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# **Child Protection Grants to Address Child Welfare Disparities: 2019-2022**

Report to the Legislature

August 15, 2026

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# I. Executive summary

This report was developed in accordance with Minnesota Statutes 256E.28, which established child protection grants to address child welfare disparities. This statute was renumbered to Minnesota Statutes [142A.417](#) by [Laws of Minnesota 2024, chapter 115, article 16, section 34](#), with responsibility for the grants transferring from the Minnesota Department of Human Services to the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families. This report covers grant activities between 2019-2022, when the Minnesota Department of Human Services was administering the grant program.

Disparities grants are intended to:

- Identify and address structural factors that contribute to inequities in outcomes
- Identify and implement strategies to reduce racial disparities in treatment and outcomes
- Utilize cultural values, beliefs and practices of families, communities and Tribes for case planning, service design and decision-making processes
- Provide support to families in the context of their communities and Tribes to safely divert children and families from the child welfare system whenever possible.

Starting in 2019, the disparities grants were combined with other Minnesota Department of Human Services grant programs that had similar goals of reducing racial and other disparities within social services systems to create [Whole Family Systems \(WFS\)](#). The BUILD Initiative (BUILD), a national organization serving children and families, partnered with the department to provide support and technical assistance to the department and grantees in identifying and addressing institutional and systemic inequities.

WFS is a partnership among the department's Child Safety and Permanency, Child Care Services and Economic Assistance and Employment Supports divisions; BUILD; and local community sites. It is the second cohort (2019-2024) of the department's systems change work that began with the [2-Generation Policy Network \(Cohort 1, 2016-2021\)](#) and the [Early Childhood Systems Reform \(ECSR\) project](#) in 2017. WFS builds upon the work and learnings from these two projects to better understand and address systemic impacts that lead to inequitable access to state services and use that information to create long-term, meaningful changes to support children and families.

Within this innovative collaborative effort, five entities were awarded five-year disparities grant funds and contracts to explore, design and implement new practices and programs to support meaningful change for families:

- **City of St. Paul:** Through partnerships with financial institutions, community-based agencies and early childhood providers, the City of St. Paul is expanding and building off its college savings account initiative (CollegeBound) to improve economic stability as well as early childhood health and well-being outcomes for children and their families.
- **Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association (IMAA):** The IMAA, along with Families First of Minnesota, is leading a multidisciplinary team that partners with families and other community agencies to explore

the social and cultural barriers to success in prekindergarten- to kindergarten-age children whose families are first-generation immigrants and refugees.

- **Minneapolis American Indian Center (MAIC):** With their partners, including families, MAIC's Bright Beginnings program will develop individual and systems-level solutions to barriers faced by American Indian women who have experienced substance use and are at risk of or have a history of child welfare involvement, helping them develop a stable, nurturing environment for their children. The project will incorporate cultural teachings and seek out additional cultural resources for their work with families.
- **NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center Inc.:** Grants to NorthPoint will support healthy child development during the critical period from conception to age 5 through improving maternal health, reducing parental stress and supporting overall family well-being. NorthPoint will research the systemic failures that result in an abundance of risk factors and a lack of protective factors for many African American children and their parents/caregivers.
- **People Serving People (PSP):** With partners including families, Mill City Kids and the Hennepin County Office to End Homelessness, PSP will explore issues related to access to childcare and quality early childhood education and ways to prevent the recurrence of family homelessness. Family homelessness overwhelmingly impacts African American and American Indian communities.

Disparities grants comprised 50% of the WFS funding for City of St. Paul, IMAA, NorthPoint and PSP, and 100% of the WFS funding for MAIC.

This report provides three recommendations for continued efforts targeted at systems improvements, racial equity, cultural services and early intervention/diversion:

- Continue to provide technical support, consultation, monitoring and evaluation for the current five entities and the equity-focused initiatives and interventions they are developing and administering through the current grant cycle to October 2024.
- Engage in further collaboration with BUILD for ongoing in-depth outcome evaluation for each cohort agency.
- Continued partnership with the department's Child Safety and Permanency, Child Care Services and Economic Assistance and Employment Supports divisions to improve equitable outcomes, decrease overrepresentation in Minnesota's child welfare and out-of-home placement systems and mitigate systemic barriers contributing to inequities.

