May 2026

LCSC Communicator

Regional News, Views, and Information

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative
Together we achieve

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YW youthworks

The Opening of Youthworks' Transitional Housing Community in Moorhead

by: Thomas Hill,
Community Engagement Officer
at Youth**works**

Youth**works**' mission is to help ensure all youth have a safe place where they can belong and be heard. That belief continues to guide the work as services expand with the opening of Youth**works**' newest Transitional Housing Community in Moorhead, Minnesota.

These housing units will provide young adults experiencing homelessness with the stability and support they need to build successful futures.



For 40 years, Youth**works** has worked alongside youth and young adults throughout North Dakota, providing emergency shelter, counseling, support services, and housing assistance. Over the years, staff have seen firsthand how access to stable housing can change the course of a young person's life. The impact of our work can be seen not only through program outcomes, but also through the stories of staff and board members who once participated in transitional housing programs themselves and now help guide the mission.

Moorhead Transitional Housing Community

Located near downtown Moorhead, the Transitional Housing Community was created by repurposing the former Ecumen Evergreens buildings into a welcoming and supportive living environment for young adults, between the ages of 18 and 24, who are experiencing homelessness. The campus includes twenty-four individual housing units and was intentionally chosen to provide residents with access to public transportation, employment opportunities, education, healthcare, and other important community resources.

Stability is about more than having a roof overhead — it is about creating opportunities and helping young people reach personal goals toward independence.

The Transitional Housing Community offers safe housing paired with individualized support services tailored to each resident's goals and needs. Whether a young person is working toward finishing school, finding employment, learning financial responsibility, or securing permanent housing, Youthworks staff will walk alongside them throughout the process.

Support services include case management, employment assistance, educational guidance, life-skills training, and connections to community resources. With staff offices and drop-in center located on-site, support and resources are easily accessible to youth and young adults in need.

This project comes at a critical time for the Fargo-Moorhead community, as youth homelessness continues to be a significant issue.

Nearly **400** youth in the area experience homelessness each year, often facing unsafe living situations, couch surfing, sleeping outdoors, or staying in spaces not meant for habitation. With the addition of the Transitional Housing Community in Moorhead, Youthworks is positioned to serve more young adults experiencing homelessness from across the Fargo-Moorhead metro area and West Central Minnesota.

Community Support for Transitional Housing

Youthworks remains deeply grateful to the local leaders, organizations, donors, and community members who helped make this vision a reality.

Their support reflects a shared commitment to addressing youth homelessness and creating brighter futures for young people in our community. Youthworks continues its campaign to raise the funds to cover the $2 million dollar purchase price.





From left to right: Mayor Shelley Carlson of the City of Moorhead and Thomas Hill, the Community Engagement Officer for Youth**works**, participated in the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony and Open House.

As Youth**works** celebrates 40 years of serving youth, this expansion marks an important step toward the future. Youthworks remains committed to creating safe spaces where youth belong and are heard as they navigate life's challenges. The opening of the Moorhead Transitional Housing Community represents new opportunities for young adults to build stable, successful futures, and we are proud to continue building that future together.

For more information on how you can partner with Youthworks to support the project, please contact Thomas Hill at thill@youthworksnd.org or 701-941-5757.

CPC Cooperative Purchasing Connection

Cooperative Purchasing Connection offers a range of furniture vendors for government offices and nonprofits, providing solutions for various spaces, such as break rooms and libraries.

Key partners include:

- **Innovative Office Solutions:** Ideal for large and small projects with in-person support.
- **National Business Furniture:** A large vendor with a strong online presence for convenient shopping.
- **Demco:** Specializes in library interior design and furnishings.
- **Mackin:** Supplies high-quality materials for public libraries.

Explore all available vendors for contract pricing and services.

CPC VENDOR LIST

Partner with Trusted Local Vendors

CPC Cooperative Purchasing Connection



Discover Our Vendors

From the

Executive Director

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



Jeremy Kovash
Executive Director

The Power of the Pen

Why Handwritten Thanks Still Matter

There is still something special about a handwritten thank you card. In a world filled with emails, texts, and quick reactions, taking the time to sit down with a pen and paper feels different. It feels personal. Intentional. Human.

One of the greatest lessons from Dale Carnegie was the importance of a person's name. He believed the sweetest sound to anyone is hearing or seeing their own name. A handwritten note does exactly that. It tells someone, "I see you. I appreciate you. You matter."

