



Strength During the Struggle:
Making Great Strides

2020 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

We all win when high-quality child care and early education is affordable and accessible. The time to invest is now. We must be deliberate. We must be unflinching. We must be bold. Minnesota's children expect this of us.

BARBARA YATES

Minnesota Reformer • MARCH 2020



2020 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

It has been a challenging yet rewarding year for Think Small. The pages that follow contain example after example of how in a tumultuous year, we continued to be committed to make a positive impact on our community and our children. To keep our commitment to our mission and community, we are strategically evolving to reach new heights of excellence in early childhood education and overcoming barriers that prevent children from accessing quality, child care.

Strength During Struggle

We believe a deep sense of commitment lies at the center of each of the many achievements highlighted in this report. Commitment to creating the very best resource for child care providers, for instance, by providing hundreds of emergency grants and supplies during COVID-19. Commitment to supporting the response to racial injustice in our community through our outreach and encouraging conversations within our team. Commitment to supporting families with resources and guides for accessing child care and providing scholarships to support children in our community. And our continued commitment to creating change in early childhood education through advocacy.

Making Great Strides

Standing together—united by a deep sense of commitment—we are expanding the boundaries of how we do our work to ensure every child is ready for kindergarten. We remain deeply honored to serve as leaders of this special organization. We are deeply grateful to the Think Small team as we continue to support child care providers, families, and children in our community.

BARBARA YATES

President and Chief Executive Officer

ROBBIN JOHNSON

Chairman of the Board



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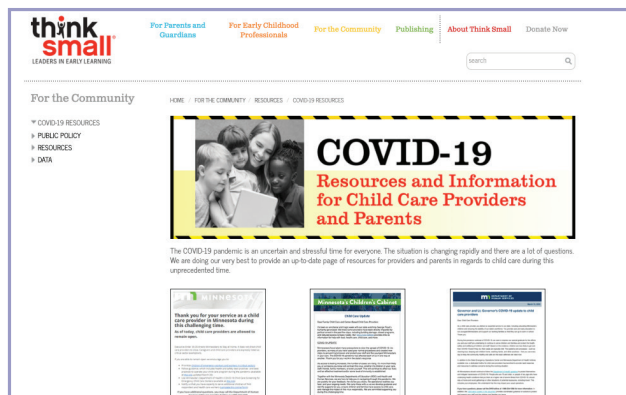
Covid-19 Response

Action in a Time of Crisis

When stay-at-home-orders were issued, Think Small immediately dipped into its own reserves and set up a Go Fund Me account to raise money for child care providers who were caring for the children of essential workers. **More than 30 family child care providers in the seven-county metro area received \$1,000 grants from the Think Small COVID-19 Emergency Fund for Child Care to help them stay open during the pandemic.**

A Valuable Resource

Early on in the pandemic, Think Small established itself as a reliable source of COVID-19 information for child care providers and families.



Online Resource Hub

Important resources and information for child care providers and parents was collected and made available on Think Small's website in an online resource hub. It included updates from the Minnesota's Children's Cabinet, the Minnesota Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Expert Advice

Think Small's Senior Vice President of Early Childhood Quality Development, Cisa Keller, was interviewed by a reporter from KMSP-TV television in March about child care facilities staying open during the pandemic to serve the children of essential workers.



Fox 9 interviews Cisa Keller in the Debra S. Fish Early Childhood Library at Think Small.

Strength During the Struggle:

2,331
providers
requested
3,876
gallons of
sanitizer
statewide

over
3,000
gallons of
bleach were
distributed



Think Small employees volunteered their time to work Emergency Supplies Distribution events and safely hand out bleach and sanitizer to area child care providers.

Getting Supplies in the Hands of Child Care Providers

When COVID-19 began, common cleaning supplies were difficult, if not impossible, for child care programs to find. Through a partnership with local businesses and organization Think Small was able to distribute emergency supplies to providers in the seven-county metro area and collaborate with Child Care Aware of Minnesota to distribute those supplies to providers in Greater Minnesota.

