

Pathways to Quality

Learning Communities



► Project Description



Think Small's experience working with early learning providers demonstrates that many benefit from additional, targeted support both prior to and during the Parent Aware rating process. Through Learning Communities, Think Small provides the additional training and coaching supports necessary to groups of providers

who share a similar barrier, such as language, culture, or geography. This approach builds individual provider quality and cultivates stronger social connections among providers who are traditionally very isolated. Implementing Learning Communities helps providers prioritize quality and remain in Parent Aware. This action aligns with our strategic plan on Early Childhood Quality. The desired result of this strategy is to increase and retain providers participating in Parent Aware. Our theory of change for this intervention rests on the knowledge that adults learn better in groups or communities, especially licensed family child care providers who can feel isolated. Think Small offered Learning Communities in Somali, Hmong, and English cohorts facilitated by a contracted trainer in partnership.

► Impact

To date, 74 providers have participated in six Think Small Learning Communities.

Participants were impacted in several ways:

- The information regarding licensing compliance was received as being valuable. Two newly licensed providers shared that they were able to connect with more seasoned providers who mentored them.
- Professional awareness and empowerment topics were also welcomed by providers. Many had not viewed child care as a “profession” and this new lens empowered them to see themselves as professionals.



A Somali provider shared that the Learning Community helped her feel more confident when talking with her licensor, and it helped her with licensing compliance. In addition, over 20 providers completed the Emergency Preparedness Plan that is now required with the new CCDBG policy changes. Several participants indicated that they have completed training for Parent Aware and were then able to purchase items to obtain a higher star rating.

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► Ability to Scale

Learning Communities are very scalable within the early childhood system in Minnesota. In fact, they are so successful the Department of Human Services (DHS), who administers the Child Care Development Block grant programs for early childhood, took notice. The success of Bush Pathways to Quality Learning Communities contributed to a DHS decision to fund similar activities across the state beginning in FY18. In spring 2018 Think Small launched the first of its two DHS-funded Learning Communities. The first one discussed the “Genius of the Black Child,” and 14 providers participated. This Learning Community focused on white privilege and how to support black children.



► Next Steps

The success of Learning Communities has been demonstrated, and as a result, Think Small will continue to evaluate opportunities to use this delivery method in the future. Below are some initial ways to use a Learning Community in practice:

- Delivering and building quality coaching
- Offering Emergency Preparedness Plan Training for Hmong Community
- Continuing to identify additional funding opportunities to support this model, especially if DHS is unable to continue its investment in this effort past FY19

Administrative policy work could evaluate how to implement Learning Communities by looking at incorporating them with other efforts around the state.

In addition, sourcing new funding could support additional Learning Communities to aid in the retention of providers in Parent Aware throughout Minneapolis and St. Paul.

To learn more about Pathways to Quality, visit ThinkSmall.org/pathways

