

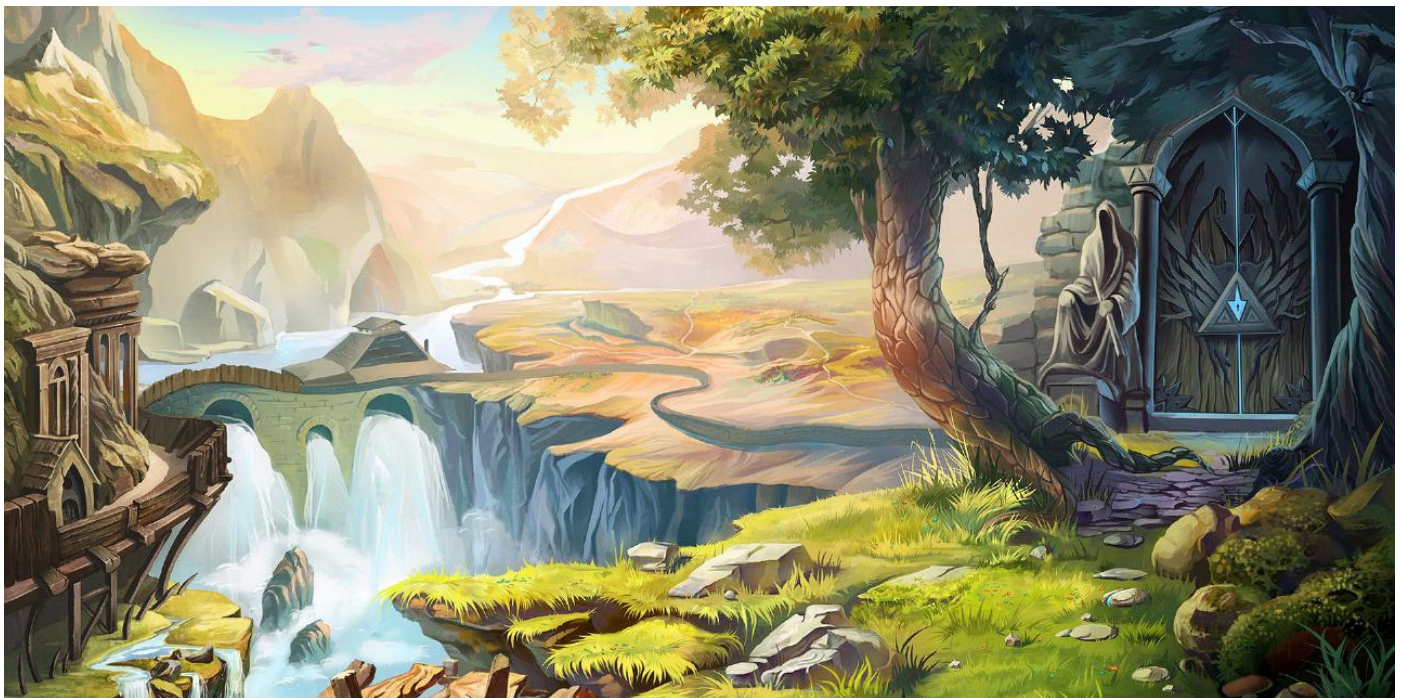
LEARNINGS FROM THE RURAL MINNESOTA
COMMUNITY SAFETY PROJECT



SAFE TOGETHER

A QUEST FOR RURAL COMMUNITY SAFETY

Build Trust, Equip Local Leaders, and Cultivate Safety From Within



The *Safe Together* report was created by Department of Public Transformation and Voices for Rural Resilience based on the Rural Minnesota Community Safety Project (2022-2025), an initiative of Nonviolent Peaceforce in partnership with the Northspan Group, Inc. and The Sowing Room, and with support from the Bush Foundation.



DEPT OF PUBLIC
TRANSFORMATION

**VOICES
FOR RURAL
RESILIENCE**



N O R T H S P A N



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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

In November 2022, the Department of Public Transformation (DoPT) and Voices for Rural Resilience (VfRR) were invited by Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) to support and evaluate the Rural Minnesota Community Safety Project—a pilot initiative aimed at translating NP’s global approach to unarmed civilian protection into rural Minnesota contexts.

In collaboration with two regional partners—The Sowing Room and Northspan—the project engaged community members in the Brainerd Lakes, Cloquet, and Cook County areas to explore and define what safety means locally, and how communities can cultivate it together. For more information about these communities and these partners, see the Credits section of this guide.

DoPT and VfRR served as evaluative storytellers, supporting the process through ongoing program design, community sensing, story circles, interviews, surveys, and real-time reflection. Our role was not only to assess outcomes, but also to listen deeply, adapt responsively, and help shape a process rooted in relationship, trust, and care.

This guide shares what we’ve learned across the first three years of the project. It’s part creative report, part invitation. Inspired by role-playing games, choose-your-own-adventure books, and oral storytelling traditions, this document offers a non-linear journey through the insights, challenges, and tools uncovered through the Rural Minnesota Community Safety Project. We honor that each rural community, like each hero’s journey, is unique. This guide is meant to be adapted for your place, not followed step by step.

Whether you are a practitioner, a partner, a policymaker, or a neighbor—we invite you to explore, adapt, and imagine what safety can look like in your own community.

PILOT PROJECT TIMELINE:

November 2022 - May 2025

KEY PROJECT GOALS:

- Decrease Fear and Violence
- Increase Systems of Safety
- Shift and Expand the Narrative of Rural Safety
- Adapt NP Model for Each Region
- Inform and model for Other Communities





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A GUIDE

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK



THE LEVELS

This guide is structured like a role-playing game—each level is a stage in the journey of building community safety. You can follow the levels in order, or jump in where you are. There's no wrong place to begin.



Throughout the guide, you'll gather tools and tokens—real strategies, trainings, and resources based on Nonviolent Peaceforce's unarmed civilian protection work, adapted for rural Minnesota communities.

THE QUIVER OF CARE

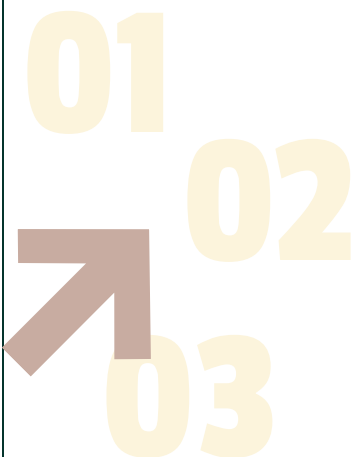
THE ENCOUNTERS

Story Circles, Surveys, One-on-One Interviews, and Trainings are key quests on your journey. You'll meet many perspectives along the way—some aligned, some in tension. Each one adds dimension to your understanding.



Keep an eye out for relics—insights, direct quotes, and lessons shared by community members and partners during the pilot initiative. These are your compass, shaped by lived experience and shared wisdom.

THE RELICS





The Sowing Room - Brainerd Lakes Area

Rooted in care and creativity, **The Sowing Room** cultivates spaces for healing, connection, and collective growth in the Brainerd Lakes Area. Their community-based work centers the wisdom of those most impacted by systems of harm and creates opportunities for dialogue, storytelling, and shared transformation. As a partner, The Sowing Room brought deep relational knowledge and a steady, compassionate presence to the Rural Safety journey.

The **Brainerd Lakes Area** is a hub of tourism and natural beauty in central Minnesota. It's a region marked by strong faith communities, economic disparities, and growing racial and cultural diversity—particularly among youth. Strengths include a robust network of service providers and community resilience; challenges include a lack of mental health support, housing insecurity, and tensions between institutional systems and grassroots efforts.

TOKENS OF COMPLETION

At the end of each level, gather tokens to signify the outcomes that have been earned and achieved.



Prompts for reflection or action. Whenever you see this, pause, ask questions, and consider your next step. Perhaps you pull out a candle and a quill and start writing.

QUEST MARKERS



Northspan - Cloquet and Cook County

Northspan is a trusted regional convener dedicated to strengthening communities through strategic facilitation, data-informed planning, and economic empowerment. Northspan served as a bridge between institutions and grassroots voices—bringing insight, coordination, and a commitment to place-based solutions that honor the unique dynamics of rural and Indigenous communities in northeastern Minnesota.

Northspan focused on working in the **Cloquet and Cook County areas** for the pilot. Cloquet borders the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and has a rich indigenous presence. Cook County, further north along the shore of Lake Superior, is sparsely populated, with high seasonal tourism and limited access to services. Cook County is inclusive of the Tribal lands of the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. Together, these communities navigate layered histories of land, sovereignty, and systemic inequity—alongside strong traditions of mutual aid, cultural pride, and deep connection to place. Safety conversations here are often tied to historical trauma, intergenerational healing, and the need for culturally grounded and community-led approaches to safety.

THE GUIDES

Those that have been on this journey before you - the past players. They are here to offer guidance through quotes and reflections based on their experiences. When you see these symbols, these are stories shared from the guides.



WELCOME SAFETY SEEKER



PRECONDITIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

PROLOGUE

You're about to embark on a journey unlike any other—a quest to build safety, trust, and belonging in your small town or rural community. But this is no ordinary adventure. There are no magic wands here. No armor forged in steel.

Instead, you carry a **Quiver of Care**—filled with tools like Listening, Empathy, and De-escalation. Your spells are Dialogue and Curiosity. Your power grows through Connection, Practice, and Reflection.

This journey is not solo. Across the region, others are gathering artists, activists, teachers, healers, neighbors. Each carrying their own hopes, fears, skills, and questions. Together, you form a Core Team—diverse characters charting a course through unfamiliar terrain.

You begin with one question: **“What does safety mean here, in this place?”**

Your mission is clear: **Listen. Learn. Equip. Connect. Build. Sustain.**

Before the path reveals itself, before the first gate appears, something deeper must stir. Not every community is ready to embark on the journey of building collective safety. How do you know when it is time to begin your journey? There are signs. Whispers. Rumbblings beneath the surface. These are the preconditions—the subtle and not-so-subtle forces that signal the landscape is shifting; the moment is emerging.



