



2024 IMPACT REPORT

Adopted June 2025

Barber County UNITED, Inc.



Empowering rural life

Barber County UNITED, Inc



2024 IMPACT REPORT

**BCU
strengthens
communities
by bringing its
citizens
together to
become
healthier
Kansans.**

A message from Debra Kolb, Executive Director

I'm filled with gratitude for the spirit and progress that defined BCU in 2024. This was a year of listening, showing up with heart, and doing the steady work that sets the stage for what's next. We revisited what matters, shifted course if needed, and moved forward with integrity.

We made bold moves last year. We advanced groundbreaking rural childcare solutions rooted in mentorship, inclusion, and real-world tools for providers - whether based in a center or home.

We also entered the prevention space with the launch of our Mobilizer program and the early formation of SPEAR—Substance Prevention Education and Resources—focused on supporting youth and young adults. These early steps reflect a deep commitment to long-term wellness.

Leadership continued to guide our work and connect our efforts across the county. From community coffees and journaling at senior centers to mentoring a student and amplifying local businesses, we created space for connection, voice, and vision at every level.

As we look into 2025 and beyond, we're grounding all of our work in four core divisions: Community Cares, Community Engagement, Arts & Culture, and Community Solutions. These focus areas reflect not just where we're headed, but how we move - with compassion, creativity, and community at the center.

Warmly, 



Table of Contents

2

Board of Directors

3

Who We Are & 2024 Snapshot

4

Projects & Outcomes

5

Economic Impact 2024

6

Financial Outlook

7

Community Cares

8

Community Engagement

9

Arts & Culture

10

Community Solutions

11

Vision & Action 2026

12 & 13

Be A Part Of What's Next

14 & 15

Partners & Stakeholders

16 & 17





Current Board of Directors

Janell Goodno, Chairperson
Pake McNally, Vice chair
Crystal Cummins, Treasurer
Brenda Myers, Secretary
Melva Armbruster
Allison Foulkrod
Tom Lee
Mellissa Mixon
Ashley Taylor

Upcoming 2025 Board Members

Danielle Farr
Kevin Cox

Retired During 2024

Hannah Brass
Cody Jackson





WHO WE ARE

Barber County United (BCU) is a nonprofit driving bold, rural-forward solutions that improve how people live, work, and connect in frontier Kansas. Through community-rooted leadership, innovative programs, and trusted partnerships, BCU strengthens the health, resilience, and daily experience of rural life in south-central Kansas.

WHAT WE DO

Founded in 2018, BCU leads across four core divisions - Community Cares, Community Engagement, Arts & Culture, and Community Solutions to create real, lasting impact in the places we call home.

Whether advancing mental health access, supporting youth and families, promoting trails and tourism, or guiding local grant efforts, BCU acts as a connector and catalyst for positive change and a leader for collaborations. Grounded in rural values and built for frontier realities, we unite people, resources, and ideas to ensure our communities not only endure - but thrive.

2024 Impact Snapshot



114 New childcare slots opened in Barber & **24** in Harper Counties

36 Mental Health Days Off to Barber County Childcare Providers

25 Local Kansans Insured through the Online Insurance Marketplace

11 Organizations receiving Fiscal & Administrative Support

4 NEW BUILD or REMODEL Child Care Facilities

1 NEW initiative focused on youth & young adult substance prevention.

2024



Programs

Details

Outcomes

Pathways to a Healthy Kansas

Blue Cross Blue Shield of KS

Evidence-based solutions and promising practices for improving active living, healthy eating, and tobacco prevention.

- Policy-driven projects for lasting impacts on BACO.
- Project decisions informed by community conversations.

Childcare Accelerator

State of Kansas Children's Cabinet & Trust Fund

Accelerator was designed to advance the rapid development of additional childcare slots statewide.

- Overcame barriers to adequate, quality childcare.
- Formation of the Tri-County Childcare Coalition (TCCC)

Innovation Communities

State of Kansas Children's Cabinet & Trust Fund

IC cohorts collaborate to assist the state to identify and scale effective and transformative statewide approaches to childcare.

