

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

# FOCUS

on the region

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## Championing Child Care Solutions

Child care issues are nothing new to our rural communities. In 1989, WCI established a child care initiative in response to a study the foundation conducted that showed less than half of the child care needed by working parents in the nine-county region could be provided by licensed providers. Three decades later, a study by the Center for Rural Policy and Development showed that 26 percent of child care needs were

not being met in the region. It's a move in the right direction, still, every day, parents struggle to find child care—impacting local employers as much as families. What is WCI doing about it? “Uniting ideas and resources,” as WCI’s vision states, to help communities, employers, nonprofits and providers meet the need. Here are some of the child care solutions WCI has helped champion.

West Central Initiative is an equal opportunity provider, lender and employer.

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**our mission**

Serving to improve west central Minnesota through funding, programs and technical assistance.

**our vision**

Uniting ideas and resources to help people and communities create a better tomorrow.

### Jill Amundson Joins WCI as Associate Planner

West Central Initiative welcomes Jill Amundson as its new associate planner. In her role, she will concentrate on economic development planning, transportation planning and community development projects.

Amundson comes to West Central Initiative after 11 years with West Central MN Communities Action, where she focused on a variety of community initiatives including housing, asset building, transportation, health insurance and food access.

“Jill’s experience helping individuals and communities in our region to reach their full potential is a real asset for WCI. Adding her to our planning team significantly expands our capacity to provide assistance in our nine counties,” said WCI President Anna Wasescha.

Learn more about Jill at [blog.wcif.org](http://blog.wcif.org)



**TAKE A LOOK AROUND YOUR COMMUNITY.**

What initiatives are making a change and bringing residents of all walks of life together? West Central Initiative wants to help out these efforts through our new Community Change Makers Grant.

Learn more about eligibility and proposal qualifications at [changemakers.wcif.org](http://changemakers.wcif.org). Next-round applications due July 6, 2018.



Building a strong workforce is vital to the success of our businesses and our region. WCI encourages nonprofits, schools and units of government in the nine counties we serve to test solutions to workforce development through our Workforce Solutions grant program.

Learn more: [workforcesolutions.wcif.org](http://workforcesolutions.wcif.org)

### Creating an Oasis in a Child Care Desert

Otter Tail County is known for its abundant lakes. It’s hardly a place one would associate with deserts, but they do exist: child care deserts. The Center for American Progress defines a child care desert as a neighborhood without any child care options or with so few child care providers that there are more than three children for every licensed child care slot.

Battle Lake sits smack dab in the middle of one such child care desert. Census data showed that within the radius of a 20-minute drive from Battle Lake there were 577 children under the age of five, with no child care center and not enough family-based child care providers to fill the need.

“Where are our parents getting child care? They are traveling great distances, or relying on neighbors or family,” said Gary Harrington. Harrington and his wife Karalyn chair a community-led fundraising campaign, “Building Our Children’s Future,” to raise \$600,000 to build a child care center in Battle Lake. This ambitious endeavor came out of a community goal to attract young families to live in the Battle Lake area. To do that, the community needed to meet these families’ basic needs. A group of area residents formed Battle Lake Youth Center Inc. (BLYCI) with the original intention of turning a vacant building into a joint recreation and child care center. Within a year, however, the BLYCI Board of Directors decided to focus its efforts solely on building a stand-alone

child care center. As part of the BLCYI, the Harringtons assembled a capital campaign team and engaged NorthPoint Professionals to design and create supporting materials. A Facebook page and website, [buildchildcare.com](http://buildchildcare.com), were launched to provide easily accessible information and updates. Cyndi Anderson of Mosaic Consulting led training sessions for the all-volunteer fundraising team. Justin and Jamie Neppel of Tiny Tykes, Inc. were contracted by the board of directors to operate the center once it is up and running.

Many personal visits, group presentations and grant writing helped the BLCYI raise more than \$440,000 before making the campaign public this March. WCI provided a \$37,500 child care capacity grant, one of five grants received by the group. Local businesses also offered in-kind gifts of services to the center, such as painting and lawn maintenance. On April 21, community and contributors will come together for the center’s groundbreaking

with a late fall opening in the works.

“We continue to be very encouraged by the degree of community support – from individuals, families, businesses, organizations, churches and city government, both locally and from a distance,” Karalyn Harrington said. “When the doors open, we can truly say it was community supported and built.”

More Child Care Solutions inside.

## Organizations—and Generations— Come Together for Community

Construction on a child care center is already underway at Knute Nelson Care Center in Alexandria. Circular saws were buzzing and the scent of fresh paint was in the air as Knute Nelson President/CEO Mark Anderson, Alexandria YMCA's Interim Director Dennis Lipp and the Y's Child Care Director Sara Peterson toured a former residential wing that is being converted into a child care center with rooms specifically designed for infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children.

This amazing transformation came from a vision for how to repurpose unused space and the great need for child care both for Knute Nelson employees and for the community at large. Knute Nelson reached out to the Alexandria YMCA, which already ran a child care center at its facility and where they already had a partnership. Would they be willing to manage another child care center? After careful thought, the answer

was yes. "The YMCA Board needs credit for pushing it. Their response was, 'We need to do this for the community,'" Lipp said.

Anderson echoed the YMCA Board's sentiment. "I think two nonprofits coming together to take on a community need is a valuable point. Strong partnership is really important. Together, along with other partners, we're achieving this for the community."

Along with providing the space, Knute Nelson is helping with financial support, grant writing and fundraising. WCI provided a \$37,500 child care capacity grant for the project.

