

Community Solution Action Plan



Central
Region

>MN Project
July 2014



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

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
The >MN Framework.....	4
The >MN Approach.....	5
The Region: Central MN.....	6
The Data.....	7
The Trends.....	12
The Plan.....	14
Endnotes.....	15
>MN Project Information.....	16

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

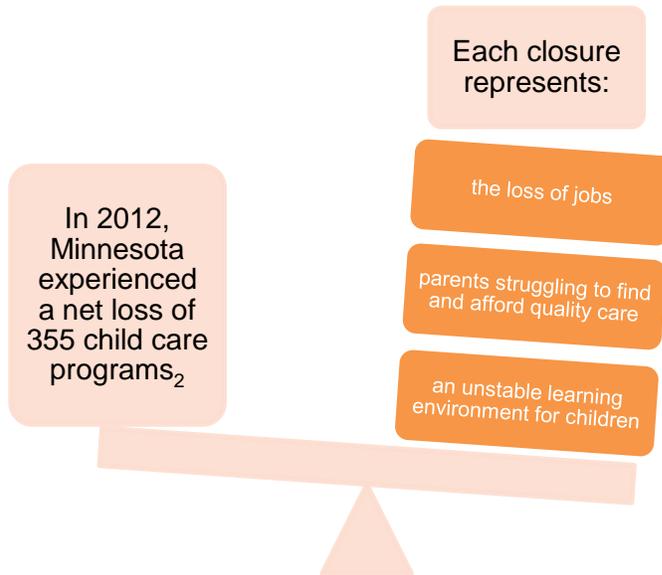
The >MN Project believes that rural communities are greater than their size in numbers. They have dreams for their children that are greater than the status quo. Together, we are greater than our challenges. Where some might see desolate swaths of land and dwindling populations, we see opportunity for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

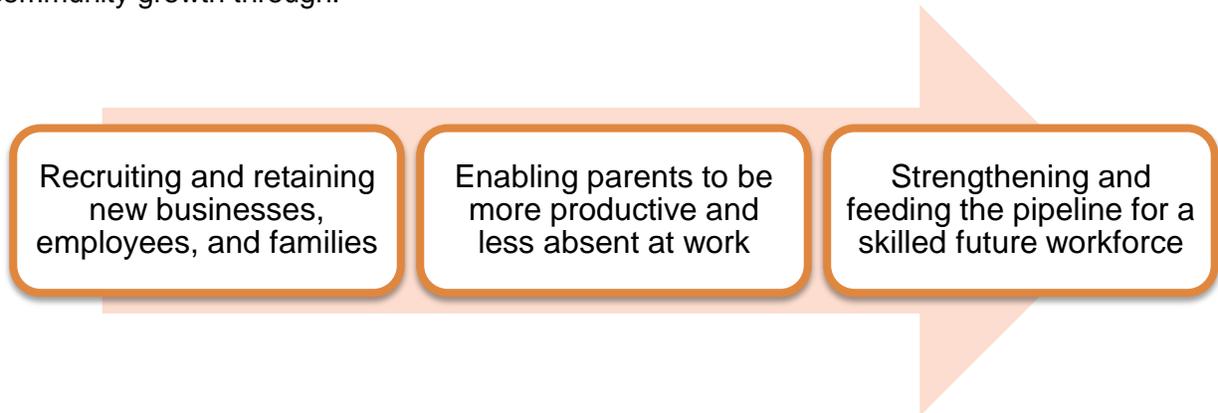
“If employees can’t find quality care for their children, they won’t work for you. They won’t move to your community, or they’ll be forced to move away, or they might have to consider quitting their job to stay home with their children because they have no other option.”

- Kris Bevell, Editor, *Prairie Business Magazine*¹

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.

