

# Community Solution Action Plan



**>MN**  
**Southwest  
Region**  
February 2014



Changing the landscape of early care  
and education in Greater Minnesota.

Because nothing is **Greater Than** Minnesota's future.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The &gt;MN Framework.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The &gt;MN Approach.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Region: Southwest Minnesota.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>The Data</b>	
Big Stone County.....	7
Chippewa County.....	8
Lac Qui Parle County.....	9
Swift County.....	10
<b>The Trends.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>The Plan.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Endnotes.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>&gt;MN Project Information.....</b>	<b>16</b>

# 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

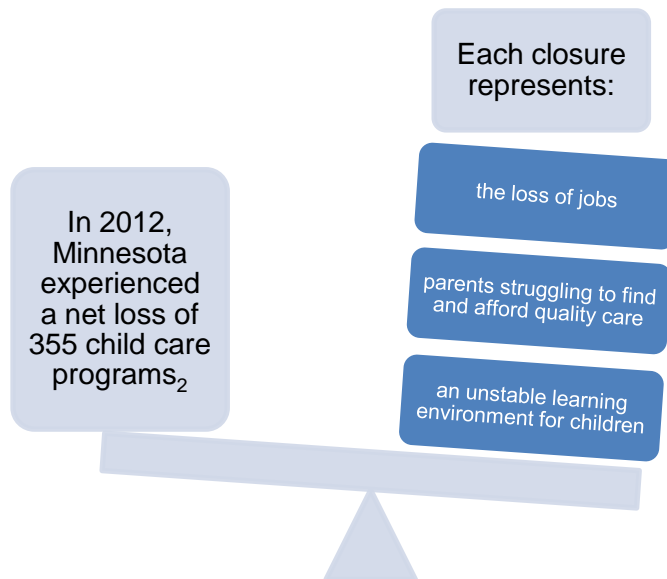
The >MN Project believes that rural communities are greater than their size in numbers. They have dreams for their children that are greater than the status quo. Together, we are greater than our challenges. Where some might see desolate swaths of land and dwindling populations, we see opportunity for 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

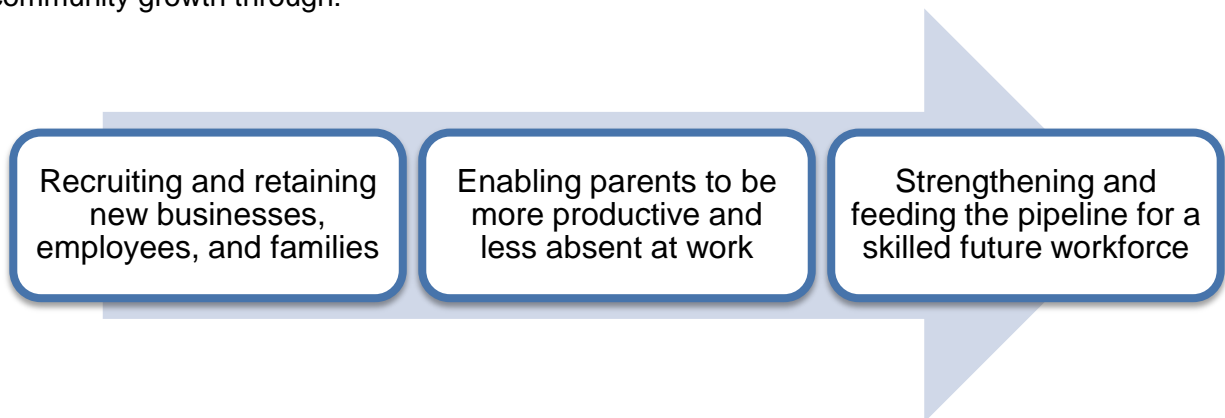
*"If employees can't find quality care for their children, they won't work for you. They won't move to your community, or they'll be forced to move away, or they might have to consider quitting their job to stay home with their children because they have no other option."*

- Kris Bevell, Editor, *Prairie Business Magazine*<sup>1</sup>

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:




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.

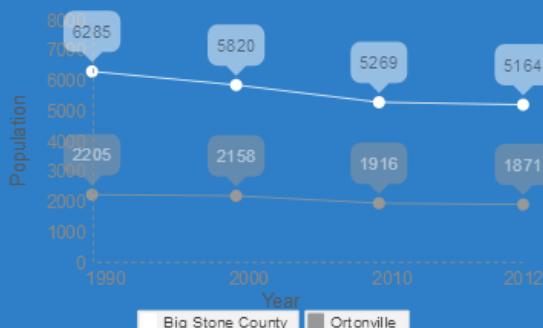


Prior to the region's Town Hall meeting, >MN gathered background data<sub>3</sub> for the area to inform the process.