Your Mission is Clear:

LISTEN
LEARN
EQUIP
CONNECT
BUILD
SUSTAIN

Let's Begin!! —>

Here is what we learned from the Rural Minnesota Community Safety Project about when a SAFE TOGETHER journey becomes possible:

A Spark: A catalyst ignites curiosity or urgency. Perhaps a moment of harm. A public outcry. An interpersonal rupture. Or maybe, a long-smoldering sense that things could be different.

A Fracture in the Old Story: Dominant narratives about who belongs, what safety means, or how conflict is resolved start to fray. People begin asking different questions. Wondering aloud. Challenging assumptions.

A Willingness (not a Consensus): Not everyone agrees. Not everyone needs to. But enough people are willing to explore another way. To risk discomfort. To try something untested.

A History of Trying: There is a backdrop of effort—previous community initiatives, listening sessions, small group gatherings, or informal networks that have laid groundwork. Even if imperfect, this history means something has already begun.

An Anchoring Partner: One or more organizations or individuals have enough trust, enough standing, and enough commitment to hold the conversations around safety. They may not have all the answers, but they're willing to convene and invite.

A Crumbling System: Sometimes the conditions are made clear because old systems are no longer working. Local institutions are overstretched, conflicts are unresolved, and mistrust is growing. The crumbling becomes a call.

These are not comprehensive and these are not requirements. If you feel preconditions exist in your context, you can take the first step. You don't need certainty. Just a beginning. Take note of the pre-conditions you believe to exist. These will come in handy along the way.

Not every community is ready for a SAFE TOGETHER journey. If the preconditions do not exist, ask yourself what you can do to start the conversation with other interested and potential partners to move toward becoming an anchoring partner or trying new initiatives to prepare your community for the journey.



"Not everyone wants to enter this conversation yet. And that's okay. It's not a failure—it's a signal."

When you recognize that one or more pre-conditions exist, your first step is to **FIND THE CONVENORS**.

Ask yourself, who are the people that...



- ☐ Show up when others step back?
- ☐ Can move between worlds (across sectors, cultures, or generations)?
- ☐ Are trusted by many, even if they don't hold formal power?
- ☐ Ask good questions and leave space for others to answer?
- ☐ Are already doing the quiet work of safety—healing, listening, checking in, making space?
- ☐ Are not polarizing figures, but bridge-builders?
- ☐ Embody a humanitarian spirit—motivated by care, not ego?
- ☐ Are good at facilitation over dissemination, listening over teaching?

You may find them in expected places—or not. They might be elders, youth, artists, organizers, service providers, teachers, coaches, bartenders, aunties, Tribal leaders, neighbors. What matters most is not their role, but their relational capital. They may not hold formal power, but they are central to the relational fabric of the community. A good peacekeeper is not the loudest activist—they are the curious listener, the steady facilitator, the one who asks questions and makes room for many voices.



In the Cloquet and Cook Count areas, preconditions emerged from a history of inclusion-focused cohorts, structural tension due to lack of resources, and a desire to build trust across cultural lines. The system was strained—local institutions were facing capacity limits, and community members were fatigued by initiatives that came and went without leaving lasting change. However, there was a growing awareness that something had to shift. The spark came through a convergence of interest among local leaders and cross-sector partners who had long observed the gaps in community response and safety efforts. These included those working in Tribal governance, youth services, public health and restorative practices.


The conveners were identified not through hierarchy, but through humility. These were bridge-builders—individuals with strong relational networks and a trusted history of work in the region, who could move between agencies and communities, quietly tending the work of care without always naming it as such.



Important Definition:

Psychological Safety:

Psychological safety means feeling safe to show up as your full self—without fear of judgment, punishment, or exclusion. It's the foundation for trust, vulnerability, and honest dialogue, and it allows people to take risks, speak up, and engage fully in collective work.



In the Brainerd Lakes Area, the preconditions for launching the journey were rooted in years of quiet groundwork. A history of inclusion-focused cohorts and past initiatives like the Justice System Consortium created a latent readiness for a deeper community safety effort. A sense of urgency was rising—conversations about harm were increasing, but trusted spaces to hold them were not. The spark came from a series of moments where harm was done in the form of hate speech and protest against efforts for inclusion and welcoming in the region. There was a collective recognition: we need to move beyond listening toward action.

The Convenors in this region were already relationship-holders. They were the “quiet peacekeepers,” known across sectors for their trustworthiness. They had one foot in institutional work and another in grassroots connection. These were folks who had attended town meetings, checked in on neighbors, and built bridges without fanfare. They were known for saying, “I’m just about human rights,” and meaning it.



"This is the work I wish I knew how to do better—for my job and my life."

Once you have identified and invited the Convenors to join you (you may also be one of the Convenors), the next step is to work together to **CREATE YOUR CORE TEAM ROSTER.**

Who's joining you on this journey? Make a list of your allies—individuals, organizations, and unexpected companions. Reach out to folks that are already doing this work or that have a vested interest in community safety. Once they're identified, gather them and invite them to be part of your Core Team. This does not have to be a big group, just a group of reliable, curious, caring local residents ready to embark on a community safety journey. These will be vital connections, folks you will lean on, when the journey gets challenging. They will be the ones you celebrate with when you have those small wins.



Important Definition:

Peacekeeper: In the context of this guide, a Peacekeeper is a trusted community member who actively cultivates safety, care, and accountability. They are not enforcers, but stewards—using tools like de-escalation, deep listening, and cultural wisdom to prevent harm and hold space for healing.



Add the following to your

QUIVER OF CARE:



Curiosity and Care – hold space for the questions you don't yet know how to ask.

Pre-Conditions Map – a list of pre-conditions that you believe to exist to spark the need for a SAFE TOGETHER journey.

Conveners and Core Team Roster – the folks who will be joining you on your journey.

Now, brave Safety Seeker, with your Quiver of Care, Conveners, and Core Team in place, you may begin walking the path toward **SAFE TOGETHER: A Quest for Rural Minnesota Safety.**

PROLOGUE

TOKENS OF COMPLETION:



Preconditions have been named.



Conveners and Core Team have been identified, and connection has been established.



The Readiness Gate is in sight.



01





LEVEL 01

READINESS GATE

DEAR BRAVE SAFETY SEEKER,

Here you stand at the Readiness Gate. You pause. The air is quiet, expectant. Before you lies a threshold—not just of planning, but of mindset. This is where you take stock. Of your resources, your companions, your context. Of the time and care you are willing to invest. Readiness is not about certainty—it's about willingness. Ask yourself, and your Core Team, these questions to gauge your readiness.

READINESS QUESTIONS:

- ☐ **Did something happen in your community to initiate a need for community safety?**
 - That has created the conditions for a community safety project to take root?
- ☐ **Are you willing to lead with curiosity, rather than certainty?**
 - To slow down and build trust before taking action?
 - To listen deeply, even when it makes you uncomfortable?
 - To share power, even when the path ahead is unclear?
- ☐ **Are you ready to be engaged and explore your own biases?**
 - To dig, into data, into relationships, into issues?
 - To be personally invested in this work?
- ☐ **Are you ready to stick with it?**




01

01

In the Rural Minnesota Community Safety Project, we learned that **readiness lives at multiple levels** and the **reason for going on the journey varied in each region**:

- The readiness of individuals to step into discomfort.
- The readiness of organizations to share power and learn alongside.
- The readiness of communities to imagine new definitions of safety, together.

In some places, the path forward was clear. In others, barriers appeared: shifting staff, unclear timelines, competing priorities, capacity strains. The team learned that **without trust, accountability, and clear shared goals, the path falters**.



The Sowing Room recognized their readiness not through certainty, but through desire and action. Years of involvement in coalition work had prepared the soil, but something deeper had started to stir. A small group of committed individuals had already been hosting conversations about harm, belonging, and exclusion—and felt frustrated by the limitations of existing systems. When the opportunity emerged to build safety differently, they didn't have a blueprint, but they did have commitment. Their guideposts were compassion, trust in each other, and the belief that the community could do better—together.


They knew they were ready when they found themselves asking, "If not us, who?"



"Readiness isn't just institutional. It takes individual bravery to even talk about safety."



"We thought we had laid the groundwork... but wondered if the community was really ready."



In Northeastern Minnesota, readiness took a quieter form. At first, the Core Team questioned whether their inclusion-focused cohorts in the Cloquet and Cook County areas, the embers of readiness were already there—along with community leaders who had long walked the line between systems and grassroots care. Northspan saw readiness not in grand declarations, but in small, steady actions: youth stepping forward with curiosity, elders sharing stories of past wounds and future hopes, partners willing to experiment, show up, and adapt.

They knew they were ready when they saw that discomfort could be an invitation—not a barrier. And that even if only a few people stepped forward at first, those few could carry the flame.

01

For the Rural Minnesota Community Safety Pilot Project the Core Team in each region knew they were ready to move forward once they had gathered enough insight to sense which safety concerns were rising to the surface and which direction the community wanted to move toward. They gathered this input from one-on-one conversations, completed surveys, and listening deeply to hesitations as well as hopes. They learned that every step forward was built on trust, and trust could not be rushed.

Readiness takes time. The Readiness Gate doesn't open with force. It opens with an understanding that this work is complex, long-term, and built one relationship at a time. It asks for humility, accountability, and care. It asks you not to move faster than your community, but to move with them.

When you determine you are ready, cross the threshold. It is time for you and your Core Team to enter the next level: Hall of Learning, where you will become equipped with additional tools and resources that will assist you on your journey.



Add the following to your

QUIVER OF CARE:



Readiness Compass - knowledge that the Core Team is ready and committed to the journey. The conditions are right and you are not alone.

Beacon of Support - a way to locate, support, and trust those already holding threads of community care. This will guide you back to the strength of the relationships of your team when you get lost in logistics or the imminent challenges ahead.

LEVEL 01

TOKENS OF COMPLETION:



The Core Team is assembled and aligning.



