June 2025

# LCSC Communicator

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative
Together we achieve

Regional News, Views, and Information

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# A YOUTH VOICE on the Morris City Council




**Seated:** Junior Council Member, Abigail Alcantar
**From Left:** Morris Council members: Kim Gullickson, Brian Solvie, Zac Kroells, and Mayor Kevin Wohlers

How do you spark civic engagement in the next generation and ensure local government truly reflects its entire community? In Morris, Mayor Kevin Wohler believes the answer lies in the youth having a voice as a Junior Council member. "Not only is civic engagement an obligation of every elected official, but it is also crucial for the development of future leaders in our community. We need to start today, finding leaders for tomorrow," said Mayor Wohler.

City Manager Rebecca Schrupp initiated the project by researching how other city councils with junior councils operated. The Morris City Council members worked together to establish the program's structure and operational outline in preparation for its launch in September 2024.

**Source**: Rebecca Schrupp, Morris City Manager

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**Author:** Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Coordinator

**The Morris City Council has established the following guidelines.**

Junior Members of the council:

1. serve a one-year term.
2. are a non-voting member of the council.
3. may express opinions and have conversations.
4. do not participate in closed sessions.
5. at the end of the term, share their experience and provide input on proposed revisions to the program.

They decided to choose twelfth-grade students as candidates for the role. They contacted the local high school civics teacher about potential levels of interest from students and interviewed candidates in December. Seven students were interested in the program. Abigail Alcantar was selected and sworn in with the council in January 2025 and served through May 2025.

The Junior Council member does not serve on any committee and only attends the monthly meetings. Through the Southwest Administrators group, the Junior Council member is also offered the opportunity to participate in Council Orientation training.

When asked about Abigail Alcantar's participation as a Junior Council member, Schrupp mentioned that she attended all the meetings and spent much of her time listening to the council's discussions. "She was learning, so I think trying to step in and have a voice in the council was a little harder," said Schrupp. With this new program, the council was unsure how to involve the Junior Council member. They look forward to next year and learning how they can improve upon asking questions and engaging the Junior Council member on their thoughts and opinions.



**Rebecca Schrupp**
Morris City Manager

One example of the Junior Council member's perspective was that Abigail Alcantar shared with the council that the City of Morris has a significant Spanish-speaking population. However, there are currently no signs in Spanish throughout the community to assist Spanish-speaking residents with navigation and commuting.

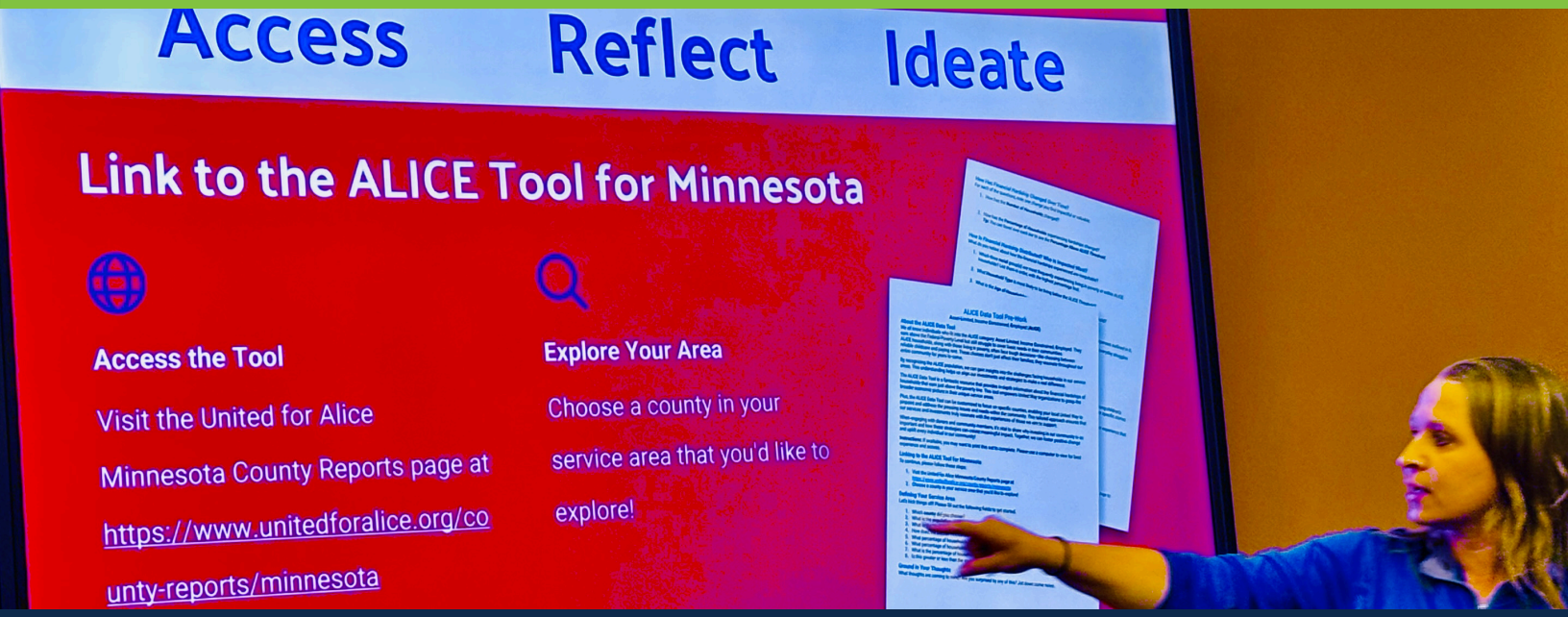
Mayor Wohler stated, "Our goal was to see what we can do to enhance our city. Basically, looking at our city through the lens of the youth in our community. We wanted to find out how the younger generation views city government, while educating them on the political process."

