



Changing the landscape of early care  
and education in Greater Minnesota.

Because nothing is **Greater Than** Minnesota's future.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## New Regional Effort in Northwest Minnesota to Focus on Child Care

MINNEAPOLIS, MN (October 7, 2013) – Growth in Thief River Falls has been a mixed blessing for the northwest Minnesota boomtown, which struggles to keep up with the rapid employment demand. A housing shortage forces many to commute from towns like Crookston, a community with its own set of challenges including a population that is becoming increasingly polarized in both age and income distribution. Caught within the fray of these very different local challenges is the availability of affordable, quality child care.

"We need to find solutions for the child care issues in our region," said Vicky Grove, Early Childhood Program Specialist at the Northwest Minnesota Foundation. "We're experiencing rural centers closing, aging provider populations, and a lack of options for the large number of shift workers in the Red River Valley."

*Greater Than Minnesota (>MN)* is determined to find new and innovative solutions to these problems. A partnership between First Children's Finance and the six Minnesota Initiative Foundations, >MN will work region by region to assess and address rural child care challenges in Greater Minnesota. The northwest area is first out of the gate and will focus on Marshall, Norman, Pennington, and parts of Polk Counties.

"A sustainable supply of affordable, high quality child care is absolutely essential to a community," said Heidi Hagel Braid, Minnesota Director at First Children's Finance. "It enables parents to go to and be productive at work, prepares children for success in school and in life, and is vital to a thriving local economy."

"One county in the northwest region recently lost its only child care center," said Grove. "It is extremely hard to go to work when you don't have a provider to take care of your children."

While each region's challenges are different, >MN's approach to creating community child care solutions is the same: identify its strengths, build on successes, and fill in the gaps. "We want to figure out what's working and what's not working," said Hagel Braid. "There are amazing things happening with early care and education in Greater Minnesota, and we plan to build on those successes."

>MN is kicking off with a Child Care Town Hall for the northwest region, hosted at Erickson's Smokehouse in Fertile on Tuesday, October 15<sup>th</sup> at 6 pm. Regional leaders and community members from all sectors – child care, school districts, universities, faith communities, employers large and small, as well as elected officials – have been invited to participate in the meeting, which will shape and inform a regional Community Solution Action Plan. "Engaging the entire community is essential for the plan to become a reality," said Hagel Braid.

In addition to the Child Care Town Hall, >MN will have an interactive online platform through a partnership with Citizen's League, where updates on and input to each community's plan will be available to the public.

"At the heart of *Greater Than Minnesota* is the belief that our rural communities are greater than our challenges," said Hagel Braid. "Because nothing is greater than Minnesota's future."

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