



Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota

FOUNDATION

Healthy Start Program

2018–2019 (Year One)



Healthy Start Program

2018–2019 (Year One)

Research shows that for every dollar invested in early childhood, the public return is as much as \$16. What happens in the first five years of life sets the stage for lifelong health, and children from low-income families receive the greatest gains. Early childhood education is a health issue, not just an education issue.

With the deep understanding of the connection between education, health, and equity, the Foundation strategically focused on supporting a Healthy Start for young children and families for our strategic framework spanning 2018–2022. We committed to investing in early education for lifelong health, recognizing the achievements and progress made will pay long-term health dividends for Minnesota children and our health care system.



Northwest Minnesota Foundation & Peacemaker Resources

WHY OUR WORK MATTERS

According to the 2018 report “Minnesota Early Childhood Risk, Reach, and Resilience” by Wilder Research, only one-third of the 12 counties served by Northwest Minnesota Foundation (NMF) are likely to achieve healthy development of young children. As is being experienced throughout the state, these counties have a critical shortage of quality child care. The majority of children in the area receive child care services from family-licensed child care providers, who generally don’t have easy access to extensive training on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and social-emotional development — a critical need for providers in our region.

OUR PROJECT

The goal of our project is to better equip family-licensed child care providers in our region to address the significant mental and social emotional needs of the children they care for, as well as their own. We’re implementing the STEP UP program — a professional development package that includes six-hour, interactive, in-person and in-home coaching visits centered on the social-emotional learning and development of children ages 0 to 5.

Our Work

YEAR ONE ACTIVITIES

- Trained and coached 56 providers and 52 programs
- Conducted 50 home visits to providers for on-site coaching and support
- Delivered 100 coaching hours

WHAT PARTICIPANTS ACHIEVED

78% of training participants rated themselves as knowledgeable about how toxic stress affects children’s behavior (compared with 30% before the training).

82% of training participants that feel equipped to respond with empathy during a challenging situation with a child (compared with 37% before the training).

WHAT PARTICIPANTS TOLD US

“This workshop was amazing. I learned so much.”

“I have much to learn, but I’m thankful for the information I received.”

“This training and home visit has been so useful — and it’s wonderful to see the teaching in practice!”

612

children impacted through our training efforts

7

new providers recruited and trained in trauma-informed practices

84

new child care slots created



What we learned along the way



Missy Okeson
Program Officer,
Community Impact,
Northwest Minnesota Foundation

The first discovery for me was that providers need new and relevant training that not only helps them work with the children and families in their care, but also helps them earn development hours and money for their programs.

I learned how important and special the one-on-one coaching piece became to providers. They left the workshops with the tools, but also gained usable strategies and techniques by coaches coming into their environment to model the calming strategies and environmental setup in real time.

I also discovered how enjoyable it is to work with Peacemaker Resources and the Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation. This process took a lot of teamwork and so much was accomplished in one year of work!



Barb Houg
Executive Director,
Peacemaker Resources

Many providers who attended the workshop commented that learning about the developing brain and how toxic stress can impact it has changed how they interact with children and families. I believe these very committed caregivers found it validating to learn that their nurturing presence has vital and long-lasting effects on the children with whom they work.



Ann Skoe
SEL Specialist,
Peacemaker Resources

This first year of working with STEP UP has deepened my appreciation for our region's child care providers. Witnessing their endurance, thoughtfulness and desire to learn was a blessing.

The providers have shared that STEP UP bolstered their knowledge of, skills in working with and compassion for the children in their programs.

I learned about the Minnesota Department of Human Services and its procedures for training child care providers. Navigating their requirements for becoming an approved trainer and learning to write approved courses were challenges.

STEP UP broadened the capacity of Peacemaker Resources to support healthy early childhoods.



Chelsea Ottman Rak
SEL Specialist,
Peacemaker Resources

I have learned from working in the STEP UP program that our area child care providers need support in doing their very important work with our youngest children. Providers benefited greatly from learning new ways to promote social and emotional learning with both children in their care and within themselves.