Now, with one year of experience, the council feels it will better grasp what the Junior Council member can accomplish while serving the council and increase the potential for a future in local government. Schrupp said they will begin selecting a new Junior Council member in the fall of 2025.

Do you want to learn more about the City of Morris's Junior Council? Contact Morris City Manager, Rebecca Schrupp, at rebecca@ci.morris.mn.us.

# JUNE NONPROFIT & GOVERNMENT AGENCY Networking Luncheon

**Source**: Jen Jabas, United Way of Douglas & Pope Counties United Way; United For ALICE
**Author:** Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Coordinator




## ALICE

Do you know families or individuals who are classified as ALICE – Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed? These individuals and families earn above the Federal Poverty Level but still face challenges in meeting their basic needs. In fact, one in three Minnesotans (36%) falls into this category.

At our Member Nonprofit and Government Agency Networking Luncheon, United Way Executive Director Jen Jabas shared compelling stories of ALICE within our region and introduced a valuable, free resource to identify where ALICE populations are located in your community: UNITED FOR ALICE.

- The ALICE Data Tool offers in-depth insights into the financial struggles faced by households just above the poverty line.
- This tool enables community organizations to understand the broader economic picture within their service areas.
- It can be customized to focus on specific counties, allowing local communities to identify and address pressing issues.

The next step is ALICE in action and how we, as nonprofit organizations and government agencies, can work together to help families and individuals who are ALICE move from surviving to thriving.



From the

# Executive Director

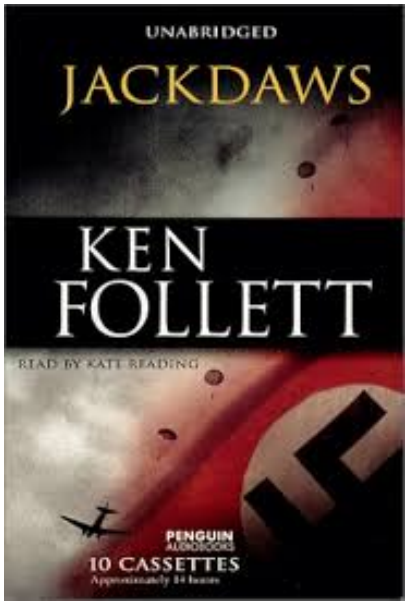
"We Advocate for Strong Communities through Service and Leadership."



