

Child Care Wayfinder

A one-stop navigation network for starting and growing programs

Program Description

Child Care Wayfinder is a one-stop navigation network for starting and growing child care programs. As part of regional Child Care Aware agencies and MNTRECC (Minnesota Tribal Resources for Early Childhood Care), local navigators help people in their communities create, sustain, and expand licensed home-based and center-based programs.

The goal of the initiative is to increase access to child care statewide by increasing the number of child care programs. The first step is targeted outreach and recruitment by local navigators to maintain and expand child care capacity in communities with the lowest access. Next, the program ensures that existing child care programs most in need of support are connected to available resources. The program launched in July 2022.

Need for the Program

The number of child care providers and the available spaces in child care programs have continued to decline, resulting in a need to open more programs. Even before the pandemic, Minnesota was already estimated to lack nearly 80,000 child care slots.¹ Outside of the Twin Cities metro area, there has been a steep decline in family- and center-based spaces, continuing an almost 20-year trend². Current child care business owners also need the support that Wayfinder provides. A recent survey by the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank asked how long survey respondents could remain in business under current conditions. One in five said a year or less, and half said they didn't know.³

Addressing Barriers to Start-Up

Two of the top barriers to opening child care programs identified through market research are concerns about the unknown costs of openings a child care business and confusion about the licensing process. The Child Care Wayfinder website and the one-on-one assistance from local navigators directly address these concerns.

Interest and Outcomes

In the short time since its launch, Child Care Wayfinder has had 358 contacts across the state. In its first six months, it helped to open 84 new programs, adding 1,061 new licensed child care slots.

The project's website has had over 8,000 visitors, and a robust digital advertising campaign is reaching potential family child care and center owners across the state.

¹ Casale, Oriane, et al. Early Care and Education: Portrait of an Industry in Crisis." Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). September 2020. Accessed on 2/3/23 at mn.gov/deed/newscenter/publications/trends/september-2020/early-care-education.jsp

² Werner, Marnie. "Rural Child Care Solutions: From the Ground Up." Center for Rural Policy and Development, October 2022. Accessed on 2/3/23 at www.ruralmn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Child-care-2022-0913-FINAL.pdf

³ Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank. "Half of Minnesota Child Care Providers Unsure How Long They'll Remain in Business." May 2022. Accessed on 2/3/2023 at www.minneapolisfed.org/article/2022/half-of-minnesota-child-care-providers-unsure-how-long-theyll-remain-in-business.