



**way to grow™**

*2015 Annual Report*



What we do together  
matters.

## Dear Friends



“

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

”

Margaret Mead

Way to Grow has never doubted the positive impact our parents can have on the community when armed with essential tools to change the trajectory of their lives. Many milestones were met by our parents who participated in parent advocacy groups, health and nutrition classes, and family game nights focused on improving their children's math and literacy skills.

Last year, 92% of our preschoolers were ready for school—an all-time high! In addition, 68% of our elementary students were reading at or above grade level and more than 90% of our parents attended a parent-teacher conference. With your support and the hard work of Way to Grow Family Educators, teachers, and staff members, we were able to impact more than 1,368 children and 1,001 parents, and complete over 11,000 home visits.

Together, we are carrying out our founders' vision of creating a community where improved literacy, effective parenting, and healthy children and families are the norm, not the exception. We are seeing this very vision come to life as more of our families move forward, find new jobs, enroll in school, and spend more time teaching their children. We often see the people we have served graduate from high school and go on to be the first to attend college in their family, but many others are still navigating through the obstacles to the finish line.

We could not do any of this work without the dedicated team of leaders at Way to Grow, or our community partners and parents. I would like to express my sincerest thanks to the Way to Grow board of directors, our supporters, and our donors who continue to support us tirelessly and allow us to carry out this important work.

Thank you for believing in Way to Grow. Thank you for being a part of the collective group of people who have been determined to make a difference in closing the opportunity gap in our community!

Sincerely,

Carolyn Smallwood  
Executive Director

# Who We Are



“

When I went to conferences and I met the teacher, she said overall my son is doing well in every area. I just want to let you know that without Way to Grow’s help, I don’t think he could have gone this far because we use many of the tools from your program. We love Way to Grow!

”

Amina  
Way to Grow Parent

## About Way to Grow

### OUR MISSION

Working closely with parents and communities, we ensure that children within the most isolated families are born healthy, stay healthy, and are prepared for school.

### OUR VISION

Together, we will ensure that every child has an equal opportunity to succeed in school and life.

## Our Story

For more than 25 years, **Way to Grow** has brought the community together to address the serious and prevalent gap in early childhood education in Minneapolis. In 1989, when then Mayor Don Fraser, Honeywell CEO, Jim Renier and the Greater Twin Cities United Way formed **Way to Grow**, community leaders around the country were beginning to recognize the ever-growing gap between low- and middle-income children. Minneapolis decided to do something about it.

Originally a program of the Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board, the **Way to Grow** mission brought together different facets of our community to address the early childhood gaps. We connected city programming, corporate community partners, and organizational leaders from across the Twin Cities to make change happen. Our founders and early supporters believed that only by working together could we make a difference.

In 2004, **Way to Grow** became an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit and under the direction of Carolyn Smallwood, began to develop and implement research-based, holistic best practices. Our Great By Eight program is now the cornerstone of our work and our unique, proven methods secure our role as a leader in early childhood education.

## Shaping the Future

### EARLY EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS MATTER

In the first five years of life, a child’s brain grows to 85% of its full capacity. During this time, children begin to form a sense of what is possible and attainable in their young lives. Furthermore, studies show that nurturing learning from birth greatly increases a child’s chance to succeed in school and life. That’s what we do every day at **Way to Grow**.



### CREATING A HOME FOR LEARNING

**Way to Grow** provides critical school-readiness and home visiting services to some of the most isolated families in Minneapolis. For over 25 years, we have worked to close the early childhood education gap, touching the lives of over 66,000 parents and children. Through family support services, health and wellness education, early childhood and elementary education, and teen parenting support, we provide the knowledge and the tools needed to move our families forward and help their children succeed.



### STRENGTHENING THE FUTURE

Parents are a child’s first and most powerful teachers. Through our holistic home visiting model, families are able to address their individual needs—and it’s working. In 2015, 100% of **Way to Grow**’s center-based preschoolers were deemed ready for school. What’s more, we now see former **Way to Grow** children completing high school, entering college, and changing the future of the next generation and our community.