**Jeremy Kovash**
*Executive Director*

One of our core values at Lakes Country Service Cooperative is Leadership: Transforming the Future for ALL. As we enter the summer of 2025, I'm reminded that transformation often begins with stories—both those we live and those we read.

Summer is my favorite time to unwind with a good book, and I've long been drawn to historical fiction. My favorite author is Ken Follett, renowned for his ability to blend sweeping historical facts with gripping personal narratives. His storytelling often reminds me of my favorite professor at Concordia College, Dr. Vince Arnold. Dr. Arnold had a gift—each class felt like story time, full of vivid accounts of Nazi Germany and modern Russia. Those lectures sparked in me a lifelong love of history (even if the blue book exams weren't always as welcome!). My wife, Deanna, and I met in Dr. Arnold's Russian History class and began studying together for these exams!




My most recent Follett read, Jackdaws, particularly resonates with me—and with our LCSC value of leadership. The book tells the story of a daring British women's spy ring working in occupied France during World War II. These courageous leaders, united by purpose and resolve, took on a mission that would prove critical to the success of D-Day. Their bravery and teamwork helped shape a better future for all. It's a powerful reminder that leadership isn't about titles—it's about action, unity, and impact.

As you enjoy this issue of the Communicator, I hope you find a moment to relax with a good book and reflect on how each of us can help transform the future. Let's continue to lead together, because Together We Achieve.

Wishing you an awesome summer!



# Rural COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

## Strengthening Public Service

**JANE EASTES**
Deputy Executive Director

The horrific events over the weekend with the tragic shootings of two Minnesota lawmakers, John Hoffman and his wife Yvette, and Speaker Emerita Melissa Hortman and her husband Mark, have shaken us to the core. Today, I can think of nothing but the devastating loss of life for the families of Melissa and Mark Hortman, the forever changed lives of the Hoffman family, and the chilling effects of the apparently politically motivated violence in our home state. I grieve for everyone, regardless of political view, who give so willingly in service to their community and now feel vulnerable. Grieving gives way to anger over the too often negative public discourse and polarization.

The Hortman's grown children, Sophie and Colin, published a statement to the media that is stunning in its simplicity, kindness, and grace. It so eloquently reminded us that we need to fall back on our values and that the best way to handle these strong emotions is to channel them into positive actions. "The best way to honor our parents' memory is to do something, whether big or small, to make our community just a little better for someone else." They write about the simple, but powerful things we as individuals can do to honor their parent's memory; plant a tree, pet a dog, visit a park and enjoy its amenities, bake a cake (for Melissa) or bread (for Mark) and give it to someone, tell your loved ones a cheesy Dad joke and laugh about it, stand up for what you believe in, especially for justice and peace.

We are so lucky in our community to have many wonderful examples of community building action that we can bring to our own communities. Have you thought about adding a Youth voice to one or more of your Boards or Council? I was so excited to read about the work Rebecca, Kevin, and the Morris Council are doing to add a high school senior as a junior council member. What an incredible community-building step – a learning and leadership win for Youth, and a growth and opportunity win for the city. This article is timely as we at LCSC have just received a grant from West Central Initiative to expand our efforts to help our members effectively bring the youth perspective to the Board and Councils.

We are dedicating the work as our action step to channel our pain into positive action on behalf of the Hortman and Hoffman families, and everyone working in the public sphere. We will always have differences but must never lose sight of our common purpose and humanity.

# THE CITY OF BATTLE LAKE

## Receives Brownfield Award

**Source**: Val Martin, Battle Lake City Clerk; mnbrownfields.org, League of Minnesota Cities
**Author:** Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Coordinator

The City of Battle Lake recently received a prestigious award for its innovative work in redeveloping a formerly contaminated downtown area. After seven years of dedicated effort, the city's Hatchery Row project won the Minnesota Brownfield ReScape Award for Economic Impact.

### What is a Brownfield?

You might be wondering, what exactly is a "brownfield"? The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines a brownfield as "real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant."

"We were the only community outside of the Metro area to be nominated," said Val Martin, City Clerk of Battle Lake. "What a fun event!"



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**From left:** Val Martin, Battle Lake City Clerk; and Richard Bullard, Battle Lake Mayor




**BEFORE**

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Basically, these are abandoned or unused properties where actual or perceived environmental contamination creates a hurdle for redevelopment.

