form CRP (Certificate of Rent Paid) from your landlord. You should also receive this if you are living in an assisted living facility or a nursing home. You can apply for Renters Rebate in Minnesota by calling 651-556-3000 or visiting [www.revenue.state.mn.us](http://www.revenue.state.mn.us)

## Transition Services for Young Adults, 18-24 years

Options' new Core Service is to provide assistance to young adults with significant disabilities as they transition from high school into postsecondary school, or to join into the workplace.

Options staff will assist you in planning your future goals.

You choose what you want to work on and staff are there to assist you in achieving your goals.

Examples of skills training offered but not limited to:

- Drivers education skills
- How to find and obtain housing
- Money management
- Pre-employment skills
- How to obtain and maintain a job
- How to ask for accommodations at school/work
- How to be a good communicator
- Personal safety
- Bus transportation skills
- Self-advocacy skills
- Leadership skills
- Self-awareness
- Cooking and laundry skills
- Shopping on a budget

## Are you on Medicare and need assistance with your prescription drugs?

If you have limited income and assets you may be able to get extra help paying for your Medicare D prescription drug program. This includes help with the monthly

premiums, deductibles, and co-payments. Assets that are counted are things like bank accounts or any stocks and bonds. They do not count your home, car, or any life insurance policies as assets.

**To Qualify:** You must live in one of the 50 states or the District of Columbia.

If you are single and your annual income is \$18,735 or less and your

assets are valued at \$14,390 or less you may be eligible for extra help.

If you are a married couple and your annual income is \$25,365 or less, and your assets are valued at \$28,720 or less, you may be eligible for extra help.

If your income is higher, you may still be able to get extra help. To see if you qualify for this program of extra help, call Options for assistance.

If you would like to receive this newsletter and other publications by email submit your request to [options@myoptions.info](mailto:options@myoptions.info) or call us.

If you would like this newsletter in alternative formats, such as audio, braille or digital, please contact Mike or email [options@myoptions.info](mailto:options@myoptions.info)

The production of this newsletter is funded at about 21% under a grant from the Department of Health. The contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Health and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

Options is a non-profit organization committed to assisting individuals with disabilities to live independently in the communities of their choice and to eliminate barriers of attitude, architecture and communication from the environment.

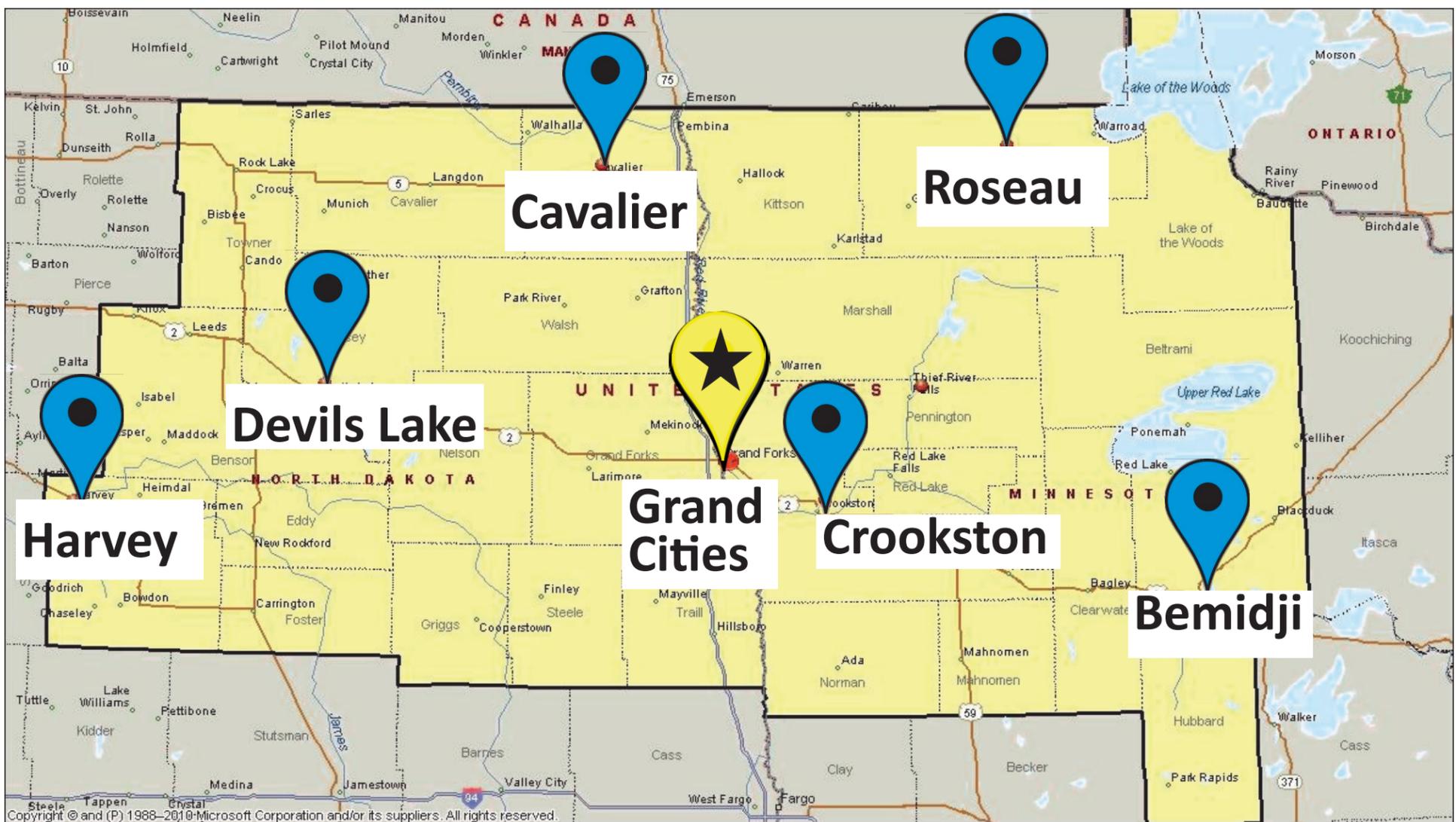
## Options on the Web [www.myoptions.info](http://www.myoptions.info)

Check out our website for more information and "Swap Shop" where people can buy and sell equipment and assistive technology.

## Options on Social Media [www.facebook.com/optionsRCIL](http://www.facebook.com/optionsRCIL)



Visit and like our social media page on Facebook to stay up to date for anything disability-related and local events.



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