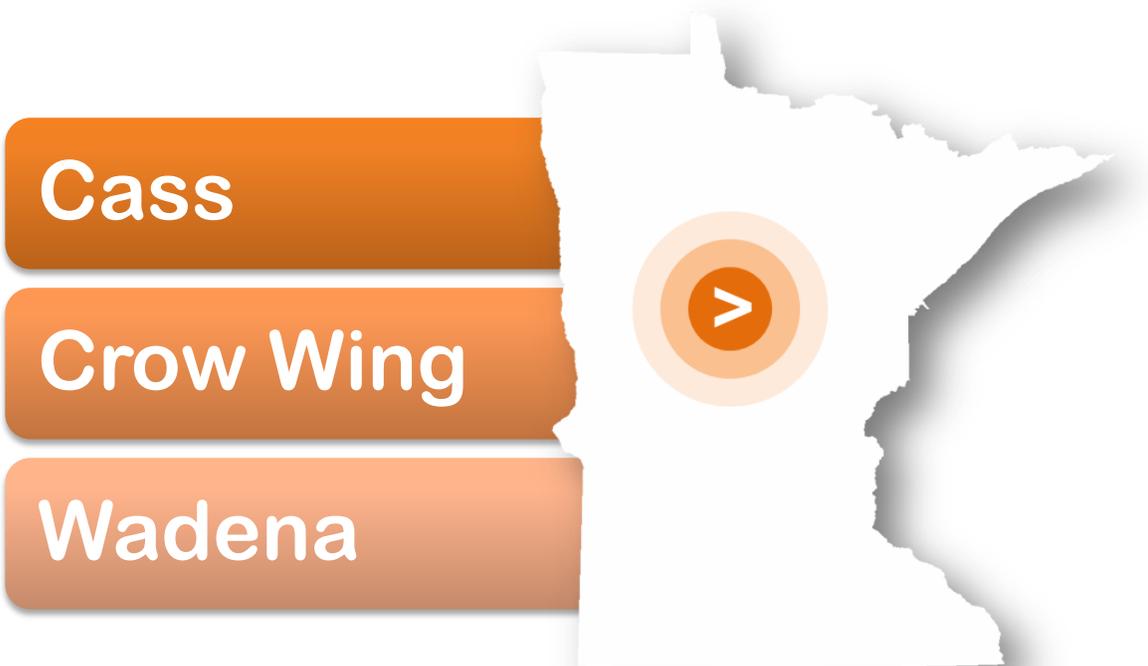
THE REGION

Central Minnesota

The >MN Project launched in Central Minnesota in partnership with the Initiative Foundation in May 2014.



The Initiative Foundation selected Cass, Crow Wing, and Wadena Counties as the initial communities to participate in the >MN Project.

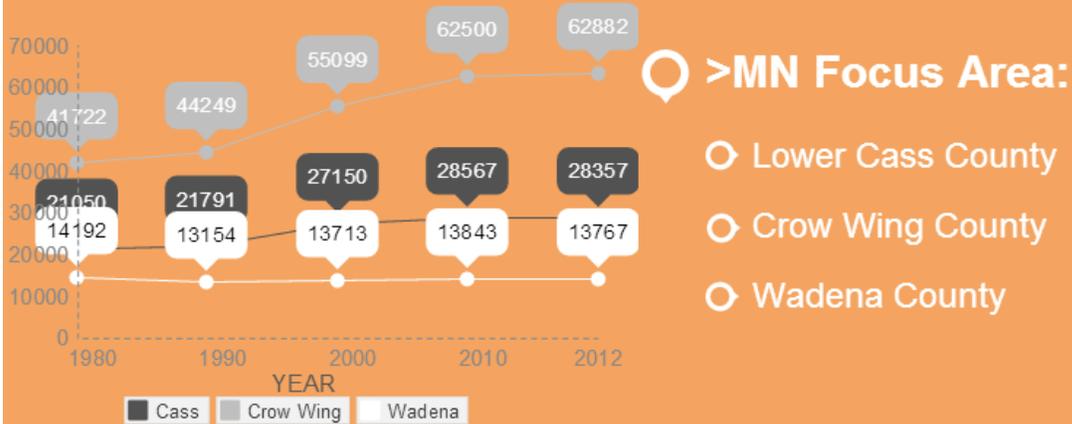


Prior to the region's Town Hall meeting, >MN gathered background data₃ for the area to inform the process.