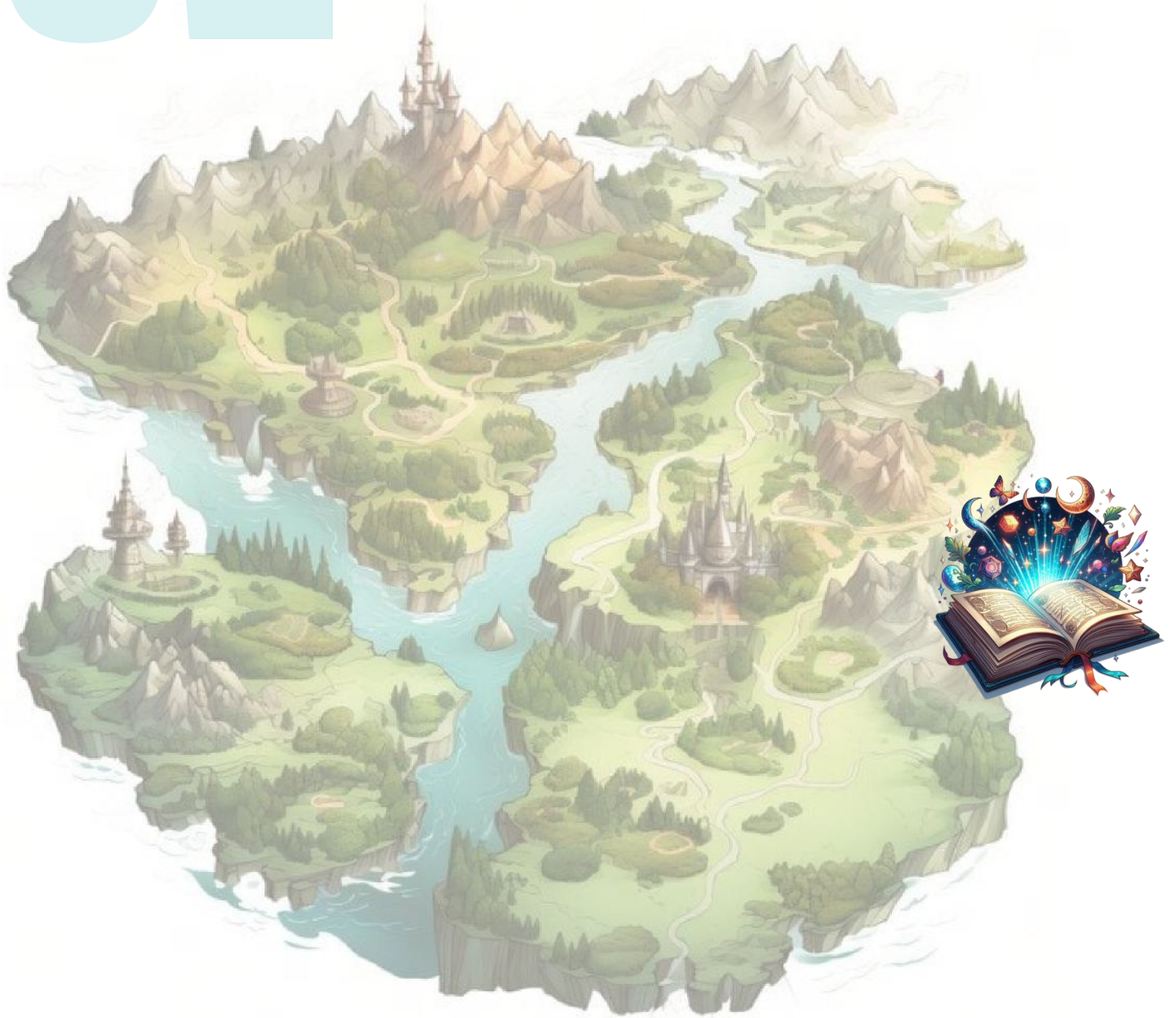
Readiness is uneven but growing. Relationships are forming.



You are prepared for the next quest: Hall of Learning.



02



LEVEL 02

HALL OF LEARNING

DEAR BRAVE SAFETY SEEKER,

Welcome to the Hall of Learning. You've passed through the Readiness Gate, and your Core Team has assembled. This is your moment to pause, root in, and prepare. Before you begin inviting others or exploring outward, you must first gather inward. Level 2 is about **Equipping and Building Trust with the Core Team and Mapping the Landscape.**

Equip Your Team: Here, your team will receive training from Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) and begin building the shared trust, language, and understanding needed to steward this work together. Through a series of tailored NP trainings, you and your team will gain foundational tools in unarmed civilian protection, de-escalation, situational awareness, and community-based safety practices.

This training isn't theoretical. It's personal. These are the very tools and principles you will be offering to others. Begin applying them in your own life and leadership. Learn by doing, reflecting, and embodying what peacebuilding looks like in practice.



02

These trainings are designed to ground you in shared values and a practical framework. NP can work with you on a curated training for your group. This might include:


- **Personal De-escalation (Window of Tolerance)** - A training that helps individuals recognize and regulate their own stress responses in order to stay grounded and effective during moments of conflict or crisis.
- **Community Awareness (OODA Loop)** - A training that introduces a decision-making cycle—Observe, Orient, Decide, Act—to help communities respond to threats with awareness, adaptability, and clarity. This training could be personalized for each community.
- **Upstander Intervention (CLARA)** - A training that equips participants with the CLARA framework—Center, Listen, Affirm, Respond, Add—to intervene in harmful situations in ways that prioritize care, safety, and dignity.
- **Role-Play Readiness (for Youth & Adults)** - An interactive training that uses real-life scenarios to practice de-escalation, nonviolence, intervention, and community safety skills in a supportive and reflective environment.




Pilot Learning – During the pilot, the NP trainings originally came after community sensing and engagement, but both teams emphasized the value of having them earlier. That shift in timing is now reflected here—allowing the Core Team to enter the listening phase more grounded, aligned, and prepared. We also held Core Team Story Circles with both The Sowing Room and Northspan, alongside Nonviolent Peaceforce staff to help build connection and trust between everyone working on the pilot project. We started to map the landscape and create the plan for outreach, alongside building trust with our Core Team.



“Mapping the safety landscape helped us realize who was already doing the work—and who had never been invited in before.”




In the Sowing Room's region, equipping began with 21 1:1 heartfelt conversations rooted in long-standing concerns around rising mental health crises and a lack of trusted public spaces. The team recognized early on that safety was about more than policing—it was about connection, and they were eager to learn how to build a culture of peace from the inside out.



Across Tribal, rural, and institutional lines, the Northspan team saw an urgent need for shared language and understanding during their inclusion cohorts. The early trainings gave the team both practical skills and a deeper sense of trust in one another. In one session, a participant said, “This work feels like a bridge—between generations, between cultures, between ideas of safety.”

Add the following to your

QUIVER OF CARE:

 **The Training Torch** – a source of light and learning passed from NP to your team.

Safety Assets and Story Circles Map – begin to chart what exists. Where will you listen? Where are the stories waiting to be shared? Who and where shall we gather to hear these stories?



Build Trust: The strength of your Core Team lies not only in its skills, but in its relationships. Take time to deepen trust. Share stories. Clarify expectations. Discuss boundaries and strengths. Practice listening, reflection, and co-leadership. Perhaps participate in a Core Team Story Circle to share experiences of safety and protection as a group.

SEE APPENDIX A for an example of a Core Team Story Circle

Map the Landscape: Start to identify other organizations in your community doing safety or safety-adjacent work. Familiarize yourself with their current initiatives. Let the connections between them emerge organically as you and the Core Team begin thinking about questions you want to ask your community. Identify places you may want to hold Community Story Circles. Create a list of folks you may want to invite to participate in Community Story Circles and/or to join the Core Team as it grows.

*It could be helpful to use a physical map of your community to begin mapping and identifying the safety assets in your community. Identify both formal and informal places of safety.

There may be tensions that arise as differing opinions on where and what provides safety. There is no right answer, just information. Ask questions like:



- ☐ What are places/organizations/institutions that might feel safe for some and not others? Where do tensions related to safety exist?
- ☐ Is there already work happening to strengthen the community safety ecosystem? Why or why not?
- ☐ What causes some people to feel safe in a certain place and not others?
- ☐ Are there third places - places outside of home and work - where people gather and feel safe?
- ☐ Where are the biggest safety gaps in our community?

Once you have Equipped your Team and Created your Safety Asset Map, you are ready to move to the next level: Listening Grounds, where you will begin hearing directly from the community.

LEVEL 02

TOKENS OF COMPLETION:



The Core Team is trained in NP safety practices.



Trust and shared purpose are growing.



Existing safety assets are mapped, with locations and individuals named as possible partners and participants.

