



Happy Holidays!

This past quarter flew by and I can't believe we are just a few days away from the start of 2026! We continue to settle into our new space, and only being here a little over a month, it already feels like home. I am so thankful for all the companies, employees, volunteers, family members, and friends that came together to get us closer to the finish line! Check out page two of our newsletter to see pictures of our journey into our new office space!

A special thank you to First Covenant Church and Peace United Church of Christ for opening their fellowship halls for us to use as we transitioned from our former office into our new space!

I hope you enjoy our 2025 holiday card (below), designed by Alicia. Her whimsical winter design is sure to put a smile on your face! As you page through our newsletter you will find a "save the date" for our upcoming annual Masquerade Ball. The theme this year is Emerald City, so get ready all you *Wizard of Oz* and *Wicked* fans!

The rest of our newsletter contains our regularly featured articles highlighting all we have been up to in the past three months.

Wishing all of you Happy Holidays and a wonderful start to 2026!



~ Kristie Buchman, Executive Director

Winter Quarterly Newsletter

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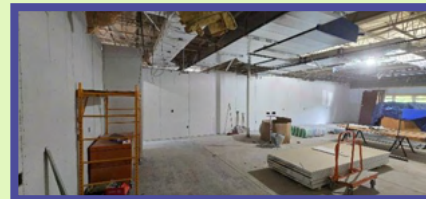
Journey Into Our New Office Space

We started this build-out with a blank slate which gave us the freedom to design a space that would meet our current needs and allow for expansion in the future. We are thankful to be here and are so grateful for the people that helped us to get this far!

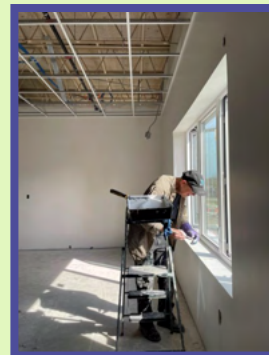


Before construction began—main entry way, former hallway, and future office space

Next Steps—Framing, insulating & installing drywall in over 10,500 square feet.



Some of our AWESOME hard-working employees, family members, friends, and volunteers cleaning and installing items to put the final touches on our new space!



Upcoming Events!
Please mark your calendars!

SAVE the DATE!

Friday, March 27th

**Greysolon Plaza
Ballroom**

Emerald

*** City ***

Masquerade Ball

Tickets will be available
in January for this
ARTS Program Fundraiser
celebrating all things OZ

Thank you to all who donated to our Give to the Max Campaign!

Steven Anthony
Richard Axler
Robin Brown
Kristie Buchman
Kelly & Jody
Faughnan
Debbie Freedman
Karen Hennis
Holly Holmquist
Carolyn King
Danny Klotz
Robert Knighton
Rachel Mock



Susan Rasmussen
Lizette Roebke
Gail Rosenquist
Karen Schmidt
Susan Solin
Gracia Swenson
Mary K Tennis
DeeAnn Trotta
Georgette & Tom
Wondolkowski

And all of our
anonymous givers!

Meet our Interns



Savannah Brooks joined CHOICE, unlimited in July 2025 as an intern. She is currently attending the College of Saint Scholastica pursuing a Master's degree in Clinical Social Work. She has a background in psychology and fraud investigation. She is also an artist and owned and operated her own small ceramic arts business. Savannah works directly with several people and enjoys connecting with both individuals served and her new coworkers! Outside of work and school, Savannah enjoys traveling, in both the US and abroad, hiking and being outside any chance she gets, knitting, singing, spending time with her family, and making pottery. She plans to stay with CHOICE, unlimited through the first part of the summer, when her first year of internship is completed.



Juniper Johnson began their internship at CHOICE, unlimited in September 2025. They are a full-time student at the College of Saint Scholastica pursuing a Master's degree in Social Work with the goal of becoming a licensed independent clinical social worker. Juniper is hoping to specialize in supporting the neurodivergent, disability, chronically ill, and LGBTQ+ communities. They believe that CHOICE, unlimited offers many new opportunities to learn. Juniper is currently working with a couple of fantastic individuals who are helping them expand their understanding and experience.



