

Community Solution Action Plan



**Clay
County**
February 2016



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

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

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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

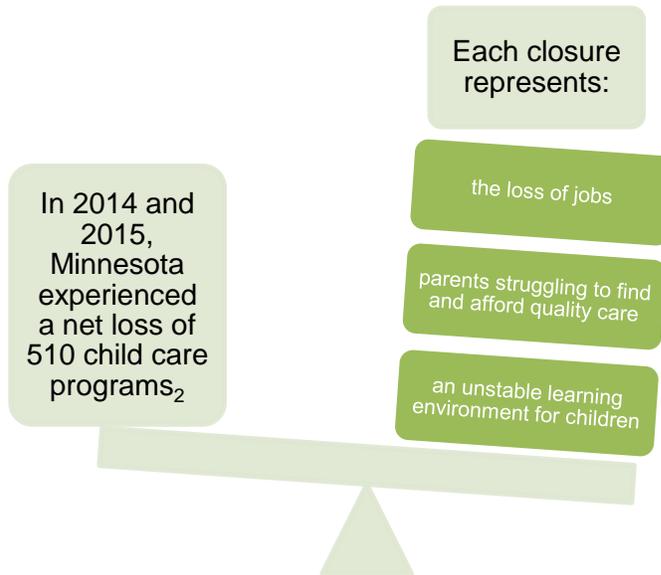
The >MN Project believes that rural communities are greater than their size in numbers. They have dreams for their children that are greater than the status quo. Together, we are greater than our challenges. Where some might see desolate swaths of land and dwindling populations, we see opportunity for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

“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*.

Engaging the Private Sector and Local Leaders



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 leaders and 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.

Child Care Business Cohorts



Based on the priorities established in the *Community Solution Action Plan*, learning cohorts are established. Learning cohorts contain 6-12 child care 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. Each child care business completes a thorough financial analysis of their program and develops a roadmap to improve their business performance.



>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

Clay County, Minnesota

The >MN Project is an initiative of First Children's Finance, in partnership with the six Minnesota Initiative Foundations. During the fall of 2015, West Central Initiative selected Clay County as the community to participate in the second phase of the >MN Project.

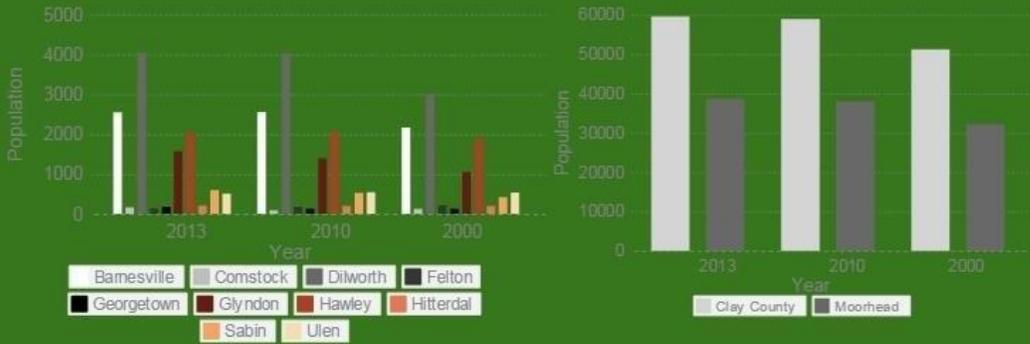


Prior to the region's Town Hall meeting, >MN gathered background data₃ for the area to inform the process. The data collection was completed by the University of Minnesota-Morris Center for Small Towns.

THE DATA

Clay COUNTY

Population Trends



4,025 children under age 5

1,818 Families with children under age 5 are below poverty



3,376 children under age 6 have all parents in the workforce



Breakdown of Licensed Child Care Slots



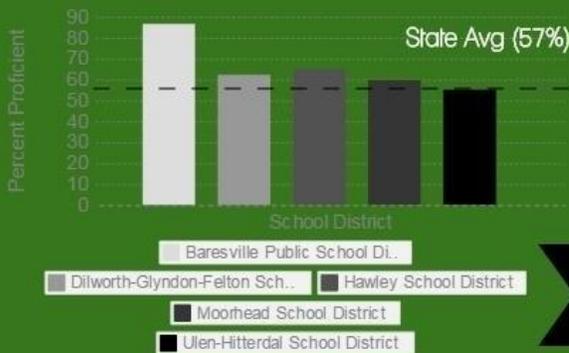
14 School-based/Head Start/Preschool sites



32 Parent Aware rated programs

(20 are in process of getting rated)

3rd Grade Reading*



Prepared by Greater Than MN 2015

*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 October 2015, two community Town Hall meetings were hosted in Moorhead and Hawley, MN, and drew participants representing diverse community perspectives.

Working together, participants reviewed the background data (included above) and identified trends impacting child care and across the county. The Moorhead Town Hall identified slightly different trends than the Hawley Town Hall, but there was consensus that the following trends are impacting all of Clay County:

- **Participants agreed that although there are high quality child care options available across the county, there is simply not enough care available. The supply of child care providers in Clay County is inadequate.**

"I have heard from mothers who have called 27 different child care programs and providers, only to learn there are no openings for an infant in Clay County."