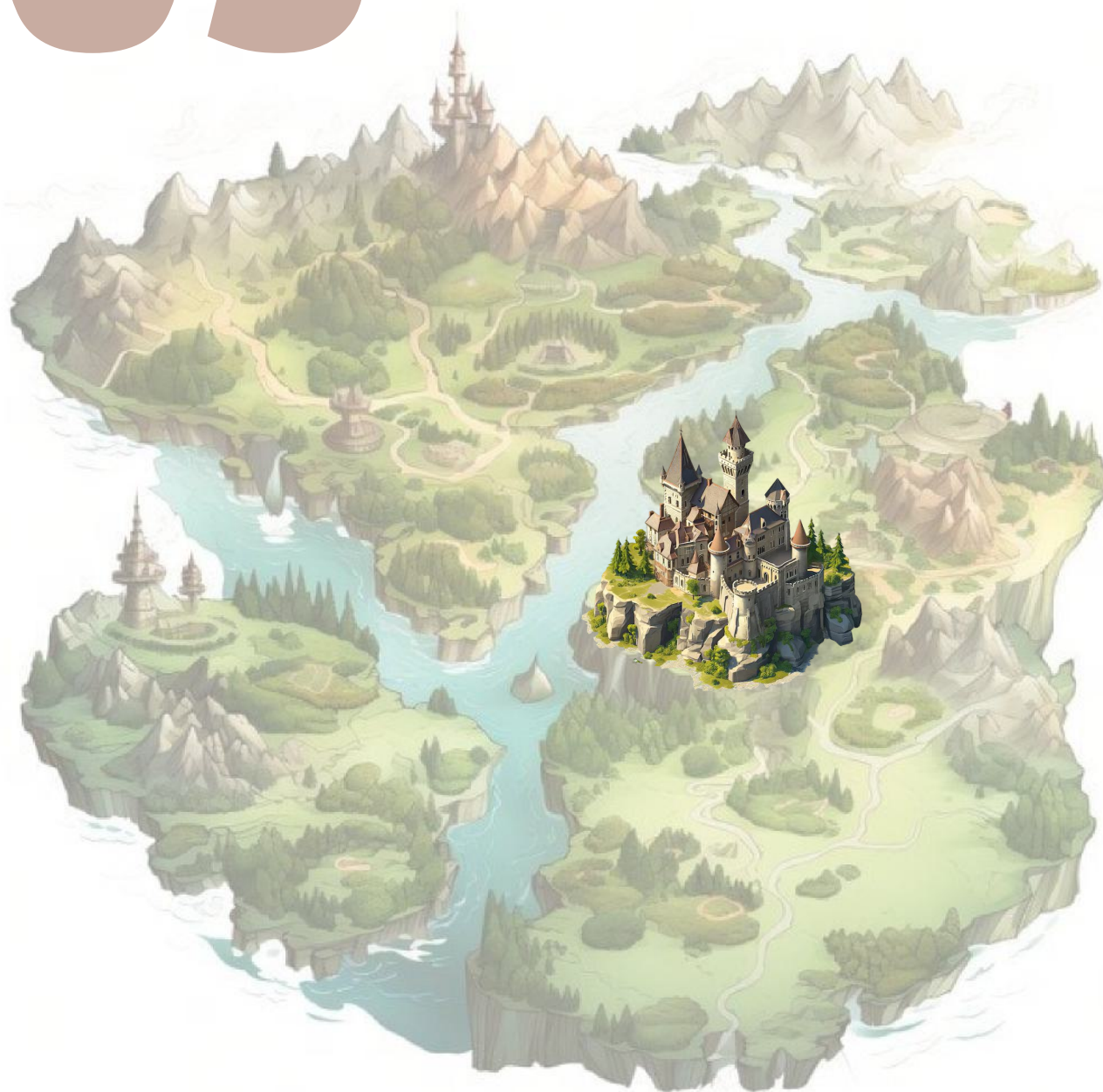


You are ready to enter Listening Grounds.



“I looked at the NP training library and wanted to do every single one”

03





LEVEL 03

LISTENING GROUNDS

DEAR BRAVE SAFETY SEEKER,

You have entered the Listening Grounds—a landscape not of answers, but of questions. This is where your Core Team leaves the comfort of its inner circle and steps into the community to listen deeply. To sense. To observe. To ask what safety means here, and why it does or doesn't exist for everyone.

At this stage, you don't arrive with solutions. You arrive with presence. **Your role now is Listener. Researcher. Witness.**

You and your Core Team engage in story circles, one-on-one interviews, surveys, and community events. You walk the streets. Sit at the coffee shop. Attend City Council and School Board meetings. Show up not just where it's comfortable, but where tensions are visible or hidden.



"We learned to listen through tension, not avoid it."



03

03

This is not a neat process. It's messy. Emotional. Ambiguous. You might not know how to explain it to others yet—and that's okay. You're listening for undercurrents. Listening reveals fractures between systems and relationships, between institutions and lived experience.

Listening Grounds may look and feel different in each place. The key component is that you and your Core Team hear from as many different perspectives as possible, to help understand and identify the core safety needs in your community. Trust deepens when people are invited to reflect on what safety means in real life, not just theory. Some examples of what this might look like include:

- Host or attend community events. Be visible. Be present. Be all over the place.
- Partner with others to host **Story Circles** that invite lived experience.
- Conduct **1:1 Interviews** with as many community members as your team can; asking the same questions and keeping track of the answers to search for common themes.
- Use **Surveys** to reach broader audiences and identify patterns.
- Practice **Conflict Context Analysis**: What are the known problems? Where are people feeling fear or tension? What narratives are surfacing?



SEE APPENDIX B for Description of Story Circles, Samples Questions, and Tools to use in The Listening Grounds.

During this process of listening or Community Sensing, notice:

- ☐ Who participates?
- ☐ Who doesn't participate?
- ☐ Who trusts you enough to speak?
- ☐ Who doesn't yet speak up?
- ☐ What themes are emerging?
- ☐ Where do tensions exist?



Be sure to keep good notes in a shared location. Bring the Core Team together to reflect on what you're hearing. Allow what you hear to shape who you connect with and what comes next.



"Youth Story Circles surfaced concerns no one else had named."

03

Remember: the goal isn't just data collection—it's relationship building, meaning making, and grounding your next steps in the lived experiences of your community.

During this level, it is recommended to host a public event or training to introduce the project to your region -- **The First Workshop (a.k.a. The Messy Workshop)**. This is an introductory workshop in which you bring together partners and community members that have shown early interest, to see how the tools are landing and what additional needs emerge. This should happen following or in conjunction with Story Circles and Survey Collection. At this first public event to the community you may offer basic tools from NP like:



- **OODA Loop** (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act)
- **CLARA** (Calm, Listen, Affirm, Respond, Add)
- **Window of Tolerance** (Self and community regulation)
- **Holistic Safety & Security** (defining community safety and mutual protection)
- **De-escalation & Updatander Intervention** (tactics for conflict intervention)
- **Situational Awareness** (experiential awareness and intentional decision making in moments of conflict)
- **Paradigm Shift** (Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) principles in daily life)



"It was hard to get people in the room who didn't already trust us."

Let this workshop be a light entry. Let it be co-facilitated by NP and members of your Core Team. You're not looking for consensus. You are not looking for this workshop to offer solutions. You're looking for clarity. What needs are emerging? What existing resources can be activated? Where is safety fragile? Where is it strong? What is the appetite for community safety?


Once you have completed a solid round of community sensing and engagement in the Listening Grounds, it is time to move forward with the information gathered to work with your community to create a shared purpose.

This level may take some time. Let it. Listening is not only a strategy, it is an act of healing.

Top community tensions leading to safety concerns identified through surveys:

- **Northspan: Substance Abuse/Addiction, Mental Health Issues, Cultural Difference, Economic Inequality, Political Polarization, New vs. Long-term Resident Conflicts**
- **The Sowing Room: Politics, Racism, Religion, LGBTQIA+, Drug Use, Poverty**

03



For The Sowing Room, trust was not taken for granted—it was built one story, one circle, one conversation at a time. The Sowing Room guided this work with humility and creativity, recognizing that equipping a community starts with deeply listening to its lived experience. Their Core Team cultivated trust by naming tensions, sharing lived realities, and practicing safety in community. When a participant shared, “We make us safe;” it became a guiding mantra—emphasizing that safety is a collective practice. They held 4 Story Circles with trauma-awareness and compassion, surfacing tensions like gender-based violence, intergenerational mistrust, and rural mental health stigma. The Sowing Room reminded us that just being present and available—at a kitchen table, in the library, or after a community event—was a kind of care.



“Once we started listening, the direction became clear.”

The Sowing Room

- 21 1:1 Conversations
- 76 Survey Responses
- 4 Story Circles




Northspan - Cloquet and Cook County

- 5 Story Circles
- 2 In-Depth Interviews
- 85 Survey Responses (Cook County)
- 90 Survey Responses (Cloquet)



“This work will step on government toes—it has to be held by community, not government. Lives depend on it.”



In the Cloquet and Cook County areas, Northspan modeled flexibility and relationship-first organizing, bringing humility, consistency, and a deep respect for Indigenous and rural wisdom. Their team learned to listen in complex cultural landscapes—spaces where multiple truths live side by side. Their region showed up with rich reflections on psychological and cultural safety—especially among young people. Northspan helped illuminate the reality that people didn’t always know how to articulate why they felt unsafe—but they “knew it in their bones.” They created pathways for stories to emerge organically—sometimes through a formal circle or widespread survey, sometimes at the end of a long conversation after a community event.

03



“Building trust within the team was just as important as the skills we learned.”

Pilot Learning – Both regions showed that equipping a Core Team is not about perfect tools, but practiced ones. The guides learned that the most powerful tool is the courage to keep showing up with care and curiosity. In both regions, the process of Community Sensing helped clarify definitions of safety, shared language, who was trusted and why—and why safety work must be led by those already holding threads of care.

SEE APPENDIX C for high-level survey results from Northspan and The Sowing Room regions.



Add the following to your **QUIVER OF CARE:**

The Listening Lens – a tool to help you focus on what’s underneath the words and what themes are emerging across multiple conversations and engagements.

The Echo Journal – where you and your Core Team record what you’re hearing, sensing, and noticing.

The Sprout of Knowledge - gained information about how your community perceives and experiences physical and psychological safety, that will help inform future trainings, workshops, and events.



LEVEL 03

TOKENS OF COMPLETION:



Community sensing has begun.



Story Circles and Interviews are underway.



A deeper understanding of safety, tension, and relationships is forming.



More community members involved and learning about the effort.



Readiness for the next quest: Commons of Intention.



04





LEVEL 04

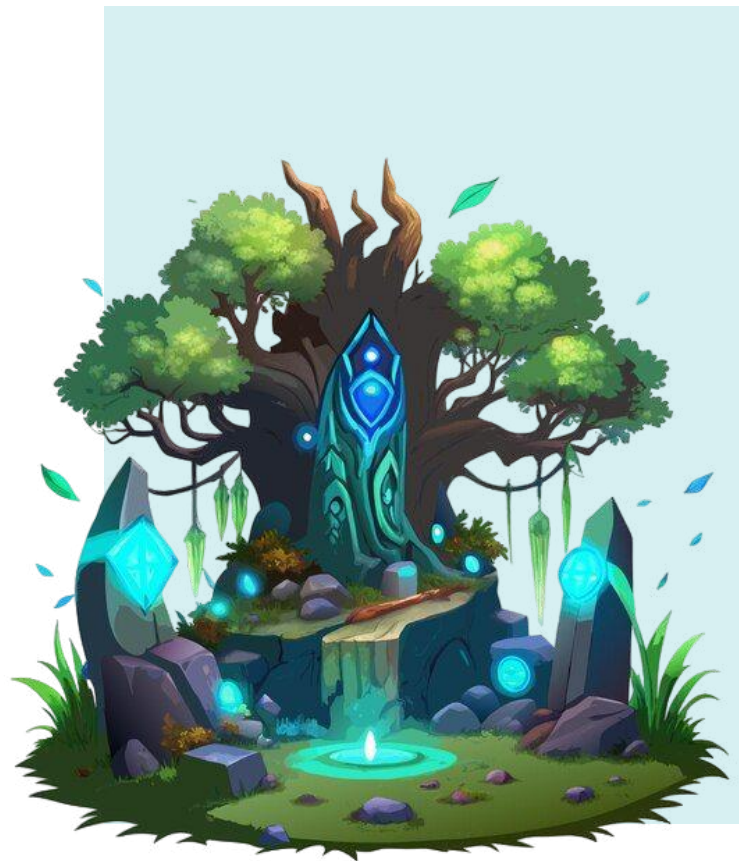
COMMONS OF INTENTION

DEAR BRAVE SAFETY SEEKER,

Let us gather in the Commons of Intention—a place where community voices converge, and a shared sense of purpose begins to emerge. Here, your Core Team returns from the Listening Grounds not to declare what's next, but to ask: **what do we build, together?**

This is where direction takes shape—not from outside expertise, but from inside wisdom. You are not here to impose a vision. You are here to co-create one.

