

The Incubator Dispatch

The LSS Incubator nurtures bold, team-powered ideas into scalable, community-grown solutions.



LSS leaders celebrate with the finalists of the Design Lab's inaugural Incubator cycle.



"What organization says to staff, 'We know you have great ideas and we want to hear them,' and then backs that up by funding those ideas? I have been blown away by the whole process, start to finish."

*~Joyce Lehman, program coordinator
for Senior Companion Services and 2024
Incubator finalist*

Tending the Future

The 2024 launch of the LSS Design Lab's Incubator program marked the planting of something new—a seed of possibility in our pursuit of a more innovative and responsive service landscape.

Thanks to the collective care of our donor investors, volunteers, mentors, staff and community partners, that seed has begun to bloom. Your commitment has watered bold ideas, tended emerging solutions and pruned them into focused, actionable pilot programs that are already reshaping how we serve our neighbors.

From the 23 proposals submitted to the seven projects selected for pilot testing, the Incubator has revealed the richness of thought and creativity within our LSS team. Nearly half of submissions came from direct service providers, 40% from BIPOC team members, and 36% from team members serving in greater Minnesota—evidence that the soil from which these ideas grew is rooted in lived experience and frontline insight. With guidance from our donor network—leaders in entrepreneurship, corporate research and development, and innovation—these early sprouts are being shaped into models with the potential to scale and thrive.

As we look ahead, LSS is building the trellis to support continued growth. We are laying the groundwork to share what we've learned across Minnesota and beyond, with a vision of a service sector that is more effective, more efficient and more attuned to the needs of those it serves.

To everyone who has walked alongside us in this first season—thank you! You've helped us grow not just a program, but a movement. May the seeds we've planted together continue to grow into a vibrant landscape of possibility, where every new idea is a step toward a stronger, more connected future.

"LSS has such a wonderful array of high quality services, and yet there is more that can be done to better serve the community. The Incubator is a great way to both improve LSS' current services and design new services to meet client needs using a data-driven approach. In addition, the Incubator will stimulate creativity and help nurture an innovative LSS culture."

~David Kadrie, retired Vice President, Lean Six Sigma & Quality, 3M



2024 INCUBATOR UPDATE: Progress Rooted in Possibility

The LSS Design Lab's 2024 Incubator launch is already demonstrating its value as a catalyst for scalable, systems-level innovation driven by frontline insights.

- **Representative Payee Services** now supports 104 clients with 81 pending. Strengthened referral pathways and Supported Decision Making collaboration are enhancing care coordination and integration potential.
- **Credit Where It's Due** engaged four LSS lines of service—Youth Services, Refugee Services, Employment Services and Financial Counseling—to obtain 27 referrals that have led to 16 recruits, with 12 actively participating. Nearly 70% of participants had limited credit knowledge, and 75% rated their budgeting skills as low. Even those with stronger financial literacy lacked access to credit-building tools, underscoring a critical gap this program is now addressing.
- **Share-A-Home Companion Services** completed 23 interviews with 33 stakeholders, shaping a matching framework and preparing for launch to support sustainable housing for older adults.

These early outcomes affirm the Incubator's core belief: Frontline staff are best positioned to identify inefficiencies and design impactful solutions. With continued investment, LSS is building the infrastructure to scale, replicate and share innovations statewide.

The Incubator is more than a program—it's a strategic lever for transforming services and helping people transform their lives.

Mentors Make a Difference

Mentors are essential to the LSS Incubator—offering wisdom, encouragement and practical insight to shape early-stage ideas into life-changing solutions. Whether you're an entrepreneur, nonprofit leader or passionate about community-driven change, your experience can help transform social services in Minnesota. Interested in mentoring? Let's connect and explore what's possible together.



2025 Incubator Cycle: Possibility in Motion

We're excited to kick off the 2025 Incubator with 22 bold, mission-driven ideas submitted by LSS team members statewide. These proposals reflect the creativity and compassion of our staff. The Selection Council is now reviewing each one to identify the next generation of pilot programs that will shape the future of social services. Stay tuned—possibility is in motion!



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Hi! My name is Kim, and I'm excited to be part of the Business Development team managing the Incubator program. Thank you for your incredible support—it truly helps bring these ideas to life. Please reach out if you have any questions or want to chat about the Incubator!



**Lutheran
Social Service**
of Minnesota