



The Art of Care:

a blueprint for Minnesota to mop up this mess

Author:

Tim Reardon

Co-Authors, Editors and Content Contributors:

Verlaine Wintermute, Ibrahim Ahmed,
Reeve Hutchinson and Jordan McKenna



© 2026 Ché + Assisi Consulting



*"liberating the purpose and potential of
Individuals, organizations and communities"*

Tim Reardon, CEO
763-370-9927
e-mail: tim@cheassisi.com
www.cheassisi.com

February 26, 2026

© 2026 Ché + Assisi Consulting

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law."



In a nut shell: What is The Art of Care: a blueprint for Minnesota to mop up this mess?

It is a direct connection between a vulnerable individual or family's basic needs and a foundation's funding to meet those needs.

Goal?

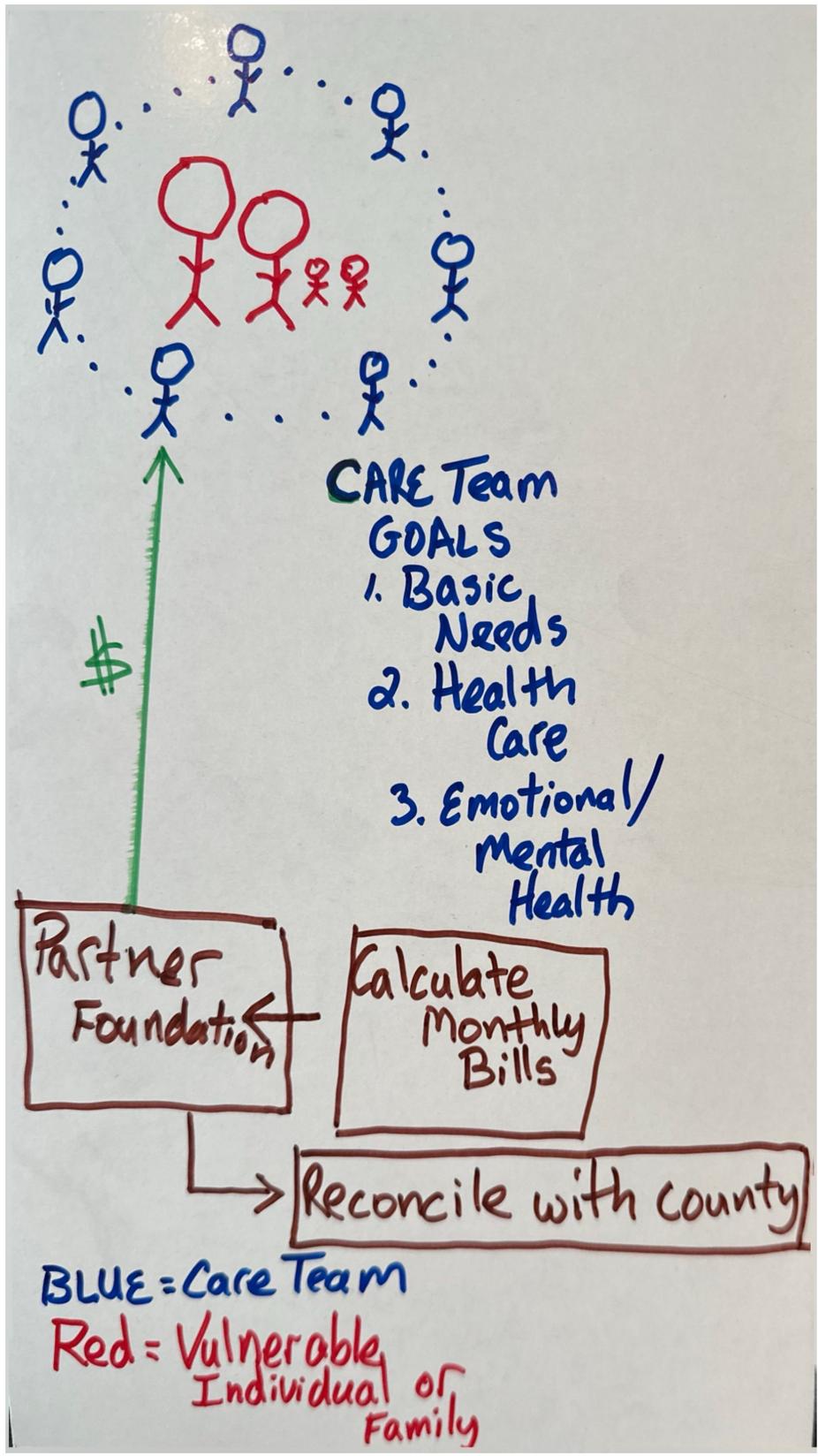
Assist a vulnerable individual or family to meet their basic, healthcare, and emotional/mental health needs.

How?

1. Each member of a Care Team gets registered as an Authorized Community of Care Provider.
2. Care Teams calculate the monthly cost of basic needs such as shelter, food, utilities and home delivery then submit an invoice to a partner foundation via Signal's end-to-end encrypted app. The identities of the vulnerable are protected.
3. Partner foundation(s) pay qualifying expenses directly to a member of the care team who transfers it to the vulnerable individual or family. Foundations reconcile with Counties, expenses that the county is mandated to cover.

Signal is used for all communication to provide end-to-end encrypted security. The identities of the vulnerable are protected.





Application to be an Authorized Community of Care Provider

I understand that filing and signing this application to be an Authorized Community of Care Provider that I am swearing to uphold each and every obligation and responsibility of this role. I understand that any violation of this agreement makes me liable for fraud and I will be persecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

As an Authorized Community of Care Provider, I agree to serve as an agent that provides financial stewardship to connect a vulnerable individual or family's basic needs and a foundation's funding to meet those needs.

