



WEST CENTRAL MINNESOTA  
***Communities Action***

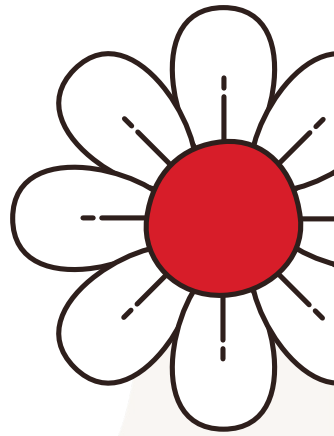
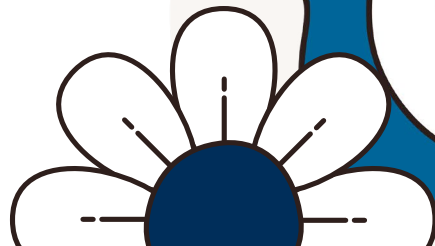
**2024**

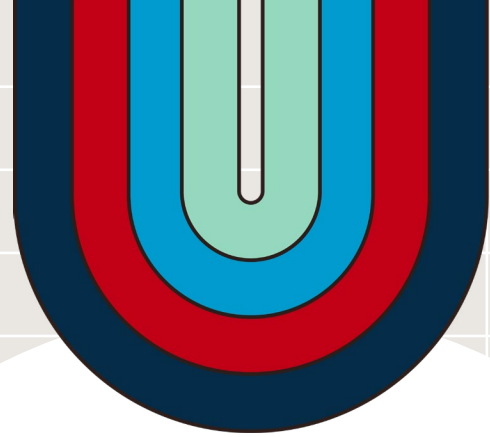
# **Annual Report**

**CELEBRATING OUR**

**60<sup>TH</sup>**

**ANNIVERSARY**





## COMMUNITY ACTION PROMISE

Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.

HELPING PEOPLE. CHANGING LIVES.

## A LEADERSHIP LETTER

### Friends of West Central MN Communities Action, Inc. -

**This year marks the 60th anniversary of West Central MN Communities Action, Inc.!** Sixty years ago, President Lyndon Baines Johnson declared a "War on Poverty." While that battle continues, we have made great strides in helping people move out of poverty. There are countless reasons why individuals and families may need support—and we recognize that asking for help is never easy. At WCMCA, Inc., we strive to ease that burden when families are struggling to make ends meet.

We are incredibly grateful for our volunteer Board of Directors, who show up every month with dedication and commitment. Our board is composed of County Commissioners, private sector employees, retirees, and community members we serve. They are actively engaged in their communities, and we deeply appreciate their service.

Our staff is equally dedicated, going above and beyond to serve children and families as they work toward self-reliance. I see our agency as the "bootstraps"—borrowing a phrase from a former Minnesota senator—we provide the support people need to pull themselves up and stay on their feet. Everyone needs help at some point, and our agency delivers that assistance with care and compassion.

Every day, I hear calls from individuals facing desperate situations, and our staff works tirelessly to ease the hardships of poverty. I often wonder what our most vulnerable neighbors would do without heat in the winter or the energy-efficient improvements that keep their homes livable. Many seniors rely on homemaking and chore services, which they simply cannot afford on a fixed income. These essential services help them remain in the homes they have worked so hard for.

For many families, Head Start provides not just childcare, but a strong educational foundation—giving children the early learning advantages they need to succeed in school and beyond. Meanwhile, affordable housing remains a pressing issue in rural Minnesota, with rents at an all-time high. WCMCA, Inc. is committed to helping families through rental assistance, homelessness services, and even homeownership opportunities, all with the goal of fostering long-term self-reliance.

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about WCMCA, Inc. through our 2024 Annual Report. We are incredibly proud of the programs we offer, and the impact we make every day. Helping People, Changing Lives isn't just a motto—it's what we do.

As we look ahead, we know that funding uncertainties may arise, but I have no doubt that we will emerge stronger than ever!

