April 2025

LCSC Communicator

Regional News, Views, and Information

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative
Together we achieve

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An equal opportunity employer

PDF Nonprofit and Government Edition



Pelican Rapids' Downtown Transformation

Roundabouts, River Flows, and a Vision for the Future

Two years ago, I met with Mayor Brent Frazier of Pelican Rapids during the planning of a new downtown improvement design as part of the Highway 59 and 108 Complete Streets Project. It all began with a meeting where city officials and planners from MNDOT spread out blueprints across a table, envisioning a transformed downtown.

Today, the downtown sidewalks are broader and more prominent, the stoplights have been removed, and two roundabouts have been installed in their place. The old rhythm of traffic signals has transitioned to a new system of merging traffic.

Source: Lance Roisum, City Administrator, City of Pelican Rapids
Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC's Communications Coordinator

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Brew Haven. Situated in the beautifully restored historic Pelican Rapids City Hall.

Initially, the roundabouts caused some confusion, as drivers in Minnesota, known for their politeness, often yielded when they shouldn't. Lance Roisum, the city administrator, chuckled as he recalled the initial hesitation among drivers. Now, the roundabouts effectively manage the flow of traffic while improving pedestrian safety. The Highway 59 and 108 Complete Streets Project is scheduled to be completed this coming summer.

In a heartfelt note on their website, MNDOT expressed gratitude for the Pelican Rapids community that embraced the disruption with patience and kindness. Maintaining an unobstructed main street is essential for ensuring access to local businesses. The businesses and residents of Pelican Rapids were understandably concerned about the potential negative impact of construction on retail traffic. However, local businesses and city collaborated effectively and adapted to the construction.

Roisum has served as the City Administrator of Pelican Rapids for just over two years. In his younger years, he worked for the City of Pelican Rapids in the Public Works Department. Before becoming City Administrator, Roisum served as a Health and Safety Facilitator at LCSC. He stated that the knowledge and training he received at LCSC has been extremely beneficial in his current role. He described the transition to city administrator as a rapid learning experience, particularly as he took on the ongoing street improvement project and the river restoration project. "I learn best by doing!" he remarked, emphasizing how diving directly into these projects has contributed to his growth in the role.

The most significant aspect of the Pelican River Restoration Project was the removal of the dam near downtown. With the project now finished, the river is flowing freely, providing an opportunity for both tourists and locals to enjoy kayaking.

Roisum mentioned that Andrew Johnson, the owner of Riverview Place, successfully rented kayaks to those interested in exploring the river last summer. There are plans to collaborate with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to install a kayak launch at E.L. Peterson Park and another one on 1st Street Northwest.

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Pelican Rapids is positioned for economic development, boasting several exciting features. The town has a golf course, a new outdoor swimming pool, and a riverfront area that is easily accessible from downtown. A bike path connects Pelican Rapids to Maplewood State Park and is set to extend to Perham in the near future. Additionally, newly developed downtown streets are enhancing the area, and plans for pickleball courts are in progress.

A collaborative effort among the Pelican Rapids Public School, the Chamber of Commerce, the Economic Development Commission, and the City of Pelican Rapids aims to create a joint-funded marketing plan that will showcase opportunities for tourism, recreation, education, and retail within the city. They are also working to establish a new Pelican Rapids brand.

> We have a great quality of life here," remarked Roisum. "We need to highlight all the wonderful reasons why people want to live here!



Pelican Rapids has recently welcomed a new business owner, Theresa Thorton, along with an addition to its downtown: Brew Haven. Situated in the beautifully restored Historic City Hall, this coffee shop is the perfect spot to enjoy your favorite brew after shopping in unique retail markets like La Mariposa Market, Dawo Halal Market, or the Mercantile on Main.

Jordan Grossman, the Regional Manager of the Community and Economic Development Associates (CEDA) Community Support Program, has been actively working with Pelican Rapids to enhance the community's economic development planning.

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The Youths of Pelican Rapids

The Youths Mission – Our mission is to lift the Youth voices of Pelican Rapids as valued members of the community. We want to see ourselves in the spaces, activities, and events in Pelican Rapids. To continue amplifying the power of the youth's voice to transform our future in our community.

