

# Community Solution Action Plan



Northwest  
Region

>MN Project  
November 2013



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

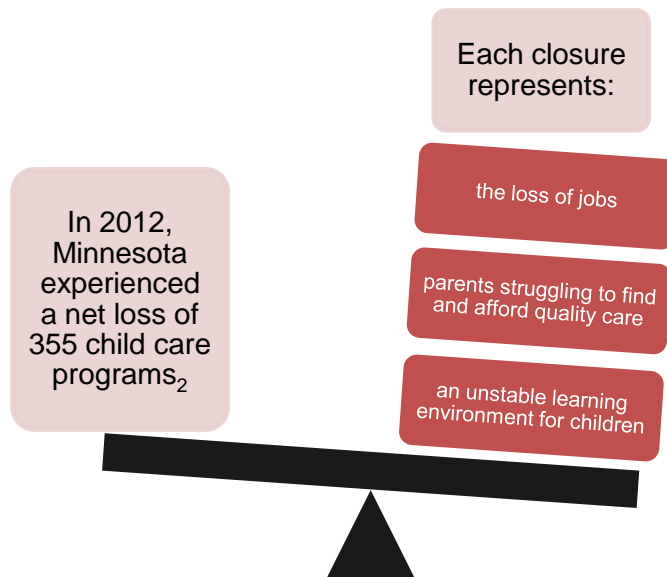
The >MN Project believes that rural communities are greater than their size in numbers. They have dreams for their children that are greater than the status quo. Together, we are greater than our challenges. Where some might see desolate swaths of land and dwindling populations, we see opportunity for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

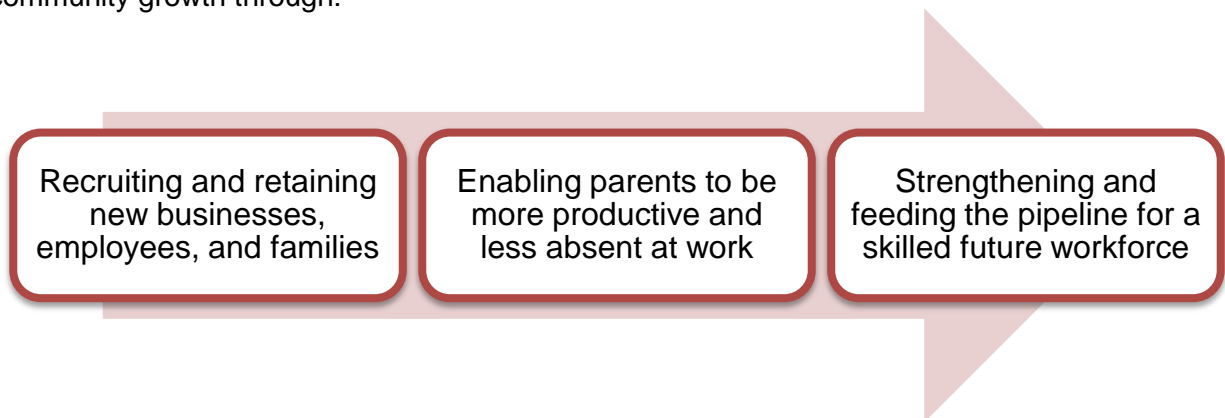
*"If employees can't find quality care for their children, they won't work for you. They won't move to your community, or they'll be forced to move away, or they might have to consider quitting their job to stay home with their children because they have no other option."*

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

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:

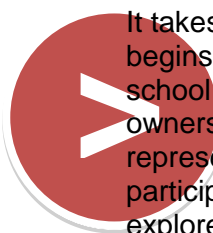


The connection is clear: when our children thrive, so do our communities. Investing in early care and education is not only the *right* thing to do for our youngest citizens, but the *best* thing to do for our economic growth and prosperity.