All Hands MN (made up of DuNord Craft Spirits, Tattersall Distilling & Brother Justus Whiskey Company) donated thousands of gallons of hand sanitizer and Factory Motor Parts gave thousands of gallons of bleach. Hundreds of boxes of masks and gloves were also offered to providers at no cost.



Watch this video to check out one of the first Emergency Supplies Distribution events at Think Small.

(Link to video)

Covid-19 Response

Emergency Supplies Make a Difference

When COVID-19 started affecting everyone's lives in the spring, Debbie Gunderson immediately came up with new procedures for entering her Brooklyn Park home. Parents no longer came inside for drop off or pick up. The children washed their hands and had a temperature check immediately upon arrival. A mid-day temperature check was also taken. Surfaces were washed often (even more than before) throughout the day.

All of these requirements put in place so she and her husband could remain open and continue to operate their family child care program during a pandemic, even though attendance came to a screeching halt.

“It was so heartbreaking to suddenly not be caring for children that we had been caring for since birth.”

Like most child care providers in the state, Gunderson had trouble accessing cleaning supplies.

“These were things that I could not get anywhere in the stores,” she said. “These were items that I purchased regularly prior to COVID-19 and was so frustrating not to be able to find them.”



She was able to pick up these hard-to-find items during Think Small's Emergency Supply Distribution events.

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Strength During the Struggle:

Think Small Quality Coaches delivered Snack Packs to child care centers and family child care programs they work with across the Twin Cities metro area.



Delivering Snacks to Child Care Programs

Think Small Quality Coaches delivered hundreds of 'You Matter' Snack Packs to child care providers who are serving children of essential workers. The snack packs came from Health Fair 11, a non-profit dedicated to improving community health. Several great sponsors made the healthy and money-saving treats possible. The snack packs also contained an encouraging note for each child: "You are amazing. Be strong, be proud. You are loved."



Watch this video to tag along on a couple of snack pack deliveries in the Twin Cities.

(Link to video)

Covid-19 Response

The Front Lines of Child Care

Minnesota's child care providers are exceptional & they have a huge impact on the lives of children and families every day. During the uncertainty of the pandemic, they did everything they could to stay open and provide a crucial service to families who needed them.

Sharing Stories of Resilience

Think Small also reached out to providers to interview them and share their stories in our 'From the Front Lines of Child Care' series. We met early educators from across the Twin Cities who genuinely and eloquently described how the pandemic was affecting their businesses, their lives, and the lives of the families they served.

Stories from the Front Lines of Child Care

HOPKINS EARLY
LEARNING CENTER
HOPKINS, MN



Stories from the Front Lines of Child Care

JOSALYN WILLIAMS
CHILD CARE PROVIDER
MINNEAPOLIS, MN



[Click here to connect to online stories](#)

Personal Outreach to Child Care Providers

In an effort to check in with child care providers during a trying time, Think Small staff called close to 1,700 licensed child care providers in Ramsey and Hennepin Counties between April 14 and May 28. They were able to personally connect with a little more than half of them to see how they were holding up and also get information about the status of their child care programs. Of the 943 providers reached, 776 programs remained open while 167 indicated they had to close. A majority of closure were centers.

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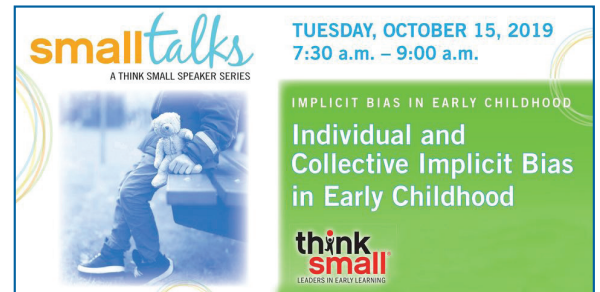


