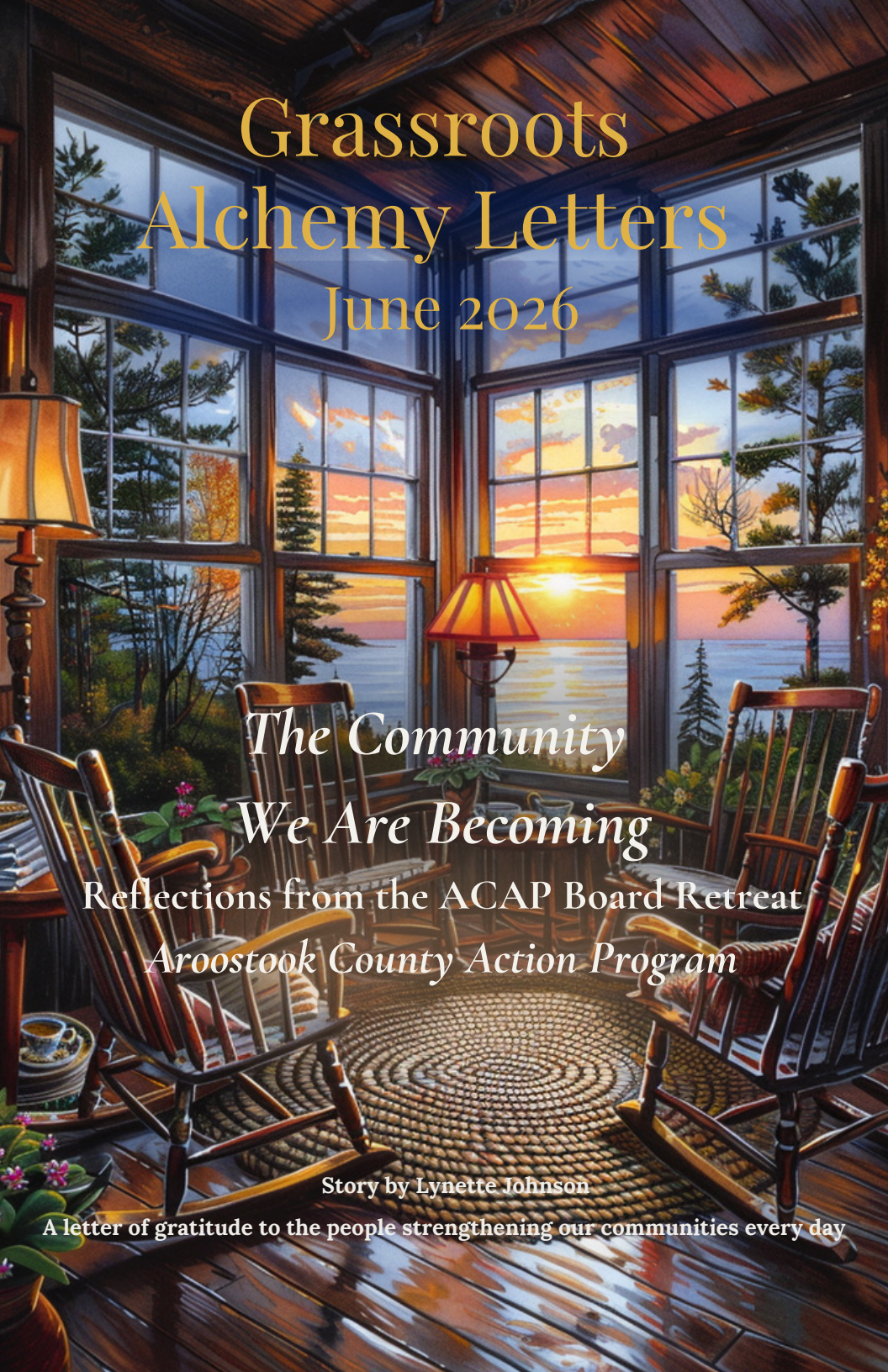




Grassroots Alchemy Letters

June 2026

The Community

We Are Becoming

Reflections from the ACAP Board Retreat

Aroostook County Action Program

Story by Lynette Johnson

A letter of gratitude to the people strengthening our communities every day

A LETTER OF GRATITUDE

Because meaningful work deserves to be seen

Every organization reaches a point when the work simply continues.

