

Region 7E Adult Mental Health Initiative

Regional LAC Meeting Minutes

May 18, 2026; 1:00pm – 2:00pm; In Person at Isanti County Family Services and via Zoom

Present:

Andersen, Jennifer	Canvas, ECCS
Alida, Danielle	Blue Cross
B Rhonda	Kanabec County LAC
D., Deb	Kanabec County LAC
Hawkins, Emily	Isanti County
Johnstone, Stacy	R7E Consumer Rep
K., Joel	Pine County LAC

Lind, Nicole	TSA
Lussier-Erickson, Katrina	Empower Recovery Services
Matthewson, Natalie	CMCOA
Schmidt, Barb	Pine County
Stevenson, Amanda	R7E Planner
Alicia	

Guests: David and Jack, Lost and Found Recovery Café

Joel opened the meeting with introductions.

Motion by Stacy Johnstone to approve the March meeting minutes, second by Amanda Stevenson. Motion carried.

Empower, Lost and Found Recovery Café, Jack, David, Katrina Lussier-Erickson

Jack and David from Empower Recovery Services and the Lost and Found Recovery Cafe provided an overview of services available in Pine City.

The Lost and Found Recovery Cafe is part of the Recovery Cafe Network, which includes recovery cafes across the country. The cafe is intended to serve as a safe, supportive, substance-free space for individuals in recovery of any kind. The purpose is not centered on selling coffee, but rather on providing connection, support, services, and community.

Services and supports include:

- Assistance with direct needs such as benefits, housing instability, food resources, resumes, job searches, GED support, and resource navigation.
- A safe place for individuals to spend time without needing to purchase anything or have a specific reason for being there.
- Opportunities for social connection and belonging.
- Free guitar lessons through a community partnership.
- Recreational and community-building activities, including foosball, ping pong, television, arts and crafts, and access to laptops.
- A developing clothing closet with donated clothing, shoes, coats, hats, and winter items.
- Plans for a washer and dryer to assist individuals without access to laundry.
- Plans for a shower room for individuals experiencing homelessness or housing instability.
- A larger meeting/presentation space with a kitchenette for potluck-style meals and community gatherings.

Current meetings and groups mentioned included men's codependency, peer support, family support, women's codependency, and all-recovery meetings.

The presenters also discussed the goal of eventually having cafe members take ownership of the space by helping facilitate meetings and programming. A future goal is to expand hours, particularly during evening "bar hours," to provide an alternative safe place for individuals.

The cafe is located in downtown Pine City at 3rd and Main Street. Current hours are generally weekdays during daytime hours, with some variation due to staffing and jail outreach.

Empower also shared that a women's sober living home is in development in downtown Pine City, with an anticipated opening around mid-June. The home may accommodate up to 12 residents, though 8–9 residents is expected to provide a more comfortable environment.

Empower House Inc and Recovery Services each have Facebook pages.

They are requesting donations of personal size shampoo, conditioner, soap, deodorant, etc.

Governing Board Update, Amanda Stevenson

Amanda Stevenson reported that the Governing Board met earlier in the day and reviewed the budget. There are currently some unallocated 2026 funds remaining.

Providers are encouraged to apply if they are experiencing gaps in serving adults with severe and persistent mental illness.

Transportation services through the Region are currently underutilized. Providers were encouraged to connect with the county supervisor serving on the Governing Board for the county where the individual resides.

The group discussed transportation eligibility and process. Key points included:

- The Region has arrangements with Attaboys and Northern Transportation Inc., also known as Stark Transportation.
- Transportation assistance must be approved by the county supervisor on the Governing Board for the county where the individual resides.
- Individuals must have a severe and persistent mental illness to qualify.
- Providers may use the uncompensated care/flex funds form to request transportation assistance.
- If a request is under \$1,000, Barb may be able to sign off on it.
- Providers are generally responsible for coordinating transportation.
- The group discussed the need to clarify the process, as transportation coordination can be burdensome for providers.

There was discussion regarding transportation for treatment, medical appointments, recovery meetings, and non-MA-covered services. It was noted that the AMHI funds generally should not be used for services that Medical Assistance is expected to cover. However, transportation to non-billable recovery supports, such as meetings or the recovery cafe, may be an area where AMHI assistance could be considered.

Danielle from Blue Cross shared that BlueRide may be able to provide transportation to certain support meetings, such as NA or AA, though restrictions apply. Members may need to call to verify eligibility and availability. [BlueRide Transportation Request](#) | [Blue Cross MN](#)

Amanda also reported that the Region recently issued a request for proposals for mobile crisis services for the next grant cycle, covering 2027–2028. The Governing Board discussed an award recommendation, and more information will be shared soon.

Consumer Report, Stacy Johnstone

Stacy shared a recent self-care activity at the Pine City Drop-In Center, where participants made chia pets through a Grow Resiliency activity. Stacy noted that caring for and watching the plant grow was meaningful and connected to the broader conversation about self-care.

She also expressed appreciation for Mental Health Awareness Month and noted that she was looking forward to the adult mental health event at Pine Technical College later that week.

Kanabec LAC, Rhonda

The group discussed plans to move meetings outdoors for the season. For May, the group planned to meet at Library Park, with Kids Kingdom as an alternate location if needed. Robinson Park in Sandstone was mentioned as a likely June location.