I will:

1. Form a care team to befriend and help a vulnerable individual or family.
2. I, and each member of the care team, will attend a short Community Care Action Plan training.
3. Each member of the team will be registered as an Authorized Community of Care Provider.
4. I will protect the identity of the vulnerable individual/family.
5. I will gather the bills of the vulnerable individual or family's basic needs for the next month.
6. I will submit those bills directly to a partner foundation with all identifying information redacted.
7. The foundation will pay the bills directly to me to protect the identity of the vulnerable person/family.
8. Once submitted, I will find a secure location to keep all receipts, bills and invoices.
9. The partner foundation will transfer funds directly to my bank account or another method such as Venmo.
10. I will either pay the bills on behalf of the family, or provide the vulnerable individual / family the funds so they can do it themselves.
11. Signal will be used for all communication to provide end-to-end encrypted security.

Legal Name:

Address:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

Driver's license:

Social Security Number:

(this information will be securely protected)

I hear by swear to adhere to every responsibility of this agreement, protect the identity of the vulnerable individual/family and hold each member of my Care Team to the same. I understand that any violation of this agreement I will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Name:

Signature:

Notarized by:



Introduction

We've all watched the amazing outpouring of MN compassion that has given birth to countless grassroots community networks of care. The communities are self-defined. They grew out of concern for those most vulnerable.

We're articulating what eyes of the world have all collectively observed. Our intent is to draw our focus to a strategic opportunity that can enhance, support and sustain what has organically grown out of this crisis. Our request is that people in positions of influence, authority and elected officials take advantage of this opportunity to sustain these MN Communities of Care. Compassion mobilized countless ordinary citizens to support the basic needs of the vulnerable members of our community during ICE Operation Metro Surge. Here is a plan to sustain it.

We Need a Minnesota Marshall Plan to Mop up This Mess

After watching the horrors of WWII, the world coalesced around the Marshall plan to rebuild Europe. Minnesota needs the same.

We have a Herculean mop up challenge ahead of us. This operation Metro Surge has historic / generational consequences. I could go down a rabbit hole of describing the depth of the mop up, but suffice it to say it will entail a strategy that matches the enormity of the mess.

Minnesota is suffering greatly. The eyes of the world have witnessed it. Immigration round ups and fraud scandals are plaguing the state. The economic damage, the fraying of the safety net by the fraud, psychological damage to kids and families - especially the most vulnerable - may not rise to the level of post-WW II Europe, but they have created a Herculean repair, restore and revival challenge.

How MN Communities of Care Emerged

It was often kids in school (as young as pre-school) reporting to their parents that their BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) best friends are too afraid to attend school. They are skipping school as a result of being racially targeted by Federal ICE Agents. Compelled by concern, empathy and compassion for the dignity of every child of God, those parents then reached out to the parents of their children's BIPOC friends to explore what they could do to assist. Driven by convictions and compassion, courage emerged despite the potential consequences from ICE Agents. It mobilized millions of acts of kindness. What some call domestic terrorism is actually just ordinary people organizing compassion.

These vulnerable families are BIPOC and new immigrant families. Racially targeting now carries the weight of the nation's highest court. In September 2025, the Supreme Court's shadow docket ruling in *Noem v. Vasquez Perdomo* effectively sanctioned the use of race, ethnicity, language, and location as permissible factors in immigration stops.

These are the same families that have the greatest opportunity gaps. They don't have a fair opportunity to develop their children's brains in early childhood and throughout their developing years. These are the families our current systems of support, education and healthcare systems have not been effective in impacting. These are the children and families that we've not been successful in transitioning out of generational poverty and achieving racial equity. These are the children and families we've failed.



We use the term, “universal targeted approach” to explain our aspiration to achieve universal social indicators of health goals for every child. Can you point at one 2-year old that doesn’t deserve an equity of opportunity to develop their brain? None are undeserving. Therefore, we target our efforts where the opportunity gaps are greatest.

Targeted universalism aspires to have “all children healthy, read proficiently, nutritionally fed etc.” While we want these goals for all children, we recognize that there are opportunity gaps between the BIPOC communities and the general population. Research statistics don’t lie. We quantify the measurable difference between children of color in Minnesota and those who are white. Minnesota has the dubious distinction of having the worst racial inequities in education, health and income in the nation. Absorb this: Mississippi beats MN in reading proficiency and has fewer racial inequities.

It is this reality that has inspired community-led initiatives to step into the breach. Our compassion mobilizes us to recognize when neighbors are treated unfairly - being actively denied equitable opportunities to meet their basic needs, to grow, to build, to achieve the promise this country made to them. Their children’s chances at the American dream are compromised by an unfair set of opportunities - not by their own choices, but by systems that don’t deal the same deck of cards to BIPOC kids as they do white ones. When the law, economic systems, societal isms and “deeply held beliefs,” fail to protect, the community can step in to create a fair playing field.

A Post Bureaucratic MN Model Social Safety Net

Because of the technological breakthrough of using Signal, what has emerged has all the ingredients of a post-bureaucratic MN style social safety net / a MN Community Care Model.

- Ordinary people identify vulnerable individuals or families. *(Even kids in pre-school can and do.)*
- In turn, the most vulnerable are befriended and asked what their basic, health and emotional/mental health needs are and what they need to feel safe.

What makes it distinct from the current social safety net?

- There are no eligibility requirements, no intake forms, no proof of need, no need to leave your home, stand in line at a government service center or nonprofit. No embarrassment. No stigma. No shame. No dependance.
- The need is met with an immediate response.
- There are no middle men. Virtually no opportunity for fraud.

It is a leaderless, decentralized, self-defined community of care.

Some Care Teams have deep enough resources to provide what is needed and some could sustain that support over time. Other Care Teams organize broader neighborhood resource hubs to gather food, organized rides to and from work/school/appointments. When the costs of supporting missed rent/utility/car/credit card payments are mounting, the capacity to sustain basic need resources are stretched (even for the most well-resourced of the Community Care Teams).

