January 2026

LCSC Communicator

Regional News, Views, and Information

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative
Together we achieve

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An equal opportunity employer

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Navigating Record NEED and Unsustainable COSTS



Source: Susie Boelter, Executive Director, North Country Food Bank; www.northcountryfoodbank.org; www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap

Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Coordinator

Susie Boelter has served as the Executive Director of North Country Food Bank (NCFB) for 20 years. NCFB first operated out of a former creamery in Crookston, Minnesota, until operations grew large enough to require a larger building.

In January 2020, NCFB moved to its new location in East Grand Forks, Minnesota, allowing the organization to operate in a space better suited to its operational needs and service area.



As a 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit, NCFB is the largest hunger-relief organization in northwest and west-central Minnesota.



Susie Boelter

Executive Director
North Country Food Bank

"The communities where we have strong partnerships are always where we are able to distribute more food," said Boelter.

> **"For every meal NCFB provides in their emergency feeding system, SNAP provides nine," said Boelter.**

They source food nationally, regionally, and locally and distribute it to 220 agency partners. "We are the most effective and efficient way to move food across the state," Boelter said. Each year, they distribute over 7.5 million pounds of food—enough for 6.25 million meals—feeding approximately 41,000 neighbors through a network of regional partners and direct programs like the Mobile Food Pantry, Nutrition for Seniors (CSFP), and the BackPack Program.

The "Perfect Storm"

Despite this robust system, the past year created what Boelter calls a "perfect storm." NCFB was already experiencing record levels of need; in the last three years, distribution has increased by 37 percent. While a three percent annual increase is normal, this spike is unsustainable.

This record need collided with inflation and the fear surrounding a potential federal government shutdown. "When you look back on last year, it's kind of impossible to predict all of the events that created this," Boelter said. The potential disruption to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) raised significant concerns among low-income residents. The USDA reports that in 2025, approximately 450,000 people in Minnesota received SNAP benefits, totaling more than $865 million. On average, families receive $304 per month, and individuals receive $159. Boelter emphasizes the scale: "For every meal NCFB provides, SNAP provides nine." It would be impossible for the food bank to fill that gap alone.

"I have been here 20 years, and I have never had as many phone calls as I did in October and November," Boelter shared. Fear spikes the need even further as people worry about how they will get through the month.

In NCFB's service area, 50 percent of users are children and 20 percent are seniors. The remaining 30 percent are largely the "working poor"—people holding multiple jobs but earning insufficient income to make ends meet. Inflation has compounded the struggle. "What used to cost twenty or thirty dollars now costs forty to fifty," Boelter noted. This inflation also increases the cost of the food NCFB must purchase to stock its shelves.

The impact of NCFB is best seen in individual moments. Recently, at a Mobile Food Drop, a rural mail carrier approached Boelter. He was worried about a veteran with disabilities on his route who relied entirely on SNAP for his food budget. Being solution-oriented, Boelter directed the mail carrier to the front of the food line, loaded a box of food into the carrier's vehicle, and the carrier delivered it to the veteran. "Missing a meal—we have all done it," said Boelter. "But not knowing when you get to eat again is a whole different thing. It's debilitating and all-consuming. That's why we are here, so people don't have to wonder how they are going to eat that night."





> **"Ninety-five cents of every dollar goes back into feeding people," said Boelter.**

Sustainability and the Future

Last year, for the first time, food banks across Minnesota lobbied the state for funding, explaining that they cannot sustain these massive increases alone. Although legislation was passed, funding was limited to one year. Now, the food banks face the same dilemma once again.

How You Can Help

- **Donate:** This was the first year NCFB received government funding, but the organization remains primarily funded through the generosity of individuals, churches, and grants.
- **Volunteer:** With only 13 employees, NCFB relies on volunteers to donate their time to manage the distribution of millions of pounds of food.
- **Advocate:** Learn about NCFB's impact and help spread the word to friends, family, and legislators about the vital role of the emergency food system in Minnesota.

The strength of North Country Food Bank lies in the community that sustains it. While the government provided a temporary bridge, the heart of NCFB's mission is powered by individual generosity. Do you want to learn more about North County Foodbank and how you can support their mission? Visit their website at northcountryfoodbank.org.