Chisago LAC, Stacy Johnstone

Stacy reported that the Chisago LAC meeting for May was moved to Wednesday, May 27, at 1:00 p.m. at the same location, Main Street Church in North Branch. The change was due to the strike in Chisago. No cancellation notice had been received at the time of the meeting.

Pine County LAC, Joel K.

Joel reported on the upcoming adult mental health event at Pine Technical College. Online registration has closed, but a few additional participants could still be added by contacting Meredith at Pine County.

Presenters for the event included:

- Laura from the VA, speaking on lethal means safety / access to safety.
- Rebecca Schmidt, presenting “The Mental Health Toolbox.”

The Pine City Drop-In Center is also planning “Let’s Go Fishing” activities in June and August, with possible openings still available for August.

The Pine City Drop-In Center meets at the Pine City Senior Center on Tuesdays from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The Pine City LAC meets on the second Tuesday of each month at 11:00 a.m.

CMCOA, Natalie Matthewson

Natalie shared information about the 2026 Minnesota Comprehensive Aging Survey, launched May 11 by the Minnesota Department of Human Services and the Minnesota Board on Aging. The survey is for individuals aged 60 or older who live in Minnesota at least six months of the year. It takes approximately 20 minutes to complete and will help inform future state aging plans, including the 2028–2031 State Plan on Aging.

Complete the survey in one of these ways:

- Online: <http://vtlr.us/cas26> or scan the QR code to the right
- By phone or mail: Call (833) 508-6398 or email cas@vitalresearch.com to ask for a phone or paper survey.



Natalie also shared information about the Minnesota Story Collective, which is gathering stories related to aging. Stories may come from older adults, providers, or caregivers and may address topics such as transportation, housing, home care, food access, meals, or caregiving experiences. The story submission process takes approximately 15 minutes and is anonymous. MN Story Collective: [AgingStories](#)

Natalie also announced a free event featuring Dr. Joseph Gaugler from the University of Minnesota, who is known for his work related to memory loss and caregivers. The event will be held June 25 at the Braham Event Center, with presentations from 10:00–11:30 a.m. and 2:00–3:30 p.m. Vendor tables and providers will also be present.

<https://cmcoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Gaugler-Isanti-County-Flyer-6-25-26.pdf>

The Development Team and Minnesota Aging Pathways Team (formerly Senior LinkAge Line) can do presentations.

Here's the link to the Presentations Titles and Topics. https://cmcoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/SLL-w_Dev_2025.websiteMAP.pdf

Blue Cross, Danielle Alida

Danielle reported that there are no major changes at Blue Cross at this time. Blue Cross is aware that some individuals are still transitioning due to senior care changes and has increased call center staffing to help members navigate questions.

BlueRide may be able to provide transportation to certain support meetings, such as NA or AA, though restrictions apply. Members may need to call to verify eligibility and availability. [BlueRide Transportation Request | Blue Cross MN](#)

Danielle also shared information about Healthy Rewards for members under age 64. Updated vouchers are now combined into one form and include incentives for preventive care services such as annual dental exams, preventive care exams, colonoscopy screenings, cervical cancer screenings, and mammograms. Rewards range from approximately \$25 to \$75 depending on the service. Members can mail the form or submit it electronically with “secure” in the subject line. Danielle can provide vouchers to counties that would like them available for members. [M1-28352R01 Activity Voucher EN Healthy Rewards Program | Blue Cross MN](#)

ECCS, Jen Andersen

Jen Anderson reported that registration is open for the Stomp Out Suicide 5K Walk, scheduled for Saturday morning, August 8, at Goodview Park in Wyoming.

RSI, Nicole Lind

RSI has a group home in Mora, Village Green 1, with openings for younger females with mental health diagnoses.

Lotus Grace, RSI’s ERTS/RCS program in Cambridge, is experiencing workforce challenges and is seeking mental health practitioners.

RSI is also hiring for an RN role and LPN positions.

RSI’s Rhine Lake facility in Finlayson, which includes a campground, pavilion, and bunkhouse, is opening for the season from approximately May through September. The facility is available to other groups for a fee and may be useful for team-building events or county meetings. <https://residentialservices.org/rhine-lake/>

TSA, Lainie Janke

Lainey shared that TSA is preparing for the summer months and has staff in the Cambridge location accepting new referrals. Staff mentioned included:

- Danda Russia, who specializes in family and couples work.
- Jackie Bleas, who serves both the Cambridge and Pine City locations and is also an LADC.

TSA is also developing a possible adult group psychotherapy opportunity focused on breathwork. Additional information will be shared when available.

Empower, Katrina Lussier-Erickson

Katrina reported that there is currently a short waitlist for mental health services and SUD treatment. Empower is also looking to hire an LADC.

Empower’s Walk for Recovery is scheduled for Saturday, September 26, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. in Pine City, beginning at Robinson Park. The event will include resource/vendor tables at the end of the walk, along with activities such as a dunk tank, food trucks, and a band. <https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/second-annual-walk-for-recovery>

Isanti County, Emily Hawkins

Fully staffed.

The Drop in Center is open on the first and third Thursdays of each month, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Pine County, Barb Schmidt

Fully staffed.

The drop-in center is open the first and third Thursday of each month from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Agenda suggestions for the next meeting:

- Approval of minutes