



Networks Northwest Regional Child Care Coalition | 14 Impactful Solutions

# Regional Child Care Plan

*“If the region wants to be desirable to young families there has to be a change.”*—LEELANAU COUNTY PARENT

## Solution 14

[DOWNLOAD THE FULL PLAN HERE](#)

# Introduction to the 14 Solutions

The following 14 Solutions arise from more than 100 distinct ideas generated by the Regional Child Care Planning Coalition

The following Child Care Solution module is one of 14 Solutions that comprise the Regional Child Care Plan of the Networks Northwest Regional Child Care Planning Coalition. The 49-member Coalition represents regional and community partners in the northwest-lower Michigan counties of Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee and Wexford.

*The work of the Coalition is funded by a Regional Child Care Planning grant awarded and supported by Michigan's Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) Child Care Innovation Fund in order to understand and address the child care crisis and to expand equitable access to high-quality, affordable child care for working families. Grants were issued to 16 regional coalitions covering every part of Michigan.*

*Regional Child Care Planning grants were issued to ECIC by the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential (MiLEAP), utilizing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*

## Each Solution Module:

### Meets several criteria:

- **Impactful** – in the opinion of the Coalition, directly addresses one or more of the Root Causes impacting the regional child care system and will improve access, affordability and/or quality.
- **Vetted** – have proven to be successful regionally or elsewhere
- **Sponsored** – one or more regional entities or groups is presently committed to or leading implementation

### Consists of five components::

- **Primary Root Cause** addressed
- **An introductory paragraph** summarizing the solution, why it can be beneficial and how it can be implemented
- **Background and Context** – relates why the solution may be needed or beneficial, along with some historical context where applicable
- **Examples and Priorities** – showcases examples of comparable approaches implemented within the region or elsewhere and then highlights implied priorities for implementation
- **Potential Near-Term Actions** – calls out near term actions that different groups of stakeholders can take in order to move toward implementation

## The 14 Solutions are:

1. State Investment
2. Local Public Funding
3. Policy Changes
4. Local Planning & Zoning
5. Provider Incubation
6. Community Facility Investments
7. Micro-Centers
8. Credential Pathways
9. Substitute Pools
10. Universal Preschool
11. Home-Based Universal Preschool Option
12. Employer Policies & Actions
13. Enhanced Family Navigation
14. Peer-to-peer & Community Collaboration



# Peer-to-peer & Community Collaboration

Strengthen peer-to-peer and community networks

SOLUTION

14

By meeting regularly and working together in peer-to-peer networks, child care providers can share information and best practices to strengthen their operations and the care they provide. In addition, cross-sector collaborations of agencies, businesses, government officials, funders, families and providers can achieve impactful system change to address the system's current challenges.

## Background & Context

**The regional child care system cannot fix itself. The root causes impacting the system are too deep and substantial. Real solutions that better support children, families and child care providers require people working together in new ways. Even solutions that are developed at the federal and state level are more impactful when local providers and stakeholders are able to work together to navigate opportunities and challenges.**

There is a particular challenge to operating a home-based child care. As a member of the Northwest Regional Child Care Coalition who is an experienced group child care home provider put it, "Caring for children in our homes is a rewarding but challenging and isolating job with a high turnover rate." As a potential remedy she went on to say, "so we need to support each other and make the profession more attractive for new providers." Although informal networks tend to crop up across the region, they may not be known and therefore available to the newest providers who may need the most emotional and practical support.

PRIMARY ROOT CAUSE  
ADDRESSED:

**System  
Disconnectedness**

An approach to establishing and maintaining peer-to-peer family child care networks can provide substantial benefits as detailed in the next section.

In the language of systems change, the problem of providing quality, affordable child care that meets families' needs and provides fulfilling, well-compensated careers for educators is a "complex problem"<sup>1</sup>—cause and effect are not predictable, there is little consensus on the problem/solution, things are constantly changing, what worked in the past might not work in the future, and there is no one solution that completely "solves" the problem. In this environment, the only enduring solutions involve:

1. Bringing together diverse stakeholders with different skills, experiences and backgrounds
2. Analyzing the system to learn about what is working and what isn't and to identify some of the upstream causes
3. Designing and testing new approaches
4. Learning and adapting
5. Repeating the process and refreshing the approaches used to address the problem

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the Cynefin Framework, Created by Dave Snowden

*“Caring for children in our homes is a rewarding but challenging and isolating job with a high turnover rate. We need to support each other and make the profession more attractive for new providers.”*—GROUP HOME CHILD CARE PROVIDER

This type of approach can take work...a lot of work. But it is the kind of approach that is most likely to achieve widespread and enduring solutions while building the relationships across communities that can adapt to future changes and policy priorities. When business leaders, government officials, community leaders, education leaders, funders, families, child care providers and community members can work together to create a stronger child care system, communities have a chance to build something special—and highly impactful.

## Examples & Priorities

**There are currently a number of peer-to-peer and community collaboration initiatives in the region that are building connections, launching home-grown solutions and broadening the base of support for the child care system.**

### Family Child Care Networks

In July 2023 the Early Childhood Investment Corporation’s Child Care Innovation Fund announced nine Family Child Care Networks (FCCN) pilot grants aiming to improve the funding, policy, and regulatory environment for home-based child care businesses.<sup>2</sup> One of the nine hubs funded as part of this work was based within northwest lower Michigan and has

been supporting three family child care networks—in Grand Traverse, Leelanau and Benzie Counties.