We happen to live at the Schmidt Artist Lofts in St. Paul. As a group of striving artists, we’ve stretch social capital quickly.

Signal is the communication tool for Community Care groups to safely connect needs to resources.



During ICE's Metro Surge, existing nonprofits were able to gear up and scale up to play a role. Some businesses morphed into volunteer hubs. Some restaurants become free soup kitchens. Faith communities delivered their pews as a tsunami of volunteers. Schools sprouted food shelves. Signal became the community organizing tool that provided a leaderless, decentralized tool for self-organizing.

Early indicators: test driving the Community of Care model

At a recent fundraiser for Minnesota State Representative Maria Isa Perez-Vega, who is running for an open seat on the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners, I had an opportunity to sketch the model on the back of one of Representative Perez-Vega's posters. I presented the model to several former and current elected officials. They each asked critical questions: How will we protect the identity of the vulnerable? How do we keep fraud out of the process with the Care Team members? How do we protect confidential information and the personal information of Care Team Members?

Sharon Sayles Belton, former Minneapolis Mayor, said the counties' mandate to providing housing, economic assistance and healthcare needs to be part of the model. To keep the transfer of money instantaneous, we incorporated her suggestion in such a way that it wouldn't slow things down. Foundations and the counties will confer after the transfer of funds to identify what funds the county is mandated to provide and settle up between themselves. Ibrahim Ahmed was intrigued and offered to get involved in moving this proposal forward. Former Independence Party Candidate for Governor Tom Horner likes it. Mauricio Montes de Oca grilled me with questions and then said, "now you've got to bullet proof it." It's sitting on the Attorney General's desk to do just that.

I met with Mary Jo McGuire, Ramsey County Commissioner, board member of the Roseville Community Foundation and past President of the National Association of Counties on Monday Feb 9, 2026. After a spirited conversation about the status quo and this innovative design, Mary Jo agreed to reach out to the Roseville Community Foundation Board Members with a proposal to urgently transfer \$15,000 to St. Michael's Church to prototype a type of Community of Care model (but not the same). St. Michael's became the pass-through nonprofit that is now giving rent assistance funds to a public school social worker to give to vulnerable families in need. It is a step in the right direction, but not enough. In a conversation with Roseville School Superintendent Jenny Loeck, Commissioner McGuire and Dan Stoltz, Blaze Credit Union CEO I pleaded with them to get even more innovative. It isn't the school social worker's job to distribute rent assistance checks. The traumatized children in the classrooms desperately need their attention. It is exhausting St. Michael's volunteers and resources. \$15,000 is a drop in the bucket of need. It is still relying on structures that ultimately stand in the way and become part of the problem, not the solution. As well intended as this response is, it quickly slides into being "toxic charity." (*explained in detail below*)

We have meetings lined up with several foundation CEOs in Duluth and have sent this plan to multiple Twin Cities Metro area foundations.

An economic development incubator

A Community of Care Network is a perfect opportunity to launch home grown entrepreneurial ventures. Imagine a sequestering cook who makes amazing enchiladas. Care Teams could provide that chef the ingredients. Foundations could fund this from the corporate funds flowing in to rebuild new immigrant owned small business. They are the business casualties of Metro Surge. The next day, Care Teams can pick up a massive volume of freshly baked enchiladas and create market places to sell them. The revenue gets returned to the chef. A home business is launched. Self-sufficiency achieved. Pride abounds.



A lasting bond between the privileged and the vulnerable

The human bonds built between the most vulnerable in our communities and those who have the privilege of not being targeted is perhaps the most enduring and meaningful long-term impact. These bonds will never go away. That level of compassion in people's most vulnerable time of need is something no one will ever forget. The recipient and giver are forever transformed by that act of compassion.

Minnesotans mobilized compassion in action by providing grocery and errand runs, driving people to and from work and appointments, and providing child and pet care. It required no government bureaucracy to deliver. Just people putting love in action.

But this moment offers something beyond immediate relief. Every relationship built between a Care Team and an insular community is a bridge that did not exist before. Every conversation about what a family actually needs - in their own language, on their own terms, in their own home - is data that no county intake system has ever captured. We are learning, in real time, why Minnesota's safety net has failed its BIPOC residents for generations. We are hearing directly from the families it was supposed to serve about what they actually need, what barriers they face, and what a system built around their reality would look like.

This is how we begin to close the divide between BIPOC communities and the nonprofit and government bureaucratic safety net in our state. Not by studying the problem from the outside, but by building relationships from the inside that finally give us the understanding to redesign systems that work. The bonds formed during this crisis are not just acts of compassion that transform hearts. They are the foundation of a new model - one that has the potential to bridge a gap that decades of policy, programming, and philanthropic investment have failed to close.

Now, the question is, how do we sustain that and make that part of our cultural DNA? How do we make that the new MN Community of Care Model?

A Post Bureaucratic MN Model Social Safety Net

These striving communities are not starting from nothing. Long before this crisis, and throughout history, BIPOC and immigrant communities across Minnesota built their own systems of care — informal lending circles where families pool resources to cover a neighbor's rent, elders who coordinate childcare across households, faith communities that operate as de facto social service providers, cultural organizations that serve as the first call when something goes wrong. These networks were not built by grant applications or program design. They were built by necessity, by trust, and by decades of shared experience. They are already doing the work. They have always been doing the work. As my 76 year old friend of African Descent, Gwen, says, "it's just what we do."

The question is not how we build something new. The question is how we resource what already exists - and how we do it without breaking it in the process.

When traditional systems attempt to serve these communities, even with the best of intentions, something fundamental gets lost. Consider something as basic as food. During this crisis, families in hiding have received donated groceries that bear no resemblance to the meals that define their homes and cultures. A Somali family receives canned goods and boxed pasta. A Latino family opens a bag of donations and finds nothing they would understand how to go about feeding their children. They get what Second Harvest Heartland delivers to the nearest food shelf – the leftovers of an obscene abundance of commodities in a world of food scarcity.