Strength During the Struggle:



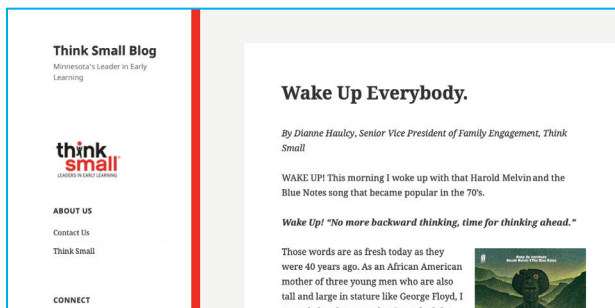
A Focus on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

To support the full potential for every child, Think Small is committed to championing policies and practices of equity that empower a just, inclusive, and equitable care and education system for children in their crucial early years.



Small Talks Series on Implicit Bias in Early Childhood

Think Small held three in-person Small Talks events with the goal of exploring implicit bias in early childhood, addressing the impact of implicit bias on our children and finding solutions to prevent bias. The events took place in October 2019, December 2019 and February 2020 at Midpointe Event Center in St. Paul.



Wake Up Everybody

At Think Small, we recognize that systemic racism and xenophobia contribute to the opportunity gaps we are trying to eliminate. In June, we shared a blog post from our Senior Vice President of Family Engagement, Dianne Haulcy entitled 'Wake Up Everybody' which addressed a second pandemic of systemic racism.

[Read the full blog post.](#)

Assisting Child Care Providers Affected by Social Unrest

Think Small staff worked with the Minnesota Department of Human Services to ensure emergency grant funds were available to assist providers affected by the social unrest in the Twin Cities area and reached out to child care programs in parts of Hennepin and Ramsey Counties to assist them with applying for grants and emergency supplies.

Created New Director of Equity Position

Think Small is committed to creating policies and practices of equity that empower a just, inclusive, and equitable work environment in which all employees can thrive. In June, Think Small created a new Director of Equity and Quality Supports position which was filled by Quality Supports Manager, Candace Yates.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Fostering a Climate of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

As a black woman who grew up in inner city Milwaukee, Think Small employee, Candace Yates, saw firsthand the impacts of continuous racial disparities within community and educational systems. Now living in Minnesota, she is reminded of how far we have to go in order to see all children experience equitable outcomes.

“Our children, my children, deserve better. They deserve a world that believes all children are worthy of high-quality learning opportunities, regardless of their geographical location, socioeconomic status, race, gender identity, or any other any other identifying trait. “

Yates started at Think Small in 2016 as a Quality Coach and was quickly promoted to Supervisor and then Manager. In her newest role as Director of Equity & Quality Supports, she will work with senior management to assess company efforts around equity, diversity, and cross-cultural inclusion programs, establishing best practices and identifying opportunities to effectively remove barriers that affect staff retention and advancement.

“This is accomplished by identifying staff needs and providing resources that will aide in furthering Think Small’s work in closing the opportunity and achievement gaps for young children and working to ensure all organizational business objectives align with our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion,” she explained.

Yates says much of what we have accepted as professional norms and best practices were developed and reinforced by the dominant, white, cultural influence. Professional development, quality ratings, community support and more must elevate the importance of acknowledging and celebrating diversity, equity and inclusion.

“Growing racial and ethnic diversity is a reality for everyone in this country, regardless of who they are and where they live. As the landscape of early childhood education continues to shift, it is critical for educators, community organizations, and government agencies to all critically assess their work through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion.”



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Our Work:

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2020 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

Empowering Child Care Providers

Child Care is Essential

Now more than ever, people are realizing that child care is essential to the future of our state. Child care providers are heroes who allow others to go to work and grow our economy. Think Small helps these early child care educators achieve their goals. We ensure they have what they need to succeed by preparing and supporting early childhood providers through professional development, consultation, and coaching.