## The ReScape Awards

The ReScape Awards are an annual program by Minnesota Brownfields that celebrates development projects focused on cleaning up, redeveloping, and revitalizing communities across Minnesota. Each year, projects are nominated in four categories:

1. Community Impact
2. Economic Impact
3. Environmental Impact
4. Innovation Awards

An expert panel evaluates submissions, selecting one winner for each category. These awards recognize project partners for their successful cleanup and reuse of contaminated land, ultimately boosting economic growth and sustainable development.

Projects that demonstrate positive economic impacts are those that:

- **Create or retain permanent jobs**
- **Increase the tax base**
- **Attract private investment**
- **Act as catalysts for neighborhood or community revitalization**

## The Hatchery Row Project

The City of Battle Lake's Hatchery Row project is a prime example of such economic impact. The revitalized downtown area now boasts a state-of-the-art, three-story, multi-use building featuring commercial space, high-end apartments, and underground parking.

The success of the Hatchery Row project was a collaborative effort. Key partners included the Battle Lake Economic Development Authority, the Battle Lake City Council, the Otter Tail County Community Development Agency, DEED, and the USDA Rural Development Program. Val Martin, City of Battle Lake Clerk, shared that the city leveraged just over $320,000 in grant funding, which included a $100,000 inter-fund loan, to help develop the site.

Congratulations to the City of Battle Lake on this well-deserved recognition and on making such a significant economic impact on your community's future!




# Lakes Country Service Cooperative

## Now Offering

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## OSHA 10-Hour Training

- **Designed for entry-level workers in general industry.**
- **Provides a basic understanding of workplace safety and health hazards.**
- **Ideal for anyone looking to build a strong safety foundation.**

## OSHA 30-Hour Training

Training Scheduled: July 28, 29, 30 & 31, 2025.
Contact Jeff Preuss for more information regarding registration.

- **Tailored for supervisors, managers, safety coordinators, and other leaders.**
- **Offers a more in-depth review of workplace safety topics and compliance.**
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**Jeff Preuss**

jpreuss@lcsc.org

**218-737-6529**

## Don't miss out on the LCSC's August Networking Luncheon for City Leaders!




EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**REGISTER NOW**

LCSC members are invited to join a networking luncheon specifically for City Clerks, Deputy Clerks, and City Administrators on Friday, August 15, 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:** David J. Heyer, Business Development Manager for the West Central region and Foreign Trade Zone Administrator for the Twin Cities Metro Area at the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). In addition to David Heyer, DEED leaders from the infrastructure, broadband, and redevelopment sectors will also discuss their programs.

## 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.™

# From Personal Passion to Powerful Leadership

# Justine Anderson's Journey at Empowering Kids Perham

**Source**: Justine Anderson, Executive Director; EKP Perham, empoweringkidsperham.org
**Author:** Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Coordinator

Justine Anderson's passion for Empowering Kids Perham (EKP) began long before she became the executive director. She has been involved with EKP since its inception in 2017, having a personal connection as one of the first clients to use their services for her son, who has an attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) diagnosis. Justine's commitment to helping children in the Perham community extended beyond her family's direct experience with EKP. She also served on the board of EKP, joining about four years ago. She was officially on the board as a parent and active community member, offering her support to the organization. In addition to her involvement with EKP, Justine serves on the school board for the Perham Public School District and has served on several other nonprofit and foundation boards.

While serving on EKP's board, Anderson recognized the challenges faced over the past year, including staff turnover and changes in organizational leadership. Anderson described this as a tough time for both employees and the board.

Anderson has a strong financial background and extensive experience managing nonprofit finances. She served as the Controller for Perham Health for six years and has spent the past seven years as the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of the organization, overseeing its financial aspects during this time. "When I entered the field of accounting, my goal was always to become a CFO," Anderson remarked.



“It was right before Thanksgiving, I remember thinking, I am ready for something different, and Empowering Kids needs a leader.”

