Community Solution Action Plan

> MN Southwest Region

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INTRODUCTION

What’s Greater Than Minnesota?

The Greater Than Minnesota (>MN) Project is an innovative initiative of First Children’s Finance and the six Minnesota Initiative Foundations to address the challenges of rural child care and early education in Greater Minnesota.

Why Greater Minnesota?

Too often, decisions about early care and education are made in the Twin Cities metro area while communities in Greater Minnesota are left out of the conversation. When the challenges are different, the solutions must be different. Populations may be smaller, but the stakes are just as high. Rural children are more likely to be poor than children in urban areas, and are more likely to be living in deep poverty for longer periods of time. Many rural areas struggle to attract and retain a young, educated workforce, while others lack the resources to keep up with their own growth and success. Although rural communities face many challenges, they are also resilient. They have the innovation it takes to develop nimble, creative solutions that will be effective in rural areas. The >MN Project leverages small communities’ independent, can-do attitudes to address early care and education in Greater Minnesota.

The >MN Philosophy

The >MN Project believes that rural communities are greater than their size in numbers. They have dreams for their children that are greater than the status quo. Together, we are greater than our challenges. Where some might see desolate swaths of land and dwindling populations, we see opportunity for innovation and renewal. We’re determined to listen and learn, not lecture and diagnose. By mobilizing and empowering rural communities, we are changing the landscape of early care and education in Greater Minnesota. Because nothing is greater than Minnesota’s future.
THE >MN FRAMEWORK

“In employees can’t find quality care for their children, they won’t work for you. They won’t move to your community, or they’ll be forced to move away, or they might have to consider quitting their job to stay home with their children because they have no other option.”

- Kris Bevell, Editor, Prairie Business Magazine

In rural communities, child care exists and often struggles within a regional market context. Ebbs and flows of the local economy greatly influence the sustainability of a community’s child care supply, and vice versa.

That’s why the >MN Project addresses child care and early education challenges through a framework of regional economic development. A robust supply of high quality child care fosters community growth through:

- Recruiting and retaining new businesses, employees, and families
- Enabling parents to be more productive and less absent at work
- Strengthening and feeding the pipeline for a skilled future workforce

In 2012, Minnesota experienced a net loss of 355 child care programs. Each closure represents:

- the loss of jobs
- parents struggling to find and afford quality care
- an unstable learning environment for children

The connection is clear: when our children thrive, so do our communities. Investing in early care and education is not only the right thing to do for our youngest citizens, but the best thing to do for our economic growth and prosperity.
THE >MN APPROACH

The >MN Project has three distinct components that build on and intersect with one another to create a comprehensive approach to addressing rural early care and education needs.

Community Solution Action Plan
It takes a community to create a community plan. That’s why each regional process begins with a Town Hall. Concerned community members, elected officials, lenders, school superintendents, family child care providers, child care centers, small business owners, large employers, teachers, Head Start, rural economic development representatives—really, anyone who is interested in discussing child care is invited to participate in a Town Hall meeting in their community. During that meeting, participants explore data about their community, identify successes, look for gaps and opportunities for improvement, and start to build the basis of a Community Solution Action Plan.

Business Advisory Council
After the framework of the Community Solution Action Plan is developed, the >MN Project recruits the business community to review the plan and start engaging in the development of solutions. Engagement of the private sector is a critical component of implementation of the Community Solution Action Plan. Local business community members shape, inform and advocate for the plan, provide business expertise to child care business owners, and identify community resources that support successful implementation of the plan.

Learning Cohorts
Based on the priorities established in the Community Solution Action Plan, learning cohorts are established. Learning cohorts contain 6-8 child care and early education programs within the region. For approximately one year, the cohort has access to training, business consultation and technical assistance from First Children’s Finance to build their capacity to improve their business operations. The regional Business Advisory Council also provides business advice and mentorship to the cohort members.

>MN’s multi-layered approach meets rural communities where they are. By building on existing strengths and providing targeted resources, the >MN Project:

- Strengthens existing early care and education businesses, ensuring that children have continuity of care that prepares them for success in school and beyond.
- Expands the availability of quality child care by creating new and innovative community partnerships.
- Increases regional and statewide public awareness of early care and education’s role in rural economic development.
THE REGION

Southwest Minnesota

The >MN Project launched in partnership with the Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF) in January 2014.

SWIF selected Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac Qui Parle and Swift Counties as the initial communities to participate in the >MN Project.