Direction When Needed Most

Ilesha Jackson knew she wanted to start a child care in North Minneapolis, but she didn't know where, and she wasn't sure how to make it happen. That's when a friend led Ilesha to Think Small's Build Your Own Program.

The program offers free individualized assistance to those beginning or expanding a family child care program or child care center. Staff helped Ilesha navigate the Minnesota Department of Human Services licensing process, access required trainings, and connect her with a Parent Aware coach who is working with her to build a high-quality, star-rated program. "Build Your Own helped me out by showing me what I was supposed to do, the steps I needed to accomplish, how to build my environment, and all of the legal items I needed to take care of," Jackson said.

Build Your Own staff also recommend Jackson take a child care business boot camp with First Children's Finance which in turn helped her acquire the perfect location for her child care. She was able to find a home to operate her small business, and it even came with an attached space for a child care program complete with its own entrance.

Jackson has worked in the early childhood field on and off for the last ten years. She was also a director at a child care center.

"I wanted to start my own child care program so that I could implement my own ideas," she said. "I was seeing how centers farther out in the suburbs have more resources and better quality so I just wanted to bring those same resources into North Minneapolis and give more to these kids."

Jackson said the Build Your Own Program provided support through the entire process.

"Networking and learning where to start. Just having that person to go to and ask questions when you get stuck," she said. "I felt like I wasn't going through it alone."

Build Your Own

The Build Your Own program works with people in underserved areas to start a childcare business, become licensed, and move towards measurable high-quality. The program offers free individualized assistance in the start-up or expansion of either licensed family child care programs or child care centers. As part of this program, our child care business coordinator meets with current or potential child care providers to assess needs and design a start-up or expansion plan.



Think Small staff members Cheryl Kottke, Ashley Hallberg and Lisa Thompson attended the Dakota County Early Childhood Career Fair in March 2020. The three met with students and educators who were searching for career opportunities.

Building Quality Care

When Carey Dailey jumped back into family child care after 5 ½ year absence, she had “A LOT of self-doubt and a huge lack of confidence.” But Dailey says her experience with Think Small’s Build Your Own Program and the Child Care Business Learning Community changed all of that.

“My confidence, my drive, my passion all were instantly reignited,” she said describing her time in the learning cohort.

Dailey had been a family child care provider for 14 years so she admitted she started out thinking she wouldn’t take away much from the program. “I was so very wrong,” she said.

Dailey learned about new rules and policies that had taken effect since she left the field. She learned how to obtain help with financing projects and quality improvements. She discovered more about Parent Aware and identified resources available to help the families and children she would serve. Also, she learned a lot about marketing her child care business and created a new website.

“I was refreshed on what it takes to run a successful business and was inspired to think positively, find my own self-worth, and value.”

Dailey open her new family child care program in her White Bear Lake home about a 1 ½ ago. She started Dailey Discoveries with six enrolled children— all from social media inquiries from her Facebook page and website. Since then, she has added children and renovated her space.

“Build Your Own provided invaluable training and I highly recommend this to anyone looking to start a family child care or center,” she said. “The staff at Think Small truly wanted each and every one of us in the program to succeed. I was truly blessed to have had the opportunity.”



