Changemakers

Changemakers want to help people recovering from addiction. They want to increase understanding of opioid use disorder and build community support. They are passionate about supporting their community and people in recovery. They are community members, professionals and volunteers affected by the opioid epidemic. Individuals from Aitkin, Itasca, Pine, and northern St. Louis counties, and Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe and Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, were recently selected as changemakers to implement an innovative idea that will make an impact in their communities. Read this report to learn more about the Changemaker retreats and their impact.

Who are Changemakers?

Jenna Dickinson

I taught elementary school for 11 years and recently opened a yoga studio. I am passionate about healing our minds, bodies, and souls. I am in recovery myself so I have learned there are lots of people in our communities who are not addicts or alcoholics and are passionate about healing. I strive to start addiction and recovery yoga at my studio in Aurora while gearing my whole studio to trauma-informed healing for everyone. I came to the changemaker retreat with an idea and the retreat helped me to strengthen my thinking, confidence to be the change I want to see and to stay focused.



Michelle Price

I am an RN recovering from opioid addiction for the past 1.5 years and involved with my community. I am passionate about helping others who face addiction and have learned that it affects everyone, no matter what their background is. My innovation is to host a fun celebration that will help support recovery, addicts and families and will bring the community together. The Changemaker Retreat made me more confident and gave me inspiration to succeed.

Michael Taskalos



I work as a law clerk in the Itasca County Courts. In my work, I regularly encounter people suffering from addiction. I have learned that addiction is very difficult to overcome, but recovery is possible through dedication and with community support. I am passionate about bringing change to the courts to better serve the public and make more efficient use of our limited resources. My innovation is to launch a CHIPS diversion program that would monitor participants' progress through frequent court appearances in less adversarial settings. This voluntary program will

allow families to remain together while chemically dependent parents access services to assist in their recovery. The Changemaker Retreat gave me an opportunity to consider my ideas in a different way than I could have on my own.



Annette Tomilla

I am a recovering addict who is now a productive member of society with a passion to make a change in our community. I am passionate about addiction reduction, mental health stability and families. I have learned that people can be rehabilitated and society as a whole is starting to notice mental health and addiction go hand-in-hand. My innovation is to help addicts and law enforcement bridge the gap. The Changemaker Retreat helped me to get started, build my connections and added fire to my desire for change.



Bryan Boone

I am a husband and father of four, pastor of Bigfork Assembly of God and mayor of Bigfork. I am passionate about building up our community and living out my witness

for Jesus Christ as I try to love people the way he did. I have learned that we can make a big impact on substance use disorder by working together. My innovation is to create an interactive art exhibit developing a recovery friendly community helping people confront their prejudices and misconceptions of recovery addicts by encountering personal stories told through art and responding to pointed questions on a community response board. The retreat helped spark my Changemaker idea and helped me formulate and tweak it.



Mary Dinger

I am the founder of Life Recovery Ministry that provides the only sober living in Aitkin, MN. I am passionate about people in addiction and recovery and tenacious about the greater good. I have learned that there is a crisis epidemic and many others who want to change that. My innovation is to create a safe, sober and friendly gathering place for all community members, enabling healthy relationships, activities and resources and is innovative in that it is focused on unity in life recovery and healing families and communities one heart and soul at a time. The Changemaker retreat taught me new tools, perspectives and resources to better impact our community and grow our ministry and non-profit.



Kayla Aubid

I am a citizen of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. I have learned that the individual nuances and the systems that serve the individuals and communities who are impacted by the opioid crisis are complex. As gallery director of the MacRostie Art Center, I advocate for community-based inclusivity through equity and kinship. Activating creativity through relationship centered practices is the space where I find trust, hope and healing. I am passionate about connecting people to projects, resources, and relationships where they can thrive and feel a deeper connection and responsibility to their roles in their communities. I see art and creativity as a catalyst to this place-based practice. My innovation centers around creating space and access to creativity and community by accentuating existing resources with arts-based intersections to support wellness, recovery, and healing. The Changemaker retreat helped me to hone and identify the skills I already have to become a more effective leaders. I was also supported in “thinking big” and leaning into innovation rather than maintaining comfort.



