



Honoring Our Founder, Investing in Our Future

A Message from the Harm Reduction Sisters Board of Directors on Sue Purchase's Planned Retirement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 3rd, 2026

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Today, the Board of Directors of Harm Reduction Sisters is sharing that the Founder and Executive Director of our organization, Sue Purchase, plans to retire in April 2027.

Considering that Sue will continue leading Harm Reduction Sisters through the spring of 2027, this is not a farewell. It marks the beginning of a thoughtful transition as Sue gradually steps back from the day-to-day work she has devoted her life to for decades. Through her lived experience, fearless leadership, and unwavering commitment to the dignity and rights of people who use drugs, Sue has helped shape harm reduction internationally, mentored leaders, and inspired people across the country. As we honor all she has helped build, we also want to share how the Board is thoughtfully preparing for the organization's next chapter.

Since founding Harm Reduction Sisters in 2018, Sue has transformed a bold vision into one of Minnesota's leading harm reduction organizations. What began as a grassroots effort to address critical gaps in services for people who use drugs has grown into a trusted resource providing harm reduction supplies, HIV services, peer support, overdose prevention, outreach, education, and advocacy across northern Minnesota. Sue returned to her home region with what she has often described as "Unfinished Business."

About her departure, Sue shares, *"Leadership is ultimately about stewardship. My responsibility has never been to build an organization that depended on me; it has been to help build one that would continue to lead, innovate, and advocate long after my tenure ended. As I prepare to retire next spring, I do so with confidence that Harm Reduction Sisters is ready for its next chapter. The future of this organization does*

not rest on a single executive director. It rests on the extraordinary people who carry this mission forward every day, a committed Board of Directors, dedicated partners, and a community that understands the value of evidence-based, compassionate care.”

Over the course of her leadership, Harm Reduction Sisters has grown from the trunk of Sue’s car into a thriving nonprofit, serving communities across the Northland. Through partnerships, innovative programming, and relentless advocacy, the organization has expanded access to life-saving resources while helping shift public understanding of harm reduction throughout the region. Long before many harm reduction approaches gained widespread acceptance, Sue championed practices grounded in evidence, lived experience, and public health research. Her willingness to innovate, advocate for cutting edge harm reduction strategies, and adapt evidence-based services to fit the needs of rural communities helped position Harm Reduction Sisters as a respected voice in the national harm reduction movement and a leader in bringing research-informed solutions to northern Minnesota.

In 2025, Sue received the Gill Bradbury Award for Excellence in Service Provision from Harm Reduction International, recognizing her outstanding contributions to harm reduction and her commitment to ensuring people have access to low-barrier, life-saving services. Longtime friend and colleague, Stephanie Prohaska, Director of Operations at The North American Syringe Exchange Network shares, *“Thank you, Sue for showing generations of harm reductionists what it means to truly give a shit about people. You have been an essential force in this movement as a mentor, a friend, and a person who always finds a way forward when many others only see barriers. Your compassion and relentless determination have helped shape programs, inspire leaders, and ensure that countless organizations reach their full potential. So much of this movement simply wouldn’t be where it is today without you. Your legacy lives in every act of compassion and every person doing this work who carries your wisdom and heart.”*

Reflecting on her work with Sue, staff member Angie Briski shared, *“Sue saw something in me that I have struggled for a long time to see in myself; she trusted my heart for the demographic we serve together as well as fostering a sense of leadership within me. The team she has recruited within the organization is my family now. I am so honored every day to work alongside some of the most bad a** social justice warriors and activists I’ve ever met. There is no doubt in my mind that she has not only saved numerous lives and mitigated a significant amount of suffering through her own work, but has given the team she has built the skills and resources necessary to do the same.”*

Over the past year, the Board has been focused on succession planning efforts as part of Sue’s planned departure. Harm Reduction Sisters has grown, and its needs are changing. Our work has evolved along with our understanding of the kind of leadership structure that will best support the organization for years to come. The Board will begin its search for the next Executive Director in the coming weeks. As part of this transition, we have also created a Director of Operations position to help strengthen the organization’s operational foundation. This new role will work closely with Sue during the transition and partner with the incoming Executive Director. This investment reflects the Board’s commitment to ensuring the organization remains both mission-driven and well-positioned for the future. While Sue’s retirement marks the close of an extraordinary chapter, the values, relationships, and vision she brought to Harm Reduction Sisters will continue to shape the organization as it embarks on its next chapter. We are lucky to have a strong foundation, clear mission, and an exceptional team to carry this work forward.

The Board embraces its responsibility to steward Sue's legacy with deep gratitude for her leadership, confidence in the remarkable people who make this work possible every day, and optimism for what lies ahead.

We encourage press engagement regarding Sue's retirement & legacy. Please reach out to theresa@harmreductionsisters.org for press inquiries or to schedule interviews.