- Engaged multiple early childcare experts regionally.
- TCCC Mentor Outreach Program was developed.

Kansas Cares CMS Navigator

Thrive Allen County

Assisting citizens to Navigate the federal Health Insurance online Marketplace.

- Increased percentage of BACO insured residents.
- More affordable policies for BACO families.

Mobilizer - Introductory Year

Kansas Dept. of Aged & Disability Services (KDADS)
Kansas Prevention Collaborative Community Initiative (KPCCI)

KPCCI goal is to reduce and prevent substance abuse in youth & young adults in identified communities across the State of Kansas.

- Development of a sustainable prevention plan.
- Increase readiness to address substance use/abuse issues
- Directed at individuals not needing treatment services.

Mental Health Initiative

Barber County
South Central Community Foundation (SCCF)

MHI implements projects identified locally to face the needs to support overall wellness countywide.

- Addressing day-to-day issues through citizens self-identified as BACO's mental health front-line.
- Senior Center Outreach program.

Leadership BCU

Barber County
South Central Community Foundation (SCCF)

BCU's approach to Leadership lies in empowered and active citizens willing to engage and seize opportunities.

- Leadership is small actions taken in moments of opportunity.
- Empowering ourselves to empower others.

Early Literacy Program

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Local Affiliate
Locally funded BCU program

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is dedicated to inspiring a love of reading by gifting books free of charge to children up to age five.

- Increases kindergarten readiness of BACO children.
- Financially supported through local funders & donors.



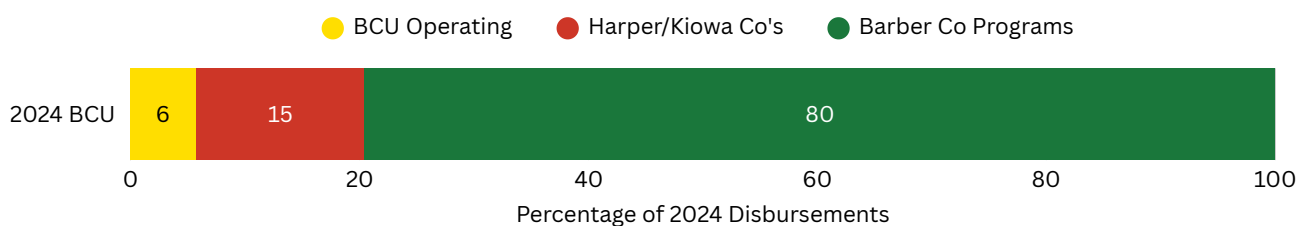
OUR 2024 ECONOMIC IMPACT

TRANSPARENCY & STEWARDSHIP

Since August 2020, Barber County United has managed over \$3.84 million in community-directed funding across Barber, Harper, and Kiowa Counties. In 2024 alone, BCU stewarded more than \$1.73 million, supporting rural programs, projects, and partnerships that improve daily life in our frontier region.

By maintaining a lean operating structure, BCU reinvested 94.3% of all dollars into local work - spanning childcare, mental health, physical activity, civic infrastructure, and more. Our approach ensures that every grant administered, and every fund managed is grounded in local voice, guided by rural need, and directed toward lasting impact.

