September 2026

LCSC Communicator

Regional News, Views, and Information

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative
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WEST CENTRAL Community Land Trust

GLENWOOD ACQUISITION REHAB





Building Community, One Home at a Time

How West Central Community Land Trust Holds the Key to Affordable Homeownership

Source: Megan Ramirez, WCCLT Housing Coordinator; Joe Niehaus, Affordable Housing Director; https://www.rondoclt.org/; https://wcmca.org
Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Coordinator

The West Central Community Land Trust (WCCLT) was established in 2021 under West Central Minnesota Communities Action (WCMCA) to address the growing issue of quality, affordable housing. WCCLT's goal is to help West Central Minnesotans build wealth, strengthen neighborhoods, and ensure housing remains affordable—not just today, but for future generations. WCCLT is the only land trust in Minnesota operating directly under a Community Action Agency.

A Community Land Trust (CLT) is a nonprofit model that separates land ownership from homeownership: WCCLT owns the land, while families own their physical homes. Homeowners lease the land through a renewable 99-year ground lease. By removing the cost of land from the purchase price, WCCLT creates homeownership opportunities for families who would otherwise be priced out of the traditional market.









How the WCCLT Program Works:

- **Acquisition:** WCCLT acquires land through purchase, donation, or local municipal partnerships.
- **Construction & Renovation:** Homes are built or renovated on the land.
  - WCCLT partners with Institution Community Work Crews (ICWC), allowing crew members to gain valuable construction skills and real-world experience.
  - Electrical and plumbing work is contracted out to certified professionals.
- **Subsidies & Affordability:** WCCLT applies for grant funding—such as the Community Homeownership Impact Fund—to subsidize construction and bring down the home's final price.
- **Purchase:** Income-qualified families purchase the home at an accessible price point.
- **Long-Term Protection:** Homeowners sign a 99-year ground lease. When a home is eventually sold, a set resale formula ensures it remains affordable for the next buyer while still allowing the seller to build equity.



Megan Ramirez, WCCLT Housing Coordinator



Joe Niehaus, Affordable Housing Director

The land trust model in Minnesota dates back to the 1990s, when Rondo Community Land Trust was established in Saint Paul as the state's first land trust to support families displaced by Interstate 94 construction. Today, 14 land trusts operate across the state, including the City of Lakes Community Land Trust in Minneapolis and One Roof Community Housing in Duluth.

At WCCLT, a team of two drives the entire operation. Housing Coordinator Megan Ramirez—who joined WCMCA in late 2021 to support the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program—works alongside Affordable Housing Director Joe Niehaus. Niehaus brings a construction background and oversees grant writing and program funding.

Together, Ramirez and Niehaus handle every step of the process, including guiding prospective buyers. For interested families on their waitlist who aren't quite mortgage-ready, Ramirez provides pre-purchase counseling resources to help them prepare.

"I look at this as a stepping stone into homeownership," explains Ramirez. "You don't get 100% of the market equity when you sell, but it opens the door to homeownership that might otherwise remain locked."

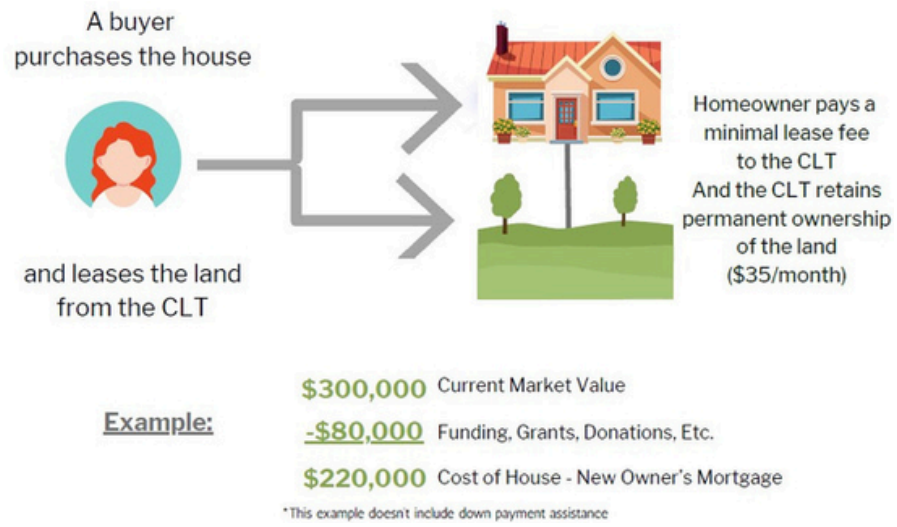
WCCLT also seeks inspiration from established programs like One Roof Community Housing, which operates a construction company, real estate brokerage, and tool lending library. Drawing from that model, WCCLT recently secured grant funding to start its own tool lending library. Starting with a storage shed or trailer, WCCLT will initially offer tool rentals to current housing clients as part of its ongoing homeowner stewardship support.

WCCLT builds roughly two homes per year and currently holds 14 homes in its portfolio across Alexandria, Osakis, Evansville, Miltona, Brandon, Glenwood, and Elbow Lake. Four of these were built in partnership with Douglas County Habitat for Humanity—a critical ally, given that Minnesota's median home price exceeds $300,000 and requires an annual income over $103,000 to buy a first home.