Empowering Child Care Providers

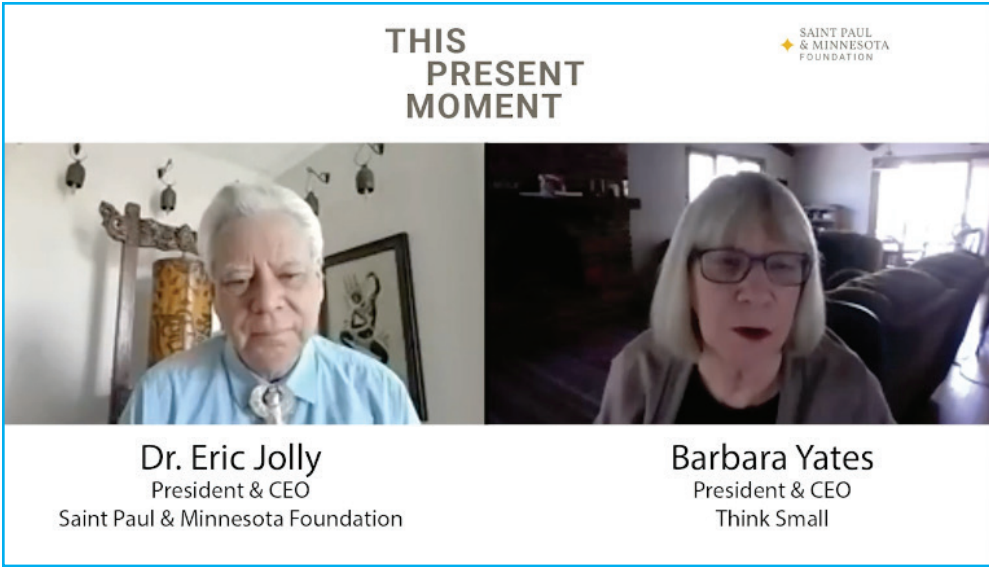
Recognition and Social Engagement

Think Small connects with child care provider and families on social media daily. On May 8, 2020, we sent out a special recognition in honor of Nation Child Care Provider Appreciation Day. Governor Tim Walz also recognized Minnesota’s child care heroes proclaiming the week of May 4 – 8, 2020, as Family Child Care Provider Week in the state.



“Child care providers are the true heroes in this. They have stayed open in numbers that are allowing essential workers to work and maintain their child care. It’s not easy.”

- Barbara Yates, President & CEO, Think Small



In May, Think Small President and CEO, Barbara Yates, discussed the plight of the child care provider as part of “This Present Moment” series from the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation.



Watch the conversation on Vimeo.
(Link to video)

Supporting and Connecting

Think Small is focused on strengthening Minnesota families, especially those in underserved communities, so that all children will be ready for kindergarten. We strive to educate parents about the importance of high-quality early care and education as well as increasing their knowledge about early childhood development. We connect families with a wide range of resources including Parent Aware rated programs, need-based financial supports, as well as innovative programs aimed at enhancing a child's learning at home.

Think Small ParentPowered Texts

More than **10,000** families have enrolled in Think Small ParentPowered Texts since its launch three years ago. This free, research-based program supports kindergarten readiness. Text messages are offered in English, Spanish, Somali, Arabic, and Dakota languages. Parents and caregivers are sent three developmentally-appropriate texts per week.



www.thinksmall.org/texts



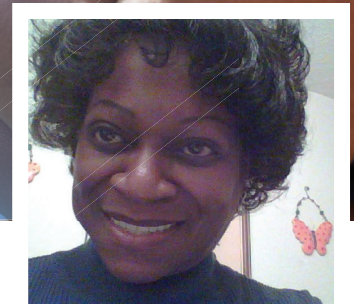
In October 2019, Dianne Haulcy, Senior Vice President of Family Engagement, was a guest on WCCO-TV's Mid-Morning show to give viewers the scoop about Think Small ParentPowered Texts.



Engaging Families

Early Learning Scholarships

Think Small is committed to improving family's access to high-quality care by administering early learning scholarships in Hennepin and Ramsey counties. Early learning scholarships are a proven, targeted approach for our littlest learners and their families.



Sharing Stories of Resilience

Bertha Pollard, and her husband Cornet, never dreamed they'd be taking over legal custody of their six grandchildren, but five years ago, due to unexpected circumstances, that's exactly what happened. Now in their 70's, the two are raising the kids, ages 17 to four, in their New Hope, Minnesota home.

"We had no intention of taking care of children at this stage in our lives," Pollard said. "But if we didn't, they would have gone into the system, and we couldn't have that."

