



Family, Friend and Neighbor Grant Program

Biennial Report to the Legislature

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As required by Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 3.197: This report cost approximately \$4,135 to prepare, including staff time, printing and mailing expenses.

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Contents

I. Executive summary	1
II. Introduction.....	1
III. History and Background.....	2
IV. FFN Grant Program	2
Grantees.....	2
Services and Supports Provided.....	3
V. FFN Grant Program Supporting Activities.....	3
Mental Health Consultation	3
FFN Advisory Committee	4
Data Collection Toolkit.....	4
FFN Website and Outreach Resources	4
VI. Program Outcomes	5
Grantee engagement with FFN caregivers.....	5
Demographic inclusion	6
Geographic representation	8
Supporting FFN caregivers in advancing careers	9
VII. Conclusion.....	10

I. Executive summary

Minnesota Statutes 2025, section 142D.24, subdivision 4, requires grant recipients to provide data and program outcomes to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (the Department) for the purpose of evaluating the Family, Friend and Neighbor grant program. Beginning February 1, 2024, and every two years thereafter, the Department must report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over child care on those program outcomes. Laws of Minnesota 2023, chapter 70, article 15, section 11, also requires the Department to include outcomes developed in consultation with Minnesota Management and Budget to be incorporated into this report.

II. Introduction

The Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) grant program was signed into law in May 2023, providing Minnesota with state general funds to promote children's social-emotional learning and healthy development, early literacy, and other skills to succeed as learners, and to foster community partnerships that will help children thrive when they enter school. Prior to 2023, a similar program was supported with limited federal funds.

This permanent program issues grants to community-based organizations who may use grant funds to:

- Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate training, support, and resources to FFN caregivers and children's families to improve and promote children's health, safety, nutrition, and learning;
- Connect FFN caregivers and children's families with community resources that support the families' physical and mental health and economic and developmental needs;
- Connect FFN caregivers and children's families to early childhood screening programs and facilitate referrals to state and local agencies, schools, community organizations, and medical providers, as appropriate;
- Provide FFN caregivers and children's families with information about high-quality, community-based early care and learning programs and financial assistance available to the families, including but not limited to the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP);
- Provide FFN caregivers with information about registering as a legal nonlicensed child care provider, and establishing a licensed family or group family child care program;
- Provide transportation for FFN caregivers and children's families to educational and other early childhood training activities;
- Translate materials for FFN caregivers and children's families and provide translation services to FFN caregivers and children's families;
- Develop and disseminate social-emotional learning, health and safety, and early learning kits to FFN caregivers; and
- Establish play and learning groups for FFN caregivers.

III. History and Background

Family, friend, and neighbor caregivers constitute a significant and essential segment of Minnesota’s early care and education landscape. FFN caregivers operate outside the formal, licensed child care system, providing care that is often flexible, accessible, and culturally responsive to the families they serve. FFN arrangements vary widely and may be paid or unpaid, full- or part-time, and conducted in the caregiver’s home, the child’s home, or another community setting. As the name of the program implies, many of these caregivers are friends, family or neighbors of the children in their care. Many FFN caregivers provide care during evenings, weekends, and overnight shifts, in response to parents’ work schedules, when other child care arrangements are not an option.

In a national survey, only eight percent of center-based child care programs offered any type of care during such nonstandard hours.¹ During the COVID-19 pandemic, reliance on FFN caregivers increased significantly as families sought smaller and more familiar care settings or experienced temporary closures of licensed child care programs. The 2019 *National Survey of Early Care and Education* estimated that Minnesota had approximately 82,700 unlisted caregivers (FFN and any other informal relationships) serving at least one child under age 13 who was not their own, for five or more hours per week.² This figure represents more than half of all individuals providing child care in the state, and a new 2026 report will include updated Minnesota estimates.