# 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

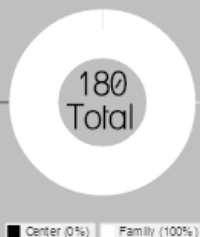


Construction



Retail

Breakdown of Licensed Child Care Slots



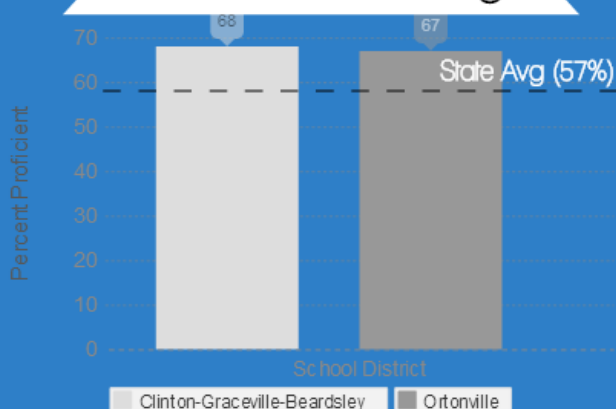
3 School-based/ Head Start/ Preschool sites



3 Parent Aware rated programs

(available county-wide in 2015)

### 3rd Grade Reading\*



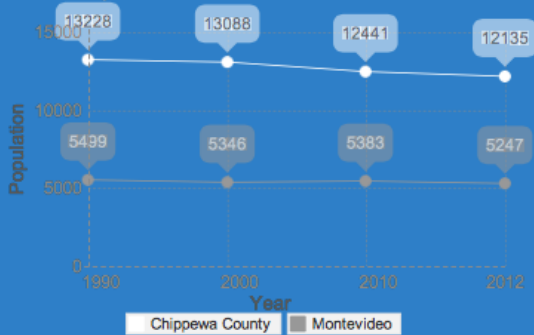
Prepared by  
Greater Than MN  
2014

\*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.

## 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

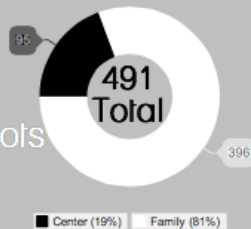


10.7% of families with children under age 5 lives in poverty

### LARGEST INDUSTRIES



Breakdown of Licensed Child Care Slots



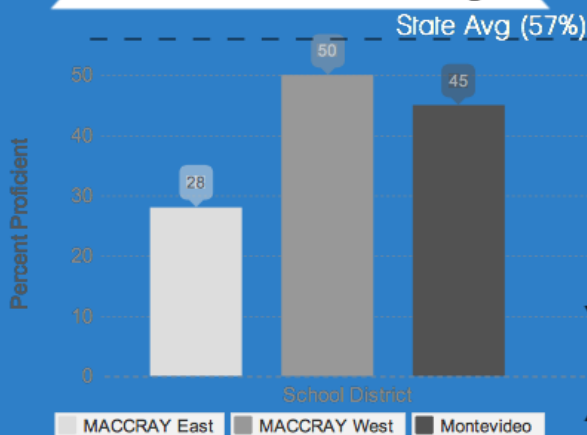
3 School-based/ Head Start/ Preschool sites



7 Parent Aware rated programs

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

### 3rd Grade Reading\*



Prepared by  
Greater Than MN  
2014

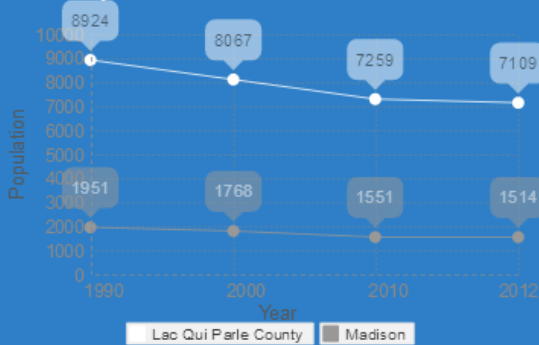
\*Children who are not kindergarten-ready are half as likely to be reading well by 3rd grade. Children who are not reading proficiently by 3rd grade are 4x more likely to drop out of high school.