Define a Common Purpose: You have your Core Team, now it is time to widen the circle. Invite in those who shared stories, who showed up on your Safety Asset Map, and those whose voices were missing. Host a community gathering—a circle, a potluck, a town hall, a storytelling night. This is a moment to return what you've heard back to the community and ask: **where do we go from here?** This isn't about solving every problem. It's about choosing a focus—together.



"Everyone had a different idea of what safety meant, but we found a shared purpose in creating spaces where people could talk about it."

04

One example of an event that can help you create shared purpose is called **“Who’s at Your Table?”** which is a facilitated conversation over a shared meal that might look something like this:

- Partnering with another Core Team member or a local organization
- Bringing together a diverse group: youth, elders, caregivers, skeptics, people impacted by physical and psychological safety concerns
 - Sharing back what surfaced from the Listening Grounds:
 - What stories stood out?
 - What themes repeated?
 - What tensions remain unresolved?
- Facilitating dialogue that moves toward shared purpose:
 - What already keeps us safe?
 - Where is safety fragile or fractured?
 - What is our shared aspiration?
 - What are we willing to focus on together?
- Ending the event with a Commitment Pledge.



Honor divergent views while finding common ground. Use participatory processes like consensus workshops, sticky-note clustering, or visual mapping.

When consensus on a direction has been reached, state the co-created shared intention. Return to it often to help guide the process.

See **APPENDIX D** for example event flow and template.



“We didn’t try to do everything. We did something. And it built momentum.”



“We weren’t just doing safety work—we were building belonging.”



The Sowing Room emerged from the Listening Grounds with a deep sense of relational commitment. They hosted 3 “Who’s At Your Table?” gatherings that brought together neighbors who had never sat together before. Their common purpose included creating bridges across generational divides and building shared language around safety and belonging. They emphasized naming the threats and centering shared values were essential for community buy-in—and that beginnings were most powerful when grounded in lived experience and hosted with hospitality.



In the Cloquet and Cook County areas, Northspan’s Core Team facilitated gatherings that brought transparency, cultural humility, and courage into the process. They found common purpose in the intentional inclusion of Native residents, youth, and service provider voices. This allowed the group to name systemic challenges—especially around trust and access to care—without losing hope. In Cook County, youth leadership helped steer the Common Purpose toward inclusivity, while Cloquet focused on reframing safety through the lens of community-led response rather than enforcement. They emphasized care as infrastructure, and their intention-setting included youth voices and ceremonial practices rooted in indigenous culture.

Name the Threats to Community Safety: This may also be the time to narrow the focus of your work together by naming threats. However, it's important to ask: **Are we ready?** If more trust is needed, you can revisit this later. If you're ready to identify threats together, ask:



- ☐ What kinds of threats are we facing—interpersonal, systemic, environmental?
- ☐ Who is most impacted?
- ☐ Do we need a **Threat Assessment Workshop** from NP now—or later?
- ☐ What specific effort feels possible and powerful right now?



“We were already doing care work. But now we had a shared framework, shared words. That changed everything.”

See **APPENDIX E** for a sample Threat Assessment Tool.

Reminder: Your goal is not agreement. Your goal is alignment—to find a purpose big enough to hold difference and strong enough to carry you forward. Name this common purpose and use it as your North Star when challenges arise on the journey ahead.



Add the following to your

QUIVER OF CARE:



The Coals of Common Purpose – threats have been named and commitment made to address them by a group of diverse community members.

The North Star – you've articulated a common purpose. This will guide your group through complexity, tension, and change.

LEVEL 04

TOKENS OF COMPLETION:



Community members have gathered to define shared safety goals.



A Common Purpose has been named (or is in development).



A wider circle of buy-in and momentum is forming.



The Core Team is aligned with a shared purpose and directed energy.



Readiness for the Next Quest: Level 5 – River of Convergence.



05





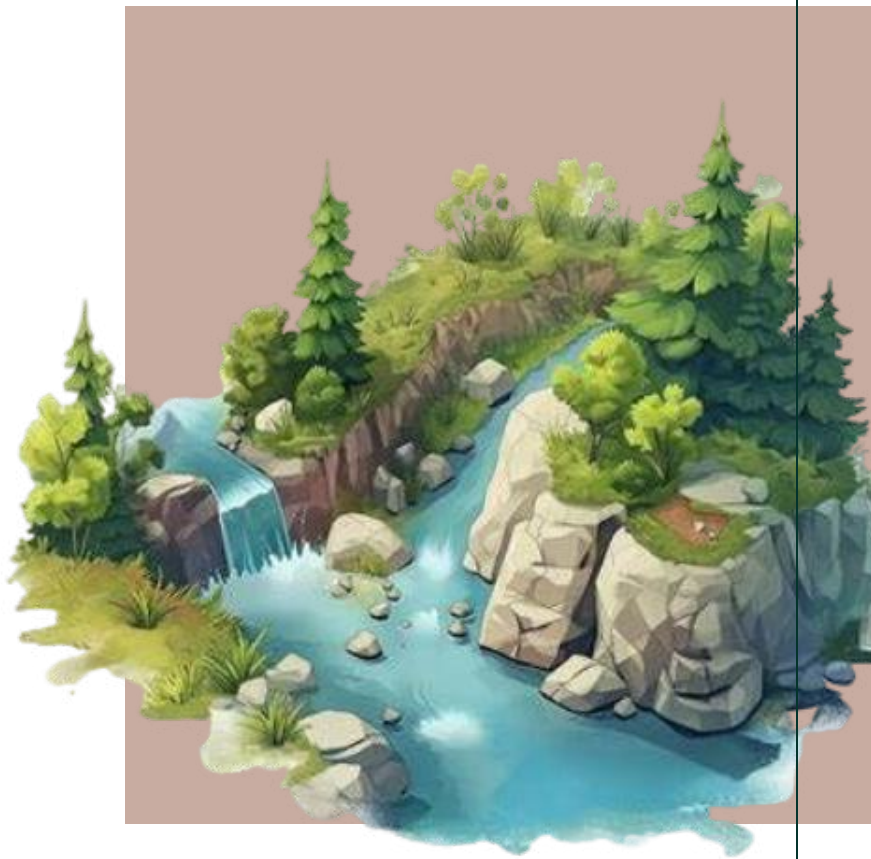
LEVEL 05

RIVER OF CONVERGENCE

DEAR BRAVE SAFETY SEEKER,

You have now entered the **River of Convergence**—a flowing place where ideas merge, energy gathers, and the current begins to shape a new direction. This is where all you’ve learned and all you’ve listened to come together. The many streams of insight, experience, and community wisdom now meet, carving out the beginnings of what’s next. In these waters, your Core Team—and those who’ve joined the circle—begin to co-create the gatherings, programs, workshops, and interventions that bring your shared safety vision to life.

This level is not just about planning—it’s about **co-creating with intention** and letting the river guide you. You are not building in isolation; you are moving in relationship. You are not delivering something to the community. You are designing *with* the community. Here, co-creation flows from trust, creativity, and collective intention. Your Core Team becomes a vessel—not of control, but of coordination—steering with care while making space for new voices to join the current. What emerges from this confluence is shaped by many hands and hearts, and carries with it the momentum of every step you’ve taken so far.



05

Co-Create the Flow: This is your “choose your own adventure” moment. Based on what you've learned and where your energy is gathering, decide which offerings, events, trainings, or gatherings to create. This could look like:

- A series of full or half-day safety trainings for community members
- Youth safety initiatives
- Train-the-trainer programs
- Safety seminars and/or community fairs
- De-escalation workshops
- Safety practitioner cohorts
- Story-based healing spaces
- Movie and discussion nights
- Book clubs
- Or something that hasn't existed—yet



This is your “CHOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE” moment!



"It helped to start small. One gathering. One story circle. Then we expanded."

With your shared purpose now guiding you, your growing Core Team steps into the role of co-designers—transforming insight into action. Return to the themes that surfaced in your Listening Grounds and let your common purpose illuminate your next moves. Together, begin outlining events, drafting training timelines, or shaping workshops that respond directly to community needs.

SEE APPENDIX F: Emergent Programming ideas created after Community Sensing in the Brainerd Lakes Area.



"Having sample curricula and a menu of options gave us the confidence to adapt and build."

In the pilot project, both The Sowing Room and Northspan used this stage to transform what they'd heard into locally resonant offerings. The Sowing Room worked with partners to co-design activities that blended creativity with safety-building—continuing the Who's At Your Table events by adapting them to include elements of trainings like Threat Assessments, etc.



Northspan adapted training priorities based on survey feedback, emphasizing the tools most relevant to the community: de-escalation, upstander intervention, and trauma-informed communication. This responsiveness helped build early trust and created a pathway for greater engagement.

From both sites, the guidance was clear: start with what already exists. Use community knowledge, cultural assets, and existing networks as scaffolding. And don't wait for perfect—begin small, test ideas, and refine together.

05



"The first time we ran a workshop, it was a little clunky—but people still said it mattered. That encouraged us to keep going."

In this stage, prototyping is key: test ideas with small groups, gather feedback, and iterate. Infuse each design with cultural relevance—through art, food, music, and local traditions that reflect the spirit of your place.