CENTRAL MINNESOTA

Population Trends

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

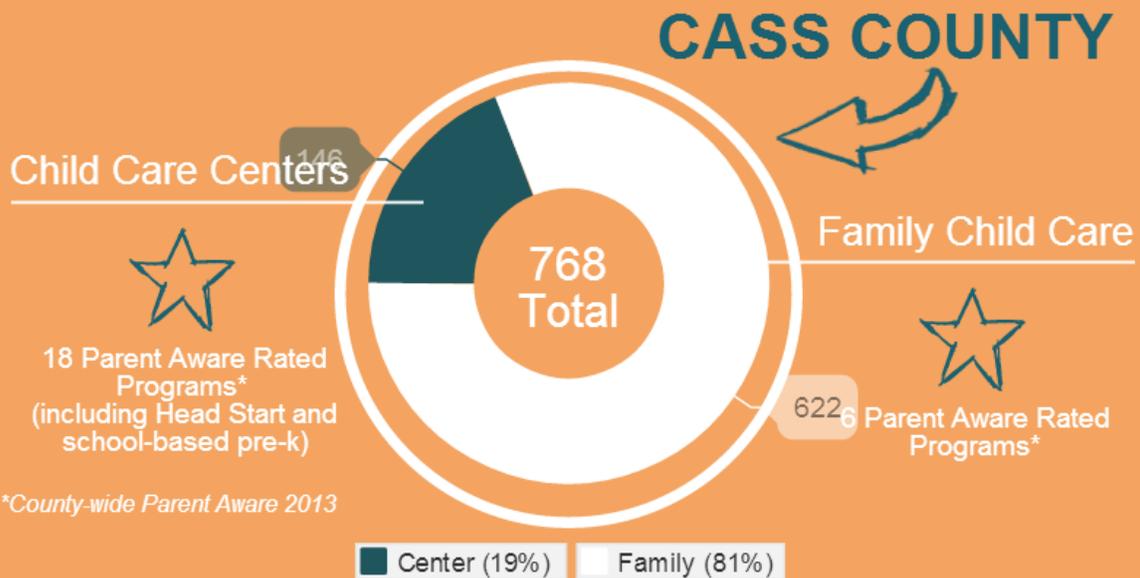


Child Care Supply

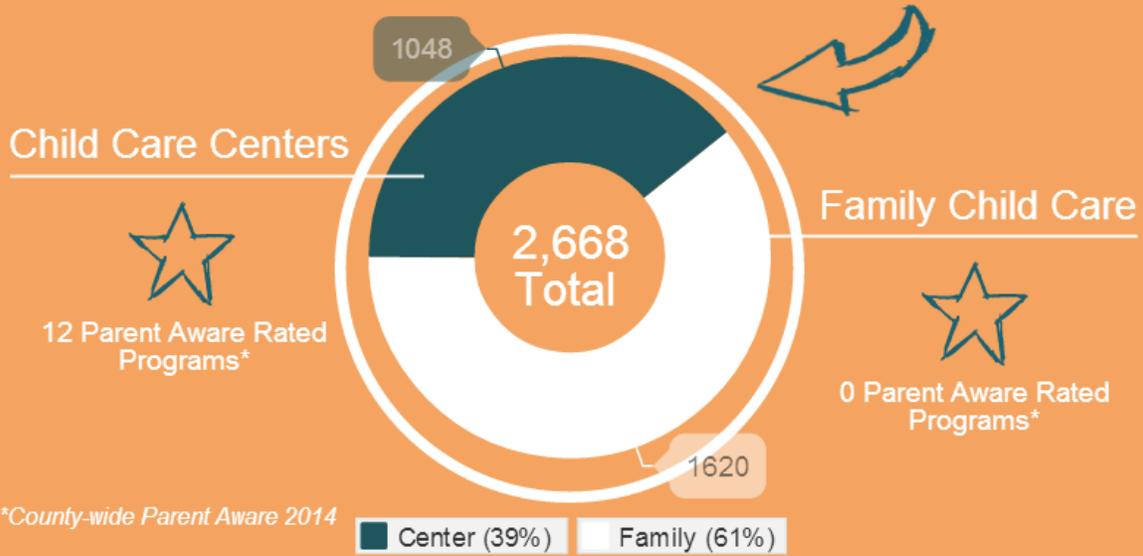
Source: MN Department of Human Services; Parent Aware

