

Dedicated to student success

After a career in education spanning nearly three decades and two states, you might expect Bovey resident Cynthia Johnson to put her work on the shelf. But as a life-long learner, advocate of education and guidance counselor at Greenway High School for 11 years, Johnson's retirement plan looks a lot like a continuation of her career.

In May 2010, three years after her retirement, Johnson joined community members from the Itasca County area to form the Student Success Core Team, an initiative born out of a series of community conversations exploring how to provide opportunities for all students in the Itasca area to succeed, co-sponsored by Blandin Foundation and the Itasca Area Schools Collaborative (IASC). The team's task: to survey the current state of education in the Itasca area and determine how to ensure students are given the skills necessary to succeed.

As the team discussed the realities of the region, the challenges became clear.

"We talked to the business community, and too many students come out of school not prepared to do what they wanted to do, nor are they prepared for the work force," said Johnson, also owner and editor of the *Scenic Range News Forum* in Bovey. "We have to look at different ways of providing educational opportunities for all of our students because the future is going to require every kid to have more education past high school."

As the Student Success Core Team met to address these issues, two subgroups emerged. One addresses families and how children are prepared for education at home.

The other, in which Johnson participates, is a team focused on educational transformation in the region.

Last fall, the team outlined four goals: finding out how students defined success, finding the right tools to ensure teachers are successful, assisting school districts in ensuring students find success, and establishing a teacher academy for teachers in the region to learn best practices from their peers.

"We gear everything for about the 20 percent of kids who are going to go to a four-year university," said Johnson. "The other 80 percent of the students deserve excellent educations also."

Johnson continues her work in the education field for one simple reason

"My motivation is all about paying back by paying it forward," she said. "Because I had a great education, I had lots of doors open. I came into public education believing as a country and as a culture that every student deserves the same kind of education I received."

The Student Success Core Team grew out of a series of community conversations co-hosted by Blandin Foundation in spring 2010 as part of its strategic focus on expanding opportunity for every person in Itasca area communities.



Cynthia Johnson, former counselor at Greenway High School and owner/editor of the *Scenic Range News Forum*, continues to work with the Student Success Core Team to better understand factors that affect successful education in the Itasca County area.



Mission: To strengthen communities in rural Minnesota, especially the Grand Rapids area

Vision: To be the premier partner for building healthy rural Minnesota communities, grounded in strong economies, where burdens and benefits are widely shared.

The "At Home" report to the community is published periodically by the Blandin Foundation and distributed to residents of the Grand Rapids area, its home community. Contributors include:

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Splendid undertakings

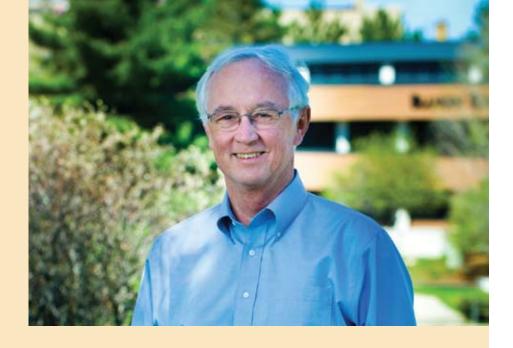
Dear Neighbors:

Charles Blandin was a man who had the strength and vision to establish this foundation during the uncertainties of 1941, making headlines across the country. While his dream was of a healthy Grand Rapids and Itasca County, what he cared about most was the Foundation being a valued community partner—a vision we still hold for our work.

In 2011, we celebrate the 25th anniversary of our Blandin Community Leadership Program (BCLP), having partnered with more than 6,000 rural Minnesota leaders—500 in Itasca County alone—in building their skills and networks. Hardly a day goes by that we don't hear a story about the impact of a single person who effectively framed an issue, built social capital and mobilized resources for their community. Community leadership most certainly matters.