Leah Ryan

I am a reporter with the Mesabi Daily News and a foster and adoptive parent in St. Louis County. I am passionate about helping children heal from the effects of the opioid epidemic. I love supporting families as they heal and recover. I have learned that opioid and substance use disorder are diseases and that transportation is a critical regional issue to end these diseases. My idea is to create a therapeutic retreat for children and parents, involved in the foster care system, when reunification is imminent. This retreat would facilitate healing damage caused by addiction by rebuilding family relationships and establishing healthy habits for when the child re-enters the home. The Changemaker retreat gave me the tools and knowledge needed to create an innovation to support substance use recovery in my community.



Curtis Jackson

I am a person in long term recovery with leadership skills. I’m also a hardworking father of four beautiful kids and fought to become a single father while in recovery. I am passionate about sober squad and recovery. I care because I’ve hit the depths of addiction and people didn’t give up on me. My innovation of Wecovery and healing on the lake would encourage adolescents and adults to come together to embrace change and empower healing. It would build healthy bonding to live a good life. The retreat helped me to build on my ideas and solve any issues or obstacles that would arise.



Amber Hartse

I am a mother in recovery who has successfully completed CHIPS and am passionate about helping other families in recovery who have CHIPS cases. Substance use disorder is a problem in all of our communities and we are losing too many people to their addictions. The Changemaker retreat gave more confidence in my idea and to lead my innovation to bring hope to the hopeless.



Sandra LeBlanc-Boland

I am the Fund Development and Emergency Preparedness Coordinator for Bigfork Valley and am part of the Performing Arts Events Committee at the Edge Center for the Arts in Bigfork. I have learned that all communities are affected by substance use disorder. I am passionate about health and wellness for individuals and families. My innovation is to research other community health and wellness centers in Northern Minnesota, to gather ideas about additional mental health and recovery services that could be offered in our community to enable healthy lifestyles for individuals and families of all ages and backgrounds in the Edge of the Wilderness area. This idea is innovative for our community in helping to reduce stigma related to mental illness and addiction. The Changemaker Retreat gave me time away from work to devote specifically to defining and refining my idea.



Jessie Schunk

I am a certified life coach and have a 30-year history of working in the public sector with personal and program change and development. I am passionate about working with and helping ordinary people to live extraordinary lives. I have learned working in partnerships around substance use disorder will be a quicker path to healing our communities. The innovation I am working on is the Holding Hand Community and Resource Center. It will provide innovative resources and learning opportunities that nd restore families.



Nick Dinger

I am in long term recovery trying to help others do the same. I have learned that suboxone can be a good tool for short term help. My innovation is to open a small repair shop focusing on people in recovery by providing free car repairs for people in need.



Kevin Glass

I am the Pine County Probation Supervisor. I enjoy helping people and spending my free time outdoors. I enjoy being on or near Lake Superior and looking for agates. I am looking for alternatives so youth in Pine County are not placed out of home. My innovation is to create a therapeutic foster home for at risk youth in Pine County involved in the Criminal Justice System or Health and Human Services enabling a safe supportive environment for youth. This is a way for community members to give back by opening their homes and making it a therapeutic foster home. Before this retreat, I knew that substance use disorder was everywhere, but the Changemaker retreat offered me the opportunity to hear what other communities are doing to help fight and treat it. It opened many possibilities to improve my community to make it a better place. I appreciated the good feedback and



Bob Marcum

I have a strong belief in and a commitment to public service. I am passionate about environmental education, health care and senior issues. I have learned that substance use disorder affects everyone. My innovation is to bring the senior community services related to opioids, addiction, and suicide.



Karlena Jo Flaschberger

I am a connector of people, lover of children, an innovative leader, a problem solver and a foster parent. I have learned that opioid addiction is everywhere and is affecting a lot of different communities. My innovation is to provide a place where individuals and families can find healing and common ground through connections to each other, resources, services and education. Our vision is that we can empower those we serve in a constructive positive way that will ultimately impact not just individual needs but our communities as a whole. The Changemaker retreat gave me the process, the connections and the resources to move forward with my



Cory Babb

I am a substance free husband and father of four who lives to give back to the recovery world. I have learned that substance use disorder affects everyone. My innovation is to create a sober house for events and meetings. The Changemaker retreat helped open doors for me.