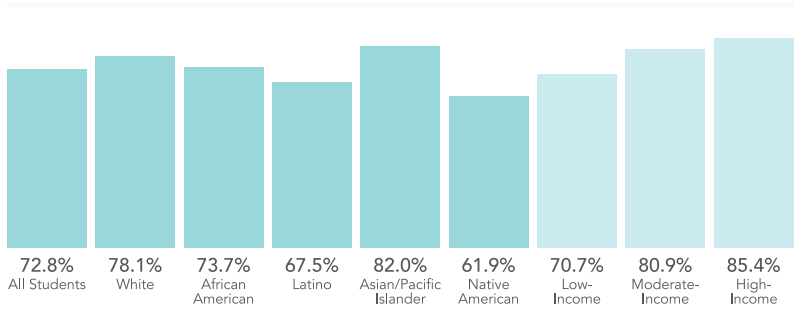
# Our Work



## Needed More Than Ever

Minnesota prides itself on its high-quality education system and statistically high-ranking students, yet our children of color are falling behind. We have one of the highest achievement gaps in the country and as Minnesota becomes more diverse, work like that of the Way to Grow Great By Eight program is increasingly important.

Minnesota Kindergarten Readiness\*



\*Information taken from MinnCAN Research Snapshot, March 2016

## Our Results in 2015



11,220  
home visits

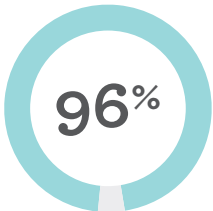


2,369  
clients served



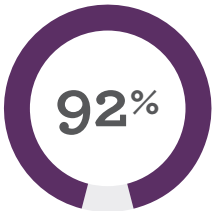
2,398  
resource referrals

### HEALTH EDUCATION



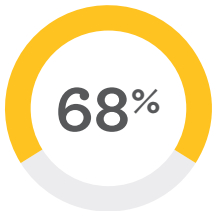
of full-term newborns born at or above a healthy birth weight

### EARLY CHILDHOOD



of Way to Grow children prepared for kindergarten

### ELEMENTARY PROGRAM



of K–3 students read at or above grade level

### TEEN PARENTING



of parenting teens did not have a repeat pregnancy



“

That was the first time I had ever pictured my kids in a cap and gown — and there he was; graduating! I will always remember that day, and thinking to myself for the first time, ‘My children are going to go far!’

”

Jacqueline  
Former Way to Grow parent

## Graduation Day

When Jose first made his way to us, his mother, Jacqueline, had recently migrated from Nicaragua and was living with her mother-in-law. Things didn’t work out, and soon Jose, his sister Shania, and mom found themselves with nowhere to go. Jacqueline’s friend told her about a program in Minneapolis doing great things. That program was **Way to Grow**.

“I picked up the phone, and I called right away,” Jacqueline shares. “The next morning, we got in the car while it was still dark outside. We drove for over an hour, straight to **Way to Grow**.” Little did she know then, the decision to pack the car that day would prove to be a turning point for the family.

When they arrived at **Way to Grow**, they met their Family Educator and were connected to resources to stabilize their family. Through these connections, Jacqueline was able to find housing and furniture, food and clothing, and a quality school for her two young children. Her Family Educator also began home visits to help Jose enter kindergarten as prepared as possible.

Jacqueline smiles thinking back to those early years as she pulls out a photo. “This day was one of the proudest days of my life,” she says looking down at Jose’s **Way to Grow** graduation portrait. “That was the first time I had ever pictured my kids in a cap and gown.”

Today, Shania has received a full-ride scholarship to Northwestern University where she just completed her freshman year. Her hope is to graduate with a degree in occupational therapy and to one day buy her mother her first house.

