

CONNECT

Spring/Summer 2019

Child care is the fastest growing economic issue in southwest Minnesota. Turn to page 4 to see one community's solution to care for our kids.



SOUTHWEST INITIATIVE
FOUNDATION

THE IMPACT OF MENTORING

Kevin Paulsen is Community Bank President at First Bank & Trust in Pipestone and a mentor for Southwest Minnesota Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities (CEO). CEO mentors help students immerse themselves in real life learning experiences with the opportunity to take risks, manage the results, and learn from the outcomes.

“Working with these students in this unique way of learning has been inspiring,” Kevin said. “Serving as a mentor for one of the students in the class, as well as working and speaking with the other students, has been an eye-opening experience. I have been involved or served on boards over the last 40 years at local, state and national levels. My experience serving on the Southwest Minnesota CEO board has brought me more pride and excitement than any other board I have served on.”

Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities



Southwest Initiative Foundation has been supporting entrepreneurs since our founding, including the business loan we made to Clara City-based Impact Innovations in the late 1980s to support its expansion. Pictured above, Diana celebrates the company's 50th anniversary with its President and CEO, John Dammermann (left), and CFO Ron Noyes. We're also supporting the next generation of our region's entrepreneurs, like the students participating in the first class of Southwest Minnesota Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities (CEO). They're pictured below at the 2018 Grow Our Own Summit in Marshall. SWIF provided grant funding for this new CEO program, which serves high schoolers in Nobles, Pipestone and Rock counties.



CRADLE TO CAREER

President/CEO Diana Anderson

Impact Innovations is a global manufacturing company that specializes in seasonal décor, paper, and fabrics as well as commercial printing and displays. Its world headquarters are in Clara City and its commercial products division is in Maynard. Southwest Initiative Foundation made a business loan to the company in the late 1980s to support expansion and last year, they celebrated their 50th anniversary.

The same day of their anniversary celebration, Stamp-n-Storage hosted a grand opening of its new 30,000-square-foot manufacturing and retail space in Hutchinson. The company provides paper crafters around the world with high-quality, space efficient wooden storage and organizers. Owner Brett Haugen says he started building them as a “honey-do” project for his wife. In 2012, we made a microloan to help Brett move his hobby out of the garage, and the business has been growing since.

Companies like these across our region provide unique products and services to people around the world and offer great careers to people right here in our region. They're also part of the work we call Grow Our Own, an effort to ensure all southwest Minnesota kids have the opportunity to succeed. Think about the families who are supported by these local jobs, the skills our young people need to enter these and other workplaces, and the kids who will grow up to be our next entrepreneurs.

Southwest Initiative Foundation has long held that economic and social growth are interdependent. Economic and social gains must be pursued simultaneously for individual initiatives and communities - and the overall region - to thrive. Research shows that more than four in 10 southwest Minnesota children live in families that are struggling to meet their basic needs. Without the right support, not all of these kids will reach their full potential. We can change that, and examples of community solutions that support all our kids are taking root where there's energy.

The Lower Sioux Indian Community's youngest citizens are speaking their native language and learning their culture at the state's first Dakota Immersion Early Head Start and Head Start program. More students are accessing programs like REACH, to develop a sense of belonging and



Diana Anderson, President/CEO

purpose when they find it's missing. High schoolers from Nobles, Pipestone and Rock counties are building a powerful local network as part of the newly formed Southwest Minnesota Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities (CEO). Parents are becoming more active in their children's educational journey through Worthington's PASS program. Public-private-academic partnerships like the LYFT initiative are building career and technical education pathways for students to follow.

Engaging business leaders in developing local solutions has been key to success. There are people in our region who care and are willing to learn, share and take action to make southwest Minnesota a place where all people can thrive.

We all play a role in supporting our kids. Learn more about programs and partnerships in the region by signing up for our monthly e-news at swifoundation.org.



Little Stangs Learning Center Director Lori Holtberg (left) and preschool teacher Megan Horsman gather the busy preschool students from their play for a photo in their new classroom.

EXPANDING CHILD CARE IN GREATER MINNESOTA

LOCAL EDA PARTNERS WITH BLHS SCHOOL

Cash Baumgardt was born with a full head of dark hair and deep blue eyes. It was love at first snuggle for his mom and dad, Deanna and Brad Baumgardt of Buffalo Lake. Deanna is a nurse, and Brad is a farmer. When it was time to return to work, they struggled to find someone to care for Cash.

“When he was born, a lot of in-home child care in our community and surrounding communities had closed or were in the process of closing, which didn’t leave us many choices,” Deanna said. “He was in three different child cares. I knew child care was hard to find but I didn’t think it

was going to be as hard as it proved to be. I hated changing. Starting somewhere new and learning to trust new people with your kids is hard for parents to do.”

