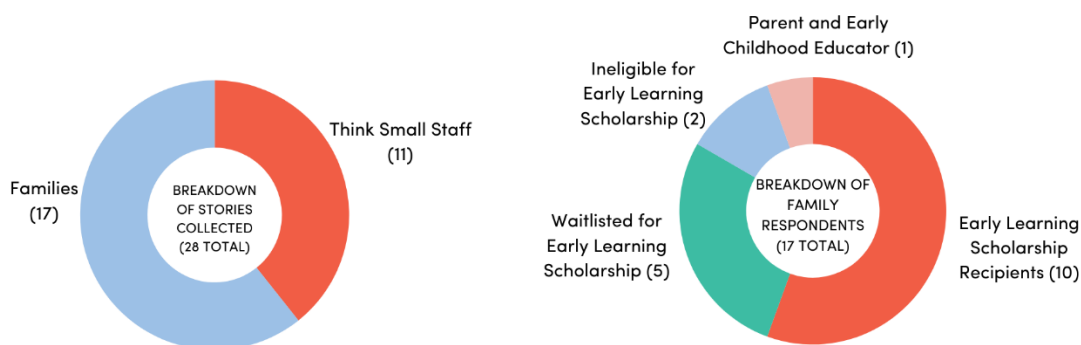


The Power of Stories: Using Storytelling to Inform Practice and Policy, FY25 Review

Think Small's Data, Policy, and Research staff collected personal stories for our Think Small Story Collection about the impact of early care and learning on our community from November 2024 to May 2025. The purpose of story collection is to highlight individual experiences to strategically frame early childhood issues for policymakers and gain an understanding of Think Small's role as an early childhood resource. These stories reflect a range of experiences from the early childhood field, from child care providers to families with young children. Centered within each story is the value of early care and education in the lives of Minnesota's children, families, and community.

Story Collection Methods

We used a variety of methods to collect stories, including phone calls, interviews, in-person meetings, and online forms for both Think Small staff and the public. Respondents were asked to complete a self-reported form or answer prompts about their experiences with child care programs and child care assistance, if applicable. A total of 28 stories were collected from a variety of respondents:



How Did We Use Stories?

Stories can influence public perceptions of policy issues because they highlight how proposed legislation, such as funding for Early Learning Scholarships, impacts individuals and the community. With permission from the story authors, we shared stories in the following ways:

- 6 Parent quotes to legislators
- 2 Parent testifiers
- 2 Letters of support for Early Learning Scholarships Legislation
- 2 Blogs and multiple social media posts

We used stories from Think Small staff and other early childhood professionals to shape our understanding of the broad impact of our work. Think Small staff play an important role in early care and education, such as supporting new child care providers as they grow their businesses or helping parents with the Early Learning Scholarship application process. The value of this support was clear in staff stories; respondents described how their work shaped their sense of purpose in the profession and the broader community.

What Did We Learn?

The following themes and accompanying quotes represent some of the broad insights identified among stories:

Financial Relief and Child Care Accessibility

- "I had no income or savings to pay for my child's school fees."
- "Words cannot begin to express the depth of my gratitude... this scholarship is more than financial support; it is a lifeline."

Burdensome Cost of Child Care

- "I am unable to afford childcare on and thinking about leaving work."
- "My son who is eight months old is still in the waiting list and I really need the Scholarship because it's very difficult for me to pay the daycare fees."

School Readiness Support

→ "The foundation laid during her daycare experience will benefit her for years to come."

→ "Helping with school readiness while easing our financial burden."

Recognition of the Importance of Early Childhood Education

→ "We all have to work together and raise healthy little ones for our future."

→ "I have been on both sides of the [early childhood education] conversation... Both roles have created a significant impact on my life."

Strong Sense of Purpose Among Early Childhood Professionals

→ "By the end of the week I had no doubt the work I was embarking on was important, needed and appreciated."

Empowerment through Access

→ "Thanks to [Scholarship] assistance, [my daughter] was able to attend daycare... the foundation laid during her daycare experience will benefit her for years to come."

→ "They helped put us in touch with different programs to help with his speech delay and occupational therapy."

Driving Change Through Personal Narratives

Whether used to compel policymakers or celebrate a child care provider's contributions to the field, personal narratives are a powerful way to support systems change and understand common themes in early care and education. Stories are valuable data that can be used to identify patterns, perspectives, joys, and challenges within our work. When shared intentionally, they can inspire action, foster empathy, and build momentum for meaningful, lasting change.