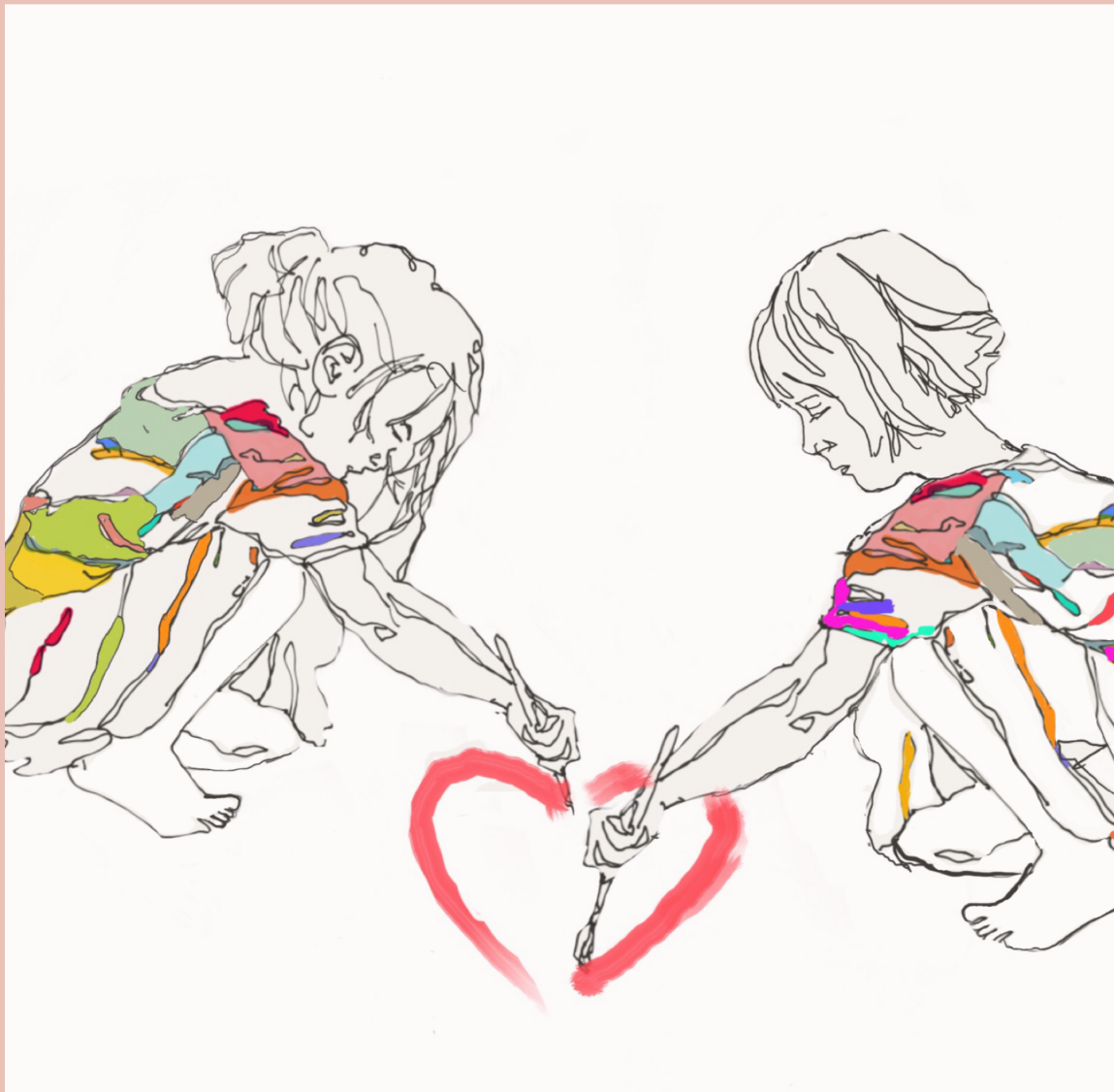


Kato towns

COMPASSIONATE CHARTER



Original Artwork by Sheila Klein

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About

The Kato Towns Compassion Charter project began in 2019. Initial focus groups were held for the leaders of fifteen sectors followed by focus groups for organizations within each of their sectors.