WCCLT focuses primarily on new construction—typically single-story, slab-on-grade, three-bedroom, two-bath floor plans with two-stall garages. While layouts are similar, exterior colors and details are varied so homes retain individual character. WCCLT has also built split-level designs and homes with unfinished basements, providing homeowners an opportunity to build additional sweat equity over time.

Initial Purchase & Resale Formula Example

Initial Purchase

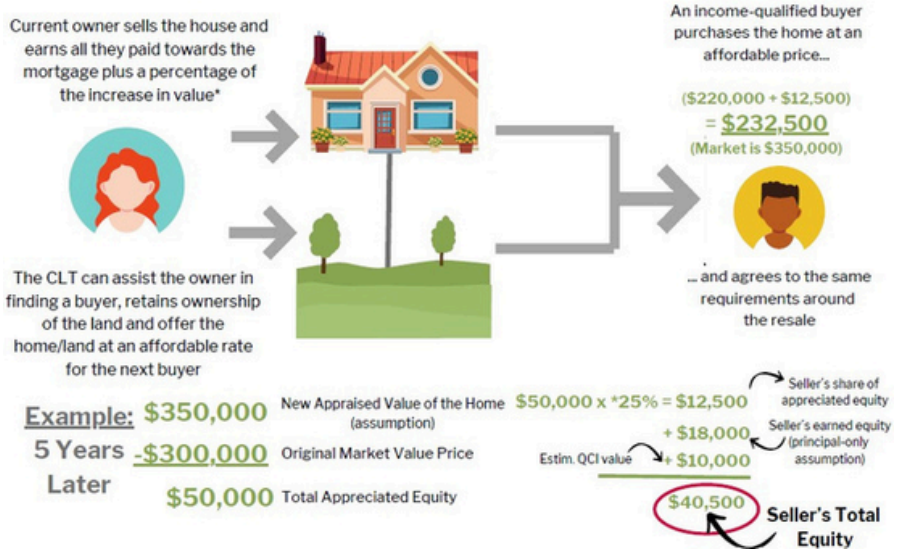


Example:

$300,000 Current Market Value
-$80,000 Funding, Grants, Donations, Etc.
$220,000 Cost of House - New Owner's Mortgage

*This example doesn't include down payment assistance

Time of Resale



Example: 5 Years Later

$350,000 New Appraised Value of the Home (assumption)
-$300,000 Original Market Value Price
$50,000 Total Appreciated Equity

$50,000 x *25% = $12,500 Seller's share of appreciated equity
+ $18,000 Seller's earned equity (principal-only assumption)
Estim. QCI value + $10,000
$40,500 Seller's Total Equity

Local partnerships are essential to making these projects financial successes:

- **Elbow Lake (Grant County):** In 2023, Grant County donated a building lot and provided a $50,000 grant. Combined with WCCLT subsidies and down payment assistance, a home appraised at $275,000 was sold to a local family for just $114,500.
- **Starbuck (Pope County):** For an upcoming build, Pope County sold WCCLT a building lot for $1, helping expand affordable options in the area.

THE IMPACT OF THESE EFFORTS IS BEST EXPRESSED BY THE FAMILIES WHO LIVE IN THEM

"West Central's CLT program has been incredible for our family; without it, buying a beautiful, newly built home wouldn't have been in reach for us. Megan and Joe are amazing and helped us through the entire process, even when we had endless questions. I highly recommend the program!"

-Community Land Trust Owner

"I love our house in Elbow Lake," says Ramirez. "It really goes to show what you can do when you partner with other agencies. It's all about those collaborations."

As housing prices keep increasing throughout the region, the West Central Community Land Trust provides a reliable and sustainable solution. By transforming community partnerships and grant funding into lasting, affordable housing assets, WCCLT is not merely constructing homes; it is securing families, fostering generational stability, and enhancing the communities of West Central Minnesota, one door at a time.



If you would like to learn more about the West Central Minnesota Communities Action CLT program. Contact Megan Ramirez at 218-391-4228 or meganr@wcmca.org.

You can also visit the WCMCA Affordable Housing webpage at wcmca.org > Housing.

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

Celebrating 50 Years of Lakes Country Service Cooperative









This month, we had the opportunity to celebrate something pretty remarkable—50 years of Lakes Country Service Cooperative.

At our 50th Anniversary Open House, I had the privilege of sharing a few thoughts with our guests about the history of Lakes Country, the people who have shaped this organization, and where we are headed next. I wanted to share pieces of that message with our CCOGA members as well, because our story has always been about more than one organization or one sector. It is about communities and people working together.

Think about everything that has changed over the past 50 years. Technology has changed. Our workplaces have changed. Schools and local governments have changed. The needs and expectations of the people we serve have changed dramatically.

And through all that change, Lakes Country has continued to do what it was created to do: bring people together to solve problems, create opportunities, and make our communities stronger. Over five decades, that work has taken many forms.

We have provided professional learning and development for thousands of public-sector professionals. Through Cooperative Purchasing Connections, organizations across Minnesota have been able to leverage the power of working together. Our Health and Safety and Technology Services support cities, counties, schools, nonprofits, and other public organizations. Our work in health insurance, HSA and HRA administration, ancillary benefits, and other services helps organizations navigate increasingly complicated systems while being good stewards of public resources.