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

five decades of serving our region

Lakes Country Service Cooperative

At LCSC, 2026 marks a momentous milestone: our 50th Anniversary.

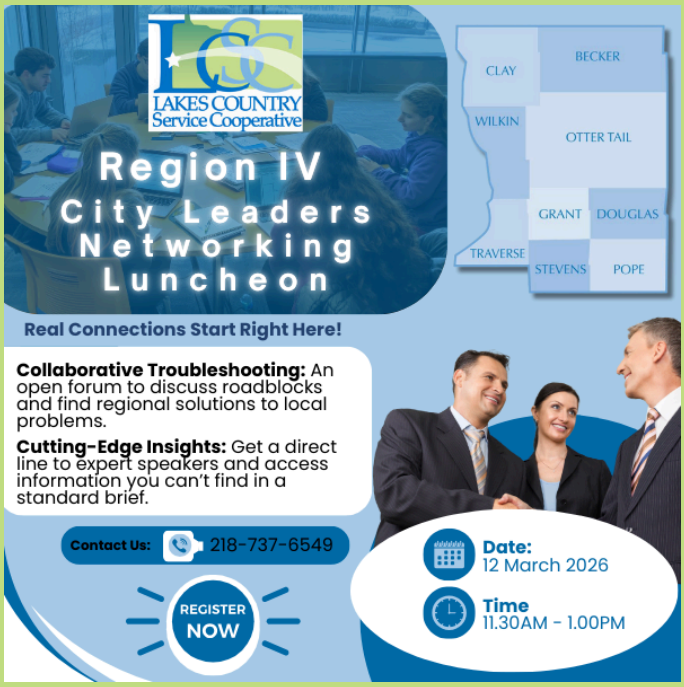
For five decades, we have remained steadfast in our mission: "We Advocate for Strong Communities Through Service and Leadership."

To honor this legacy, we are dedicating the entire year to celebrating our region and the people who make our work possible.

Visit our website's **"50th Anniversary"** page to learn more about our celebration and important dates to add to your calendar!

City Leaders

Networking Group



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

LCSC members are invited to attend a networking luncheon for City Clerks, Deputy Clerks, and City Administrators on Thursday, March 12, 2026, 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 great opportunity to network and discuss pertinent topics with fellow regional members. We are excited to welcome Ryan Muchow, Fire Chief for the City of Fergus Falls, as our speaker. Ryan is a strong advocate for mental health resources for firefighters and fire department employees. He will share information about resources for your fire departments.

REGISTER NOW

From the

Executive Director

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



Jeremy Kovash
Executive Director

As we step into 2026, I want to begin by wishing each of you a year filled with inspiration, momentum, and purpose. There is no question that we are living and working in challenging times. The issues facing our cities, counties, and governmental institutions are real, complex, and often demanding. But I remain incredibly optimistic—and energized—by what I see across our region.

That optimism comes from leadership. Strong, thoughtful, committed leadership. Every day, I see leaders in our communities who are leaning in, making tough decisions, and holding themselves—and their organizations—to a high standard of excellence. This kind of leadership matters. It builds trust. It creates stability. And it reminds us that progress is possible, even in the midst of challenge.

At Lakes Country Service Cooperative, our mission is clear: we advocate for strong communities through service and leadership. That mission comes to life through the work each of you does every day—serving others, collaborating across systems, and leading with intention. When leadership is rooted in service, communities thrive. And when leaders work together, the impact is multiplied.

I was reminded of this recently while reading the book "Theo of Golden." It's a simple yet powerful story about humanity, connection, and the importance of "filling buckets"—for ourselves and for those we serve. The message is timely and relevant: leadership isn't just about outcomes and results; it's also about presence, kindness, and the way we show up for one another.

As we move forward into 2026, my hope is that we continue to lead with purpose, energy, and compassion. That we support one another, lift one another up, and never lose sight of why this work matters. The challenges will be real—but so is the talent, commitment, and heart of the leaders across our region.

Together, through service and leadership, we will continue to advocate for strong communities—and build an even stronger future.



