

State Policies for Supporting Family, Friend, & Neighbor Care

BUILD Initiative Policy Brief

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In 2007, the Minnesota Legislature appropriated \$750,000 for the 2008-09 biennium to a new, family, friend and neighbor (FFN) care competitive grant program to expand services and supports for FFN caregivers throughout the state. Minnesota became the first state to provide explicit state financing focused upon strengthening such care through broad-based community actions. The legislation has interlocking purposes of promoting children’s healthy development, early literacy, school readiness and fostering community partnerships in carrying out these goals. It requires that the grants, administered by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), be awarded to partnerships that include community-based organizations, Indian tribes, libraries, non-profits, child care resource and referral agencies, public early childhood and family education programs, and Head Start.

Learning from groundbreaking legislation ● ● ●

The legislation gives priority to FFN caregivers receiving child care subsidies, those caring for infants and toddlers, and those providing FFN care in underserved culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including immigrant and refugee communities. These priorities are intended to promote “equity in access to learning opportunities, preservation of cultural or ethnic heritages, and reduction in disparities based on income and race/ethnicity” (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2007).

Eligible evidence-based or innovative activities to be supported through the grant include:

- Parent education and caregiver support and training;
- Links to programs for nutrition, child and family health and mental health, safety, economic needs, developmental needs of children, early literacy, and school readiness; and
- Purchase of materials that promote literacy and school readiness and resources to equip bookmobiles.

This groundbreaking legislation explicitly recognizes the role of informal FFN caregivers in supporting young children – caregivers who provide care to children they already know in order to help out those children’s parents, largely on an unpaid basis. It also recognizes the importance of offering public funding and supports, on a voluntary basis, to such FFN caregivers, on a fundamentally different basis than that provided to formal, paid child

care providers. While the initial appropriation is small, particularly when contrasted with the amount of funding devoted to subsidizing and regulating formal child care, the legislation is important in serving as a catalyst for local action and innovation to support FFN caregivers and to leverage additional local resources that recognize the value of FFN care.

This resource brief describes the process that led to the enactment of this legislation, involving research, advocacy, and consultation on evidence-based practices with experts in the field. Using Minnesota as a case example, it describes how state government strategies and policies can be expanded to recognize and support family, friend, and neighbor care and how the resources of various existing systems can be tapped by applying an early learning policy framework focused on educational equity and child development. The appendix provides brief descriptions of selected efforts in other leading states that are seeking ways to recognize and support FFN care.

Definition and dimensions ● ● ●

While the definition of family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care varies by state and some even extend the definition to include family child care home providers caring for multiple unrelated children (Schulman and Blank, 2007), this brief uses the basic definition of FFN care as that which takes place in the child's or the caregiver's home during the day, evening, or overnight, generally based upon the caregiver's prior relationship with the child and family. The family part of FFN includes older siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, although research shows the great majority of the family members providing FFN care are grandparents. Friends and neighbors are caregivers unrelated to the child or children in their care. FFN care is provided free, for a fee, or by barter, with the great majority provided free or for barter. A small percentage of FFN caregivers register with their state or county to receive child care subsidy payments for eligible children. For the most part, though, FFN care is defined by what it is not. It is non-parental, informal, unlicensed, and unregulated care.

In reality, the demarcations between different types of child care are not entirely clear. For example, a grandmother caring for her own grandchildren may decide she can care for other neighbor children as well, and be in the position of moving into the registered or licensed family child care home system; or a licensed family child provider may run her child care business during the day and care for her friend's children at night as a favor, without a fee.

An Important Policy Issue ● ● ●

Support for FFN care is a very important policy issue both because of its prevalence and because so many parents choose it as a preferred source for care. Based on national surveys, summarized by the Child Care Bureau, an estimated quarter to half of all children age five and younger are in FFN care (Child Care Bureau, 2007), a much higher percentage than for any other type of care. Further, FFN care is by far the type of care most likely to be provided for children on weekends, in the evenings, and for non-scheduled times when emergencies or other needs arise.