There is beauty in cursive writing, or even the simple printed word on paper. My three sons remind me that "no one" writes in cursive anymore! Nonetheless, a thank you card carries personality. It carries effort. It carries relationship-building potential that technology sometimes struggles to replicate.

The interesting thing about writing thank you notes is that they often help the writer as much as the recipient. Gratitude fills buckets on both sides. It slows us down enough to reflect on kindness, leadership, service, mentorship, friendship, and simple acts that too often go unnoticed. It makes us feel good. Connected. Grounded.
You may be surprised how much impact a simple "thank you" can have — not only on others, but on yourself.

And finally… thank you for reading this issue of the Lakes Country Service Cooperative Communicator. Have a wonderful summer.





JANE EASTES
Deputy
Executive Director

Rural COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Youth in Civic Life:

Building a Pipeline of Community Leaders

Community members, students, and school staff came together in Alexandria and Fergus Falls this week for a hosted conversation exploring connections between schools and communities to build real-world student learning opportunities. The forums were facilitated by the educators at World Savvy, in partnership with Lakes Country Service Cooperative, Alexandria, and Fergus Falls schools. If you want to feel hope in the future, sit at a table with students, community members, and school staff and brainstorm what the future can look like when students are actively engaged in their communities!



Fergus Falls

The forums modeled an inquiry-based approach where everyone's voice contributed. How would you or a young person in your life answer some of these guiding questions?

- What skills, experiences, or mindsets do you think are most important for students to thrive here—and how well are our communities and schools supporting those today?
- When do you feel most engaged or motivated in your learning? What makes that experience different?
- What's something you've learned from young people that has shifted your thinking about education or the future?
- Imagine it's one year from now, and this work has made a real difference —what's changed for students, schools, or the community?

The conversation was lively, thoughtful, and too short! In a room full of people from different backgrounds, professions, and age groups, everyone was engaged and excited to connect and share ideas.

The Community Forums are part of a multi-year pilot initiative called the Future-Ready Rural Schools Learning Lab led by World Savvy.

The goal is to support educators to design learning around real-world, action-based community-linked projects that teach youth to think critically and collaboratively, and as the student at my table said, "with a growth mindset!"

World Savvy is a national nonprofit dedicated to working with educational professionals to "prepare every young person with the skills, mindsets, and adaptability they need for work, community, and life." The rural learning lab project is supported by a Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropy grant. We, at Lakes Country, are excited to partner with World Savvy to bring this opportunity into our region and to learn and build alongside our schools and communities. We are awed by the committed work of the administrators, staff, and students at Discovery Middle School and the Fergus Falls ALC for leading in this important work.



Alexandria

West Central Initiative

Help Shape What's Next for the Region

Thank you for dedicating a few moments to engage in the update of our region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

CLICK HERE

To complete the 6 question survey

As the federally designated planning organization, West Central Initiative creates a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the region every five years.

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy outlines the region's needs, goals, strategies, and the implementation process for economic development. The document is a blueprint for regional collaboration. West Central Initiative updates the strategy every year to better reflect current conditions.



MOBILE FOOD DROP

Date: Thursday, May 28, 2026

Time: 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
or until food runs out

Location: Vector Windows
1505 Pebble Lake Rd
Fergus Falls, MN

Food will be available for drive through pickup.

No pre-registration required. All are welcome!

Questions: Contact Kristin Osowski @ 218-399-7360

In partnership with:

NORTH COUNTRY FOOD BANK, INC.
www.northcountryfoodbank.org

THE 52 MEAL BANK

UNITED WAY Lakes and Prairie

What Is the Food Drop?

United Way's Food Drop is a free food distribution event that supports individuals and families who are in need.

We understand that circumstances change from month to month. That's why we operate on an expressed need model and ask participants to register each month if they'd like to receive food.

At each Food Drop, registered households drive through a car line and receive an assortment of groceries at no cost.



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



Join us on Thursday, June 18, 2026, for a networking luncheon designed specifically for leaders like you.

This is a space to step back from the daily grind, share insights on the topics that matter most to our communities, and build the cross-sector relationships that drive real change.

Event Details

- When: Thursday, June 18, 2026
- Time: 11:30 PM – 1:00 PM
- Cost: Free (Lunch is on us!)
- Attend virtually or in person

REGISTER NOW



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Program Cost

- An annual fee of $7.50 per email account covers phishing detection and monthly training.
- An initial setup fee is necessary to activate the service, which varies depending on the size of the organization.



