

## Whole Family Systems (WFS) Initiative Overview

The Whole Family Systems Initiative is a partnership between the Minnesota Department of Human Services, local community sites and the Build Initiative. This partnership is a multi-year, co-created process intended to develop or expand upon the 2Gen Policy Network (Cohort 1) and the work of the Early Childhood Systems Reform to intentionally bring together the work and learnings of 2Gen with the work and learnings of Early Childhood Systems Reform.

The work of Whole Family System Initiative is in response to the disconnect between the problems that communities and families experience and the current solutions and programs “the system” has in place. The state’s current funding system is siloed but families’ experiences are not; instead, they are broad and interconnected. Communities of color and indigenous communities are particularly negatively affected by the failures of the system. The current system is transactional rather than adaptive, transformative, and innovative.

The work began with [The 2Gen Policy Network \(2016-2021\)](#) and consisted of four local sites that partnered with DHS Economic Assistance and Employment Supports Division (EAESD), Minnesota Management and Budget, and Future Services Institute of the University of Minnesota. The Two-Generation approach seeks to strengthen opportunities for families across key domains such as education, economic assets, health and well-being, career pathways, and social capital. Serving families in this holistic way often required collaboration, integration, and relationship building across service areas, levels of government, and sectors. The [Early Childhood Systems Reform \(ECSR\) project](#) was a partnership of DHS Child Care Services, the Department of Health and the Department of Education and was launched in early 2017. The intent of the project was to create an effective state system of early childhood programs and services that ensures pregnant and parenting families of prenatal to three-year olds are receiving the supports they need in a manner that encourages their optimal growth and development and eliminates racial disparities in program access and outcomes. The work of these two projects was foundational to the creation of the Whole Family Systems Initiative.

The Whole Family Systems Initiative is the 2<sup>nd</sup> cohort of Minnesota’s system change work that began in 2017 and will continue through October 2024 to build on the learnings of the 2Gen Policy Network and the Early Childhood Systems reform (ESCRP) Project. Three divisions within DHS are now partnering within the Minnesota Department of Human Services: Economic Assistance and Employment Supports, Child Care Services and Child Safety and Permanency and blending funding to award five-year grants to community sites chosen from across Minnesota to partner with us. The blending of funding allows us to serve families more holistically across programs.

The WFS network seeks to:

- 1) Provide resources for new local program design to address racial disparities in important human services and outcomes

- 2) Enter into unique relationships with those sites to identify program, practice and policy barriers for change
- 3) Enable systems change grounded in local realities.

## Whole Family Systems Objectives

The Whole Family Systems Initiative is a partnership between the State of Minnesota, the Build Initiative, and local sites across Minnesota, and we are working together for the following goals:

- To **improve and bring stability to the health and wellbeing of children and their families**, especially in communities that have faced – and still face – significant adversities and disparities.
- To **lift up experiences and knowledge of communities and families**, and co-create solutions that reduce, and ultimately remove, systemic barriers.
- To put **equity into action** through implementing and **learning from universal-targeting, culturally specific approaches and emerging practices that address over representation and disparities** for African American and American Indian children, families, communities, and tribes.
- To develop a **community of learning** which includes local communities and tribal governments, state agencies, and other partners. In this community of learning, information flows in all directions and is equally valued. The learnings build on the lessons from various streams of work, starting in 2016.

## Whole Family Systems Vision

The vision of the Whole Family System Initiative is to shift and change the system across government and organizations so that it truly enables and supports whole family approaches and responses to families' challenges that encompass all aspects of their lives, including well-being, family preservation, housing, childcare, health, and economic stability.

## Our Partnering Sites

We are currently partnering with seven sites across Minnesota. The following is a brief description of the work of each site:

- **City of St Paul** through partnerships with financial institutions, community-based agencies and early childhood providers, the City of Saint Paul is expanding and building off its college savings account initiative (CollegeBound) to improve economic stability as well as early childhood health and well-being outcomes for children and their families.

- **Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES)** will address the disparities, particularly during ages birth to 5, faced by children in Latino families regarding school readiness as a result of systemic failures, and engage the whole family in services to enhance their well-being. CLUES will partner with Latino parents and system partners to create community-based solutions and implement recommendations to best meet their multiple needs.
- **Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association (IMAA)** The association, along with Families First of Minnesota, is leading a multi-disciplinary team that is partnering with families and other community agencies to explore the social-cultural barriers of success in pre-kindergarten- to kindergarten-age children, whose families are first-generation immigrants and refugees.
- **Minneapolis American Indian Center (MAIC)** with their partners, including families, the center's Bright Beginnings program will develop individual and systems-level solutions to barriers faced by American Indian women who have experienced substance use and are at risk of or have a history of child welfare involvement, helping them develop a stable, nurturing environment for their children. The project will incorporate cultural teachings and seek out additional cultural resources for their work with families.
- **Northpoint Health and Wellness Center Inc. (NorthPoint)** will support healthy child development during the critical period from conception to age 3, along with partners and families, will research the systemic failures that result in an abundance of risk factors and a lack of protective factors for many African American children and their parents/caregivers.
- **Ojibwemotaadidaa Omaa Gidakiiminaang (OOG)**, the Fond du Lac College's language immersion program is partnering with the state, Child Care Aware and Fond du Lac Social Services to plan and implement "Grandma's House," a language nest where infants and toddlers, with the help of their parents, elders and language staff, will grow up immersed in Ojibwe language and culture in a rich, home-like environment to convey a sense of identity, responsibility and spiritual relationship to all creation.
- **People Serving People (PSP)** with partners including families, Mill City Kids and the Hennepin County Office to End Homelessness, People Serving will explore issues related to access to child care and quality early childhood education, and ways to prevent the recurrence of family homelessness. Family homelessness overwhelmingly impacts African American and American Indian communities.