Our public policy and grant-making work also give us a front-row seat to rural community leadership. The transformations we have seen through our partnerships in rural broadband, early childhood and student success—work that often leads the way nationally—makes us even more hopeful for rural Minnesota communities and their futures.

A look at the list of 2010 grants also is a powerful reminder of the passion and innovation of leaders here and throughout rural Minnesota, as well as the significant needs of our neighbors in such uncertain times.



Laurence Rossman, Charles Blandin's good friend, said in 1946 that one of Blandin's basic expectations for his foundation was that it was to be a "...partner in splendid undertakings with the community and the county."

To our many partners, thank you for your truly "splendid" work to propel our students, to care for our neighbors, to create an intentional future for our communities, to work across and celebrate our differences, to be generous with each other. As in 1941, the challenges and opportunities of the future will demand the best of us all.

Jim Hoolihan

A share in progress

2010 grants infuse community action

Since 1941, Blandin Foundation has been a partner in community-driven activities in the Itasca County area and rural Minnesota. Working with people who share the Foundation's mission of strengthening communities, grantmaking efforts move forward projects and programs of all sizes and scopes, giving people here, and throughout the state, the opportunity to enhance their rural communities.

Grants listed below were awarded between January and December 2010, and were made in the Foundation's three strategic priorty areas. Each area addresses a unique aspect of rural life, with the common vision of healthy rural communities grounded in strong economies, where burdens and benefits are widely shared. Brown type denotes grants made in the Foundation's home giving area, the Itasca County area. This list does not include grants of \$1,000 or less.

Commitment to Home Local Grants

Centennial Rotary Club of Grand Rapids....

2010 annual Thanksgiving dinner for the Grand Rapids area

Cooperative Solutions\$10,000 Early Case Management/Early Neutral Evaluation voluntary mediation pilot program over 18 months for low-income families in the Itasca County area

Depot Commons Association \$5,500 Support for the 2011 Governor's Fishing Opener

GRACE House of Itasca County\$50,000 For operating support of the shelter and day center services in Itasca County

City of Grand Rapids......\$50,000 Support for the Library Alternative Heating Project

Grand Rapids Area

Community Foundation \$1,300

Mt. Itasca funding plan facilitation as part of the Rural Quick Start Program **Grand Rapids Area**

Community Foundation \$5,000

Angel of Hope Memorial Park as part of the Rural Ouick Start Program

Sharing Fund

Grand Rapids Area

Community Foundation \$7,400 Support for a seminar sponsored by Healthy Brains for Children to reinvigorate the focus community organizations place on public education regarding fetal alcohol syndrome

Grand Rapids Area

Community Foundation \$4,800 Production of the 2010 Itasca Area Nonprofit Giving Guide

Grand Rapids Area Male Chorus \$5,000 Partial support for the regional Big Sing event in 2011

Greenway Senior Citizens \$2,000 Upgrades to the roof and chimney of the Marble Senior Center

Habitat for Humanity of

Itasca County......\$50,00 Sustaining contribution for low-income housing\$50,000 development in Itasca County

Independent School District 318 . . . \$146,000 For continued support of the Baby Steps Boutique in Itasca County

Itasca Community Television \$150,000 For continued operating support through 2012 in Itasca County

Itasca Economic

Development Corporation \$5,000 Study the feasibility of creating a leadership education economic opportunity in the local community

Itasca Economic

Development Corporation \$38,000 Project support for a leadership education economic training program in Itasca County

Itasca Economic

Development Corporation \$200,000 For continued operating assistance to promote economic development opportunities throughout

Itasca Ski And Outing Club. \$5,000 Support for hosting the biathlon and ski jumping Olympic trials

Center in 2010

KOOTASCA Community Action \$51,000 For crisis housing activities in Itasca County

KOOTASCA Community Action\$95,000For continued support of the Itasca Area Crisis Nursery program in Itasca County

KOOTASCA Community Action\$118,000 For continued support of the Teenage Parent Program in Itasca County

MN Assistance Council

for Veterans...... Programming and services for veterans and their families in Itasca County