The programs may look different from one another, but there is a common thread running through all of them:
How can we accomplish more by working together?
That question has been at the heart of Lakes Country for 50 years.

Our partnerships have also been essential to that work. Whether we are collaborating with cities and counties, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, our fellow Minnesota Service Cooperatives, state and national partners, or the many professionals who participate in CCOGA, we continue to see the same thing—good things happen when people get around a table, listen to one another, and work on solutions together. Our governance reflects that same spirit of partnership.

I am especially grateful for the elected officials who serve on the Lakes Country Service Cooperative Board of Directors and bring the perspective of local government and the communities we serve to our work. That includes Kevin Campbell from Clay County, David Meyer from Becker County, and Kurt Mortenson from Otter Tail County. Their public service, along with that of all our Board members past and present, has helped Lakes Country remain responsive to the needs of our region.

Another part of our history that I am particularly proud of is our commitment to financial stewardship. For 50 years, our Boards and leadership teams have understood that innovation and stewardship need to go hand in hand. We have a responsibility to manage resources carefully, but good stewardship isn't simply about saving money. It is also about making thoughtful investments, trying new ideas, building programs, and responding when our members and communities tell us they need something different.



But when I think about 50 years of Lakes Country, I don't think first about programs, buildings, budgets or balance sheets.
I think about people.
People willing to serve.
People willing to lead.
People willing to pick up the phone and ask a neighboring organization, "How are you handling this?"
People willing to share an idea rather than keep it to themselves.
People willing to sit around a table, listen to one another, solve a problem and find a better way forward.
That spirit is just as important today as it was 50 years ago.

Our mission at Lakes Country is simple:
"We advocate for strong communities through service and leadership."
I love that our mission says communities.

Strong schools matter. Strong cities matter. Strong counties matter. Strong nonprofit and community organizations matter. And all of them are stronger when the people leading them know one another, learn from one another, and are willing to work together. Together We Achieve.

As we celebrate our first 50 years, I am incredibly grateful to our staff, Board members, elected officials, partners, and the thousands of people and organizations who have trusted Lakes Country to work alongside them.

And now we get the privilege of building the next 50.
I hope that when people gather for Lakes Country's 100th Anniversary, they can look back at our generation and say: They served. They led. They cared about people. They were good stewards. They weren't afraid to innovate. And they left their communities better than they found them. That would be a legacy worth celebrating.

Thank you for being part of the Lakes Country story—and for the work you do every day to make our communities stronger.

Together We Achieve.
—Jeremy Kovash
Executive Director
Lakes Country Service Cooperative









JANE EASTES
Deputy
Executive Director

Rural COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Youth in Civic Life:

Building a Pipeline of Community Leaders

Minnesota, like its midwestern neighboring states, is facing a natural decline in birthrate triggering workforce pressures and a reliance on migration from other states and countries to keep its population and local economies stable. We've been hearing and living this fact for years now. And, actually, we are faring better than many of our neighboring states. The growth rate in the combined counties of Greater Minnesota grew 1.5% in the 2020's, up from the negative growth rates of the previous decade.

That doesn't surprise me, because in Minnesota, we are used to meeting challenges head-on. The marketing efforts to attract and keep people and families in our communities are so creative, heartwarming, and true. This is a great place to live, work, and raise a family or find a chosen family. What I love most is the focus on quality of life (I know I've found my Inner Otter!), which is what will attract and keep people here for lifetimes. It's creating a sense of belonging.

I also know and appreciate how much thought has gone toward intentionally countering our sinking population numbers. Our numbers would still be negative if we were not looking at the data and using it to plan for a future we want to see.

center for rural policy and development
Seeking Solutions for Greater Minnesota's Future

One of our premier sources of solid research is The Center for Rural Policy and Development (CRPD). This small and mighty team of three has just finished another fascinating study looking at the workforce pathways high school graduates in Greater Minnesota take after graduation. The results are full of implications for how we build community for youth, and where they choose to stay and thrive in Greater Minnesota. Check out their study report by **regional reports,** and a wonderful summary on their **website**.



From left: Kelly Asche, CRPD Senior Researcher; Julie Tesch, CRPD President & CEO; Marnie Werner, CRPD VP of Research & Operations

Broadly, CRPD found that graduates tend to sort into three pathways after high school that they term College Completers, Workforce-first, and the Disconnected.

- About 50 percent of graduates are College Completers, and this group is consistently associated with sustained workforce participation over many years in and out of the region.
- About 20 percent of graduates do not complete post-secondary education and enter the workforce directly. Interestingly, most have been involved in a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program or some career planning and have taken the ACT test. This group also achieves sustained workforce participation in and out of the region over time.



- About 30% are the Disconnected, who do not complete post-secondary education and have not been involved in career planning or CTE programs at school. Some in this group work but never achieve sustained employment, and many disappear from the state employment record entirely (the data does not capture the specific reasons, and there are likely many causes).

It's great that we have about 70 percent of graduates who seem to find their niche in employment and, hopefully, civic life, now to keep them in Minnesota! The roughly 30 percent of graduates who become disconnected is a significant number of people to be falling off the roles. We are not alone in questioning why and asking how do we prevent the disconnection and reconnect when possible? It's a national conversation that many organizations and states are grappling with. There is a little over 4.3 million Disconnected Youth, also called Opportunity Youth in the U.S (2022, American Community Survey). As CRPD points out, this group represents a large pool of individuals who are not engaging fully in the local or state workforce.