## II. Introduction

This report provides an evaluation of disparities grants awarded to five entities for a multi-year (2019-2024) project called the [Whole Family Systems \(WFS\) Initiative](#), including a description of the initiatives and activities supported with the disparities grants and how those grants have:

- Identified and addressed structural factors that contribute to inequities in outcomes
- Identified and implemented strategies to reduce racial disparities in treatment and outcomes
- Utilized cultural values, beliefs and practices of families, communities and Tribes for case planning, service design and decision-making processes
- Supported families in the context of their communities and Tribes to safely divert children and families from the child welfare system whenever possible.

This report covers grant activities between 2019-2022. Information and recommendations contained in the report reflect the project's activities from 2019-2022, and following reports will cover the final two-year period of the project. The information contained in this report comes from existing documents, reports and content found on the [Minnesota Department of Human Services' \(department\) public website](#), in addition to updates from WFS sites receiving whole or partial funding from disparities grants.

While the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families' Child Safety and Permanency Administration currently manages disparities grants, it was housed as a division within the Children and Family Services Administration in the Minnesota Department of Human Services during this reporting period. Accordingly, this report refers to the administration and structure of the disparities grants between 2019 and 2022.

### Purpose of report

This report is submitted to the Minnesota Legislature pursuant to Minnesota Statutes 142A.417, subd. 6 (c). The purpose is to provide an evaluation of the grant program funded under this section using the outcomes established by the legislature.

### III. Legislation

This statute was previously found in Minn. Stat Ch. 256E.28 while Child Welfare Disparities Grants were under the jurisdiction of the Department of Human Services. Upon the formation of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families in 2024, responsibility for the grant was transferred and the statute was renumbered to 142A.417.

#### **142A.417 CHILD PROTECTION GRANTS TO ADDRESS CHILD WELFARE DISPARITIES.**

Subdivision 1. **Child welfare disparities grant program established.** The commissioner may award grants to eligible entities for the development, implementation, and evaluation of activities to address racial disparities and disproportionality in the child welfare system by:

- (1) identifying and addressing structural factors that contribute to inequities in outcomes;
- (2) identifying and implementing strategies to reduce racial disparities in treatment and outcomes;
- (3) using cultural values, beliefs, and practices of families, communities, and tribes for case planning, service design, and decision-making processes;
- (4) using placement and reunification strategies to maintain and support relationships and connections between parents, siblings, children, kin, significant others, and tribes; and
- (5) supporting families in the context of their communities and tribes to safely divert them from the child welfare system, whenever possible.

Subd. 2. **State-community partnerships; plan.** The commissioner, in partnership with the legislative task force on child protection; culturally based community organizations; the Indian Affairs Council under section 3.922; the Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs under section 15.0145; the Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage under section 15.0145; the Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans under section 15.0145; the American Indian Child Welfare Advisory Council under section 260.835; counties; and tribal governments, shall develop and implement a comprehensive, coordinated plan to award funds under this section for the priority areas identified in subdivision 1.

Subd. 3. **Measurable outcomes.** The commissioner, in consultation with the state-community partners listed in subdivision 2, shall establish measurable outcomes to determine the effectiveness of the grants and other activities funded under this section in reducing disparities identified in subdivision 1. The development of measurable outcomes must be completed before any funds are distributed under this section.

Subd. 4. **Process.** (a) The commissioner, in consultation with the state-community partners listed in subdivision 2, shall develop the criteria and procedures to allocate competitive grants under this section. In developing the criteria, the commissioner shall establish an administrative cost limit for grant recipients. A county awarded a grant shall not spend more than three percent of the grant on administrative costs. When a

grant is awarded, the commissioner must provide a grant recipient with information on the outcomes established according to subdivision 3.

(b) A grant recipient must coordinate its activities with other entities receiving funds under this section that are in the grant recipient's service area.

(c) Grant funds must not be used to supplant any state or federal funds received for child welfare services.

Subd. 5. **Grant program criteria.** (a) The commissioner shall award competitive grants to eligible applicants for local or regional projects and initiatives directed at reducing disparities in the child welfare system.