In recognition of this critical role, the state of Minnesota allocated a total of \$5.5 million in federal relief funding to establish an FFN grant program. Between January 2021 and September 2023, the state issued a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) and 23 community-based organizations received grants to provide culturally and linguistically relevant training, resources, technology, and networking opportunities. The current FFN grant program, established by the Legislature in 2023, was widely supported by community organizations and advocates, who recognized that child care shortages and costs were problematic for many families.

IV. FFN Grant Program

Grantees

The Family, Friend and Neighbor grant program currently provides grants to 20 community-based organizations across Minnesota, making supports available to FFN caregivers through community engagement, public

¹National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team. Fact sheet: provision of early care and education during non-standard hours. Accessed November 2, 2021; <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/national-survey-of-early-care-and-education-nsece-2010-2014>.

² NORC at the University of Chicago. “Characteristics of Minnesota Home-based Early Care and Education Providers in 2019.” June 2021. https://dcyf.mn.gov/sites/default/files/2025-02/NSECE%20MN%20Home%20Based%20Provider%20Characteristics_2019_graphsfixed_acc_final.pdf

awareness-building and service delivery networks. While these organizations cover most of Minnesota and 11 Tribal Nations geographically, supports vary by grantee, prioritizing needs in their individual communities.

Services and Supports Provided

The FFN grant program provides supports to FFN caregivers to promote children's social-emotional learning and healthy development, early literacy, and other skills to succeed as learners, and to foster community partnerships that will help children thrive when they enter school. Building relationships and trust have been crucial in connecting to multilingual communities and people of color, who often respond more positively when engaged by individuals who share their racial or cultural background. The FFN grant program awarded 20 grants in October 2023; in 2024, the program was able to expand to serve every region in the state. Current grants are in effect through June 2027. For more information on Minnesota's current cohort of FFN grantees please see [map of service coverage area and grantees](#) and [grantee summary](#).

FFN grantees are often able to provide additional supports through close community connections. For example:

- Several FFN grantees provide individualized support to complete complex, and often overwhelming, English-only applications to become licensed child care providers in the state of Minnesota;
- A common FFN grantee activity is distributing learning kits and supplies to support child development, literacy, health and safety to FFN caregivers;
- Many FFN grantees support the transportation needs of FFN caregivers to ensure their participation in trainings and events;
- Several FFN grantees share multilingual CPR-first aid trainers across rural areas; this ensures that FFNs receive and understand the training in their first language; and
- Multilingual FFN grantees work closely with the public schools to assist with health screenings in the native language of children in FFN caregiver settings and alleviate unnecessary external referrals.

V. FFN Grant Program Supporting Activities

In addition to overseeing FFN grantees, DCYF also supports grantees and the communities they serve through mental health consultation, an advisory committee, an FFN Data Collection Toolkit, and outreach resources, including a website.

Mental Health Consultation

FFN caregivers have access to mental health consultations through a partnership between DCYF and the Department of Human Services (DHS) Behavioral Health Division. Consultation helps FFN caregivers provide sensitive care to young children using a rational approach involving reflection and professional development, attuning to the care provider's needs and feelings, and relating to and regulating children in healthy ways. It is a practice widely used in human services which supports health and wellbeing of not only young children and their families, but FFN caregivers themselves.

Mental health consultants are licensed mental health professionals that are contracted by DHS' Behavioral Health Division. Consultants hold expertise and skills in early childhood development, mental health and relationship promotion.

The Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation have had positive impacts on child, provider, and program outcomes. Evaluations of the statewide program have found gains in children's social-emotional skills and reductions in behaviors adults identify as challenging. Further, Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation has been associated with lower rates of suspension and expulsion. ³

FFN Advisory Committee

DCYF established an FFN advisory committee in July 2024 that met regularly to share resources and provide input into the FFN grant program. The advisory committee held work sessions with DCYF leadership to discuss emerging issues and co-create solutions.

Key actions and deliverables included:

- Reimagining grantee advisory sessions to maximize interaction of peer learning where multiple FFN grantee staff shared their approach to common challenges;
- Direct listening segments that featured in depth interviews with FFN caregivers (with translation support); and
- Collaborative activities, including breakout groups, resource sharing, and problem solving.