# 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



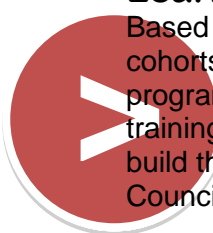
It takes a community to create a community plan. That's why each regional process begins with a Town Hall. Concerned community members, elected officials, lenders, school superintendents, family child care providers, child care centers, small business owners, large employers, teachers, Head Start, rural 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.

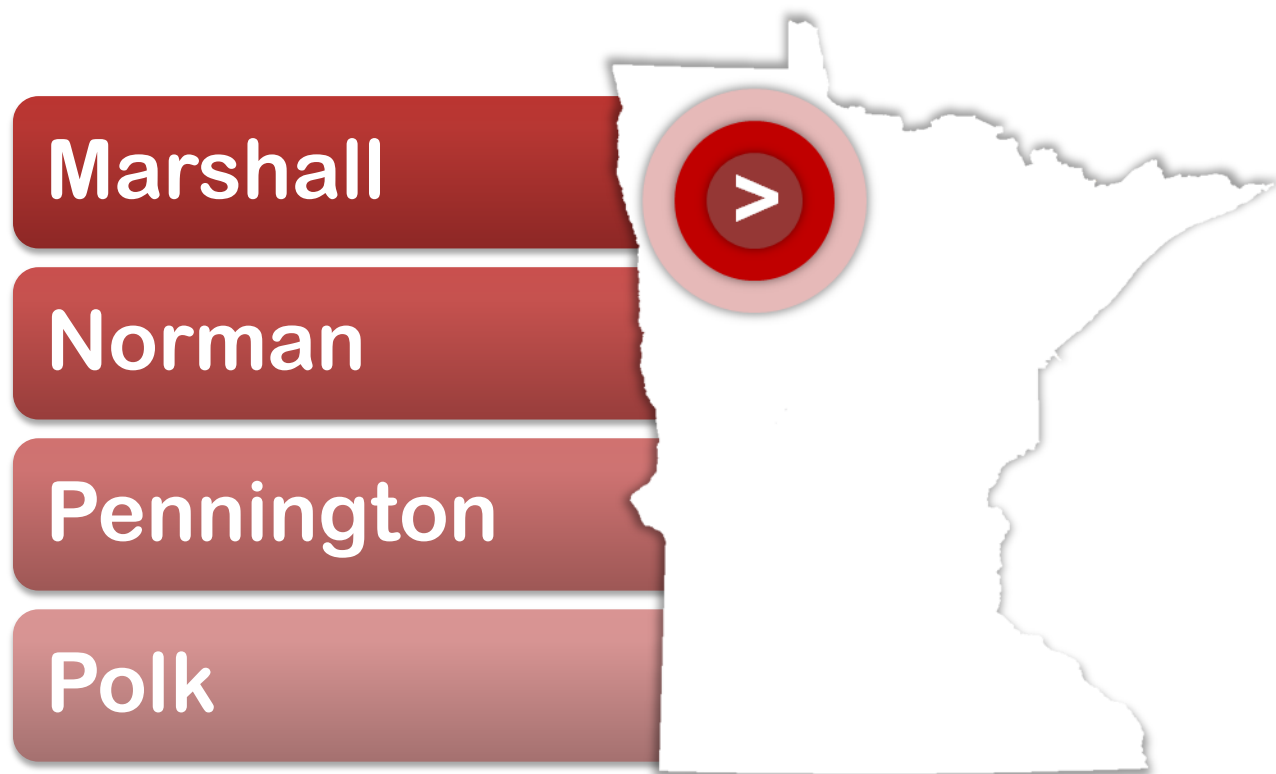
## THE REGION

### 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.

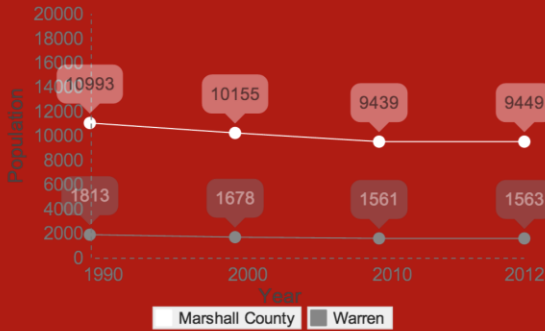


Prior to the region's Town Hall meeting, >MN gathered background data<sub>3</sub> for the area to inform the process.