2024 BCU Disbursement Comparison of \$1,733,339



2024 Financial Snapshot

\$1,733,339 Total dollars stewarded in 2024

\$1,378,333 Invested in Barber Co programs in 2024

\$255,805 Invested in Harper & Kiowa Co's in 2024

\$99,200 Total 2024 BCU operating expenses

94.3% Reinvested directly into community programs

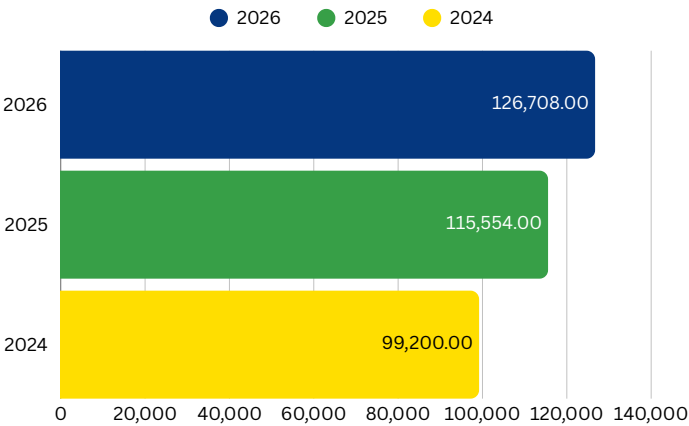


SUSTAINING RURAL IMPACT 2025–2026

**OUTSIZED
IMPACT**
\$3.84 million

managed with less
than 10% going to
operations from
2020 - 2024.

BCU GENERAL OFFICE PROJECTION



Note: Projected operational needs reflect supervision, compliance, communication, and cross-county coordination.

BCU is actively seeking general operating support to strengthen our backbone, expand rural capacity, and serve Barber County with bold, responsive leadership.



Let's talk about how we can partner.

Contact:

Debra Kolb, Executive Director

Email:

deb@barbercountyunited.org

Phone: (620) 886-1759

Learn more:

barbercountyunited.org

We participate in
MATCH DAY



Learn more

Much of BCU's funding is restricted to programs, often allowing 0–10% for admin. In 2024, operations made up just 5.7% of \$1.73M managed. To sustain momentum, scale responsibly, and meet growing demands in 2025–2026, flexible general operating support is essential.



COMMUNITY CARES

BCU strengthens the mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing of rural Barber Co. Kansans through grassroots programs focused on prevention, aging support, crisis response, wellness access, and a growing rural mental health network.



5
Communities
equipped with
ALL-ABILITIES
ARSENALS
to support
Inclusive
Childcare.



MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVE

Supporting:

- Kiowa Manor Mental Health and Wellness Projects - Outdoor Spaces
- Both USD 254 & USD 255
- Library needs in Medicine Lodge, Kiowa, & Hardtner
- Freedom Gates Boys Ranch
- Child Care Innovations:
 - All-Abilities Arsenals
 - Conscious Discipline
 - Critical Start-up Needs

PREVENTION INITIATIVES

Community Mobilizer

- Developing a Barber County Youth & Young Adult Program
- Building a High-Capacity Coalition



135

South Barber
Grade School
**Students and
Pre-K Students**
Were Fed Nutritious
SNACKS
During the
2024 - 2025
School Year.

Barber County United 2024

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

From innovative approaches to rural childcare to leadership development, early literacy, and local resource building, BCU works with families, schools, and civic partners to grow a more connected and resilient Barber County.



LEADERSHIP BCU INITIATIVE

Community Networking:

- Monthly Coffee Talks in both Kiowa and Medicine Lodge
- Senior Centers Outreach - Painting Parties, Journaling, Gardening, and Conversations
- High School Internship - ML USD 254
- Gift of Giving

Main Street Impact:

- South Barber Area Chamber of Commerce
- Kiowa Pop-Up Shops

Dolly Parton Imagination Library Local Affiliate

- Funded by Sponsors & Local Donors



CHILDCARE INNOVATION INITIATIVES

Empowering Providers

- Drop of Sunshine & Drop of Cheer Programs
- Higher Quality Curriculum in Home Settings
- Stem Materials for the Home Provider
- Business Tools, Contracts, & Bookkeeping

Challenged Restrictive Licensing and Established Rural Child Care Models

"We want to nurture kindergarten-readiness for all children - not just those under our own care.

As leaders, we must influence the quality of curriculum accessible to local home-providers to really impact a change."

