



# EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVE



Expanding High Quality Child Care Programs  
in Greater Minnesota



Mardag Foundation



# MARDAG FOUNDATION

## *Investing in Quality Child Care in Greater Minnesota*



For the past 50 years, the Mardag Foundation has been making grants to nonprofit organizations that are striving to improve the quality of life in Minnesota for families, children, seniors and other at-risk populations. The Foundation has focused on programs in education and the arts.

To ensure all youth in Minnesota have access to the best child care, Mardag Foundation implemented an Early Childhood Initiative to increase access to quality child care in greater Minnesota.

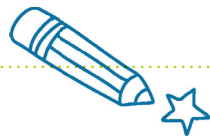
Since 2013, Mardag Foundation's Early Childhood Initiative has provided funding to Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership, West Central Initiative Foundation, the Northland Foundation and the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation to support child care providers' participation in the Parent Aware program.

The grantees used the funds to recruit, train and coach child care providers through the Parent Aware Rating process. While each grantee had similar goals, their use of funds varied based on their community's unique needs and programming strengths.

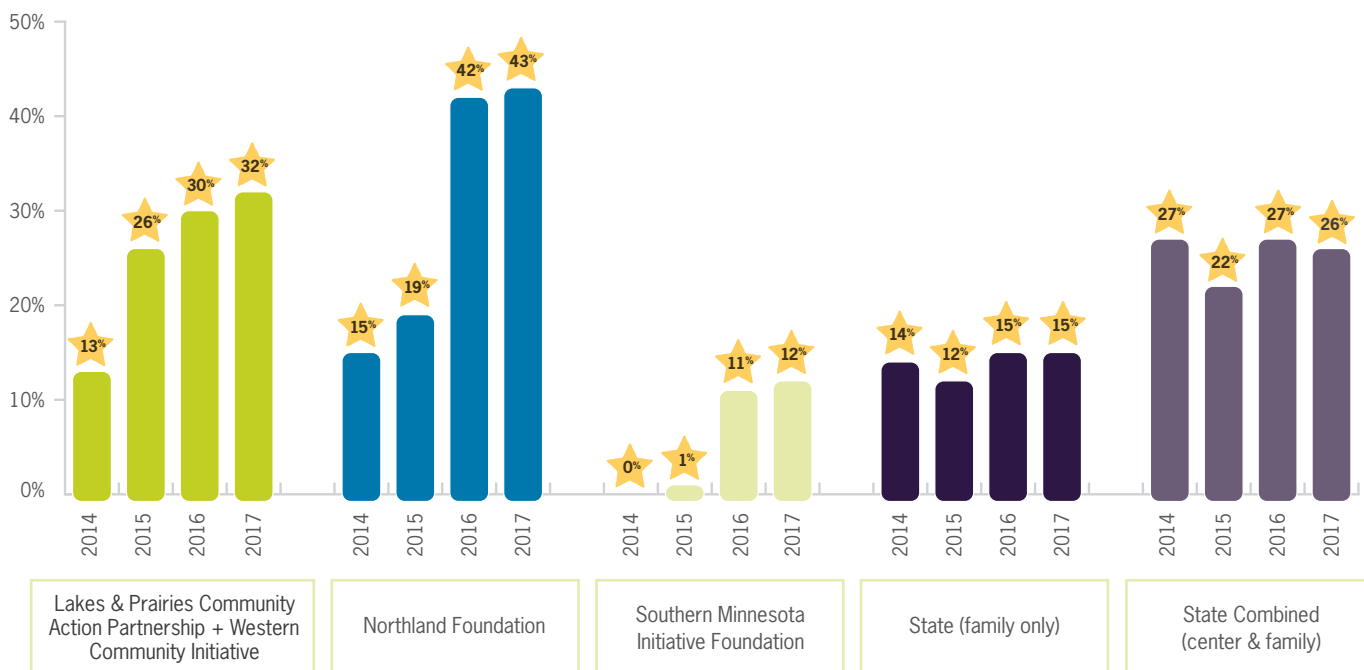


Parent  
Aware

Parent Aware is Minnesota's Quality Rating & Improvement System, offering tools and resources to help families find quality child care and early education. Child care programs improve their practices and children benefit from care and education that prepares them for school and life.



### ENROLLMENT GROWTH



# ALL FAMILIES DESERVE ACCESS

## *to High Quality Child Care*



The Minnesota Parent Aware Quality and Improvement System provides families with children ages 0-5 access to high quality education and care. Early relationships with caregivers and providers help promote healthy brain development, social and emotional skills and language development.