**Missy Becker-Cook**  
*Chief Executive Officer*

**Teresa Gustafson**  
*Board Chairperson*





## WCMCA LEADERSHIP

### WCMCA LEADERSHIP TEAM

**Missy Becker –Cook**  
Chief Executive Officer

**Heather Carlson**  
Fiscal Services Director

**Danie St. John**  
Director of Administration

**Paige Carlson**  
Aging Well & Asset  
Development Director

**Andrea Goeden**  
Energy Assistance Director

**Amber Holmstrom**  
Family & Community  
Services Director

**Jim Haugen**  
Head Start Director

**Joe Niehaus**  
Housing Director

**Dave Snyder**  
Statewide FAIM Director

**Toby Weigand**  
Weatherization Director

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

#### Executive Committee

**Ken Johnson, Chair**  
Commissioner – Grant County

**Larry Lindor, Vice Chair**  
Commissioner – Pope County

**Bob Staples, Treasurer**  
Stevens County – Private

**Jessica Boyer, Secretary**  
Douglas County – Private

**Teresa Gustafson, Past Chair**  
Traverse County – Low Income

#### Governance Committee

**Charity Bullick**  
Douglas County – Low-Income

**Marlene Cihlar**  
Pope County – Low-Income

**Jerrel Olson**  
Commissioner – Traverse County

**Michelle Rinke**  
Traverse County – Private

**Robin McNamar**  
Grant County – Low-Income

**Hannah Michaelson**  
Stevens County – Low-Income

**Adam Palan**  
Pope County – Private

**Keith Swanson**  
Grant County – Private

**Jeff Way**  
Commissioner – Douglas County

**Donny Wohlers**  
Commissioner – Stevens County

*Board Members as of January 1, 2025*



ONE YEAR



THREE  
YEARS



FIVE  
YEARS



15 & 20  
YEARS

# THANK YOU

For Your Service



TEN YEARS



25 & 30  
YEARS



# events OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

## IMPACT CELEBRATION

In September 2024, West Central MN Communities Action proudly hosted its first-ever Impact Celebration—a heartfelt gathering to honor the power of community action and its profound local impact.

This special event brought together our passionate staff, visionary board members, resilient clients, dedicated legislators, invaluable community partners, and every changemaker who makes our mission a reality. It was a time to reflect, connect, and celebrate the collective efforts that drive meaningful change. Through dedication, resilience, and an unwavering belief in a better tomorrow, our communities have transformed challenges into triumphs. Whether through volunteer efforts, grassroots initiatives, or simply lifting each other up in times of need, our impact is undeniable.

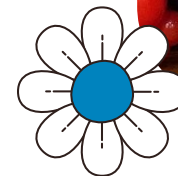


## ALL-STAFF ANNUAL MEETING

With packed schedules and endless commitments, our staff gets just one day each year to come together for training, connection, and, of course, everyone's favorite part—great food! When this day arrives, we make it count!

This year, we had the privilege of hearing from Andre Koen, who challenged and inspired us with his powerful message on Moving Beyond Tolerance. His insights sparked reflection, discussion, and a renewed commitment to growth.

We were also joined by the WCMCA Board of Directors for our annual meeting, where we presented our Annual Report and honored the dedication and service of WCMCA's finest. It was a day of learning, recognition, and strengthening the bonds that make our work so valuable.



Pictured Top Left: FAIM & Aging Well Team, Bottom Left: Fiscal Team, Top Right: FCS and PLUS Kids Team, Bottom Right: Weatherization Team





## HEAD START TRAINING CAMP

Training Camp is an annual tradition—a time for our seasonal Head Start staff to reunite with the full team and gear up for the exciting school year ahead!

These two days are filled with valuable training, thoughtful planning, and plenty of laughter as we come together to strengthen our skills, share ideas, and build connections. It's more than just preparation—it's a celebration of the incredible work we do to support children and families in our communities.



## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

**Outreach and education are the foundation of community action.**

Over the past year, we've been dedicated to learning, teaching, and giving back—ensuring that knowledge, resources, and support reach the communities we serve. Every conversation, workshop, and act of service strengthens our collective impact and brings us closer to a brighter future for all.



