VOLUME 20 | NOVEMBER DECEMBER 2026

JEDI Tool Shed

one seed at a time

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S STITCH

Shorter Days and Longer Nights

Hello friends.

As 2026 winds down, the cooler weather sets in, and daylight hours are shrinking, I am reflecting on the past ten months. This wasn't an easy year for many of us. Gas prices and food prices stretched our budgets thin. Operation Metro Surge and the continued presence of ICE disrupt families and daily lives, even out here in our rural communities. The attempted erasre of our transgender friends and neighbors. And our election cycle included some of the vilest advertising I have ever witnessed in my life.

However, I am hopeful. Even as the challenges of 2026 were pressing down upon us, we came together as neighbors. We pushed back against, and continue to push back on, inhuman immigration practices, a war that none of us wanted, and elected officials who care more about power than people. Locally, we took to the streets to defend democracy, fed our immigrant neighbors, held space for the LGBTQIA+ community and celebrated the diversity of our communities through events like the Indigenous Peoples Celebration, Pride in the Park and the return of Central Lakes College's Festival of Nations.

Things can change. Humans are the ones who created the systems, the processes and the rules and humans are the ones who can change them. As we begin to plan for 2027, what systems, processes or rules exist in your lives that don't put people first and what can you do to change that?

See you in 2027!

Dawn Espe, Executive Director

THE SOWING ROOM

Planting the Seeds of Inclusive Communities

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

scan to share your thoughts about The Sowing Room

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QUEERLY

Social Club

LOOKING FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT WITH OTHERS?

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18+

MONTHLY SOCIAL GATHERINGS IN THE BRAINERD LAKES AREA

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Planting the seeds of
inclusive communities...

Impact Report

YEAR TWO

"Each of us must work for self improvement, and at the same time share a general responsibility for all humanity." — Marie Curie

"Life doesn't get easier or more forgiving, we get stronger and more resilient." — Steve Maraboli

A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER

The passage of time and the process of aging has been on my mind over these past few months. As it seems to both move fast and slowly, finding focus on how we move through the world as the years pass. The speedy times are when we are absorbing our worldviews, perspectives, values and belief systems. And during the slow times, we can reflect and identify the gaps and the misalignments and decide if we need to make adjustments.

A YEAR OF DISCOVERY

The Sowing Room has been moving through the speedy times, growing as a nonprofit, listening to community members and celebrating of our diversity. We are now in the season of reflection, looking back on our first two years, identifying lessons learned, and ensuring we are living our mission of creating places and spaces of inclusion in our rural communities.

Looking forward to Year Three!

Dawn Espe, Executive Director

IMPACT SNAPSHOT

825

Social Media Followers

357

JEDI Workbench Newsletter Reach

500+

People engaged in the mission of The Sowing Room



FINANCIAL REPORT

$330,600.00 INCOME

$280,400.00 EXPENSES

Thanks to our funding partners:
Five Wings Arts Council, Initiative Foundation, Sourcewell, Region Five Development Commission, Women's Foundation, Lakes Area Justice Table, PFund and the First Congregational UCC.

Sharing the Story

Sowers and Growers

Planting seeds of inclusion isn't a one-size-fits all. How and where we show up in community matters. The Sowing Room showed up in a variety of ways in 2026.

Social Media

- Facebook | 721 followers
- LinkedIn | 202 followers
- Instagram | 104 followers

JEDI Workbench Newsletter

- 6 newsletters sent to 484 subscribers
- over 30 new subscribers

Community Presentations

- Relationship Safety Alliance Staff Training
- CLC Human Services Courses
- St. Cloud State University Panel

At the table

- CLC Human Services
- WeARE
- Friends in the Field
- Radically Rural



Community Events

Places and Spaces

Planting seeds of inclusion is slow, intentional work.

Showing up authentically, holding space for a variety of worldviews and lived experiences and being consistent are important pieces to building a connected community.



Events and Gatherings

Third Space Thursdays

- Nine events were hosted during 2026 in partnership with Lil Fish Studios
- Each event offered a hands-on activity, plus food and beverages, connecting to the evening's theme
- Ages of attendees spanned across generations, bringing together between 4-15 people each month

Pride in the Park

- This was the sixth annual Pride in the Park, however, this was the first year it was hosted by The Sowing Room.
- Over 200 attendees, 35 vendors, 9 artists and a small team of volunteers
- Gender affirming clothing swap was a hit!

Community Bridgemakers

- The Sowing Room acts as the convenor of this group, bringing together individuals across a variety of organizations who work on social cohesion
- Partnership with CLC Human Services student gathering
- Community Impact Fairs

Queerly Social

- Drag-tastic Make Up and a Pride Picnic were hosted in 2026.
- Private Facebook group with over 100 members
- Monthly club meetings beginning in 2027

2026 Spotlight Event

Indigenous Peoples Celebration

Background

In partnership with Indigenous Education of Brainerd and the Lakes Area Justice Table, this third annual gathering has grown from a 40-person stroll through the courthouse, looking at paintings of Indigenous life during the 1800's to a community-centered celebration bringing together over 225 people around art, tradition, history and modern-day experiences. This event is not only a celebration of Indigenous culture, it is also a bridge of understanding and inclusion in our shared space.



Photo Credit: Brainerd Dispatch

By the Numbers

Attendees	Culture Bearers and Artists	Volunteers	Pieces of Frybread served
225+	15	18	125

Community Meal

Nearly 230 folks shared a meal of chicken wild rice hotdish, frybread, and salad, catered by Dan's Catering in Onamia.

Offering a community meal, a place for people to sit down with one another and being nourished through food as well as conversation and connection to others. 2026 was the first year that this was offered and the planning team hopes to make it an annual offering.

Artistry and Demonstration

Indigenous artists and vendors shared their wares, including birch bark bowls, dreamcatchers and porcupine quill earrings.

Culture and Tradition

The Mille Lacs Band Color Guard and a large drum group has been at all three of this annual celebration. However, this year was a first for the large drum, as it was build and played by local high school students.

Another first was asking a local college student to serve as Emcee.

Hosting space for future culture bearers is an important part of this collaboration

Education

Michele Berger presented on Powwow etiquette, and Benji Sam gave a birch bark demonstration. Crow Wing County Historical Society shared more about their Indigenous history project. A Medicine Ball film screening follwed the celebration.

THE SOWING ROOM

Planting the Seeds of Inclusive Communities

Thank you

to all our sowers
and growers.

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Baxter, MN



You Belong Here