MN Council on Foundations.....\$5,616 Subscriptions for 24 area grantees to Minnesota Grantmakers Online

Minnesota D.A.R.E., Inc. Programming support for northern Minnesota

NE MN Area Health

Education Center.....\$5,000 A public education program focusing on germ awareness in Itasca County and surrounding schools as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Nonprofits Assistance Fund \$75,000 Project support to build nonprofit capacity, promote partnerships and strategic alliances among Itasca County area nonprofits

Northern Community Radio......\$5,000 Documentary production training Northern Itasca Joint Powers Board ...\$5,000 Support to conduct a comprehensive community

plan for the City of Bigfork

Service Center \$25,000 Support for the home visiting program for families with children 0-3

Northland Counseling Center/

Itasca County.....\$9, Support for training costs associated with the Certified Peer Specialist program in Itasca County. Pengilly Booster Club \$3,000

Fencing and playground equipment

North Central Food Bank

Kids Packs to Go backpack program in Itasca County

North Central Food Bank\$2,500 Kids Packs to Go backpack program in Itasca County

Invest in Leaders

Rural Minnesota Grants

Cambridge Area Chamber Support for the Isanti County Leadership Program as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Center for Sustainable Living. \$2,100 Understand the economic implications of climate change and fossil fuel dependence on rural communities as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Headwaters Regional

Development Commission \$5,000 Technical assistance for the community of Marshall to begin a stewardship process as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Hmong Arts Connection.....\$5,000 Initial organization and start-up expenses for the Southwest Minnesota Hmong Community Center as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Independent School District 659 \$5,000 Project support to build inclusion and leadership among diverse populations in the Northfield School District as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Nicollet County\$5,000
Technical assistance with the development and implementation of a countywide leadership/ network program in Nicollet County as part of the Rural Quick Start Program Redwood Area

Communities Foundation.....\$5,000 Technical assistance for leadership planning and development for the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor as an outgrowth of participation in the Community Advantage Leadership Training

Redwood Area

Communities Foundation.....\$5,000 Planning support for the Minnesota Valley History Learning Center as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Southwest Initiative Foundation....\$25,000 Community Engagement and Leadership Competencies project throughout rural Minnesota

Southwest Initiative Foundation....\$5,000 Support for the endowment of the Granite Falls Area Community Foundation as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

University of Minnesota......\$10,000 Support for the "One Minnesota" Legislative Policy conference

Women's Leadership Fund \$10,000 Planning grant for the Rural Women's Leadership Summit in Minnesota

Expand Opportunity

Action through Churches Together . . . \$5,000 Itasca Community Connect event where individuals and families are able to learn about the services available throughout Itasca County

Area Partnership for

Economic Expansion \$45,000 Conduct research and develop strategies aimed at promoting new economic activity and job growth in the Grand Rapids/Itasca County area

Arrowhead Economic

Opportunity Agency.....\$10,000
Operational support for the Free At Last program serving Itasca County youth

Arrowhead Economic

Arrowhead Economic

Opportunity Agency...........\$50,000 Creation of a marketing plan for AEOA transportation services

Arrowhead Economic

Opportunity Agency.......\$180,500
For continued support of the Adult Scholarship
Program in Itasca County

Bigfork Valley Foundation \$10,000 Planning and research support for the development of a medical reprocessing manufacturing facility in the Itasca County area

Cass County Economic Development Corp\$2,500
Health care facility feasibility study

Cass County Economic Development Corp\$2,500

Membership for 2010 to promote economic development in that segment of the Foundation's

Depot Commons Association......\$50,000For continued support of the Workforce

Development Initiative in Itasca County **Edge of the Wilderness**

Community Center\$2,500 Support for the theater production of The Laramie Project which is based on the aftermath of the murder of a young gay man in Laramie, Wyoming

City of Grand Rapids......\$3,000 Education program for Grand Rapids area businesses and nonprofits on ADA requirements and possible solutions to barriers allowing people with mobility issues access to facilities