Employees of the Quarter

For many creative people, self-employment is an excellent way to both do what you love and have an income. Artists in the CHOICE, unlimited Arts Vocation program take their passion for creativity to the next level by striving to produce not only beautiful handmade art and craft but also earn income from it. This requires dedication and determination, because being your own boss, setting your own hours, making creative objectives for yourself, and striving for financial goals is never-ending work! Maria Brown guides these artists in all phases of operating an art business.

Stephanie Wilcox is the artist behind Wilcox Diversified Art, the business she operates to sell her art and jewelry at local art and craft fairs and galleries. Stephanie's art is instantly recognizable as bright, expressive, fun and what can only be described as funky! From framed paper works with ink pens to large canvases with acrylic, or delicate jewelry featuring her amazing designs, she shows her work at various shows throughout the year. Her favorite thing about being an artist is having people buy her designs. Updates and news can be found online on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and her original designs can be found for sale on [Redbubble](#) and at the Northwoods Pioneer Gallery and Gifts.



Stephanie displaying her art at Northwoods.



Pete making his loom knit goods.

Pete Barnett is the craftsman behind Crafted by Pete, his longstanding business. He realized he not only loved to knit but there was a market for his creations. "I like that I'm able to do something that I love and work the hours that fit my schedule the best", Pete shares. On most summer weekends, you can find Pete and his loom-knitted goods at the Two Harbors Farmers Market and other shows. In the fall holiday shopping season he is at many community art and craft shows. He makes hats, mug cozies, scrubbies, bags, pet toys and more. Pete's work can be found on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and at Northwoods Pioneer Gallery and Gifts.

Roxanne Nelson is starting her self-employment journey with the creation of Roxie's Boutique. Her goal is creating a business from which she can sell her hand sewn creations. When asked why this is something she enjoys, the answer is simple: "I like getting paid! Selling MY artwork, happy that people are buying my artwork that I made." She is learning the skills it takes to make high quality bags, pouches, pet toys, and table runners, to name a few. It is an exciting time to watch Roxanne's business dreams take off!



Roxanne putting the final touches on her handmade project.



Jayson with his art at the Duluth Art Institute Member show.

Jayson Knutson is the artist behind Planet X Comics which is newly minted as Duluth Indie Comic Co. Jayson enjoys creating his own comic book characters and stories, as well as original art for local shows throughout the year in the Duluth community. You can find a lot of Jayson's original designs on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and for sale on products on his [Threadless page](#), check it out!

It is always a good time to support local artists. Watch for their next shows and events!



Maria Brown with artists Roxanne and Stephanie at the Holiday Pop-up Sale

Volunteers of the Quarter



The Salvation Army's iconic red kettle has become a symbol of generosity and community spirit during the holiday season. Across the greater Duluth area, these kettles are a familiar sight, stationed at local businesses and attended by smiling volunteers and dedicated staff. This year, several of those volunteers were individuals served by our own agency—people who are eager to give back and make a positive impact in the community they love. Their enthusiasm and commitment remind us that the holiday season is about more than celebration; it's about connection and compassion. You may have seen Jackie, Nicki, Jen, and Shannon greeting shoppers at JCPenney and Applebee's in the mall; spreading cheer while helping raise funds for an important cause.

The red kettle campaign has a rich history starting back in 1891; and by 1897, the campaign had expanded nationwide, enabling the Salvation Army to serve 150,000 Christmas dinners to families in need. Today, this tradition continues to thrive, supporting millions of individuals year-round through food assistance, housing programs, disaster relief, and countless other services.

As we celebrate the season of giving, we are proud to recognize the efforts of our volunteers and partners who make a difference every day. Their dedication ensures that the spirit of the red kettle lives on—not just during the holidays, but throughout the year.

Thank you Jackie, Nicki, Jen, and Shannon for giving back to your community during the busiest time of the year!

Volunteering for Wrestle Mania!