Data Collection Toolkit

DCYF created a data collection toolkit to gather quantitative data required by the program's evaluation plan and statutory requirements to report data and program outcomes as described in Section IV. The toolkit includes a data collection template for grantees that do not have their own database, data privacy reference materials, and a frequently asked questions document. DCYF led several trainings on the toolkit and on data reporting requirements with grantees.

FFN Website and Outreach Resources

In October of 2022, DHS launched a public [FFN Minnesota website](#) that provides resources and information to the public about the FFN grant program, including caregiver eligibility for services, program benefits, how FFN caregivers can connect to an FFN navigator, how FFN caregivers who care for children in the Child Care Assistance Program can become a legal nonlicensed provider, and other frequently asked questions. This public website transitioned to DCYF in April of 2025.

³ Research has documented positive effects of IECMHC services on several child, provider, and program outcomes. For example, evaluations of statewide IECMHC programs have found gains in children's social-emotional skills and reductions in behaviors adults identify as challenging. Further, IECMHC has been associated with lower rates of suspension and expulsion.

In fiscal year 2025, DCYF created outreach materials to help FFN grantee organizations in recruit, engage, and connect FFNs to resources across the state. New outreach materials include:

- A flyer translated into six languages (Arabic, Hmong, Karen, Oromo, Somali, and Spanish) that can be customized to fit an organization’s needs and activities;
- A trauma resource poster with cross-agency resources; and
- A scavenger hunt template to encourage continued engagement that can be customized.

The program also introduced a platform for FFN grantee organizations to share resources and engage in an open forum. This allows for continued peer learning and collaboration.

VI. Program Outcomes

Grantees are required to report on program outcomes quarterly. This includes workplan updates and narrative descriptions of activities and program impacts. Additionally, an evaluation plan and associated reporting began in July 2024 pursuant to Laws of Minnesota 2023, chapter 70, article 15, section 11. This evaluation plan was developed through consultation with Minnesota Management and Budget and includes reporting on:

- Information about the breadth and depth of engagement with FFN caregivers,
- Inclusiveness of the program in terms of geography, race, ethnicity, Tribal affiliation, and language; and
- Information about FFN caregivers who go on to become legal nonlicensed or licensed family child care providers.

Quantitative data is only available for fiscal year 2025; qualitative data goes back to the launch of the program on October 1, 2023.⁴ Because the quantitative data collection and reporting process was new in fiscal year 2025, there was some technical and data quality troubleshooting needed throughout the year. Data quality improved over the course of the year and is anticipated to continue to improve in future years.

Grantee engagement with FFN caregivers

Grantees engaged an average of 1,300 FFN caregivers each quarter in fiscal 2025. Of these, approximately 70% were returning and 30% were newly engaged in a given quarter.⁵ Over the course of the full fiscal year, grantees engaged an estimated 2,478 unique individual FFN caregivers.

⁴ Quantitative data in this section comes from 19 of the 20 grantees; Fond du Lac Tribal College has a different model which involves supporting four specific family, friend, and neighbor caregivers who care for children enrolled in the Ojibwe immersion child care program. Because their work looks different from other grantees that are supporting a more general community of FFN caregivers, their reporting on outcomes is in a different format and not included in the quantitative data analysis in this section.

⁵ “Returning” means the FFN caregiver had already engaged with the grantee organization in a previous quarter and was returning for additional support; “new” means the FFN caregiver was engaging with the grantee for the first time in a given quarter.