City of Grand Rapids.......\$3,500Preliminary design work on the Library/Blandin Foundation alternative energy project

Grand Rapids Area

Community Foundation \$3,500 Phase 2 of the funding plan facilitation for Mt. Itasca as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Grand Rapids Area

Community Foundation \$150,000 Continuation funding for the Itasca County Trails

Independent School District 316 \$5,000

Independent School District 316 \$15,000 Planning support to identify opportunities for sharing resources between the Nashwauk and Greenway school districts in Itasca County

Independent School District 316 \$3,000 Support for Children First! activities throughout 2010

Independent School District 317 \$40,000To provide Deer River area students with high quality after school educational experiences and opportunities through the Boys and Girls Club of Deer River

Independent School District 317 \$2,000 Support for Children First! activities throughout 2010

Independent School District 318 \$1,200 Working Family Resource webinars for working parents throughout the Itasca County area

Independent School District 318 \$9,000 Support for Children First! activities throughout 2010

Independent School District 318 \$25,000 Continuation funding for the Children First! Initiative in Itasca County

Independent School District 318 \$90,000 For continued support of the Step Ahead parent education program in Itasca County

Independent School District 318 \$11,000 Continuation funding for community mini grants as part of the Children First! initiative in Itasca County

Independent School District 319 \$2,000 Support for Children First! activities throughout 2010

Independent School District 363 \$5,000 Support for a FIRST Robotics Team

Itasca Alliance Against

Sexual Assault\$2,500 Support for strategic planning and merger expenses with Sexual Assault Services of Aitkin County

Itasca Community College \$3,050 Financial aid presentations at area high schools for parents and students to learn about financial preparation for college

Itasca Community College \$375,000 For financial aid assistance for Itasca County high school graduates during the 2011-12 school year

Itasca Community College\$40,000 For supplemental financial aid assistance for the 2010-11 school year

Itasca County Family YMCA \$50,000 Operating support for the Get Fit Initiative in the Itasca County area

Junior Achievement of

the Upper Midwest.....\$10,000 Implementation of Junior Achievement programming in Itasca County schools

KOOTASCA Community Action \$103,000 For community engagement activities in Itasca County

KOOTASCA Community Action \$283,000 For continued support of the Circles of Support program in Itasca County

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe\$50,000 Capital support for broadcasting equipment to start a broadcasting operation on the Leech Lake **Indian Reservation**

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe\$50,000For the Bug O Nay Ge Shig school truancy reduction program

Leech Lake Tribal College \$10,000 Support towards creation of a master campus development plan

City of Marble \$10,000 Capital support for the new Marble Public Library

MN Technology of Participation\$10,000 Provide training to 25 Itasca County nonprofits in the Technology of Participation facilitation methods

Northern Lights Community School ...\$57,000 For the ItascaCorps mentoring project in Itasca County

Reif Arts Council\$2,500 Kennedy Center Partners in Education project in Itasca County

Rural Minnesota Grants

African Development Center \$225,000 Continuation funding to build and strengthen economic development opportunities for African-Americans throughout rural Minnesota

Alexandria Technical College \$30,000 Programming support for the Diversity Action Resource Alliance

American Red Cross-

Northland Chapter\$25,000 Disaster relief for June tornado victims in rural Minnesota

American Red Cross-

Beltrami Area

Service Collaborative \$150,000 Project support for the Students First! Initiative in

Citizens League \$10,000 Support for the "Creating Pathways to Prosperity" policy initiative

Cambridge Area Chamber

of Commerce Foundation.....\$5,000 Support for the Keep It Local program as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

work with Dakota youth from August 2010 -August 2011 to increase academic success, civic engagement and adult volunteerism

areas around the state related to Governor and

Depot Preservation Alliance.....\$5,000 Research and planning for preservation of the rail depot in Baudette

Dovetail Partners, Inc.....\$5,000 Support for the "Working Forests and Carbon" workshop and field tour in Aitkin County