Cash is 5 now, and he has a brother, Mavrick, who is 2. They learn and explore each weekday at Little Stangs Learning Center, which didn’t exist when they were born. With the vision of the Buffalo Lake Economic Development Authority (EDA), a creative partnership with Buffalo Lake-Hector-Stewart

(BLHS) School, and community support and funding, this new child care center went from an idea to opening its doors in less than two years. It welcomed kids to its classrooms June 2018.

“I like to tell people if there was just one person who couldn’t do their part, it wouldn’t have happened. That’s how important the community support was,” said Lori Holtberg, director at Little Stangs.

A local couple donated the land for the center. The EDA owns the building, and BLHS School operates the center. Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF) awarded the project \$20,000 through a grant from the State of Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) to increase child care capacity for children and families in the area.

“Buffalo Lake, Hector and Stewart formed a true child care desert. With only one of the three communities having licensed care available, families were going to extreme measures and driving distances as far as 30 minutes or more to find care,” said SWIF Youth and Family Officer Jodi Maertens, noting that Little Stangs has created 60 new child care slots, with the potential to add up to 15 jobs.

The foundation is committed to finding child care solutions that help families, employers and communities. Our Bright Beginnings Loan Program is designed specifically for child care providers, both family child care and center-based. In addition to loans and grantmaking, SWIF staff gather people around the table for conversations to figure out what a community needs and can support.

One key part of those conversations is inviting businesses to help face a challenge that may not appear to affect them. In Buffalo Lake, EDA director and financial advisor Lorie Kurth-Kirtz gets the



Cash Baumgardt (center) was in three different child cares before his parents were able to enroll him at the new Little Stangs Learning Center that opened in Buffalo Lake last year. A grant from Southwest Initiative Foundation helped build the center, which created 60 new child care slots in a community that had almost none.

economic impact of child care and helped lead the Little Stangs project.

“It’s been a huge asset to the community, and that was our goal as the EDA – to bring people to main street, to have parents dropping their kids off every morning and night, using the grocery store and the bank and other services,” Lorie said.

And the child care brings another economic benefit. Parents like Deanna and Brad can be part of the local workforce. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that in 2014, 74 percent of Minnesota households with children under age 6 had all parents in the workforce, the third highest in the nation.

“We love our kids and I want to make sure that when we can’t be with them, that they are with someone who cares about them as much as we do,” Deanna said.

How did the small, rural communities of Buffalo Lake, Hector and Stewart tackle this big project? Read more of the story online at swifoundation.org/Little-Stangs.



Hutchinson High School student Teddy (left) receives support from REACH teacher Rhoda Hubbard and other caring adults. Teddy's mother has a history of severe mental illness, which made for an incredibly difficult home life, including moving around a lot. REACH gave her a sense of belonging.

Collaboration MAKES HIGH SCHOOL A HUB OF SUPPORT FOR OUR KIDS

Solutions to close the opportunity gap for kids living in poverty are complicated. It takes collaboration to make the long-term investments that help our kids thrive and reach their full potential. Hutchinson Public Schools channels a local spirit of collaboration in two innovative programs to set up students of all economic backgrounds for success – TigerPath Academies and the REACH Program.

In Hutchinson, conversations around career pathways helped spark the development of TigerPath Academies in 2014. This public, private and nonprofit collaboration connects students to local businesses and exciting career options starting in ninth grade.

“Career readiness training needs to be intentional, and it needs to be

available to all students,” said SWIF President and CEO Diana Anderson. “TigerPath is a great example of working together to provide our kids on-ramps to careers they find engaging, so they can be successful.”

Success in the new economy means a major shift in how high school students and their families prepare for the next step in their education, said Hutchinson’s economic development director, Miles Seppelt.

FROM INTERNS TO ENTREPRENEURS

Jacob Albers, a senior at Hutchinson High School, is part of TigerPath’s internship program. He’s learning on the job at Innovative Foam with owner Dean Bertram, a former loan client of the foundation who got started as a small business owner with our help.

“Jacob is a fabulous kid, and a great worker,” Dean said. “I think it’s very valuable for students to get that work experience. Jacob will step into another job and he’ll be better off with whatever he’s learned here. For me, it’s a good way to give back.”

From supporting entrepreneurs to funding innovations in pathways to careers, SWIF is helping provide opportunities for our kids to reach their full potential. Read more about Dean and Jacob at swifoundation.org/innovative-foam.



TigerPath intern Jacob Albers (right) is learning on the job at Innovative Foam with owner Dean Bertram, a former loan client of the foundation who got started as a small business owner with our help.

In southwest Minnesota, less than 1 in 6 job openings require a bachelor’s degree or more, while 18 percent require vocational training or an associate degree, according to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED).

“It’s long been college, major, career. It should be career, major, college. It should be ‘What do I want to be in life? What are the skills I need?’” Miles said.