Licensed Child Care Slots

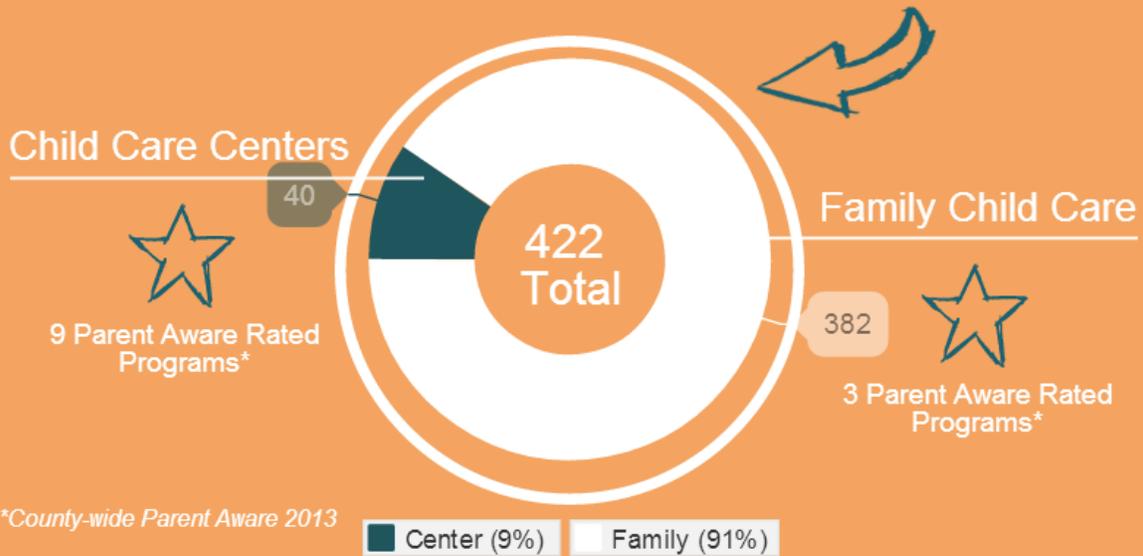
Note: Figures below only include school-based pre-k programs and Head Start programs that are licensed by DHS