(b) The commissioner may award up to 20 percent of the funds available as planning grants. Planning grants must be used to address such areas as community assessment, coordination activities, and development of community-supported strategies.

(c) Eligible applicants may include, but are not limited to, faith-based organizations, social service organizations, community nonprofit organizations, counties, and tribal governments. Applicants must submit proposals to the commissioner. A proposal must specify the strategies to be implemented to address one or more of the priority areas in subdivision 1 and must be targeted to achieve the outcomes established according to subdivision 3.

(d) The commissioner shall give priority to applicants who demonstrate that their proposed project or initiative:

(1) is supported by the community the applicant will serve;

(2) is evidence-based;

(3) is designed to complement other related community activities;

(4) utilizes strategies that positively impact priority areas;

(5) reflects culturally appropriate approaches; or

(6) will be implemented through or with community-based organizations that reflect the culture of the population to be reached.

Subd. 6. **Evaluation.** (a) Using the outcomes established according to subdivision 3, the commissioner shall conduct a biennial evaluation of the grant program funded under this section. Grant recipients shall cooperate with the commissioner in the evaluation and shall provide the commissioner with the information needed to conduct the evaluation.

(b) The commissioner shall consult with the legislative task force on child protection during the evaluation process.



(c) The commissioner shall submit a biennial evaluation report to the task force and to the chairs and ranking minority members of the house of representatives and senate committees with jurisdiction over child protection funding. This paragraph expires January 1, 2032.

Subd. 7. **American Indian child welfare projects.** Of the amount appropriated for purposes of this section, the commissioner shall award \$75,000 to each tribe authorized to provide tribal delivery of child welfare services under section 142A.03, subdivision 9. To receive funds under this subdivision, a participating tribe is not required to apply to the commissioner for grant funds. Participating tribes are also eligible for competitive grant funds under this section.

## IV. Background

In 2019, three divisions within the Department of Human Services' Children and Family Services Administration — Child Safety and Permanency, Economic Assistance and Employment Supports, and Child Care Services — blended grant funding with similar goals of reducing racial, economic and other disparities experienced by children and families in Minnesota's social services systems and outcomes to award five-year grants to community sites chosen from across Minnesota to participate in the [WFS Initiative](#). Of the seven WFS sites, five are partially or wholly supported through disparities grants.

As part of the department's ongoing systems change work, WFS evolved from the initial work and learnings of the [2-Generation Policy Network \(Cohort 1, 2016-2021\)](#) and the [Early Childhood Systems Reform \(ECSR\) project](#), which began in 2017. The blending of grant funding allows the department to serve families more holistically across programs and address the systemic factors that contribute to overrepresentation and disparate outcomes. The BUILD Initiative joined WFS full-time in March 2022 to help state and local partners identify and address structural and institutional inequities based on race, health, wealth and geography to improve outcomes for families, especially for pregnant and parenting families with young children. WFS is therefore a partnership among the department, BUILD and local community sites.

Additional information on the Whole Family Systems Initiative can be found on the [Department of Children, Youth, and Families' website](#), who adopted responsibility for the Initiative upon its formation in 2024.

## V. Grant Recipient Profiles

Five of the seven WFS sites across Minnesota are partially or wholly funded through disparities grant awards. WFS sites work with families to develop innovative program designs that are referred to as prototypes. This section contains information about each of the WFS sites that receive partial or full funding through disparities grants, including a description of their prototypes, core community team members, project scope, target population, and outcomes. Each site has completed Year 2 as of this report's reporting period.

### 1. City of St. Paul

Through partnerships with financial institutions, community-based agencies and early childhood providers, the City of St. Paul is expanding and building off [CollegeBound](#), its college savings account initiative, to improve economic stability as well as early childhood health and well-being outcomes for children and their families.

Disparities grant funding accounts for 50% of the City of St. Paul's WFS work.

#### Project scope and target population

- Project scope: Develop CollegeBound Saint Paul to be a platform to improve financial health, early childhood development and health outcomes of St. Paul families with young children.
- Target population: St. Paul families with children born on or after Jan. 1, 2020, with a particular focus on Black, Indigenous, Latino and Asian families in St. Paul.