*Rosie Mitchell, Director
Kiowa District Healthcare Childcare Center*



ARTS & CULTURE

We bring the spirit of Barber Co. to life by developing immersive trail systems that support mental health and outdoor connection, expanding the Scenic Byway experience, preserving local history, investing in public art, engaging local youth, and celebrating the rich cultural identity of the Gypsum Hills region.



2
BCU Collaborated
with Leaders &
Statewide
Champions to Form
Kansas Trails Inc
and Holds 2 Chair
Positions on the
State Board



ACTIVE OR OUTDOOR LIFESTYLE PLACEMAKING & COMMUNITY ART

- Mural & Community Art Installations
- Increasing Accessible Opportunities for Outdoor or Cultural Experiences
- Partnering to Develop Trail Systems & Connectivity
- Rural Parks, Community Spaces, Main Street Beautification
- Enhanced Trails: Incorporating Mental Health & Wellness into Outdoor Spaces
- Gypsum Hills Scenic Byway Expansion to Peace Treaty's Memorial Peace Park
 - Accessibility in 2 Areas of the Park
 - Play and Family Spaces
 - Historical Placemaking
 - Outdoor Museum Trails



COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

BCU equips rural communities and nonprofits with experienced grant writing, planning support, and technical assistance—grounded in local data and driven by real community needs. From securing funding to building long-term capacity, we help turn bold, rural-forward ideas into action.

“BCU helped the City of Sharon navigate the Pathways process and was instrumental in making our Community Center floor replacement a reality.”

*Wendy Crenner, City Council Member,
City of Sharon, KS*



COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

- Grant Administration & Fiscal Sponsorship
- Strategic Appeals & Public Fund Management
- Project Coordination for Community Partners
- Survey Design & Local Data Collection
- Needs Assessments & Rural Trends Analysis
- Stakeholder Engagement & Community Conversations
- Evidence-Based Program Planning and Proposal Support



VISION IN MOTION: 2025 – 2026

Every step forward begins with connections...



COMMUNITY CARES: Mental Health & Prevention

BCU's Mental Health Initiative began as Barber County's first homegrown effort — shaped by community priorities and sustained through local investment. In 2025, we build on that foundation by advancing SPEAR (Substance Prevention Education and Resources) into its second year, expanding youth-focused strategies for substance misuse prevention.

New initiatives include suicide prevention programming through KDADS and countywide engagement through Phase One of the Kansas Health Foundation's Food Forward Mass Action Hunger initiative. We also look forward to deepening partnerships with Horizons Mental Health and NAMI Kansas to strengthen rural mental health networks.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Connections

Leadership continues to be BCU's throughline — not only a focus, but a method. We invest in cultivating local leaders of all ages, in all roles. Through Coffee Talks, senior center outreach, grade school wellness, high school internships, and small business revitalization, we meet people where they are to build networks of support.

In 2026, this approach will guide us as we grow Leadership BCU programming, scale civic connection, and help residents shape their own rural futures — from classrooms and community centers to Main Streets and local libraries.

...where do you fit into the future of BCU?



STRATEGY IN ACTION

Here's how we're responding....



ARTS & CULTURE: Place, Voice, Spirit

From painting downtown windows to building trails that honor local heritage, BCU uses art, outdoor spaces, and rural placemaking to reflect and celebrate community identity. Our work has helped spark pride, preserve memory, and activate public spaces across Barber County. In 2026, we'll expand features at Memorial Peace Park with new interpretive elements that blend storytelling, nature, and mental wellness. Our commitment to active, outdoor living continues through trail beautification, community mural projects, park enhancements, and cross-generational arts initiatives — all designed to invite connection, movement, and meaning in everyday rural life.



COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS: Innovation & Support

BCU serves as the operational backbone for rural-led efforts — providing fiscal sponsorship, grant administration, appeals strategy, and program management across Barber County and beyond.

In 2026, we aim to formalize public project supports like the ReStore and Donor Awareness Toolkit. We'll also expand our data and evaluation infrastructure, increasing our ability to serve as a resource hub for local governments, educators, and community leaders working to launch or scale programs that meet local needs.