- Moorhead Town Hall participant



Participants discuss community trends at Moorhead Town Hall

Working in small groups, participants identified the strengths of the local child care industry and concluded that there are several opportunities to build upon. Participants' discussions are summarized below.

- The high demand for child care can be attributed to the strength of the regional economy.
- Spreading awareness about the shortage of child care options across the county will result in creative child care solutions.
- Businesses, local government and schools are aware of the child care shortage and are concerned about its impact on the growth of the economy.
- The Fargo-Moorhead Area Foundation has commissioned a study of the regional workforce and has identified unmet need of 15,000 child care slots in the Fargo-Moorhead metro area. Its Build Committee has also identified a shortage of child care workers, limiting the enrollment and expansion of child care programs.



Hawley Town Hall participants

THE PLAN

Community Solution Action Plan CLAY COUNTY

The community has identified a need to increase the number of child care slots by:



1

Increasing awareness of child care's role in building a strong community

2

Providing financial incentives for expansion or new child care businesses



Economic Development

- Provide context to the community about the important role of child care in a strong regional economy
- Engage with Fargo-Moorhead Area Foundation planning processes, emphasizing the need for more child care
- Create financial incentives to increase the supply of child care



Government

- County agencies can create materials that assist new providers in understanding licensing requirements
- Provide financial incentives for new child care businesses, prioritizing those that serve infants and toddlers
- Increase funding to add more county child care licensors to adequately interact with family child care providers



School Districts

- Encourage alignment between schools and child care programs
- Provide resources that promote child care programs' professional development



Private Business

- Create partnerships to establish on-site child care programs for employees
- Sponsor professional development opportunities for existing child care programs

Prepared by
Greater Than MN
2016

THE PLAN NARRATIVE

Clay County residents considered what initiatives and systems were already operating within their region and developed a Community Solution Action Plan based on potential synergies between child care, school districts, local government and local government agencies, the private sector and economic development initiatives.

The following strategies were generated by participants and prioritized during the Town Hall meetings.

Economic Development

- Child care advocates can provide context to economic development leaders about the important role in economic development
- Economic development leaders can communicate the availability of high quality child care as a recruitment strategy to attract new businesses to Clay County
- Encourage economic development initiatives to include financial incentives (i.e., tax breaks, vouchers, etc.) to increase the supply of child care

Local Government and Government Agencies

- Provide funding for child care business start-up, expansion, or quality improvement to decrease barriers to the child care industry
 - Prioritize programs that are serving infants and toddlers
 - Provide low-cost or no-cost training opportunities to assist providers in meeting licensing or quality rating system requirements (Parent Aware)
- Strengthen communications between child care programs and elected officials to ensure they understand the need for early learning scholarships and effective child care regulations
- Increase funding to add more county and state licensors to adequately interact with family child care providers

School Districts

- Establish formal collaborations between school districts and high quality child care programs in an effort to improve kindergarten readiness through alignment strategies
- Provide busing to and from child care programs
- Include child care programs in curriculum and assessment trainings
- Provide space to child care programs

Private Sector Business

- Large employers can create innovative partnerships to provide on-site child care for their employees
- Local businesses can sponsor or provide subsidies to child care programs by:
 - Providing free or low-cost space or a facility
 - Providing financial support to a child care program
 - Purchasing slots within a child care program for its employees
 - Sponsoring training and professional development opportunities for child care programs

- Child care program can communicate openings directly to employers or HR departments

Additionally, there are several strategies generated that are important, but fall outside the categories listed above.

- Identify facilities or spaces for new programs or expansion of existing program, particularly in rural portions of Clay County.
- Evaluate transportation needs of low-income families in Clay County; transportation is a barrier to accessing child care and employment.
- Create partnerships that would increase the availability and affordability of trainings across the county.

NEXT STEPS

The Clay County Community Solution Action Plan will be posted to the >MN Project website: www.greaterthanmn.org. Following the public release of the plan, the >MN Project and West Central Initiative will host a series of events in Clay County to further the conversation about child care and economic development. First Children's Finance will also begin recruiting child care programs to participate in a Business Leadership Cohort.

ENDNOTES

1. “Don’t Forget Daycares,” Kris Bevell, Prairie Business Magazine, Oct. 25, 2013
<http://prairiebusiness.areavoices.com/2013/10/dont-forget-daycares/>
2. Minnesota Department of Human Services, Licensing Division
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/>



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>MN PROJECT INFORMATION

WEBSITE

www.greaterthanmn.org

TWITTER

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

CONTACT



Jessica Beyer | Business Specialist, First Children's Finance
320-808-7066 direct
jessica@firstchildrensfinance.org



Heidi Hagel Braid | Minnesota Director, First Children's Finance
612-279-6504 direct
heidihb@firstchildrensfinance.org

PARTNERS

Minnesota Initiative Foundations | Otto Bremer Foundation
Bush Foundation | MN Department of Human Services