Jose is a high school student at Hope Academy. With a 4.0 GPA, he is a soccer player, a track star, and a **Way to Grow** alumnus. He continues to work hard, sometimes falling asleep at the table while doing homework late at night. Jose shares, “My Mom always fights in life. She has always kept us together and works so hard to support us. I am so thankful for all of the opportunities I have been given in this life here, because of her and what **Way to Grow** did for my family.”

It is inspiring to see our **Way to Grow** alumni making an impact within their family and in their community. We will never know all the lives that Jose, Shania and Jacqueline will touch. However, we can be confident that our work has had a return that was worth far more than that early investment.





“

I love Way to Grow—it’s like family to me. When I see families feel like they belong, and know they have someone they can count on, it gives me joy. I may be tired at the end of the day after many home visits, but seeing my families’ lives changed from education renews me again.

”

Maria Soto  
Way to Grow Family Educator



## Programs and Services

### FAMILY SUPPORT

Effective early learning starts in a stable home. While Way to Grow parents are committed to helping their children succeed in life, overwhelming economic and social barriers often block their way. Our Resource Advocates work closely with parents to address the challenges their families may face and need help to overcome.

### HEALTH AND WELLNESS

A strong start happens in a healthy home. Research shows that when children are born healthy, they have fewer developmental delays through their formative years. Our in-home health and wellness programming teaches parents about prenatal care, nutrition, immunizations, well-child checkups, and safety to ensure all children are healthy and prepared to learn. When necessary, our Resource Advocates refer families to health and dental care partners.

### CENTER-BASED LEARNING

Way to Grow has two high-quality center-based preschools for enrolled families with children ages three to five. Preschool Pals, a four-day-a-week program, is National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredited and has been awarded a four-star rating by Minnesota Parent Aware. Preschool P.A.L.S. also has classes four days a week and engages parents through parent-child classes twice a month.



### GREAT BY EIGHT EARLY LEARNING

Success starts well before the first school bell. During home visits, Family Educators use the *Sprouts* curriculum to teach parents how to promote vocabulary development through conversation, sound awareness, and alphabet knowledge with their infants and toddlers ages zero to three. For children ages three to five, Family Educators utilize the *Read Together, Talk Together* curriculum to prepare children for school and to continue teaching literacy skills like vocabulary, alliteration, rhyming, letter naming, and letter sounds.

### GREAT BY EIGHT ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Reading skills at age eight strongly influence a child’s high school, college, and future success. Through a partnership with Minneapolis Public Schools, the Great by Eight K-3 Elementary Education program focuses on the skills children need to develop by the end of third grade. Participants in the Way to Grow K-3 Elementary Education program receive home visits to support the academic development of students; and parental support in navigating the school system, becoming involved in their child’s education, and building relationships with teachers.

### DREAM TRACKS TEEN PARENTING PROGRAM

Young parents face many obstacles beyond raising a child. Way to Grow works with these families through our Dream Tracks program, helping to educate and prepare parents ages 15-21 for a successful life. Dream Tracks addresses parenting challenges, provides motivation and emotional empowerment, helps parents maintain a focus on academic success and career goals, and provides information pertaining to sexual and reproductive health. Not only do our youngest parents feel supported and part of a community, there are fewer repeat pregnancies with our teen parents.

## Lucy C. Laney Community School

To increase our presence in the school setting, we at Way to Grow expanded our home visiting, early childhood, elementary, and parent engagement programming to Lucy C. Laney Community School in North Minneapolis. In collaboration with Wooddale Church, Way to Grow works on-site to provide services to families with children ages 0–8 (through grade three) both in the home and school/center environment.

The Way to Grow Family Room at Lucy Laney acts as a home base for many children and families in the community. At this new site, families are invited to participate in activities supporting both parent and student goals. These activities include open play time, personalized resource connections, parent/child activities in our Play to Grow classes using curriculum for children 0–5, and K–3 tutoring in partnership with Wooddale Church.

We envision great things happening with this program as we continue to connect with additional Lucy Laney families and the surrounding community.