Rural COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

JANE EASTES
Deputy Executive Director

The results of the Minnesota Student Survey, given last year to 5th, 8th, 9th, and 11th grade students in public, charter, and tribal schools, have recently been made available, and the data are showing some interesting trends. If you are not familiar with the survey, it is the longest-running state survey that asks about matters important to youth and families, including mental health, engagement, safety, and social development.

Minnesota Student Survey

The survey is voluntary, and the questions (also voluntary) are tailored for each grade. The information is used by many youth-oriented organizations, not just schools, for community supportive programs. In our own region, Horizon Public Health has used the MSS to support over $4 million in competitive grants to help keep youth healthy and safe in Pope, Stevens, Traverse, Grant, and Douglas counties.

The triennial survey last occurred in 2022. While the 2025 survey has mixed results, there are many positive trends worth noting. We haven't had good news in Minnesota for too long, so when I see headlines that are positive about kids, I'm ready to celebrate. I bet you are too!



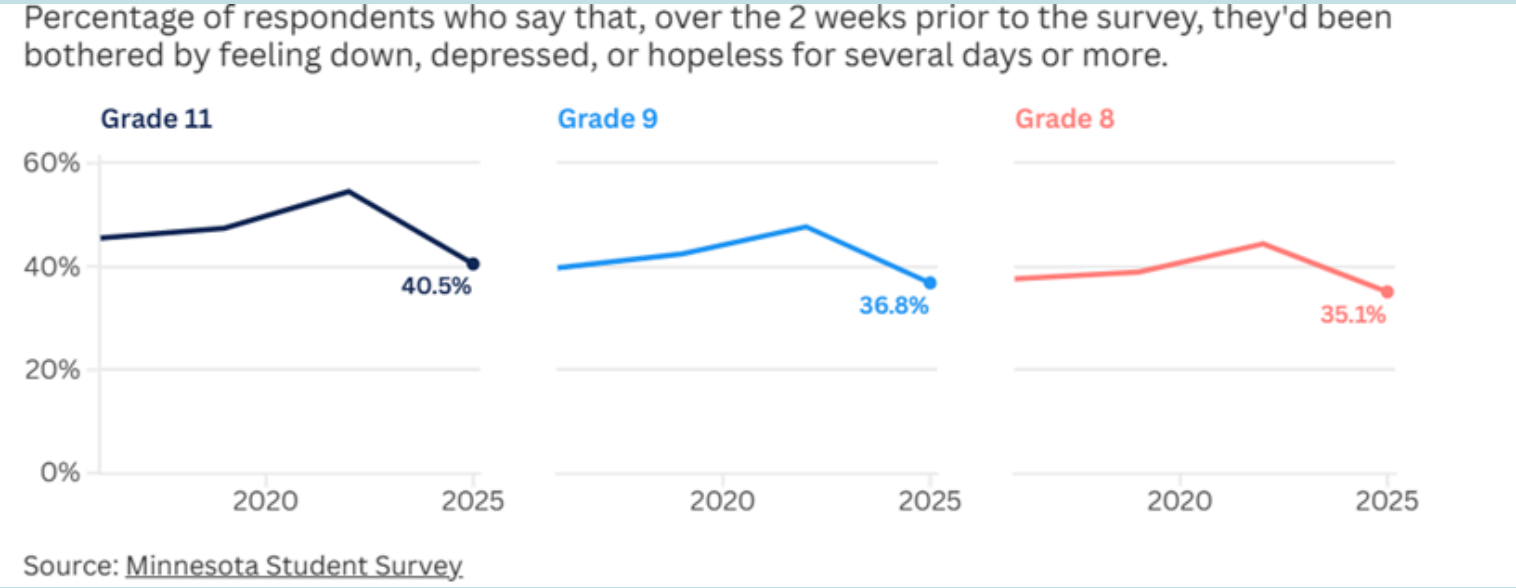
What's Positive

On the whole, students are reporting better mental health, healthy eating, school climate, and closer connections to schools and families. The group of mental health measures related to anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and comfort in talking with school mental health resources when feeling stressed showed an improvement for all age groups taking the survey. The percentage of 11th-grade students who said they were considering suicide fell to its lowest point in a decade.