Minnesota has one of the most vibrant and diverse food cultures in the country - and yet the food showing up at the doors of our most vulnerable neighbors tells them, in the least subtle way possible, that the people helping them do not understand who they are. It carries an expectation to assimilate. For adults, that is a loss of comfort and cultural identity in a moment when identity is already under siege. For children, it is even harder. A child who is already afraid to go to school, already separated from their routines and their friends, is now being asked to eat strange food that reminds them this is not home. It is survival stripped of dignity.

This is what happens when systems are designed from the outside and imposed on the inside. It is charitable colonialism. New immigrant and BIPOC communities already know themselves. They know what its members eat. How its families are structured. Who is trusted. What safety looks like. Where the real needs are. When people are in crisis there is no bandwidth to educate the very people who are supposed to be helping them. The privileged proclaim "beggars can't be choosers." Toxic charity imposes an additional burden on people who are fixated on survival. They're grateful for the means of survival – simultaneously resentful of the impact. The intent sincere. The harm undeniable.

The Community of Care model does not ask striving communities to come to us. It is them. It builds on the existing bonds, connections and compassion. There is no vetting required. Cultural understanding is embedded and embodied in these existing networks. These Care Teams already understand the needs because they created caring communities to support each other for years, decades and centuries. They know which families are struggling. Which elders need medication. Which children are hungry. No training manual is required. Nor cultural sensitivity or cultural competence training.

They simply need fair and equitable access to resources. Resources delivered with respect. Building on the natural resources within a community we nurture something that no external program can authentically replicate. They are seen by people who already, and always have, and always will see them.

We put an end to "toxic charity."

Don't Put New Wine in Old Wine Skins

We can learn from our recent history. After George Floyd's murder we witnessed a flood of dollars tossed at nonprofits. The "programs are us" approach hasn't ever delivered an impact on our racial inequities and transition out of generational poverty. Minnesota has almost as many nonprofits as we have lakes. Each year we attend galas and weep at the human tragedy we witness in the polished video showcasing the nonprofit's work. We grab our wallets, drive home in our Lexus to our privileged enclaves, often bypassing the very communities where the needs are concentrated. We witness the collective of nonprofit organizations, (the Poverty Industrial Complex), grow exponentially each year. Nonprofits grow, their staff salaries increase, yet Minnesota has the second worst racial inequities in the country. Where is the accountability for the ROI? Who has the political courage to call the question?

And here is the question no one has had the courage to ask: who are we consulting when we design these systems? We consult academics. We consult nonprofit executives. We consult corporate partners. We hold convenings and summits and strategic planning retreats. And then - only then – and often as an after-thought, we ask the people impacted what they think. It's backwards. It has always been backwards. The communities these systems are supposed to serve have been telling us for decades what is not working, and we have been too



invested in our own infrastructure and patting ourselves on the back to listen. As well intended as LBJ's War on Poverty was, its unintended consequences destroyed the family unit and provided perverse incentives to stay unemployed. We knew it. Communities told us the damage it was creating, the family units it was destroying. The single parent households it perversely incentivized. Yet it was decade after decade of ignoring reality till public policy began to tip their toe into rectifying the wrongs. By then the political divides were already entrenched defending the indefensible. Stigmatizing those who became dependent on a well-intended yet toxic social policy.

[We know better. Now we need to do better.](#)

Any business plan begins with an understanding of a customer's needs and what the business will offer to meet that need in a manner that will delight the customer. Why don't we treat the vulnerable and poor with the same respect? Are they not worthy of the same?

Examples: Our current bureaucratic social safety net requires a family to navigate a multi-step intake, assessment, income verification process to receive rental assistance - only to be evicted before the check arrives.

A single mother with three children and two jobs car battery dies on a cold Minnesota winter morning. She can't do her daily routine of getting the kids to day care, dropping the others off at school enroute to her shift on her day job. The rusty but usually trusty used car, whose monthly payments she can barely afford, just wouldn't start this morning. She takes a bus spends four hours at a county economic assistance office, filling out paper work, grabbing a number and stands in a long line of others needing assistance. The intake worker reviews her application and denies her because she has two jobs. She hasn't failed enough to qualify. All she needs is a \$70 battery to keep her family afloat. She wasn't poor enough. She wasn't desperate enough. She lost her dignity. Lost her job because she was absent. Lost her ability to pick up the kids from day care and school all in one day.

The vulnerable do not fail the system. The system fails them.

The vulnerable don't lack voice. They lack systems willing to hear it.

Each cultural community in Minnesota has a unique set of strengths, assets, cultural ties and traditions. A one-size-fits-all toolkit - no matter how well-funded or well-intentioned - cannot serve a Somali family in Cedar-Riverside and a Latino family in the West Side and a Hmong family in Frogtown and a Native family in Phillips with the same playbook. The needs are different. The trust structures are different. The cultural dynamics are different. The barriers are different. The food is different. And yet, year after year, we design programs from the top down and wonder why the outcomes don't change.

The grassroots response to Operation Metro Surge has shown us something that should have been obvious all along: our neighbors, our friends, our communities are tired of watching the same things done over and over with the same results. Minnesotans did not wait for a program. We did not wait for a grant cycle. We did not wait for a strategic plan. We organized. We showed up. We met needs in real time, through relationships built on trust rather than eligibility forms. It is no longer feasible - it was never feasible to bypass the communities directly targeted by these crises and expect different outcomes.

What we are proposing is not a reform of the old system. It is a new, sustainable method of caring for our neighbors that fills the gaps the state and the nonprofit social safety net systems already in place are missing.



Grow and sustain the model of taking care of our neighbors that emerged as a result of ICE's Metro Surge. Set clear measurable goals and hold our strategies accountable for either delivering impact or switching gears and investments to those that do. The "programs are us" era's shelf life expired long before George Floyd's murder.