Bertha had a full-time job at North Memorial Hospital at the time and knew her youngest grandchildren would need child care. There was no way the family could afford the \$600 plus a week it would cost for the three children to attend a good program. A co-worker told her about Think Small and early learning scholarships which made it possible for the family to gain access to a high-quality, four star Parent Aware rated child care center.

The three youngest grandchildren, Janais (now 9), Ivelisse (now 7) and Chancellor (now 4) all attended School-Readiness Academy, a licensed child care center off of Lowry Avenue in Minneapolis. Chancellor, the youngest, is still there, thanks to his early learning scholarship. Pollard said he knows his ABCs, he can write his name and is working hard to read. He even knows some sign language and Spanish.

"The scholarships help us with funding, but also with the education of the children. When they come away from SRLA, they are ready for kindergarten," Pollard said. "Janais and Ivelisse scored high in their elementary classes because they were so advanced thanks to their early childhood experience."

Pollard says the children are thriving and she couldn't be more grateful for the opportunity early learning scholarships have provided her family.

"It has been a journey," Pollard added. "But when Think Small came along, it was one big relief. I don't know what we would have done without it. I really appreciate the help."

Making Early Learning a Top Priority

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.

Long Story Short

We were excited to launch Long Story Short in January 2020. This story collection website allows child care providers, families, and early childhood partners a space to tell us about their early care and education experiences. We will be sharing these early learning stories with legislators, educators, and member of the public to inform and inspire.

<https://stories.thinksmall.org>



A screenshot of the 'long story short' website. The header includes the logo 'long story short' with the tagline 'A Collection of MN Early Learning Stories' and 'POWERED BY THINK SMALL'. Navigation links for 'Stories', 'Share Your Story', 'About', and 'Contact Us' are visible. The main content area features a large graphic with a map of Minnesota containing photos of children and text: 'Connecting Community. Sharing Experiences. Advancing Early Learning.' To the right, a section titled 'Stories are powerful.' explains the website's purpose and includes a call to action for sharing stories during the COVID-19 pandemic. Below this are two featured story cards: 'Featured Story' for 'Josalyn's Story' and 'Share Your Story' with a photo of a child and a 'Share Now' button.

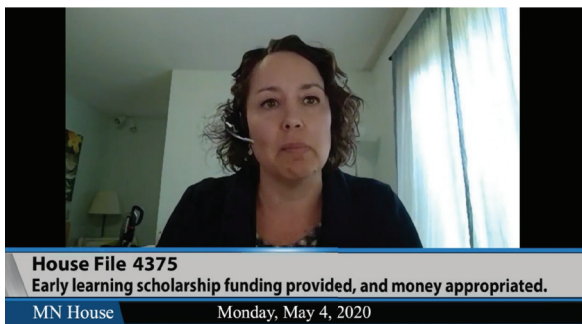
Catalyzing Change

Advancing Policy Priorities

Think Small staff advances policy initiatives focused on improving access to early care and education for Minnesota children.

Legislative Testimony Continues

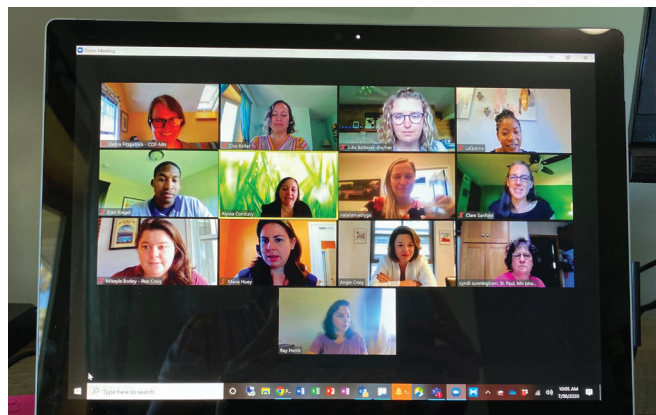
In February, Senior Vice President of Early Childhood Quality Development, Cisa Keller, testified at a House Committee Meeting in support of a bill that would close the opportunity gap, address the child care shortage and invest in early care learning opportunities through policy changes and \$500 million in appropriations. At the time, there was a \$ 1.3 billion budget surplus.