The coaching visits were crucial, as we could model the skills introduced at the workshop. We were also able to connect with providers by listening to their stories, supporting them in their challenges, and sharing strategies from other providers.

Some providers have had multiple coaching visits, allowing us to develop deeper relationships with them to better understand how to support them.

We must continue to lift up our child care providers, give them the tools they need to work with our precious youth, and work together to ensure quality child care in our communities.

La Red Latina de Educación Temprana

WHY OUR WORK MATTERS

Most of Minnesota's early childhood resources are focused on improving the best practices of licensed child care centers and preschools. Latino children, and children from many other communities of color, are most often cared for by family, friend and neighbors rather than child care centers. Many professional development resources leave out friend, family and neighbor (FFN) caregivers and fail to address many of the systemic barriers that keep communities of color out of centers and preschools. The cultural and family preference of communities of color are often ignored, leaving those families with limited options.

OUR PROJECT

La Red is stepping up and supporting those communities and providers that are being left out of the existing education and early childhood systems. We are expanding the definition of what "quality care" means and are providing the high-quality, welcoming and inclusive trainings for Latino families and child care providers.

Our Work

YEAR ONE ACTIVITIES

Hosted and facilitated monthly linguistically and culturally relevant trainings with an average attendance of 40+ participants.

Training topics include:

- Healthy early child care development
- Nutrition, physical activity and school readiness
- CPR and first aid
- Emergency preparedness
- Healthy relationships with families
- How to support children with special needs

300+

Latino children impacted

WHAT PARTICIPANTS ACHIEVED

Of the nearly 40 survey respondents to the year-end survey:

97%

have made changes in the nutrition, physical activity and school-readiness work they do with the children in their care.

94%

agree that since coming to La Red, the quality of the care they offer has increased.

92%

have made positive changes with their own children and family.

190+

Latino FFN providers trained

WHAT PARTICIPANTS TOLD US

"[Before] coming to La Red I didn't feel confident of my work, but once I motivated myself to come [to La Red], now I talk with parents about what I'm learning. I feel confident knowing what to do when I'm caring for children."

"[La Red] creates community to support us more and be more united."

"[La Red provides] education that helps me better my child care delivery and makes my work more professional even if I care for children at home."



LA RED LATINA
DE EDUCACIÓN TEMPRANA

HERRAMIENTAS • CAPACITACIÓN • LIDERAZGO • PODER

What we learned along the way

What we are proud of . . .

More organizations are seeing the work families, friends and neighbor child care providers are doing.

The women of La Red have grown and risen up to provide child development trainings that our community has asked for, including speech, language, physical activity, nutrition and working with children with special needs.

Where we experience challenges . . .

Our bilingual children are often assessed in ways that make it seem as if they have a mixed-up understanding of numbers or letters. However, we find they have a strong understanding of concepts in their own language.

We have many barriers, but we always have overcome them. We have barriers in education, space, sometimes money, but **we always find a way to offer our classes** and move La Red forward. People keep supporting us — that's why we are growing.

Advice we would give other communities that want to do this work . . .

Supporting FFN caregivers is a significant commitment to the people of your community. You will learn a lot about navigating the system, education, helping children advance and maintaining connections.

You must be prepared. If we're prepared and well informed, we educate our people in a culturally relevant way that leads to understanding and credibility.



Ruth Evangelista

Director,
La Red Latina de Educación Temprana

Ana Isabel Gabilondo-Scholz

Health Care Analyst,
Center for Prevention at
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota



Guillermina Rodriguez, Patricia Mendoza

Faviola Estrada and Vicenta Ramírez
La Red Latina de Educación Temprana Leaders

Northland Foundation

WHY OUR WORK MATTERS

Northland Foundation works to improve health outcomes of young children in northeastern Minnesota, which ranks in the bottom 20% in the state for poor health outcomes. We're helping young children be better prepared for school by increasing access to and availability of quality early care and education opportunities.