We're seeing dollars flow again. Instead of investing in the Poverty Industrial Complex, let's offer an alternative: infuse care givers with the resources they need to provide a vulnerable individual or family's basic needs.

Who's gonna do it?

Its already being done. The care teams. The communities themselves. The people who have been building informal systems of care out of compassion during the ICE Metro Surge. In new immigrant and BIPOC communities the neighbors already know which families are struggling, the community leaders who have earned trust through years of showing up, the cultural organizations that serve as the first call when something goes wrong. These culturally based communities of care will always outperform the nonprofits, state and the federal government program outcome measures. Why? Because they are uniquely prepared to handle their communities' unique needs in ways that someone on the outside could never have considered. They do not need permission to care for their neighbors. They have been doing it. What they need is the investment to sustain it.

But they cannot do it alone. The private, philanthropic, and artistic creative sectors are going to need to take the reins. The reality is stark: the state simply cannot/will not. Federal funding is in freefall. Minnesota is staring down a nearly \$3 billion budget shortfall. The fraud investigations that have shaken public trust in how safety net dollars are managed have made every elected official gun-shy about new spending. State government won't be spending a dime given the polarized politics and fraud scandals. The Feds just want to close the spigot. So it is the business community, nonprofits, philanthropy, faith communities, and artists that need to step into the void — not because government shouldn't be doing this work, but because someone has to fight for the most vulnerable members of our communities right now, and the public sector is not in a position to lead.

We are in a unique situation and window of opportunity with the business community. The corporate community broke their silence last week about ICE's Metro Surge. When corporate executives have the courage to coalesce to speak with one voice on a social issue, as they did with their letter calling for an end to ICE's Metro Surge, we are in a rare moment of history. That courage needs to be matched with investment.

R.T. Rybak and the Minneapolis Foundation have taken the lead and already tapped the corporate community and have successfully generated millions of dollars dedicated to revitalizing the mom-and-pop enterprises that have suffered. They are also hustling funds for a general fund to Mop Up This Mess.

As dollars flow to mop up this mess, we have an opportunity. Is it possible to invest to sustain and grow this new MN Community of Care Model? What would that look like? The answer is already in front of us. The communities have built the model. The corporate sector has signaled its willingness to invest. The philanthropic infrastructure exists. What has been missing is the bridge between the dollars and the people who know how to deploy them — not through programs designed in boardrooms, but through the networks of trust that have been holding families together long before this crisis began. We now have the technological innovation that makes it possible. Instantaneously.



We need a MN Mop up the Mess Music Festival.

Arts are healing. Several weeks ago, State Representative Maria Isa Perez Vega released the local Latina anthem "Que Se Vaya El Hielo" (ICE Leave MN). Bruce Springsteen followed the next day releasing the anthem that through history will artistically articulate the era. After humanitarian disasters, major superstars historically gather to generate funds. Why? Arts are healing.

Rep. Perez-Vega asked us to help organize an Arts are Healing Festival. The St. Paul W 7th Arts District that Tim Reardon co-founded with Heather Friedli has made this the theme of the W 7th Spring Art Crawl. The W 7th community will gather to collectively create the Festival. We're still intoxicated by the energy and enthusiasm of the launch meeting in early December of 2025. Businesses, funky vintage shop owners, salon technicians, barbers, brewery / restaurant / bar / bakery owners and dozens of artists gathered to cultivate the creative capacity and economic vitality of the W 7th neighborhood.

Let's host the MN Mop Up this Mess Music Festival Fundraiser. Let's have Maria Isa invite Bruce Springsteen, Bad Bunny and all the Grammy Award caliber artists. Let's model it after the major fundraising concerts internationally renowned musicians have done after other humanitarian disasters. Record a "That's What Friends are For" styled Grammy Award level song group performance. The proceeds will get funneled into the Art of Care End of Toxic Charity Mop up This Mess Community of Care Network model.

Compassion and Courage are Transformative

Transitioning to a Community of Care Model means shifting our focus to healing — but before we can heal, we have to name what has been taken. Beyond the fear. Beyond the economic devastation. What our neighbors are experiencing is an unprecedented loss of **dignity** - the erosion of their ability to make decisions for themselves, to navigate the systems that are supposed to serve them, to exercise the basic agency that every person in this country is entitled to. They've been robbed of the American Dream they immigrated to achieve.

Our kids are traumatized. There aren't enough child psychologists, therapists and psychiatrists on the planet to meet the need. But it doesn't take a PhD to provide the neuro regulating act of having a kid sit on your lap with a compelling story. Singing them a song. Dancing with them. Playing with them. Talking to them. This happens on a lap, not a laptop. Not on a screen, but when kids are seen.

Our kids need to know they are safe. They are loved. They are valued. They matter. No one can take away the power of their spirit. And that spirit, their education, their character - no brutality can beat it out of them. That spirit is nurtured and fostered by reading. By tapping the collective human wisdom on each page of the collection in the Library of Congress.

And reading is not just the key to a child's academic success - it is the key to navigating life in a system as complex as ours. It is the bedrock of a democracy.

Impact on educational achievement

We need to be honest about where we are. Minnesota's schools had only just begun to recover from COVID. Third-grade reading proficiency had dropped for four consecutive years. Attendance was climbing back. Teachers were



rebuilding the classroom routines and relationships that remote learning shattered. And now we are facing the impact Operation Metro Surge will have on academic achievement.

Over 7,000 students in St. Paul alone moved to emergency virtual learning. Minneapolis launched temporary online options for 5,500 students overnight. Attendance has dropped sharply across districts statewide. Schools in Minneapolis and Fridley were forced to close. Educators who were already stretched thin have become front-line responders — running safety patrols, delivering groceries, connecting hiding families to rental assistance — while trying to teach the children who do show up. We spent years and millions of dollars trying to undo the damage COVID did to our kids' education. This crisis has undone that progress in weeks.