## Jessica & La’rissa

If you are lucky enough to find yourself in a room with Jessica and her 18 month-old daughter, La’rissa, you know what pure pride and joy looks like. But, 21 year-old Jessica wasn’t always so full of life. Jessica enrolled in **Way to Grow** during one of the most challenging times in her young life; a time when she found herself pregnant, alone, and bouncing around from shelter to shelter without any hope she could provide for herself and her unborn child.

“Within a few months, I had lost my apartment, found out I was pregnant, and lost all my friends. I was very depressed and struggled with suicidal thoughts,” Jessica admits. Angie, Jessica’s first **Way to Grow** Family Educator, helped her work through her emotional pain and encouraged her to find stability in her once chaotic life. “Angie was there for me at a time I didn’t have anybody else to talk to. She helped me through some tough stuff and to realize I could do this.”

When La’rissa was born, Jessica says, “It was really like something in me switched. I saw how much joy she brought out of me – it was like the world stopped. My problems didn’t matter, because she was right there,” Jessica says. This precious little human was the inspiration Jessica needed.

“I realized I didn’t want to raise my daughter on collecting checks,” Jessica states frankly. “And Ashley [my new Family Educator] has helped me work on my resume, look for jobs, and prepare for interviews during our time at Dream Tracks [Way to Grow’s teen parenting program]. Ashley has also helped me with La’rissa as she has grown. Ashley helps La’rissa practice talking more by reading books with her and asking her questions about the book. She found out that La’rissa really likes saying the different colors, playing games, and doing counting activities, so we do a lot of that at home visits. Watching her work with La’rissa helps me know what to do, like to know that building with blocks is good for her development, and she helps me find little books with questions I can ask La’rissa in the back.”

When you are a teen parent, life holds a lot of ups and downs. Jessica’s path will not be easy, but with **Way to Grow** in her corner she looks forward to a brighter future for her and her daughter, La’rissa.

## Parent Engagement and Support

### NEW PARENT SUPPORT GROUP

During our monthly New Parent Support Group, expectant parents and parents with babies up to 18 months participate in activities that support parent education, child development, and health. These sessions are designed to create an intimate, open environment where parents can share their experiences and receive relevant information on topics like daily routines, money-saving ideas, sleep schedules, safety, and nutrition, all while teaching their babies through play.

### COOKING MATTERS

In partnership with the University of Minnesota Extension Services, **Way to Grow** offers Cooking Matters, a six-week cooking and nutrition course for parents and their children. Families learn skills for healthy cooking, eating, and shopping, as well as how to plan healthy meals on a tight budget. During the class, a professional chef demonstrates how to prepare those nutritious meals at home and parents leave with the groceries and knowledge to be able to cook healthy meals for their families.

### PARENT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Our Parent Leadership Council teaches parents how to advocate for their families and communities at large. Participants are equipped to build relationships with their children’s teachers and school administrators, as well as find resources for education and employment. These parents work alongside **Way to Grow** as they help share the success of our program with other parents and supporters.







“

I’ll never forget Ayan coming up to me after a Cooking Matters class, and sharing she knows how to look at labels at the grocery store and that she and her family make healthy meals together now, eating dinner together at least 3 times a week. Ayan also signed her family up for the YMCA. This is just one of many stories I have heard from families on how our health programming has changed, not only their nutrition knowledge, but their lifestyle.

”

Megan McLaughlin  
Way to Grow Program Director

## Healthy Bodies, Healthy Lives

In 2015, we at Way to Grow expanded our health and nutrition programming to further address the growing health disparities facing Minnesota families such as poor nutrition, obesity, and hunger. When we raise up our families, we raise up the entire community.

Nutrition and education are interconnected and deeply affect the lives of the families we serve. Studies show that nutritional deficiencies early in life can negatively affect overall health, cognitive development, concentration, academic performance, and have a lasting, detrimental effect on learning and memory.