**Empowering Kids Perham Executive Director, Justine Anderson**

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Despite being very fulfilled in her position at Perham Health, Anderson felt a strong pull in November 2024 to apply for the executive director opening at EKP. She then met with the EKP board to share her intention to apply for the position and officially resigned from the board. Her decision surprised her fellow board members and many community leaders in Perham.

Anderson, who applied in November 2024, was selected as the new executive director and started her new role on February 3, 2025.

Anderson reflects six months later, "I haven't looked back once. This is where my passion is.

"Within the first week of her new role, the annual Giving Hearts Day charity event, EKP's biggest fundraising event, took place. Anderson admitted to being nervous about the $50,000 goal, which she felt was a long shot. The local Perham Rotary Club visited EKP and the Boys and Girls Club that day to learn about their programs.
After the presentation, the Rotary Club donated over $8,000 between the two organizations.

"This gave us the momentum we needed to continue with our refresh and reset at Empowering Kids," said Anderson.
Local partnerships also contributed to the event's success, with K.L.N. Family Brands providing a match for donations from their employees who contributed to the Giving Hearts Campaign.
"Community support is one of the best things a nonprofit in Perham has.

This is a unique community with businesses supporting each other and community members who invest in Perham," said Anderson.

In her initial months, in addition to addressing the financial situation, Anderson focused on stabilizing the current workforce. Her priorities included getting to know the team, not making waves, allowing the team to get to know her, and building trust and showing appreciation for their dedication to EKP. Subsequently, she worked on expanding the team, reaching out to the community, and marketing to attract individuals interested in building careers at EKP.

EKP's biggest current struggle is that the demand for services is outpacing its capacity to serve more children, with over 30 children currently on the waitlist. To meet this demand, EKP needs to hire more providers. With the organization reset, Anderson is purposeful about ensuring the right people are in the correct positions. Currently, they are not hiring new employees, as Anderson is mindful of the detrimental impact on clients when providers start and leave in a short period of time.

"It is so detrimental to our work, and I feel very strongly that it has to be somebody here for the right reasons and wants to do this work," she stated. They plan to hire providers in the fall to avoid overwhelming the current staff. EKP has six providers for Early Intensive Developmental and Behavioral Intervention, which requires one-on-one therapy for clients. A major success has been filling the Level 2 Provider position with two new excellent providers. Anderson shared that all Level 2 Providers are gifted in the services they provide, with past experiences ranging from Special Education Teachers, Registered Behavior Technicians (RBT), or individuals with experience working as a PARA in Special Education. "I am proud of the quality service our staff provides and the focus on the kids. They focus on the mission," said Anderson. EKP offers intense one-on-one therapy that focuses on understanding each child, identifying their triggers, and helping them expand their goals and skill sets.

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EMPOWERING KIDS PERHAM TEAM

"What I want most for people to understand about Autism is that it is not something to be fixed. Let's understand it better, let's understand what it does, and how it impacts lives. Neurodivergent people have always existed. We just have so many more services, understanding, and compassion to help them." - **Empowering Kids Perham Executive Director, Justine Anderson**

This June, EKP is excited to introduce a new program called NeuroCrew, specifically designed for neurodivergent young adults aged 18 and older. This initiative will provide opportunities for participants to engage in fun social events within the community and hopes to expand this initiative further.

Additionally, EKP provides after-school and summer social and recreational groups led by special education teachers from the Perham School District. Anderson is excited about enrolling 20 children for the summer programming.

Another vital service EKP offers is occupational therapy (OT), which helps children develop essential skills for participating in everyday activities such as play, learning, eating, and socializing. It focuses on supporting children in building their independence, self-confidence, and ability to engage in activities that are meaningful to them.

Anderson recently received notification of a $7,500 grant from West Central Initiative for a Caregivers Support Group. "I am very excited about this grant because we often operate on a bare-bones budget as a nonprofit. Receiving this grant will allow us to provide childcare for parents so they can attend," said Anderson. She understands firsthand how a caregiver support group can offer emotional support, resource sharing, coping strategies, skill development, encouragement, and more.