OUR PROJECT

Building on our past learnings, our project employs four pathways to increase the availability of and access to quality early care and education to improve health outcomes and increase school readiness of young children from diverse backgrounds in northeastern Minnesota communities:

Pathway One: Engage licensed family and center-based child care providers to become Parent Aware-rated and increase or maintain a Parent Aware rating to support school readiness of young children. Supports include: outreach, training incentives, technical assistance and coaching, Quality Improvement Incentive Grants, and peer-learning networks.

Pathway Two: Provide resources and support for culturally appropriate community-based early childhood education and health-related trainings for informal caregivers, especially grandparents, other relatives, friends and neighbors who are caring for young children.

Pathway Three: Build and strengthen relationships between licensed family and center-based child care, school-based early childhood, and early elementary programs to ensure families with young children from rural communities and Tribal Nations are ready for kindergarten.

Pathway Four: Assist a broad cross-section of local and regional partners to ensure young children, especially those from low-income families, have access to high-quality early care and education programs.

Our Work

YEAR ONE ACTIVITIES

Goal one: Engage licensed providers in obtaining, maintaining or increasing Parent Aware ratings

- 1,141 licensed providers trained in Parent Aware-related supports
- \$12,000 in financial support distributed to support quality improvements

Goal two: Support family, friend and neighbor (FFN) caregivers through community-based educational sessions (Play and Learns)

- 305 FFN caregivers trained through 19 education sessions in 11 communities
- 341 children impacted

Goal three: Strengthen links between early childhood educators and licensed family providers

- 344 participants engaged in networking sessions centered on kindergarten transition and training
- 58 participants in programs connecting early childhood educators with licensed family providers

Goal four: Develop and strengthen partnerships to support systems change in early childhood care and education

- 10 new or expanded partnerships

80%

of the 160 licensed child care programs engaged in our initiative are Parent Aware rated or achieving a rating

400+

providers supported in Parent Aware quality efforts

95%

of the 400+ providers increased their knowledge and skills to support the healthy social-emotional development of children in their care

WHAT PARTICIPANTS TOLD US

"The social-emotional development training helped me be mindful about how I talk with children and intentional about asking them about their emotions and feelings more often."

"The meeting with early childhood and kindergarten teachers from the local school district helped me learn more about kindergarten expectations."

"Thanks to the Northland Foundation's free trainings and participation in Parent Aware I am now more comfortable assessing children. I have a curriculum that I use. I am now holding parent conferences and am confident doing so. Parents no longer request to take their children from my program for part of the day to send them to preschool. Free trainings are very helpful."



What we learned along the way



Lynn Haglin

Vice President/KIDS PLUS Director,
Northland Foundation

The free Parent Aware training strategy continues to be highly effective in increasing the knowledge and skills of providers and program quality. It also makes professional development opportunities available across the region.

Continuing to build relationships with county child care licensors, Child Care Aware of Minnesota – Northeast District and the Northland Foundation has made strong inroads in increasing understanding and better coordinating supports for child care providers in the region. Quarterly meetings with child care licensors and our partners — Child Care Aware and First Children’s Finance — advance a greater understanding of the importance of Parent Aware ratings.

Financial incentives and technical assistance are catalysts for newly licensed child care programs to prioritize becoming Parent Aware rated.



Zane Bail

Director of Development
and Special Projects,
Northland Foundation

Quality improvement incentives made possible through the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation grant are especially valued by programs receiving their four-star rating because current state legislation provides no financial supports for achieving this highest rating.

Partnering with early care and education staff to provide coaching and mentoring to in-home family child care providers is an effective strategy to help build their skills and provide new strategies to support the school readiness of young children in their care.

School district early care and education staff are eager to develop partnerships with family and center-based child care providers to bolster supports that will ensure young children and their families have a smooth transition into kindergarten.

Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ)

WHY OUR WORK MATTERS

NAZ seeks to advance the quality of early childhood care in North Minneapolis at a systemic level. Through extensive collaboration with families and early childhood partners, we're driving a community-wide effort to build a culture of achievement so all young scholars are ready to begin their academic journey to college. Our long-term goal is to increase kindergarten readiness rates in the Zone from 28% to 80%. Currently, 53% of NAZ scholars enrolled at one of our anchor early childhood centers are kindergarten ready.

OUR PROJECT

We're adopting an evidence- and observation-based early childhood assessment system called Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG), which creates a full narrative on the development of each scholar. Through intensive and targeted coaching and administrative support, our goal is five NAZ Scholar Anchor Sites fully implementing TSG.

Our Work

YEAR ONE ACTIVITIES

- Engaged five NAZ scholar early childhood centers
- Provided coaching supports to 17 early childhood providers and center administrators
- 10-15 coaching hours delivered each month
- Ongoing assessment and problem-solving by the implementation team to improve teacher uptake of TSG assessments
- Integration of TSG data from anchor sites into our system (NAZ Connect), which will enable NAZ to describe the full range of child development outcomes for our children

80+
children impacted

OUR IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

Classroom signs



17
providers trained

Daily teacher assessment worksheets



What we learned along the way



Andre Dukes

Senior Director Collective Impact,
Early Childhood,
Northside Achievement Zone

We're learning how to be adaptive and responsive to teachers as they deepen their use of TSG to assess and improve outcomes for our scholars.

In our first year of this grant, we heard from some of our teachers that they are challenged to find time throughout their busy days to jot observations on each scholar. We continue to adapt and create as we keep our eyes on the prize, which has always been using evidence-based systems to accelerate child development outcomes for our children.

I remain inspired by the commitment of our teachers, site administrators and various partners supporting this effort.



Bonita Lacey

Professional Development Consultant

While the vision for our work — full implementation of TSG in the NAZ Anchor Centers — is ambitious, I remain enthusiastic about getting our teachers and centers more comfortable with the system. We're committed to implementing systems and practices that improve child development outcomes for our children.

I'm excited about all the ways our implementation team is innovating and finding creative ways to make TSG usable and accessible to both new and veteran teachers. We have clear goal, and we're getting better with creating and deploying support for our teachers.

Working with people who have the same goals and outcomes for our children is what I enjoy the most.

Southwest Initiative Foundation

WHY OUR WORK MATTERS

Quality, affordable child care is a critical part of our southwest Minnesota regional economy. The barriers are systemic across the industry and require a more comprehensive, regional approach to find sustainable solutions.

OUR PROJECT

We're a site for the Rural Economic Development Philanthropy Innovator's Network (REDPIN). We're implementing an ecosystem-based approach to addressing child care in our communities. Our work includes five areas of focus: project investment and technical assistance, community planning, professional development, public policy, and public relations.

Our Work

YEAR ONE ACTIVITIES

Project investment and business development

- Distributed \$425,000+ in loans, training and technical assistance, feasibility studies and disaster relief

Professional development

- Trained 250+ child care providers at regional child care conference

Public relations

- Provided 350 providers with appreciation events
- Engaged 250+ child care providers in provider-appreciation events
- Created a new child care resource website

Public policy

- Worked with our Minnesota Initiative Foundation colleagues to secure bipartisan support for funding to address the child care shortage in greater Minnesota
- Facilitated or supported community convenings in six communities or counties to specifically identify and address local child care shortages

118

slots created or retained through our investments



What we learned along the way



Jodi Maertens
Youth and Family Officer,
Southwest Initiative Foundation

A key lesson has been that a one-size-fits-all approach won't solve the child care crisis in greater Minnesota. Each community is different, and so are their needs and available resources. Through this work, we meet with communities to discuss areas of strength and where there are opportunities to build on. That helps us customize our response. Sometimes the need is simple: a grant to pay a bill or hosting a provider appreciation meal. Other times it may be funding for facility improvements or getting an architect to come in and look at a space to see if it could be a community-based project. We work to be flexible and responsive to the diverse needs in our region.