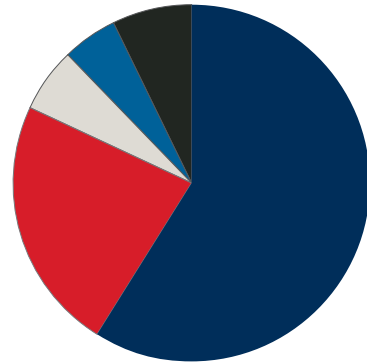
Pictured Top Circles: Outreach at Ashby Days & Veteran Walk, Bottom Left: Outreach & Education at MinnCap Conference, Top Right: Head Start Outreach Booth, Bottom Right: Outreach at Alexandria Community Night Out at City Park

Pictured Top Left: Head Start Pelican Rapids Team, Bottom Left: Head Start Fergus Falls Team, Top Right: Head Start CAT Data Team, Bottom Right: Head Start Alex. Tech. Comm. College Team



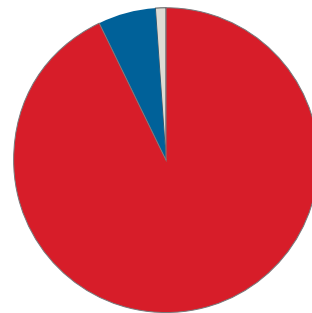
# FINANCIALS

A YEAR IN REVIEW



REVENUE – \$13,799,450

- Federal Grants – 59%
- State Grants – 23%
- Affordable Home Sales – 6%
- In-Kind Contributions – 5%
- Other – 7%

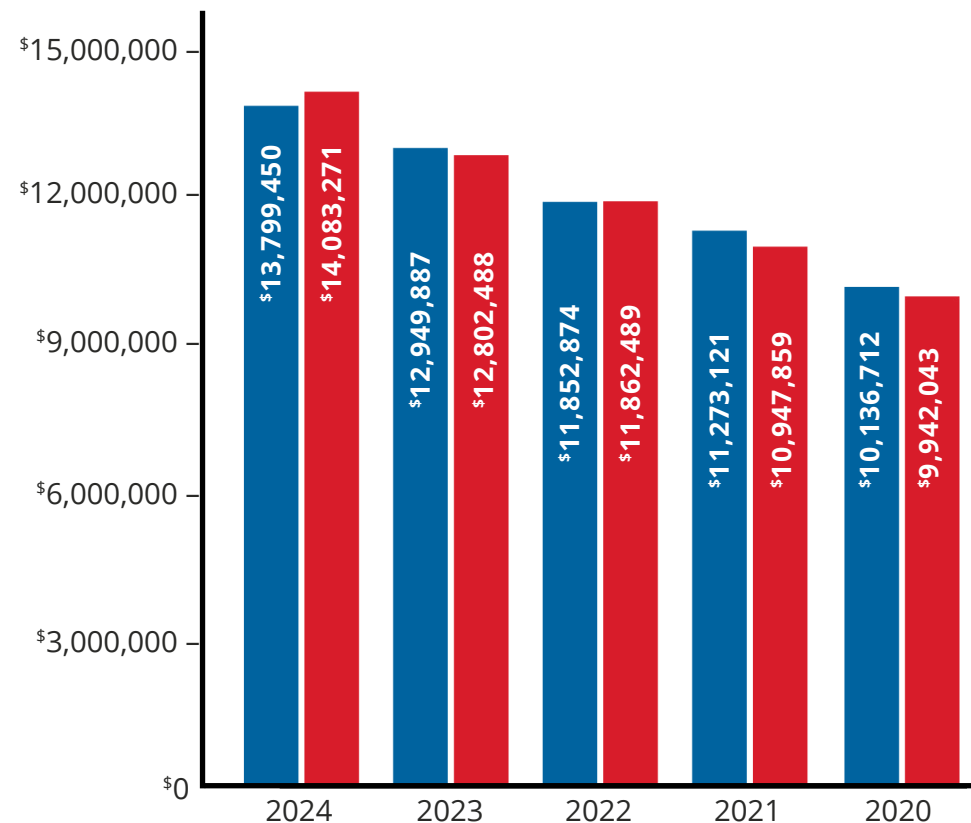


FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES – \$14,083,271

- Program Services – 93%
- Management & General – 6%
- Fundraising – 1%

## REVENUE VS. EXPENSES

- Revenue
- Expenses



WCMCA received a clear audit with no significant findings.

# ENERGY ASSISTANCE & WEATHERIZATION

Ensuring eligible households have affordable and continuous energy access is vital for well-being. Assistance programs, like the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), help families manage costs, while emergency support offers relief during crisis. Energy efficiency programs also reduce consumption and costs over time. Together, these initiatives promote comfort and security for all residents.