Dovetail Partners, Inc.......\$100,000To continue efforts to develop ecosystem service market opportunities including forest-based carbon offset projects that support rural communities and responsible land care in rural Minnesota

Duluth Local Initiatives

Support Corp......\$5,000 Support for Sustainable Community Week as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Duluth-Superior Area

Community Foundation......\$5,000
To build the fundraising capacity for the Duluth Legacy Endowment Fund and strengthen it's long-term ability to provide quality-of-life programs and activities that meet a public need as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Enterprise Minnesota \$5,000 Regional sponsorship for the third annual State of Manufacturing poll to be conducted in February 2011

Enterprise Minnesota \$5,000 Regional sponsorship for the second annual State of Manufacturing poll

Friends of the Minnesota Valley \$5,000 Creating Entrepreneurship Opportunities through Natural Resource Conservation project in southern

Greater MN Housing Fund \$2,000,000 For continued support to create affordable housing for families throughout rural Minnesota

Greater Twin Cities United Way.....\$20,000Phase II of the School Readiness Funders Coalition business plan that will direct the state in the area of early childhood care and education policies for the next decade

Growth and Justice.........\$80,000 Project support for the Smart Investments in Minnesota's Students project throughout rural Minnesota

Immigrant Law Center of MN \$220,000 For general support for statewide advocacy outreach and expansion of services to serve immigrants and refugees and for an attorney to implement benefits of Comprehensive Immigration Reform to clients living in rural Minnesota

Independent School District 309 \$50,000 Student Success project - a program to nurture, grow and retain talented students in the Park Rapids area

Initiative Foundation\$25,000 Capital for a low-interest, short-term loan fund for businesses damaged in the Wadena tornado

Itasca Community College \$35,050 Initiate a shared ride system to address transportation issues that have been barriers to student success within the five member colleges of the Northeast Higher Education District

JOBS NOW Coalition.....\$115,000 For continued support to promote economic opportunities and labor market outcomes for residents throughout rural Minnesota

Keepers Sacred Tradition

Continued support for the Native youth drum and

Planning grant to increase economic development and heritage tourism as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Main Street Project \$10,000 Encourage participation of rural Latinos in the

MN Campus Compact \$20,000
To improve college success measures, develop job skills and attitudes and expose rural and urban students to career opportunities in rural Minnesota

Minnesota Chamber Foundation....\$5,000 Operating support for Minnesota Business Gives

MN Coalition for the Homeless \$10,000 Design and facilitate a strategic planning process that identifies short and long-term direction for their statewide work

MN Council of Nonprofits Inc. . . Sponsor the Fast Fundraising Facts Workshop in MN Council of Nonprofits Inc. . . .

Sponsorship of the 2010 annual nonprofit conference MN Council of Nonprofits Inc.

Support for the rural elements of MCN's Nonprofit Advocacy Network

Minnesota E-Democracy......\$10,000 Continuation of Cass Lake/Leech Lake Issues Forum community outreach efforts

MN Home Care Association \$5,000 Planning for a more robust system for home health care technology resource delivery

MN Humanities Center.....\$10,000 Support for the Iron Range history and cultural project

Minnesota Public Radio\$200,000 For continued support of delivering news programming to rural communities throughout Minnesota

Minnesota Rural Partners, Inc.....\$10,000 Public education efforts to highlight the interdependence of rural and urban areas of the state

Minnesota Wood

Education Project\$8,000 2011 Goods from the Woods program which combines an UpNorth Marketplace for specialty forest products and a living green program initiative

NE Entrepreneur Fund, Inc.....\$125,000 Project support to expand coaching services to entrepreneurs committed to growing their businesses throughout rural Minnesota

Northland Foundation \$5,000 Support for the 2010 Northeastern Minnesota Early Childhood Summit

The Northspan Group, Inc.....\$15,000 Sponsorship of the Minnesota Cup business plan competition

plasma arc gasification opportunity

City of Palisade \$20,000 Further research, planning and public education for the Palisade Plasma Arc Gasification Endeavor (PAGE)