Most state supports for FFN caregivers come as a by-product of their investments in paid, formal child care. Federal law requires that child care subsidies funded through the federal child development block grant be made available for any legal form of care, whether regulated or unregulated, in a state. A primary goal of the federal child care subsidy program is to enable parents to work, and federal law provides for subsidies to go to relatives, friends, and other caregivers who are not part of a state's licensed child care center or licensed child care family day care home system.





In most states, however, the vast majority of FFN caregivers do not receive subsidy payments under the child care subsidy program, and those who do, get a lower rate than the regulated providers.

Similarly, while all states have some training resources to support child care and specific quality improvement initiatives, particularly quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS), these are typically designed with the formal, registered, or licensed child care community in mind. While informal FFN caregivers may be able to attend training programs through child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agencies, few programs are designed with FFN caregivers in mind. Those types of family oriented and FFN-focused approaches have been more commonly funded by public-private partnerships or by private foundations, not by states (Porter, 2007).

Profile of FFN in Minnesota ● ● ●

A 2004 statewide representative household survey in Minnesota (Chase, et al, 2005) found that among the three out of four families who use some form of child care on a regular basis, 70 percent use FFN care. About one quarter use FFN care exclusively; while 22 percent use FFN care as their primary arrangement but also use some other types of care. FFN care is a positive choice for many families, especially families with children age two and younger, and families who prefer care by a relative, a caregiver they know and trust, and someone who shares and can transmit their family and cultural values. Families more likely to use FFN care exclusively

include families with children ages two and younger, families of color and immigrants, those with a child who has special needs, low-income families, and families without child care subsidies. FFN care frequently is the only source of care available for non-traditional work hours, in the evenings and on weekends.

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This study also estimated that about 150,000 households in Minnesota provide FFN care (Chase, et al, 2006). The caregivers are primarily female (86%) with an average age of 48 to 49. Grandparents make up about half of FFN caregivers; while 16 percent are friends, 15 percent aunts or uncles, nine percent neighbors, six percent other relatives, and three percent nannies or babysitters. About three-quarters of FFN caregivers are taking care of one (39%) or two (35%) children age 12 or younger on a regular basis. Sixty-two percent of the children are under the age of six.

Most FFN care is provided part time when families need it. Fifty-nine percent of FFN caregivers provide child care for 10 or fewer hours per week. On average, FFN caregivers provide 19 hours of care in a typical week, for two to three days per week and for six or seven hours per day. Over 70 percent provide care

during standard weekday hours (7 a.m. to 6 p.m.), in the evenings, or during the weekend; 51 percent provide care late at night, and 39 percent in the early morning. Seventy-eight percent of FFN care is provided in the caregiver's home.

Most relatives (85%) provide FFN care without charge. About half of the non-relatives do. In Minnesota, less than five percent receive state or county child care subsidy payments. About 60 percent of FFN caregivers have a paying job in addition to providing child care. About half are considered low-income households, with incomes of 200 percent of poverty and below.

Conceptual framework for how public policies can support FFN care ● ● ●

Since FFN care is by definition distinct from formal child care, public policies and strategies that support FFN care must also distinguish FFN care from regulated child care. To this end, support for FFN care has come to be commonly framed as family support, grounded in principles of family strengths, voluntary relationships, and respect for cultural

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differences (Sazer O'Donnell, et al, 2006). FFN caregivers often want information about how they can create environments that respond to their children's developmental needs, but they do not see themselves as professionals or describe their needs in terms of training and education. They want practical tools and tips and opportunities. They want these at times and places that meet their and the children in their care's schedule, where they and the children in their care can have fun and learn. Most FFN caregivers do not seek certification or see themselves as being regulated by the state; but they often do want to take advantage of programs, information, and resource materials that can help them in their caregiving role.