And the effects extend far beyond our BIPOC neighbors. Consumer-facing businesses across the Twin Cities lost an estimated \$81 million in January alone. The City of Minneapolis has tallied over \$203 million in total economic impact in a single month — from lost wages, shuttered businesses, rent assistance for 35,000 households, and food insecurity affecting 76,000 people. More than 700 businesses closed their doors in a single day of economic protest. The state is projecting a nearly \$3 billion budget shortfall. This is not a crisis contained to one community. It is a crisis that has disrupted the economic engine of this region and the educational future of an entire generation of Minnesota's children — all of them.

For kid's sake: it isn't red or blue, it's purple

This is not a left issue or a right issue. This is a children's issue, an economic issue, and a future-of-the economic engine of our-state issue - and it belongs to all of us. No legislator, no matter where they sit on the aisle, would look at a five-year-old and say that child does not deserve the chance to read. No business owner would say they want to watch their customer base evaporate. The goal of giving every child in Minnesota a fair shot at the future is one that transcends party lines. And it is our children - the children facing the steepest climbs, the widest gaps, the deepest systemic barriers - who stand to gain the most when we invest in this with the urgency it demands. But make no mistake: when we fail these children, we fail ourselves. We fail all of Minnesota.

The simple act of reading, talking, singing, dancing, and playing are all prescriptions for what ails us. The teaching of reading does so much more than produce a proficient reader. The act of placing a child on a lap has a transformative social-emotional impact: it cultivates cultural identity, moral and character development, intergenerational bonding, and human-to-human care and healing.

It is hard to determine who benefits most from these interactions. When a parent sits down with their child and a book, something happens that no clinic or program can replicate. The child feels safe. The parent feels capable. In that moment, the parent is not a case number, not a name on a county list, not a person defined by their vulnerability. They are doing what every parent wants to do: caring for their child. That is healing - for both of them.

By creating a path for parents to be directly involved in their children's healing - through reading, through presence, through the simple act of being there - we are not just helping children recover. We are rebuilding the family unit from the inside. And the research is unequivocal: a strong familial unit, **no matter its composition** - whether that is two parents, a single parent, grandparents, extended family, or any combination that shows up with love - is the single most powerful force in a child's development. When we strengthen the family, we strengthen the child. When we give parents the tools and the opportunity to participate in the healing, we give them back something that the system took: their role.

Healing happens on a lap, not a laptop. Children and adults thrive when they are seen - and that doesn't come from a screen.



What does reading have to do with this?

Tim Reardon co-founded Minnesota's Rally to Read, a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization. Reading is skill that set up kid up for success in life. It is the great equalizer and civil rights opportunity of our day.

Their BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal) is to transform Minnesota to the state with the highest reading proficiency, with the fewest inequities and achieve it with a fierce urgency of now. The benchmarks of success: every child is wired to read by age 3 and reads proficiently at grade level.

Minnesota's Rally to Read, communities like Monticello and Mankato are following a Community Innovation process to mobilize a community's collective impact strategy (action plan) to achieve the BHAG in their community, to identify the kids with the greatest opportunity gaps and provide an equity of opportunity for them to develop their brains in the first 3 years of life and assure they read proficiently at grade level. The Minnesota Communities of Care Model already mobilized these connections. When we shift to the expediency of a direct deposit to meet a family's basic needs, the Care Team can spend that time reading, signing, storytelling, dancing and playing.

How?

Now that we've got Communities of Care popping up all over the state, and reading is one of the best ways to develop children's brains, let's add access to books as part of our mission with sustaining Communities of Care and achieving the 3rd goal of meeting families emotional and mental health needs. Reading is healing. It is a trauma reducing act. Anyone past third grade can put a kid on their lap and read a story.

Why is it urgent?

Reading is the great equalizer. It is the key skill for a child's success. Today's readers are tomorrow's leaders. It is an essential tool for a democracy to succeed.

The consequences of a child's brain not being wired to read by age three and able to read proficiently by third grade are staggering for the child and the community. The inability to read triggers shame and erodes a child's self-esteem and confidence. It is a major indicator of the social determinants of health. Children unable to read by grade three are more likely to get poor grades, be truant, drop out of school, end up in special education, have discipline problems, experience depression, anxiety, death by suicide and enter the juvenile justice system. For many it is a pipeline to prison. The ripple effect impacts the family, livelihood, community, health and has a toxic effect on employment, the workplace and the economic engine of the state.

We either invest in literacy now, or pay for the consequences in the future. Economists, including our homegrown champion of early childhood education, Art Rolnick, former Senior VP and Director of Research at the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank [has calculated an inflation adjusted 18% return on investment](#) in early literacy.

Teaching a child to read is one of the best strategies for reducing inequities in Minnesota. It is a civil rights disadvantage **we know how to solve.**



How to we sustain the communities of care?

Che' + Assisi Consulting will conduct a very brief training to Authorize a Community Care Provider and register them. Each Care Provider will sign an oath to uphold their responsibilities or risk being prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

How can Communities of Care be held accountable for Results, for a collective ROI?

A Community Care Team has clear measurable goals. Resources will be needed to fill the economic crisis families face. Families need to get back on their feet, pay the rent, seek new employment and catch up with bills.

The goals are to meet a vulnerable individual or family's:

1. Basic needs of food, clothing, shelter
2. Access to health care
3. Emotional and mental health needs.

Next Step

We propose a team of like-minded business leaders, corporate CEOs, the MN Business Partnership, professional sports teams, philanthropic leaders, faith communities, local and national music and artistic superstars mobilize to build the Minnesota Marshall Plan to mop up this mess.



Verlaine Wintermute



Verlaine Wintermute is a community organizer, strategic advisor, entrepreneur, and co-author of *The Art of Care and End of Toxic Charity Blueprint*. Her work sits at the intersection of grassroots advocacy, nonprofit strategy, and direct community care shaped not by theory, but by lived experience and an unwillingness to watch her neighbors suffer in silence.

