



Celebrating Unity



LAURA BAKER
SERVICES ASSOCIATION

Bringing the Power of Possibility to People with Special Needs

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



Letter from the Board President

STEVE UNDERDAHL

The More Things Change ...

It is tempting to think of the present moment as unique. Nothing like this set of circumstances has ever happened before! In some ways, this is true, but then, patterns appear to remind us that we have been this way before.

As we think about the mission of Laura Baker Services Association (LBSA) and the people we serve, many of our challenges are stubbornly consistent. Funding, staffing, overstretched families, community education, political advocacy and dozens of other challenges have been part of our core work for decades. These challenges foster a culture of creativity and tenacity. We find a way. Sometimes we need to invent a new way.

Caring for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families has always been noble but demanding work. We have leveraged decades of experience and learning to help us continually improve our ability to support people who cannot support and advocate for themselves. LBSA is dedicated to the proposition that none of these folks fall through the cracks of our society.

We are also devoting significant energy into the health of the organization. The challenges are daunting, but we do what we always do; stay true to the mission and lean into the creativity and tenacity that has served us for decades. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, we are never doing this work alone. As has always been the case, our community of friends and supporters has shared this mission and its challenges with us. People who give their time and money to this work is the literal safety net for LBSA.

This moment certainly does present new challenges, but our focus on our mission, our overarching principles as well as the gracious help of our community supporters will help us continue this important work as we always do. Thank you for making our mission possible.

Sincerely,

– Steve Underdahl
Board President



Letter from the Executive Director

SANDI GERDES

2025 began with a genuine sense of hope.

The pandemic finally felt behind us. Staffing was improving, previously closed households were reopening and we were preparing to launch our Behavior Support Services (BSS). We felt that momentum deeply. And for much of the year, that early optimism didn't fade – it turned into real, measurable progress that we are proud of.

At the same time, we want to be honest about the challenges we faced. We did not fill open positions as quickly as we had hoped, and that continued to place pressure on our finances throughout the year. Those realities were significant and ongoing. What mattered just as much, though, was knowing we were not facing them alone. **Our community – you – understood what we were navigating and continued to show up with trust, encouragement and support.** That belief in our work made a real difference, and for that, we are deeply grateful.

Beyond our organization, the broader world often felt heavy. News of fraud and financial abuse led to new layers of oversight – without additional resources to support that work. Immigration enforcement increased, creating fear and uncertainty for many. While we were fortunate to avoid direct scrutiny, the stress and worry our staff carried was very real. As leaders, we saw that burden firsthand, and together we worked to respond with care, steadiness and compassion – for our staff and for the people we serve.

In moments like these, it can be easy to slip into frustration or negativity. We made a conscious choice not to do that. Instead, we committed ourselves to noticing and naming the signs of hope around us every day: client progress, growing staffing stability, strong referrals, meaningful movement toward our goals and partners who continued to walk alongside us. Those moments grounded us. They reminded us why this work matters – and why we remain optimistic about what lies ahead.

We also found ourselves asking deeper questions this year. When did we lose the ability to assume the best of one another? When did blame and punishment become our default response? Accountability matters – and so does grace. As leaders, we believe that progress requires both. Holding standards and offering understanding are not opposing values; they are complementary ones.

In 2025, our focus was unity and a return to pre-pandemic strength. It's true – this is something we've been talking about for years now. That reality speaks to the depth and lasting impact COVID has had on our work. We are still learning what makes the most sense for hybrid, remote and in-person work. For our direct support staff, remote or

hybrid options have never been possible, and we remain deeply aware of the inequities that reality creates. We continue to wrestle with difficult questions about how remote or hybrid work affects teams and processes. While individual productivity does not necessarily seem impacted, the long-term effects on connection, collaboration and culture are still unfolding.

As leaders, we do not pretend to have all the answers – and we are committed to listening, learning and leading with intention. Above all, we remain committed to our mission, to our staff and to the individuals and families who place their trust in us.

Thank you for being part of this journey with us. Your partnership makes our work possible, and your belief in our mission continues to guide us forward.