CRPD's research found that the factors that characterize Disconnected Youth are easily identifiable while they are still in school. Finding the most effective mix of interventions that build a sense of belonging which allows 100% of our graduates to find meaning, purpose and wellbeing in their life and in our collective civic life is partnership work that is vital to the vision of our future. Everyone, schools of all types, nonprofits, government and community organizations, can contribute to preventing disconnection in youth and in helping reconnect youth falling out of the community. We at LCSC are excited to become a regional partner, along with West Central Initiative, in a newly formed statewide network of youth focused organizations. We are fortunate to be led in this work by the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions, which has a history of effective community work focused on youth and, especially, Opportunity Youth. Together we can make a positive difference in youth's lives for the future of our rural communities.



Shannon Hunstad is an experienced educational leader currently serving as the Superintendent of the Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton School District since July 2021, where he focuses on building strong community relationships and fiscal responsibility.

With a career spanning over three decades in education, his previous leadership roles include Superintendent and K-12 Principal at Lancaster School District, Activities Director, High School Principal, and Director of Educational Services at Pillager Public School.

He holds a Superintendent Licensure and K-12 Principal Licensure from St. Cloud State University, a Master's in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of St. Thomas, and a Bachelor of Science in Physical Education from Minnesota State University Moorhead.

Alongside his administrative duties, Shannon actively serves on regional service cooperatives, educational boards, and district committees, demonstrating a lifelong commitment to student-centered learning.



JOIN US

Guest Speaker: Jenna Ray
Executive Director & CEO
giveMN

Join us on Thursday, October 1, 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.
Attend virtually or in person.

Event Details

- When: Thursday, October 1, 2026
- Time: 11:30 AM – 1:00 PM
- Cost: Free (Lunch is on us!)

Rural Minnesota CEP's Regional Workforce Alliance and Good Jobs Employer Designation

EMPOWERING LOCAL BUSINESSES AND JOB SEEKERS THROUGH COLLABORATIVE WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

Source: Christine Kirschbaum, Regional Coordinator, Rural Minnesota CEP; https://www.rmcep.com/
Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Coordinator

When Chrys Kirschbaum joined the Rural Minnesota Concentrated Employment Program (CEP), she found a career she quickly grew to love. Hired in October 2021 as a Career Advisor, Kirschbaum fell in love with the work right away. "One of the things I enjoy most is bringing people and organizations together around workforce needs and opportunities," said Kirschbaum. She stepped in seamlessly to support the Henning and Battle Lake School Districts—where she had previously taught and coached—and went on to secure a new contract with the Pelican Rapids School District. Her natural skill for connection led to a quick promotion—within just six months, she stepped into the role of Regional Coordinator. Now marking three years with the organization, her passion for the job is obvious, and she feels so deeply valued at Rural Minnesota CEP.

Today, Kirschbaum's work centers on driving regional impact through two key initiatives: the Regional Workforce Alliance and the Good Jobs Employer Designation.

The Regional Workforce Alliance

As Regional Coordinator, Kirschbaum facilitates collaboration across 26 counties—19 within Rural Minnesota CEP's service area and seven in the partner Inter-County Community Council (ICCC) area. The Minnesota Association of Workforce Boards funds the Regional Workforce Alliance. This alliance requires no membership fee for participating partners and provides a stipend and mileage reimbursement to support participation.



Regional Workforce Alliance members touring the Waabigwan facility.

Kirschbaum works hard to bring real value to these partners, expanding the network to 50 member organizations, with 25 to 30 attendees consistently participating in each in-person meeting and as many as 57 participating virtually. “I want these meetings to be a place where we solve problems, make connections, and build real partnership across our 26 counties,” says Kirschbaum. She organizes quarterly gatherings—alternating between two virtual and two in-person formats—focused on driving solutions and sharing best practices across specific industry sectors:

· **Cannabis & Agriculture:** Her first sector meeting tackled cultivation, processing, manufacturing, and retail. Partnering with Janelle Klinke, HR Director at Waabigwan Mashkiki in Mahnomen, Kirschbaum secured grant funding to help facilitate the event. She toured their facility and hosted an agricultural panel featuring a local legislator, a Central Lakes College teacher, an AgCentric representative, and a rural mental health behavioralist.

· **Manufacturing:** The upcoming October meeting features a panel of manufacturing CEOs for a “CEO Hot Seat“ and an interactive workforce “Escape Room“ where participants solve realistic business scenarios. The event will also feature speakers on apprenticeships, coordinated with the Governor’s Workforce Board and the Minnesota Association of Workforce Boards.

· **Healthcare:** Slated as the next major focus area following the manufacturing event.



Christine Kirschbaum
Regional Coordinator, Rural Minnesota CEP

Elevating Workplace Standards: Good Jobs Employer Designation

In addition to the Regional Workforce Alliance's quarterly meetings, Kirschbaum spearheads the Good Jobs Employer Designation program under the Minnesota Governor's Workforce Development Board. This initiative revitalizes an earlier effort—the Inclusive Workforce Employer program. The new program assesses local businesses based on the Governor's Workforce Board's **Eight Principles of a Good Job:**

1. Recruitment and Hiring: Ensuring equitable, effective practices to attract talent.
2. Benefits: Providing comprehensive packages that support employee well-being.
3. Pay: Establishing fair and competitive compensation structures.
4. Empowerment and Representation: Giving workers a voice in decision-making.
5. Organizational Culture: Fostering an inclusive and supportive environment.
6. DEI-A: Demonstrating commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility.
7. Skills and Career Advancement: Investing in professional development.
8. Job Security and Working Conditions: Ensuring stable employment and safe workplaces.