The Minnesota Department of Health lists the positive trends seen in the survey data, such as:

- **An increase in fruit and vegetable consumption.**
- **A decrease in substance use, including tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis.**
- **A decrease in sexual activity.**
- **An increase in overall educational engagement.**
- **An increase in students reporting they believe their teachers and others in their lives care about them.**
- **An increase in reporting that an adult in school helped connect them with post-secondary career and educational opportunities.**

Continued on next page



I know these results are not random. We know schools, communities, local and state government and nonprofits are working diligently to make systemic changes to address the crisis that was so apparent in the last student survey. One thing we've all learned is that the youth themselves have to be collaborators within and alongside our organizations doing this work. They, after all, know the issues better than any of us.

What's Next

To see the overall trends in youth health and relationships improving adds fuel to our drive to continue building partnerships , initiating supports that are proven to work, and changing our systems to work for all youth. The data show that we still need to turn around some of the concerning trends around school attendance, and inequities by gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation.

For example, the percentage of American Indian students who strongly agree to the question of feeling safe at school is half that of White male students.

For the first time, the survey asked about **social media use.** Youth recognize both heavy use and its effect on them. About 90% of high school students reported using social media every day. About 4 out of 10 students say they may have a problem with spending too much time on social media, and many believe it's contributing to them having trouble getting homework, or other major responsibilities done. More than half of high school students reported using technology between midnight and 5 a.m. on a school night at least once per week.

One thing all of us can do is to understand the importance of this survey. It is not perfect, but is one of the most comprehensive, voluntary tools for gathering information about youth and families directly from youth that we have.

The information is crucial in using scarce resources to effectively improve student and family well-being. The survey has been under attack in the last ten years for asking some controversial questions about sexuality and drug use, and as a result participation is falling. According to Minnesota based nonprofit Education Evolving, district participation has fallen from 85% to 61%, and student participation from 68% to 45% in ten years.

Take a minute to encourage your local school administrators to keep giving the survey, even as they advocate for updates and changes to modernize it. Our schools can use support in the community to counter misconceptions and encourage participation. Let's keep listening to our youth and working to respond to what they are telling us for a healthier future for our communities.



for a West Central Initiative Grant



Apply before Thursday, February 26, at 5 p.m.
Grants range from $3,000 to $25,000

Environmental sustainability, social change that advances equity and opportunity, and civic engagement are essential to a healthy, resilient region. We created these grant opportunities with those priorities in mind.

We'll award grants in three priority areas:

- Environmental Sustainability Grants will support community-led projects and nonprofits focused on sustainability and climate initiatives.
- Social Change Grants will support organizations working with historically marginalized communities to advance equity and systems change.
- Civic Engagement Grants will support nonpartisan organizations that promote social change, cultivate local leadership, educate communities about government and civic systems, and encourage participation in public meetings.

To simplify the application process, organizations can submit one application to cover multiple focus areas.

Informational Webinars: Join us to discuss eligibility, walk through the application process, and ask questions.

Tuesday, January 27, 5:30-6:30 p.m. | Register here.
Wednesday, January 28, 11 a.m.-12 p.m. | Register here

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative



Congratulations to Tamara Uselman!

We are thrilled to announce Tamara Uselman's selection as the Associate Director of Collaborative Programs at Lakes Country Service Cooperative.

The Associate Director of Collaborative Programs involves:

- Developing, maintaining, and advising on collaborations between internal and external organizations and teams.
- Assisting in the design of professional development initiatives within the agency.
- Providing guidance on program design and development as needed.

Welcome to the Lakes Country Team!

someplace safe

SAFETY. OPTIONS. HOPE.

Parenting Time Centers

Five Years of Nurturing Parenting at **Someplace Safe** Parenting Time Centers

By: Emilyn Wahl, Director of Parenting Time Centers



This January marks five years since the Nurturing Parenting Program (NPP) became part of the services offered through Someplace Safe's Parenting Time Centers. Since then, 95 parents have participated, and the growth we've seen has been inspiring.