Parents United for Public Schools . . . \$75,000 For the Parents United Leadership Boot Camp, a training program provided to community leaders in rural Minnesota that have interest in quality E-16 education and the skills needed to effect change

Pine Point Community Council.....\$5,000 Ojibwe language revitalization program on the White Earth Reservation as part of the Rural Quick Start Program

Pine Technical College......\$20,000 Technical assistance to design and develop operating procedures and guidelines for effective operation of an Entrpreneurship Center and Technology Business Incubator on the Pine Technical College campus

RAIN Source Capital Inc......\$2,500 Sponsorship for the 2010 Regional Angel Investor Network educational conference

Rainy River Community College ...\$100,000 Project support to establish math and science education programs throughout rural Minnesota

Redwood Area

Communities Foundation.....\$10,000 Continuation of Sunktanka Native Youth Development program

Southern Minnesota

Initiative Foundation \$ Support for the Tornado Recovery Fund to provide assistance to farmers and rural businesses impacted by the June tornado

Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation\$20,000

Support for the Flood Recovery Fund to help businesses get back to pre-disaster conditions from the widespread flooding during September in southern Minnesota

University of Minnesota.....\$10,000 To continue implementation of the Vital Forests Vital Communities Task Force recommendations

University of Minnesota..... Community-engaged design work for the Superior National Forest Scenic Byway

University of Minnesota......\$50,000For the Minnesota Principals Academy research-based executive development program in northern Minnesota

University of Minnesota..... \$50,000 Project support for the Engaged Philanthropy Program throughout rural Minnesota

Voyageur's National

Park Association\$25,000
For the Sustainable Gateway Communities
Initiative to work with communities to create teams for the benefit of their local economy and connect their community to public lands across rural Minnesota

Welcome Center, Inc ...\$35,000 Project support for the College Access program in rural Minnesota

Wells Academy\$50Operating support to provide training to Native American apprentice students in northern Minnesota

White Earth Band of Ojibwe\$50,000 Project support to assist northern Minnesota Indian reservations with organizational development and strategic plan implementation in rural Minnesota

White Earth Land Recovery Project . . . \$10,000 Increase and expand the White Earth Food Systems project on the White Earth Indian Reservation

Willmar Area Multicultural Market . . . \$50.000 Support for a multi-cultural community kitchen in

Renewable Energy initiative throughout rural Minnesota

Grants Awarded 2005-2010

Grand Rapids/Itasca Area \$58,148,034 (72%)

Rural Minnesota \$22,828,582 (28%)

Note: Full financial statements always can be found at the Blandin Foundation web site or by contacting the foundation.

Growing and learning together

Deer River early childhood program benefits mother and daughter alike

Students named class valedictorian have achieved academic success. But Felicia Shadley, valedictorian of the Deer River High School class of 2010, has successfully met more than academic challenges.

At 16, Shadley found herself pregnant and in need of a plan to balance school and raise her daughter, Aleigha.

"I was desperately in need of daycare, and I wasn't working because I was in high school," she said.

When Shadley began her senior year, her not quite one-year-old daughter was accepted into Deer River's Invest EarlyTM program, a program that focuses on early childhood care and education and offers a wide variety of services to children and families in Itasca County. She enrolled her daughter in an Invest Early early childhood center just blocks from the high school. But Shadley discovered that being close to school was only one of the program's advantages.

"I see a lot of improvement with Aleigha's vocabulary and manners," Shadley said. "She used to have a lot of anger problems. They have been helping her with calming techniques, and it shows at home."

Melanie Storlie, lead teacher with Invest Early in Deer River, explained that the program addresses many facets of a child's development.

"We help children learn to regulate emotions, make sure they understand the teaching, and make sure they are learning and comprehending language while reaching developmental milestones," Storlie said. "So for Aleigha, as with other children, we adjust our teaching to her developmental stage, not her age. We allow her to explore and grow her developmental skills."