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LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative

This program is provided by Lakes Country Service Cooperative through a partnership with Southwest West Central Service Cooperative



Fergus Falls Youth in Government

Building Skills to be a Future Leader

Source: Stephanie Grow, Branch Director, Fergus Falls branch of the YMCA of the Northern Sky; www.ymcanorth.org/locations/center_for_youth_voice/programs/youth_in_government; www.mncivicseal.org

Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Coordinator

For the students of Fergus Falls, the halls of government are no longer just topics in a textbook—they are a training ground. This year marked the inaugural season of the Civic Leaders group, a local delegation of the Minnesota Youth in Government (YIG) program. Launched this past fall by Stephanie Grow, Branch Director of the Fergus Falls YMCA of the Northern Sky, the program empowers students in grades 8–12 to move beyond being spectators and become active participants in democracy.

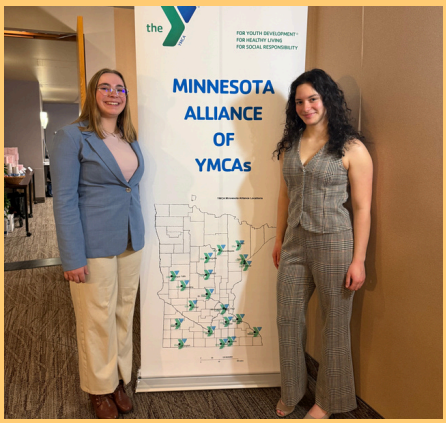
Established by the YMCA in 1946 and overseen by the Minnesota YMCA Center for Youth Voice, YIG offers a "state model government" experience. Participants don't just watch the process; they elect their own leaders, draft bills, and debate policies that reflect their values. Depending on their interests, high school students serve as attorneys, legislators, judges, lobbyists, or media representatives, while eighth graders join the Leadership Corps to explore all areas of the program.

The Fergus Falls cohort, which maintains a supportive 10:1 student-to-volunteer ratio, was guided by Delegation Director Ben Schierer and Delegation Advisor Christine Muller. To ensure the students were prepared for the rigors of state-level debate, Schierer and Muller met with the students weekly at the YMCA of the Northern Sky to mentor the group and prepare them for their cases and conference work.



The impact of the program is already evident. "It was so exciting to listen to their stories," Grow shared. "One of our students, Belle, told me she was able to sit in a legislator's chair, use their microphone, and the voting buttons."

- Stephanie Grow, Branch Director, Fergus Falls branch of the YMCA of the Northern Sky





Local experts also stepped up to help, including attorneys Steve Rufer and Jake Thomason, Otter Tail County Attorney Michelle Eldien, and State Senator Jordan Rasmusson.

A Successful Pilot and the Civic Seal

The launch of the Fergus Falls program was so successful that the group was invited to participate in the Minnesota Civic Seal pilot.

Embedded within the YIG season, the Civic Seal is a student-led, project-based recognition for those who take meaningful action in their communities. Students focus on one of five areas:

- **Democratic Engagement**
- **Civic Knowledge**
- **Media Literacy**
- **Community Service**
- **Bridge Building**

Fergus Falls Senior Nadia Carlson, for example, is focusing her project on "Healthy Conflict." Nadia and fellow student Belle Holland were recently invited to Advocacy Day in St. Paul, where they met with Minnesota Senators and Representatives to discuss YMCA-supported issues and share their personal experiences with the YIG program.

The program follows a rigorous schedule, running from September through January. After months of weekly meetings and a "LAUNCH" training event in October, the experience culminates in a massive four-day conference in St. Paul and at the Minnesota State Capitol.

From January 7 to 10, 2027, the Fergus Falls delegation will join students from across Minnesota and Western Wisconsin for the 73rd annual session. A grant from West Central Initiative has been instrumental in this journey, helping cover transportation and registration fees and ensuring that financial barriers don't stand in the way of civic engagement.



From left to right: Fergus Falls high school students Nadia Carlson and Belle Holland; Minnesota Governor Tim Walz; and the Branch Director of the Fergus Falls branch of the YMCA of the Northern Sky, Stephanie Grow.