With gratitude and resolve,

– Sandi Gerdes
Executive Director



LBSA HONORS

2025 TEAM MEMBERS

Congratulations to the 2025 award recipients!!

★ INNOVATOR:

Penny Penn, Olivia Hubers and Valarie Voracek

★ COMMUNITY BUILDER:

Brianna Maciel, Arturo Gomez and Karina Orozco

★ TEAM BUILDER:

Amy Crowningshield, Niish Winter and Darcy Uecker

★ CHEERLEADER:

Chris Goodwin, Kathy Bromley and Amy Wagner

★ ROLE MODEL:

William Scheremet, Giselle Renteria and Ryan Kisor

★ RISING STAR:

Tara Osborn, Christopher Dietrich and Samantha Engelby

★ STEADY EDDY:

Jillian Moyer, Aaron Dunn, Audrey Mahn and Linda Castle



★ SPIRIT OF LAURA BAKER AWARD*:

Congratulations to Caitlyn Lehman, the recipient of the Spirit of Laura Baker Award. This award is given annually to one individual who best embodies the mission, vision and values of LBSA – and the spirit of Laura Baker. Recipients care deeply for the people we serve and make a difference in their lives and in the life of the organization.

Our Administrative Team and the LBSA Board of Trustees would like to acknowledge **ALL STAFF** for their incredible dedication, compassion and persistence. **Thank you** for all your effort each and every day!

*The Spirit of Laura Baker Award is given annually to one individual who best embodies the mission, vision and values of LBSA – and the spirit of Laura Baker. Recipients care deeply for the people we serve and make a difference in their lives and in the life of the organization as a whole. Leadership and teamwork are the hallmarks of award winners' work in the organization.



Meet Alex

When you spend time with Alex, one thing becomes clear almost immediately: he is deeply connected to his community. Whether he's helping customers at Just Food Co-op, setting up tents at Riverwalk Market Fair, playing soccer with friends or participating in activities at LBSA, he brings warmth, kindness and genuine connection everywhere he goes.

Alex has a wide range of interests, with one of his biggest passions being Italy. Handmade notebooks collected from Tuscany are filled with travel ideas, notes about villas and other inspirations. By his estimate, the collection includes at least 100 notebooks.

After visiting Italy once, plans are already underway for another trip next spring. Practicing Italian words and phrases have become part of daily life, while calendars from places like Siena serve as reminders of favorite memories abroad. Florence remains one of the places he most hopes to revisit. Conversations about Tuscan homes, travel destinations or guidebooks quickly light up the room, making it easy to see how much joy these experiences bring him.

Closer to home, being someone that neighbors can rely on is especially meaningful. One of his favorite traditions is helping with the Riverwalk Market Fair, where Saturday mornings often begin with setting up tents before the event starts. “They call me the person who helps set up the tents,” he shared with a smile.

Music and creativity are another important part of Alex's life. He plays an unusual instrument called a washboard, which resembles an old-fashioned laundry board but is used as percussion. On Tuesdays, Alex practices music and is excited to join a jug band with his housemates this summer at LBSA. Performing together is already something to look forward to!



Art classes each week provide another creative outlet, with projects ranging from abstract birds to mixed-media artwork. Crossword puzzles, word searches and reading the newspaper with friends and staff are also favorite pastimes. The “News of the Weird” section regularly sparks laughter and conversation thanks to its unusual stories. Alex's natural curiosity about the world is one of the many things that make spending time with him especially enjoyable.



That same sense of responsibility carries into work at Just Food Co-op. Tasks include repacking dried fruit, cleaning the break room and helping customers find items throughout the store. One regular responsibility, known as “repack,” involves transferring dried fruit into smaller containers for customers. One especially memorable shift for Alex involved low-sugar mango that became so sticky and difficult to separate it turned into an unexpected workout. Even when tasks get hard, humor and determination are never far behind. “I’m proud of my work,” he shared. Coworkers and community members know him as hardworking, friendly and helpful, with a strong attention to detail and genuine pride in doing the job well.

Much of the opportunity to build these routines, relationships and experiences has been supported through LBSA. Living at Truman House has made a meaningful difference, creating an environment filled with supportive, encouraging and caring people. “Oh, my goodness, I love all the people, they’re nice,” he shared.