Figure 1: Caregivers engaged by quarter

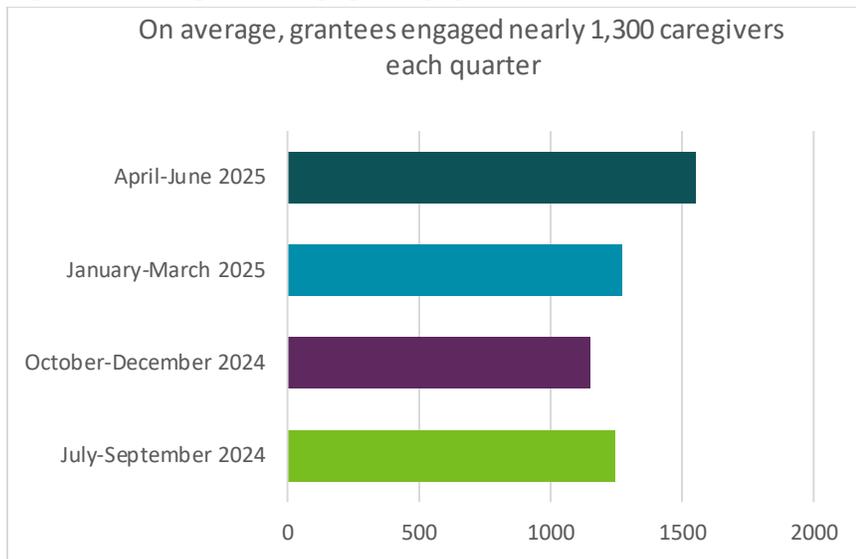
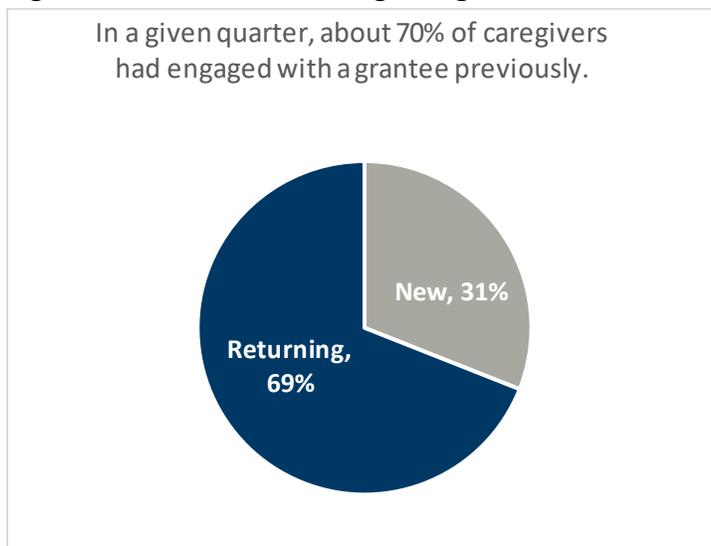