Every year the United Way hosts a fundraising wrestling event in Superior, Wisconsin. Of course, they need lots of volunteers to make the event successful!

This year Ken, Tracy, Chris, Tye, and Olivia went out to help. Olivia and Tracy ushered guests for the event while Chris, Tye, and Ken watched the entry doors to make sure all guests had wristbands. This was the third year that Ken and Tye volunteered at this event. It was the second year for Tracy and Olivia, and the first year of volunteering for Chris! Once their volunteer shift was over, they were able to stay and enjoy the wrestling event for free - what a perk! They are already looking forward to next year!



Dedicated volunteer Team! Olivia, Tracy, Chris, Tye, Ken



Ken & Tye enjoying wrestling merch!



Chris, Ken, & Tye ready to welcome guests



ARTS Program Update



Fall was nice and long and languid and then one day it was winter! It is time to hunker-down and start baking, decorating and making gifts, listening to our favorite seasonal tunes and snuggling in while watching our tried-and-true holiday films. Winter is a time we turn to the creative to help stay inspired on cold days and long nights. The ARTS Program is no different- always special things cooking on our proverbial stove!

Fall was a time for an abundance of projects, performances and expression! Creative Writing Class had a Poetry Reading at Wussow’s Concert Coffee house on November 7th. There was a rich variety of styles and points of view shared with the supportive crowd. Also, it was great timing due to three artists from our Arts Vocation program being featured on the gallery walls at that time.



Visual art classes jumped into a new session with a nature theme. The first project used found nature objects and a hand painted nature scene on cardboard to create a 3-D hanging art piece. Students explored the differences between 2D and 3D artwork. Classes this fall also created cheerful winter animal collages out of cut paper. Perhaps they summoned the snow with their layers of snowbanks creating the illusion of depth, as shortly after we got our first snowfall! Alicia's rabbit in the snow was selected to be featured as the annual holiday card! Students are currently working on paper mache bird ornaments, which will be a delightful addition to any Christmas tree. And recent student artwork is featured at the Superior Public Library from November-December, so you can still check it out!

Acting Class just performed their original one-act play “A Pirate’s Life for Me” on the Depot Theatre stage on December 11th. Arrrrgh- this one was a real treasure! The wildest story of a pirate ship and its rowdy gang of buccaneers that never expected a mermaid mutiny to take-over. Lots of laughs and great character development.



BOLD-choice had a great experience at the North SHorror Event in October- trying out some new skills with a serious and spooky vibe. Guests were welcomed into a dinner party of sorts- where only the creeps were served-actors stretched themselves and delved into their dark roles for the evening. The main-stage play is still in creation, and the cast is having a blast leaning into a world of drama and ridiculousness for their original soap opera. BOLD also had another great experience in the Christmas Parade!

Music Classes are currently mid-session and taking their creative powers in all sorts of unique directions! Dance Classes are meeting and moving together weekly, gearing up to create a new choreographed piece to perform at the upcoming **Masquerade Ball Fundraiser on March 27th**! This year’s theme is “Emerald City”- all things Oz folks, so get your ruby slippers buffed, shine up those wands, shake off that broom and be sure there is plenty of oil in your oil-can- we can’t wait to party again this year with you all!

Health and Wellness Program Update



Alicia prepping mushrooms for a healthy snack.

Health and Wellness class participants embraced the season of falling leaves and fall holidays. For Halloween, Health and Wellness Coordinator, Jessa Swift, offered an upbeat dance aerobics class that included songs like Thriller and Ghostbusters. The class enjoyed learning actual dance moves from the Thriller video! The room was packed and everyone enjoyed some ghoulishly great exercise.



Pete, Josie, and Denise-ready for class at Whole Foods Co-op.

The Healthy Lunch Bunch class celebrated Halloween with healthy snacks and some Halloween trivia. Topics throughout the fall celebrated seasonal eating. They learned about squash, the history and tradition of wild rice, and came up with their own fall recipes. On December 16, the class attended a cooking class at Whole Foods Co-op where they prepared a savory wild rice dish based on two of the students' recipes!