Prior to the region’s Town Hall meeting, >MN gathered background data for the area to inform the process.
THE DATA

BIG STONE COUNTY

Population Trends

- 296 children under age 5
- 73.9% of families with children under age 5 have both parents in the workforce
- 47.7% of families with children under age 5 lives in poverty

LARGEST INDUSTRIES

- Health Care & Social Services
- Construction
- Retail

Breakdown of Licensed Child Care Slots

- Total: 180
- Center (5%)
- Family (95%)

3 School-based/Head Start/Preschool sites

3 Parent Aware rated programs (available county-wide in 2015)

3rd Grade Reading*

- 88
- 87
- State Avg (57%)

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*Children who are not kindergarten-ready are half as likely to be reading well by 3rd grade. Children who are not reading proficiently by 3rd grade are 4x more likely to drop out of high school.
THE DATA

CHIPPEWA COUNTY

Population Trends

767 children under age 5

81.3% of families with children under age 5 have both parents in the workforce

10.7% of families with children under age 5 lives in poverty

LARGEST INDUSTRIES

Health Care & Social Services

Manufacturing

Retail

Breakdown of Licensed Child Care Slots

3 School-based/Head Start/Preschool sites

7 Parent Aware rated programs

(2 center, 2 family, 2 Head Start
1 public school-based)

3rd Grade Reading*

State Avg (57%)

Prepared by Greater Than MN 2014

*Children who are not kindergarten-ready are half as likely to be reading well by 3rd grade. Children who are not reading proficiently by 3rd grade are 4x more likely to drop out of high school.

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THE DATA

LAC QUI PARLE COUNTY

Population Trends

- 387 children under age 5
- 78.6% of families with children under age 5 have both parents in the workforce
- 18.8% of families with children under age 5 lives in poverty

LARGEST INDUSTRIES

- Retail
- Wholesale
- Accommodation & Food Service

Breakdown of Licensed Child Care Slots

- 200 Total
- 4 School-based/Head Start/Preschool sites
- 4 Parent Aware rated programs (available county-wide in 2015)

3rd Grade Reading*

- Prepared by Greater Than MN 2014
- *Children who are not kindergarten-ready are half as likely to be reading well by 3rd grade. Children who are not reading proficiently by 3rd grade are 4x more likely to drop out of high school.

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THE DATA

SWIFT COUNTY

Population Trends

- 523 children under age 5
- 73.2% of families with children under age 5 have both parents in the workforce
- 20% of families with children under age 5 live in poverty

LARGEST INDUSTRIES

- Health Care & Social Services
- Retail
- Wholesale

Breakdown of Licensed Child Care Slots

- 486 Total
- 8 School-based/Head Start/Preschool sites
- 8 Parent Aware rated programs (available county-wide in 2014)

3rd Grade Reading*

- State Avg (57%)
- Prepared by Greater Than MN 2014

*Children who are not kindergarten ready are half as likely to be reading well by 3rd grade. Children who are not reading proficiently by 3rd grade are 4x more likely to drop out of high school.

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THE TRENDS

Data is important, but it’s only one piece of the puzzle when evaluating the current needs of a community. In a recent op-ed titled *We Need to Address Why People Don’t Move Here* by the Swift County News-Monitor's editor Reed Anfinson, "they can’t find daycare so they look for communities where they can readily find it" and "the daycare facilities don’t have flexible hours that accommodate people working shifts" were highlighted as barriers to attracting and sustaining a talented workforce in Swift County.

On January 28, 2014, the community Town Hall meeting was hosted in Benson, MN, and drew 40 participants from 28 different organizations representing 4 counties – Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac Qui Parle, and Swift. Working together, participants reviewed the background data of their communities and identified trends impacting child care and early education in Southwest Minnesota:

- There is a strong, committed group of child care advocates in Southwestern MN, notably within the private sector.

- Professional development opportunities for providers and educators are expensive and require travel.

- There is strong interest and support in the community for child care facility development, but in order to ensure its necessity and sustainability its decision for implementation should be based on data, costs, and thorough feasibility research.

- There is a limited number of preschool, Head Start, and ECFE slots and sites.

- Child care providers are feeling a saturation of time commitment
  - Managing the business operations of child care and early education programs can be overwhelming to center and family providers.
  - There is a need for a respite and support system for child care providers to decrease their sense of isolation.
  - Licensed family child care providers are experiencing a turnover rate that affects the number of child care slots available in the community.

- Large local employers are trying to find employees who have reliable care and care during nontraditional hours (shift work) and rotating schedules (week on/week off). Child care is difficult to obtain, especially care during extended hours. The result is parents who are unable to maintain employment, or children who are in substandard care situations while their parents are at work.