Students choose a TigerPath Academy in ninth grade, and it guides them through “minds-on, hands-on” learning, said Hutchinson Schools Superintendent Daron VanderHeiden. The four TigerPath Academies are SCI HI (primarily health care), Business, Human services and STREAM (science, technology, manufacturing, etc.)

“We want to have kids apply their skills and experience to what they’ll do in a career,” Daron said.

Local businesses have supported the program with donations, materials, mentorships and internships. SWIF is one of 23 partners that financed the \$1.2 million TigerPath Initiative, which includes an update to the career and technical education space at Hutchinson High School, now called the “Center for Technical Excellence.” Among other improvements, the new facilities have state-of-the-art machining and welding

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Hutchinson Schools Superintendent Daron VanderHeiden (left) and Hutchinson Economic Development Authority Director Miles Seppelt stand in the career and technical education space at Hutchinson High School during updates. Now called the "Center for Technical Excellence," it's part of the school's award-winning TigerPath Academies career pathways initiative.



Jacob Albers, a senior at Hutchinson High School, interns at Innovative Foam as part of his study in the TigerPath STREAM Academy focusing on science, technology, renewables, engineering, art, agriculture, mathematics and manufacturing.

"We want to get away from a one size fits all education," Miles said. "Find your own path. Find the right fit."

Encouragement within REACH

Focusing on the future is asking a lot of students who are struggling with personal challenges day-to-day. For kids who need support academically, socially or emotionally at Hutchinson High School, there's REACH. It's an elective class that helps students experience success by learning new life skills to overcome challenges. REACH works with students, families, counselors, administration and community to surround students and families with a network of support.

For HHS student Teddy, REACH was a lifesaver. Teddy's mother has a history of severe mental illness, which made for an incredibly difficult home life, including moving around a lot. REACH gave her a sense of belonging.

"Someone has to teach you that you are valued and you are loved," Teddy said.

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equipment. It's at the center of a three-floor classroom wing, with the entire first floor dedicated as hands on "maker space." Keeping up with industry will help students market themselves to area employers, many of which are advertising jobs that require skills training, not a four-year degree.

"Every manufacturer in town could hire people today if we had people with the right skills," Miles said. "It's not just degrees, it's skills we need."

Across Minnesota and the region, TigerPath's model is generating interest. It won a League of Minnesota Cities 2017 City of Excellence Award and a 2018 workforce development award from the Mid-America Economic Development Council. But it's our kids and the communities where they live, and eventually work, who will take home the real prize: When high school students explore all paths to success, not just four-year degrees, they can find a smooth transition from school to an engaging career.

Eleven years ago, Hutchinson School administrators looked at failure rates, dropout rates and students who could benefit from alternative instruction. With total failing grades in excess of 900 a year, something needed to be done. In 2011, the district decided to tap Chad Harlander, a local family counselor, to launch the REACH program at the Hutchinson High School. Ten years later, in 2017, failure rates had dropped to 132 and students enrolled in REACH were passing 92 percent of their classes.

The program's success comes in part from a trauma-informed approach that looks at the whole student and acknowledges the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that is, traumatic experiences of abuse, neglect or household challenges like divorce or incarceration of family members that occur before the age of 18. Students in REACH take a modified version of the 10-question ACEs survey to assess cumulative childhood stressors with a score ranging from 0 to 10. ACEs are common, with about 68 percent of adults having at least one. Studies show a higher ACE score increases a person's risk of health and social problems such a substance abuse, chronic mental and physical health conditions, violence and being a victim of violence.

Without supportive early intervention, adults with an ACE score of 4 are twice as likely to be smokers and seven times more likely to be alcoholic; they face increased risk of emphysema or chronic bronchitis by nearly 400 percent, and risk of attempted suicide by 1,200 percent. People with an ACE score of 6 or higher are at risk of their lifespan being shortened by 20 years. Last year, nearly 70 percent of REACH students had an ACE score of 4 or more and 20 percent had a score of 8 or more.

Developmental research shows that having one caring adult in a child's life increases the likelihood that child can flourish and become a productive adult. REACH is countering the effects of ACEs by teaching "the hope and the how": Students, no matter

what their ACE score, can build resilience and find success in all areas of their lives.

"If you're familiar with trauma and the brain, the number one thing that can overcome some of that destructive trauma – trauma that comes from generational poverty, from chronic stress – is unconditional love. ... We don't often talk about love and loving our students, but that's where the answer is," said REACH teacher Rhoda Hubbard.

Across Minnesota and into South Dakota, more than 30 schools have a REACH program based on Hutchinson's model. SWIF has awarded several grants to REACH to support its work, including funding a one-day Mental and Chemical Health Training for teachers throughout Minnesota.