## Overview of the Team

The Build Initiative joins the WFS project full time in March 2022 (year 3). Build will support the project by helping the state and local partners to identify and address structural and institutional inequities based on race, health, wealth, and geography in order to improve outcomes for families, especially for pregnant and parenting families with young children.

The team of committed staff from DHS and Build will learn together with our community partners to improve services and policies for Minnesota families. There will be site-specific teams, and initiative-wide roles involved in this work.

**State Project Manager:** This person has an eye on the overall initiative, and coordinates the various teams and players involved. They will shape strategies, share progress with leadership and partners, and convene the WholeFamily Network Meeting.

**Site Team:** The site team consists of the local site Project Coordinator, a State Site Lead, an Innovation Lead from Build Initiative, the Learning Team. This team oversees and tracks the detailed activities of each site, strategically solves emerging needs, documents learnings, and supports facilitation of engagements to do this work.

**Project Coordinator:** An appointed lead from each site whose full-time job is to manage and run the WholeFamilies Systems grant project.

**State Site Lead:** Based in a state agency, the state site lead provides support in connecting the local work to state policy areas. The State Site Lead is a partner in this work and does not serve as a contractual reinforcer for the state.

**Innovation Lead:** The innovation lead (from Build Initiative) will partner with the site team and support the work through facilitation, research, program development, among others.

**Learning Team Lead:** A member from the learning team (from MN DHS and Build Initiative) will share learnings across the sites and elevate learnings to other levels (e.g. state) for action.

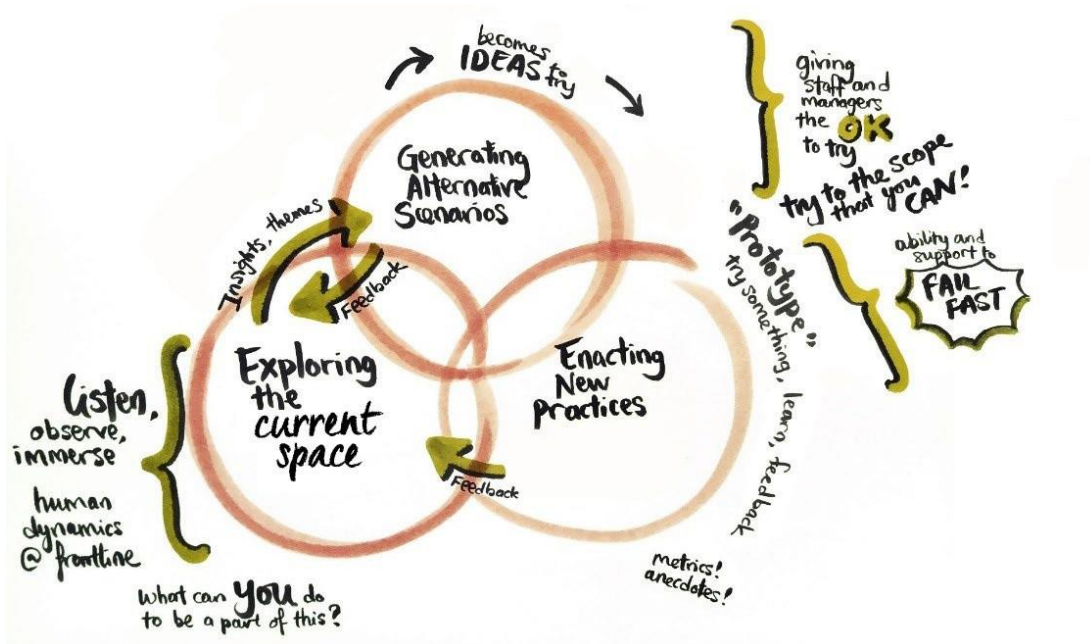
**Contract manager:** Pamela McCauley (MN DHS, Interim contract manager) works on contracting and payment, and will be available to support all sites on their contracting inquiries.