As the first year comes to an end, Fergus Falls continues to build momentum. Several students are working to complete their Civic Seal before graduation, and a planning meeting for the 2027 conference is scheduled for April. The students are shifting from participants to program architects. By joining the state steering committee, they will help organize next year's conference and keep the path they started open for future Fergus Falls leaders. Though their YIG program is still in progress, it already feels like they are actively shaping the future instead of just preparing for it.

Would you like to learn more about the Youth in Government and Minnesota Civic Seal programs coordinated by the YMCA Center for Youth Voice? Email Stephanie Grow at grow@ymcanorthernsky.org

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative
Together we achieve

Wi-Fi Survey



Are you experiencing slow and unreliable Wi-Fi? You may be experiencing issues with reliability, speed, or coverage in the wireless networks at your organization, which costs your users time and makes them less efficient. LCSC is proud to present a new service to help address these issues – wireless site surveys.

The Survey Includes

- Radio Frequency (RF) environment mapping
- Interference analysis
- Optimal access point placement

COST

We have a base rate of $1,950 for a two-day engagement: one day for an on-site survey and another for analyzing results and reporting findings. Larger entities or those over 120 miles from Fergus Falls should contact us for a quote.



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COUNTY FOOD WASTE DROP-OFF PROGRAM

expands to New York Mills

by: Natalee Yates, Otter Tail County solid waste public information and education officer

"Every time someone drops off their food scraps instead of throwing them in the trash, they're keeping valuable nutrients out of the landfill and helping create compost that enriches our soils."

— **Natalee Yates**
Otter Tail County solid waste public information and education officer

Otter Tail County opened a new food waste drop-off site in April outside the New York Mills Food Shelf at 400 S. Walker Ave. The site is the fifth location in the county where residents can drop off food scraps for composting.

Food waste from the drop-off site goes to the Glacial Ridge Compost Facility in Hoffman, MN, where it is turned into compost. The program keeps food waste out of landfills and provides compost that can improve soil and plant health.

"We collected approximately 270,000 pounds of food waste last year, and we're excited to make it even easier for New York Mills residents to participate," said Natalee Yates, Otter Tail County solid waste public information and education officer.

Those interested in joining the organics recycling program may pick up their organics recycling starter kit at City Hall, 28 W. Centennial 84 Drive West. Residents may also bring food scraps to drop-off sites in Fergus Falls, Battle Lake, Perham, Parkers Prairie, and New York Mills. All food scraps are accepted, including meat and dairy products that are not recommended for backyard compost.

The program also picks up food waste from local restaurants and businesses.

Residents or businesses interested in participating can visit ottertailcounty.gov/odo or call the Solid Waste Department at (218) 998-8950 for more information.



Lakes Country Service Cooperative

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June 8, 9, 10, 11, 2026

8:00 AM to 4:30 PM

LOCATION - LCSC

1001 E. MOUNT FAITH,
FERGUS FALLS, MN 56537

REGISTRATION

$750 - LCSC Member
$850 - LCSC Non-Member

REGISTER NOW

Contact us to learn more.
Classes in June!

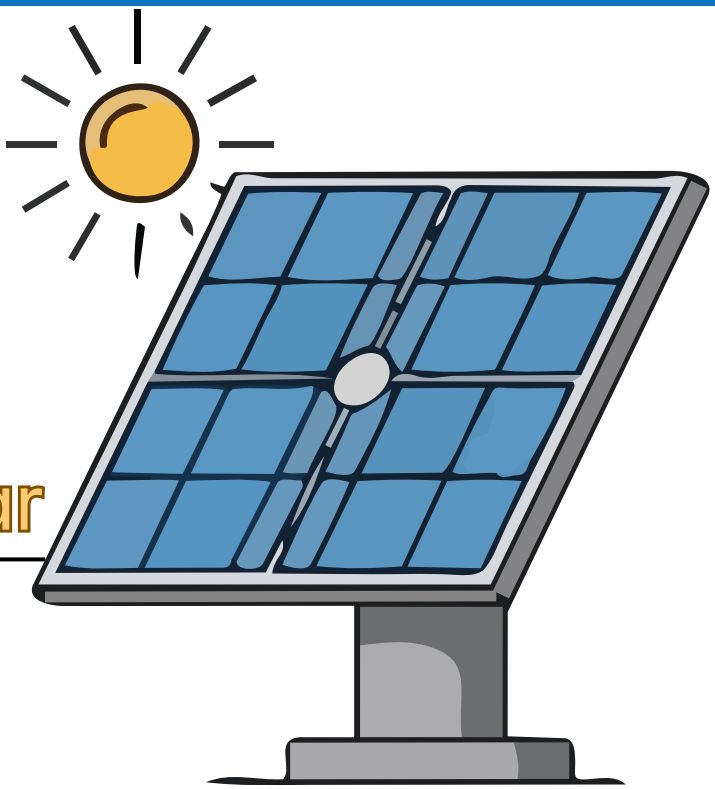
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Building Local Resilience