Sarah and Steph prepping a healthy snack.

Students in the Tai Chi classes recently learned a new segment of moves that are practical in self-defense as well as great exercise. Instructor Jessa Swift also introduced some new breathing and Qi Gong exercises this session.

Seated Stretch and Strengthen classes resumed at North Pointe Center on Tuesday afternoons after taking the summer off. The class is a combined group with folks from North Pointe. It has been fun for everyone to see friends from North Pointe.



Hot beverages were served after the Carol Singalong.

During the month of December, additional fun activities were held to celebrate the holidays. The Christmas Carol Singalong had a large turnout and everyone enjoyed singing familiar holiday tunes followed by social time, cookies, and hot cocoa. The month was rounded out by a fun game of *Healthy Holidays Bingo* at First Covenant Church.



Jessa, leading the Carol Singalong

HOBBY HUB

Alix Porter is an avid gamer and writer. He is combining his two talents to share a brief review of [Pokemon Legends: ZA - A New Frontier for a Classic Franchise](#)



The newest Pokemon game, "Pokemon Legends: ZA", came out recently, and it has been largely praised for its fresh take on the almost thirty-year-old franchise. It runs extremely well on the new Nintendo Switch 2 system, and my personal experience with the game on the older Switch 1 is still pretty good considering its age. PL: ZA (short for Pokemon Legends: ZA) introduced a real-time battle system, giving us the closest equivalent to the anime in game form that is possible. I will say, it is a little rough around the edges sometimes, such as Pokemon taking two or three seconds to roar before being able to start moving around. And once in a while, my Pokemon would get stuck behind something. But overall, the battle experience has been pretty smooth, and I would highly recommend playing this game if you want to get a semblance of the feeling of battling in the Pokemon anime.

Cultures Around the World



Katie and Kim at the Nordic Center

The Cultures Around the World Class celebrated one year of “traveling” the globe! The class started in December of 2024 learning about the history of Santa Claus. From there they explored a vast range of topics including the influence of the British royal family, the dark history of bananas, and how tea and coffee are consumed around the world. This past summer there were several field trips including a trip to the Lincoln Park Pavilion which facilitated discussion about the Civilian Conservation Corps and how that program helped end the Great Depression.



Culture's Class with Scott Keenan

While visiting Enger Park and Billings Park the class learned about Duluth and Superior’s sister cities and why diplomatic programs matter. There were also guest speakers from UMD. Dr. Alexis Elder taught the philosophy of friendship through the teachings of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Latin American



Justin at the Nordic Center.

music was covered by Dr. Paula Gudmundson, and Dr. Jen Brady gave an overview of the country of Spain. Scott Keenan, the founder of Grandma’s Marathon, walked through the marathon’s transition from its humble origins to the world class event it is today. In October there was a case study on Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* comparing his character traits to our favorite vampire movies of today. The winter holidays inspired a trip to the Nordic Center to see their Peppercakebyen exhibit. This gingerbread city is inspired by a larger one in Bergen, Norway. It’s been a very fun year with additional cultural exploration planned for the upcoming year.

**Sarah Koehn is the instructor of the Cultures Around the World Class and Nature Class. She is also an Employment Specialist with CHOICE, unlimited.*

Nature Class



Making plant prints with Local artist Monica Ihrke at Hartley Nature Center

This past quarter the Nature Class explored parks around Duluth and Superior! Class participants got their steps in while learning about the world around them. The class covered topics such as the science behind fall leaves, cultural influences on “scary” animals and much more! At Hartley Nature Center the class studied invasive species with local artist, Monica Ihrke. Students then made plant prints using tansy. Free education kits from the aquarium were used to enhance the learning.



Adam at the Lake Superior Estuarium.

When delving into birdwatching, the class studied the “cowbirds versus warblers” race, to demonstrate nest parasitism which brought on a great deal of laughing and cheering. On a tour of WLSSD, the class

participated in a water quality study to determine the best places to swim in Duluth. It was discovered that Brighton Beach was cleaner than Park Point! A trip to the Lake Superior Estuarium provided an enlightening overview of the St. Louis River Watershed. There are many new topics planned for 2026 and they can’t wait for the new year!