Nicole Stone

I am a registered nurse, mother and student. I am looking to help make a change to further help the youth in our community. I am passionate about changing the stigma surrounding mental health, providing help and resources to everyone and making a difference with our community youth. I have learned that opioid addiction affects so many people, not just the individual using. We need to stand by to support the users, families, children, and community and continue to educate regarding the effects of substance use disorder. My innovation is to create an Iron Range Center for adolescents enabling a safe and therapeutic environment providing crisis intervention, peer support, education, therapy, and skill building and is innovative in that it provides face-to-face support for our community adolescents whenever needed. The Changemaker retreat helped to open my mind to all of the possibilities that I can start to make a difference toward my end goal.



Randell Sam

I am an addict in long term recovery helping others in community start a better life. My innovation is to build an addiction free reservation one person at a time. The Changemaker retreat helped me to explore options that I can take back to my community.



Robyn Bertelsen

I am a long-time married mother of one daughter and I am working as a program director for a local non-profit. I am passionate about equity, equality and accountability. I have learned that substance use disorder is far more present than I realized and far more destructive. My innovation is to create a collaboration that connects the Ely area and Bois Forte communities to come together to build trust and understanding. My innovation was a complete surprise to me. Without the significant presence of the Native American community at the Changemaker retreat, it is doubtful this idea would have occurred to me.



Megan Ruzic

I am the mother of three boys and I am currently attending college to become a Licensed Alcohol Drug Abuse Counselor. Breaking the cycle of addiction for my children and wanting to help my community get well is my passion. I have learned that substance use disorder is a big problem in the world today. The innovation retreat opened new doors for me. Seeing everyone’s ideas for wanting to get a change in their community gives me a lot of hope.



Danielle Jones

I am an RN care coordinator for an office-based opioid treatment program in Hibbing, MN. I am passionate about ending the opioid epidemic, treating addiction as a chronic disease, and decreasing the stigma around addiction in our community. I have learned that substance use disorder is everywhere and affects everyone. It does not discriminate. My innovation is to develop a protocol for individuals

presenting to the emergency department with opioid use disorder, which enables access to care in a safe and non-judgmental environment. It will provide a standard of care for individuals with opioid use disorder and it will also ensure follow-up with a physician in a clinic setting so appropriate treatment measures are incorporated. The Changemaker retreat supported me by encouraging me to use moonshot thinking and to not be afraid to think big.



JoAnne Jacobson

I am a mother of someone whose son was on meth and didn’t know what to do and I have become passionate about community health and recovering from opioid addiction. I have learned that substance use disorder is pervasive, obtrusive and affects family and community. My innovation is to provide community education around use of substances, the scope of usage in our community and the neuroscience of addiction. The Changemaker retreat gave me the tools to use to build a plan of action.



Renee Senich

I am a mother of four children and I’ve been a nurse for 21 years. I am passionate about helping people who are struggling with or are in recovery. I have worked at Fond du Lac in their MAT program and loved what I was doing. I started working at Riverwood Healthcare Center so I could dedicate more time to Opioid Use Disorder. My innovation is to educate people in the Aitkin Community as well as medical staff about addiction to help decrease stigma in hopes that people will be more honest about their use. Hearing others’ stories and the guidance from the coaches at the



for me.

David Miller

I am an addict in recovery who is passionate about helping others recover from a seemingly hopeless situation. I believe education is a vehicle for change. I have learned that people from all walks of life can be Changemakers including non-addicts. Developing a client-counselor relationship is easier when clients feel at ease. My innovation is to meet people in their comfort zones by starting mobile client services. Through this retreat I realized that my idea is possible.



Maria Costello

I am a fun, eager, kind, and compassionate woman who is the mother of four wonderful kids. I am passionate about healing families together no matter what it takes. I have learned through opioid addiction that it is in all communities and it affects all family members. My innovation of family healing in communities involves a respect of different faiths and spiritualities. The Changemaker retreat has made me re-evaluate where I am in my life, prioritize what I need to focus on in this stage of my life and look at how I can make a difference.
