

# Community Solution Action Plan



**Redwood  
County**  
January 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, in partnership with the six Minnesota Initiative Foundations, to address the challenges of rural child care 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

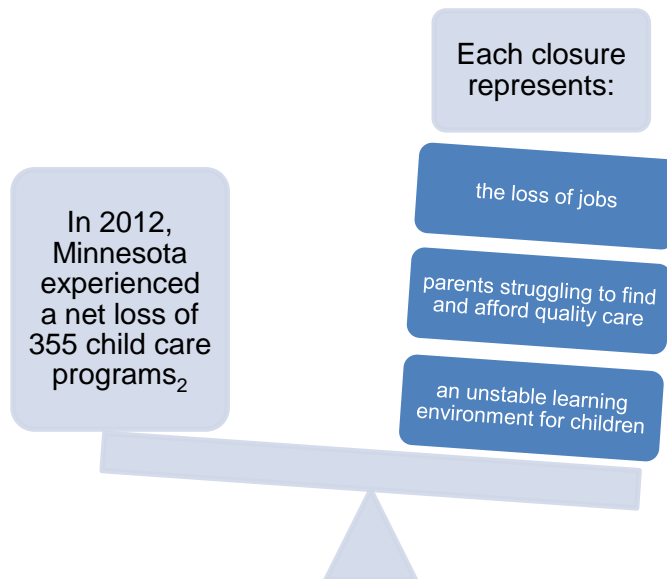
The >MN Project believes that rural communities are greater than their size in numbers. They have dreams for their children that are greater than the status quo. Together, we are greater than our challenges. Where some might see desolate swaths of land and dwindling populations, we see opportunity for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

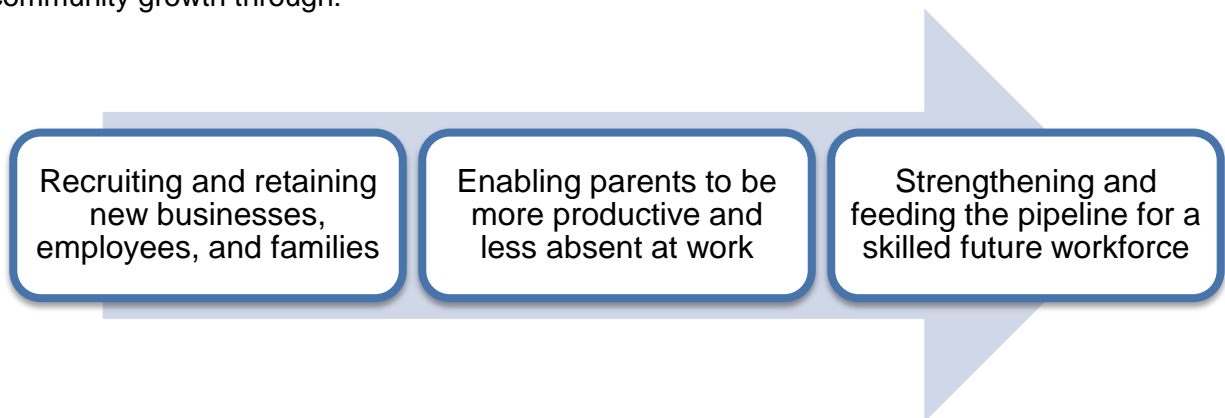
*"If employees can't find quality care for their children, they won't work for you. They won't move to your community, or they'll be forced to move away, or they might have to consider quitting their job to stay home with their children because they have no other option."*

- 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



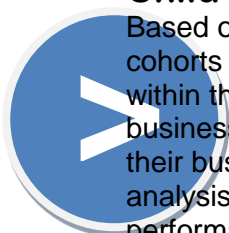
It takes a community to create a community plan. That's why each regional process begins with a Town Hall. Concerned community members, elected officials, lenders, school superintendents, family child care providers, child care centers, small business owners, large employers, teachers, Head Start, rural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

## 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 are comprised of 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 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

The > MN Project is an initiative of First Children's Finance, in partnership with all six Minnesota Initiative Foundations. During the summer of 2015, the Southwest Initiative Foundation selected Redwood 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 data<sub>3</sub> for the area to inform the process. The data collection was completed by the University of Minnesota-Morris Center for Small Towns.