Just as important as what you create is how you bring it together: refine your internal roles, clarify who is doing what, and make intentional space for shared facilitation, coordination, and creative leadership within the Core Team. Co-creation is not only about what you build—it's about how you build it, and who builds it with you.

In the River of Convergence, you may visit the Menu of Offerings from NP and start to decide which trainings, tools, and workshops you would like to bring to your community.

SEE APPENDIX G: Menu of Offerings.

Once you have outlined a plan and timeline for an iterative design process, it is time to enter the Field of Practice.



Add the following to your

QUIVER OF CARE:



The Design Compass – helps you stay oriented toward your North Star while adapting to changing needs.

The Band of Flexibility – a reminder that this journey is iterative; you'll come back to this forest again and again.

The Blueprint Scrolls – draft plans, training agendas, or program outlines to test and refine.

LEVEL 05

TOKENS OF COMPLETION:



Offerings, gatherings, or programs are co-designed.



Materials and workshop/training curricula are drafted and ready to pilot.



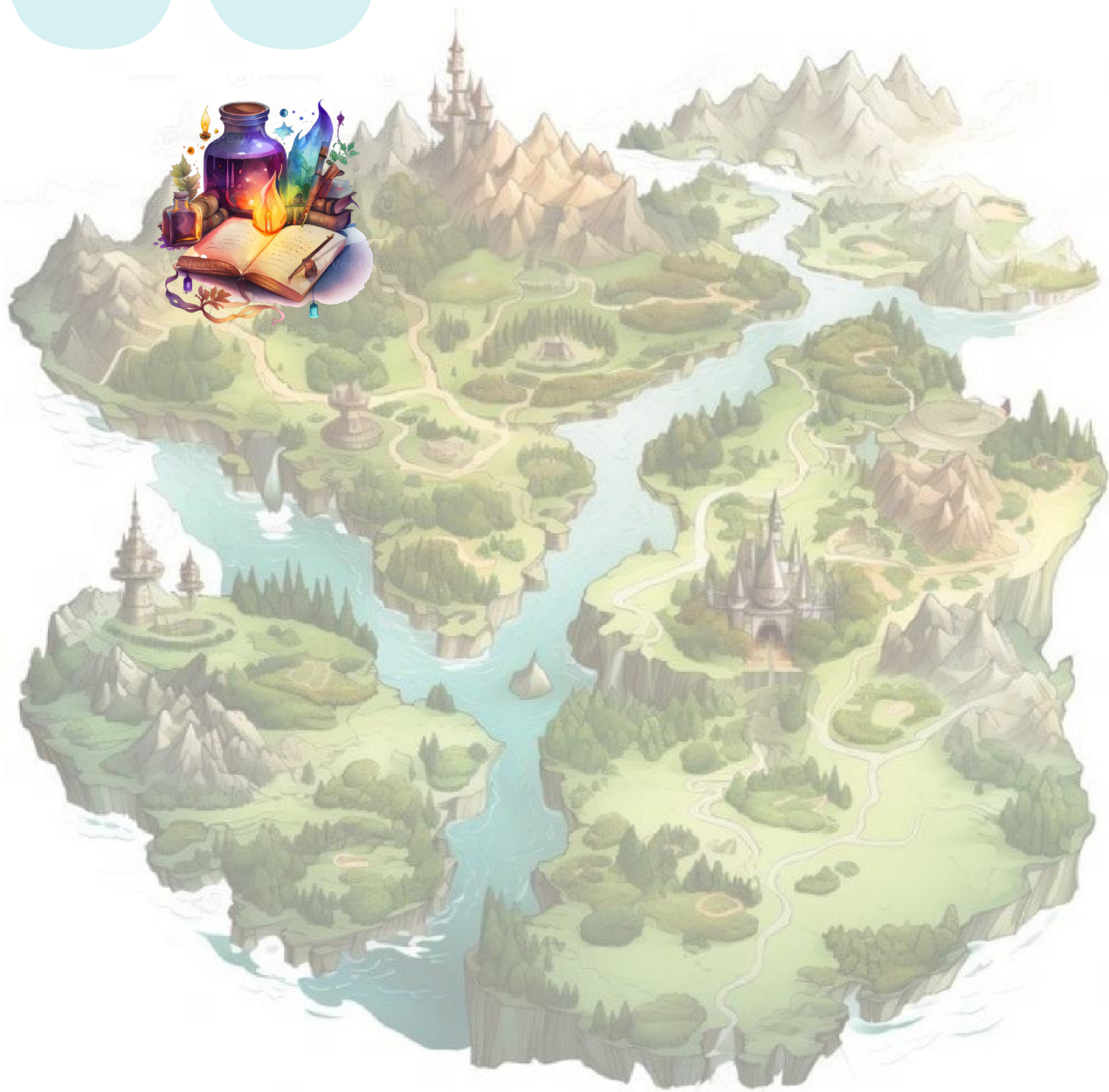
Core Team and partner roles are clarified.



You are ready to enter the Apothecary of Practice.



06



LEVEL 06

APOTHECARY OF PRACTICE

DEAR BRAVE SAFETY SEEKER,

Open the door and step inside the **Apothecary of Practice**—a space where wisdom is blended with care, and practical tools become healing remedies for our communities. After shaping a shared purpose and designing a strategy, your team now begins to mix, measure, and share the ingredients of safety in real time. This is the moment when community safety becomes a shared practice—not just a shared idea.

In this apothecary, tools and tonics are not just handed out—they're tested, refined, and offered with intention. Here, you deepen your collective capacity through trainings, de-escalation practice, and exploration of conflict and regulation. This is also where your circle expands—where peacekeepers, bridge-builders, caregivers, and curious neighbors are invited to blend their strengths into the mix. The **Apothecary of Practice is where the work becomes tangible:** where neighbors gather, skills are exchanged, and trust begins to take root.

Like a well-tended remedy, your gatherings are crafted to fit your community's unique conditions—responsive to local culture, timing, and readiness. Whether through formal workshops or informal rituals, the goal remains: to **embed these tools into daily life** and nurture a resilient culture of care and accountability that lasts.



06

06

Below are key approaches to equipping your people with practical tools that nurture a culture of safety, care, and accountability:

- Offer **workshops and training series** (on your own or in partnership with NP) tailored to your community's culture, schedules, and needs.
- Blend **formal training** (NP's curriculum, Threat Assessment, Holistic Safety, Nonviolence, Situational Awareness) with **informal gatherings** (potlucks, story circles, movie nights, community dinners).
- **Work across difference**—bring together people from various sectors, backgrounds, and ideologies.
- **Incorporate cultural practices** into your learning spaces. Let local traditions, culture and pace guide tone and rhythm.



Pilot Learnings: Here are a few lessons learned from rural partners who have already begun walking this path. These practical tips help smooth the way, especially when balancing capacity, engagement, and complexity.

- Use a **mix of in-person and virtual gatherings** to meet accessibility needs.
- Make time for **practice**, not just theory—role-play scenarios, journal, debrief together.
- **Be responsive:** attend local events, offer short drop-in trainings, or partner with existing groups.
- **Don't rush.** Return often to what you've already taught.
- **Repetition is part of rooting.** Return to what you've already taught.



“We used the CLARA model in our town hall and it changed the tone of the whole night.”



**“People wanted to dig into the tools, but they also wanted to see how we'd use them—
together.”**

In the Brainerd Lakes Area, The Sowing Room entered the Apothecary of Practice with a deep commitment to cultural grounding and relational trust. They focused on informal and accessible safety learning, partnering with local leaders and organizations to host gatherings that were welcoming and rooted in local tradition with local partners.



- Hosted 7 events in the region, including community trainings and "Who's At Your Table" events.
- Engaged over 80 participants during the course of the project, including youth, elders, artists, and nonprofit professionals.
- Focused on culturally responsive formats—leaned into Indigenous knowledge systems, emphasizing connection, storytelling, and accountability.
- Co-designed workshops that included youth-led scenarios and responses to real community issues.

“We're not just equipping people with tools. We're reviving what has always kept us safe: community care, storytelling, ritual, connection.”

→ Quote from a Sowing Room core team member during debrief

Add the following to your

QUIVER OF CARE:



The Practice Instrument – sharp but unfinished, this tool improves with each use.

The Reflective Mirror – a prompt for personal and team check-ins: Are we growing? Where do we need more practice?

The Nesting Circle – community gatherings layered with trust, skill, and connection.



In the Cloquet and Cook County areas, Northspan designed and delivered public safety workshops shaped directly by community listening and survey data. Their Apothecary of Practice prioritized structured learning environments with clear takeaways, while maintaining flexibility for informal community feedback and iteration. They specifically focused on engaging the local Native communities and ensured their training series and events had cultural grounding.



- Hosted 8 community-based trainings and events in Cloquet and Cook County.
- Engaged over 100 participants during the course of the project, including service providers, students, artists, nonprofit professionals, and city leaders.
- Offered workshops and trainings in partnership with Nonviolent Peaceforce, with local adaptations based on regional survey data and cultural grounding.
- Facilitated practice-driven sessions using NP Curriculum, along with storytelling and group reflection.

“We didn’t start with assumptions. We started with questions: How do people here want to learn? And how can we meet them where they are?”

→ Quote from Northspan training facilitator in program reflection

LEVEL 06

TOKENS OF COMPLETION:



Community members have access to tools and trainings.



Informal events and programs designed specifically for your community’s needs begin to take root.



Cultural elements are woven into the practice.



Core Team and allies are growing their skills and confidence.



A broader circle of safety keepers is forming.



Safety Keepers are ready to walk together toward the Deep Rooted Tree.



07





LEVEL 07

DEEP ROOTED TREE

DEAR BRAVE SAFETY SEEKER,

You have reached the Deep Rooted Tree—where commitment deepens, and the seeds of long-term change begin to anchor. You’ve moved from listening to action, from imagining safety to practicing it. Now the question becomes: **how do we make it last?**

This is the place of local capacity. Of stewardship. Of community ownership.

It’s where your Core Team begins to step back just enough—so others can step in. The Deep Rooted Tree is not a place of endings—it’s a turning point. It’s where your rooted work begins to reach beyond the Core Team and into the daily lives of neighbors, schools, gatherings, and institutions.