Meetings continue and conversations unfold.
Problems are solved while new challenges arrive.

The work continues because people assume their responsibilities every day.

Colleagues thank one another. Leaders consciously recognize their teams. Together, milestones are celebrated.

These moments remind us that what we do matters.

Yet it's different when you hear it from someone who has been invited into the work from the outside.

Someone able to pause long enough to notice what those closest to the work may no longer see.

That is why this letter exists.

To simply say: *We recognize what you are building together.*

We see the care with which you welcome one another.
The openness you bring to difficult conversations. And
the community you continue strengthening every day.

WHAT WE RECOGNIZED

Culture is experienced before it is described

Most of all, we recognize the culture you have created together.

It is not something we take for granted.

Some of us have experienced organizations where culture worked against the mission. Where people carried unnecessary weight, and collaboration became far more difficult than it needed to be.

Experiencing its absence has deepened our appreciation for its presence here.

Healthy cultures do not happen by accident.

They are created through thousands of choices people make together, every day.

It is one of the greatest strengths an organization can cultivate. One of the greatest gifts it can offer its people and the communities it serves.

Thank you for welcoming us into this next chapter. It is a privilege to serve alongside you.

We are proud to be part of this organization.

And deeply grateful for all that you continue building together.

WHEN MORE IS ASKED OF US

What communities reveal when responsibility grows

As people slowly gathered their things at the end of the retreat, conversations continued in small circles around the room.

We weren't in a hurry to leave.

The conversation kept returning to the people who are carrying the work.

Organizations like ACAP are being asked to carry more than ever before.

More responsibility as community needs continue to grow, while resources remain more limited than anyone would choose.

Pressure has a way of revealing what an organization has been building before it arrives.

The strength of a culture. The depth of relationships.

The character of leadership.

Here, it revealed people who continued choosing possibility when circumstances became more difficult.

Collaboration that grew stronger as responsibility expanded.

And a willingness to carry that responsibility together.

THE COURAGE TO SHARE WHAT IS TRUE

Leadership begins with sharing what is true

Throughout the day, someone would name a challenge.
And then begin exploring what could be built from it.

The conversation moved naturally between opportunity
and challenge.

The future taking shape.

The responsibility continuing to expand.

The realities of changing funding and growing community
need.

There was an honest humility in the room.

An openness that invited people into the work itself.

When people are able to speak honestly about what is true,
shared understanding begins to grow.

Shared understanding creates trust.

Trust creates the confidence to solve together.

When people can see the same horizon, responsibility
begins to feel shared.

And shared responsibility expands what becomes possible.

THE CAPACITY WE CANNOT COUNT

Some forms of capacity cannot be measured

When we think about capacity, our minds often go to what can be counted.

Funding. Programs. Staff. Buildings. Technology. Systems. Resources matter — they always will.

Yet they never tell the whole story.

Another kind of capacity determines what an organization becomes capable of.

It is created through trust and relationships.

Through people who listen before deciding and collaborate before competing. Who continue asking what becomes possible when responsibility is shared.

That was the capacity we experienced throughout the day.

It revealed itself in the willingness to engage difficult questions. To solve together. To keep looking beyond today's challenges.

This is the capacity that helps shape the future of a community.

Because resources make work possible.
Relationships expand what becomes possible.

This capacity is one of the reasons your communities continue to grow stronger.

THE CULTURE WE STEWARD

Culture shapes what an organization is capable of

Culture revealed itself through conversation consistently throughout the day.

It was reflected in the way people welcomed different perspectives. The way new communities were spoken about with care and respect.

As ACAP continues growing, there is an equal commitment to stewarding culture itself.

Honoring what already makes each community unique, while building something larger together.

Growth has a way of testing culture.

It asks whether an organization can continue growing without losing the qualities that made people trust it in the first place.

Here, it felt as though growth was strengthening those qualities. That is not something to assume.

Stewardship like that deserves recognition.

Because culture is not something an organization has.

It is something people choose to build together, every day.

BEYOND OUR BOUNDARIES

Community expands through connection

As responsibility continues to grow, so does the opportunity to strengthen the community itself.