4,539

TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS ASSISTED

\$653,279

ENERGY RELATED REPAIR PROGRAM

\$2,261,377

PRIMARY HEAT BENEFITS PAID

\$836,353

PAID TO HOUSEHOLDS IN CRISIS

"I am so thankful for the Assistance I receive from WCMCA's EAP Program. I am so happy to be able to stay in my home and live near my friends and church. This would not be possible without assistance from this program. The LIHEAP grant helps me afford the rising costs to heat my home, which gives me peace of mind. At 86 years old, I am beyond thankful."

– J.O., 2024 energy assistance client

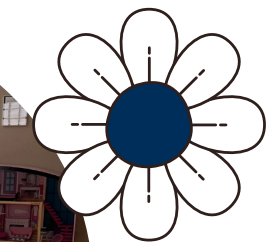
320

TOTAL WEATHERIZATION HOUSEHOLDS

\$1,162,717

Primary uses: Appliances, furnace replacements, water heater replacements, insulation of homes, air sealing of homes, and many other health and safety related home expenses.





## FAMILY & COMMUNITY SERVICES



Serving children and their families in WCMCA's primary five counties plus several surrounding counties and North Dakota

PLUS Kids is designed to provide a positive, neutral, and safe environment for the exchange or supervised visitation of children by separated parents in cases where visitation would otherwise be difficult due to issues of conflict or abuse. Services are offered help to prevent children from witnessing and/or experiencing unhealthy behaviors between family members.

Services include:

- Supervised Parenting Time
- Supervised Telephone Calls
- Monitored Parenting Time
- In-home Supervision
- Zoom Visits
- Safe Exchanges
- Parent Education

**580**  
SUPERVISED  
PARENTING VISITS

**199**  
HOME VISITS

**1,612**  
PARENTING  
HOURS

**120**  
TRANSPORT  
HOURS

**84**  
CHILDREN  
SERVED

**47**  
HOUSEHOLDS  
SERVED

**40**  
SAFE  
EXCHANGES

**96**  
ZOOM VISITS



## TEMPORARY SHELTER PROGRAMMING

Households utilize time in the Launch Pad program to accomplish goals created by the client with the assistance of their case manager, during intensive case management required of the program.

Goals may include but are not limited to:

- Securing or increasing employment/income
- Securing daycare
- Applying for benefits such as SNAP, MFIP, Medical Assistance, and daycare assistance
- Reinstating a driver's license
- Paying off fines
- Searching for safe, stable, and affordable housing, in whatever capacity that may be.

There is no set amount of time households are able to utilize Launch Pad, as long as they are actively participating in case management and goal planning. The average length of stay is 60 days.

Above: This new Launch Pad unit was completed in the Spring of 2024.

**74**  
TOTAL  
HOUSEHOLDS  
*June 2020 – Sept. 2024*

**30**  
HOUSEHOLDS  
THIS YEAR  
*Current fiscal year*

**124**  
HOTEL VOUCHERS  
*July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024*

**LAUNCH PAD  
HOUSEHOLD  
EXITS**

**5** SUBSIDIZED  
HOUSING

**5** UNSUBSIDIZED  
RENTAL

**3** TRANSITIONAL  
HOUSING

**14** SUBSIDIZED PROGRAM  
THROUGH WCMCA

**2** EXITED FROM  
PROGRAM





In November, the Family and Community Services Department along with volunteers from other departments, partnering agencies, community members, and agency clients held our annual Cardboard Brigade in Alexandria, MN.

This event is held yearly during National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness week. From 3:30-5:00pm, those partaking in the Cardboard Brigade held statistics about hunger and homelessness along the busy Broadway Street. Some stopped to read our signs, some thanked us for the work we do and awareness we were spreading, while others were not as friendly. This event is extremely eye opening every year and gives a very slight glimpse at the treatment of our homeless community members.

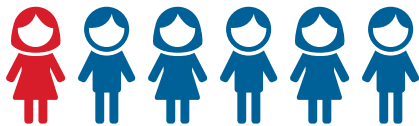
In 2021, we began a homeless drive for needed items for the homeless households we serve. We collect winter hats and gloves, winter jackets, hand warmers, non-perishable food items, personal hygiene items, and monetary donations.

## HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

**365**  
HOUSEHOLDS  
ASSISTED WITH RENT  
Both short- and  
long-term programs

**17**  
TRANSITIONAL HOUSING  
HOUSEHOLDS  
*The Phoenix Transitional Housing located in Alexandria is a subsidized housing complex owned by WCMCA with the purpose of providing temporary housing to homeless families with children.*

**13%**  
HOUSING ASSISTANCE  
CLIENTS ARE  
YOUNGER THAN 24 YEARS OLD



1 IN 6 CHILDREN  
LIVE IN POVERTY

## A LIFELINE OF HOPE: HOW WCMCA CHANGED MY LIFE

I still remember the day I arrived in Minnesota, full of hope and excitement for a new job. But life had other plans.

The job didn't work out and I found myself with nowhere to call home. That's when WCMCA stepped in with a RentHelpMN referral, like a beacon of hope in a stormy sea. They not only helped me find a safe and secure place to live but also gave me the stability I desperately needed. I was grateful to have a roof over my head, even if it meant sharing a kitchen with my floor-mates. But WCMCA's support didn't stop there.

With a newfound sense of security, I was able to focus on finding a better job. And what a blessing it was to land a role at the U.S. Post Office, just a 3-minute walk from my apartment complex!

As time passed, I was able to move into a more private and spacious home, and I even saved up enough to buy a vehicle. Life was finally falling into place. But then, life threw me another curveball.

A few months later, I suffered a brain aneurysm and underwent emergency surgery. The road to recovery was long and challenging, but WCMCA was there for me once again with a referral to RentHelpMN, providing months of rent assistance while I healed.

I'm forever grateful for the support and kindness of WCMCA. They've been more than just a helping hand – they've been a lifeline of hope in my darkest moments. I hope to pay it forward one day and help others in need, just as these programs have helped me.

– Housing Assistance client, 2024





## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Offering services from emergency to rehabilitation loan programs and new single family home construction. This department also manages the individual tax preparation program.

28

HOUSEHOLDS USED  
PRE-PURCHASE  
HOMEBUYER COUNSELING

2

NEW HOMES BUILT  
BY THE ICW CREW

+ 1 Temporary Shelter Duplex

## COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

A Community Land Trust, providing affordable homeownership, buys or receives donated land and builds new homes and / or acquires and rehabilitates existing homes, and makes these homes available for sale to limited-income homebuyers, writing down the purchase price to an affordable level through the use of public and/or private subsidies.

The CLT sells the home at an affordable price to an eligible, qualified homebuyer household, but retains ownership of the land parcel on which the home sits, leasing the parcel to the homeowner through a 99-year, inheritable, renewable ground lease.

The West Central Community Land Trust Program will have placed:

9 HOMES IN  
THE TRUST

5 ADDITIONAL HOMES  
THROUGH FALL OF 2025

Includes new construction, acquisition rehab, and two Habitat for Humanity homes.

## FREE TAX PREP SERVICES

\$807,268

BACK TO THE COMMUNITY TO  
SUPPORT MN RURAL ECONOMY

1,215  
FEDERAL TAX  
RETURNS

1,185  
STATE TAX  
RETURNS

403  
PROPERTY TAX  
REFUNDS



120  
COMPLETED MNSURE  
APPLICATIONS



PROGRAMS  
COMPLETED IN  
2024:

6 REHABILITATION  
LOAN PROGRAM → \$202,414 SPENT

1 EMERGENCY  
LOAN PROGRAM → \$17,010 SPENT



Pictured Left Circle: Elbow Lake Community Land Trust home  
Pictured Top: Brandon Community Land Trust home



## AGING WELL



This volunteer driver program provides rides to adults 60 years and older who are living in our 5-county area. The rides can be for non-emergency medical appointments, grocery shopping, visiting family and social opportunities throughout their communities and the state of Minnesota.

**8** VOLUNTEER DRIVERS

**60,529** MILES DRIVEN

**819** TOTAL RIDES



Homemaking and chore services assist adults with light maintenance items, cleaning, yard maintenance or basic household chores. On-staff service providers and volunteers assisted 67 clients in our 5-county area, allowing them to remain living in their homes independently.

**67** CLIENTS SERVED

**374** HOMEMAKING PROJECTS

**269** CHORES COMPLETED



## IN-HOME MODIFICATION PROGRAM

This program helps adults aged 60 and over purchase items that will help improve the safety of their home environment. In 2024, the program provided essential home modifications for 46 adults in our communities. Each home received safety enhancements valued up to \$150, including the installation of fire alarms, updated lighting, improved walkways, handrails, grab bars, and other fall prevention tools.