To refine the program, Kirschbaum ran a pilot group with employers including the Initiative Foundation, Rural Minnesota CEP, Dairy Queen in Battle Lake, and Essentia Health in Brainerd. After pilot feedback revealed that the initial application took over 80 minutes to complete, her team streamlined the process. Today, the updated application and an interactive regional roadmap are live on the Rural Minnesota CEP website. Businesses awarded a Good Jobs Employer Designation are automatically enrolled as members of the Regional Workforce Alliance.

Regional businesses interested in recognition for strong workplace practices can learn more about the Regional Workforce Alliance and apply for the Good Jobs Employer Designation by visiting www.rmcep.com, clicking on the menu, and selecting Northwest Minnesota Regional Workforce Alliance.

Through the Regional Workforce Alliance and the Good Jobs Employer Designation programs, Rural Minnesota CEP is developing workforce solutions across a 26-county area. Kirschbaum's talent for uniting employers, educators, community leaders, and workforce partners fosters an expanding network of workforce professionals dedicated to addressing regional workforce challenges. This collaborative approach provides local businesses with tools to flourish, while job seekers enjoy supportive workplaces—ultimately cultivating a more connected and resilient workforce in Rural Minnesota CEP's region.

Want to learn more about Rural Minnesota CEP, the Regional Workforce Alliance, and the Good Jobs Employer Designation?

Contact Chrys Kirschbaum at christinek@rmcep.com or visit their website at www.rmcep.com.

Creating Civic Trust

and Participation in Moorhead

by: Isabel Fynboh, Summer 2026 Digital Marketing & Brand Strategy Fellow at West Central Initiative



Participants listening to a presentation.

Civic engagement goes far beyond simply casting your ballot in elections. Civic participation extends to joining local conversations, seeking to understand how your city operates, and stepping up to make a difference. It can include attending a public meeting, serving on a local board, or simply staying informed about city developments.

The City of Moorhead recognizes the importance of fostering an engaged civic community, and it's on a mission to inspire residents to get involved. This effort starts with the Citizens Government Academy, an annual eight-week program that meets weekly from March to May. The program empowers residents with the knowledge and resources they need to play an active role in civic life.

Through the Citizens Government Academy, Moorhead residents have the opportunity to engage in interactive listening sessions, site tours, and informative Q&A talks. Over two months, participants explore everything that keeps Moorhead running, from public works to economic and community development to law enforcement, fire services, parks, and city governance. The goal of the program is to help citizens gain a deeper understanding of local city government and its ongoing programs and services.

Building a Connected Community

What makes this program so unique is that it's truly an interactive experience. Participants hear directly from city staff members, attend city council meetings, and tour municipal facilities.

During each session, they're regularly encouraged to ask questions, share their perspectives, and learn alongside fellow residents and city staff members.

This collaborative environment benefits both the residents taking part in the program and the city staff leading the sessions. It provides a direct line for community conversation, allowing city officials to understand what matters most to residents.

As Kelly Kuntz, the Communications Coordinator for the City of Moorhead and program co-lead, notes, learning goes both ways. She says, "I see things, and I hear things in the class, and I can go, 'Well, maybe we should do something about that.'"

By inviting open communication with residents, the City of Moorhead is ensuring both residents and city staff leave the discussion feeling heard, valued, and ready to collaborate.

Fostering Curiosity & Trust

One of the program's biggest impacts is helping residents understand not only what their local government does but why it does it. By learning and experiencing how municipal government functions, a deep sense of trust and community action is cultivated.

"I think the biggest thing for me is really just giving people the tools they need to be informed residents of Moorhead," Kuntz says. "Knowing what's happening in the community and why it's happening—why the city makes some decisions it does is important for folks."

When residents understand the regulatory, financial, and logistical frameworks the city operates within, curiosity replaces frustrations, and trust is planted. Kuntz says, "There's a lot of misinformation out there, and the more we can inform people, and build trust with each other, and build relationships, the better."



Participants learning about City services.

By fostering trust and collaboration, the City of Moorhead is supporting residents as they become more confident in participating in civic life and engaging in productive conversations about community issues.

Supporting Lasting Civic Engagement

In fact, program graduates continue active involvement in the community. They're out sharing and spreading the knowledge they've learned through the Citizens Government Academy.

"We see our people at city events. We see them responding to things on social media and we're seeing them run for elected offices," Kuntz shares. "Someone ran for council. Someone is running for mayor. They're signing up for boards and commissions. There's been a lot of participation, overall."

With the foundational tools and relationships established through the Citizens Government Academy, Moorhead residents are equipped to make a difference in civic participation locally.

"It's really awesome to have these residents who want to know about municipal government, and that we have this ability to give them the tools to learn," says Kuntz.

Learn More

The Citizens Government Academy is a 2026 West Central Grant Recipient. Visit https://wcif.org/grant-opportunities/ to explore our grant opportunities and view the full list of grant recipients.