It's vital to begin by assessing a community's readiness to work on the issue of child care. Pushing for a conversation about child care before a community is ready isn't an efficient use of anyone's time. In fact, a premature start that goes nowhere makes people hesitant to join the conversation again later.



Scott Marquardt
Vice President,
Southwest Initiative Foundation

We know the importance of engaging community partners from a variety of different sectors on the issue of child care. Strategies for building broad support include writing a one- or two-part newspaper series in the local newspaper or having a conversation with the county board or a city council. It can also be helpful to speak to individuals who are struggling to find appropriate care and business owners concerned about attracting and retaining employees. We intentionally include stakeholders from the broader community. When we get people who are completely disconnected from the child care ecosystem to care, progress is made.

Starting child care businesses isn't the main challenge — we see deeper challenges retaining qualified staff given high turnover rates. This goes hand in hand with provider compensation, which is often low. We must work harder to educate people to recognize that child care workers are professionals.

Think Small

WHY OUR WORK MATTERS

Between 2005 and 2014, the state lost more than 3,000 family-based child care providers — leaving less than one slot for every four preschool-age children in the state. Since July 2016, the number of family child care providers in Minneapolis and St. Paul has decreased by 24%. This decrease is due in part to systemic factors: high turnover, low wages, and the high cost of running a business, combined with a lack of financial supports to offset the costs of earning and maintaining a Parent Aware quality rating. While our efforts to recruit providers into Parent Aware have begun to pay off, we're still seeing an alarming number of providers either lose their rating or close their doors. All of these factors add up to a capacity crisis that impacts child care providers, children, families, employers, and entire communities, especially low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse communities — the very communities Think Small is committed to serving.

OUR PROJECT

We support child care providers in the seven-county metro area by implementing two efforts:

Build a Better Business: A child care business development program that helps prospective child care providers assess their needs, design a plan, set goals and create a timeline for launching their own business. We provide technical assistance to help providers become licensed or expand their capacity.

Advocating for Young Children Policy Trainings: A training that helps child care providers understand the importance of advocacy and learn strategies for engaging in policy matters.

Our Work

YEAR ONE ACTIVITIES

Child Care Business Program

- 117 prospective providers trained
- 25 prospective providers became licensed by completing the program
- 798 coaching/training hours delivered
- \$25,787 in financial assistance distributed to providers

Build a Better Business

Think Business Success!

Build Your Own:
Child Care Program

360

new child care slots

Advocating for Young Children Policy Trainings

- 244 providers and administrators trained (164 were child care providers)



26

new licensed providers



36

jobs created

The top three policy actions taken by participants following the policy training were:

1. Talking to a parent about a child care issue
2. Identifying their legislators
3. Calling or emailing an elected official



What we learned along the way



Trinette Potts

Child Care Business Coordinator

I knew there was a need for the services that we provide. I didn't know how great the need was. We've had an overwhelming response from individuals who want to open a child care business — both native English speakers and those learning English as an additional language.

I help participants navigate the licensing process, understand the language to use when writing policies and procedures, set up their learning environment, and register for the correct trainings.

One of the program benefits is the Learning Community, in which participants gain a full understanding of the licensing process and together learn *The Seven Elements of Program Management*. Those individuals who complete the Learning Community are better prepared for their licensing visit from their county licensor or Department of Human Services.



Marie Huey

Public Policy and Advocacy Coordinator

Many child care providers are interested in learning how to advocate for themselves and children in their care at a policy level. Providers would come to the training because it was free but leave with a greater understanding and interest in the topic. It was surprising and reassuring to see the appetite for the training!

Because advocacy can seem like such an intimidating and separate topic, I find it essential to give examples related to providers' everyday work. I adapt based on what's going on at the moment — during legislative session or close to elections are good times to talk about those topics. I also continue to edit the training based on feedback.

There's plenty of room to build onto this entry-level training; we're just getting started. However, encouraging more providers to see themselves as professionals and participants in the process is the start of an exciting shift in mindset.



Healthy Start Program

2018–2019 (Year One)