### STAR RATINGS

Licensed family child care and center-based programs take the Full Pathway to receive a One-, Two-, Three- or Four-Star Rating. Programs may also choose to participate in Building Quality, which offers additional time and coaching to programs to learn and implement kindergarten readiness best practices before submitting documentation for their rating.



### STAR RATING CHALLENGES & FACTORS

Benefits to participating in the star rating system include financial incentives, high quality training and peer-sharing experiences. Currently, providers are awarded \$2,500 for qualifying for One-, Two- and Three-Star Ratings to improve their rating. Four-Star providers don't receive incentives and as a result, several four-star programs are re-rating at lower star levels.



### SCHOLARSHIPS

The State of Minnesota funds an innovative program called Early Learning Scholarships to help families access and pay for high quality early learning programs, as demonstrated through the Parent Aware Ratings. One of the challenges in working with the Early Learning Scholarship Program has been the changes in program eligibility. Initially, families could use the scholarships, valued at up to \$7,500 per child per year, at any Star Rated or participating program. The policy then changed to allow use at only Three- and Four-Star programs. A statute change then reversed this policy and pushed back its implementation to 2020. These changes have caused some confusion and struggles for families and providers.

### CHALLENGES TO PARENT AWARE PARTICIPATION



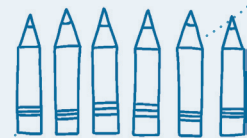
TIME



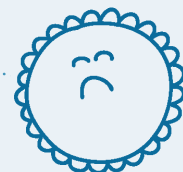
TRAVEL



FAMILY



RESPONSIBILITIES



LIMITED RESOURCES



# LAKES & PRAIRIES COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP + WEST CENTRAL INITIATIVE FOUNDATION



## PEER LEARNING AND EDUCATION

Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership (CAPLP) and West Central Initiative Foundation (WCI) provide professional development opportunities for early childhood professionals across Northwest and West Central Minnesota. CAPLP offers an array of programs and services that are designed to meet the needs of the children, families and seniors who live in the communities they serve. WCI strives to improve West Central Minnesota through funding, programs and technical assistance. Based on the needs of the geographic areas and the providers, Parent Aware coaches and evaluators worked to deliver adequate and quality training.



### MODEL



To achieve their goal, CAPLP and WCI hired a well-known, local early childhood educator to recruit providers and support their unique needs as they participated in the Parent Aware Rating training and application process. The educator also developed a peer-learning strategy to make the one-to-one coaching caseload manageable. The peer-learning groups qualified for coaching credit, helped manage the increasing numbers and provided valuable group learning and support.

In addition, the foundations worked with child care centers and family providers to provide free coaching and grant funding to support providers in the Parent Aware Rating process.

From 2014 to 2017, the number of providers rated or enrolled in Parent Aware increased from 13 percent to 32 percent — a higher percentage than the state as a whole.



*"I enrolled in the Parent Aware Star Rating program because I wanted to ensure I was doing everything I could to make myself and my program the best it could be. The money I received for completing my first round of the Parent Aware program was such a blessing. I was able to purchase many items to improve my program that I would otherwise not have been able to purchase on my own."*

— Trisha Mylebust, child care provider and LPCAP Parent Aware participant



## MARDAG FOUNDATION FUNDING

- Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership (CAPLP) received \$90,000 from 2015 to 2017
- West Central Initiative Foundation (WCI) received \$221,050 from 2014 to 2016; they also received \$65,000, which they re-granted to Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership over the course of three years to partially fund a Parent Aware recruiter

## ADDITIONAL FUNDING

*secured thanks to  
Mardag Foundation investment*

- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation awarded CAPLP a \$200,000 grant

# SOUTHERN MINNESOTA INITIATIVE FOUNDATION



## PARTNERED SUCCESS

Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF) is a regional development and philanthropic organization that fosters economic and community vitality in 20 counties of southern Minnesota through a culture of collaboration and partnership. Based in Owatonna County, SMIF focused only on family child care providers, often a difficult group to recruit. Their Quality Child Care Program offered results-oriented training to all area family child care providers. Participants who enrolled are eligible to receive \$300 for Parent-Aware-approved curriculum once per year.