NPP is an evidence-based, trauma-informed program that helps parents strengthen empathy, build positive discipline skills, and improve communication with their children. For many parents engaged in parenting time, it becomes a turning point, shifting from compliance to genuine self-discovery and connection.

Our Parent Coaches witness powerful changes. Parents who once entered the centers anxious or unsure begin approaching parenting time with confidence and calm. They learn new ways to connect with their children, view behaviors as communication, and build trust one moment at a time. Many immediately apply what they learn: praising their children, setting boundaries with empathy, and managing emotions with greater patience.

The program's flexibility makes it a strong fit for Parenting Time Centers. Whether parents meet with their children weekly or less often, NPP provides tools they can use immediately. It supports them in breaking harmful patterns, modeling empathy, and creating environments where children feel safe, valued, and loved.

Each of our centers serves families rebuilding after separation, conflict, or trauma. Through NPP, we offer not just supervision, but meaningful education and encouragement. This aligns perfectly with our vision: "Safer Families. Safer Communities."

As I often remind our staff and parents:
"No matter what, we are never done learning. Every day, we can learn something new, and how beautiful to do that for the benefit of our children and our shared future."

Five years of Nurturing Parenting is more than a milestone; it's a testament to what happens when compassion meets opportunity. When parents grow, families thrive. And when families thrive, so do communities.

Lakes Country Service Cooperative Presents:

Leading
Through the Storm
Navigating Today's Conflict Situations

Whether it's a heated board meeting, a frustrated parent, a disgruntled client, or working with a difficult colleague, high-emotion interactions are an exhausting reality of public-facing work. In an era of increasing public tension, the ability to lower the temperature of a room is a critical safety skill. Learn how to validate concerns without making concessions; use empathetic listening to dissolve anger; and move from a potential crisis to a more constructive outcome.



LCSC Member - $75
LCSC Nonmember - $100

FACILITATOR
Dave Bartholomay

DATES
26 February, 2026

TIME
9:00 AM - 1:00 PM

LOCATION
1001 E MOUNT FAITH
FERGUS FALLS, MN 56537

Register Now

www.lcsc.org

SCAN ME

What You'll Walk Away With

- Real-world scenarios and strategies for dealing with difficult people and having tough conversations
- How to make an individual feel heard and validated without agreeing to unreasonable demands or compromising policy, including specific phrases that address feelings without over-promising.
- Exit Strategies: knowing when a conversation is no longer productive and how to end it safely.
- Techniques for the "come down" after a tense encounter to ensure staff don't carry the stress home.

Who should attend

- **Education:** Superintendents, Principals, and Front Office Staff.
- **Government:** City/County Administrators and Clerks, Elected Officials, and Department Heads.
- **Nonprofits:** Program Directors, Case Workers, and Volunteers.
- **Business:** Client-facing Managers and Service Teams.

DAVE BARTHOLOMAY

Dave Bartholomay served as the Mayor of Circle Pines, Minnesota, for 20 years, and in June 2025, he was awarded the C.C. Ludwig Award by the League of Minnesota Cities.

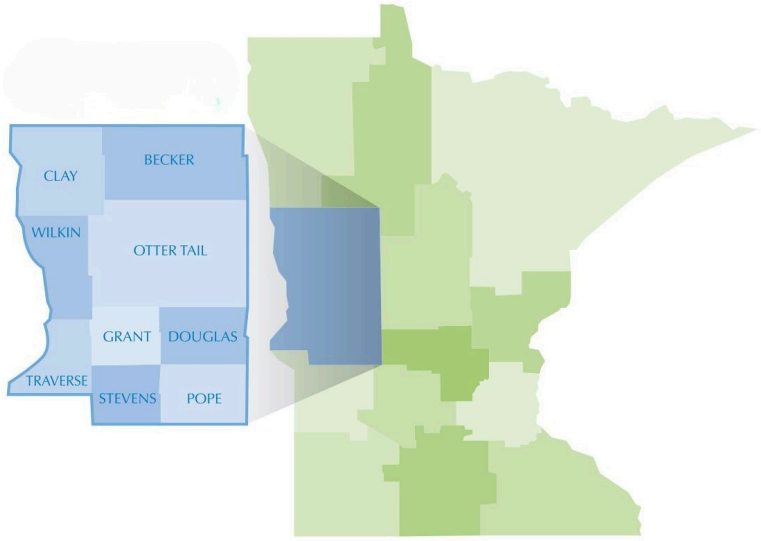
The award is the highest honor available to local elected officials, and one recipient is chosen each year for their vision, statesmanship, and unwavering commitment to the public good.