In response, we expanded the health component of our work to include a new curriculum for home visits, additional healthy cooking and nutrition classes, family nutrition events, and intentional, health-focused instruction for Way to Grow preschoolers.

Last year, our health and nutrition program reached all 739 Way to Grow families. Results from our home visit nutrition education surveys found 97% parents reported increased access to healthy foods and 92% of parents indicated increased nutrition knowledge. In addition, parents say they are making reductions in the amount of sugars and

salt in their children’s diets and are increasing the amount of daily walking and movement with their children.

“I recognize that healthy habits are essential and very important to maintaining a healthy body. I learn that to eat each food in the [5] groups is important for good health,” a Way to Grow parent shared.

Parents are a child’s most important teacher in all aspects of life and in 2016, our work continues to educate and empower our families to create a culture of health, wellbeing, and learning in their own home.



## Financials



### Operating Revenue & Expenses

REVENUE	2015	2014
Contributions	\$140,629	\$146,633
Government	\$889,064	\$904,634
Foundation	\$1,162,233	\$992,117
United Way	\$123,994	\$124,462
Program Service	\$114,841	\$73,692
Annual Celebration	\$191,553	\$136,826
Interest & Other Income	\$782	\$2,135
Total Operating Revenue	\$2,623,096	\$2,380,499

EXPENSES		
Program Services	\$1,812,517	\$1,773,313
Administrative Services	\$201,162	\$177,668
Fundraising Services	\$363,364	\$314,524
Total Operating Expenses	\$2,377,043	\$2,265,505

### Financial Position

ASSETS	2015	2014
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash	\$726,683	\$400,912
Receivables	\$489,762	\$618,166
Prepays	\$40,875	\$38,654
Total Current Assets	\$1,257,320	\$1,057,732

PROPERTY & EQUIPMENT		
Furniture & Equipment (net of depreciation)	\$79,093	\$82,818
Total Property & Equipment	\$79,093	\$82,818

OTHER ASSETS		
Long-term Receivables	\$0	\$220,000
Deposits	\$10,906	\$10,906
Total Other Assets	\$10,906	\$230,906
Total Assets	\$1,347,319	\$1,371,456

### LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS

CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Accounts Payable	\$30,757	\$25,426
Accrued Expenses	\$56,183	\$114,331
Unearned Revenue	\$26,860	\$0
Total Current Liabilities	\$113,800	\$139,757

NET ASSETS		
Unrestricted	\$699,319	\$453,266
Temporarily Restricted	\$534,200	\$778,433
Total Net Assets	\$1,233,519	\$1,231,699
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$1,347,319	\$1,371,456



# Thank You

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Thank you to all our donors and community partners! We have made every effort to make sure our list is accurate, but we know mistakes can happen. Should you have any corrections, updates, feedback, or wish to learn more about how your gift is changing the lives of our families, please contact **Way to Grow** at 612.874.4740.

“

Supporting Way to Grow over the past several years, I have seen firsthand the impact of both my financial and volunteer support. I walk away knowing my involvement with the organization means more families are on a path to success, starting with the parents first.

”