About Isabel Fynboh

Isabel Fynboh is West Central Initiative's Summer 2026 Digital Marketing & Brand Strategy Fellow. She contributes to content creation, supported our social media efforts, and helped promote key events.

A Simple Question

on Cooperative Purchasing Connection



by: Jerome Evans, CPC Program Representative at Lakes Country Service Cooperative

Earlier this past summer, at the League of Minnesota Cities conference, someone asked me a very simple question: "Why do people use Cooperative Purchasing Connection (CPC)?"

This simple question prompted a good conversation. There are SO MANY reasons why people use CPC depending on their organization type, their needs, their knowledge of the services CPC provides, and practicality. This poor conference attendee probably didn't approach the booth expecting to be regaled with the many and varied nuances of cooperative purchasing, but I think he left the conference knowing a lot more about CPC and cooperative purchasing than he did when he came in.

What follows is a brief recap of the highlights of our conversation.

The primary reason people use CPC is efficiency.

CPC is a program of eight Minnesota Service Cooperatives, and our mission is to help schools, cities, counties, nonprofits, and other government agencies find efficiencies in procurement. We're also flexible in pursuing that mission because every business or finance office is unique to the organization it serves. Some organizations have strong offices that leverage CPC to extend their capacity; others have decentralized procurement across the enterprise and need help ensuring compliance; and still others are one-person shops that need help keeping their heads above water. CPC can help find efficiencies no matter how the organization is set up.

The CPC Contract

The primary way we help organizations procure more efficiently is through our competitively awarded CPC contracts.

Here's how it works:

- We run the competitive, sealed solicitation process on behalf of public entities in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota. By partnering with our awarded vendors, members can confidently purchase goods and services without duplicating that process.
- When we go out to bid, we leverage collective volume purchasing power to secure deeply discounted pricing and exclusive member benefits.
- We let CPC members use those awarded contracts at no cost to themselves. You can find a general breakdown of these contract discounts directly on each vendor's profile page at PurchasingConnection.org. Additionally, we can provide a comprehensive spreadsheet of all current vendors and discounts upon request.

When you're starting a project, we encourage you to work with vendors who have already been awarded a cooperative purchasing contract through a sealed solicitation process so you can avoid duplicating the work of running a similar bid yourself.

Express

Shopping online doesn't exempt you from state procurement rules and best practices. CPC provides a free online shopping platform called Express. The great thing about Express is that it's filled with commodities that every office needs - pens, pencils, cables - that are all available on a CPC contract. Moreover, when the same product is available through multiple contracted vendors, you can compare pricing and other benefits to choose the best possible product for your organization. Express is a great option for organizations that need to improve efficiency and compliance.





From Left: Julia Dangerfield, CPC Program Representative; Amy Lohse, Procurement Specialist; Jane Eastes, Deputy Executive Director; Joni Puffett, Procurement Solutions Program Director; Mary Juliot, Marketing & Design Generalist; Jerome Evans, CPC Program Representative; Rosemary Dahl, North Dakota Independent Contractor; Melissa Mattson, Director of Administrative Services; Lori Mittelstadt, Cooperative Purchasing Program Assistant

CPC Team

In my biased opinion, the CPC Team is the most helpful group of nonprofit public procurement professionals that you can work with. Our job is to help. If you email asking for help finding something on contract, we will first look for it on the CPC Contract. But if we don't have it on the CPC Contract then we will try to find it on another cooperative purchasing contract because that is in service to our overall mission of driving efficiencies across the region.

Recently, our procurement team has also begun to assist state and local governments in running their own solicitations.

CPC works hard in the service of convenient, competitive, and compliant public procurement. We're always working to improve, and we welcome your feedback. Contact your Cooperative Purchasing team at 888-739-3289 if you have any questions or want additional information on our programs.

Come say "Hi!" when you see us at a conference or send us a **quick email**.

Every Season Matters

Support Available for Rural Mental Health During Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

by: Reese Ellison, Otter Tail County Public Health Educator



Communities across Minnesota are marking Suicide Prevention Awareness Month in September with the "Every Season Matters" campaign, an effort to support the mental health of farmers, ranchers, and rural residents.

Farming brings pride and purpose, but it also brings pressure. Long hours, financial uncertainty, unpredictable weather, and the responsibility of providing for others can take a toll. Suicide Prevention Awareness Month is a reminder that help is available, and that seeking support is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Prairie Lakes Community Health, which serves Otter Tail and Wilkin counties, encourages residents to learn the warning signs of emotional distress and to check in on people who may be struggling. A shared meal, a phone call, or a visit can remind someone they are valued.

Farmers, ranchers, and rural families can call the Minnesota Farm & Rural Helpline for free, confidential support. The helpline connects callers with people who understand the pressures of agricultural life and offers emotional support, stress counseling, financial and legal consultation, and referrals to local resources.

Minnesota Farm & Rural Helpline
Phone: 833-600-2670 (833-600-FARM)
Hours: 24 hours a day, seven days a week
Website: www.minnesotafarmstress.com
Anyone experiencing emotional distress or thoughts of suicide can call or text 988 to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Trained counselors are available 24 hours a day to listen and connect callers with support.
Every season matters, and so does every person. Farmers, family members, friends and neighbors are encouraged to check in on one another and to ask for help when they need it.