**46** CLIENTS SERVED

*"I was so worried about the snowstorm, and then all of a sudden I looked outside, and my driveway was cleared, Courtney is amazing."*

*– A 2024 Home Care & Repair client*



## MATTER OF BALANCE

In partnership with Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging, our Aging Well team provided a Matter of Balance and BingoCize health course. These evidence-based courses reduce the risk of falling for older adults. Here is what Becky had to say after we hosted a class at the Alexandria Senior Center:



*"Our participants enjoyed Courtney's energy and learning health/wellness tips. We heard a lot of laughter and fun coming out of those classes!"*



**EXPERIENCE THE JOY OF GIVING BACK!**

**CALL: 218-405-3011**

### Home Care Contractors Needed!

Older adults have great need for help with basic chores and homemaking services, so they can remain living safely in their home. Receive a minimum of \$25 per project and make a difference in your community.

### Ready Ride Volunteers Needed!

As a Volunteer Driver, you pick your driving schedule and choose where you would like to drive. You will receive mileage reimbursement for all miles driven.



# FAMILY ASSETS FOR INDEPENDENCE IN MINNESOTA



A matched savings project that helps Minnesota resident low-wage earners build assets. Participant savings may be matched by the program at a rate of 3:1.

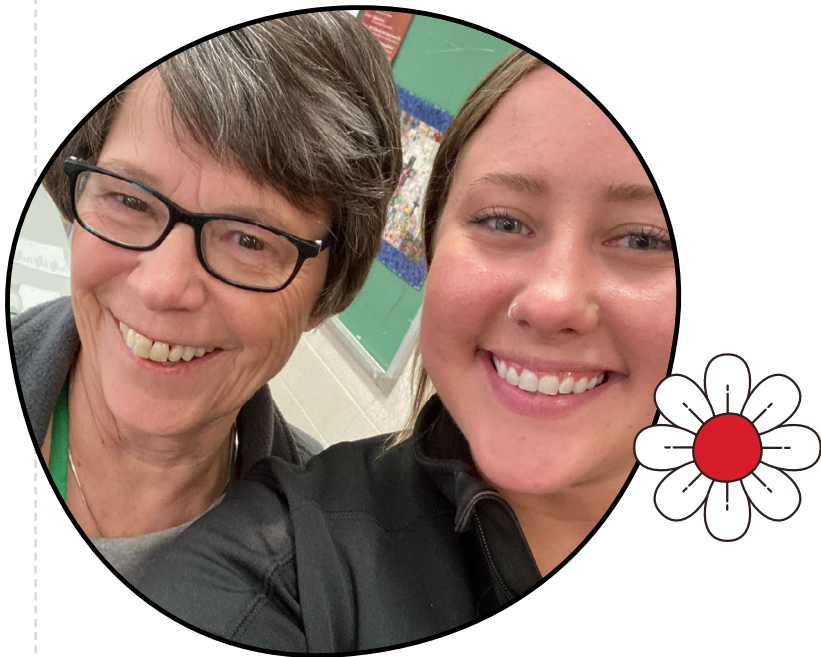
The Family Assets for Independence in Minnesota (FAIM) program continues to thrive under the fiscal leadership of West Central Minnesota Communities Action.

This match savings initiative, supported by 34 partners across the state, is dedicated to helping Minnesotans achieve financial freedom through asset development.

At WCMCA, our local efforts are spearheaded by a dedicated financial coach, Megan Radermacher (pictured on right), who has been instrumental in assisting individuals in our community. In 2024, she helped local community members secure \$24,000 in FAIM funding to purchase valuable assets.

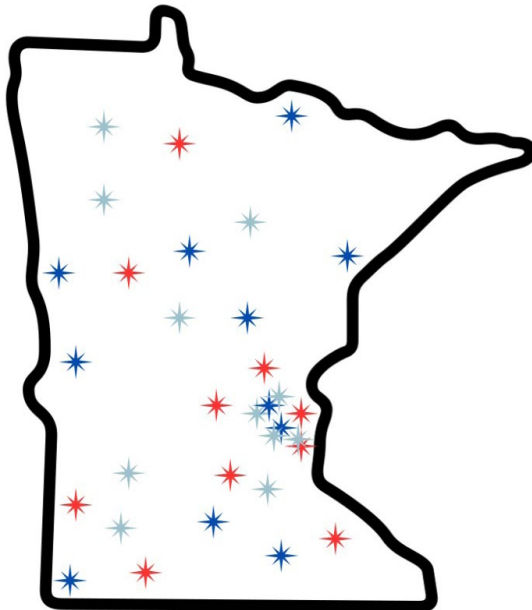
Marie, a FAIM participant, shared her heartfelt gratitude for her coach and the program, saying, "Because of WCMCA and FAIM, I have a functional and safe kitchen! I am beyond thankful for Megan and the team at West Central. What a blessing they have been to me."