Monica Little  
Founder and Chair, Little & Company



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Allina Health	Jewish Family & Children’s Services of Minneapolis – Parent Child Home Program	Powderhorn Cultural Wellness Center
American Indian Family Center	Joyce Preschool	Prodeo Academy
Aurora Charter School	Kente Circle	Sabathani Community Center
Bell Museum of Natural History	Kids in Need	The Salvation Army
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota	Kidz Kloset	St. Stephen’s Human Services
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Broadway Family Medicine	Legal Aid Society	Sustainable Resource Center, Inc.
Broadway School at Longfellow	Links Women’s Organization	Tapestry Resource Center
Bundles of Love	Lucy Laney at Cleveland Park Community School	Think Small
Center for Families at Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church	Lundstrum Center for the Performing Arts	Twin Cities Rise
Centro Cultural Chicano	Lutheran Social Services	UCare
Children’s Defense Fund	MacPhail Center for Music	United Health Group
Children’s Dental Services	Magers & Quinn Booksellers	University Life Care Center
Children’s Hospitals & Clinics of Minnesota	Medica	University of Minnesota Center for Early Education & Development
Children’s Theatre Company	MinnCAN	University of Minnesota Extension - Cooking Matters Program
Church of St. Gerard	Minneapolis Early Childhood Screening	University of Minnesota Physician Clinics
City of Minneapolis Office of Multicultural Services	Minneapolis Healthy Start	University of Minnesota Technical Assistance Program
Community Initiatives for Children – Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)	Minneapolis Public Schools	University of Minnesota Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center
Community University Health Care Center	Minneapolis Public Schools Early Childhood Special Education	Urban Ventures
Division of Indian Work	Minneapolis Public Schools Early Learning Labs, Inc.	Washburn Center for Children
Early Childhood Family Education	Minneapolis Public Schools Health Related Services	Wellshare International
Early Childhood Intervention Services of Hennepin County	Minneapolis Public Schools New Families Center	Women Achieving New Directions (WAND)
Early Head Start	Minneapolis Public Schools Teen Parent Services	Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
East Side Neighborhood Services	Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children	
Emerge Family Supportive Housing Program	Minnesota Children’s Museum	
Fairview Health Services & Clinics	Minnesota Comeback	
The Family Partnership	Minnesota Indian Women’s Resource Center (MIWRC)	
FirstBook	Minnesota Internship Center (MNIC)	
Four Directions Early Learning Center	Minnesota Lynx	
Friendship Academy School	Minnesota Timberwolves	
Gale Woods Farm	Minnesota Twins	
General Mills	Minnesota Visiting Nurse Agency (MVNA)	
Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches	Minnesota Workforce Center	
Generation Next	Native American Community Clinic	
Harvest Prep/Best Academy	North Life Care Center	
Head Start, Parents In Community Action (PICA)	Northside Achievement Zone	
Hennepin County Human Services & Public Health Department	NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center	
Hennepin County Medical Center & Clinics	NorthPoint Human Services	
Hennepin County Research, Planning & Development Department	PACER Center	
Hennepin County Teen Parent Connection	Park Avenue Methodist Church	
Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association, Inc.	Park Nicollet Health Services	
	People Serving People	
	Phyllis Wheatley Community Center	
	Pillsbury United Communities	

## Partner Spotlight: Little & Company

**Way to Grow** has been honored to be the recipient of seven years of pro bono work by Little, a design and branding agency in Minneapolis. Since 2009, Little has worked with **Way to Grow** to enhance its public presence and support fundraising efforts. Some of Little’s incredible work includes rebranding the organization, website redesign, online marketing, video production, and fundraising efforts. In addition, the employees support the community through annual drives for books, food, clothing, and personal care items to help our families meet their basic needs.

President and chief creative officer of Little, Joe Cecere, said, “Education is the solution to generational poverty, one of the most critical issues affecting the well-being of our community. With partners like **Way to Grow**, our teams are inspired to use our design talents to

make a real difference in the lives of families and children in our own neighborhoods.”

Little’s phenomenal creative campaign with **Way to Grow** earned them a Minnesota Business Magazine Community Impact Award. Congratulations, Little, and thank you to the numerous team members who have worked on our behalf! We are so grateful to have you as our continued partner, working together to ensure all children succeed in school and life.



Great by Eight is supported by a subgrant from the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service. The Social Innovation Fund combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the United States.



# Our Board

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- David Henderson, Treasurer

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Schroeder Company
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Director of Master of Public + Nonprofit  
Administration Program/Professor in  
College of Management,  
Metropolitan State University



“  
In my work with Way to  
Grow, I know my support  
of the organization’s  
early childhood  
programs can make an  
extraordinary difference  
in outcomes for the child,  
their family, and society.  
”  
  
Laurie Lafontaine  
Way to Grow Board Chair



Life thrives when we create  
a home for learning.





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Executive Director



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