She spends three days a week in Pelican Rapids and has been an invaluable resource in revitalizing the Pelican Rapids Economic Development Authority (EDA) and the Economic Development Corporation (EDC). Grossman works to foster collaboration among these organizations, including the Pelican Rapids Chamber of Commerce. Additionally, she played a key role in facilitating the opening of Brew Haven.

Many rural communities in Minnesota, including Pelican Rapids, are facing challenges in attracting employees due to a shortage of housing. To address this issue, the City of Pelican Rapids partnered with Otter Tail County to relocate its county garage, allowing for the development of nine residential lots on that land. Currently, the county is finalizing plans to construct three homes on this property.

One lot has already been sold to a private party, and five additional lots are available. A local realtor has built two twin homes and is considering further developments. Moreover, the former funeral home is being renovated into five apartments, and land in southwest Pelican Rapids is being subdivided for potential development. Additionally, Jordan Grossman from CEDA is collaborating with the city to start developing a 120-acre area in Pelican Rapids for future housing projects.

The steady hum of activity resonates throughout Pelican Rapids. Major employers like Sanford Health and the West Central Turkeys plant anchor the community, providing a solid foundation for life here. Pelican Rapids Public Schools are vibrant with the energy of learning, while Lake Region Electric and Arvig Communications keep the town connected to the broader world. "What people appreciate about our community is its diversity," said Roisum.

"The world has come to Pelican Rapids. Our children are exposed to various cultures that work in harmony, which prepares them well for the future."

Additional support for children in Pelican Rapids comes through the support of The Youths. The Youths is a dynamic leadership team composed of dedicated young individuals striving to establish a space they can truly claim as their own. The Future Bridge Center is a nonprofit community space aimed at connecting cultures, generations, and communities in the heart of downtown Pelican Rapids. This group represents the spirit of community leadership, showcasing the vibrant cultural diversity of Pelican Rapids and ensuring that every voice is represented in shaping the future. This youth initiative further illustrates how Pelican Rapids is committed to investing in future generations.

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Pelican Rapids is thriving and full of life! Instead of traffic jams, you'll find smooth roundabouts and beautiful rivers perfect for kayaking. The pool is gearing up for some fun splashes, and Brew Haven is ready to serve you smiles and good vibes. With numerous new homes being constructed, this charming, diverse town looks toward a prosperous future!

Do you want to learn more about this beautiful, diverse community?
Visit their website at www.pelicanrapids.com.

PELICAN RAPIDS™

Kaffeeklatsch



At LCSC, we value the opportunity to host and facilitate events that foster meaningful conversations within our community.

Many thanks to our community partner, West Central Initiative, for working together to host a successful event.

Participating Legislators:

- Senator Jordan Rasmusson
- Representative Paul Anderson
- Representative Heather Keeler
- Representative Tom Murphy

From the

Executive Director

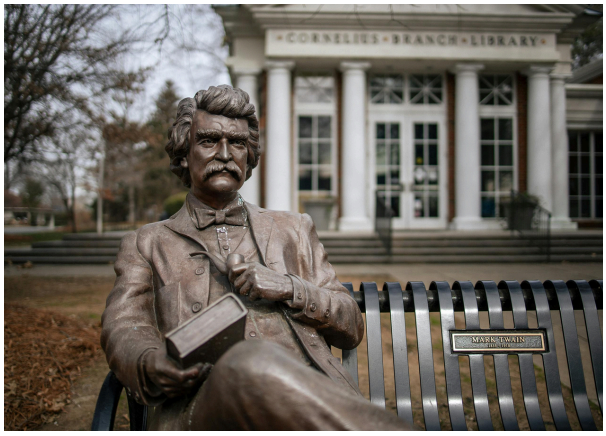
"We Advocate for Strong Communities through Service and Leadership."



Jeremy Kovash
Executive Director

"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."

– Mark Twain, The Innocents Abroad (1869)



I had the good fortune to visit the Mark Twain Home and Museum in Connecticut — a powerful experience that deepened my appreciation for his words and wisdom. Twain's insight on travel remains as relevant today as ever. While travel outside our state and country certainly expands our horizons, there is also incredible value in exploring and connecting within our own region and state.