At sixteen years old, Verlaine launched a used truck parts business that modernized how companies sourced replacement parts for 18-wheelers. She identified an inefficiency that the industry had accepted as normal - junkyards sitting on surplus inventory while trucking companies searched endlessly for the parts they needed and built the bridge between them. She invented her own inventory control system and personally catalogued over 50 yards with large surplus throughout the Southern region, helping them modernize their stock management and reach customers they never would have found on their own. She didn't just create a business, she built a system that made an entire regional market more efficient. That ability to see a broken system, understand both sides of the gap and build the infrastructure that connects them has defined every venture since.

As a Strategic Advisor to the Marcella LeBron Foundation, Verlaine provided strategic direction for the development of the first and only women's breast cancer facility in Nigeria - a groundbreaking clinic that went beyond basic cancer screenings to provide comprehensive women's health services in a country where access to such care had never existed at that scale. She managed the administrative and logistical planning required to bring the project from concept to operation, oversaw the preparation of the clinic's governmental proposal to Nigerian officials, and served as the liaison between construction crews and government offices on the status and progress of the project. Her role spanned the full lifecycle - from navigating a foreign government's approval process to managing the physical build to ensuring the facility could deliver on its mission.

As a Consultant at the New You Recovery House, Verlaine redesigned the organization's entire operational structure, managed patient experience logistics including transportation coordination, flight arrangements, medication scheduling, and appointment management, and authored the facility's aftercare guides, educational materials designed to ensure that women who could not afford the program's services still had access to the knowledge they needed to care for themselves. She also served as an emergency contact for patients, often staying through late hours with women in crisis — not because it was in her job description, but because it was the right thing to do. That commitment reflects something deeper than professional obligation. Verlaine is fiercely passionate about women's rights and women's health, and her work has consistently been driven by the conviction that no woman should have to face her hardest moments alone.

That same instinct, to make sure no one falls through the cracks, even when the system says they are outside its reach, defines her approach to every project she touches.

Beyond her formal roles, Verlaine has spent years organizing independently in her community. She has sourced funding, gathered resources, and personally coordinated back-to-school supply drives, Thanksgiving meal distributions, and food outreach for unhoused neighbors not through an organization, but through her own initiative and her own relationships. She has deep cultural ties to the Hispanic and Caribbean communities both in the Twin Cities and in her home state of Georgia. She is rooted in her own background and sustained through the trust that comes from consistent, visible presence.





Ibrahim Ahmed

Ibrahim Ahmed is a Minnesota-based public policy strategist, legislative professional, and nonprofit growth consultant with a record of advancing high-impact initiatives across healthcare, housing, arts and culture, and electoral campaigns.

He is the Founder and Principal of NWS Solutions LLC, where he leads cross sector consulting engagements focused on public policy strategy, stakeholder mobilization, and organizational scaling. Through his firm, Ibrahim has advised executive leadership at Global Health Alliance and People in Action, directing initiatives in maternal health, crisis management, housing stabilization, and large-scale community festival organizing. His work has supported measurable service expansion, strengthened government relations, and elevated public visibility for mission-driven organizations.

In government, Ibrahim served as a Legislative Liaison with the Minnesota House of Representatives (DFL Caucus), where he conducted legislative research and policy analysis across health, immigration, and housing portfolios. He supported constituent casework and legislative implementation while directly engaging diverse communities through culturally competent outreach practices.

Ibrahim also brings extensive campaign experience, having managed strategy, field operations, finance organizing, and delegate mobilization for state and federal races. His work has included securing endorsement victories, expanding multilingual voter outreach, and strengthening coordinated GOTV efforts statewide.

He is currently pursuing a Master of Advocacy and Political Leadership degree(Public Policy Program) at Metropolitan State University and holds a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Minnesota.

Fluent in English and Somali, with professional working proficiency in Spanish and conversational Arabic, Ibrahim operates at the intersection of public policy, community power-building, and institutional strategy designing solutions that are politically executable, operationally disciplined, and most importantly community centered.



Jordan McKenna

Jordan McKenna is a highly motivated professional with a strong background in client relations, project management, and video production within the wedding and business sectors. Proven ability to understand client needs, manage projects from inception to completion, and build lasting relationships. A quick learner with excellent communication and organizational skills.



Reeve Hutchinson

Reeve Hutchinson is the President of Nautical Endeavors, DBA Crow’s Nest Yachts. He is a University of Minnesota School of Architecture and was Director of Interiors of RSP Architects; Founder and President of FormStreet, Inc; President and Board Member of Hamline Midway Local Development Company.





Who is the guy behind Che' + Assisi Consulting, Tim Reardon?

Why am I championing and facilitating the launch of "Art of Care?"

Minnesota's Art of Care is perfectly aligned with my aspirations to accelerate opportunities to break the cycle of generational poverty and racial injustice in Minnesota.

I met Lauda Pena in January of 2026 in the lobby of Schmidt Artist Lofts in St. Paul. Lauda shared her concern and fear that Federal ICE Agents would racially profile her. Piakea is her adorable 4 - month old daughter. When I met Piakea I instantly became the self-proclaimed Tio Tim and her Fairy God Father. The bond with Lauda and Piakea was instant. We are clearly old souls meant to meet.

Like the song from Wicked, "I've heard it said some people come into our lives for a reason bringing something we must learn. And we are led to those who help us most to grow, if we let them and we help them in return. Well, I don't know if I believe that's true, but I know I am today because I met you."