Under Anderson's passionate leadership, EKP is well-positioned for continued growth and impact. Her deep personal connection to the mission, combined with her extensive financial and leadership experience, is propelling the organization forward. While challenges persist, particularly due to the high demand for services, Anderson's strategic focus on building a strong team and fostering community partnerships is helping to create a resilient and hopeful future for the children and families served by EKP.

To learn more about Empowering Kids Perham's services or how you can support its mission, visit their website at empoweringkidsperham.org or their Facebook page. If you have questions, contact Justine Anderson at justine@empoweringkidsperham.org.

# Conference or Meeting Room Reservations at Lakes Country Service Cooperative

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative
*Together we achieve*

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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 Hillyard's 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 the Nilfisk-Advance catalog, 25% off some 3M products, and 35% off the entire Rubbermaid catalog.

**Learn more about CPC's contract with Hillyard**




# Otter Tail County

## Housing Summit Activates Partners

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

Otter Tail County hosted a countywide Housing Summit on Wednesday, May 14. The summit brought nearly 100 housing partners together at Thumper Pond Resort to learn about housing successes, engage with each other, and activate continued housing investment for the county.

The Housing Summit included presentations from developers, city representatives, the Otter Tail County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA), and the Community Development Agency (CDA). Otter Tail County's housing finance programs and technical assistance services for communities were also highlighted during the presentations.

Keynote speaker, Ben Winchester, a Rural Sociologist from the University of Minnesota Extension Department of Community Development, highlighted the importance of housing investment for the future of rural economies, including Otter Tail County. "There is certainly an economic return on building a home and investing in housing. Our early Extension research shows that every household living in a home produces upwards of $51,000 in economic output annually," shared Winchester.

This metric does not include the output from building the house or individuals from the household participating directly in the local workforce.That is only the household spending and other economic contributions to the community. Beyond economics, housing allows for community wealth to be created through leadership and volunteer opportunities, local small business ownership, school enrollments, and nonprofit growth.

Otter Tail County Commissioner and CDA and HRA Board Member, Kurt Mortenson, said of the summit, "It was encouraging to hear about the shared successes and broad benefits that housing investment has on our communities. Many partners came together today to share information and make connections to continue this impactful housing work."

The Housing Summit was an excellent event to share resources and activate nearly 100 partners to continue housing growth efforts. More information about the Housing Summit and other housing resources in Otter Tail County is available at bigbuildotc.com.

# West Central Initiative Awards Grants to 55 Regional Organizations

**Submitted by:** Ashley Quam
West Central Initiative,
Marketing & Communications Officer

West Central Initiative awarded grants totaling $570,000 to 55 organizations working across the region to address sustainability, equity, and civic engagement.

"These grants represent more than just funding—they're a collective investment in a stronger region," said Director of Development Rebecca Lynn Petersen. "We're honored to support organizations whose work uplifts our communities and sets ripples of good in motion."

## West Central Initiative Grant Recipients

- **A Place For Hope:** Recovery and Wellness Center for a refurbished walk-in freezer for the food shelf.
- **Artistree Community Inc.** for the Facilitating Racial Equity Collaborative (FREC) Greater Minnesota Racial Equity Conference.
- **Bagosendaan** for promoting learning and emotional growth to low-income youth ages 11 to 18 who are at-risk or are previous offenders within a court or school system.
- **Bam'idizowigamig Creator's Place** for providing employment, skills training, and education to those who have been historically marginalized, including individuals who have experienced long-term unemployment, past incarceration, or lack formal education.
- **Baraza La Afrika** for the Congolese Community Garden.
- **Boys & Girls Club of Detroit Lakes, Inc.** for the Hydroponic Farm Education Program, which provides agricultural education and healthy food access.
- **City of Henning** for the Trinity Center cellular shade project, which will reduce heat loss and improve the center's energy efficiency.
- **City of Pelican Rapids** for EcoRide Equity: Pedaling Towards Inclusivity, which will establish an equitable e-bike program at the Pelican Rapids Public Library.
- **Civic Bridgers** for local facilitation coordinators for Beyond Civics: Youth Civic Engagement that Bridges Divides.
- **Clay County Social Services** for the Clay County Family Resource Center to provide welcoming spaces for connection, access, support, and community building for all Clay County families.
- **Clifford J. Benson Center** for Community Partnerships, University of Minnesota Morris, for the Rural Intercultural Education Initiative and the Rural Food Systems Initiative.
- **Community Connect Center** (formerly the South Sudanese Foundation) for expanding community-based equity conversations, enhancing the Healthy Connections program, mobilizing civic engagement and leadership, and strengthening organizational capacity.