# THE DATA

## REDWOOD COUNTY

### Population Trends



### LARGEST INDUSTRIES



Gaming



Manufacturing



Wholesale





## THE DATA

# REDWOOD COUNTY

Breakdown  
of Licensed  
Child Care Slots



Center (0%) Family (100%)



10  
School-based/  
Head Start/  
Preschool sites

12 Parent Aware  
rated programs



1,015 children  
under age 5



780 children under  
age 6 have all  
parents in the  
workforce

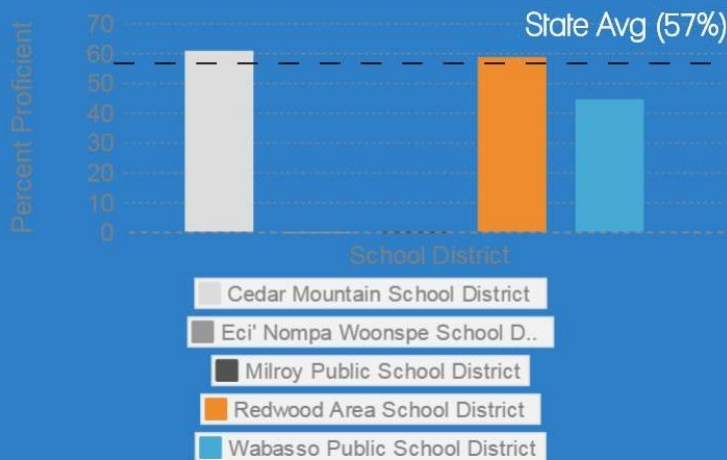


357 families with  
children under age 5  
lives below poverty



\*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.

## 3rd Grade Reading



\* Data not available for Eci' Nampa Woonspe School and Milroy Public School





## THE TRENDS

Data is important, but it's only one piece of the puzzle when evaluating the current needs of a community. On November 2, 2015, the community Town Hall meeting was hosted in Redwood Falls, MN, and drew approximately 50 participants representing diverse community perspectives.

Working together, Redwood County residents reviewed background data of their communities (included above) and identified trends in child care across the county. Participants' discussions are summarized below.

- **Participants agreed there are high-quality, reliable family child care providers who currently operate excellent programs across the county.**
- **The participants also unanimously agreed that although the existing child care is excellent, there is simply not enough care available. The supply of child care providers in Redwood County is inadequate.**



Working in small groups, participants identified the strengths of the child care system in Redwood County and concluded that there are several strengths to build upon.

- The licensed family child care providers have positive working relationships and appear to be well-connected to one another.
- Redwood County residents expressed appreciation for the high quality family child care providers, school-based programs and preschool programs that are currently providing child care.
- Spreading awareness about the shortage of child care options across the county will result in creative solutions involving diverse sectors of the region.
- Businesses, local government and schools are aware of the child care shortage and are concerned about its impact on the regional economy.



Again, working in small groups, participants discussed how the lack of child care was impacting the county's economy. The groups identified several risk factors that are impacting employers, business productivity, and the local economy.