I told Lauda that the community at Schmidt Artist Lofts was woefully unorganized to support her and all the other BIPOC and new immigrants living and working here. So a group of us hosted a meeting, "be the change, create a community of care to support each other during ICE Metro Surge." The meeting created a container for the Community of Care to launch. During the meeting several residents stood up and began recording on large sheets of paper the various needs the vulnerable members of the articulated they needed. Those who are sequestered and fearful of going to work or school articulated needing help grocery shopping, errands, rides to and from work and appointments, rent/utility/car payment/and other monthly bills. Then, residents signed up for the teams and began to organize.

Approximately 40 people got vetted to the Signal W 7th Neighborhood Group. The Signal Team then created our own Schmidt Resident's Group. Signal is the technical breakthrough that allows this underground community organizing to secretly form without being detected by ICE Agents (although they are constantly attempting to infiltrate to spy on those organizing to support ICE when they target a vulnerable community member.

We've decided to document the implementation of this Schmidt Artist Lofts Community of Care. After all, we've got artists skilled in the production of documentaries, videography, editing, promoting, marketing, advertising and distributing films.

Minnesota's Art of Care is a platform to use my experience, leadership skills and deep convictions to mobilize grassroots action to tap our community's abundant social capital. I bring a track record of creating authentic mutually respectful relationships, implementing evidence-based strategies, building multi-sector partnerships/collaborations and inspiring people to give their time, talent and treasure for a worthy cause. A "fierce urgency of now" fuels my passion to ameliorate unconscionable racial inequities.

As a seasoned executive, consultant and professor, I've built a statewide network among government (local, regional, and state levels), nonprofit, private industry, faith communities, universities and unique collaborations between these sectors. I have extensive experience working for the MN Department of Education, school districts across Minnesota and intimately with the 17 school districts in Hennepin County in multi-sector innovations to support the success of children and their families experiencing the greatest opportunity inequities. I'm an accomplished fundraiser with experience tapping individuals, federal/state/regional/local governments, foundations civic organizations and faith communities.



As a consultant I've worked with the Public Strategies Group in government and nonprofit reform efforts to focus on providing citizens with better, more inclusive/culturally curated, quicker and cheaper results than typical bureaucratic systems are capable of delivering. I'm trained in facilitating Community Innovation Action Planning and have used this methodology to mobilize grassroots solutions and multi-sector coalitions to ameliorate a myriad of social issues including, improving children's mental health services, preventing truancy / teen pregnancy / juvenile detention / homelessness and assisting homeless individuals secure housing and employment.

I was awarded a Bush Foundation Leadership Fellowship to obtain Master in Public Administration Degree and Masters Certificate in Leadership Development, from Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. My Fellowship focused on leading innovations to accelerate social impact. I also obtained a Master's Degree in Public Affairs focused on management of nonprofit and government organizations and social policy at the U of M Humphrey School of Government. I studied Liberation Theology with Gustavo Gutierrez at the Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru. Nine of us who were affiliated with St. Lawrence Seminary and the Capuchin Franciscans who run the seminary drove from Chicago to Managua Nicaragua in a Chevy Suburban to celebrate the 1st Anniversary of the Revolution. Daniel Ortega was the hero then, dictator now. We got detained in Bonanza Nicaragua by Sandanista Soldiers who suspected we were counter revolutionaries.

During my volunteer experience in Peru after graduating from St. John's University when we launched Programa San Francisco de Asis. The mission brought gringo plastic surgeons from St. Paul Minnesota to Peru to perform surgery on infants, youth and adults with cleft lips, cleft palates and burn scar contractures.

Since returning to Minnesota, I've engaged in initiatives that allow me to put my experience and education to work on innovative approaches to get better results for the people in greatest need.

Working extensively with diverse communities I've sharpened my skills in relating effectively to a broad spectrum of people. As a gay man, single parent, proud father of a transgendered son and throughout my career and life experience, I have developed a deep understanding of the role that race, class, gender, sexual identity, life experience, belief systems and cultural dynamics have in either unleashing or inhibiting an individual's purpose and potential in life. I've used these insights to develop the empathy to transform people's hearts and minds to the plight of the most vulnerable and discriminated members of our society. I became an accidental advocate for marriage equality. My experience of being denied the legal right to sign off on the disposition of my partner's remains made my story and testimony pivotal in the fight for equal rights.

I know first-hand how important effective mentoring, prevention, intervention, and support is for children living in generational poverty and experiencing racial inequities in health, education and opportunities. I look forward to using my skillfulness to accelerate the impact of Minnesota's Communities of Care.

Tim Reardon, MA, MPA



Data Sources

School disruption: Star Tribune (Feb. 9, 2026); Chalkbeat (Feb. 18, 2026); 7,000+ St. Paul students in temporary virtual learning (22% of enrollment); 5,500 Minneapolis students online; Rochester 4x increase in ELL absences; Minneapolis and Fridley schools closed; Fridley Public Schools lawsuit against DHS.

COVID learning loss baseline: MN Dept. of Education / 2025 MCA results; third-grade reading proficiency declining four consecutive years; over 54% of third graders not meeting grade-level standards; statewide proficiency still 10 percentage points below pre-pandemic 2019 levels.

Economic impact: City of Minneapolis Preliminary Impact Assessment (Feb. 13, 2026); \$203.1 million total impact; \$81 million in small business revenue losses (January 2026); \$15.7 million in additional rent assistance for 35,000 households; 76,000 people experiencing food insecurity; 8,713 school-age children needing additional mental health services; \$6+ million in city operational costs.

Business closures: Reuters / Star Tribune / Wikipedia; 700+ businesses closed Jan. 23, 2026 day of economic protest; businesses operating at severely reduced capacity across St. Paul East Side, West Side, Midway, and North End.

State budget: Minnesota budget office projection; nearly \$3 billion shortfall for upcoming biennium (FOX 9, Feb. 13, 2026).





*"liberating the purpose and potential of
Individuals, organizations and communities"*

Tim Reardon
763-370-9927
e-mail: tim@cheassisi.com
www.cheassisi.com

© 2026 Ché + Assisi Consulting

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law."