Through LBSA, life has become centered around independence, friendship and community involvement. Support from staff and housemates makes it possible for Alex to participate in activities that bring genuine happiness, from bingo and art classes to music groups, outings and community events. More importantly, there is the freedom to continue pursuing what matters most: maintaining a job that is enjoyable, staying active in the Northfield community, nurturing friendships and continuing to learn and explore his interests.

For Alex, community is about relationships, contribution and belonging. Whether helping at the market, talking with coworkers, practicing music with friends or sharing stories about Tuscany and favorite foods like pasta, Alex brings joy and personality into every space he enters. Life is full of meaningful experiences, strong connections and the activities that bring the greatest sense of joy and happiness.



2025 Highlights

Year after year, decade after decade **YOU** give us hope! We are committed to **Celebrating Unity** and creating a community that embraces all people. Your support has allowed us to continue our mission and accomplish great things this year.

- This year we reopened our final house closed during COVID. The **Elwell House** is a busy home again and LBSA is almost at capacity. Thank you for all your financial support which has helped LBSA put COVID in the rear-view mirror!
- In the Spring of 2025, we collaborated with Carleton College's **Poetics of Disability** class for the second time! Carleton students visited five LBSA houses for several weekly visits to engage with LBSA residents, which resulted in a collaboratively created poem for each house. The class culminated with Carleton students and LBSA participants gathering for a sharing event which included ice cream sundaes and art activities as well as the reading of a collaborative poem about the students' experience.



- **Music Therapy** continues to grow, and LBSA now employs three music therapists! Tess Zastrow and Nick Juve are here full-time. Wendy Russell, who was our music therapy intern, was hired last year as a part-time music therapist. In addition to conducting individual therapy sessions in their studio in Millis Hall, Tess, Nick and Wendy also bring music to the LBSA homes in the form of individual or group sessions. They also organize, conduct and host practices and performances with the LBSA choir!
- **Saturday Fun Respite** is a monthly program for families who care for children/adults with IDD. Adults and children aged five and above with special needs who live at home with their families are welcome to join LBSA on the second Saturday of the month for crafts, games, outdoor activities and snacks. In 2025, Saturday Respite served 72 participants through November, staffed by dozens of volunteers. Three of the volunteers were hired as direct support staff!





- We offer creative arts sessions with local artist and arts educator, Angie Ekern. Friday **"Art with Angie"** sessions are **free** for participants and open to anyone in LBSA's residential or support service programs. Often, one of LBSA's Music Therapists provides music. A special thank you to the Groves Foundation, Win & Christie Neuger Foundation, Northfield Shares, Rotary Club of Northfield and Post Consumer Brands for supporting this program.
- Our new **Behavioral Support Services (BSS)** program is off and running! BSS provides behavioral consultations and training to families and organizations that serve people with IDD who are experiencing behavioral issues that may jeopardize their current living or occupational setting.
- In **program satisfaction surveys** distributed annually to clients' family members and care team, LBSA has maintained a 4.5 rating out of a possible 5 for overall service satisfaction.
- In addition to providing housing and a suite of support services to people with IDD, LBSA hosts a wide variety of **community events**. In 2025, LBSA partnered with the American Red Cross to host six blood drives. In August, we hosted our annual Summer Fun Day where 200-250 people enjoyed a picnic lunch, music, games and horse and wagon rides. On Thanksgiving

Day, LBSA held its annual Community Thanksgiving Dinner, providing hot meals in our dining hall and delivering meals to homebound individuals thanks to our team of volunteer drivers.

- In October, we hosted our second Annual **Path Forward Conference** at St. John's Lutheran Church in Northfield. The event brought together approximately 40 advocates, professionals and families committed to supporting individuals with IDD. The day was filled with meaningful conversations, shared insights and a collective focus on building more inclusive communities.
- We received a **"Top Rated Nonprofit"** designation from GreatNonprofits.org and a **Gold Transparency** rating from Candid (GuideStar) for the eighth consecutive year.



Thank You for Your Continued Support!