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- **Concordia College** for Amplifying Indigenous Voices: Education for Mutual Respect in West Central Minnesota, which will convene local Indigenous leaders and healthcare providers to enhance providers' cultural competency, strengthen trust, improve health outcomes, and amplify Indigenous voices.
- **Conexiones** for ongoing activities and resources for the growing immigrant population, and to support strategic planning to meet emerging needs.
- **Cornerstone Community and Youth Center** for Cultural Fusion to offer culturally relevant programs in collaboration with White Earth Nation and cultural groups.
- **Cultural Diversity Resources** for the Family Engagement for Healthy, Social and Financial Well-Being Project to provide nutritional and financial education to low-income individuals, marginalized and underserved New Americans, and those who identify as Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color.
- **Dilworth Glyndon Felton Public School #2164** for Native Voices and culturally responsive professional development to create a school where all students feel like they belong, are valued, seen, and heard.
- **Douglas County Car Care Program** for the expansion of the Car Care Program to Fergus Falls. The program provides vital transportation support through vehicle donations, affordable repairs, and mechanical training for historically marginalized populations, including low-income households, individuals with disabilities, and single-parent families.
- **Empowering Kids Perham** for the establishment and facilitation of a parent and caregiver support group for families of neurodivergent children.
- **Ethnic Self-Help Alliance** for Refugee Assistance (ESHARA) for reducing barriers and expanding access to critical resources, including employment, housing, healthcare, and education for refugees, immigrants, and New Americans.
- **Fergus Falls Community Food Shelf** for a new cooler for the fruit and vegetable recovery program to utilize discarded fresh produce.
- **Fergus Falls Public Schools #544** for the Rooted in History, Growing Our Future prairie restoration initiative.
- **First Congregational United Church of Christ** for Youth Stewards Internship program to provide youth with hands-on experience in sustainable farming practices and natural resource protection.
- **Friends of the Alexandria Nature Trail** for the protection and enhancement of the Alexandria Nature Trail.
- **Ganawenindidaaa** (We Take Care of Each Other) for water quality monitoring of the Otter Tail River, Buffalo River, Wild Rice River, and the Red Lake River.
- **Grant County Collaborative** for hosting seven Grant County Changemakers in the Community 2.0 activities focused on sustainability, equity, and civic engagement.
- **Harvest Hope Farm** for hands-on farm experiences and education for youth regarding sustainable food resources and environmental stewardship.
- **Henning Public School District #545** for improving library programming access for students and community members.
- **History Arts & Cultural Organization** for the creation of the Where Did They Go? The Story of the Indigenous People of East Otter Tail County exhibit at the History Museum of East Otter Tail County.
- **Hope Blooms** for Flower Empower to enhance well-being and social connectedness for older adults and those with disabilities, in recovery, in mental health facilities, and many others.
- **Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota** for educational presentations about immigration law and rights for immigrants in west central Minnesota.
- **Inclusive Moorhead** for facilitating events, programs, and services that empower marginalized groups, including New Americans, Indigenous people, those with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ communities.
- **Izaak Walton League Prairie Woods Chapter** for creating an outdoor pollinator and environmental science classroom at the Detroit Lakes Boys & Girls Club in collaboration with a Boy Scout Troop 674 Eagle Scout.