Figure 2: New and returning caregivers

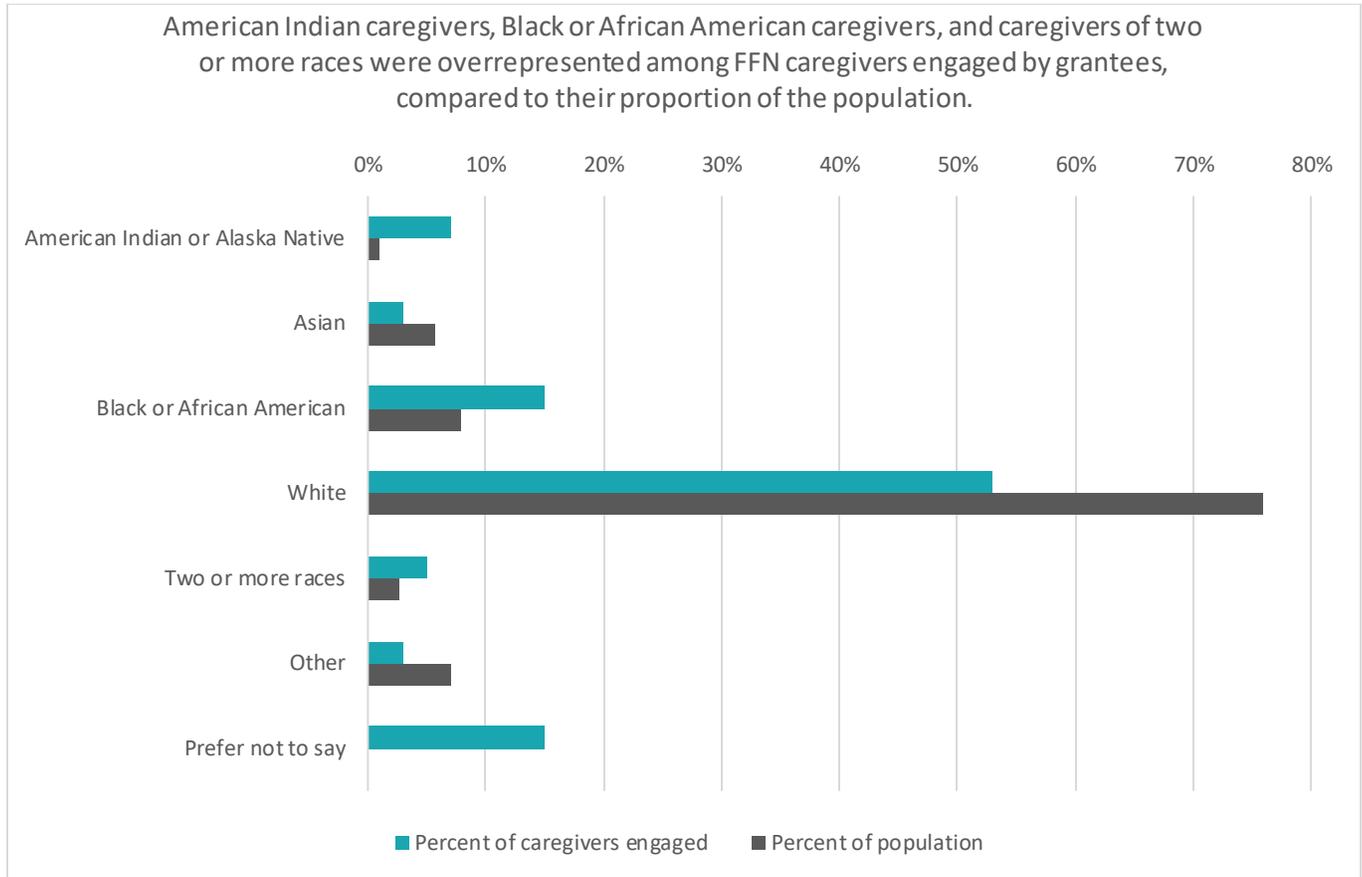


Grantees also tracked touchpoints with each caregiver engaged. A “touchpoint” is any instance where a grantee’s FFN navigator or key staff has a connection or communication with an FFN caregiver. Grantees engaged in deep relationship-building work with caregivers, averaging 9.4 touchpoints per caregiver overall and completing nearly 50,000 individual touchpoints with caregivers across all grantees in FY 2025.