Sector leaders then created best practices from the stories, needs, and suggestions heard from within their organization - represented by the voices of staff, employees, members, or students.

The focus groups' questions for both sector leaders and their organization's focus group(s) related to belonging, loss, and resiliency.

**WE
BELONG**

**WE TAKE
CARE OF
EACH OTHER**



COMPASSIONATE *Kato towns* CHARTER

INTRODUCTION



Kato towns

COMPASSIONATE CHARTER

Compassion literally means “to suffer together.” It can be defined as the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another’s suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering.

A Compassionate Community recognizes that care for one another at times of crisis and loss is not simply a task for health and social services but is everyone’s responsibility. A Compassionate Community promotes education and opportunities to mobilize its residents to provide practical and emotional support when community members are in need.

A Compassionate Town Charter is the cornerstone of a Compassionate Community that highlights community-developed best practices to create a social culture where everyone feels that they belong and are cared for during life’s difficult experiences.

The Kato Towns Compassionate Charter represents the experiential wisdom that is harvested from conversations centered around belonging, loss, and resiliency. Through grassroots community action, best practices are now established in the Kato Towns Charter, promoting healthy and supportive responses to the hardships we experience throughout life. The Charter framework is celebrated by local government and expanded upon every year.

Why do we need a Compassionate Community?

A compassionate community is a place where all people feel a true sense of belonging. The deep desire to belong—to be heard, trusted, and valued as part of a group—is universal. It is in our DNA. When we don't have this, we feel excluded, isolated, angry, and stressed. These feelings can lead to diseases of despair, incarceration, joblessness, homelessness, addiction, violence, abuse, depression, and suicide. Isolation, and the risk for a myriad of health and social problems it triggers, can occur most often in times of loss, unresolved grief, and death. These are among the upstream and hidden factors that can have a major effect on our lives.

Loss, grief, and death are unquestionably among the forces that shape the conditions of our daily life. How we privately grieve and publicly mourn can impact our health, family dynamics, work performance, life expectancy, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. It is imperative that we begin to recognize and honor these experiences as part of the whole of life. We can begin in community to harness the wisdom of these experiences, starting by engaging with conversations about loss. Conversations can bring forth the words needed to vocalize our feelings. When we talk about our difficult experiences, we can learn from them, and from each other.

The Charter – Having the Conversations

The Charter initiative began by empowering conversations. We are all going through difficult experiences – how do we share our experiences so that we are not feeling isolated and alone with them? The answer is in the giving and receiving of our stories. We create belonging and build bridges by sharing our stories. Stories help us to heal, to connect, and to know that we are not alone.

Our community held conversations from 2019-2021 centered around loss, belonging, and resiliency. Early partners in the conversations for the Charter include **Blue Earth County Community Corrections, City of Mankato, City of Mankato Public Safety, City of North Mankato, Ecumen Pathstone Living, First Presbyterian Church, Greater Mankato Diversity Council, Loyola Catholic School, Mankato Public Schools ISD 77, Messiah Lutheran Church, Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging, Minnesota State University Mankato, Mogwai Collaborative, MRCI, and South Central College.**

History of Kato Towns Compassionate Charter

November 2019 – September 2021

NOTE: Kato Towns is comprised of North Mankato (population ~14,000) and Mankato (population ~ 43,000). These two cities, separated by the Minnesota River, share many of the same amenities, although they are distinct cities in separate counties. In the Charter, the two cities are united and rebranded as 'Kato Towns'.