with Residential Solar



by: Griffin Peck,
Energy and Adaptation Planner, West Central Initiative

The sun provides free, renewable energy—and more homeowners in west central Minnesota are starting to take advantage of it. While residential solar installations are still relatively limited across the region, interest continues to grow as energy costs rise and more people look for ways to take control of their energy use.

Three local homeowners recently shared why they chose to install solar, what they've learned, and how solar fits into their lives today. Each story reflects a different motivation, but all point to a common theme: building resilience at home.

A Natural Fit for Sustainable Living

Luther and Julie Aadland have spent nearly 35 years building a sustainable lifestyle on their farmstead north of Fergus Falls. Over time, they restored prairie and savanna habitat, planting more than 5,000 trees. Adding solar felt like the next logical step.

"We've always wanted to reduce our impact on the earth and on nature," said Luther. "Through our careers with the DNR and other state agencies, we've witnessed firsthand how human impacts are fundamentally changing the land around us."



After joining the 2025 Lakes and Prairies Solar Co-op through Solar United Neighbors, the Aadlands installed a 12-kW ground-mounted system above their hillside home. Combined with efficient heating, cooling, and land stewardship, they now see their lifestyle as close to carbon neutral.



Julie Smith inside the Old Town Hall Airbnb.

> How can I protect the people and things I love when I can't rely on traditional systems?

Powering Peace of Mind in Kensington

Julie Smith took a different approach, focusing on energy security and protecting others. Her property in Kensington has served many purposes over time—from a schoolhouse to a family home to its current role as the Old Town Hall Airbnb.

Her most recent investment included a 28-kW solar array paired with a 30-kWh battery system. The setup produces roughly as much energy as the building uses annually, while also providing backup power for essential systems like lighting, refrigeration, and cooking.

Smith made the decision with her guests and family in mind. Solar and battery storage now allow her to keep the property running during outages and provide peace of mind for visitors and family members nearby. She also sees future potential for the space, including community-focused uses like a youth center.

A Practical Choice on the Farm

For Otter Tail County Commissioner Robert "Bob" Lahman and his wife, Connie Tarasek, installing solar came down to practicality and long-term thinking. About three years ago, he installed a 20-kW system on his farm near Parkers Prairie.

"It's common sense," Lahman said. "Installing solar, for us, was just the right thing to do, especially given climate change."



Bob Lahman and his wife, Connie Tarasek, and their solar install.

Lahman, a diesel mechanic and auto parts salesman, approached solar from a practical perspective. His decision reflects a growing trend among rural residents. He didn't expect the system to generate significant financial returns.



“It wasn’t about saving a ton of money or making money,” he said. “Realistically, we didn’t go into this expecting a full financial payoff in our lifetime. It’s not something we would have done when we were younger, but now we have the resources to invest in this and offset our impact.”

His system now offsets nearly all of his household’s energy use. His experience also helped inform his work as a county commissioner, where he supported solar investments at the county level.

Looking Ahead for Residential Solar

These homeowners may share more than just solar panels—they share their experiences. Their stories help neighbors understand what’s possible, from choosing an installer to understanding system benefits.

As energy costs continue to rise and communities face growing climate challenges, solar remains a practical and forward-looking option. For many homeowners, improving insulation and upgrading appliances still comes first. But solar and battery storage now offer an additional way to stabilize energy costs, increase independence, and build long-term resilience.

Even without the residential solar tax credit, interest continues to grow. More homeowners see solar not just as an environmental choice, but as a way to take control of their energy future.

To learn more about going solar or to join an upcoming solar co-op, visit our Solar Energy Resources page to connect with resources designed to help you take the next step.



About Griffin Peck
Griffin serves as West Central Initiative’s Energy and Adaptation Planner. They partner with communities across west central Minnesota to advance clean energy projects, strengthen climate resilience, and support local strategies that prepare the region for a changing climate.

LCSC COMMUNICATOR

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