CROW WING COUNTY



WADENA COUNTY



Child Care Demand

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey

CASS COUNTY



1,718 children under age 5



77.5% of families with children under age 6 have both parents in the workforce



35% of families with children under age 5 live in poverty

CROW WING COUNTY



4,021 children under age 5



77.1% of families with children under age 6 have both parents in the workforce



17.5% of families with children under age 5 live in poverty

WADENA COUNTY



974 children under age 5



44.9% of families with children under age 6 have both parents in the workforce



37.6% of families with children under age 5 live in poverty

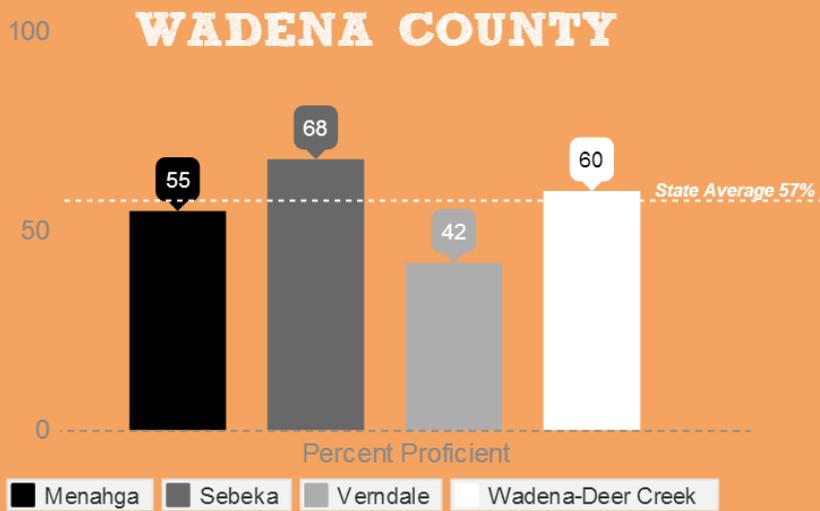
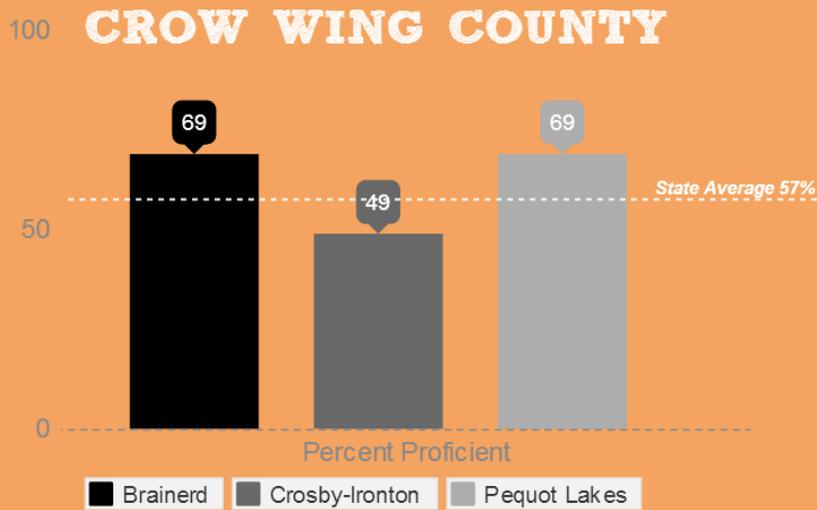
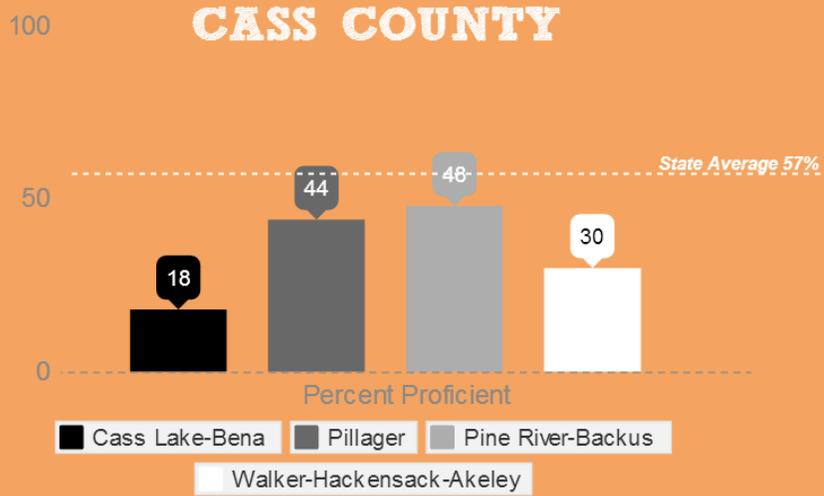
3rd Grade Reading

Source: MN Department of Education



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 following charts represent school districts' average percent proficiency on 3rd grade reading MCA scores from school year 2012-2013



THE TRENDS

Data is important, but it's only one piece of the puzzle when evaluating the current needs of a community. On May 22, 2014, the community Town Hall meeting was hosted in Brainerd, MN, and drew participants representing child care, early education, community organizations, business, government, law enforcement and faith communities from Cass, Crow Wing, and Wadena Counties. Working together, participants reviewed the background data and identified trends impacting child care and early education in Central MN:

- Training and professional development opportunities for providers and educators are expensive and require travel.
- A lack of local resources in Central MN affects the consistency and continuity of care in the community.
- There is a lack of public knowledge and awareness in the community about what *quality* early care and education is and why it's important. Parents need to recognize the importance of social and emotional intelligence in relation to academic skills.
- Infant care is expensive to provide and space is limited.
- The child care assistance program (CCAP) co-payments are insufficient to cover the cost of quality care for parents and providers.
- There are problems with retaining and maintaining quality early care and education staff because of low wages and a lack of recognition for professionalism in the field.
- Local employers and businesses are losing employees because of a lack of high quality, affordable child care in the community.
- At-risk and high needs children need more funding and attention, but aren't getting it.

