



Child Care Wayfinder Program Summary, FY2025

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 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, underscoring the need to expand the number of programs. Family child care programs are closing, continuing a 20-year trend, and a modest increase in child care center capacity has not been sufficient to offset that loss.¹ Workforce shortages also mean many centers operate at less than their licensed capacity. The top two barriers to starting child care programs, as identified through market research, are the unknown costs of opening a child care business and confusion about the licensing process. The Child Care Wayfinder website, along with one-on-one assistance from local navigators, directly addresses these concerns.

Outcomes

In State Fiscal Year 2025 (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025), 35 Wayfinder Navigators throughout the state have worked with 1,574 potential and currently licensed programs. They responded to 1,314 inquiries about starting a family or center-based child care program. As a result of this activity, 227 programs were newly licensed, with a capacity of more than 3,500 children. They also assisted almost 200 programs in sustaining their operations and helped 26 programs interested in expanding.

The program’s website had over 9,000 visitors in FY25, and a robust digital advertising campaign reached potential family child care and center owners across the state.

¹ Tu-Uyan, Tran. Minnesota child care sector struggles as business model changes. Accessed January 9, 2024 at <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/article/2023/minnesota-child-care-sector-struggles-as-business-model-changes>





Participant Testimonials

“It has been wonderful to have Wayfinder here to support me as I navigate through being a new family child care 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*

