

# Our Community Promise

2017 Way to Grow Annual Report

way to grow™

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What we do together matters.



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.

Dear Friends,



Way to Grow was founded with one promise to our community: that we would work every day to change the lives of some of our most vulnerable neighbors. After 29 years, we are proud to have reached over 68,000 children and their families across Minneapolis. Through the hard work and dedication of our staff, community partners, donors, and volunteers, we have helped stabilize families, built networks of services, and prepared children for school.

Each year, we recommit ourselves to serving our neighbors—to ensure that all children have an equal opportunity to succeed in school and life—and 2017 was no different. Last year, 87% of preschoolers were prepared for kindergarten, 100% of teen parents did not have a repeat pregnancy, and 91% of parents attended a parent-teacher conference. We proudly worked with partner agencies to provide 2,353 referrals for basic needs and services, and our team of Family Educators reached 1,409 children and 1,003 adults through 11,665 home visits. What's more, with dozens of group sessions, preschool classes, and events throughout the year, we brought neighbors together, celebrated successes, and provided critical support to over 760 families.

We could not have done all this without our leaders at Way to Grow, our board of directors, generous donors, dedicated community partners, and hard-working volunteers. It is only through working together that we are able to make change and impact lives. Thank you for your support and guidance.

Way to Grow believes that every one of our neighbors is a valued member of our community, and we are committed to continuing to fight for education and economic equity for all. As the late Senator Paul Wellstone said, "We all do better when we all do better." Won't you join us in our promise of providing a brighter future? What we do together matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Smallwood".

Carolyn Smallwood,  
Chief Executive Officer



# Touring 2017



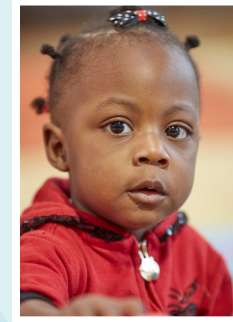
## EARLY EDUCATION

In 2017, Way to Grow served 1,409 children. 60 attended one of our NAEYC, Four-Star Parent Aware preschools.



## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

In support of creating a culture of learning in the home, we hosted 4 Family Engagement Nights with over 170 participants in 2017.



## DREAM TRACKS TEEN PARENTING PROGRAM

In 2017, Way to Grow served 55 teen parents through our *Dream Tracks* program, where they learned about reproductive health, money management, goal setting, and life skills.



## SHINE CELEBRATION

In October, hundreds of Way to Grow supporters contributed over \$490,000 for our programming.



## BACK TO SCHOOL

In the fall, Way to Grow distributed 350 backpacks filled with school supplies, in partnership with Greater Twin Cities United Way.



## NUTRITION EDUCATION

Way to Grow hosted 30 weeks of cooking courses offered through our partnerships with Cooking Matters and Expanded Food and Nutrition Program (EFNEP) with University of Minnesota Extension.



## WAY TO GROW FAMILY ROOM

Our Way to Grow Family Room at Lucy C. Laney hosted Play to Grow, Together We Grow, weekly tutoring, and engagement events throughout 2017, bringing together families, Family Educators, and volunteers.



## GRADUATIONS

In June, we congratulated over 60 third graders who graduated from our Great By Eight program. Two months later, 500+ children and families celebrated 116 preschoolers at our Early Learner Graduation. In 2017, 87% of Way to Grow preschoolers were deemed ready for kindergarten.



## CRADLE TO K

In 2017, Way to Grow participated in the final year of Mayor Betsy Hodges' Cradle to K initiative. CEO Carolyn Smallwood co-chaired the cabinet that was launched in 2014.



## MY VOICE MATTERS

Way to Grow launched a new parent engagement initiative, *My Voice Matters*, hosting workshops and events to help parents navigate the systems that impact their child's education.



## VOLUNTEERS

More than 120 volunteers donated over 300 hours of time in 2017, increasing our capacity to serve families.



## ADOPT-A-FAMILY

In December, our friends at Allina provided basic needs supplies and gifts to over 30 Way to Grow families through our Adopt-a-Family program.





## Our Community Promise

For 29 years, Way to Grow has brought the community together to address the serious and prevalent gap in early childhood education in Minneapolis. While Minnesota may be a leader in education, our children of color are too often left behind. With one of the largest opportunity gaps in the country, we have made a promise to our community—we will be there for you.

At Way to Grow, we support families with children from birth to age eight, empowering our next generation of leaders. We are proud to work with more than 2,400 individuals in both North and South Minneapolis—neighbors who work hard to provide for their children and are active in their community and their child’s education. With a team of talented Family Educators and Resource Advocates, we provide year-round services every day to these families throughout the city.