Demographic inclusion

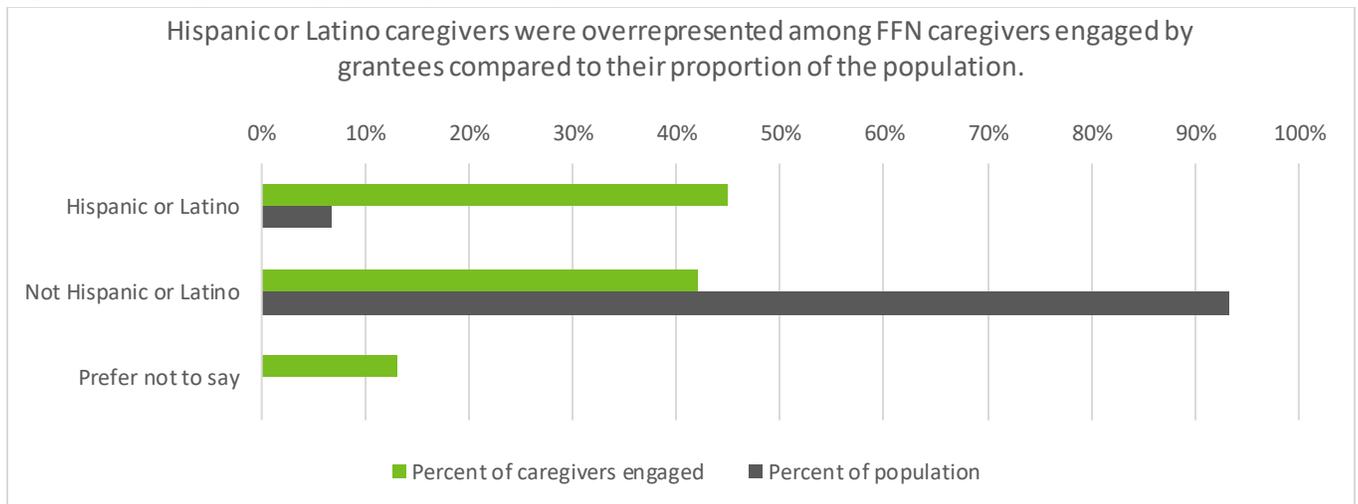
Many of the FFN grantees have explicit goals to directly engage with FFN caregivers from specific cultural, ethnic, and linguistic communities. The data show that grantees have been successful in connecting with these communities, with many communities of color and Tribal Nations overrepresented among participating caregivers compared to those communities’ proportion of the overall population.

Figure 3: Caregivers engaged by race



Population data from Minnesota Compass, 2024 data.

Figure 4: Caregivers engaged by ethnicity



Population data from Minnesota Compass, 2024 data.

The significant percentage of FFN caregivers who prefer not to share their race or ethnicity is indicative of a central element of the work of the FFN grantee organizations. These organizations are engaging with caregivers who have not previously been connected to formal networks of support.

Several of the FFN grantees focus on engaging with caregivers who are affiliated with Tribal Nations, and other grantees have engaged caregivers who are Tribal members as well. In fiscal year 2025, grantees supported caregivers affiliated with 31 Tribal Nations, including 10 of the 11 federally recognized Tribes located in Minnesota.⁶

Grantees served many caregivers who speak languages other than English. These services may have been provided with the assistance of an interpreter, though in many cases the grantee organizations have navigators on staff who speak the primary language of the communities they are most focused on serving. In fiscal year 2025, grantees supported caregivers speaking at least 16 different languages:

- English
- Spanish
- Hmong
- Somali
- Arabic
- Swahili
- French
- Oromo
- Kiswahili
- Pashto
- Anishinaabe
- Karen
- Urdu
- Pidgin English
- Mankon
- Amharic