Build community-rooted capacity: You’ve asked the questions. You’ve trained and equipped. Now it’s time to grow the circle. In this level, you focus on sustainability—mentorship, local leadership, and shared ownership. You shift from doing the work to supporting others in doing it.



“That shift—from ‘what’s wrong’ to ‘what can we do’—was the turning point.”



07

Below are practical strategies drawn from the field to help your team support long-term stewardship and embed safety into the culture of your community:

- Host a **“Commitment Gathering”** where participants name their next steps and perhaps make a new Shared Commitment Pledge. Ask:
 - What will you do with what you’ve learned?
 - How will you stay connected to others doing this work?
 - What will you commit to for yourself? What will you commit to for your neighbor?
- **Story Circle Revisited:** Revisit your purpose through shared stories. What sparked this journey? What do you hope to learn, change, or build together? This is your chance to align—on the path, the pace, and the power you want to cultivate as a team.
- Launch a **Train-the-Trainer** program for local peacekeepers, facilitators, and allies.
- Create **mentorship pairs or pods** to support learning, accountability, and care.
- Identify and **uplift emerging leaders**. Share power. Practice stepping aside with trust. Ask together:
 - What will it take to sustain this work here?
 - What needs to be in place for it to live beyond us?



As you and the Core Team transition leadership, it is important to make the work you have done already accessible and available to those joining the journey. Make commitments visible with shared documents and resource libraries. Provide support scaffolds that include outlining clear roles and check-in structures. Stay in relationship—but don’t hold the center forever. Let it rotate. And share your story.

Sharing the impact: Evaluation doesn’t just mean metrics—it means meaning. Sustaining the work also means learning from it. But success should be defined by your community—not imposed from outside— and be based on your community’s values, culture, and vision. Create your own ways to track, celebrate, and share progress. Use both quantitative and qualitative approaches:

- Track training attendance, participation, and engagement across events.
- Conduct short reflection surveys or interviews after gatherings.
- Collect creative forms of reporting—zines, murals, audio diaries, digital storytelling.
- Revisit your Safety Asset Map: what has strengthened? What gaps remain?



In both Cloquet and Cook County Areas and the Brainerd Lakes Area, the path toward long-term sustainability took shape through building confidence in facilitation, leaning into cultural grounding, and cultivating shared ownership. Core Teams began to shift from leading every effort to supporting others in stepping into leadership roles.

One participant asked, “How do we ensure long-term steps for humanizing each other?” The answer came not in any single gathering—but in the way roles were handed over, ideas were shared, and community members took ownership. In both regions, sustainability was not a static goal—it was a dynamic practice rooted in trust, tradition, and shared care.

07

Add the following to your

QUIVER OF CARE:

The Steward's Stone – a symbol of community-held leadership, passed from hand to hand.

The Legacy Ledger – a living document of commitments, plans, and next steps.

The Measuring Stick – be sure to track and measure your progress in the way that makes sense for you and your community; choose your own ways of measuring success.



Let storytelling lead. Data supports the story—but doesn't replace it. Blend **storytelling** and **creative reporting** with **data collection**. Use community-led evaluation tools that ask:

- ☐ What are we learning? What's shifting?
- ☐ What stories are unfolding?
- ☐ What feels different in our community?
- ☐ Who is participating now that wasn't before?
- ☐ Where are we seeing moments of care, protection, or transformation?
- ☐ How has our sense of safety changed?



SEE APPENDIX H: Community-Centered Evaluation Framework Worksheet for additional ideas

Your evaluation should mirror your community: relational, reflective, and rooted in lived experience. Tell the story of your place and how you grew and changed over this journey. It will inspire others to do the same, and continue to fan the flames of a rural community safety movement.



“Leadership is no longer a person—it’s a practice we carry together.”

LEVEL 07

TOKENS OF COMPLETION:



Local leaders have been equipped to carry the work forward.



Community members have made commitments to action.



Mentorship and train-the-trainer models are in place.



Evaluation practices reflect community-defined success.



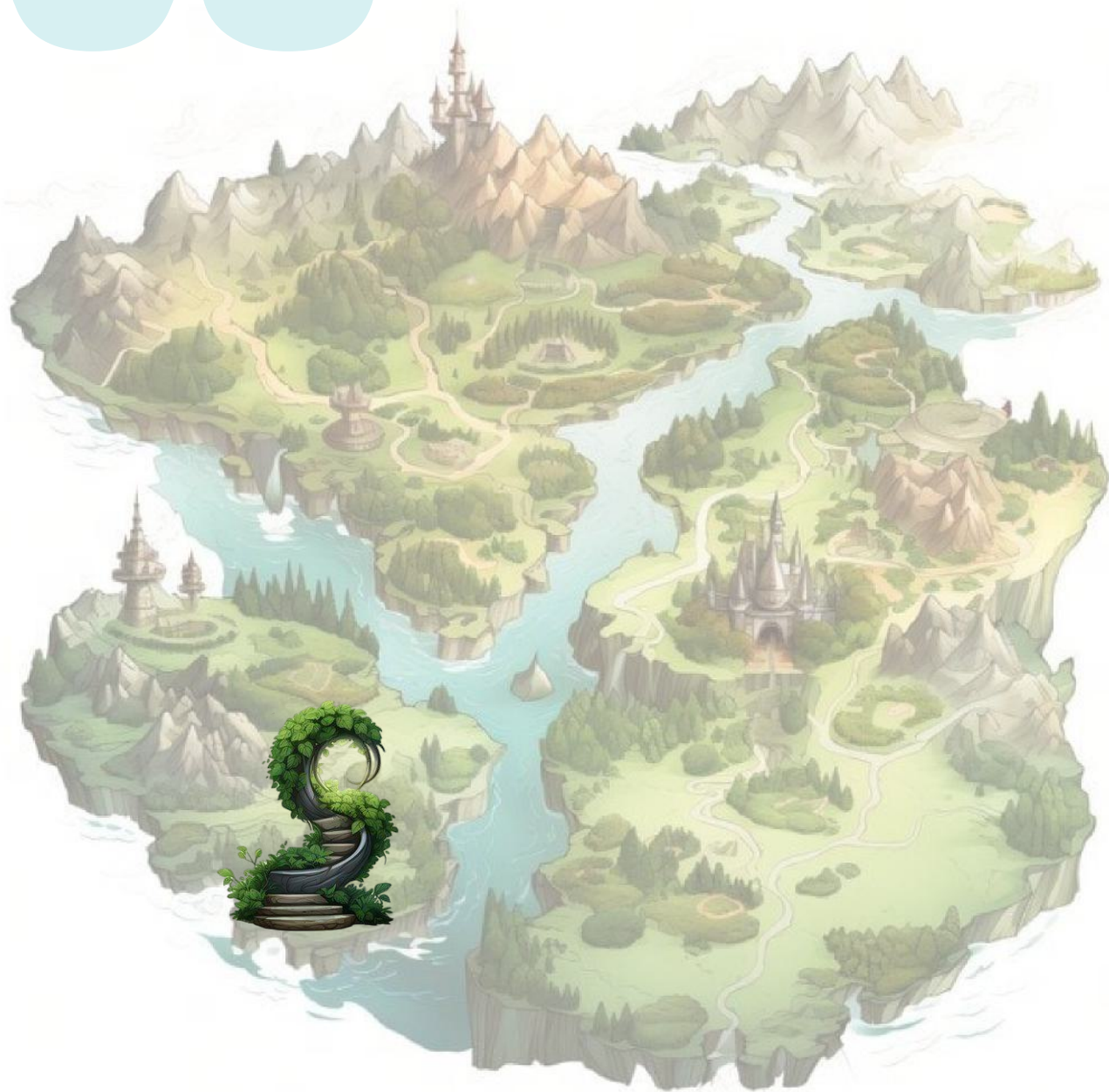
The work is growing roots—anchored in people, place, and purpose.



You are ready for the Spiral Path.



08





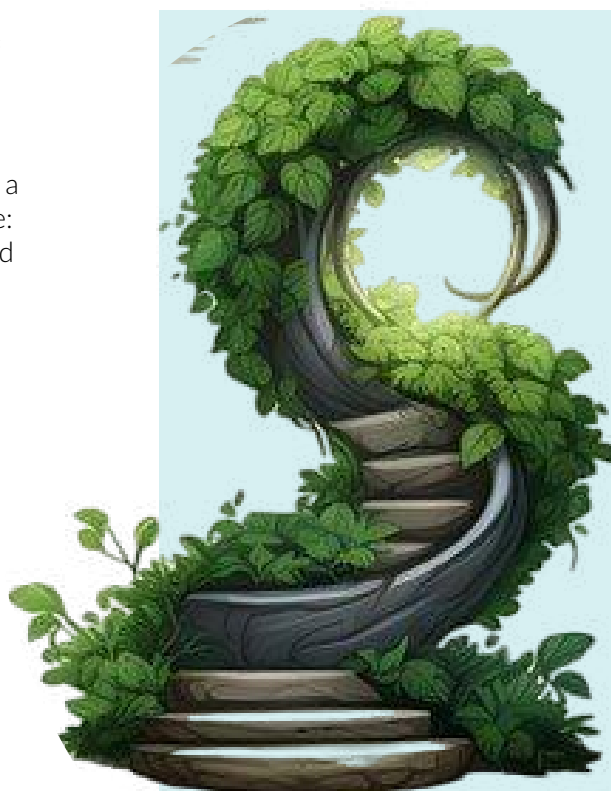
LEVEL 08

SPIRAL PATH

DEAR BRAVE SAFETY SEEKER,

You have arrived at The Spiral Path—a place of return, renewal, and rooted evolution. You’ve walked through listening and learning, co-creation and practice, anchoring and adaptation. Now, the path curves—not toward a finish line, but toward something more durable: a living, breathing culture of community-rooted safety.

The Spiral Path is where endings become beginnings. Where what you’ve built begins to sustain itself—not only through programs or policies, but through people, patterns, and place-based trust. It’s the turn toward stewardship. Legacy. Long-term care.



“It’s not about scaling up. It’s about spiraling out. We just need to keep inviting people in.”