For almost three decades, we have led the Twin Cities’ early childhood education community with our innovative home visiting model and expansive programming. Yet while we have touched the lives of thousands of people, we know there are still families who need our help. To reach those not already receiving our services, we are finding new ways to share our knowledge with our ever-growing community.

Way to Grow staff can be seen at neighborhood events, school nights, and even in the grocery line, telling new parents about the resources available to their family. Last year alone, Family Educators attended more than 30 events to connect with new families. The cornerstone of our work may happen at home, but there is much that we can do to shape the future of our youngest neighbors and their families throughout our entire community.

Closing the opportunity gap must be a community-wide effort. In 2017, Way to Grow partnered with over 100 community partners to provide critical basic needs and additional enrichment opportunities for our families. Our work was further supported by more than 325 donors who chose to invest in the future of our families, and in turn, in the vitality of this community. Finally, **more than 120 volunteers** inspired us by giving their time and talents to support our programs.



At Way to Grow, we believe it is important to engage not only our supporters in the fight to close the opportunity gap, but also our families. Programming like our Play to Grow and Together We Grow parent groups, classes at the Way to Grow Room at Lucy C. Laney Community School, Cooking Matters cooking and nutrition courses, our My Voice Matters initiative, and family engagement nights continue to create a culture of learning in the home and empower families to change their lives and brighten their futures.

*Our community promise is more than a promise to our families. It’s a pact that weaves a web of support between parents and families, community partners, teachers, donors, and volunteers. We are all in this together—stewards of community and caretakers of one another. Won’t you join us?*



2,422  
clients  
served

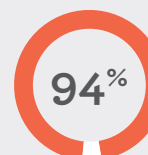


11,665  
home visits

2,353  
resource  
referrals

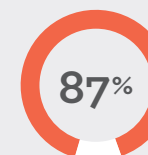


### HEALTH EDUCATION



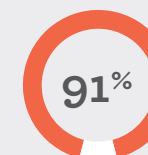
of full-term newborns born at or above healthy birth weight

### EARLY CHILDHOOD



of Way to Grow children prepared for kindergarten

### ELEMENTARY



of K–3 students improved on grade-level vocabulary assessments

### TEEN PARENTING



of parenting teens without a repeat pregnancy



# A Pipeline to Success:

# Great By Eight

## FAMILY SUPPORT

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

## EARLY LEARNING

## ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

## CENTER-BASED LEARNING

## DREAM TRACKS TEEN PARENTING



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 stand in their way. Way to Grow Family Educators get to know each family and work with them to identify their needs, and our Resource Advocates work closely with clients to address the challenges they may face by connecting them to critical services. Whether we are providing books to build a home library or referrals to housing opportunities, we are there for our families every step of the way.



A strong start happens in a healthy home. Through our *Growing Strong* program, we work with families in the home, teaching 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. Out of the home, we partner with local agencies to provide an annual Health and Nutrition Fair as well as several sessions of cooking and nutrition courses.



Parents are a child's first and most important teachers. During home visits, Way to Grow Family Educators offer developmentally appropriate early learning experiences for children birth through age five. With the whole child in mind, our staff guides parents through an understanding of child development, health and nutrition, emergent literacy, and social-emotional learning. All activities are designed to model different learning approaches and introduce parents to key skills as they read and play with their child.



Our elementary programming focuses on the tools elementary children (K-3) need to be successful as they progress through school. While the focus is literacy-rich, other subjects like math and science are incorporated during bi-monthly visits. Home visits are centered around skill-building for both parent and child, as well as helping parents navigate the K-12 education system. Staff work with families to understand the development of their children's academic skills, and provide parental support as families become involved in their child's education and build relationships with teachers and school administrators.



Way to Grow has two high-quality, center-based preschools for enrolled families with children ages three to five, which are National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredited and have been awarded a four-star rating by Minnesota Parent Aware. Programming is centered around the interest of the child and the developmentally appropriate practices of our highly effective preschool staff. Unique from other early learning programs, our preschools offer monthly parent-child classes and field trips. Way to Grow's preschools foster the positive relationship between family and school and provide a fun learning environment for families in North and South Minneapolis.



Young parents face many obstacles beyond raising a child. Way to Grow works with these families through our *Dream Tracks Teen Parenting Program* to help 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 on sexual and reproductive health. Additionally, teen parents receive regular home visits and are invited to participate in all events and activities. Not only do our youngest parents feel supported and part of a community, there are fewer repeat pregnancies.



We share in a collective responsibility to be stewards of our neighborhoods, relationships, and traditions — our community.

**This is our promise.**

11 stories, 11 ways our community is coming together with the help of Way to Grow. These individuals represent the best of us as they work to support their families, neighbors, and friends. They embody the truth that we are all part of one community promise, that what we do together matters.