## 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

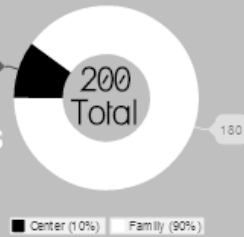


Wholesale



Accommodation & Food Service

Breakdown of Licensed Child Care Slots

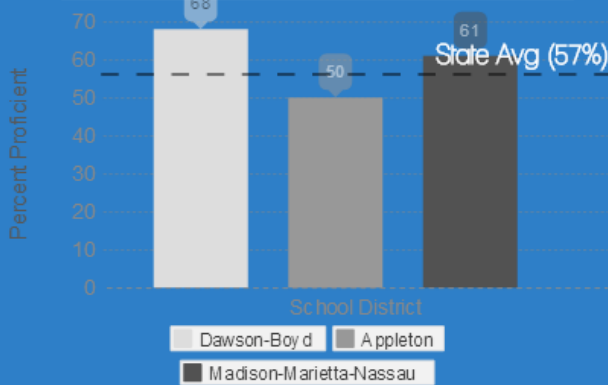


4 School-based/ Head Start/ Preschool sites



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

### 3rd Grade Reading\*



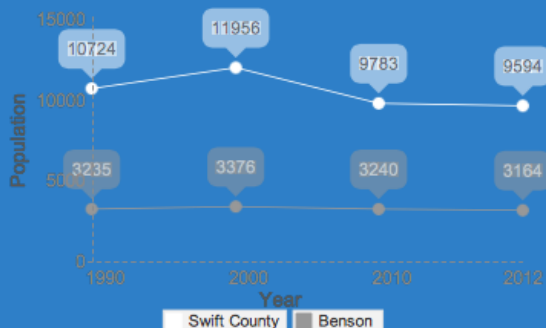
Prepared by  
Greater Than MN  
2014

\*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.

# 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 lives in poverty

### LARGEST INDUSTRIES



Health Care & Social Services

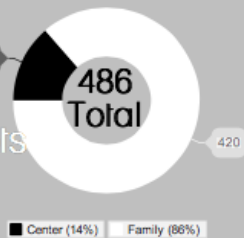


Retail



Wholesale

Breakdown of Licensed Child Care Slots



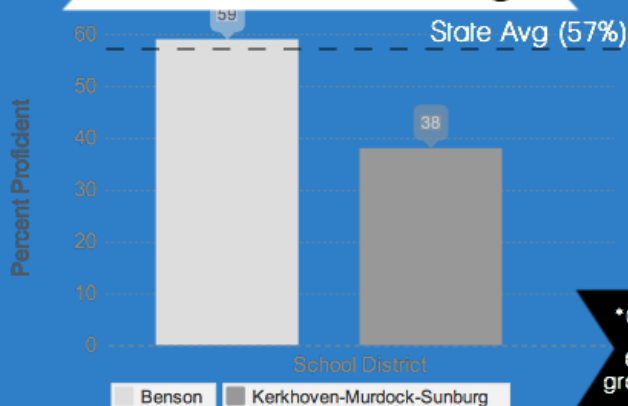
8 School-based/ Head Start/ Preschool sites



8 Parent Aware rated programs

(available county-wide in 2014)

### 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.

## 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:

*"Swift County's ability to offer affordable, high quality child care is critical as we look to attract new residents to our area."*

- Jen Frost, Director, Swift County Rural Development Authority

- 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 ECCE 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 City Manager  
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

# ENDNOTES

1. “Don’t Forget Daycares,” Kris Bevell, Prairie Business Magazine, Oct. 25, 2013  
<http://prairiebusiness.areavoices.com/2013/10/dont-forget-daycares/>
2. Child Care Aware of Minnesota Annual Report, 2012  
[http://www.childcareawaremn.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2012\\_annual\\_report.pdf](http://www.childcareawaremn.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2012_annual_report.pdf)
3. Background data sources:
  - American Community Survey, US Census Bureau <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/>
  - 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/>



Changing the landscape of early care  
and education in Greater Minnesota.

Because nothing is **Greater Than** Minnesota's future.

## **>MN PROJECT INFORMATION**

### **WEBSITE**

[www.greaterthanmn.org](http://www.greaterthanmn.org)

### **TWITTER**

[@greaterthanmn](https://twitter.com/greaterthanmn)

### **CONTACT**



Heidi Hagel Braid | Minnesota Director, First Children's Finance

612-279-6504 direct

[heidihb@firstchildrensfinance.org](mailto:heidihb@firstchildrensfinance.org)



Jamie Swezey | Business Development Associate, First Children's Finance

612-279-6512 direct

[jamie@firstchildrensfinance.org](mailto:jamie@firstchildrensfinance.org)

### **PARTNERS**

Minnesota Initiative Foundations | [www.greaterminnesota.net](http://www.greaterminnesota.net)

Otto Bremer Foundation | [www.ottobremer.org](http://www.ottobremer.org)

Bush Foundation | [www.bushfoundation.org](http://www.bushfoundation.org)