Some leaders in Minnesota recognized that to fully develop an early learning system for all children requires

a framework that pays attention to both formal and informal early care and education, that provides equity in access to early learning opportunities and resources, and that centers on child development and outcomes for the children. Such a framework shifts the focus from the caregiver to the child, viewing the equal access for support as a means to achieve child development and school readiness rather than as a tool for professional caregiver development to achieve high-quality child care. This early learning framework provides the path for how public policies can make a range of options available to support both formal child care and FFN care in ways that best nurture and fit the needs and situations of the children in each type of care.

Creating voluntary opportunities for support ● ● ●

While regulating and ensuring safety and quality and professional care for children within licensed and registered formal settings is one approach to actualizing this early learning framework, a different approach is required for FFN care. Much as public libraries, parks, and recreation programs make opportunities available to residents on a voluntary basis, supporting FFN care involves making opportunities available on a voluntary basis for FFN caregivers and the children in their care. This includes FFN-child programs and activities, information and resource materials geared to FFN caregivers (particularly tips to grandparents on caring for their grandkids), and networking and information/training opportunities for FFN caregivers themselves. While





such programs and resources are voluntary and no one is “mandated” to participate, experience to date shows that many FFN caregivers step forward and they and the children in their care benefit as a result (Porter, 2007; O’Donnell et al., 2006). In some instances, simply removing barriers to participation for FFN caregivers in programs designed for parents and children has proved effective.

Based upon the willingness of early childhood leaders to explore this new framework, Minnesota is among a handful of states that have recognized the extent that FFN caregivers, like parents, have a role in early learning and in early childhood development, particularly in low-income and diverse cultural communities, and have begun to support more of them in this role.

How Minnesota enacted state FFN legislation and secured appropriations - the back story ● ● ●

FFN caregivers have been part of the child care policy and service landscape in Minnesota since the late 1990s, when they became eligible to receive child care subsidy payments through the Child Care Assistance Program as part of welfare reform. By 2007, the Minnesota Department of Human Services’ FFN policy evolved to a focus on enhancing opportunities for all FFN caregivers “to provide high-quality child care to enable the children in their care to succeed in school” (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2007).

Private foundations and funding organizations, such as the Bush Foundation, The McKnight Foundation, and Greater Twin Cities United Way (Success By Six), have been funding FFN research and services since 2002. These organizations formed the FFN Child Care Study Group, learning from each other through the various pilots and projects they were funding that were focused on developmental outcomes for young children leading to school readiness, particularly in immigrant and low-income communities and with Indian tribes. In addition, libraries, particularly in rural Minnesota and in conjunction with Minnesota Tribal Resources for Early Childhood Care, had been serving FFN caregivers through bookmobiles and story times.

In 2003, Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) became part of Sparking Connections, a national initiative of the Families and Work Institute to test and assess community-based strategies for helping FFN caregivers, working parents and their children, and employers.

The Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral agencies, beginning with their 2004 state contracts, were required to offer outreach

and services to FFN caregivers, initially without any additional funds to carry out this work. In 2006 and 2007, these agencies had \$200,000 per year additional funds allocated from state and federal Child Care Development Funds to deliver services to FFN caregivers for quality improvement, plus about \$40,000 in 2006 and \$77,000 in 2007 for special projects.

Research illuminates family needs and preferences ● ● ●

In 2004-05, the Minnesota Department of Human Services contracted with Wilder Research to conduct a statewide survey of FFN caregivers, providing some important firsthand information about their status, needs, and preferences. This research and the attendant reports helped both to quantify the extent of FFN care in the state and to put a face on the care that was being provided.

Reports and fact sheets on FFN supply and demand were widely circulated beginning in 2006. In the summer of 2006, these fact sheets were used by Ready 4 K, a statewide early learning and school readiness advocacy organization, as it began to formulate its early childhood policy agenda for the upcoming legislative session. This agenda included how state FFN care policy could improve the quality of FFN care to improve the school readiness of young children.