SOUTHERN MINNESOTA  
INITIATIVE FOUNDATION



## MODEL



In 2016, First Children's Finance partnered with SMIF to plan, develop and implement the Parent Aware case-study training curriculum. Together they offer child care providers training relevant to their work with youth as well as to their roles as business entrepreneurs.

SMIF broadened their potential audiences for training by working with other organizations.

From 2014 to 2017, the number of providers rated or enrolled in Parent Aware increased from zero percent to 12 percent.



*"I'm so glad I came to the training because I didn't even know about Parent Aware or First Children's Finance. I'm super excited to offer a more intentional program and to take advantage of the grant dollars through Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation & Parent Aware."*

– Family child care provider from Springfield and SMIF Parent Aware participant

## MARDAG FOUNDATION FUNDING

- Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF) was awarded \$240,000 from 2014 to 2018

## ADDITIONAL FUNDING

*secured thanks to  
Mardag Foundation investment*

- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation awarded \$100,000 for 2015–2016
- Otto Bremer Trust awarded \$170,000 in 2017 to strengthen its Quality Child Care Program and build its joint Parent Aware programming between SMIF and First Children's Finance
- SMIF's Youth Trust Fund received \$90,768.53 to strengthen the Quality Child Care Program
- Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development awarded \$76,000 to SMIF and First Children's Finance
- ABDO and Capstone Publishing awarded a donation totaling \$311,082 between 2017 and 2018
- In 2017, SMIF received a legacy gift of \$1 million

# NORTHLAND FOUNDATION



## COMMUNITY VALUES

The Northland Foundation is a publicly supported foundation serving northeastern Minnesota through grantmaking, an operating program, business lending, special initiatives and community assistance. Lynn Haglin, Northland Foundation vice president and director of KID PLUS, believes the early Mardag Foundation grant gave them the opportunity to develop key relationships with other child care leaders in the state, creating a thorough understanding of child care issues and knowledge of regional leaders.



## MODEL

Northland Foundation established Parent Aware Pathways, a special project in close partnership with Child Care Aware Minnesota – Northeast District to help increase the number of Parent Aware-rated child care providers in the region. They also faced a unique challenge: their region includes Saint Louis County — one of largest counties by area in the state.

Through this initiative, the Northland Foundation increased the number of free training opportunities for family and center-based licensed child care providers across the rural seven-county region of northeastern Minnesota. On an annual basis, Northland Foundation provides 40-50 training sessions focused on the latest research and best practices to help child care providers support the social-emotional development of children in their care.

From 2014 to 2017, the number of providers rated or enrolled in Parent Aware increased from 15 percent to 43 percent — a higher percentage than the state as a whole.



*"A family provider in Chisholm who had been in business for over 20 years was planning to stop providing care. She was feeling burned out and shared that it seemed time for her to move on to another occupation. Then, Parent Aware Pathways came along. Attending trainings, networking with other providers and participating in the Parent Aware rating process gave her new energy. She is still in business today and continues to seek ways to ensure families with young children have access to high quality child care."*

— Lynn Haglin, vice president and KIDS PLUS director, Northland Foundation



## MARDAG FOUNDATION FUNDING

- Northland Foundation was awarded \$575,000 between 2013 to 2018

## ADDITIONAL FUNDING

*secured thanks to  
Mardag Foundation investment*

- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation awarded \$400,000 over four years from 2014–2017 and recently provided a \$200,000 two-year grant ending June 30, 2019
- Northland Foundation raised an additional \$295,000 to support Parent Aware Pathways from funders including Sheltering Arms Foundation, the Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation, Southern St. Louis County Family Service Collaborative and Northland Foundation
- Minnesota Department of Education awarded Northland Foundation \$2 million to administer the Minnesota Early Learning Scholarship Program
- Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development awarded a one-year grant in 2017 of \$125,000 to support the start-up and expansion of child care programs that committed to participating in the rating system. In 2018 the Northland Foundation was awarded another one-year grant of \$90,000 to continue the work



# CONCLUSION



By 2017, 527 child care providers were enrolled or rated by Parent Aware in the 17 counties included in the Early Childhood Initiative. As the number of rated and enrolled providers increased, so did the number of children served.

Over the past six years, rated providers have played a large role in recruiting peers. Financial incentives, peer learning and high quality training have helped all four grantees increase interest in Parent Aware. In addition, Mardag Foundation funding allowed the grantees to leverage their dollars to increase financial and community support for quality child care in their regions.



## TOTAL CHILDREN SERVED