...with every project, every partnership, and every person who believes in what we can do together.

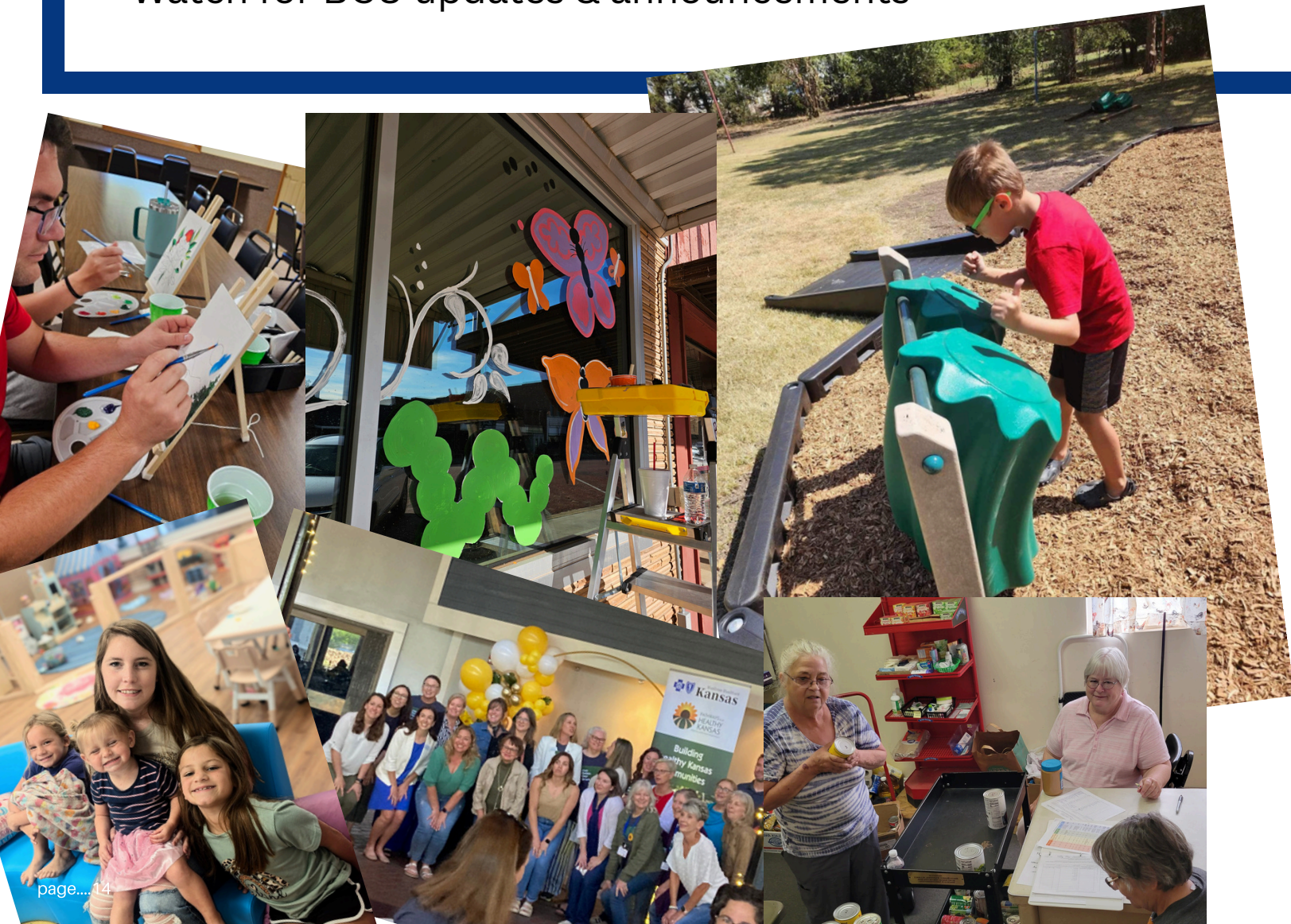


BE PART OF WHAT'S NEXT

Let's keep the momentum going!