#### The networks have provided a number of benefits to providers:

- Mentorship and peer learning opportunities for providers, from the very experienced to the newly licensed
- Professional development and learning opportunities associated with business management, child care licensure and early learning curriculum
- A forum to discuss current and emerging policy issues impacting the system
- A self-directed setting allowing home-based providers to develop their leadership and advocacy skills
- Stipends and meals to acknowledge the value of their time

#### In return the three networks have generated a great deal of insight based on practical experience:

- They developed sets of policy priorities that have been shared with elected officials and officials within MiLEAP
- They provided feedback on proposed changes in child care funding and priorities
- They provided substantial input into and vetting of the Regional Child Care Plan



### Community Collaborations

When the Regional Child Care Planning Coalition formed in Spring 2023, there were already five cross-sector community initiatives under way seeking to address the complexities of the child care system at a county and sub-regional level.

#### These are:

- **Child Care Initiative (CCI)** – CCI is a community-centered solution to Emmet County’s child care shortage housed at North Central Michigan College
- **Infant Toddler Collaborative Startup (ITCS)** – After successful proof of concept for incubating

<sup>2</sup> “Family Child Care Network Grantee Announcement” <https://www.firststepskent.org/articles/family-child-care-network-grantee-announcement>



new child care businesses in Leelanau County (see *Solution 5: Provider Incubation*), ITCS is expanding to also cover Benzie and Grand Traverse Counties

- **Raising Manistee County (RMC)** – RMC is an action-oriented, cross-sector initiative working to preserve and develop a strong, coordinated early childhood infrastructure in Manistee County
- **Child Caring Now (CCN)** – Child Caring Now is a collaborative initiative addressing the critical shortage of child care capacity and workforce in Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska and Leelanau Counties through seven action teams
- **Childcare Access and Resources for Everyone (CARE) for Benzie** – CARE for Benzie builds on work completed with First Children’s Finance. The initiative seeks to build community education and partnerships plus recognition for providers

These initiatives have generated ideas and pioneered new approaches that are transforming child care within the region. Indeed some of their approaches have already changed statewide policy and are being widely adopted throughout Michigan.

**This is powerful systems change work.**

## Great Start Collaboratives

Michigan’s Great Start Collaboratives (GSCs) are coalitions of community agencies, business partners, faith organizations, schools, health care providers, parents, and individuals working together to improve



programs and services for families with children from birth to age eight.<sup>3</sup>

**These collaboratives are not specifically charged with strengthening regional child care, focusing more broadly on four main early childhood outcomes:**

1. Children born healthy
2. Children healthy, thriving, and developmentally on track from birth to third grade
3. Children developmentally ready to succeed in school at the time of school entry

4. Children prepared to succeed in fourth grade and beyond by reading proficiently by the end of third grade

However, GSCs have typically been the venues where representatives of a variety of community groups and individuals come together to strengthen community partnerships and work together to improve outcomes for young children and families.

Community Collaborations should work closely with the region’s three Great Start Collaboratives for efficiency and mutual support.

<sup>3</sup> State of Michigan website “Great Start Collaboratives and Family Coalitions” <https://www.michigan.gov/mikidsmatter/community/gspc>

## The Importance of Parent and Provider Voice in Community Collaborations

Although we all benefit when the regional child care system works well, the most direct beneficiaries are the children in care and their families. Following the principle of “nothing about me without me,” it is essential to involve parent voices in developing programs and solutions meant to strengthen the regional child care system. Of course this goes beyond parents to include grandparents, foster parents and all of the other caregivers who are responsible for raising children in our region.

In addition, a representation of providers from across the mixed-delivery child care system is essential when decisions are being made that may impact them positively or negatively.

**To authentically include parents and providers in the conversation about the regional child care system, several principles should be followed:**

- Include parents and providers in decision making and leadership groups
- Support them with time, information and context so that they can be confident advocates
- Meet at times and places that are convenient for them
- Remove barriers to participation by providing stipends for time and helping to address child care and/or transportation needs



- Value and celebrate their participation as the true “experts” on their children, circumstances, cultures and experiences

### Improving Collaboration Efforts

Not every peer-to-peer and community collaboration effort will yield greatness. However, many of them hold that potential.

**Those who fund and participate in these efforts can improve their potential outcomes by ensuring these networks have:**

- Backbone support from one or a few people who can effectively organize all activities
- Mutually agreed-upon community agreements and governance structures that are clear, consistent and fair
- Effective facilitation that cycles through stages of outreach to stakeholders (to keep refreshing groups), analysis and problem-solving, action planning and implementation and learning/adaptation
- Measurable goals tied to desired system outcomes and shared ways of tracking progress toward goals
- Communications internally and externally about signs of change and stories of progress



## Potential Near-Term Actions

**Policy makers and funders** should continue to support the Family Child Care Networks and hubs that facilitate home-based providers self-organizing to share resources, ideas and supports, sustain their businesses and advocate for themselves.

**Funders and local leaders** should sustain and broaden initiatives throughout the 10 counties of northwest lower Michigan that involve cross-sector community collaboration and systems change efforts, especially ones that are showing positive signs of change.

**All existing initiatives** should work to ensure they are legitimately including parent and provider advocates with a diversity of perspectives...and working to help them find their voices.

**Networks Northwest Coalition**

**Regional Child Care Plan 2024**