"Quality child care is a very critical topic which we must continue to dialog about in how we can do more to help this area. We know that children's brains develop most rapidly from 0 – 5 years old. When we invest in those years it will not only give the child a greater opportunity for success in their future education, it is also a fiscally wise investment."

- Rep. John Ward, MN House District 10A

Thank you to everyone who participated in the Central MN Town Hall meeting:

Nicky Anderson, Little Cardinals Academy
Balinda Bailey, Child Care Aware
Nicole Borich, Annie's Child Care & Learning Center
Melvin Carter, Office of Early Learning
Christel Cartie, Stepping Stones Child Care Center
Teresa DeGeest, Teresa's Child Care
Betty Doss, Pillager Family Center
Al Doty, Office of Congressman Rick Nolan
Becky Dryburgh, Trinity Children's Center
Susan Estabrooks Anderson, Staples-Motley ISD2170 School Readiness
Wendy Fay Willits, Family Child Care Provider
Tammy Filippi, Initiative Foundation
Megan Gates, Annie's Child Care & Learning Center
Chris Hecker, Open Arms Daycare
Amber Hennessey, Family Child Care Provider/Crow Wing Family Child Care Association
Don Hickman, Initiative Foundation
Renee House, Pillager Family Center
Lowell Johnson, Brainerd Lakes Area Early Childhood Coalition
Joy Larson, Brainerd Police Department
Jessica Meyenburg, Stepping Stones Child Care Center
Christin Mohr, Child Care Aware
Melissa Ness, Open Arms Daycare
Kim Opay, Family Child Care Provider
Joan Ostrowski, Annie's Child Care & Learning Center
Dana Patsie, Child Care Aware
Valerie Pflapson, Stepping Stones Child Care Center
Kathy Stevens, Learning Tree Nursery School
Rep. John Ward, MN House District 10A

THE PLAN

Community Solution Action Plan

for Cass, Crow Wing, and Wadena Counties

The community has identified a need for:



Funding to Support Quality



Staff Training



System Support

GOAL 1 Funding to Support Quality

- > Link providers serving children with special needs with local professionals and special education supports
- > Subsidize child care businesses serving at-risk children with timely grants
- > Funding available for facility expansion or renovation, equipment, and curriculum
- > Identify subsidies for infant care

GOAL 2 Staff Training

- > Encourage providers to engage in Parent Aware to raise the overall level of quality of care available in our community
- > Train local trainers to increase the number of accessible professional development opportunities in Central MN
- > Utilize technology to connect to statewide training opportunities
- > Provide local, affordable trainings

GOAL 3 System Support

- > Establish an ongoing and direct communication network with DHS and the county licensor to identify policy changes that could increase effectiveness of child care
- > Create a community coalition between child care providers, schools, Head Start, and early childhood organizations to share resources and expertise
- > Partner with regional economic development agencies to increase the awareness of child care as a critical component of a strong local economy
- > Identify funding to create a safety net for families who experience a gap in CCAP authorization or do not qualify for government assistance

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
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

TWITTER

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

CONTACT



Heidi Hagel Braid | Minnesota Director, First Children's Finance
612-279-6504 direct

heidihb@firstchildrensfinance.org



Jamie Swezey | Business Development Associate, First Children's Finance
612-279-6512 direct

jamie@firstchildrensfinance.org

PARTNERS

Minnesota Initiative Foundations | www.greaterminnesota.net

Otto Bremer Foundation | www.ottobremer.org

Bush Foundation | www.bushfoundation.org