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LEADERS IN EARLY LEARNING

**Report  
to the  
Community**

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**2019**

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LEADERS IN EARLY LEARNING

# thinking **BIG...**

## Dear Friends and Colleagues:

Think Small is thinking BIG. We are grateful to everyone who has helped us visualize BIG dreams and accomplish BIG goals.

This 2019 Annual Report is the story of what three years and three million dollars can do. We are truly excited to share the impact with you.

Think Small recently finished a multi-year, multi-million-dollar project in partnership with Generation Next called Pathways to Quality (P2Q). The program focused on increasing the number of Parent Aware rated family child care programs by providing them the necessary tools to improve quality.

Through the success of this program, we were able to create over 6,500 new high-quality child care slots for families to access in the Minneapolis and St. Paul metro area--more than tripling our goal of 1,700 high-quality slots.

Because of our P2Q work, the percentage of licensed family child care providers in Minneapolis and St. Paul with three- and four-star Parent Aware ratings rose from 9% to 23% in three years compared to statewide growth of only 3% to 7%! The percentage of center-based providers rose too. What's even more incredible, is that all of this happened during a tumultuous time in the early care and education field in which 30% of licensed family child care programs in the seven-county metro area went out of business entirely.

This multi-year grant from the Bush Foundation, combined with other grants and generous contributions, helped us change and improve early care and education. We also changed how we do our work. We are focusing even more on data and results. We're adapting to the circumstances outside of our control and coming up with solutions. We are applying targeted strategies to increase access to high-quality child care, and we're aligning with partners to achieve BIG things.

We know that Minnesota still has one of the worst achievement gaps in the nation, which research shows start in children well before their first birthday. We know that children from low-income families face the steepest obstacles to success and we know that too many children start kindergarten behind and never catch up.

## Think Small is Thinking BIG!

Improving kindergarten readiness best practices in early learning and care programs is a smart and effective way to help close persistent gaps and make sure all children are ready to succeed in school and in life. With your continued support, we can make this happen.

Sincerely,

Barbara Yates and Robbin Johnson



*Barbara Yates*

**BARBARA YATES**

PRESIDENT AND CHIEF  
EXECUTIVE OFFICER



*Robbin Johnson*

**ROBBIN JOHNSON**

CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

# Think Small is

by increasing access to  
high-quality care.

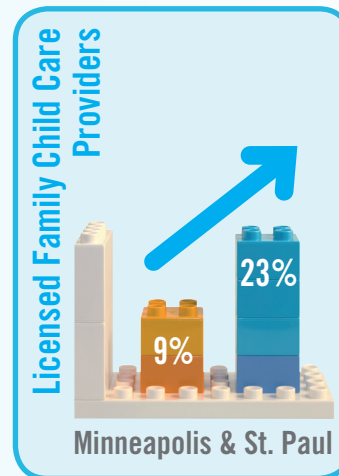
We provide Pathways to Quality for early care and education programs through research-based interventions and supports.



## PATHWAYS TO QUALITY



More than 6,500 high-quality child care slots were created in Minneapolis and St. Paul over 3 years far surpassing the goal of 1,700 slots.



The percentage of licensed family child care providers in Minneapolis and St. Paul increased from 9% to 23% in 3 years compared to statewide growth of only 3% to 7%.

After implementing \*Parent Aware Retention Incentives for two years for 87 family child care programs, 80% maintained their rating and stayed in business. Of those 30 programs that applied for Retention Incentives but did not qualify, 47% went out of business and 17% dropped their ratings.

\*Parent Aware is Minnesota's voluntary quality-rating and improvement system for early childhood education programs.

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# thinking **BIG...**

## by empowering providers.

The Build Your Own program works with people in under-served areas to start a childcare business, become licensed, and move towards measurable high-quality.



### BUILD YOUR OWN

In one year, the Build Your Own program has created



**360**

New child care slots



**25**

Newly-licensed child care programs



**36**

Jobs

## by catalyzing change.

Think Small believes all children should have access to high-quality early care and education. We catalyze change by advancing early learning policy initiatives and by educating lawmakers and the public on the value of high-quality early childhood education.



### PUBLIC POLICY

For years, Think Small has successfully provided additional training supports to groups of providers who share similar barriers such as language, culture or geography during their quality-rating process. This past year, we successfully advocated for this program to be expanded throughout the state by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.



**5000** subscribers to our Policy newsletter.

We sent **77** policy-related communications this year.

We held **4** organized policy-related events, and offered

**13** advocacy trainings with more than **240** participants.

Think Small hosted the Early Care and Education Crisis Work Group with the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce. We addressed two crises impacting Minnesota's young children — worst-in-the-nation achievement gaps that begin by age 1 and a child care shortage. A Roadmap for Action report provides policy fixes and recommendations.



## by engaging families.

Think Small is committed to strengthening family's access to high-quality care by administering early learning scholarships, as well as increasing their knowledge about early childhood development.



## THINK SMALL PARENTPOWERED TEXTS

Think Small ParentPowered Texts is a free, research-based program that supports kindergarten readiness. Parents and caregivers are sent three developmentally-appropriate texts per week. Text messages are offered in English, Spanish, Somali, Arabic, and Dakota languages.

**9,000+** families enrolled in Think Small ParentPowered Texts since launched in 2017.

**2,000,000** text messages have been sent.

**94%** of parents say they do activities from these texts with their child at least once per week.

**88%** of parents say they are likely or very likely to recommend Think Small ParentPowered Texts.

Learn more about Think Small ParentPowered Texts at [ThinkSmall.org/texts](http://ThinkSmall.org/texts).

## by sharing results.

Think Small has invested considerable resources in its data capabilities and has adopted a culture of continuous improvement. This approach gives us timely and actionable information on the effectiveness of our work and drives systems-level change.



## DATA DRIVEN



We developed a Minnesota Child Care Programs Summary online tool to customize data about child care programs in the state based on specific geographic locations and their quality-rating.



We assisted the University of Minnesota with ChildCareAccess.org, an interactive tool which maps access to child care for families in the state.



# Think Small is thinking BIG.

Our goal is that all children in Minnesota will be ready for kindergarten.

## Our mission.

Think Small is dedicated to advancing quality care and education of children in their crucial early years. We do this by preparing early child care educators to provide high-quality programs to children, engaging families, and encouraging decision makers to make early learning a top priority.

## Thank you!

The work we do every day emphasizes our desire to provide early childhood educators and families with the tools needed to ensure young children are successful in kindergarten and in life. BUT we can't do any of it without you! As you look through this report, we hope you will be inspired by all that we have accomplished and be motivated to help us THINK BIG. Together we can achieve BIG things!



## Learn more.

Be sure to visit [www.ThinkSmall.org/AnnualReport](http://www.ThinkSmall.org/AnnualReport) to learn more about Think Small. Here you will find links to our audited financial statements, as well as a list of our Board of Directors.