Nature Class—Birdwatching



Katie, Mariah & Tracy WLSSD—Resource Renew



Winter Remote Class Schedule



Coffee Club - Thursdays 10am - In coffee club, we get together with our morning beverage of choice to visit and enjoy each other's company.

Dance - Wednesdays 11am - Weekly dance instruction, exercise and social connection that allows students an opportunity to move their body, get exercise, and see fellow students.

Mindfulness Through Zentangle - Thursdays 9am - A class designed to teach participants to tune into their thoughts and use the Zentangle method tools to increase focus, happiness, and peace.



Music - Wednesdays 10am - Weekly music exploration and instruction. Drawing out and honing natural strengths-instrumentation, voice, rhythm and lyric work.

Something to Smile About - Tuesdays 10:30 am - This class showcases heartwarming and inspiring stories from around the world, guaranteed to lift your spirits and bring a smile to your face. Each session highlights acts of kindness, courage, and triumph, and a little laughter reminding us of the incredible good in the world.



Studio Art - Tuesdays, Wednesdays at 2:00 pm, A creative social hour to spend time working on personal creative projects such as drawing, painting, knitting, or other projects.



Art Club - Fridays at 1:00 pm—An opportunity for artists to gather and work on art, share their latest project, and talk about art and art happenings scheduled throughout the community.

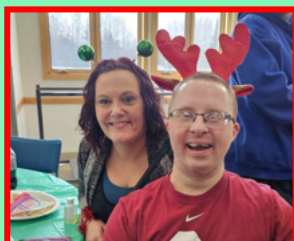


Sweatin' to the Oldies- Tuesdays 9am - Exercise class set to fun music.

****If you are interested in participating in remote classes, call Karen at 218-724-5869 for more information.**

Celebrating the Holidays

We celebrated the Holidays together on Friday, December 19th and enjoyed a delicious traditional meal of Swedish Meatballs and the fixings, a pop-up Holiday Sale for those last minute Christmas gifts, a make and take ornament craft event, Karaoke, and of course dancing!



**We would like to recognize and extend our appreciation to the
Community Employers with whom we partner!**

**310 Pub
Anderson's Greenhouse and Florist
Animal Allies
Barkers Island Inn
Bayshore Health Center
Bent Paddle Brewing Company
Builders Saloon
**Destination Fitness
Dicks Sporting Goods
Duluth Art Institute
Duluth Parks and Recreation
Duluth Running Co.
Essentia Health
Ecuman Lakeshore
Enger Park Golf Course
First Lutheran Church
First United Methodist Church
Five Below
Gordy's Gift and Garden
Grandma's Marathon
Hampton Inn-Duluth
Hampton Inn-Superior
Holiday Inn Express-Superior
Home Depot
Hydrosolutions
ISD 709
JCPenney
Johnson's Bakery
Keyport Liquor
Kidz Kollege Learning Center
Kohl's**

**McDonald's-Hermantown
Men as Peacemakers
Mexico Lindo
Michaels
Mount Royal Fine Foods
Northwest Wisconsin Community
Services Agency
Northwood Children's Services-Main
Northwood Children's Services-West
Old Chicago
Old World Meats
Perkins -West
Progressive Care-Mt. Royal Pines
Queen of Peace Catholic School
Ravin Crossbows
REM Arrowhead-Sevita
Salem Lutheran Church
Slumberland Furniture
St. Mary's Catholic Church-Silver Bay
Super One Foods-Kenwood
Super One Foods-Miller Hill
TJ Maxx
Twin Ports Dog Training Club
Two Harbors Moose Lodge
United Protestant Church
Walmart-Hermantown
Wild State Cider**

**** Denotes a new Employer Partner this quarter**



Vision

CHOICE, unlimited envisions a vibrant community that empowers individuals with disabilities and fosters a culture of inclusiveness.

Mission

CHOICE, unlimited creates and enhances opportunities for individuals with disabilities within local communities.