Emerald Pines Cooperative

Expands Affordable Homeownership in Alexandria

By: Greta Hentges, Marketing and Communications Specialist at West Central Initiative

Three new homes are helping mark a new chapter for Emerald Pines Cooperative in Alexandria. With help from CoNorth, a nonprofit that supports manufactured home communities in becoming resident-owned cooperatives, residents now collectively own the land, make decisions about their community, and determine how to invest in its future.

"Quite often, there are decades of disinvestment in these communities because they were prioritized as opportunities for making money rather than as safe, stable, growing communities for the residents," said Amelia Swisher, CoNorth Director of Communications and Advancement.

The transition gave residents control over decisions, including setting budgets and planning community improvements. It also began a period of significant change as residents addressed years of deferred maintenance and prepared the community for the future.



Typical exterior of the new manufactured housing in resident-owned communities.

> “West Central Initiative helped with a loan to meet the current expenses so that the community could start expanding again, which we very much appreciated.”
>
> -Amelia Swisher, CoNorth Director of Communications and Advancement.

Giving Residents a Voice

CoNorth began in 1999 as Northcountry Cooperative Foundation and shifted its focus to affordable housing and manufactured home communities in 2004. Since then, the organization has helped 18 manufactured home communities transition to resident ownership.

In a traditional manufactured home community, residents typically own their homes but rent the land beneath them. In a resident-owned cooperative, residents collectively own the land, elect a board, set budgets, and decide how to invest in their community.

“The great part is that these are democratically governed, collectively owned communities, so residents have a voice in what happens in their community,” said Amelia.

Resident ownership can also provide more financial stability. Instead of lot rent supporting an outside owner, that money stays within the cooperative and helps meet the community’s needs.

Supporting the Next Chapter at Emerald Pines

Emerald Pines needed significant infrastructure improvements, and some residents left during the transition, leaving the cooperative with fewer members than anticipated.

Our lending team provided financing to help the community manage expenses during this period and prepare for future growth.

Now, that next phase is taking shape as CoNorth has placed three new manufactured homes at Emerald Pines, creating more affordable homeownership opportunities in the Alexandria area.

“They’re durable, energy-efficient, and deeply affordable,” said Amelia. “Our last two buyers had been renting and found that owning a home in a resident-owned community cost about the same each month as renting an apartment.”





Growing for the Future
For Emerald Pines, adding new homes brings new residents into the cooperative, helps support shared expenses, and strengthens the community for the future.

“The community has converted, residents know how to run their community, and the infrastructure work has happened,” said Amelia. “It really is a visual reminder when you’re walking through, and you see several new homes in the community.”

As Emerald Pines welcomes new homeowners, CoNorth will continue supporting residents as they manage and plan for their community.

To learn more about CoNorth and its work supporting resident-owned manufactured home communities, visit conorth.coop.

Visit wcif.org/loans/ to learn more about our loan program and how financing can help bring your next project or business idea to life.

PerkSpot

An Employee Discount Solution

EXPLORE SAVINGS ON EVERYDAY ESSENTIALS

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Health and Wellness

Clothing and Shoes

Automotive



Minnesota Healthcare Consortium

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative

PerkSpot is a program available to those on the MHC/ LCSC Health Insurance.



Traveling Tree House Brings a Summer of Learning, Books, and Adventure to Local Communities

By: Jen Jabas, Executive Director
at United Way Lakes & Prairie

This summer, children across the region attended the Traveling Tree House for a summer filled with stories, creativity, discovery, and plenty of fun.

Presented by United Way Lakes and Prairie, the Traveling Tree House brought free, 75-minute literacy experiences directly into local parks and communities throughout the summer. From June 8 through August 14, Traveling Tree House teachers led children through interactive activities, story time, crafts, hands-on learning, and themed adventures, all while helping children discover the joy of reading.

The impact this summer was made possible by a simple idea: bring the books, the learning, and the fun directly to children where they live and play.

A Summer of Stories and Discovery

Over the course of the 10-week program, the Traveling Tree House visited 14 communities and parks, providing and serving approximately 150-200 children each week, giving children throughout the region a consistent opportunity to learn, explore, and connect with others during the summer months.

The learning didn't stop when the session ended. Each child received a gently used book of their choice to take home after every visit, putting books directly into the hands of young readers and giving families another opportunity to read together.

This summer, the Traveling Tree House distributed approximately 2,000 books to children in our communities.

Every week brought a new theme and a new opportunity for children to explore their imaginations. From Pete the Cat and puppets to generosity, persistence, ingenuity, and sportsmanship, the themes encouraged children to think creatively, try something new, and learn through play.

More Than a Summer Program

The Traveling Tree House is about more than keeping children busy during the summer. It creates positive experiences around reading and learning while helping families access books and educational activities close to home.

For children, a weekly visit might mean discovering a new favorite story, creating a craft, making a new friend, or proudly taking a book home to read. For parents and caregivers, it provides a free opportunity to support their children's learning in a welcoming community setting.





United Way Lakes and Prairie invests in programs like the Traveling Tree House because youth opportunity begins with giving children the experiences, resources, and encouragement they need to grow and succeed. When children have access to books, caring educators, and opportunities to learn outside the classroom, they are building confidence and developing skills that can support them well beyond the summer.