This initial Charter was developed with the support of community sector leaders, members of their organizations, and researchers from MSU Mankato School of Nursing Faculty. It is a project of NicBluCares, the national pilot of a successful worldwide movement called *Compassionate Communities*. The people of Nicollet and Blue Earth Counties in Minnesota are building a safety net of community support, strengthening our compassion and capacity to care for one another in times of crisis and loss.

History of Kato Towns Compassionate Charter *(continued)*

November 2019 – September 2021

The Kato Towns Compassion Charter project began in 2019. Initial focus groups were held for the leaders of fifteen sectors followed by focus groups for organizations within each of their sectors. Researchers from MSU Mankato School of Nursing Faculty with NicBluCares Executive Director facilitated and recorded the focus groups. The narratives were transcribed (removing any names or facts that could identify participants) and sent back to each organization's sector leader for review.

Sector leaders then created a best practice(s) from the stories, needs, and suggestions heard from within their organization - represented by the voices of staff, employees, members, or students.

The sector leaders all met together again after they reviewed the transcribed narratives of their organization's focus group(s). This final gathering of sector leaders created the opportunity to discuss their groups' findings and experience a community-wide cross-pollination of best practice considerations.

The focus groups' questions for both sector leaders and their organizations' focus group(s) related to belonging, loss, and resiliency, as identified in the script below.

History of Kato Towns Compassionate Charter *(continued)*

November 2019 – September 2021

There were sixty organizational focus groups, representing fifteen sectors, scheduled to start end of March 2020 - just when COVID 19 hit. The research had to be resubmitted and approved as virtual focus groups. In the trauma of the pandemic, eight of the sectors discontinued/postponed their participation due to the increased workload created by the pandemic.

The evidence-based research for the formation of our initial charter is complete and MSU Mankato School of Nursing Faculty will write and publish findings. The best practices below represent completed fourteen focus groups and the seven sectors that completed participation to the end of the project.

Initial Charter Project Outcomes

1. Focus group conversations will lead to the identification of promising practices to further the compassionate culture of each organization (business, school, church).
2. A guiding principle from each participating organization will be brought forward as a policy, design, or management recommendation to form the initial Kato Towns Compassionate Charter.
3. The Charter creates a community agenda that promotes belonging and inclusion where all voices are invited and valued, especially in times of need.
4. Focus Group findings will be disseminated through a media campaign to inspire and empower participation from other sectors.
5. MSU Mankato School of Nursing Faculty will study and publish the process of creating a Compassionate Town Charter, providing evidenced-based research for ease in duplication of Compassionate Charters in other towns across America.
6. Under the mentorship of Public Health Palliative Care International, the umbrella organization for Compassionate Communities worldwide, Kato Towns (Mankato and North Mankato) will be recognized as the first Compassionate City in the USA.

Kato Towns Compassionate Charter Research Team

Diane Witt, PhD, APRN, CNP Assoc Prof MSU Mankato School of Nursing

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Conversation Facilitation Example

Our invitation is for us to be authentically present for each other as we hear the stories that people choose to share. We invite you to bear witness, to receive the story without the need to fix, save, or advise. We listen with our hearts. Often the only thing we can do for someone – and the best thing we can do – is to simply acknowledge their experience by attentive listening.

The groups each began by addressing "belonging":

1. How do you define belonging?
2. Where are you connected with each other at work?
3. When do you feel a sense of belonging with co-workers?
4. Are there any other supportive connections or activities you would like to have in your organization?

Conversation Facilitation Example *(continued)*

Next, participants were invited to reflect and share an experience within around loss, grief, or death that was personally impactful - anything from the loss of a budget, to the 'hard to identify ambiguous loss' you may be feeling during COVID-19, or to a profound loss through death or illness. After this sharing, the group talked about support around loss:

1. With the losses you have identified, what was most helpful during that time? Can you name a physical place where you felt most supportive, a person who you felt understood you most, and any words or actions that gave you comfort?
2. What was missing?
3. What role does organization play in supporting people with loss?
4. Knowing the structure of the organization, what are creative ways to reach people with messages and actions of support and care?
5. What would be a best practice that you would like to see in your organization to better prepare for loss, grief, or death?

