

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.

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Participant Testimonials

- It has been wonderful to have Wayfinder here to support me as I navigate through being a new family childcare provider. My navigator has been a great help and support to me for helping me set up some goals to have a purpose in providing care for littles in my area. One goal she helped me set up is getting started with Parent Aware. She has set up visits to make sure things are going well and to check up on me to make sure my goals are being accomplished. I know I can ask her questions and she can get the information or help provide support in areas that are needed to give me strength in my growing program. She encourages me to keep working hard. – *Jo Schmitt, Family Child Care Provider*
- My Wayfinder Navigator helped boost my confidence in being able to push me into pursuing my dreams of being a licensed in-home child care provider. My Navigator came out to my house and was extremely helpful. She helped me plan out what would work best in my space and gave opinions on how to set things up in my home. She gave me a TON of resources for advice on how to deal with different behaviors in children and when to have children get screened for preschool. My Navigator also gave me resources of other people that I could reach out to for further advice if I needed help in other areas. She went out of her way to be of assistance to me when I needed help and didn't know who else to turn to. She helped me apply for financial help to be able to have things for my children and families to use and enjoy. – *Kailee Ripplinger, Family Child Care Provider*
- I would not have gotten through even half of the daycare licensing paperwork and requirements if it weren't for my navigator with Wayfinder. She has helped educate me on how to open and start a business as well as how to be successful long-term. ...This process is tedious, time consuming, confusing and has been quite frustrating to say the least. I have not had this kind of enthusiastic positive support and drive to help me follow through with my dream in any other career paths I have gone down before. To say this program is highly necessary and needed is an understatement. – *Liz Elton, Family Child Care Provider*
- As I showed an interest in opening my own in-home child care program, I was introduced to a [Wayfinder navigator] and the Wayfinder program. Honestly, I had held a license previously and thought, "well, how hard could it be to jump back in 5 years later?" I couldn't have been more wrong. ... I not only got a contact when I was introduced to Tori but someone I can reach out to that I know is an expert in her field and I whole heartedly trust her opinion. – *Danielle Weiss, Family Child Care Provider*
- Although I am not new to owning a family child care, I am new to owning one in Minnesota, specifically Duluth. I reached out and was put in contact with the Wayfinder program ...We came up with goals and a game plan as I was struggling with enrollment and advertising. Due to my navigator's vast knowledge and experience of having been a center director, she was able to help me formulate a plan that was manageable and realistic, and ultimately, successful. She has been a wonderful asset as childcare is a difficult business to navigate at times and knowing there is someone who is only an email or phone call away that can answer questions is very comforting. I am very grateful that a program like this exists for new providers, even those of us who are not new to the field. – *Pauline Zifko, Family Child Care Provider*