# THE DATA

## MARSHALL COUNTY

### Population Trends



534 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

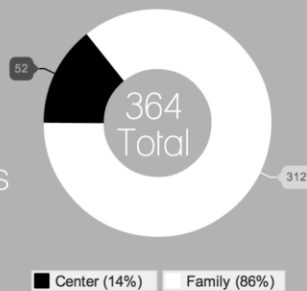


Manufacturing



Health Care & Social Services

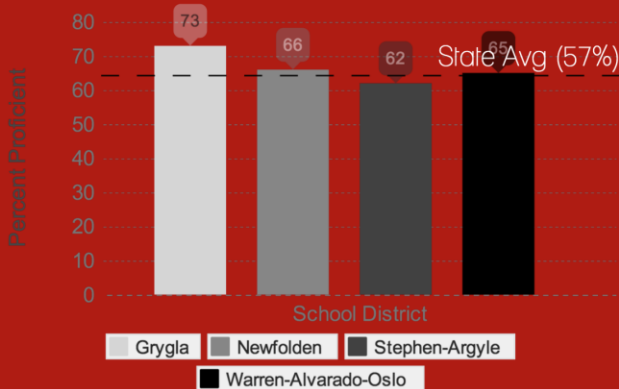
Breakdown of Licensed Child Care Slots



4 Parent Aware rated programs

(available county-wide in 2014)

### 3rd Grade Reading\*



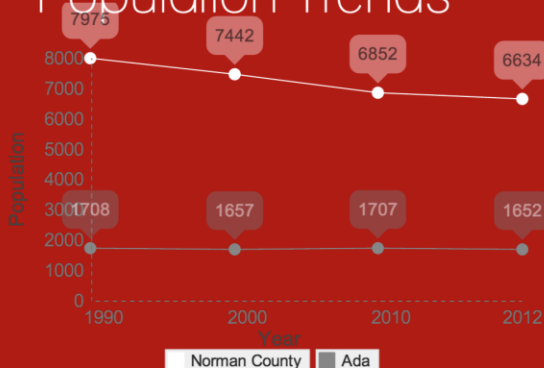
Prepared by  
Greater Than MN  
2013

\*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.

# 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

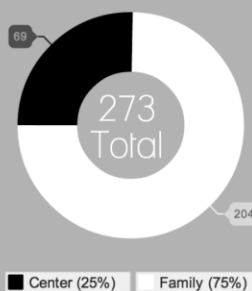


Education



Public Administration

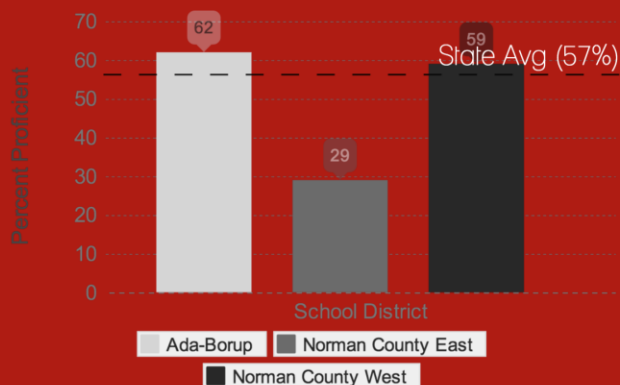
Breakdown of Licensed Child Care Slots



2 Parent Aware rated programs

(available county-wide in 2015)

### 3rd Grade Reading\*



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2013

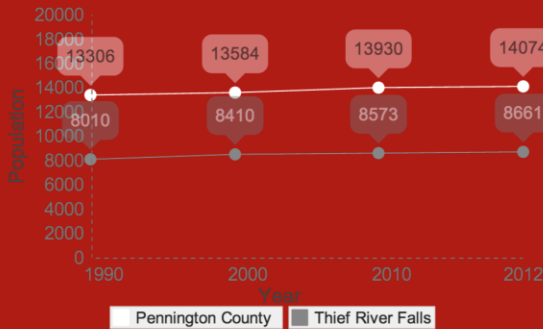
\*Children who are not kindergarten-ready are half as likely to be reading well by 3rd grade. Children who are not reading proficiently by 3rd grade are 4x more likely to drop out of high school.