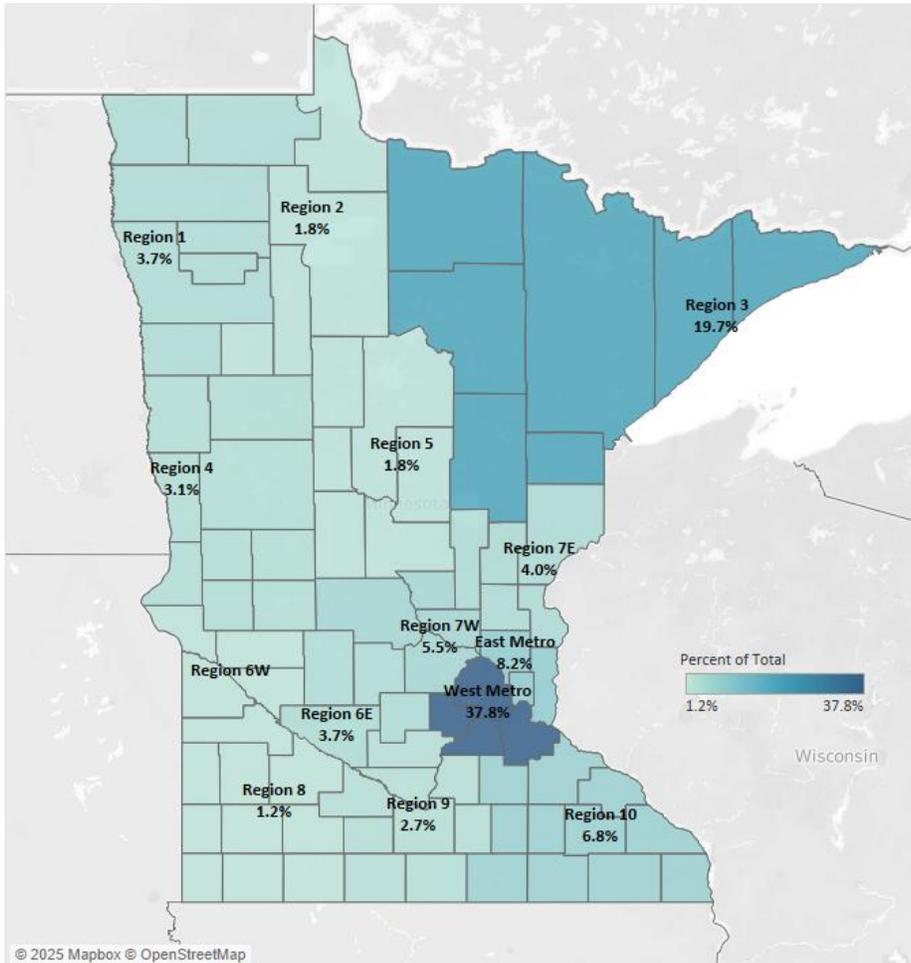
Geographic representation

FFN grantees are spread throughout the state, and one goal of the program is to engage FFN caregivers across a diverse range of geographies. The map below shows the percentage of all grantees engaged in FY 2025 in each of the Child Care Aware regions (with Region 11, the seven-county metro area, split into West Metro (Hennepin, Dakota, Scott, and Carver Counties) and East Metro (Ramsey, Washington, and Anoka Counties).

⁶ In FY2025, no grantees identified any caregivers served from the Upper Sioux Community.

Figure 5: Caregivers engaged by region

The highest percentages of FFN caregivers engaged in FY2025 were located in the West Metro, followed by Region 3.



About 38% of FFN caregivers engaged in fiscal year 2025 were in the West Metro, with an additional 20% in Region 3 (which includes Duluth). Caregivers were engaged in every region of the state. The grantee serving Region 6W did not report the number of FFN caregivers served in that region because they partner with another organization to serve caregivers in those counties.

Supporting FFN caregivers in advancing careers

One objective of the FFN grant program is to support caregivers in becoming legal nonlicensed (LNL) providers, thereby enhancing quality, safety, and access to state resources. An estimated 102 FFN caregivers supported by FFN grantees have registered as LNL providers, and 15 have become licensed family child care providers, since October 1, 2023. Becoming licensed can feel complex and difficult to navigate for FFN caregivers. Grantees provide individualized support to complete applications, which are complex and not translated. Multilingual staff have been vital in assisting caregivers through this challenging process.

VII. Conclusion

Family, friend and neighbor caregivers play an important and often undervalued role in the care of young children. They offer care in an intimate setting, with culture and continuity when families need to work, and contribute greatly to the growth and development of children in their care. Resources provided by the state have made a difference in diverse communities that typically lack supports and benefit from connection. FFN grantees engaged an average of about 1,300 FFN caregivers each quarter and completed more than 50,000 touchpoints with FFN caregivers during FY 2025. The FFN network in Minnesota has grown to cover all regions, through many activities that fit the needs of communities throughout the state. Several FFN caregivers highlighted the transformative impact of the FFN program on their professional and personal lives, emphasizing its role in empowering them to provide high-quality, meaningful care for children:

“I’m proud of the help this community offers to support us caring for children.”

“Reflective practice helped to improve our relationships, encourage personal growth, and made a positive impact on my work as a caregiver.”

“We love the child development and health and safety training that is provided regularly.”