Further research commissioned by Ready 4 K highlighted the role of FFN care in providing culturally consonant care for children in immigrant and refugee



communities and other children of color (Emarita, 2007). Based on a series of group discussions, this research described the many different ways that culturally diverse families teach their children to succeed and then aligned those practices with Minnesota's Early Learning Standards from the perspective of the ethnic communities. This report placed special impetus upon supporting FFN care as one means to insure inclusion in developing an early childhood system that supports all children.

Legislation backed by diverse stakeholders ● ● ●

In addition to Ready 4 K, the legislation was supported by Minnesota CCR&R, other child care advocacy groups, library associations, and other groups focused on improving opportunities for low-income children and children from diverse cultural communities, particularly immigrants, refugees, and Indian tribes. Ready 4 K staff met with these culturally diverse and community-based groups that work with FFN caregivers to discuss what strategies would assist them in their work and to determine what legislation they would support. The legislation was developed during these meetings, shared among the groups, and finalized as a Ready 4 K policy initiative. These various early childhood groups supported the legislation because they were already working with FFN caregivers and they had helped craft the legislation to meet their needs.



Steps and information used to support the 2007 Minnesota legislation ● ● ●

Ready 4 K worked with the Child Care Resource and Referral Network's FFN care workgroup, the foundations who were funding work in the early childhood field, the Minnesota Library Association, and leaders from diverse cultural communities to build on the growing awareness about the central role of FFN care in early learning. Meeting with each group independently, Ready 4 K called upon each of them to meet with legislators and to present testimony at public hearings.

Eric Haugee, the Ready 4 K legislative advocate and organizer, was instrumental in designing the strategy for obtaining legislative support. Thinking back to how the legislation was successful, Eric attributed passage of the bill to "cutting-edge research regarding FFN in Minnesota, hard work by the coalition of advocates on behalf of the bill, and desire by legislators to want to do something new and innovative... I don't think we could have killed it if we had wanted to. We were sure it was going to eventually disappear from the various versions of the budget spreadsheets, but the funding held tight... Also, the name – 'Family Friend and Neighbor' -- as a line item on a spreadsheet, even without knowing much about it, made it difficult to be against."

The authors of the bill were both freshman legislators with a passion for early childhood education. Senator Patricia Torres Ray had worked in early childhood within state agencies and, representing an urban district with a large Latino community, was especially aware of how widespread FFN care use is in cultural

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communities. Representative Erin Murphy was a former nurse and lobbyist for nursing and was very interested in working with Ready 4 K.

Representative Murphy was convinced by "study after study that demonstrates the value of early education to school readiness and student success... Since a majority of Minnesota families rely upon FFN childcare, FFN grants are a smart investment in early education."

Some initial criticism of the bill raised concerns about going into private homes and forcing government-sponsored training on parents. These concerns were alleviated by clarifying the FFN support was strictly voluntary.

Research strengthens legislative testimony ● ● ●

Information from the Wilder household survey provided material for legislative testimony that backed the conclusion that FFN caregiver support is good public policy because it is a good way to promote healthy child development and school readiness for children from low-income families and in diverse cultural communities.

In addition to the high percentage of families with young children using FFN care, particularly in low-income, immigrant, and communities of color, FFN caregivers expressed through the survey high interest in quality improvement for school success. For example, 81 percent of FFN caregivers are eager for or open to support from child development specialists



and interaction with other caregivers to improve the quality of their care; and more than half say they would find it very helpful to have information about how to help children learn and do well in school. They are motivated to improve because they want to aid the healthy development of the children in their care. Far fewer (18%), however, are “very interested” in becoming licensed.

Information from the FFN survey also pointed to approaches for FFN care support that are flexible, voluntary, and tailored, recognizing and respecting the inherent strengths of FFN care, the cultural differences, and the essential voluntary and personal relationships of FFN care giving. That meant the programs providing support should not expect the FFN caregiver to come to them but must build on natural connections, going where FFN caregivers already congregate – parks, churches, libraries and community centers.

