

Testimony

Human Services Committee

Autism Technology Grant

August 28, 2014

Chairman Damschen and members of the Human Services Committee, I am Marcia Gums, Chief Operations Officer of Community-based Services, for Anne Carlsen Center. I am here today as a representative of Anne Carlsen Center and as a board member of Specialisterne Midwest. Anne Carlsen Center has served individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) since the mid -1980's in its residential and school program located in Jamestown. In 2008, we expanded our efforts to provide services to individuals with disabilities within their local communities. In 2012, we further expanded the community-based services, offering intensive support and programming for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders and their families. At that time, the Center began discussions with representatives from Specialisterne regarding a model for training and employing individuals with ASD in the technology field. In 2013, the Anne Carlsen Center Board of Directors committed \$500,000 to Specialisterne Midwest in order to support the efforts in moving the program forward, believing that it aligned with the Center's mission.

The Anne Carlsen Center and Specialisterne Midwest would like to thank the legislature for its efforts to support employment of individuals with ASD through the technology grant pursuant to Section 61 of 2013 House Bill No. 1013. We would

also thank Wayne Kutzer, State Director and Executive Officer of the North Dakota Department of Career and Technical Education, for his work to further these efforts.

Tony Thomann, the Executive Director of Specialisterne Midwest, will offer testimony regarding the status of the grant. Before he does so, I would like to share my observations of the work completed thus far.

As a Specialisterne board member, I had the honor of attending a demonstration conducted by the six (6) gentlemen in the first cohort. Through the initial training, they were able to learn the language of code creating LEGO robots, the necessity of working as a team, and the ability to present the information in front of an audience, explaining their projects and answering questions regarding the work. The level of intelligence and zeal for the work was inspirational. I was truly awed. It strengthened the belief that individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders are quite capable of lending their talents in a manner that benefits us all. Employment is an attainable quest. The combined efforts of all will see this to fruition.

Thank you.