Meet Our Good Neighbors

LBSA is a member organization of Providers' Network, Inc. (PNI). Each year PNI hosts a Good Neighbor banquet. This is an opportunity for member organizations like LBSA to nominate Good Neighbors (people and/or entities that have been good partners to our organization).

Good Neighbor – Julie Thorsheim

Julie is a passionate advocate for people with IDD – and for other groups that have traditionally been marginalized. She served as an LBSA board member for more than 10 years. She and her husband Howard have been generous donors over the years.

A social worker by profession, Julie takes to heart the need for legislators and others to take action when it comes

to ensuring that people whose voices aren't always heard, are represented. She is **one of LBSA's top advocates**, as we work to ensure that compensation for our services and staff members is adequate, and that affordable housing is available for the people we support AND their staff members.

At her church, Julie often spends Sunday morning coffee talking about why it's important for people to support LBSA and people with disabilities.



Good Neighbor – Matt Karl

Matt Karl is **one of the most involved and valued "friends" of the entire LBSA community**. He volunteers at our events like Dinner Theater, Summer Fun Day and the annual Golf Tournament. Matt has planted trees and done landscaping on our Oak St. campus in Northfield. He is generous with his time and often spends Saturday afternoons providing respite support at our monthly respite events. Last year when the LBSA kitchen's dishwasher retired, Matt stepped in and now comes to LBSA every Tuesday to wash dishes and has become an important part of our kitchen team.

Last year Matt joined LBSA's Board of Trustees. His work on our development committee has been amazing as he has begun introducing family and friends to the organization and encourages them to support LBSA with their time and resources. Matt is humble and does not seek fanfare or recognition. Matt's desire to give back and his generosity with his time and kindness and elbow grease can't be measured. We are grateful and excited to honor Matt Karl with a 2025 Good Neighbor award!

Behavioral Support Services: Seeing the Person Beyond the Behavior

At LBSA, we believe every individual deserves to be seen, heard and supported with dignity.

For decades, LBSA has provided compassionate support to individuals with IDD. As the needs of the community continued to evolve, one reality became increasingly clear: while many individuals were receiving support for daily living needs, many others fell through the cracks, particularly people with challenging behaviors and/or mental health challenges.

In response to this growing need, LBSA officially launched BSS in 2025. This is an important expansion of services designed to provide person-centered behavioral and mental health support for individuals with IDD across Minnesota.

The launch of the program was made possible in part through a federal grant awarded to support the development of these critical services. The funding has allowed LBSA to begin building sustainable, community-based behavioral support that recognizes the complex emotional, mental health and behavioral needs experienced by many individuals with disabilities.

When Doug Turk joined LBSA as Director of BSS, he saw an organization whose values closely aligned with the work that has guided his career for more than two decades. As a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker, Turk has spent his career supporting vulnerable populations through foster care, pediatric oncology, hospital social work, therapy and crisis care.

Across every setting, one belief remained constant: people are more than a diagnosis, a behavior or a label.



“What drew me to LBSA was the passion for supporting this vulnerable population and the commitment to person-centered care,” Turk shared. “Every individual comes from their own unique place in the world. Their experiences, relationships, opportunities and challenges all shape who they are. We can’t support people effectively if we only look at behaviors without understanding the person behind them.”

That philosophy is at the heart of LBSA’s BSS program.

Like anyone else, individuals with IDD can also experience anxiety, depression, ADHD, trauma and other mental health challenges. Often, these struggles are misunderstood or expressed through behaviors that create barriers at home, in school or at work.

Behind every behavior is a person trying to communicate a need, cope with stress, or navigate a world that may not fully understand them.

BSS takes a relationship-based, person-centered approach to understanding whole person, not just the behavior. LBSA’s Behavioral Support Specialists partner with individuals, families, caregivers, schools and support teams to better understand each person’s experiences, strengths and challenges through observations, interviews and comprehensive review of supports and history.

Together, the team works to answer important questions:

- What is this person trying to communicate?
- What unmet needs or missing supports may be contributing to distress?
- What environments help this individual feel safe, successful and connected?
- How can we increase independence, confidence and quality of life?