Dave's passion is servant leadership and helping others improve their community. He holds a bachelor's and a master's degree in political science and has worked in leadership positions in local, state, and national government, focusing on collaboration and innovation in public-sector service delivery.

He lives in Circle Pines with his wife Janis and their son Kyle.

West Central Initiative and Lakes Country Service Cooperative



Team Up for City Solar Savings

by Jane Eastes,
Deputy Executive Director,
Lakes Country Service Cooperative

West Central Initiative (WCI) is well into its second wave of working with cities in our shared nine-county region to add solar electric infrastructure to public buildings. Fourteen cities in six counties are looking at participating in the next cohort to cooperatively bid for solar projects. Potential building sites on the list include fire halls, event and community centers, liquor stores, and city halls.

This is the second time West Central Initiative and Lakes Country Service Cooperative (LCSC) have worked together to construct a cooperative bid for the purchase and installation of solar infrastructure for public buildings. WCI brings expertise in the design, specifications, and financing aspects of solar projects. LCSC brings expertise in public procurement, and the legislative ability to bid and contract on behalf of all of our members.

Solar energy costs have become more affordable, and with incentives, rebates, and grants, it is one of the easiest ways for cities of all sizes to save taxpayer money by cutting operating costs. Savings accumulated over time can contribute to other municipal projects.

The first cohort of ten cities is well into the installation phase of their projects. Holsen Solar was the winning bidder. Each community is using 1 to 3 years of energy savings and utility payments to cover the portion of the project not funded by incentives, rebates, or grants. After that, they save $2,000 to $6,000 every year for 25 years or more.

Want to know more? Contact Cedar Walters, Director of Climate and Sustainability Programs, cedar@wcif.org, or Griffin Peck, Energy and Adaptation Planner, griffin@wcif.org.

For more about public cooperative procurement, contact Melissa Mattson, Director of Cooperative Purchasing Connection, mmattson@lcsc.org .

AESA



Congratulations!

Congratulations to Darcy Josephson for being selected as one of six AESA Global Coordinators! She is set to embark on an eight-month journey focused on enhancing global leadership and engagement skills within their agencies. Participants will learn to:

- Promote educational diplomacy
- Conduct cross-cultural negotiations
- Build international collaborations

They are expected to initiate global projects in their regions and create opportunities in partnership with AESA Global. These outcomes not only support local programming but also expand horizons for their respective regions.

> "I am enthusiastic about the opportunity to join Lakes Country Service Cooperative and Southwest West Central Service Cooperative as the Global Exchange Program Director. This role offers an exciting chance to develop and support international exchange opportunities for educators and students, fostering continued learning, collaboration, and growth across our communities."
>
> **Darcy Josephson**
> Global Exchange Program Director

Throughout her career, Darcy has served in key leadership positions, including Assistant Superintendent, Director of Teaching & Learning, and Coordinator of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. She also brings classroom credibility from her years as an elementary teacher and gifted and enrichment coordinator. Known for her collaborative approach, Darcy has led initiatives across 22 school districts, coordinated regional professional learning, and successfully organized large-scale conferences attended by over 1,400 educators.

Global Coordinator Program Director
The Global Coordinator Program Director plays a crucial role in establishing and executing a worldwide exchange program for Minnesota, representing Lakes Country Service Cooperative and Southwest West Central Service Cooperative. This position requires collaboration with the Association of Educational Service Agencies to create sustainable, globally-oriented programs for both students and educators in Minnesota.

Things Are Growing Inside and Out



at the Boys & Girls Club of Detroit Lakes

by: Amanda Quam, Grants Officer,
West Central Initiative

The Boys & Girls Club of Detroit Lakes, Inc., now has an outdoor classroom, a hydroponic farm, and endless opportunities for plants and youth to grow year-round!