Here in Minnesota, we have so much to learn from one another — through shared experiences, best practices, collaboration, and simply taking the time to listen and grow together.

At Lakes Country Service Cooperative, our mission is clear:

"We Advocate for Strong Communities Through Service and Leadership."

And our core values guide everything we do:
Leadership: Transforming the Future for ALL
Collaboration: Together We Achieve a Culture of Learning and Growth
Service: Responsive, Innovative, Effective Solutions

These principles remind us that whether we're crossing oceans or visiting the next community over, there's always something to gain — and to give — when we stay curious, connected, and committed to one another.



Rural COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

JANE EASTES
Deputy Executive Director

Strengthening Public Service

Research and Recommendations from the Citizens League

Like housing and childcare, workforce issues are ongoing, sticky problems that, as public entities, we grapple with every day. For many of us, it is the "fire" you deal with most every day: hiring, recruiting, retaining, training, paying, and keeping happy a unique workforce.

I just finished reading a new research report from the Citizens League, **Strengthening Public Service: Workforce Challenges and Opportunities for Local Government Entities in Minnesota.** If you have not seen it yet, it is worth your time. The Citizens League, a nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to building civic life and public policy in Minnesota, teamed with the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) and the League of Minnesota Cities (LMC) to produce an easily readable policy report.

The first key finding is not one that will surprise you; local governments are distinct. They are not 'one and the same,' and each will have different challenges, needs, and responses when working to improve public service.

The value of this report is that it does not attempt one-size-fits-all answers. Instead, they plumb the vast experience of public employees from all sizes and circumstances and distill the ideas into a "What's not working - Challenges" and "What's Working - Opportunities" section, followed by broad recommendations for each of seven topic areas.

Of course, the one topic that hits home with us at LCSC is the Public Understanding and Civic Education topic. Here are a few examples from the report:

What is not Working?

- "Public misunderstanding about the work, breadth, structure, and roles of local government…" "Public service functions – and career opportunities – are not always effectively modeled or taught in our K-12 education system…"

What's Working?

- Intentional partnerships with schools and learning cohorts that invite young people into local civic life …"

We not only agree but are working to support the recommendations to advocate for continued efforts to expand civics education with a local focus, and to invest in existing educational partnerships and pipeline programs with schools and learning groups, especially to expand the youth voice on boards and committees.

This is just a taste of the valuable insights and recommendations you will find in this report. Kudos to the Citizens League, AMC and LMC for keeping their work grounded in reality and accessible to all local governments, regardless of size and location.

Join us in Fergus Falls on May 1!

THE VIEW FROM HERE:

TELLING THE STORIES OF OUR REGION



West Central Initiative

May 1, 2025
Bigwood Event Center
11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.

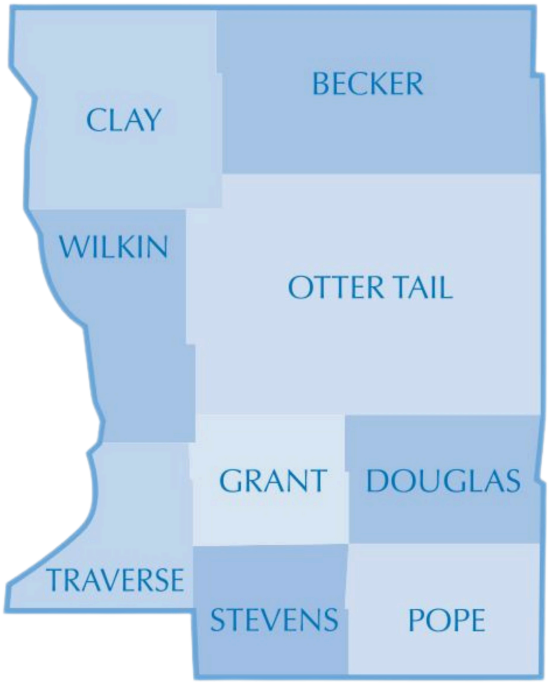
Join us for The View from Here:

Telling the Stories of Our Region

Join us for The View from Here: Telling the Stories of Our Region, a dynamic event exploring the power of local journalism in shaping our communities. The keynote address will be delivered by Steve Grove, the CEO and Publisher of the Minnesota Star Tribune, offering insights into the evolving media landscape.