Thank you to the families who joined us, the communities that welcomed us, the teachers who made each session special, and the donors and partners who helped make free summer literacy programming possible.

Together, we are United for Reading, and UNITED is the WAY we are creating opportunities for children to learn, grow, and thrive.

To learn more about United Way Lakes and Prairie and the programs made possible through community support, visit www.uwlp.org.



Otter Tail County Treatment Court

Celebrates Recovery Month

By: Shannon Terry, Public Information Officer at Otter Tail County

Treatment court staff and participants, families, friends, and community partners came together for ice cream and time to visit. The event honored the progress people in the community are making in recovery. A graduate of the DWI court and the drug court also spoke at the event and shared their recovery story, along with Fergus Falls Chief of Police Justin Paul.

"This is a time to recognize the strength, courage and hard work of those who are on the journey of recovery," remarked 7th Judicial District Judge Kevin Miller.

Judge Miller also thanked the people who support that work, including families, friends, treatment providers, probation officers, attorneys, and law enforcement.

Recovery Month is held each September. It honors people in recovery from substance use disorders and those who support them.

Treatment court offers another path through the justice system. Participants receive treatment and support while working closely with a judge and a team of professionals. The goal is lasting recovery and a safer community.

"As a treatment court, we see every day that recovery is not always an easy road," Judge Miller said. "There can be setbacks and challenges, but there are also incredible successes. Every day someone chooses recovery is a day worth celebrating."

For more information about Otter Tail County Treatment Court, visit ottertailcounty.gov.

2026 MCN ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Truth be told

MINNESOTA COUNCIL OF NONPROFITS

OCT. 29-30 | ST. PAUL

Registration is now open for MCN's 2026 Annual Conference, Minnesota's largest gathering of nonprofits, October 29-30 in St. Paul!

We're gathering around the theme – **Truth Be Told: Stories, Power, and the Future We Build.**

MCN's Annual Conference provides a unique opportunity for team members across your organization to learn, connect, and explore strategies to support sustainable, thriving nonprofits.

With topics covering leadership, communications, fundraising, technology, policy, finance, and more, there's something for everyone on your team.



Together with 1,000+ nonprofit peers, over two days, we'll tackle questions big and small and celebrate the amazing work being done throughout the state by organizations like yours.

Thursday, October 29
Noon – 4:30 p.m.

Friday, October 30
7:30 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Saint Paul RiverCentre
175 Kellogg Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55102

REGISTER NOW

MCN Members – register by 9/1 to secure your Early Bird Rate and save $30!

MINNESOTA COUNCIL OF NONPROFITS

Chinese Bridge Program

March 26 - April 6, 2027

Organized by AESA Global & Liaocheng University (Shangong, China)

About the Program

The Chinese Bridge Program is an international cultural and language exchange initiative organized by the Chinese Educational System that promotes Chinese learning and intercultural understanding. In March 2027, AESA Global and Liaocheng University will host U.S. students in Beijing, China's historic capital, and Shandong, the birthplace of Confucian tradition.



Eligibility Requirement: Participants must be enrolled in grades 10–12 and be at least 15 years old by the program departure date (March 26, 2027).



Why Apply?

Academic Enrichment: Study Chinese history, language, and philosophy at their source to strengthen future academic opportunities.

Cultural Depth: Experience Beijing's imperial heritage and Shandong's Confucian legacy beyond the classroom.



Leadership & Growth: Build independence, resilience, and adaptability in cross-cultural settings.

Global Competence: Form lasting friendships with Chinese peers and prepare to thrive in a connected world.

Program Highlights

Studentenvoys will embark on ajourney that combines cultural immersion, academic enrichment, and peer-to-peer exchange.

Activities include (with final itinerary subject to adjustments):

- **Beijing 101 High School**: Join classes, sports, and cultural activities at one of Beijing's top schools.
- **Forbidden City & Great Wall**: Explore two of China's most iconic landmarks.
- **Cultural Masterclasses**: Try calligraphy, music, Peking Opera, and acrobatics.
- **Dragon Boat Experience**: Paddle on Dongchang Lake with Liaocheng's championship team.
- **Mandarin & Culture Courses**: Learn language, philosophy, and arts with expert instructors.
- **High-Speed Rail:** Travel between provinces on China's world-class bullet trains.

A finalized day-to-day itinerary will be released closer to departure. Some activities may be added or adjusted.

AESA GLOBAL

MIDWEST GLOBAL BRIDGE
Connecting Schools to the World
A program of Lakes Country and SWWC Service Cooperatives
In partnership with AESA Global

Scholarship & Costs

TheChineseBridge Program is a scholarship-based, competitive selection program for American youth. Applicants are evaluated for academic merit, leadership, and cross-cultural interest.

Program Value: USD $8,300
Student Scholarship: USD $5,300
Student Contribution: USD $3,000

- Includes airfare, visa, hotels, meals, transportation, and activities
- Excludes personal expenses

Key Dates

Application Deadline: October 19, 2026
Scholarship Announcements: October 30, 2026

Registration Fee Due: November 20, 2027

- A valid passport must be submitted at this time
- Passports must remain valid for at least six months beyond the April 2027 program end date

Final Payment Deadline: February 1, 2027

Click here for Student Application

Click here for Parent/Guardian Acknowledgement Form

Please submit questions to djosephson@lcsc.org

LCSC COMMUNICATOR

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