Keller testifying from home mid-pandemic.

Participating in Virtual Meetings

Members of Think Small's Policy Team and other advocates met with U.S. Representative Angie Craig to discuss the *Child Care is Essential Act* in Congress. The message was clear - reopening the economy and supporting child care providers go hand in hand.



Keller testifying from the Capitol before COVID-19.

Sharing Important Messages

Think Small helped arrange a news conference for Governor Tim Walz in early July. The Governor visited the Learning Garden at Hamline Child Care Program to announce a \$56.6 million dollar proposal to help support Minnesota child care providers during the COVID-19 pandemic. While there, Walz talked with staff and helped Think Small deliver snacks and supplies to the program.





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Making Great Strides

Putting Beliefs Into Action: A Board Member Story

Jaylon Rosenblum says serving as a member of Think Small's Board of Directors has allowed her to take her beliefs and put them into action by supporting an organization that is working to combat some of the inequities that are built into society. She believes an investment in early childhood education will pay dividends.

As the only child of a mother who changed her life trajectory through the power of education, Rosenblum was drawn to Think Small.

"I not only believe in the value and impact that early education can have on children, I also see it first hand in my own kiddos," she said.

Rosenblum is a mom to two young boys, ages three- and five-years old.

"I see their wheels turning as they learn new things and interact with the world around them. I believe that all kids should have access to high-quality early education to ensure they enter grade school ready for kindergarten."



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Mission

Think Small is dedicated to advancing quality care and education of children in their crucial early years.

Individual Donors

Think Small recognizes with gratitude the financial support contributed by the following between July 1, 2019, and June 30, 2020.

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Investing in Early Learning: A Donor Story

Greg Pearson's mother spent her career working as a teacher and preschool director in early childhood education so he's known from an early age the positive impact high-quality teachers and programs have on a child.

"I think through the recent crisis, all parents have gained a deeper understanding of what the teachers of their children go through on a daily basis. They are truly heroes and deserve better support systems," Pearson said.

Later in life, he discovered the economic work of Art Rolnick and Rob Grunewald, which shows that investing in early childhood programs is one of the highest ROI investments we can make with our tax dollars. He then learned about Think Small and its mission of advancing quality care and education of children in their crucial early years.

"I was very impressed with how the group was able to efficiently harness public and private resources to make a huge difference for young kids," he said.

As a parent of a 2-year old and 4-year old, the work of Think Small has become even more personally important to me.

"My wife and I are invested in trying to provide more families with the type of high-quality early learning experiences that we have been able to provide for our kids. The exciting thing is: not only is this the right thing to do morally, it is truly one of the best investments we can make with our private resources and public dollars."

Making Great Strides

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Focusing on the First Five Years: A Donor Story

The BlueCross BlueShield of Minnesota Foundation is a long-time funder of early childhood care and education. As a Senior Program Officer, Allison Corrado, believes the highest impact they can have is focusing on the first five years. “We support the work because we know it has an impact,” she said. “When kids are in really high-quality early childhood settings, we see health impacts immediately and it effects what happens 30 years down the line.”

Corrado says there is also new research that shows second generation impacts of having high-quality early childhood care and education. “We believe that when we invest in these first few years of life, we know we’ll see that pay off in the health space for many, many years”



Corrado says when the BlueCross BlueShield Minnesota Foundation talks about what they fund, they talk about health equity.

“We’re asking who the people are and where the places are that have been prevented from having access to high-quality early care and education and why, and we are supporting organizations that are working on that,” Corrado explained. “We want to break down barriers for families to access quality care and education and support providers that have been prevented from having the resources, tools, and support to provide high quality care.”

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