A panel of regional newspaper representatives will discuss the challenges and opportunities of regional news and storytelling. Don't miss this opportunity to engage with industry leaders and celebrate the vital role of local news in our region.
Lunch is provided. Space is limited, so be sure to register below to save your spot.
Event Timeline

- 11:30 a.m. – Doors Open & Lunch is Served
- 11:45 a.m. – Program Begins
- 1:00 p.m. – Event Concludes



REGISTER NOW



Join us for an upcoming gathering of nonprofit leaders and government agencies in the region.

- **June 13, 2025**
- **11:30 - 1:00 p.m.**

REGISTER NOW

We invite you to join us for a luncheon featuring informative sessions, opportunities for networking, and the chance to connect with fellow leaders from our nine-county area. This event is generously sponsored by LCSC and will include a light lunch.

Guest Speaker: Executive Director of United Way of Douglas & Pope Counties, Jen Jabas.

Topic: **ALICE:** - ALICE is an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed, and represents the growing number of families who are unable to afford the basics.
Attend in person or virtually!

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Whenever you shop Hillyard outside of Express, please verify that your purchases are being made on the CPC contract. A good practice is to review your quotes and invoices to verify that your contract discounts have been applied. A better practice is to chat with your Hillyard rep and request the CPC contract. And the best practice is for your business office to formally request that Hillyard place every transaction on the CPC contract.

Visit Hillyards CPC Vendor Profile Page to view the CPC Member benefits associated with our Hillyard contract, get contact information for Hillyard representatives, and retrieve audit paperwork. Member benefits include: 21% off of the Nilfisk-Advance catalog, 25% off of some 3M products, and 35% off of the entire Rubbermaid catalog.

Learn more about CPC's contract with Hillyard

BEYOND SUPPORT

CAPLP
Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership



Lori Schwartz
Executive Director
CAPLP

How Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership

Empowers Individuals & Families

Source: Lori Schwartz, Lakes and Prairies Community Action Executive Director, Headstart.gov; aspeninstitute.org
Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC's Communications Coordinator

On the south side of Moorhead, Minnesota, a significant force for change is at work. This force is led by Lori Schwartz, the Executive Director of Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership (CAPLP), along with her dedicated team of exceptional leaders. They are deeply committed to the agency's mission of uplifting individuals living in poverty and helping underrepresented people have a voice in Clay and Wilkin Counties. “We are fighting for the people who need to be heard,” said Schwartz. “They may have a voice, but those voices are not always heard.”

It all began for Lori 32 years ago, not in a boardroom but in a Head Start classroom. There, amidst the bright-eyed children and the struggles of their families, she discovered her passion. The mission of Community Action, born from President Lyndon B. Johnson’s "War on Poverty" and the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, resonated within her.

Lori climbed the ranks at CAPLP, from teacher to operations director, before stepping into the executive director role in 2016. Each step deepened her understanding of the agency's purpose: to provide not just support but dignity.

CAPLP, with its diverse team of teachers, social workers, and financial experts, operates four main divisions: Head Start, Housing Stability, Economic Empowerment, and Child Care Connections. Funding, a complex web of federal and state grants, allows them to address the multifaceted needs of the communities they serve. The unrestricted funds come from the Federal Community Services Block Grant, the State of Minnesota Community Action Grant and a handful of local funders.

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"I can't imagine doing anything else," Schwartz said. "This isn't just a job; it's part of something bigger."

Since these funds are classified as unrestricted, CAPLP has local control over how to allocate these resources. This flexibility enables innovation and directly addresses the communities' needs and concerns. This programming does not take away from the other critical programs of CAPLP.

Schwartz pointed out that while working on their strategic plan, she often heard that many organizations create plans only to let them collect dust. She said, "Our plan isn't just sitting on a shelf; we regularly check in on our goals, see how we're doing, and share what we find." Schwartz and her team spent two years figuring out their identity. They dug into their core values, intending for these to be lived out daily, not just written down. They also focused on how they'd work together and made sure everyone knew what was expected.