Implications for future policies and appropriations ● ● ●

The partnerships requirement in the legislation is designed to promote inclusiveness and sustainability, assuming the partnerships, both within and outside usual early childhood circles, would more effectively reach FFN caregivers and do more to leverage resources from a variety of sources when this grant runs out.

Terry Vasquez, the FFN Outreach Coordinator for the Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network, in commenting on what may happen with future FFN work because of this legislation, believes that “with all the partnerships that have started with the funding, stakeholders are ready for the next step in comprehensive, integrated system development that will connect with FFN and the families they serve... If the early childhood system is truly comprehensive, it will integrate FFN care in it, because we know from Wilder’s research, that’s where the kids are... It was a unique approach in the legislation to strongly encourage partnering with R&Rs, where FFN care has been the focus of work for several years, recognizing and honoring that work and empowering FFN caregivers to provide the best care for their children.

The demand for the funding was strong. DHS received 22 proposals that requested \$2.6 million but had sufficient funds only to support six partnerships – three in the metropolitan area, two in greater Minnesota, and one American Indian tribe. The impact of the grant program on children’s school readiness as well as the implementation and effectiveness of the program activities are being evaluated by the Center for Early Education and Development at the University of Minnesota. While the legislation had strong bipartisan support, any future appropriations will likely depend on positive evaluation results.





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Conclusion ● ● ●

Family members, friends and neighbors meet the needs of many families for child care, particularly low-income families from diverse racial and ethnic communities. Most FFN caregivers, even those caring for young children from disadvantaged families, provide this care free and are not now served by child care subsidy programs or any other public programs.

For states seeking educational equity and expansion of early learning opportunities for low-income children, and to achieve a goal of school readiness for all children, FFN care must be a core part of the equation. States should recognize the extent to which FFN caregivers have a role in early childhood development and maximize the early learning that takes place in FFN care homes on a voluntary, not a regulatory, basis.

Appendix: Actions and policies in other states ● ● ●

While Minnesota is the first state to establish a legislative funding stream for FFN care activities, several other states have taken significant steps to recognize and support FFN care. Their initiatives are described briefly below.

Hawaii

Hawaii is the home of Play+Learn groups (now identified as Parent Child Interaction Programs), originally created as traveling preschools by Kamehameha Schools in the early 1990s. This idea was developed by Hawaii’s Good Beginnings Initiative and has been replicated by Native Hawaiian groups,

Hawaii’s Department of Education, parent support groups and other programs across the state including a version used with incarcerated parents.

A Play+Learn group focuses on reaching families, building relationships and providing caregivers with the resources and information they need to increase the quality of care provided to children. These adult-child participatory groups promote children’s language, cognitive, physical, and social-emotional development while at the same time providing peer support and learning for the caregivers. The groups are facilitated by early childhood or parent educators (often former FFN caregivers themselves) knowledgeable about the health, protection and developmental needs of children, usually for two-to-three hours per session, two days per week.

Hawaii has also worked to provide easy-to-use Preschool content standards, which include family and community guidelines to share with caregivers and provide appropriate guidance and ideas for activities to support healthy development for young children.

Website: <http://www.goodbeginnings.org/hawaii.htm>

Washington

A network of community organizations in Seattle/King County convenes more than 70 Play & Learn groups, serving diverse caregivers, including Vietnamese and Somali FFN caregivers and the children in their care. This neighborhood and community-based network, operated by the FFN Caregiving Project, is coordinated by Child Care Resources, the local child care resource and referral agency serving King County. Partners include libraries, family resource centers, local government, Head Start and Early Head Start, community colleges, community centers, parent education, faith communities, public health,

and employment programs. Funding for the project is provided by both public and private sources including the Washington State Department of Early Learning.

In 2007, with technical support from Child Care Resources of Seattle/King County, the Washington State Child Care Resource and Referral Network formed a statewide FFN learning community to increase the capacity for serving FFN caregivers. The project integrates FFN support into the state and local Kids Matter framework, the state's outcome-based early childhood systems building framework. The learning community activities include site visits to Seattle Play and Learn groups, meetings, quarterly conference calls, and peer mentoring.