#### Core community team members

- African American Babies Coalition (AABC)
- Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio (CLUES)
- Cultural Wellness Center
- Lutheran Social Services of MN
- Model Cities
- Mne Sota Fund
- Prepare + Prosper
- Ujamaa Place
- Allina Health/United and Children's Minnesota Hospital
- Regions Hospital – HealthPartners.

#### Description of prototype/s

- **Integration:** Integrate CollegeBound into financial health and early childhood interventions and programs through engaging financial health and early childhood agencies and community-based organizations as enrollment and referral partners to enroll and engage eligible families in CollegeBound.

- **Family access:** Provide CollegeBound families with access to financial health and early childhood development programs and resources, with plans to design pilots with financial health, early childhood development and wellness partners to connect CollegeBound families with interventions, resources and activities.

## Outcomes

The City of St. Paul's WFS work resulted in the following outcomes:

- Reconstituted the core team into a financial health group and an early childhood team, which allowed for more focused conversations with partners
- Convened early childhood service providers, stakeholders and leaders to develop a CollegeBound Early Childhood Equitable Action Plan, which identified focus areas with targets for early childhood work and identified strategies to meet those targets over the next three years
- Executed contracts with five financial health partners
- Enrolled over 5,000 children in CollegeBound by the end of Year 2
- Established a total of 30 outreach partners, comprised of early childhood organizations and programs.

## 2. Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association (IMAA)

IMAA, along with Families First of Minnesota, is leading a multidisciplinary team that partners with families and other community agencies to explore the social and cultural barriers to success in prekindergarten- to kindergarten-age children whose families are first-generation immigrants and refugees.

Disparities grant funding accounts for 50% of IMAA's WFS work.

### Project scope and target population

- **Project scope:** IMAA is addressing disparities faced by immigrant and refugee families related to school readiness for children and general digital access for families by narrowing the project scope to focus primarily on digital equity in addition to addressing access to school readiness programming, in alignment with the project's overall goal. Primary community partner Families First of Minnesota is assisting with school readiness and access to high-quality education. Transportation will also be a component of school readiness.
- **Target population:** Low-income immigrant and refugee families with early childhood-age children (generally defined as ages 0-5, but due to the work's longitudinal focus, will be expanded to ages 5-8). Families are broadly defined to include extended family members who often serve as caregivers as well as expecting parents.

### Core community team members:

- Laptop distribution: Hawthorne, Families First, IMAA

- Digital equity: Somali American Social Service Association, Project FINE, Listos Preschool & Childcare, IMAA
- Evaluation: Cradle 2 Career, IMAA
- Policy changes and future planning: Minnesota Department of Human Services, University of Minnesota's Future Services Institute, City of Rochester (Public Library), IMAA.

### Description of prototype/s

- **Family access:** Partner with families who are part of the cohort for digital equity and literacy to identify and address the social-cultural determinants and the systemic policies, practices, programs, initiatives, funding, governance, data and communications that impact immigrant family access to and engagement with early childhood learning programs in southern Minnesota. The project will also continue to engage parents when their children transition from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten. The project will break down barriers in state and local programming and identify new opportunities to increase access to early childhood learning.
- **Digital equity and literacy:** Provide laptops, internet access and digital literacy training to address the digital equity gaps for immigrant and refugee families. Families will have opportunities to be successful by having access to virtual learning and other family needs, such as communicating with teachers, childcare providers and other formal and informal supports.

### Outcomes

- In Year 2, IMAA distributed laptops to 132 families, who used devices in multiple ways:
  - 73% connected with friends and family
  - 61% connected with their child's school
  - 76% provided education for a child under 5
  - 56% provided education/distance learning for older children.
- One hundred forty families received access to broadband
- Fifty-three families received technology tutoring.

## 3. Minneapolis American Indian Center (MAIC)

With their partners, including families, MAIC's Bright Beginnings program will develop individual and systems-level solutions to barriers faced by American Indian women who have experienced substance use and are at risk of or have a history of child welfare involvement, helping them develop a stable, nurturing environment for their children. The project will incorporate cultural teachings and seek out additional cultural resources for their work with families.

Disparities grant funding accounts for 100% of MAIC's WFS work.