- Follow us on Facebook & Instagram
- Volunteer for a local project or outreach event
- Join a community conversation or trail workday
- Bring BCU in for strategic support or fiscal sponsorship
- Partner on a youth program or cultural event
- Donate during Match Day, help grow our Endowment
- Sponsor or support a new BCU initiative
- Watch for BCU updates & announcements





PARTNERS & STAKEHOLDERS

LOCAL

Achenbach Memorial Park
Barber County Commissioners
Barber County Development BCD
Barber County Extension Agency
Barber County Health Department
Barber County Literacy Committee
Freedom Gates Boys Ranch
Friends of KDH & Manor Foundation
Gyp Hills Corridor Coalition
Gypsum Hills Scenic Byway Committee
Hardtner Library
Intertribal Powwow Grounds at Memorial Peace Park
Isabel City Park
Kiowa District Healthcare
Kiowa District Healthcare Childcare Center
Kiowa Hometown Market
Kiowa Manor
Kiowa Public Library
Lincoln Library
Medicine Lodge Daycare, Inc.
Medicine Lodge Memorial Hospital & Physicians Clinic
Medicine Lodge Peace Treaty Association
North Barber County Rec. Commission NBCRC
North Barber Ministerial Alliance
Sharon, KS Community Center
South Barber Food Bank
South Barber Ministerial Alliance
USD 254 North Barber County Schools
USD 255 South Barber County Schools

Local

MUNICIPALITIES

City of Hardtner
City of Hazelton
City of Isabel
City of Kiowa
City of Medicine Lodge
City of Sharon

Capacity
Fundors

CAPACITY FUNDERS

Barber County Commissioners
ITC Great Plains
Invenergy
Public Service Company of Oklahoma
SCTelcom

REGIONAL

Attica Long-Term Care Facility
Harper County Childcare Center
Harper County Commissioners
Hearing Life
Kansas Sampler Foundation
Kiowa County Economic Development Foundation
Leadership League of South-Central Kansas
Ninnescah Opioid Workforce
South-Central Community Foundation SCCF
Thrive Allen County
Tri-County Childcare Coalition TCCC

Regional

STATE

State

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas
DCCCA
Elevate Kansas
Kansas Cares
Kansas Children's Cabinet & Trust Fund
Kansas Department of Commerce
Kansas Dept. of Aged & Disability Services
Kansas Department of Transportation KDOT
Kansas Leadership Center KLC
Kansas Office of Rural Prosperity
Kansas Prevention Collaborative Community Initiative
Kansas State Dept. of Education KSDE
Kansas Tourism - TravelKS
Kansas Trails Inc.
NetWork Kansas
Pathways to a Healthy Kansas a BCBSKS Initiative
Seed 2 Roots Legal and Policy Consultants
Sunflower Foundation
Thrive Kansas
WSU Community Engagement Institute

NATIONAL

Dolly Parton Imagination Library
Federal Highway Administration
National Scenic Byway Program

National

PARTNERS & STAKEHOLDERS





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[Learn More](#)



Debra Kolb,
Executive Director
620-886-1759

Find & follow us on our socials:

@barbercountyunited

#barbercountyunited



Looking Ahead: Building the Future Together

Since 2018, Barber County United has proven that small communities can lead big change. In every community project, park restored, conversation sparked, and barrier broken, we've created local solutions from limited resources - and transformed them into lasting impact.

Our future is shaped by empathy, by determination, and by the relationships we build. It's in the seniors we sit with, the youth we mentor, the providers we support, and the stories we carry forward. BCU is more than a nonprofit - we are a bold, rural-forward voice, powered by connection and driven by possibility and rooted in rural-frontier quality of life.

As we move into 2026 and beyond, our commitment deepens. Let's keep building our future - together.

