Community Solution Action Plan

Northwest Region

> MN Project November 2013
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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

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:

1. Recruiting and retaining new businesses, employees, and families
2. Enabling parents to be more productive and less absent at work
3. 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

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

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

Northwest Minnesota

The >MN Project launched in partnership with the Northwest Minnesota Initiative Foundation (NWMF) in October 2013.

NWMF selected Marshall, Norman, and Pennington Counties, along with a portion of Polk County 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

MARSHALL COUNTY

Population Trends

- 10155 children under age 5
- 74% of families with children under age 5 have both parents in the workforce
- 12.5% of families with children under age 5 lives in poverty

LARGEST INDUSTRIES

- Education
- Manufacturing
- Health Care & Social Services

Breakdown of Licensed Child Care Slots

- 364 Total slots
- 81 Center (14%)
- 313 Family (86%)

4 Parent Aware rated programs (available county-wide in 2014)

3rd Grade Reading*

- 73 Grygla
- 66 Newfolden
- 62 Stephen-Argyle
- 57 State Avg

Prepared by Greater Than MN, 2013

*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

NORMAN COUNTY

Population Trends

395 children under age 5

74.5% of families with children under age 5 have both parents in the workforce

40.2% families with children under age 5 lives in poverty

LARGEST INDUSTRIES

- Health Care & Social Services
- Education
- Public Administration

Breakdown of Licensed Child Care Slots

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

3rd Grade Reading*

Prepared by Greater Than MN 2013

*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

PENNINGTON COUNTY

Population Trends

- 889 children under age 5
- 79.5% of families with children under age 5 have both parents in the workforce
- 10.2% of families with children under age 5 lives in poverty

LARGEST INDUSTRIES

- Wholesale
- Manufacturing
- Retail

Breakdown of Licensed Child Care Slots

- 852 Total
- 609 Center (17%)
- 243 Family (83%)

1 Parent Aware rated program
(available county-wide in 2015)

3rd Grade Reading*

- Goodridge
- Thief River Falls

Prepared by Greater Than MN 2013

*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

POLK COUNTY

Population Trends

2,013 children under age 5

72.3% of families with children under age 5 have both parents in the workforce

17.5% families with children under age 5 lives in poverty

LARGEST INDUSTRIES

Health Care & Social Services
Manufacturing
Education

1,599 Total

Breakdown of Licensed Child Care Slots

15 Parent Aware rated programs (available county-wide in 2014)

3rd Grade Reading*

63

60

48

46

55

49

33

60

57

State Avg

Prepared by Greater Than MN 2013

*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. The area of Northwest Minnesota was selected because the region has been impacted by strong employment trends. As major employers in the area have been expanding business operations, the availability of child care has risen to a crisis level.

On October 15, 2013, the community Town Hall meeting was hosted in Fertile, MN, and drew 35 participants from 24 different organizations.

Working together, participants reviewed the background data of their communities and identified trends impacting child care and early education in Northwest Minnesota:

- There is a strong, committed group of child care advocates in Northwestern MN.
- Professional development opportunities for providers and educators are expensive and require travel.
- Early care and education professionals are serving more children with a higher level of need. Providers are struggling to find resources to serve:
  - Children of teenage parents
  - Children who have mental health and developmental delays
  - Children living in poverty
  - Single parent families with limited resources that do not qualify for social benefit programs.
- 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 employers are trying to find employees who have reliable care and care during nontraditional hours (shift work). 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.

(Continued on Page 12)

“We need to find solutions for the child care issues in our region. We’re experiencing rural centers closing, aging provider populations, and a lack of options for the large number of shift workers in the Red River Valley.”
- Vicky Grove, Early Childhood Program Specialist, Northwest MN Foundation

“Digi-Key is very committed to doing what we can to promote an increase in the availability of a variety of child care options – particularly evening child care options – in the Thief River Falls area in order to better serve the needs of the Digi-Key workforce. Presently, child care resources are limited and increased resources will help support our company growth in Thief River Falls.”
- Rick Trontvet, VP of Human Resources, Digi-Key
• A significant number of children are arriving at kindergarten unprepared for the changing educational standards.

• 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 almost nonexistent.

• Communities feel their growth is limited because families cannot find child care.

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

Faye Achenpaugh, Northwest MN Council of Collaboratives, NWMF
Eric Bergeson, Fertile-Beltrami ECI
Marjie Broden, Fertile Beltrami ECI
Dayna Bruggeman, Discovery Place
Dennis DeMers, Tri-Valley Opportunity Council
Angie Dueck, Norman County East ECI
Amber Finseth, Fertile-Beltrami ECI
Jessica Flores, Tri-Valley Opportunity Council
Cathy Forgit, Fertile-Beltrami ECI, NWMF
Ashley Fredrickson, North Valley Public Health
Dawn Ganje, NWMF
Kathy Girdler, Polk County Public Health
Vicky Grove, NWMF
Gina Gunderson, Villa St. Vincent Child Care
Maire Haas, Fertile-Beltrami ECI
Michele Halvorson, St. Francis Health Services
Kim Hemberger, Northwestern Mental Health Center
Ann Holub, Tri-Valley Opportunity Council, Child Care Aware
D'Anne Johnson, Head Start
Tulasi Kanukuntla, Sanford Health
Rep. Debra Kiel, MN House of Representatives District 01B
Jennifer Larson, Fertile-Beltrami ECI
Amber Lindgren, Digi-Key Corporation
Jeffrey Lund, Marshall County Central Schools
Sister Judy Moen, Sunrise Center for Children and Families
Carol Osmundson, Fertile-Beltrami ECI, School Readiness/ECFE
Cassie Reese, Inter-Community Council Head Start
Peggy Rogers, Northland Community and Technical College
Gerald Schulte, Northland Community and Technical College
Sheree Setterholm, ECI Coordinator
Leah Swenby, Fertile-Beltrami ECI
Teresa Tehran, Crookston EDA
Jeannie Thorsen, Child Care Business Owner

and thanks to Erickson's Smokehouse for hosting.
THE PLAN

Community Solution Action Plan
for Marshall, Norman, Pennington, and portions of Polk County

The community has identified a need for:

- Additional child care slots
- Extended & non-traditional hours of care for shift workers
- More infant care
- Affordable, local training for providers

GOAL 1
Increase the availability of affordable, quality child care in the area.

> Establish additional child care centers
> Create additional options for infant care
> Provide non-traditional hours or overnight child care options
> Establish unique partnerships with local early care & education providers to expand the number of options available
  - Employer-based child care
  - Create partnerships with local employers to increase the number of available child care slots
> Educate parents and the community about the importance of quality early care and education
  - Create strong partnerships with parents so they choose quality programs
  - Educate local businesses, elected officials, and economic development entities about how child care intersects with a robust local economy
  - Seek local investments in early care and education
  - Share information that links the availability of jobs directly to the availability of child care
> Expand existing quality preschool and child care programs to serve additional children

GOAL 2
Provide additional training & support for existing child care businesses.

> Increase providers' capacity to serve children with special needs
> Create a respite network to support local child care providers attending training & professional development events, or to take time off
> Create a network of early educators so all providers (family & center) have access to a system of support and information
> Improve providers' professional credentials
> Create regional training opportunities at locations donated by local churches, schools, or employers
> Provide a wraparound system in each community that provides resources for each child

Prepared by
Greater Than MN
2013

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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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Otto Bremer Foundation | www.ottobremer.org
Bush Foundation | www.bushfoundation.org

Changing the landscape of early care and education in Greater Minnesota. Because nothing is Greater Than Minnesota’s future.