Through the combined efforts of our statewide partners and local support, the FAIM program continues to make a significant impact on the lives of Minnesotans, empowering them to build a more secure and prosperous future.



The FAIM program partners with resources and organizations across the state of MN.

LEARN MORE: MINNESOTAFAIM.ORG



## ASHLEY GARDNER

**Dog Mom, Girlfriend, Sister, Daughter, Woman in Recovery, and HOME OWNER!**



Life hasn't always been as fruitful and easy as it is now.

From 2015 to 2020, I really grappled with my mental health and addiction to meth and heroin. My trials and tribulations led me to chronic homelessness. At one point my only option was to live in my tent. I set up camp along the Cannon River. This is where I lived for several months.

Finally, I was connected to the necessary resources and a whole team of people who were willing to stand up for me and support me, despite the fact that I didn't feel worthy of being advocated for. About 10 months into my recovery journey, I was introduced to the FAIM program by Candace at Northfield Healthy Community Initiative.

Two years later, I completed the program and used the financial education and savings match to purchase my first home!

*As I looked through the backyard of my new home, I realized that the same river where I lived out of a tent for months actually flows through my backyard, which brought me so much joy, freedom and pride.*

Ashley is now over four years sober and works as an impact coordinator for the Rice County Chemical and Mental Health Coalition. With a major in Advocacy and Political Leadership, she is on track to graduate.

*"I couldn't be more grateful to all of the people that believed in me and cheered me on throughout my journey – and I am just starting out on my own path of giving back and helping others in crisis."*



## CHILDREN & EDUCATION



West Central Minnesota Communities Action

# HEAD START

### THE HEAD START APPROACH

WCMCA Head Start supports children's growth from birth to age five through services that support early learning and development, health, and family well-being. Head Start staff actively engage parents, recognizing family participation throughout the program as a key to strong child outcomes.

## 103

**HOME-BASED  
EARLY HEAD START**

Pregnant women & children (Prenatal to 3-years old)

## 270

**CENTER-BASED  
HEAD START  
PRESCHOOL**

(Children Ages 3-5)

## 420

**PARENT  
VOLUNTEERS**

Head Start & Early Head Start

## 18,737

**VOLUNTEER  
HOURS**

From parent volunteers

### PROGRAM SUCCESSES

# 88%

**Of 4-year-old Head Start children met or exceeded expectations for Kindergarten readiness.**

To meet Head Start Performance Standards, and optimal school readiness, Head Start (3-5 year old) services ensured 93% of enrolled children participated in timely, well-child exams and health screenings (developmental, mental health, hearing/vision) with community providers and 77% established dental care exams.



# 60 YEARS of RESULTS

**HEAD START** | Since 1965



### Happy Birthday Head Start!

Head Start is turning 60, and we are thrilled to celebrate this incredible milestone! Since 1965, Head Start has empowered millions of children and families across the nation, offering opportunities to grow, thrive, and succeed. At West Central Minnesota Communities Action Inc., we're proud to continue this legacy every day. Our dedicated Early Head Start and Head Start staff work tirelessly to help children, from birth to age five, build the skills they need for success in school and life. We also partner with parents, equipping them to be champions of their child's growth. From early learning and health services to family support, we're committed to giving every child and family a strong start.

Over six decades, Head Start has proven that where you start doesn't define where you can go. At WCMCA, our partnerships with local schools, health providers, and community organizations create brighter futures for children and build stronger communities for all.

As we celebrate this 60th anniversary, let's honor not just Head Start's remarkable history, but the hope, opportunity, and impact we continue to create together. Join WCMCA in wishing "Happy Birthday, Head Start!" and celebrating the difference we can make in the next 60 years and beyond!







WEST CENTRAL MINNESOTA  
***Communities Action***

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**wcmca.org**