## THE DATA

# 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

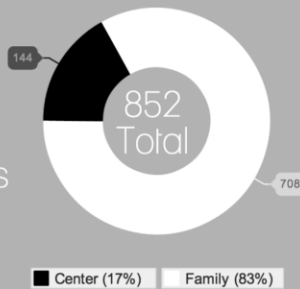


Manufacturing



Retail

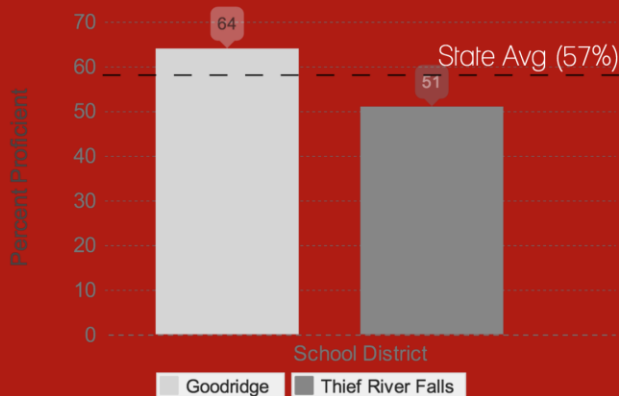
Breakdown of Licensed Child Care Slots



1 Parent Aware rated program

(available county-wide in 2015)

### 3rd Grade Reading\*



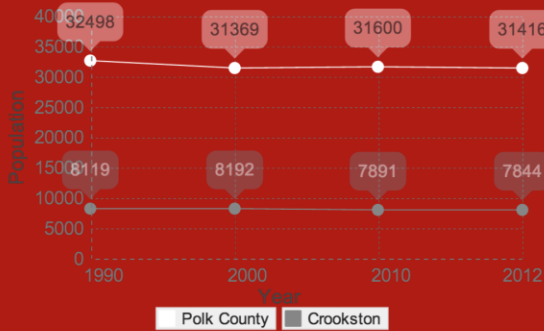
Prepared by  
Greater Than MN  
2013

\*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.

# 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

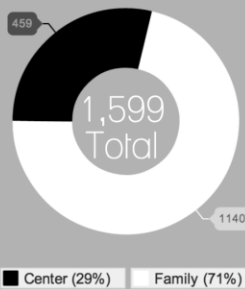


Manufacturing



Education

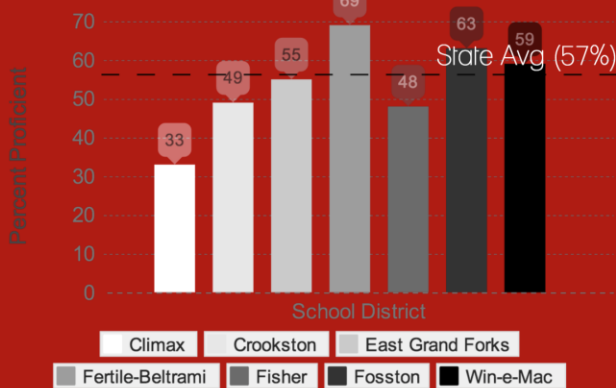
Breakdown of Licensed Child Care Slots



15 Parent Aware rated programs

(available county-wide in 2014)

### 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.

## 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.

*"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

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.

*"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

(Continued on Page 12)

- 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  
 Thersea 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*

## 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)

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### **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)