The goals outlined in their five-year strategic plan are:

1. Individuals and families with low incomes are stable and achieve economic security.
2. Communities where people with low incomes live are healthy and offer economic opportunity.
3. People with low incomes are engaged and active in building opportunities.
4. Agency capacity supports high achievement.
5. Organizational culture built on diversity, equity, and inclusion.
6. Employees continue to be engaged and active in shaping the future of CAPLP, understanding their impact on the Community Action movement.

CAPLP Leadership Team



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HEAD START

The Head Start program, a lifeline for low-income families, is Lori's first love. She understands the weight of the program's federal regulations and the constant vigilance required to ensure every child thrives. Yet, she worries about the program's future. Potential federal funding cuts could devastate the program, denying children who live in poverty the crucial early learning they need.

Child Care Connections, which evolved from the Minnesota Child Care Aware program, now supports early childhood programs across all 53 counties in North Dakota through the Bright & Early ND quality rating system. In Northwest Minnesota, CAPLP serves 21 counties and two tribal nations, offering child care grants, professional training, and Parent Aware outreach. Additionally, it provides child care start-up support, early learning scholarships, and coaching in nine Minnesota counties. It administers the Child Care Assistance Program in Wilkin County to help families afford quality child care.



PILOT ERIC VISITS THE HEAD START CLASSROOM

The Housing Stability division tackles another critical need, providing safe havens for those facing homelessness. CAPLP believes that everyone has the right to a simple, decent, and affordable place to live with dignity and safety. Last year alone, they helped over a thousand people secure stable housing. Schwartz shared that they are incredibly grateful for the funding they receive to provide support to individuals and families facing a housing crisis.

The Economic Empowerment Division truly embodies Lori's vision of sustainable change, helping to move families and individuals out of poverty.

Schwartz shared that their underfunded programs, which fall under the Economic Empowerment Division, are crucial to helping people get back on their feet. They offer financial literacy courses, manage the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, operate the Clay County Seniors Program, and conduct Homebuyer Education classes to enable successful homeownership for low- and moderate-income households. Additionally, they run the Career Connect program, which connects low-income families with skills training to secure high-demand careers, such as nursing, welding, and other trades. Their coaches work closely with individuals every step of the way to overcome personal barriers, such as transportation or childcare, and to secure and maintain employment. "This may even be providing an alarm clock to help a client meet the goal of getting up in the morning," said Schwartz. The focus is on providing courses that will lead to a living-wage job once individuals are in the workforce. This program is an innovative partnership with M State and the United Way of Cass-Clay. CAPLP has increased the number of coaches and navigators from one to three, thanks to the additional grants they have received.

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Schwartz described the whole-family approach as a strategy supported by data and evidence demonstrating success in reducing poverty. Various agencies nationwide are adopting this approach to help families escape poverty. Flourishing Families utilizes family-centered coaching, empowering parents to be the experts on their children and family dynamics. CAPLP implemented this program in 2021. Families establish their goals by identifying their aspirations, strengths, and areas of challenge. Each family is paired with a coach who equips them with the necessary tools to set, plan, and achieve their objectives. Schwartz noted that statistics indicate that when a whole-family approach is successfully implemented, nine out of ten children raised in poverty do not remain in poverty as adults.

"In a perfect world, we would use this approach with all of the families we work with," said Schwartz. If CAPLP does not have a program for someone that walks through their doors, they do not turn the person away. They work very closely with Clay County Human Services and strive to do everything within their control.
As CAPLP's services expanded, they realized they had outgrown their office space. Fortunately, they could secure a new location and purchase their Belsly property six years ago, thanks to the generosity of a donor passionate about supporting their mission. This donor provided the down payment, and CAPLP continues to manage the property's mortgage. Schwartz shared that they are already beginning to outgrow their Belsly location as their services continue to expand.

In Breckenridge, CAPLP's satellite office plays a vital role in supporting the local area by providing all the same essential services, including food assistance and tax preparation.

Over five years ago, they acquired land across from the courthouse and completed the construction of a smaller office, made possible by the generosity of the same donor who helped build the Belsly location. This central location near the courthouse allows CAPLP to offer services more efficiently to families and individuals in Wilkin County.