There was a willingness to look beyond individual programs and traditional boundaries.

The focus gradually widened from what each program could accomplish to what became possible for the community as a whole.

The future being imagined was larger than any one program or organization could build alone.

When organizations begin building alongside one another, communities begin discovering strengths that remain hidden in isolation.

That possibility lives within collaboration. And it is practiced here, every day.

It reaches beyond what each of us does.

It is the shared pursuit of something larger than ourselves.

This is how communities flourish.

More people choosing to steward what matters together.

RETURNING TO POSSIBILITY

Leadership is shaped by where attention returns

Conversations did not linger on obstacles for very long.

They returned to possibility.

How might we partner, or who else could help?

What becomes possible if we think differently?

That spirit remained with us throughout the day.

Every challenge became an invitation to think beyond what already existed.

New possibilities often begin with better questions.

Questions that strengthen relationships and invite new ways of thinking together.

Over time, this becomes more than optimism.
It becomes a way of leading.

A way of strengthening community, even when the path ahead is uncertain.

Resilience grows where people continue returning to possibility.

That spirit became one of the defining qualities of the day.

BUILDING BRIDGES

Systems create structure. People create connection

Individual programs remained important — while the focus kept widening toward the community itself.

Systems naturally create boundaries.

Programs have distinct purposes. Funding has defined responsibilities. Those boundaries exist for good reason.

Yet there are moments when a little flexibility could change everything. Opportunities often live between the boundaries systems were designed to create.

The people we serve experience community as a whole. They do not experience their lives one program at a time. Needs overlap. Circumstances intersect. Life happens.

While systems continue defining boundaries, people continue building bridges.

Looking beyond individual programs to strengthen the community as a whole. Whole families. Whole communities. Connecting around a shared purpose.

Every bridge reflects a belief that stronger connections create stronger communities.

Thank you for continuing to build those bridges.

Systems create structure. People create connection.

And every bridge expands what becomes possible.

BEYOND THE MOMENT

The work we seldom see

Much of the work that shapes a community feels ordinary while it is happening.

A conversation offers a family renewed hope.

A moment of recognition helps a colleague feel supported.

A new partnership allows one organization to breathe while strengthening the community around it.

A meeting ends with a deeper shared understanding.

Support reaches one person and, through them, reaches many more.

The full significance of these moments is seldom visible while they are unfolding.

One relationship strengthens the next.

One act of care becomes part of something larger.

These moments continue through relationships — into families and through communities.

Opening doors that may not have opened otherwise.

Strengthening trust in ways we may never fully witness.

The work we do today becomes part of what is possible tomorrow.

And tomorrow expands what is possible for all.

HOW WE LEFT

What the way we leave a room tells us

The way we leave a room tells us something about what happened within it.

Toward the end of the retreat, we were each invited to describe in a single word how we were feeling after spending the day together.

Around the room, one word after another was offered. More than thirty voices. Different words, yet most carried a similar feeling.

Engaged. Inspired. Committed. Optimistic. Hopeful.

The words reflected something more than individual feelings — they reflected what had been created together throughout the day.

This was a meaningful moment of the retreat.

After hours of discussing growing responsibility, changing funding, and the expanding needs of our communities, we did not leave carrying more weight.

We left carrying a deeper sense of possibility.

What is created together extends beyond the decisions made around the table —

Into how people feel as they leave it.

WHAT CONTINUES

Much of what matters continues beyond the moment

Much of what you are building cannot be measured while it is taking shape.

Yet it is taking shape. It happens one person at a time, until an entire community begins to feel different.

Every day, people leave your care carrying something they did not have before.

For some, it is renewed hope. For others, it is greater confidence. It may simply be the feeling that life's challenges no longer need to be carried alone.

This work asks much of the people who choose to steward it.

It asks for patience when progress is difficult to measure — or feels like it's working against us. It asks people to believe in outcomes they may never fully witness.

Because much of what begins today continues unfolding tomorrow.

Its influence finds its way into families.
Into neighborhoods.
Into the communities we all call home.

This is the work unfolding through your hands.

Thank you for holding it with such care.

We are proud to be standing with you.