**Local Core Team:** An advisory group that the local site convenes that includes the site team and all relevant partners representing the various systems that touch the problem being addressed at the site. The core team will gather at least once per month to learn together, make decisions on next steps and plan ongoing activities for the project. Regular and ongoing participation from Core Team partners, including the site team, is required, expected, and is critical to the success of the cross-systems learning relationships.

**Whole Family Network Meeting:** A quarterly meeting of all WFS sites to learn from each other. Each site team's integral staff attend the quarterly meeting.

To do this work well, we have some grounding practices to help us envision the work ahead.

## Human-Centered Design (HCD) Learning



The Human-centered design focuses on the experience and needs of the various groups within the context of what we’re designing or redesigning together. **Listening to all voices and centering family voice, applying creative responses, and iteratively learning** are practices we use to bring people from various parts of the system together in this process.

**The nature of this work is emergent, and we will learn together** in this new space we all create. We recognize that some of the changes that will emerge includes *tangible* results (such as policy changes, integrated programs, thoughtful methods of engagement, culturally significant practices, deeper resource investment where matters), and *intangible* results (such as better experiences for families and workers, stronger relationships between partners, collective knowledge on doing this important work together).

### Year 1: Exploring the current space

The design process begins by *Exploring the Current Space*, via deep exploration into the context – who, what, how. The Site Teams will work together to identify methods that would be helpful to understand existing

context. We engage using various methods including conversations, ecosystem mapping, user journey maps, literature reviews, observation, and indigenous and culturally-informed methodologies. Together, we question assumptions being made within the system and uncover assets that push ideas forward.

**Support from the site team:** The site team will help to listen for the emerging voices from the core team, the families and other partners, and begin to capture the tangible and intangible learnings in the current space.

## Year 2: Generating alternative solutions

Potential solutions are imagined as part of *Generating Alternative Scenarios*, where we collectively brainstorm and flesh out ideas to explore what a possible future might look like. Some insights are then turned into tangible ideas that can be tried quickly in the context, and feedback is used to refine ideas for longer-term implementation in subsequent years.

**Support from the site team:** The site team brings a diverse set of practices and the sensibility to try what's meaningful and appropriate to the issue and context.

## Years 3-5: Enacting new practices

In years three to five, local sites with support from the site teams will enact new practices to test and adapt as they receive feedback from families and core teams. The learnings from each site will be shared with the WFS network and other state agencies. Policy, practice and programs will be adapted.

**Support from the site team:** The Learning Team will work closely the local site to design meaningful feedback loops.

# Building in learning

## Feedback loops



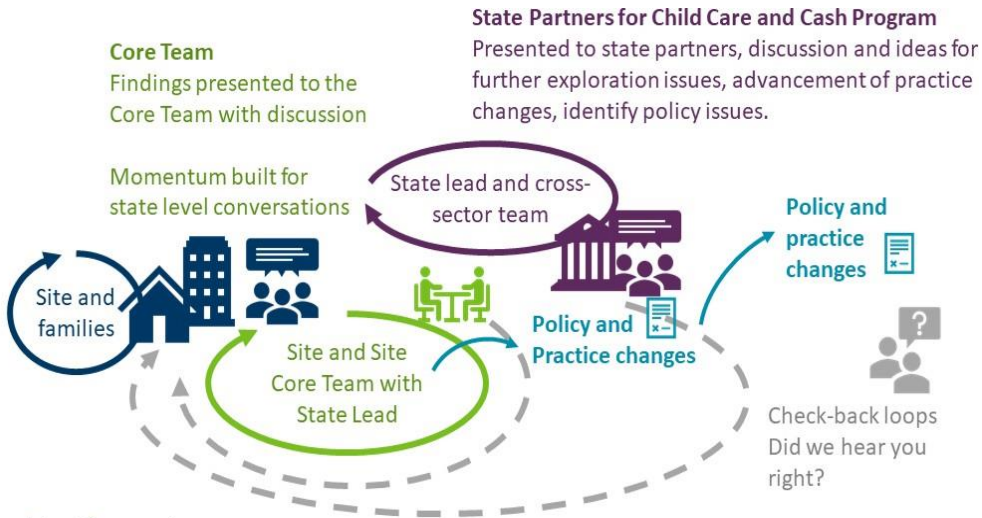
Each site will design their

feedback loops and learning plan with the Learning Team. Therefore, each plan has a different form and format to support what’s meaningful in your context. The state site leads will work with you to hear and understand where those concerns ‘live’ within the state, county, local government, and tribal nations. These localized learnings/feedback then goes to the Learning Team and beyond, and/or diving deeper to understand it better. Potential policy and practices changes can emerge as a result, with share backs to the sites.

**We learn best directly from the sites. The site work is supported by a Learning Team that will document and share learnings across all sites.**

Check-back loops  
Did we hear you right?

## An example from our 2Gen Work



### NAZ/Hired/Hennepin

Convened separately parents and county and contracted caseworkers to ask:  
*How can we make the experience of Child Care Assistance better?*

Also informed by data analysis from Human Services about denials, processing time, etc.