Lori knows the work is hard. "I have high expectations for the culture at CAPLP," said Schwartz. She shared that there are days when the challenges seem insurmountable. But she also knows the power of collective effort and the satisfaction of seeing lives transformed. Alongside her passionate team at CAPLP, they are not just providing services; they are building pathways to stability, empowering voices, and fostering a future where poverty is not a defining destiny.

Would you like to learn more about CAPLP's programs and services? Contact Executive Director Lori Schwartz at loris@caplp.org or visit their website at caplp.org.

2-1-1: Your Community's Connection to Help.

211

Get Connected. Get Help.™



When residents face challenges like job loss or needing senior support, 2-1-1 is a free, confidential service providing 24/7 access to essential health and human service programs via phone, text, and online chat.

For our cities, counties, government agencies, and nonprofits, 2-1-1 streamlines access to your vital resources, ensuring residents find the help they need easily.

By promoting 2-1-1, you empower your community with a single point of contact for food, housing, healthcare, employment, and more. Let's amplify this lifeline together.

UNITED WAY | 211 Get Connected. Get Help.™



DON'T MISS OUT ON THE LCSC'S MAY NETWORKING LUNCHEON FOR CITY LEADERS!

LCSC members are invited to join a networking luncheon specifically for City Clerks, Deputy Clerks, and City Administrators on **Friday, May 9, 2025**, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at LCSC. You can participate either in person or via ZOOM.

This event offers a fantastic opportunity to network and engage in discussions about pertinent topics with fellow regional members.

Guest Speaker: Scott Wendorff, the Program Director of Information Technology at Lakes Country Service Cooperative, will present an overview and share the latest information on cybersecurity, Wi-Fi audits, and essential tips for recognizing online phishing threats.

REGISTER NOW

STRONGER TOGETHER



UNITED WAY MERGER

EXPANDS THEIR REACH IN THE REGION

Source: Jen Jabas, United Way of Douglas & Pope Counties, Executive Director; www.unitedforalice.org/methodology; uwdp.org; uwotw.org

Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Coordinator

In Alexandria and Fergus Falls, Minnesota, an important transformation is underway that aims to broaden the impact of improving the lives of our friends and neighbors. Leading this change is Jen Jabas, Executive Director of United Way of Douglas & Pope Counties. Her days, already brimming with the multifaceted responsibilities of leading a vital community support organization, have taken on an added layer of complexity and excitement. Jabas is orchestrating a crucial merger, a strategic alliance that will unite her United Way with the neighboring United Way of Otter Tail & Wadena Counties.

This ambitious consolidation, set to take effect on July 1, 2025, will empower the newly formed entity to serve a vast region that includes the four counties of Douglas, Pope, Otter Tail, and Wadena and stretches into parts of Todd County.

They are currently in the integration phase, working on how to merge the two United Ways while preserving what is essential for each community in the region they serve. Letters and emails announcing the merger have been sent to major donors, partners, and stakeholders in the communities served by both United Ways.

Jabas recognizes that the needs can and do look different in each community they serve. They are planning for all existing board members to continue to serve and contribute to unified efforts, and the current offices and staff in Alexandria, Fergus Falls, and Perham will remain intact. “As we go through the merger process, we will continue to have a local presence,” said Jabas.

The name of the merged United Way is still yet to be determined. There has been outreach to the communities, and a survey has been sent to seek feedback and ask for naming ideas. Supporters have suggested three top names, and the United Way team met from across the region and reviewed the feedback.

Soon the board will meet and decide on the name that will carry this large, regional nonprofit serving thousands of people each year into the future. They expect to announce the name close to the merger date of July 1.

There are various cycles for determining funding distributions for community investments and grants for each United Way. For the first year, they will continue to provide funding independently, and then, after that, they will open a grant-making process that will be unified for the region.

Jabas is enthusiastic about establishing consistency in campaign messaging throughout the region, recognizing that this approach will increase efficiency.