## Project scope and target population

- Project scope: Implementation of an enhanced version of Bright Beginnings, which has been operating for four years, by: 1) adding a second case manager to increase caseload to 30 clients and increase capacity to add peer recovery coaching and a possible alumni group, and 2) utilizing Bright Beginnings as a pilot program with Hennepin County Child Protection.
- Target population: American Indian women living in the Twin Cities who are pregnant or have recently delivered, have a history of substance use and either have a history with child protection or are at high risk for being involved in child protection.

## Core community team members

- Hennepin County Child Protection Services.

## Description of prototype/s

- **Enhance and promote recovery:** The goal of Bright Beginnings is to support American Indian women who are pregnant or parenting an infant, have a history of substance abuse and either have a history with the child welfare system or are at risk of child welfare system involvement. Support is designed to help parents have healthy babies, achieve stable long-term recovery from substance abuse, avoid involvement and reinvolverment with the child protection system, and create a healthy, stable and nurturing family and home environment in which children can grow and thrive.
- **Video presentations:** Videos will highlight stories of American Indian women who are impacted by disparities in the child welfare, housing, early childhood and substance use disorder systems. MAIC will use the videos to educate community stakeholders and workers in hospital settings about the impacts of implicit bias on women giving birth in their facilities.
- **Establish a child welfare pilot program:** Bright Beginnings will create a child welfare pilot program with Hennepin County Child Protection and have earlier involvement with families to help divert families from child protection actions, when possible, for mothers with substance use disorder.
- **Develop treatment housing plans:** Bright Beginnings will create a vision for housing development for mothers and their children. This includes exploring treatment housing options for mothers and their children that incorporate cultural healing practices to promote recovery and strengthen cultural foundations.

## Outcomes

- Fifteen women received intensive case management services.
- Fifteen women received support from a cultural coordinator to develop cultural practices, teachings and ceremonies, and receive elder consultations in alignment with their Tribal heritage, prior knowledge, involvement in culture and overall readiness.
- A pilot project with Hennepin County is being developed to engage Bright Beginnings in the child protection investigation process to prevent out-of-home placement of American Indian infants and make referrals and connections to chemical health assessments and treatment.

- Twenty recovery coaches from the American Indian Community, including several Bright Beginnings participants/alumni, were trained.

#### **4. Northpoint Health and Wellness Center Inc.**

Grants to NorthPoint will support healthy child development during the critical period from conception to age 5 through improving maternal health, reducing parental stress and supporting overall family well-being.

NorthPoint will research the systemic failures that result in an abundance of risk factors and a lack of protective factors for many African American children and their parents/caregivers.

Disparities grant funding accounts for 50% of NorthPoint's WFS work.

#### **Project scope and target population**

- Project scope: Risk factors being focused on are high-risk pregnancies and low birth weight babies, trauma and its multiple impacts on parents and children, child maltreatment/out-of-home placement and poverty as an exacerbating factor in promoting healthy child development. Protective factors being focused on include culturally responsive maternal health care, high-quality early childhood education and the financial and emotional participation of fathers in their children's lives.
- Target population: African American children from conception to age 3 and their families.

#### **Core community team members**

- Project lead, NorthPoint
- Community health worker, NorthPoint
- Outreach and health initiatives manager, NorthPoint
- Professional in psychotherapy
- Professional in engagement of men and fathers
- Hennepin County Attorney's Office
- Hennepin County Child Protection
- Part C coordinator, Minnesota Department of Education
- Future Services Institute
- Child Safety and Permanency Division, Children and Family Services Administration, Minnesota Department of Human Services.

#### **Description of prototype/s**

NorthPoint, along with partners and families, will support healthy child development during the critical period from conception to age 3, and will research the systemic failures that result in an abundance of risk factors and a lack of protective factors for many African American children and their parents/caregivers. NorthPoint's prototype is named Whole Family Stability.