The Hydroponic Farm

The hydroponic farm education program is a unique program that not only offers educational opportunities for the Boys & Girls Club members but also provides access to tasty, nutritious food. Youth have the chance to learn hands-on as they watch their produce grow from seed to harvest.

"Here at the Boys & Girls Club of Detroit Lakes, our students learn about the importance of growing their own food," said Boys & Girls Club Recreation Coordinator Ethan Mattson. "They get to plant the seeds and go through every step of the process until they harvest and eat the produce. Through the entire process, they learn how to balance pH, nutrients, maintain climate, view, and measure the growth of the plants. They also have input on improvements at the farm, types of plants that we try next, and ideas to make learning even more fun."

Best of all, some of the harvested produce is incorporated into meals served at the Boys & Girls Club. What a fun way to learn and reduce your carbon footprint by eating locally grown food!

The program serves youth ages 3–18. The youngest gardeners learn the basics of healthy food, and enjoy pretending to cook. The older youth have the chance to experiment and test innovative gardening methods. For example, this summer they grew some plants in water and others in soil. They measured and compared their plants, growth time, and yields. The youth have also tried planting a variety of produce to see what's possible. They have tried growing cantaloupe and even eggplant. When young people learn to grow their own food, they develop a deeper appreciation for where their food comes from.



These young gardeners are growing a lot of food! The biggest and newest hydroponic green wall can yield between 100 and 125 pounds of produce per harvest, while the smaller towers typically produce between 25 and 30 pounds per harvest. The youth stay engaged, as a growing period for lettuces, other leafy greens, and herbs is only about one month long.

If you visit MANNA Food Co-op, you can see two of the Boys & Girls Club hydroponic setups on display for community engagement and education. Eventually, the club plans to sell excess produce at the co-op.

The first year of this project was funded by a grant from West Central Initiative, as well as grants and donations from other community organizations and individuals.

Outdoor Pollinator and Environmental Science Classroom

The outdoor pollinator and environmental science classroom is a shining example of a youth-led initiative and a story of community collaboration. The project was led by local Eagle Scout Peyton Malecka from Troop 674, with support from his Scoutmaster, Lance Akers, the Izaak Walton League Prairie Woods Chapter, and the Boys & Girls Club of Detroit Lakes. The project was also supported by in-kind donations and volunteer time from the Detroit Lakes Public Service Department, the Detroit Lakes Parks Department, Nature's Design Landscaping, community volunteers, and grants from West Central Initiative and other local organizations.

"We all worked together to bring the vision of an outdoor environmental classroom to life," Peyton said. "Making this project what it is took the work of dozens of people, and without the support from the community of Detroit Lakes, we couldn't have completed this project."

The garden will cultivate a new generation of land stewards and outdoor enthusiasts with the potential to make a lasting impact in the community.



This outdoor classroom will serve not only as a learning space for young people but also as a habitat for pollinators, with over 1,000 native plants. And pollinators are important! According to the USDA, three-fourths of the world's flowering plants and about 35 percent of the world's crops depend on animal pollinators to reproduce. That accounts for about one out of every three bites you eat!

I was fortunate enough to attend the ribbon-cutting event, and you could feel the excitement in the air. Representatives from various organizations and community members gathered to celebrate the project's completion. This project contributed to Scouting America's Distinguished Conservation Service Award, one of the most prestigious honors in scouting. Since 1910, only about 1,500 scouts have earned this award.

"Projects like Peyton's are only made possible through the support of strong communities," said Lance Akers, Scout Master for Scouting America Troop 674. "The youth of Scouting America Troop 674 have been blessed with many willing local and state organizations who see the value of not only creating creative outdoor learning spaces like his, but also understand the true value of encouraging young men and women to develop leadership skills, dream big, and make an impact on their communities. Because of this young man's hard work and dedication to serving children, adults, and pollinators, each will see a lasting benefit."

Continuing to Learn, Grow, and Connect

The Boys & Girls Club members are fortunate to have access to green spaces throughout the year. Youth will enjoy their new outdoor classroom during the warmer months and continue to grow produce at the indoor hydroponic farm in the colder months. Together, these projects show how community partnerships and hands-on learning can empower young people to grow healthy food, care for the environment, and cultivate skills that will benefit them—and the Detroit Lakes community—for years to come.

