



First Children's Finance Newsletter

December 2024

Welcome!

As we find ourselves in this busy holiday season, First Children's Finance staff wants to sincerely thank everyone who supports our organization and those who participate in our programs, services, and funding opportunities.

Our work centers on supporting the vital work that child care entrepreneurs and countless others do to ensure that families and children have safe, sustainable child care each day.

As 2024 draws to a close, we wanted to share some great examples of FCF's work and success stories from outstanding providers who are making a difference.

FCF Names Chief Program Officer Heidi Hagel-Braid as New President and CEO

First Children's Finance (FCF) is proud to announce the appointment of Heidi Hagel-Braid as its new President and Chief Executive Officer. Heidi is only the second CEO in the non-profit's 33-year history, succeeding founder Jerry Cutts, who retired in September 2024.

Heidi's career at FCF spans over 12 years, most recently serving as Chief Program Officer. During her tenure, she has spearheaded several groundbreaking initiatives, including the Rural Child Care Innovation Program and the First Children First Nations Child Care Collaborative, an initiative to build Tribal child care supply, and the ECE Business Collaboratory, a program designed for states and Tribes to address the business and finance needs of child care from a system perspective. Her leadership has been instrumental in guiding FCF through periods of transition and growth, ensuring the organization maintained a strategic programmatic focus while navigating industry challenges.

Under Heidi's leadership as Chief Program Officer (CPO), First Children's Finance played a vital role in supporting small child care businesses across the country during the pandemic. The organization administered millions of dollars in pass-through grants and forgivable loans while also expanding its operations by opening a fourth state office and nearly tripling its workforce in just over three years. Most recently, as Interim President and CEO, Heidi successfully secured state funding to establish Oregon as the fifth state office location for FCF — further demonstrating her readiness to assume the permanent CEO role.

As CEO, Heidi will focus on strengthening the sustainability and accessibility of high-quality child care, advocating for a well-compensated workforce, and driving innovative solutions to the complex challenges facing the sector. Her vision will continue to align resources and build the capacity needed to improve outcomes for children, families, and child care providers nationwide.



FCF Honors Founder Jerry Cutts on His Retirement After

Leading for More Than 33 Years

On November 12, First Children's Finance staff, friends, and family had the opportunity to celebrate the retirement of the organization's founder, Jerry Cutts, who also served as President and CEO for more than 33 years.



Jerry started FCF in 1991 and dedicated himself to transforming and enriching the lives of countless individuals. His visionary leadership and unwavering commitment shined through even the most challenging circumstances, as he consistently sought viable solutions with a heartfelt determination.

Jerry was a pioneer in highlighting the important intersection of child care and community economic development. Building on that, he deeply understood the profound impact of FCF's mission and passionately guided the organization in creating thousands of sustainable child care businesses.

In conversations with Jerry, it becomes quickly evident how much he cares—not only about child care but also about his family. As a devoted husband, father, and grandfather, his love for his family is at the heart of who he is.

First Children's Finance is deeply grateful to Jerry for his vision, leadership, and dedication. The organization would not exist without Jerry; even in retirement, he will always remain a part of FCF.

Thank you, Jerry, as you begin the next chapter of your life. It is clearly well-earned and richly deserved.

*Thank You to the Sponsors of
Our 2024 All Staff Meeting!*



FCF National Consulting Team Works with the State of Wisconsin to Provide Successful Business Training



In 2022, First Children's Finance (FCF) partnered with the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families to support Project Growth's Dream Up! Child Care Supply Building Grant program to support and expand the supply of child care throughout the state.

Through this program, FCF worked with communities using a collaborative, community-led approach to evaluate, plan, and sustain existing care and expand child care in needed areas.

"I loved the business aspect of this program. I wish I had this training before I opened my family child care."
- Program Participant

[Read the Full Story and Report HERE!](#)

Floodwood (MN) Responds to Child Care Crisis Through Partnerships and Teamwork

When three of the four family child care providers in the Floodwood, MN, area closed down within a year, the community was in trouble.

The town of 500 people, one hour west of Duluth, needed a solution. It had become a child care desert, and the number of childcare slots in the community could not meet current or future needs.



"We knew we had to do something," said Danielle Larva, board president of Polar Cubs Childcare Center. "We had to find a way to help our community meet what we all knew was a desperate need."

FCF Awards \$50,000 Grant to Craftsbury Saplings, Supports Statewide Expansion of VT Child Care

First Children's Finance VT (FCF) announced the first recipients of the Vermont Planning Grant Project, a program designed to expand child care capacity across the state.



Among the awardees is [Craftsbury Saplings](#), which received a \$50,000 grant to plan a new child care facility in Craftsbury, Vermont. With its current facility at capacity and a lengthy waitlist, the \$50,000 grant helps lay the foundation for a new 7,100-square-foot building that will nearly triple its current capacity from 19 children to 54.

Vermont Planning Grants Project—made possible through a partnership with Let's Grow Kids and funding from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development—provides in-kind professional services, child care business assistance, and a financial stipend to support planning a capital construction project for new or expanded child care operations.

[Read the Full Story Here!](#)



Partnership, Perseverance Help Minneapolis Couple Open "Awesome" Home-based Child Care

Nearly 30 years ago, First Children's Finance built the Corcoran home in south Minneapolis as part of a plan to build home-based child care centers in areas of high need.

No, after working with FCF staff members for the past year, Phyllis and Burt Turner have opened the child care center of their dreams that will help neighborhood families for years to come. [\(Click on the video above to watch their story.\)](#)

Minnesota Communities Gather to Celebrate Success Through FCF Rural Program

An essential part of hard work is celebrating success when the job is done or nearing the finish line. On September 25, First Children's Finance spent a day celebrating with communities that had successfully found solutions to child care and staffing issues through the help of the Rural Child Care Innovation Program (RCCIP), Child Care Strategic Supply Plan, and other community consultation.



Nearly 100 community, county, and state leaders gathered to hear success stories from across the state, highlighting innovative child care centers, family child care, and staffing models.

[Read about the MN Event!](#)

[Attention Providers: Upcoming FCF Trainings](#)

First Children's Finance offers online training opportunities in Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Oregon, Vermont and Wisconsin.

[Visit Our Website](#)

FCF in the News


[New Child Care Facility for Rural Northern Vermont Close to Breaking Ground](#)

[EFCF Minnesota Director Attributes Child Care Crisis to 'Broken' Business Model, Offers Solutions](#)

[What Happens When a State Brings Deep Discounts to Child Care?](#)

[Pipestone \(MN\) Community Members Brainstorm Child Care Solutions](#)

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