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"We will present a unified narrative about United Way's efforts, allowing us to tailor it for each community and illustrate how United Way contributes locally," stated Jabas. "It is crucial to have a single, consistent message when the United Way Annual Campaign kicks off." Jabas further explained that their communities are well-acquainted with their initiatives for raising and investing funds in two primary ways: by providing internal programs and through Community Investment grants that enhance the essential work they are already undertaking.

Donors, nonprofit partners, and individuals receiving support through United Way programs or grants will hear the same message and have a similar experience across the region. This will unify the United Ways but also lend itself to ALICE. ALICE is an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed, and represents the growing number of families who cannot afford basic needs.

"When we serve our communities, we will be focused on ALICE in our communities beyond the poverty level," said Jabas.



"There are members of our communities that are ALICE and continuing to grow in numbers and percentages." She went on to share that it is essential that United Way ensures they serve people that are working hard every day but struggling to make ends meet.

ALICE is a statewide initiative with an online database that was a year in the making and was launched in the fall of 2024.

> ***"As we go through the merger process, we will continue to have a local presence," said Jabas. "The statistics and data are vital to examine, as we often assume that issues aren't present in our community, or individuals may hesitate to seek help, believing someone else might need it more. I hope that through this process, we can diminish the stigma surrounding community needs and those who require assistance. This allows us to better understand what these needs look like and encourages us to feel more comfortable asking for support." - Jen Jabas***

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The Minnesota Statewide Association, United Ways of Minnesota, is in the early stages of educating its communities about ALICE and telling the story. This will help them to advocate for services in their communities. The next phase is ALICE in action. This phase is not just about taking the data and sharing the information but also about using the data to develop programs or initiatives to create more resources for people who fall within that category.

ALICE is a tool that all programs serving Minnesota residents can use to determine their needs. It is in addition to tools already available to nonprofit organizations, such as community needs assessments facilitated by Public Health and Community Action Agencies, Minnesota COMPASS, and 211.

Data shows that communities using ALICE data for extended periods have begun to create initiatives, such as Wi-Fi hotspots for students to do their homework where they were otherwise limited due to family financial constraints. This represents how the data was used to identify a need and solve a problem using the data from ALICE.

When asked about trends she may be seeing since the program's launch in Fall 2024, Jabas shared that using the tools that ALICE provides has been more about awareness and education than ALICE in action. “The data set is just that, it's more of an acronym for defining a struggling population in our community. The programming piece will come because of the education piece,” said Jabas. “Sometimes we are not even aware of the significant number of families that might fall within that category until we bring that data forward.”

ALICE provides tools such as a Household Survival Budget and a Sustainable Budget within the family’s community.

When families see increased costs, this can help them determine what they need to make ends meet and stabilize based on the size of their household.

"ALICE is one piece in that puzzle that helps us to be intentional about how we serve the community," said Jabas.

The data in ALICE is a collaborative effort between many partners, and the data provider for each category may be different in the methodology.

PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THE METHODOLOGY

Since the War on Poverty initiation in 1965, the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) has served as a benchmark for assessing the number and percentage of individuals living in poverty across the U.S. The FPL is often considered too low, prompting many government and nonprofit organizations to use multiples of it to establish eligibility for various assistance programs. Although alternative measures have been created, none effectively capture the extent of households facing hardship in each county within a state. The ALICE research addresses this gap.

Jabas is enthusiastic about the program, as the data shows a decline in poverty levels. However, ALICE highlights that many individuals diligently work each day yet still face challenges in making ends meet.

This data shows families that they are not alone in their struggles. It aids United Way in developing programs that can benefit not just one specific group but a broader community. This awareness is valuable for all these reasons.

"The statistics and data are vital to examine, as we often assume that issues aren't present in our community, or individuals may hesitate to seek help, believing someone else might need it more. Through this process, I hope we can diminish the stigma surrounding community needs and those who require assistance. This allows us to understand better what these needs look like and encourages us to feel more comfortable asking for support," Jabas stated.

Jabas and her team are analyzing what programs are going well in each service area and how they can build and learn from those strengths. "We are now in the exciting phase of what can be!" said Jabas. She shared that they will be focused on a unified marketing approach to promote United Way Worldwide's new brand refresh across the region. Through the year-long merger process, Jabas has often encountered the question, "How will you do more with less?" She responds, "I see it as we will do more with more!"