For both Knute Nelson and the Y, one of the most exciting elements of this collaboration is the daily interaction planned between the children and the residents. A team made up of Knute Nelson and YMCA staff have visited several centers with intergenerational programs.

"Our goal is to interact in some way every day, from snacks with residents to doing activities together," Peterson said.

The new center, YMCA Child Care at Knute Nelson, plans to open this spring.



## Building Child Care Bridges Across Cultures

The need for culturally relevant child care came to light with what appeared to be a completely unrelated problem: middle school- and high school-aged Somali-American students were missing classes. As Clay County Social Services staff from the Truancy Intervention Program and staff from Moorhead Public Schools investigated, they found a surprising reason. Reluctant to trust the care of their young children to providers outside of their culture, working Somali-American mothers had their older children stay home to care for their younger siblings.

WCI received a Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation grant to fund a two-year pilot project to provide culturally relevant child care for Somali-American children in Moorhead.

Hukun Abdullahi, executive director of the Afro American Development Association (AADA) estimates there are about 70 Somali, Sudanese and Congolese children in Moorhead who are in need of child care, and that number is growing. The AADA is working with Child Care Aware of MN Northwest's Deana Overmoe, who was hired as the Somali child care



project coordinator, to meet and mentor Somali women living in Moorhead.

"Much of this first year of the project has been focused on developing relationships and making connections in the Somali community as well as identifying potential barriers and the support needed to navigate the child care system to become legal non-licensed or licensed family child care providers," Overmoe said. "I have been participating in weekend English Language Learning classes at the AADA. This has been a great way to develop relationships, build trust, learn more about Somali culture, and get a sense of the varied language and literacy levels. I have also had the opportunity to connect with leaders at the AADA and in the Somali community."

The relationship building is bearing fruit. Overmoe is currently working with a mother and daughter who are attending child care training courses together and moving toward opening their own licensed child care business.

## Coming Soon: Forgivable Child Care Loans

WCI will be launching the third round of its Forgivable Child Care loan program. For the second year, WCI received funding through the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development to help recapitalize funds for the program. There have been some changes and adjustments with this phase. The funds have been divided into two focus areas. For family-based providers, funding priorities will be directed to new start-ups (those still in the licensing process or those open for less than a year). To encourage applications from Traverse or Grant counties, both start-ups and established providers from these counties will be eligible for the program. Funding will also be available to for-profit and non-profit child care centers. If you wish to be notified once the program is launched, please contact Greg Wagner at [greg@wcif.org](mailto:greg@wcif.org). Or watch for an announcement on WCI's social media pages and webpage: [loans.wcif.org](http://loans.wcif.org). WCI will also notify county licensors and ECI coordinators once the program is open. Loan requests that will utilize the funds for safety improvements or other licensor-stipulated improvement will be given top priority.

## 15 Amazing Kid-centric Years

Governor Dayton proclaimed March 20 Minnesota Initiative Foundations' Early Childhood Day.

The recognition marks the 15th anniversary of the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative (ECI), an ambitious experiment established by the MIFs and McKnight Foundation to give the children of Greater Minnesota the best possible start toward a healthy life of learning, achieving and succeeding. McKnight hosted a thank-you celebration that included WCI's Director of Early Childhood Nancy Jost and the 10 west central Minnesota ECI coordinators who have worked so hard for the children and families in our region.

*Photo, from left to right: Jeannie Pederson, Pope County; Diane Strobel, Stevens County; Kristi Maas, Wilkin County; Fran Rethwisch, Becker County; Nancy Jost; Julie Smith, Traverse County; Connie Fields, Douglas County; Casey Francis, White Earth Nation; Marsha Erickson, Otter Tail County. Not in attendance: Deb Hengel, Grant County; and Carolyn Strnad, Clay County.*



## Sue Huebsch joins WCI Board

The West Central Initiative Board of Directors welcomes Sue Huebsch as its newest member. The Perham resident takes the reins from Dean Simpson, who served on the board from 2012 to 2018.

Huebsch and her husband, Doug, own and operate New Life Farm, plus four retail businesses.

Huebsch never considered herself a business person, but opening their businesses was almost akin to civic duty for her. "We try to meet a need," she said. "When I see one, I like to follow through." One need expressed by Perham residents was additional meeting space in the community, and a place to "hang out." That need became the Huebschs' latest venture, The Nest coffee shop and kitchen store.

"My future son-in-law is teaching me that giving back is karma. Doing good comes back to you," she said.

Community involvement—"doing good"—just makes sense to Huebsch. "If we don't make a stand for our community, we don't progress," she said. Huebsch has served on the Perham Area Chamber of Commerce, Perham Area Scholarship Fund, 549 Family Foundation,



Women of FOCUS and the Perham-Dent School Board. She has been actively involved in Perham capital campaigns and excess levy referendums.

That activism is something Huebsch brings to the WCI board. "I'm proud of Perham, but I'm just as proud of west central Minnesota. We have a lot of blessings," she said.

With a longtime interest in public policy, she is keen to contribute to the work of West Central Initiative. "There are issues WCI is working on—child care and workforce shortages, and the need to ensure quality of life, that are so very important," she said.

"When Dean Simpson introduced me to Sue, I could see that her passion for community engagement and her experience in agriculture, business, and education all aligned perfectly with the mission and vision of West Central Initiative," said WCI President Anna Wasescha. "We are incredibly grateful to Dean for his outstanding board service. We look forward to working with Sue to keep our communities strong and vibrant into the future."