- Parents are traveling distances each day to access child care, creating stress that negatively impacts individual and family health.
- Parents who travel outside their home community to access care are choosing to relocate and, at minimum, are spending money outside their home communities.
- Low-income parents may be dependent on government systems longer because they cannot enter the workforce due to a lack of child care.
- Parents are using inadequate care out of desperation.
- The travel, stress and use of inadequate child care options have a direct impact on Redwood County businesses and employers, including, but not limited to:
  - Lost productivity,
  - Parents opting out of the workforce because they cannot access child care,
  - And, workforce growth and business growth are limited.
- Local business leaders identified a struggle to find employees who have reliable care. Employees who do not have access to reliable care are often unable to maintain employment.
- **Overall, participants identified that the lack of child care may be limiting population growth and the growth of the labor force in Redwood County.**
- **Community members worry that a lack of child care creates a negative public perception of Redwood County and feel their community's growth is inhibited.**

When asked what types of child care are needed most, participants prioritized: 1) infant care, 2) toddler care, 3) child care for children ages 0-5, and, 4) extended hour care for shift workers.



# Community Solution Action Plan

## REDWOOD 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

3

Supporting current child care businesses with resources and opportunities



### Economic Development

- Increase awareness of child care's role in supporting the regional economy and local employment
- Provide incentives for new child care businesses
- Sponsor forums that connect child care businesses and local employers



### Government

- Create tax incentives for private businesses to create on-site child care programs
- Provide financial incentives for new child care businesses
- Increase awareness of child care's role in community vitality



### 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
- Provide resources to existing child care businesses

Prepared by  
Greater Than MN  
2016

# THE PLAN NARRATIVE

Redwood County Town Hall participants 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 meeting.

## **Economic Development**

- Economic development agencies should increase their own understanding of child care's role in supporting the local economy and individual employers, and become a champion of creating community awareness of child care's connection to a vibrant rural community.
- Economic development agencies could sponsor forums that connect child care businesses and local employers.
- Economic development initiatives should include financial incentives for start-up businesses and/or provide ongoing quality improvement or program expansion incentives for current providers.

## **Local Government and Government Agencies**

- Local government should increase its understanding of the child care industry, and identify policy changes that create efficiencies and opportunities to build a robust rural child care supply.
- Local governments should provide financial incentives to new start-up child care businesses.
- Local governments could provide tax breaks for businesses who offer on-site child care.

## **School Districts**

- School districts can provide leadership in creating alignment between schools and child care programs, including curriculum and assessment alignment, and sharing professional development resources.
- High school students could access post-secondary courses in early childhood education at the MinnWest Community and Technical College.
- Schools could explore creating and/or improving transportation between early childhood programs, child care programs and Head Start programs.

## **Private Business/Private Sector**

- Private businesses of all sizes should increase their awareness of child care's role in supporting the local economy and employers.
- Businesses can establish on-site child care to increase the supply of high quality child care in Redwood County. Employers can develop partnerships with existing child care providers to accomplish this goal; employers do not have to operate child care programs in order to meet the objective.
- Employers can invest in child care programs (corporate sponsorship of professional development, providing in-kind space, purchase slots, etc.).
- The private sector can inform child care businesses of the needs of their employees.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The Redwood County Community Solution Action Plan will be posted to the >MN Project website: [www.greaterthanmn.org](http://www.greaterthanmn.org). Following the public release of the plan, the >MN Project and the Southwest Initiative Foundation will host a series of events in Redwood County to further the conversation about child care and economic development. First Children's Finance will also begin recruiting child care providers 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. 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/>
  - American Fact Finder, US Census Bureau <http://factfinder.census.gov/>
  - Rural Data Portal <http://www.ruraldataportal.org/>
  - 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/>

## ABOUT FIRST CHILDREN’S FINANCE

Founded in 1991, First Children’s Finance is a multi-state nonprofit organization. We work with states, communities, and local for profit and nonprofit early care and education businesses to increase the supply and sustainability of high quality early care and education in urban and rural areas. We do this through business management training, technical assistance, and financing. We engage community leaders and form public and private partnerships. For more information about First Children’s Finance, please visit: [www.firstchildrensfinance.org](http://www.firstchildrensfinance.org).



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## **>MN PROJECT INFORMATION**

### **WEBSITE**

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

### **TWITTER**

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## **PARTNERS**

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