In the past two years, the Washington Department of Early Learning has contracted with the Washington State Child Care Resource & Referral Network to replicate locally-based play and learn supports for FFN caregivers in seven new communities. They are also planning for similar FFN services in underserved communities in five other counties and eventually across the state. In addition, the goal is to develop a menu of options to serve FFN caregivers beyond the Play and Learn model and make the supports a part of the R&R's core services.

Washington has also successfully engaged the private sector in supporting FFN care. In Seattle/King County, a group of 20 private and public funders came together to form the SOAR Opportunity Fund providing almost



\$2 million in grants to FFN supporting agencies as well as evaluation and staff support for these efforts. Other public and private resources have been raised to support the planning and areas of focus that have come from these grants. The leaders who have emerged from this funding collaborative have provided vocal support and leadership in addition to the financial resources.

A five-year FFN business plan to expand the FFN effort statewide has also emerged. Based on that plan, private investments (Kresque and Discuren Foundations) have been added to public funds to support statewide expansion activities.

Washington State Child Care Resource and Referral Network website: <http://www.childcarenet.org/families/types-of-care/family-friends-and-neighbor-care/ffn-grant.doc/view>

Iowa

Legislation enacted in 2008 launched FFN planning efforts in Iowa. The law directs the State Community Empowerment Board to study FFN care in Iowa and come back to the General Assembly with recommendations for state policies and practices that can support FFN care. Particular emphasis is placed on identifying promising programs and strategies to support grandparents who are taking a primary role in caring for and raising their grandchildren. The legislation specifically calls for conducting a scan to identify current programs funded under local community empowerment boards that provide support for FFN care; convening a conference on FFN care options, opportunities, and best practices; and developing a long-term strategy for supporting FFN care. The legislation also creates an advisory group consisting of FFN caregivers, child development specialists, librarians, community empowerment board members, United Way members, and child care resource and referral service providers and calls for identification of potential public and private partnerships to provide learning opportunities for FFN caregivers.

Over 100 leaders and stakeholders attended a statewide summit held in early November 2008. National and state leaders provided data and general



information on FFN care issues. Interactive workshops specific to FFN policy, research, practice and promotion were held and led to a large group discussion around next steps at the state and local levels.

In addition, the City of Des Moines and United Way of Central Iowa are part of the “Promoting School Readiness in FFN Care Setting Phase II” technical assistance planning initiative supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and led by United way of America and the National League of Cities, Institute for Youth, Education and Families. As one of six participating communities, Des Moines is working to identify families, provide training, distribute early care materials, and develop a community action plan for developing new strategies for supporting FFN caregivers with the input of FFN caregivers.

Website: http://www.ci.desmoines.ia.us/mayor_council/agendas/2008_as/021108/28.pdf

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania has created a comprehensive FFN policy to support parent choice and FFN caregivers, with a current focus on extending current child care resources to FFN providers as a way to ensure high quality of all early learning experiences in any type of early childhood environment. The BUILD Taskforce on Quality in Regulation Exempt Care Settings was created to formulate this policy for the Pennsylvania Office of Development and Early Learning. Taskforce recommendations were based on an analysis of best practices in other states, feedback from national and state experts and a review of children serving programs nationally.

Taskforce recommendations include state and local implementation strategies and ways to tap potential funding sources. For example:

- Developing easy-to-use guides describing the state early learning standards for FFN caregivers;
- Developing a communications and outreach campaign for FFN caregivers to assure they are familiar with available resources and services;
- Expanding Pennsylvania’s Professional Development System to support FFN caregiver training;
- Completing an assessment of the needs of local FFN caregivers;
- Developing local leadership and professional networks; and
- Engaging, educating and soliciting funding opportunities for this work in Pennsylvania.

To see the full “Report on the Build Taskforce on Quality in Regulation Exempt Care Settings” please go to http://www.pde.state.pa.us/early_childhood/lib/early_childhood/Reg_Exempt_Final.pdf

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