About the Author



Amanda Quam is West Central Initiative's Grants Officer. She helps unite ideas and resources to support projects that promote environmental sustainability, social change, civic engagement, and community well-being in our region.

Cooperative Purchasing Connection (CPC) Announces New Contracts for Disaster Preparedness and Remediation

INSIGHT RESTORATION AND SERVICEMASTER

CPC has chosen to provide contracts in this area due to its awareness of the challenges its members frequently encounter, such as damage from water, wind, fire, and other sources. These contracts aim to support your organization in recovering from disasters effectively.

Insight Restoration specializes in commercial disaster mitigation and recovery from water damage, fire damage, mold damage, storm damage, biohazards, sewer backups, and vital document damage.

ServiceMaster Recovery Management is the leading provider of Disaster Restoration Services for businesses and commercial buildings.

RELATED BENEFIT: EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Both Insight Restoration and ServiceMaster have free emergency preparedness programs. The programs feature priority response and - as a practical matter - a convenient person to contact in the event of a disaster. Please review each vendor's CPC Vendor Profile Page and reach out to the appropriate contact to learn more about their respective preparedness plans.

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative

Information Technology Team



From Left: Scott Wendorff, Program Director of Information Technology; Matt Holtberg, Assistant Program Director of Information Technology; Gilbert Perry, Senior Information Technology Specialist; Travis Johnson, Information Technology Coordinator

IT Services & Support Designed for Your Needs

Lakes Country Service Cooperative's (LCSC) dynamic team of IT professionals provides affordable, high-quality hardware and software solutions for members.

- Fully Managed and Co-Managed IT Services
- Technology Infrastructure and Cybersecurity Audits
- Network Design, Installation, and Management
- Wireless Site Surveys and Remediation
- Server Installation and Management
- Microsoft 365 and Google Workspace Management
- IT Helpdesk Services



Reach out to Scott Wendorff to learn more!
218-737-6538
swendorff@lcsc.org

Otter Tail County

Workforce Summit

By: Shannon Terry
Otter Tail County Public Information Officer



Otter Tail County convened nearly 100 employers, educators, service providers, and community leaders for a countywide Workforce Summit and Poverty Simulation on Thursday, December 11, at Minnesota State Community and Technical College (M State). The events provided an opportunity to have honest conversations about today's workforce realities and showcased practical, local solutions to strengthen Otter Tail County's workforce.

The Workforce Summit featured panel discussions and presentations that focused on the lived experiences of working families, including housing and food insecurity, child care challenges, transportation barriers, and skills gaps that can interfere with stable employment. Speakers represented employers, workforce development partners, nonprofit organizations, and the Otter Tail County Community Development Agency (CDA), alongside guest presenters from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and M State.

Sessions emphasized moving beyond awareness to action. They highlighted employer partnerships, resource navigation, and innovative solutions such as onsite child care, second-chance hiring practices, customized training programs, and evolving transportation services.

M State President Carrie Brimhall shared, "We know that we can't do our work alone, and we're grateful for the partnerships we have with our communities, elected officials, Chambers of Commerce, and counties. Part of what makes those partnerships special is opportunities like the Workforce Summit to give and get feedback on our workforce development efforts in authentic ways."

Otter Tail County Commissioner Kurt Mortenson emphasized the broader strategy behind the event, saying, "The County's OTC Works workforce strategy is about promoting workforce resources, helping employers recruit and retain workers, and building partnerships to address workforce needs. The Workforce Summit brought partners together to identify their role in solutions like investing in employee training, reducing barriers to employment, and creating workplaces where people feel supported and valued."

The Workforce Summit was an excellent event to connect and activate workforce partners to explore innovative solutions. Presentations were recorded and can be viewed on Otter Tail County's YouTube page at **www.youtube.com/OtterTailCountyMN**. More information about the OTC Works strategy and Otter Tail County workforce efforts is available at ottertailcounty.gov/otc-works.

LCSC COMMUNICATOR

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