Using this understanding, individualized strategies and supports are developed to help individuals thrive in their homes, schools, workplaces and communities. This may include caregiver education, skill-building, environmental supports, community resources and practical tools that create greater stability and success for everyone involved.

For Turk, this work is deeply personal and rooted in advocacy.

“Too often, systems become focused on efficiency instead of humanity,” he said. “BSS gives us the opportunity to slow down, ask better questions and help people feel understood instead of judged. Our hope is to help individuals and caregivers identify what may be contributing to behaviors, what those behaviors may be communicating, and provide tools and supports that help everyone move forward and thrive.”

Even in its first year, the impact of the program is being felt.

In 2025, LBSA’s BSS program supported 25 individuals and their teams, helping create stronger outcomes for families, caregivers, schools and community programs.

Families gain hope and guidance. Caregivers feel more confident and supported. Schools and programs build stronger partnerships and better outcomes. Most importantly, individuals experience greater connection, independence and opportunity to participate meaningfully in their communities.

Because every person deserves more than being defined by a diagnosis or behavior.



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Megan Zwolenski





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Brick Oven Bakery
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Fette Electronics

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Forget-me-not Florist
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Andrei Sivanich
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Dale & Kristen Askeland

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David & Patricia Schmidt
Andrei & Wendy Sivanich
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Dwayne & Theo Wee

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Dawn Trnka



THANK YOU, LEGACY CLUB MEMBERS

Thank you to our supporters who have included LBSA in their estate plan! Legacy Club members help create a lasting impact on LBSA's future.

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Teri Knight
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Ed & Anne Lundstrom
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Northfield Shares
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Post Consumer Brands
Rotary Club of Northfield
St. John's Lutheran Church
Win & Christie Neuger Family Foundation

THANK YOU, LIFETIME DONORS

Thank you to our Lifetime Donors who have generously contributed over \$100,000 to LBSA during their lifetime!

Over \$250,000

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Brad & Gail Austin
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Mr. & Mrs. Edwin S. Elwell Jr.
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Ed & Anne Lundstrom
Otto Bremer Trust
Alma Smith Wright 1952 Trust

Over \$100,000

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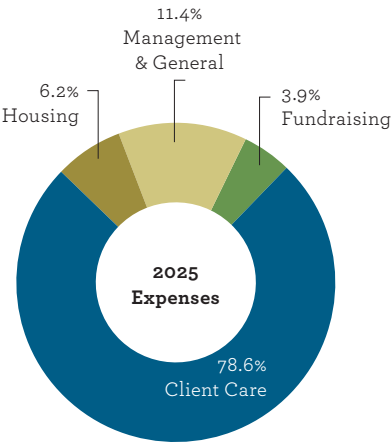
*Staff
+Board Member

Financials

Statement of Activities For the Year Ending December 31, 2025

SUPPORT AND REVENUE	
Client Services	\$6,349,408
Donations	\$1,052,929
Other Income	\$370,606
In-Kind Donations	\$36,283
Net Gain/(Loss) on Investment	(\$122)
Total Support & Revenue	\$7,809,104

OPERATING EXPENSES	
Salaries & Benefits	\$5,287,078
Client Program Expense	\$266,050
Purchased Services	\$434,485
Housing	\$503,459
Food	\$245,404
Other Client Care Expenses	\$146,376
Total Program Services	\$6,882,852
Management & General	\$925,650
Fundraising	\$312,667
Total Support Services	\$1,238,317
Total Expenses	\$8,121,169



Statement of Financial Position as of December 31, 2025

ASSETS	
Current Assets	\$766,131
Investments	\$3,304
Building & Equipment (Net)	\$3,165,668
Other Assets	\$651,876
Total Assets	\$4,586,979

LIABILITIES	
Current Liabilities	\$964,191
Long-Term Liabilities	\$811,206
Total Liabilities	\$1,775,397

NET ASSETS	
Without Donor Restrictions	\$2,791,762
With Donor Restrictions	\$19,820
Total Net Assets	\$2,811,582
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$4,586,979

2025 financial results audited by LB Carlson, LLP



Thank you to our corporate partners!





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