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- **Kondial Kel International** for the MoneySmart Program to address the critical gap in financial literacy among youth and women from low-income families.
- **Lake Region Healthcare Foundation** for the Lake Region Takes Root Community Garden expansion.
- **Lakes Country Service Cooperative** for the Youth in Leadership Launchpad project to strengthen civic engagement and leadership development among high school students.
- **League of Women Voters, Detroit Lakes Area** for Democracy in Action to educate, energize, and engage community members about local government, democracy, and voting.
- **Minnesota Council of Churches** for building local leadership, encouraging civic participation, enhancing community education, and expanding the Respectful Conversations series.
- **Minnesota Flyers Gymnastics for FlyTime**, which offers fitness equality for individuals who have physical or emotional limitations that require extra assistance and specialized equipment.
- **Monarch Joint Venture** for The Habitat Reciprocity Project to provide public education about the loss of native grassland habitats and the decline of bird and pollinator species.
- **New Roots Midwest** for the African Immigrant Mentorship Program to teach practical skills, such as financial literacy, housing options, healthcare access, and transportation systems, to ensure newcomers can settle comfortably into their new homes.
- **Otter Tail County** for the Empowering Workers Program, which provides training and services to individuals and families to overcome barriers to employment and obtain high-demand jobs that pay a household-sustaining wage.
- **P's & Q's Etiquette** for expanding hands-on, skills-based, youth-informed programming to help disadvantaged youth become effective leaders.
- **Planned Parenthood Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota** for Sexual and Reproductive Health Peer Education to provide culturally specific, age-appropriate, and medically accurate education to increase equitable access to health resources and empower young people.
- **Prairie Rose Agricultural Institute** for Research, Innovation & Education for the New Roots Farm Incubator.
- **Project 412 for the HOTdish:** Turning Ideas into Action & Community into Changemakers annual grassroots event designed to inspire and fund community-driven projects in Detroit Lakes.
- **Regional Native Public Defense** for addressing systemic inequities by ensuring culturally competent legal representation, advocating for fair outcomes, and reducing barriers to justice for individuals in White Earth Nation and the surrounding area.
- **Renewing the Countryside** for culinary events serving local foods from local farms.
- **Resource Connect** for Pathways to Opportunity: Equitable Transportation for Marginalized Workers to address critical transportation barriers facing historically marginalized populations in the Fargo-Moorhead region.
- **Richland-Wilkin Kinship** to provide opportunities and support for youth with adverse childhood experiences through the power of mentoring.
- **RUSC Kinship Mentoring** for fostering equity in the community by ensuring that all youth, regardless of background or circumstance, have access to positive mentorship, literacy resources, and developmental support, and to increase public awareness of NEAR (Neuroscience, Epigenetics, Adverse Childhood Experiences, and Resilience).
- **Seed Coalition for the Civic Action Academy and Engaged Faculty Institute** to support the long-term development of civic engagement in Stevens and Clay Counties and the surrounding region.
- **The Gifted Learning Project** for the Seeds of Heritage: Indigenous Youth Growing Traditions to reconnect Indigenous youth with traditional agriculture to learn how Indigenous food systems support community health, environmental resilience, and cultural preservation.
- **Women Initiative Network of Liberia in Cass and Clay Counties** for furthering its mission of creating a place with activities and support services for single moms, youth, children, and vulnerable adults.

***continued on next page***

- **YMCA of the Northern Sky – Fercho** for YMCA Youth in Government, which provides students in grades 8 through 12 with a hands-on opportunity to engage in civic education.



**Amanda Quam**
West Central Initiative, Grants Officer

"The remarkable volume of high-quality applications we received this year speaks to the extraordinary energy, bold ideas, and deep commitment driving change in our communities," said Grants Officer Amanda Quam. "While we couldn't fund every project, we were inspired by the vision and dedication shared in each application. We look forward to continuing to support and uplift the good work happening throughout our region."

These grants were made possible through the West Central Initiative Endowment. If you'd like to make an impact and help regional and local initiatives, consider donating to the Start a Ripple Campaign at wcif.org/donate. Your generosity can help make ripples of good in the communities you love.

**About West Central Initiative**

West Central Initiative is a place-based nonprofit, community foundation, and regional development organization dedicated to fostering a thriving, inclusive, and sustainable future for White Earth Nation and Becker, Clay, Douglas, Grant, Otter Tail, Pope, Stevens, Traverse, and Wilkin Counties. Since its founding in 1986, West Central Initiative has provided funding, technical assistance, planning resources, and philanthropic services to strengthen the economic and social fabric of the region. The organization has provided more than $59 million in loans and approximately $82 million in grants to businesses and organizations. **Learn more at wcif.org.**




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