- Strained human resource departments at large employers may not know the actual demand for child care.
• There is a general lack of available, affordable child care options. Child care programs are sparsely located, and not always in convenient locations. Infant care is the most difficult to find.

• Community members worry that a lack of child care is a negative for the Southwest region’s public perception and feel their growth is limited because families cannot find child care.

• Child care providers are not regarded as professionals in the community. However, they are small business owners that must remain ‘open for business’ in order to foster community growth. They need guidance and support to be sustainable.

• Limited flexibility of both local and federal dollars has stunted innovative ideas for community child care projects.
Thank you to everyone who participated in the Benson Town Hall meeting:

Mark Anderson, Benson Christian School
Liz Auch, Benson Countryside Public Health
Jane Baukol, Our Redeemer’s Church
Laree Breen, Breen's Pharmacy
Gene Doscher, Our Redeemer’s Church
Robin Finke, Swift County Attorney
Jen Frost, Swift County Rural Development Authority
Heather Giese, Parent/Teacher
Matt Gilbertson, Chippewa County Commissioner
Trisha Hering, Kids Korner/Kinder Kare
Steve Jones, City of Montevideo
Marge Knudson, Child Care Aware
Steve Loen, Loen Electric, Inc.
Jan Lundebrek, SWIF Board, First Security Bank
Jodi Maertens, SWIF
Kelly Michaelson, Swift County Benson Hospital
Elaine Mitteness, Our Redeemer’s Church
Jamie Moe, KMS Preschool
Erin Nagler, Benson Area Community Foundation
Eileen Niemeier, Family Child Care Provider
Renee Nolting, United Way of West Central MN
Vicki Oakes, Ortonville Economic Development Authority
Lorri Pederson, Swift County Human Services
Mike Poggeweaver, Swift County Administrator
Marie Reszel, Montevideo Community Education
Pam Rud, Big Stone County Family Services
Deanne Steckman, Swift County Human Services
Angela Steinbach, Montevideo Community Development
Heidi Svingen, Parent
Mary Beth Thayer, Benson Area Chamber of Commerce
Ann Thompson, Lac Qui Parle Valley Early Childhood Initiative
Shelly Vergin, Benson Community Education
Linda Wall, Loen Electric, Inc.
Teresa Winzenburg, KMS ECI/United Way
Rob Wolfington, Benson ECI/United Way
Andy Zurn, Our Redeemer’s Church

and McKinney’s in Benson for hosting.
THE PLAN

Community Solution Action Plan
for Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac Qui Parle and Swift Counties

The community has identified a need for:

- Additional child care slots, especially for infant care
- Business supports for all child care businesses
- Community-wide response to providing quality child care & early education

GOAL 1
Additional child care slots, especially for infant care

- Assess the need for child care in Benson
- Child care options to accommodate nontraditional hours
- Infant care
- School age care
- Quality preschool care and educational opportunities
- Establish a child care center in small cities to meet demand
- Encourage partnerships between nonprofit facilities and individuals or organizations interested in starting child care businesses

GOAL 2
Local business supports for all child care businesses

- Resources to support child care businesses developing business and marketing plans
- Increase businesses' ability to meet licensing requirements and meet financial requirements
- Technical assistance training/mentor for those interested in starting a child care business
- Financial incentives for quality care

GOAL 3
A community-wide response for providing quality child care and early education

- Survey largest businesses to determine employee child care needs
- Establish employer-sponsored child care that accommodates rotating shifts or nontraditional hours
- Engage local businesses in early childhood planning
- Create a community task force to coordinate efforts to increase and support child care and early education
  - Centrally track child care openings
  - Identify roadblocks to new family child care businesses becoming licensed
  - Support child care businesses with volunteers
  - Identify potential spaces that may fit licensing requirements
- Explore incentives or subsidy for new and existing child care businesses from local government

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ENDNOTES

http://prairiebusiness.areavoices.com/2013/10/dont-forget-daycares/


3. Background data sources:
   - Data Center, Minnesota Department of Education  
     http://education.state.mn.us/mde/Data/
   - Data Tools, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development  
     http://mn.gov/deed/data/data-tools/
   - Minnesota State Demographic Center http://www.demography.state.mn.us/
   - Licensing Information Lookup, Minnesota Department of Human Services  
     http://licensinglookup.dhs.state.mn.us/
   - Parent Aware Ratings http://parentawareratings.org/
   - Infographics created with Piktochart http://piktochart.com/
>MN PROJECT INFORMATION

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