08

This wisdom reminds us: **sustainability is not about perfection. It's about shared stewardship.** It means letting go of hero models and embracing handoffs. It means rooting the work in community pace and capacity. It means designing not just for impact, but for endurance.

Together with your Core Team and the growing constellation of community peacekeepers, explore:

- ☐ Who is ready to carry the work forward?
- ☐ What do we need to keep the flame alive—without burning out?
- ☐ What rhythms, relationships, and resource-sharing will help this work live and breathe into the future?



This is the moment where momentum becomes rootedness—where the work shifts from short-term initiative to long-term infrastructure.

It is not a starting over, it is a looping back to find another intrepid group of safety seekers, and help them on their journey.

Remember: As you walk the spiral path, there are key tools to keep handy. These tools are not fixed templates, but adaptable strategies—designed to flex with your evolving community ecosystem:

- **Identify a Core Circle** of local peacekeepers, storyholders, youth leaders, and safety stewards ready to keep the vision alive.
- **Create a Rhythm**—monthly circles, seasonal story nights, annual community check-ins, shared rituals, or collaborative projects. Let these rhythms be spacious and responsive, not burdensome.
- **Connect Regionally**—join or spark a Community of Practice across rural communities doing similar work. Cross-pollinate ideas. Celebrate wins. Hold each other in the long haul.
- **Revisit What Worked**—focus your energy on the programs, moments, or gatherings that felt most alive. Nourish what resonated.
- **Plan for Change**—assume turnover, transformation, and pauses. Design roles and resources that can be picked up and passed on with ease.



"This work started small—but the ripple effect is real."

08

During this level, the process is iterative, circling back to gather more people, partners, and ideas for how to move community safety work forward in your community. It is a spiral with no beginning or end. A journey that grows as it goes. But this journey requires resources in order to continue.

Resourcing the Work: Sustaining community safety efforts requires not only people power—but financial support. As your work deepens, consider how to braid together resources that reflect your community’s strengths and relationships. Local community foundations can be powerful partners, especially when they see the alignment between your goals and their mission. Explore regional and state-level foundations that fund health, youth, justice, or rural development—they may be eager to support work that connects across sectors. Engage cross-sector partners like schools, libraries, clinics, cultural centers, and city governments, who may be willing to contribute funds, space, or staff support. Consider cooperative funding models or shared grant applications with aligned organizations.

Remember: resourcing the work isn’t just about securing money—it’s about building a resilient web of support that believes in the vision and is willing to invest in its future.

To continue tending to the flame of future safety seekers, revisit these key questions regularly and often:



- ☐ Who are the community champions we want to uplift and invest in?
- ☐ How are we centering and supporting those most impacted by safety threats?
- ☐ What balance do we need between lived experience and allyship?
- ☐ How do we keep extending the invitation to new voices, across generations and identities?
- ☐ What does it look like to “pass the torch” with care and clarity?
- ☐ What long-term partnerships, funding, or anchors could support this work?

There is no final arrival on the Spiral Path—only deeper invitations. With each loop, you gain new perspective, new companions, and new understandings of what safety truly means in your place. This level is a reminder that the work of community safety is never finished—it grows, shifts, and deepens alongside your people. You are no longer starting from scratch. You’re building from roots, relationships, and real experiences. This is the turning point where the journey becomes a shared inheritance—one that spirals on with trust, creativity, and collective care.

“This work is not meant to be held by one person for long. It’s too heavy to carry alone. You need to be able to set it down and come back to it, knowing others will be there to hold it.”

In the final stages of the pilot, each partner began identifying long-term stewards and planning for sustainability:



The Sowing Room focused on growing internal leadership, asking: How do we deepen, not just widen? Core Team members began experimenting with peer mentorship and planning a seasonal cadence for continued work.

Northspan explored ways to embed community safety practices into existing youth programming, civic spaces, and cultural work. They noted that ongoing success relied on not just training individuals—but creating a web of shared care.



As one participant reflected:

“We can’t burn people out. We need to trust that someone else will pick up the thread—and they will.”

Another shared:

“It’s not about sealing up. It’s about spiraling out. We just need to keep inviting people in.”

The Rural Minnesota Community Safety Pilot Project was funded by the Bush Foundation. Both partners are seeking funding to continue this work and/or embedding this work into existing programming within their organizations.



“The most powerful thing we did was identify who was already leading and give them what they needed to keep going.”



Add the following to your

QUIVER OF CARE:



The Spiral Token – a symbol of continuation and cyclical growth. No end, just evolution.

The Invitation Echo – a tool for reaching out again—to new allies, to past participants, to those who may now be ready.

The Cycle Sigil – a reminder that sustaining work is iterative, not linear.



**“We planted seeds,
and now we’re seeing
them bloom in ways
we never expected.”**



**“For us, training wasn’t just
learning. It was unlearning
too—about who we thought
was responsible for safety.”**

LEVEL 08

TOKENS OF COMPLETION:



A core local group has been identified and supported.



A sustainable rhythm or structure for ongoing work is in place.



Regional connections are forming or deepening.



The work is shifting from externally supported to community-led.



The Spiral Path is open—ready for return, renewal, and continued care.



THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

PARTING WORDS

DEAR SAFETY SEEKER,

You have traveled far.

From the first stirrings of readiness to the spiral of sustainability, you and your companions have braved complexity, held hard conversations, built unlikely alliances, and woven safety with care, humility, and courage.

But this isn't the grand finale. There is no end screen. Because this journey isn't about finishing—it's about continuing. It's about how you walk now, and who you walk with.

You've gathered tools and tokens, stories and strategies. You've sparked something—something rooted in your community's truth. You have strengthened your community's co-creation muscles. You have sparked a shared desire with your neighbors to seek community safety. The spark may be a flicker or a flame, but it's alive. And it belongs to all of you.

Success here is not one moment. It is a way of being. And, it looks like:

- Trust built, even when it took time.
- Power shared, even when the path was unclear.
- Safety reimagined, not imposed.
- Belonging seeded, even in fractured soil.
- Confidence in how to be an upstander.
- A Core Team that grew and became a community.

You are now part of something much bigger than yourself—part of a growing fellowship of rural changemakers, peacekeepers, and bridge-builders. You are not alone on the path. Across small towns and tribal lands, farm fields and forest edges, others are walking too—carrying their own Quivers of Care, facing their own gates, tending their own flames of collective safety.

We hope this guide helps you feel courageous. We hope it helps you feel connected. And most of all—we hope it helps you remember:

- *Safety is something we grow together.*
- *The path spirals on. Walk it with care.*
- *And when the time comes—pass the torch.*

Onward, in solidarity.

—With gratitude from Department of Public Transformation, Voices for Rural Resilience, Nonviolent Peaceforce, The Sowing Room and The Northspan Group, Inc.



ONWARD, IN SOLIDARITY

***Safety is something we
grow together.***

***The path spirals on.
Walk it with care.***

***And when the time
comes—pass the torch.***

CREDITS

PROJECT PARTNERS

This report is shared with deep gratitude and respect for the project partners and communities that participated in the Rural Minnesota Community Safety Pilot Project. Northspan in the Cook County and Cloquet areas, The Sowing Room in Brainerd Lakes Area, and Nonviolent Peaceforce, with a local chapter in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Early on in the project, we also worked with Region 5 Development Commission and Southwest Minnesota Initiative Foundation. Both of these partners were instrumental to our journey, however, we ended up working more closely and long term with The Sowing Room and Northspan, which is why we only included information from these partners in this creative report.

This project is made possible with support from the Bush Foundation.

PROJECT PARTNERS - ROLES:

- Nonviolent Peaceforce - Project Coordinator and Trainer
- Department of Public Transformation & Voices for Rural Resilience - Community Sensors and Evaluators
- Northspan - Community Partner
- Sowing Room - Community Partner
- Bush Foundation - Funder



THE NORTHSPAN GROUP, INC

The Northspan Group, Inc. (Northspan) is a private, nonprofit consulting firm that has been a behind-the-scenes force in economic development for over 40 years. Northspan offers a diverse portfolio of services to help businesses, communities, and organizations thrive by forming connections, building capacity, and accessing capital. They are also proud to power the Driving Access to Wealth and Networks (DAWN) program, which supports a range of targeted resources and initiatives aimed at bolstering economic and community resilience across Northeast Minnesota. Since its inception, Northspan has spearheaded regional partnerships, lent a fresh perspective, and built deep relationships in the communities it serves.



Cloquet



Cook County



**Stefanie Sjelin &
Amber Lewis**

THE SOWING ROOM (TSR)

The Sowing Room (TSR) began as a newsletter and website. Through outreach, connections and conversations, it has emerged as a grassroots organization that supports projects, programs and initiatives designed to create social cohesion and a sense of belonging for all who live in and those yet to discover North Central Minnesota. Their mission is to provide spaces and places that create opportunities and pathways for under-represented individuals and cultural communities in rural places.



**Brainerd
Lakes Area**



Dawn Espe





Ethan Quezada, Primary Trainer

NONVIOLENT PEACEFORCE (NP)

Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) is a global, non-governmental organization (NGO) that uses unarmed strategies to protect civilians in violent conflicts. NP's work is guided by principles of nonviolence, non-partisanship, the primacy of local actors, and civilian-to-civilian action. NP's work is based in a suite of methods known as "Unarmed Civilian Protection" (UCP) and the conviction that conflict is inevitable, but violence is not.



Anna Claussen, Director

VOICES FOR RURAL RESILIENCE

Voices for Rural Resilience facilitates the social change necessary to protect and heal our natural world by embracing deep stories, locally relevant knowledge, resources, and experiences to shift the way people think and feel about climate change and each other.



**Ash Hanson, Creative
Executive Officer**

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC TRANSFORMATION

Department of Public Transformation is a nonprofit organization that works locally and relationally to develop creative strategies for increased community connection, civic engagement, and equitable participation in rural places.



MORE TO DISCOVER

APPENDIX

During the Rural Minnesota Community Safety Pilot Project, the Core Team created a number of templates, charts, high-level findings, and event flows. Included in this Appendix are samples and examples that you can adapt and utilize as tools for your SAFE TOGETHER journey.

Travel well, Safety Seeker! You are not alone!

[LINK TO GOOGLE DOC PDF](#)