Shadley also has seen the benefits of Invest Early in her post-secondary education. She began the LPN program at Itasca Community College (ICC) in Fall 2010. After Shadley completed her first year of classes at ICC, she was named to the Dean's List for achieving a 4.0 grade point average for the Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 semesters.

"They (Invest Early) are really flexible with me, and if I need more time to study or if I am at school after the time I am supposed to pick her up, they don't mind," she said.

Shadley said she'll continue to utilize Invest Early for Aleigha's care while she completes the LPN program, then spends one more semester earning her associate's degree. She credits Invest Early with helping her be successful



Felicia Shadley and her daughter, Aleigha, have been involved with the Invest Early program since 2009. While Felicia completes the LPN program and an associate's degree at ICC, Aleigha is getting a solid foundation of developmental and educational skills for her young life.

academically, but says Aleigha's benefits in learning key life skills are just as important.

"I tell her she's going to school, because it is educational based, and the children learn and acquire different skills," Shadley explained. "The staff is so involved with the kids, teaching them to treat each other with respect, sharing and working together. It has helped a lot."

Blandin Foundation's support of Invest Early is part of its commitment to the Itasca area, its home community. The initiative, which receives about \$1.5 million in grants from the Foundation annually and is in its sixth year of operation, is making strides in supporting families with young children, and in preparing children for school. For details on Invest Early, visit www.investearly.org or call 218-327-5850.

Offering hope through leadership

Community change seems to be a theme for Dave and Jeff Roerick of Grand Rapids. Together and separately, father and son are providing leadership on key issues facing Itasca area communities.

Jeff is a single father with custody of his two children. His passion for community change was ignited when his son was abused, and the sentence given didn't seem to fit the crime. At that point Jeff vowed to make a difference. He began working towards his goal of achieving a degree in criminal justice. In May 2011, he fulfilled that goal, graduating from Bemidji State University.

As Jeff pursued his degree, he realized tackling change of the

criminal justice system as a whole was impossible. Instead, he felt the only way to make a difference was on an individual level.

"It's not the system's problem," he said "It's a citizen's problem."

Dave, Jeff's father, is involved with Circles of Support and Advocates for Family Peace in Itasca County. His community involvement opened up an opportunity to take part in Blandin Foundation's Leaders Partnering to End Poverty (LPEP) program in summer 2010. When another spot opened for LPEP training, Dave suggested Jeff be involved, too, not realizing they would end up working together on an LPEP community project team

whose goal is to work alongside people to navigate the legal system in ways that help them move their lives forward.

Both the training and project team work connect two of Dave's and Jeff's clear passions: poverty and the legal system. They realized that poverty and unemployment present unique challenges to navigating the legal system and services. And they again vowed to catalyze change. They're currently working with the court system, probation and other agencies to create a new program that gives a leg up to people in poverty leaving incarceration and re-entering Itasca County.

"Our main goal is to close the revolving door of the criminal justice system," said Jeff, who understands how overwhelming issues of poverty can be."I've been on assistance programs. I want to tell people that they can get through this, and that life will be better. I want to be that guiding light for someone."

This means working alongside someone as they navigate their future.

"I hope to see a combining of all the resources for someone who has hard times and was incarcerated and has served their time," said Jeff.

"My dad's work ethic gave me opportunities," he continued. "I think I picked up that gene. I have that passion he has for giving back."

Blandin Foundation has offered LPEP in Grand Rapids twice in recent years, as part of its strategy to invest in community leaders. LPEP is designed to empower community leaders from all income levels to reduce barriers for people living in poverty in their community. Blandin Foundation encourages all communities to recognize that leaders are everywhere, and that leadership matters.

David (left) and Jeff Roerick are two of the numerous Itasca area leaders working to address the impacts of poverty in the Itasca area. The Grand Rapids men are working on a program to assist people making the transition from incarceration to community life.

