

An eleven-year veteran of public health, Kristin was thinking of moving on. The assistant director of a rural county public health department in Minnesota, in the last few years she had grown tired of trying to find ways to do more with less. She was discouraged by the invisibility of public health in the community and, like many of her peers, was becoming overwhelmed by a growing mountain of new challenges. Rather than wanting to lead, Kristin was ready to check out.

Minnesota Turning Point How Kristin Got Her Groove Back

Like Kristin, the entire field of public health is facing huge leadership challenges. Community needs are growing. Public health issues, such as emergency preparedness, are becoming more complex. Yet many leaders are retiring, as the American workforce ages, and others have

realized they neither can nor want to shoulder the burdens of leadership alone.

Late in 2002, Kristin's director encouraged her to apply for a new public health program focused on collaborative leadership. The Emerging Leaders Network (ELN) was developed in

support of Minnesota's Turning Point Partnership vision: to strengthen the public health system. "We realized that we could use what we were learning through our involvement in the Turning Point Leadership Development National Excellence Collaborative to identify and mentor future leaders in our state," says Lee Kingsbury, Minnesota's Turning Point Program Coordinator. "We developed the Emerging Leaders Network to provide individuals with the training and confidence they need to step into formal and informal collaborative leadership roles."

For Kristin, participating in the yearlong ELN program was a turning point, both personally and professionally. "The most important

moment for me came during a simulation of a public meeting," she says. "I had the opportunity to take on the role of an elected official, and when the situation got overwhelming, I checked out, letting a more assertive person take over. Later, as we all reflected on the experience, I discovered that others had wanted my leadership and that my way of leading would have calmed rather than escalated the situation. They valued my skills and my style in a way that I had not expected. From that realization, I gained a lot of confidence in my ability to lead and have become more willing to trust my instincts in difficult situations."

In another exercise, she was required to introduce herself to other attendees of a statewide conference. Together with an ELN "buddy" they strategized how to get acquainted with new colleagues. "I met many wonderful people that I would not have met otherwise," she says. "It helped me learn how to build a network and also made me appreciate all the different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of people in public health."

Kristin is looking ahead with renewed confidence. She has new passion for strengthening the public health system overall and she wants to share it. "These experiences," Kristin says, "forced me out of my comfort zone. By making new connections, meeting new individuals, and hearing different perspectives, I learned I am not alone. Because of the ELN experience I joined the Minnesota Public Health Association and accepted a place on the Governing Council. I never would have thought that possible a year ago! The ELN connected me to the entire public health system in a totally new way. I now know that together we can take on tomorrow's challenges."



At a Glance: *Minnesota*



Aim of Minnesota Turning Point

The Minnesota Turning Point partnership aims to improve the health of all residents by strengthening Minnesota's governmental public health system and expanding public health partnerships.

Minnesota's Public Health Challenges

Minnesota consistently ranks as one of the healthiest states in the US, due in large part to strong public health policies and partnerships. Broad averages, however, often mask significant differences in health status, and Minnesota has some of the widest gaps, of any state, in the health of various populations.

Minnesota Turning Point's Contribution to Improving Public Health

Minnesota Turning Point has achieved numerous system changes both within and outside of the traditional public health system through their expanded partnership. Outcomes include:

- A process to established minimum standards for local public health services and activities.
- Local planning requirements have been refocused on outcomes, local priorities and strategies.
- Civic engagement strategies have been incorporated throughout Minnesota Public Health.
- A major foundation and partner is redesigning funding guidelines to reflect the link between health status and social and economic conditions.
- "A Call to Action," a multi-disciplinary report, was written, focusing on social and economic change as a strategy for health improvement.
- Grants to local public health departments were consolidated, simplified, and new funding formulas were developed.
- Private and nonprofit sector partners worked together with public health to set statewide goals.
- A multi-disciplinary effort focused on social and economic change as a strategy for alleviating health disparities.
- An innovative program develops and supports emerging public health leaders.
- Redesign of public health reporting systems has begun.
- Work is underway to define what every Minnesotan should be able to expect from their local governmental public health agency.
- A workforce development project aims to increase the number and diversity of Minnesotans choosing careers in public health.

For More Information

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