"We're providing funding for REACH and programs like it because southwest Minnesota's future depends on Teddy and all of our kids getting what they need to succeed," said SWIF Community Impact Director Nancy Fasching.

"I grew up in a home where I couldn't go to school because my mother wouldn't let me, and that's why I work hard and am grateful for school," Teddy said. "That's why I'm where I am today. But it wasn't easy—for a long time, I felt lost. This is why the REACH program matters to me. Every day, everywhere someone is lost just waiting to be found."

These initiatives show how community collaboration can set our kids up for success, even in the face of challenges. What could that collaboration look like where you live?

Call us at 800-594-9480 to request a local Grow Our Own presentation exploring challenges and opportunities in your community.

TEACHER PREP PARTNERSHIP BUILDS PATHWAYS TO THE CLASSROOM

Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF) is part of a new partnership to help our region's students find their way back to the classroom as a career. In the face of a critical teacher shortage, the McKnight Foundation awarded a \$75,000 planning grant to create the "Southwest Teacher Preparation Partnership," which involves Worthington Public School District, Minnesota West Community and Technical College, Southwest Minnesota State University and SWIF. These organizations are laying the groundwork for a teacher career pathway that will increase the diverse pool of quality teacher candidates in the region.

The largest barrier to hiring qualified teachers is the number of applicants for openings, according to a 2016 survey of school officials conducted by the Minnesota Department of Education. A competitive job market and low salaries for teachers are hurting the field.

This partnership is also working to understand what it takes to support students who want to teach, especially students of color who aren't often seeing teachers who look like them in their classrooms.

According to the Worthington Public School District, more than 68 percent of its high school students are from one of over 40 cultures in the area. And more than 78 percent of elementary students in the district are students of color. Only about 7 percent of their teachers are people of color.

SWIF granted \$15,000 for the first steps on the pathway for prospective teachers. This funding helped convene thought leaders and launch a new club at WHS called

Future Teachers of America (FTA) to support and encourage students interested in a career in education.

Perla Banegas is helping advise the new FTA club. She is a WHS graduate and teaches English language learners at the school. After working for five years as a paraprofessional, Perla went back to school and obtained her teaching degree. It was a major financial challenge, juggling her studies and a job, but she felt supported by her coworkers and administrators at WHS. She stayed in Worthington because her family is here, because she has strong connections with her former teachers who are now colleagues and because there's a lot of room to make a difference in a smaller, rural area.



Perla Banegas (left) is helping advise the new Future Teachers of America club at Worthington High School, and Jessica Ventura – a senior who loves math and wants to become a teacher – is excited to be a member.

"At the end of the day, teaching is really about having a kind heart and the difference that you make in your students' lives. Sometimes we don't see that difference on a day-to-day basis, sometimes it's not until graduation or until other milestones our students reach," said Perla, who has mostly ninth and 10th grade students.

Perla is leading the FTA club with fellow teacher Patrick Mahoney. About 40 students are participating. Their meetings twice a month will include spending time observing in classrooms, volunteering and networking, as well as instruction from Perla and Patrick.

Jessica Ventura is a senior at WHS and part of FTA. She loves math and wants to become a teacher because of the positive experiences she's had in school. Jessica hopes to attend Minnesota West Community and Technical College this fall to start her journey to becoming an educator.

"I want to help students to grow and develop. I would love to teach everything—kindergarten, first grade, elementary, or maybe ESL because I struggled in that category, and I want to help other students," Jessica said.

Watching Perla teach has helped Jessica imagine herself as a teacher and given Jessica ideas about the way she wants to show up for students in her future classroom.

"Part of what the club offers is that exposure students need in connection with the profession. This is not just a fantasy, but a dream they can achieve by watching others, by being involved, by participating," Perla said. "Our goal is to encourage students to build relationships around the district, so they are able to ask questions and hopefully have a better understanding of what teaching involves."

What Kids Need to Succeed



In our last fiscal year, SWIF awarded \$505,000 in grants to projects like this for Grow Our Own, an effort to support all southwest Minnesota kids and their families. Our partner funds – including local community foundations, school foundations, donor-advised funds and others – also fund this work. SWIF is organizing its efforts around the framework shown here, which highlights what kids need to succeed.



**SOUTHWEST INITIATIVE
FOUNDATION**

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GROW OUR OWN ONLINE

Grow Our Own: Supporting Our Kids from Cradle to Career is a special TV program created in collaboration with Pioneer Public Television. It features excerpts from the 2018 Grow Our Own Summit and raises awareness about the economic and social realities facing today's youth, and the role all community members play in equipping them for lifelong success. **To see the program, along with complete presentations from the summit's national and local speakers, visit pioneer.org/growourown.**

Southwest Minnesota panelists Rhoda Hubbard, Theodora Jarrell, Ned Wohlman, Matthew Mallery, Adry Stafford and Blanca Palma with moderator Dana Nelson.



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