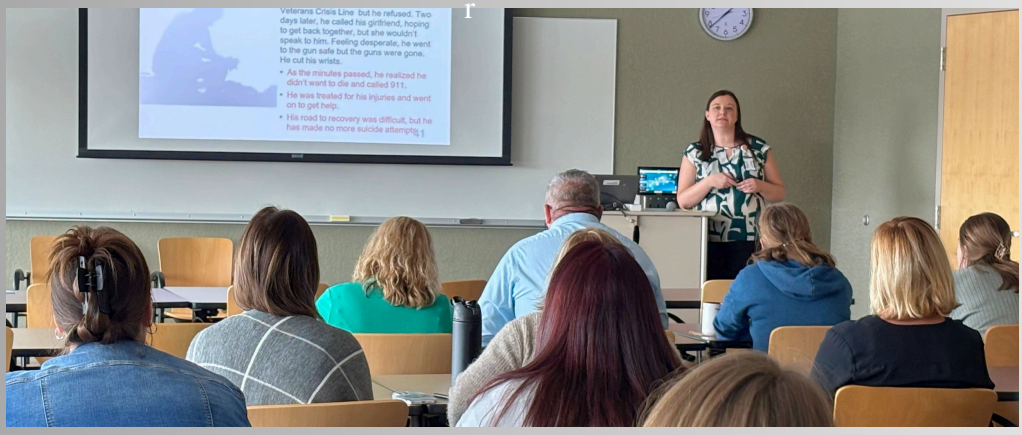
Jabas is scheduling meetings with stakeholders to help create awareness about ALICE and how you can help move to ALICE IN ACTION.

If you have questions about the merger of United Way of Douglas & Pope Counties with United Way of Otter Tail & Wadena Counties or if you would like to learn more about ALICE, reach out to Jen Jabas at 320-834-7800 or send her an email at **jjabas@uwdp.org**



Otter Tail County
Hosts CALM Training to Address Suicide Prevention

Submitted by: Shannon Terry, Otter Tail County Public Information Officer



Otter Tail County recently hosted and participated in Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM) training. The three-hour training was organized by members of the county's multi-disciplinary team, a cross-section of professionals from throughout Human Services, Probation, and the County Attorney's Office. The training was facilitated by clinicians from the Fargo Veterans Affairs Healthcare System and equipped professionals with strategies for reducing access to lethal means among individuals at risk for suicide.

Suicide rates in Otter Tail County and other rural areas are highest among middle-aged males. According to the Minnesota Department of Health: Firearms were involved in 47% of all suicide deaths in 2023. Historically, white males account for about 80% of firearm suicide deaths in Minnesota, with men in general representing about 80% of all suicides in the state.

Rates of firearm suicide were about twice as high in rural counties as in urban counties. Given these statistics, Otter Tail County recognizes the need for targeted suicide prevention efforts. CALM training provides vital tools for professionals and community members to engage in life-saving conversations and promote firearm safety among those at risk.

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center describes CALM training as "a powerful addition to existing strategies to reduce the risk of suicide death in at-risk people while respecting their rights and autonomy." The training educates professionals, gun owners, and the public on methods to limit access to firearms and other lethal means for individuals at risk, while maintaining their autonomy and decision-making rights.

"I can attest that despite attending numerous suicide prevention trainings in my career," said Assistant Director of Human Services, Jess Steinbrenner, "CALM provided me with new information and new conceptualization of suicide prevention."

Otter Tail County has an established coalition, Community Partnerships for Suicide Prevention (CPSP), which works to implement mental health and suicide prevention initiatives throughout the county. Including 30 members with diverse professional and personal backgrounds, the coalition is funded by the Comprehensive Suicide Prevention Grant from the Minnesota Department of Health. Through this funding, the group has developed a comprehensive plan for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention in Otter Tail County. CALM training is an opportunity to support the mission of the CPSP and work to prevent suicide across the county.

If you or someone you know needs free and confidential support, call the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988. For more information about suicide prevention initiatives in Otter Tail County, please visit ottertailcounty.gov/suicide-prevention/

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