From these intimate caring circle conversations, Kato Towns sector leaders and their organizations have given voice to the Charter. Our vision is that the Kato Towns Compassionate Charter will contribute to better decision making, better use of resources, less anxiety, and a more attractive community in which to live and work.

THE CHARTER



Kato towns

COMPASSIONATE CHARTER

Kato Towns Compassionate Charter - Sept 15th, 2021

Community Contributors:

First Presbyterian Church

Messiah Lutheran Church

City of Mankato Public Safety

Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging

City of North Mankato

Mankato Area Public Schools

Minnesota State University, Mankato





First Presbyterian Church

- Addressing grief:
 - We give people the opportunity to remember loved ones by donating flowers to mark a significant date and in an annual worship service to name the loved ones lost within that year.
 - The Pastor shares a wealth of resources to support people going through different challenges and also for the families that are grieving the loss of a loved one – specifically through the first year of grief.
 - Deacons have “sunshine cards” that go to people experiencing hard times (loss, surgeries, etc)
- Addressing belonging:
 - We are a presence in the community for events that focus on building people up (eg. Alzheimers walk, PRIDE, Juneteenth)
 - We share our time and money with local non-profits that work on breaking down systemic problems (eg. loneliness/hunger/homelessness) and work toward wholeness
 - We wear name tags in church so folks can get to know one another without the awkward conversation of trying to recall names from week to week as the relationship grows.



First Presbyterian Church *(continued)*

- Addressing loneliness:
 - We keep records of folks living alone and with limited means of travel as a part of a “Home Connections” list. These folks are offered communion at their home, visited regularly by deacons and pastor, and receive special mailings to keep connected to the community.
 - We have a caregivers group to help support, mentor, and offer community connection to those who are caring for a loved one that can no longer be fully independent.



Messiah Lutheran Church

North Mankato, MN

"Compassionate Charter Practice: Visitation Team"

Messiah Lutheran Church has a ministry team composed of the pastor and volunteer lay leaders for the purpose of visitation and connection with other members of the faith community, especially those who may not be able to join in-person worship and fellowship activities on a regular basis. Together, this mission team:

- Identifies members who may be in need of or interested in having regular visits. This identification happens on an ongoing basis, especially as there are life changes such as a move to a care facility, the death of a spouse, etc.
- Those members who desire a regular visitor are matched with a volunteer layperson.
- Visits occur approximately every 4-6 weeks, with scheduling done on an individualized and mutually agreed-upon basis.
- Additional pastoral care visits by pastor supplement these visits.
- Lay visitors bring communion as requested.
- Lay visitors are equipped with additional resources such as prayers and conversational guidelines to assist in their ministry.



City of Mankato Public Safety

As discussed at our sector leader meeting, one of the recommendations or best practices for our sector was to designate a person or group of individuals that can reach out and offer support when others are struggling with personal losses. Our agency is committed to doing this and will be training certain staff members in peer-to-peer support. We want to ensure that we set ourselves up for success and thus will be formally training key staff in peer-to-peer support practices versus informally adopting this as a practice.

Another suggestion and best practice is to develop or utilize quiet rooms to give space for individuals to process incidents. This is already a practice within the Mankato Department of Public Safety, and we will continue to utilize conference rooms and other quiet spaces to allow staff to have some quiet time to process calls for service.

Public Safety in Kato Towns will formally train key staff in peer-to-peer support practices, designating a person or group of individuals that can reach out and offer support when others are struggling with personal losses. Public Safety will develop or utilize quiet rooms to allow staff to have some the space and quiet time to process calls for service.



Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging

- MNRAAA encourages and assists in coordinating support for employees during personal life events. Support is provided by sending cards, flowers, memorials, and personal emails.
- MNRAAA values employee health and wellness, including when someone has suffered a loss or traumatic event. Employees help to develop and implement programming that is meaningful and timely. Guest speakers are solicited for staff meetings and retreats to address the current needs of employees.



City of North Mankato

Here are the practices the City will implement (and is currently offering in some capacity).

- Public Safety Recommendation: The City will designate or utilize quiet rooms to allow staff to have some space and quiet time to process incidents or calls for service.
- Internal Employee Recommendation: The City will provide an Employee Assistance Program that offers support to staff members."



Mankato Area Public Schools

Mankato Area Public Schools commits to the Charter and agrees to express a view of health and wellbeing that embraces social empathy in our support of staff. Additionally, we commit to continuing a compassion-building process and will agree to an annual review of our practices.

The best practice we choose to highlight is Employee Health Promotions. It is the promotion of health and wellness activities for employees of Mankato Area Public Schools. This work influences the physical, mental, economic, and social well-being of employees and in turn the health of their families and our community. This universal program offered to each employee of every program, school, and position type is designed to be delivered through a combination of district-led activities and building or program-created communities. The work is delivered through the utilization of site representatives, who facilitate communication between the district program leadership and building or department staff members to encourage site participation in communal activities.



Mankato Area Public Schools *(continued)*

The 2021-22 School Year calendar of District-led activities are:

- October Random Acts of Kindness Challenge
- November Gratitude Calendars
- December Physical health month and national handwashing awareness
- January Resolutions/Mindset
- February Heart Health Month Challenge
- March 10K a day
- April Mental Health Prep Month
- May Shape Up Challenge

Additionally, Mankato Area Public Schools Employee Health Promotions is partnering with Counseling Services of Southern Minnesota to offer targeted employee groups the opportunity to participate in bi-monthly reflective groups. This environment will serve as a place to come together and reflect on challenges within the job and think through options with fellow co-workers. The groups are free of charge thanks to legislative approval to provide school personal with a place to discuss challenges faced in the workplace.



Minnesota State University, Mankato

Minnesota State University, Mankato commits to improving access to mental health care services and enhancing online resources.

We have made several advancements this past year or two with increased access to services through non-traditional means:

- Both Student Health Services and the Counseling Center began offering in-person or telehealth visits for psychotherapy and medication management.
- Mental Health First Aid was offered both in-person and online and increased the number of people certified significantly.
- An online course focusing on mental health awareness and resources was designed and offered to all students within our current learning management system.
- The Counseling Center incorporated a Stepped Care model that includes increased access compared to a 1:1 model.

YOUR NEXT STEPS



Kato towns

COMPASSIONATE CHARTER

KATO TOWNS COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY NEEDS YOU!

Support someone you know who is suffering:

Reach out with a phone call, a visit, a text, or email. Loss is not something we can fix. Compassion is about the willingness to share in the suffering of another. Being present and listening is often just what's needed.

Pause to remember:

We invite you to acknowledge that we all experience loss and grief. We are all caregivers...and we all need each other.

Visit our Compassionate Community Website: NicBluCares.com

- Share your story! Tell us about the acts of kindness already happening that are making a difference. Stories help us to heal, to connect, and to know that we are not alone.
- Join the Kato Towns Charter! Gather in circle conversations with your neighborhood, organization, or business to discuss and identify your group's best compassionate practice for the Charter. Then, add your organization's best practice(s) to Kato Towns Compassionate Charter.
- When you or others are in need, find help at NicBluCaresNOW.com, our Community Resource Directory. Click the **'suggest a program'** at bottom of any page to add a resource and help us grow awareness of our available community support.

Each one of us has a role to play.

We can enhance our sense of belonging and support in the places where we work, play and call home.

We do not have to face hardships alone.

We belong. We take care of each other.

**WE
BELONG**

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EACH OTHER**



COMPASSIONATE *Kato towns* CHARTER