- **Mothering spaces:** NorthPoint created monthly Mothering Spaces for mothers with young children based on a series of focus groups with mothers in the Integrated Care for High-Risk Pregnancies (ICHRP) program. They are designed to reduce parental stress and maternal depression as well as promote social connections. Free childcare and transportation are provided.
- **Fathering spaces:** As the Mothering Spaces were being designed and implemented, fathers requested their own spaces. In response, the core team designed Fathering Spaces to support fathers in developing healthy relationships with their children and their co-parents.
- **Legal summit:** A monthly to bimonthly legal summit for families with young children in the NorthPoint area. Planners will ask families who participate in WFS opportunities at NorthPoint to help generate legal topics. If needed, the Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers will offer families one-time one-on-one legal consultation services.
- **Multiparenting education groups (co-parenting):** Curriculum is being developed to allow participants to attend sessions most relevant to their situation while ensuring that whichever group is offered does not duplicate work already being done in their primary program.

## Outcomes

Northpoint Health and Wellness Center experienced instability in leadership and staffing in the development and delivery of its equity initiatives. By the end of the reporting period, the agency and team members were receiving technical assistance and support in implementing prototypes and identifying potential outcomes.

## 5. People Serving People (PSP)

With partners, including families, Mill City Kids and the Hennepin County Office to End Homelessness, PSP will explore issues related to access to child care and quality early childhood education and ways to prevent the recurrence of family homelessness. Family homelessness overwhelmingly impacts African American and American Indian communities.

Disparities grant funding accounts for 50% of PSP's WFS work.

### Project scope and target population

- **Project scope:** The prototype will be aimed at seeking how to actively involve families experiencing homelessness as a part of a team of core partners working to systematically identify and address structurally racist practices, programs and policies that result in higher rates of homelessness in African American and American Indian populations. A goal is to ensure access to quality early learning care and education.
- **Target population:** Families experiencing homelessness or who have recently experienced homelessness in Hennepin County, especially families who are pregnant and/or have children ages 0-3.



## Core community team members

- CEO, PSP
- Whole Family Systems manager, PSP
- Director of Family Supports, PSP
- Education director, PSP
- Mill City Kids
- Area manager, Hennepin County Housing Stability.

## Description of prototype/s

- **Award fellowships:** Participants recently or currently experiencing homelessness are selected to be fellows and be part of a team working to identify and address structural racism in policies, programs and practices that result in higher rates of homelessness in African American and American Indian populations. Fellows will participate for a set number of hours each month and commit to two years of fellowship. Fellows will also receive a stipend for their participation.
- **Ethnic/multicultural curriculum:** The team will create a curriculum based on community, educator and parent feedback for the educational needs of children in the community. The curriculum will center on belonging and will include protective factors for children. The Gathering of Native Americans (GONA) model will be used to develop curriculum and evaluation with the intent of increasing resiliency factors of Black and Indigenous families served through PSP and Mill City Kids.
- **Pathways to Employment Program:** This prototype will identify a process for people who have recently experienced homelessness to obtain living wage jobs at Hennepin County that will allow flexibility for wraparound services within the workweek as the participant stabilizes their family. These wraparound services will be provided for one year and are intended to meet the individual needs of each participant.
- **Culture shift work:** Through intentional curriculum, the PSP leadership team is exploring and addressing power, control and comfort-seeking in their organization. The training is facilitated by a core team member, Mill City Kids. Leaders will explore alternative ways of being and doing, and co-design and formalize more inclusive and welcoming policies and practices for the families staying at the shelter.

## Outcomes

- Eight fellows completed the 18-month advocacy and leadership program.
- Forty families participated in the multicultural curriculum as it continued to be developed.

## VI. Recommendations

Recommendations listed below reflect the findings of the Initiative's work from 2019-2022. Additional updates will be shared in subsequent reports.

Racial equity work should continue within the comprehensive WFS model and infrastructure. While Minnesota's social services systems tend to be siloed, they are experienced as one system by children, families and caregivers. A more integrated approach to addressing racially disparate outcomes better serves the needs of all Minnesota children and families.

Additional recommendations include:

- Continue to provide technical support, consultation, monitoring and evaluation for the current five entities and the equity-focused initiatives and interventions they are developing and administering through the current grant cycle to October 2024
- Engage in further collaboration with BUILD for ongoing, in-depth outcome evaluation for each cohort agency
- Support continued partnership among the department's Child Safety and Permanency, Child Care Services and Economic Assistance and Employment Supports divisions to improve equitable outcomes, decrease overrepresentation in Minnesota's child welfare and out-of-home placement systems and mitigate systemic barriers contributing to inequities.