Whether you are a parent navigating school systems, a volunteer tackled by preschoolers, a donor dedicated to investing in the future, or a school bus driver turned role model, we are each part of the same community. Together, we carry the responsibility of caring for our neighbors.





*Our Community Promise:*

## Creating Lasting Bonds

**On his first day of preschool, Daniel could barely speak a word. A nervous child and unsure of his surroundings, Daniel didn't play or interact with any of the other children. His only method of communication was guiding his teacher to what he needed, and often he would burst with frustration. "Imagine being in a busy and new environment where you can't verbally communicate your needs," says Ashley Saupp, then the Lead Teacher of Way to Grow's Preschool P.A.L.S. "As an educator, I knew that the best environment and people for him would be those who supported him from where he was at the time, not from where he needed to be."**

"When Daniel first started preschool, he hardly spoke," explained his mother Berenisce. "I was afraid to send him, thinking that couldn't tell me what was happening at school, or communicate with his teacher and classmates." Her oldest son had recently graduated from Preschool P.A.L.S., and even though she was apprehensive, she trusted that Way to Grow would be able to support Daniel and his unique needs.

Surrounded by colorful pictures, toys for interactive play, and stacks of books, Preschool P.A.L.S. is a haven for fun, growth, and social interaction. Yet while the other children happily played and learned together, Daniel struggled to communicate and connect. Determined to help this new preschooler grow to his full potential, Ashley made sure every day was treated as an opportunity for growth. By utilizing a picture communication system combined with speech therapy, over the course of many months, Daniel learned how to communicate and convey his thoughts and needs. "He used to throw his shoes, hide underneath the table, and scream when he was frustrated that he couldn't get his point across. In time, he relied on me to self-regulate his behavior, and eventually he was able to do it himself," Ashley explains.

Taking awhile to become interested in interacting with the other children, Daniel leaned on his teacher for support. During playtime, Ashley would have him sit directly next to her, and after awhile they started inviting other kids to play with them. Over time, Ashley was able to slowly move away and allow Daniel space to play with his new friends all on his own. Ashley laughs, "It was almost like I had to wean him off of me!"

If Daniel's first year at P.A.L.S. was all about change and adapting to new surroundings, his second year was about personal growth. During year two in Ashley's classroom, Daniel's spirit and energy came alive as he gained the confidence to participate in class and grew in his language development. He developed friendships and became even more comfortable in the classroom. Having grown so much in his two years of preschool, Daniel's family placed him in kindergarten the following fall.

However, Daniel and his family quickly learned that elementary school was a very different environment than his former preschool classroom, and the transition proved to be very difficult. "It did not go well,"

explains Ashley. "He just was not emotionally and academically ready." Although not the traditional route, Berenisce knew that Daniel needed a little more time, so he returned to his former classroom for one more year. According to Ashley, "You cannot rush child development. You can guide it, but you cannot rush it."

Upon returning to Way to Grow's preschool, Daniel's third year focused on readiness. By giving him flexibility and more time to learn kindergarten expectations, Daniel adopted a new level of emotional maturity and exhibited a true yearning to learn. As Ashley describes, Daniel had truly transformed: "Our last day together was graduation in front of hundreds of people. What on his first day would have completely scared him, was a huge moment of celebration. He walked across the stage on his own and received his preschool diploma to the cheers of his family and new friends. I was so proud of him."

Today, Daniel is in 1st grade at Seward Montessori School. He can count to 100, speaks Spanish and English, and is especially interested in reading, writing, and animals. "Daniel is doing so well in his school," notes his mother enthusiastically. "He likes all of his friends and gets along with everyone!" Given his love of animals, it's no surprise that Daniel already wants to be a veterinarian when he grows up.

As Daniel moved on to kindergarten, Ashley also moved forward. She now leads both our NAEYC-accredited preschools as Way to Grow's Manager of Education Programming. Looking back at their time together, Ashley is reminded that while children are the focus of any classroom, their teachers learn right alongside them. "Often it's the case that we think about what our role is and what our impact was on our children, but it shouldn't always be like that," Ashley reflects. "Daniel gave me so many experiences and taught me so many lessons that I will use to help other children facing issues like his. We grew together, and that truly speaks to our mission and what we do in the community."





*Our Community Promise:*

## Investing Time and Energy

Barry Lee always thought his calling was to be a teacher, but life has a way of working in surprising ways. It wasn't until after a successful 40-year career in the private sector that he finally found himself sitting in a tiny chair, surrounded by children in a classroom.

For the past 10 years since retiring, Barry has volunteered in his community in various ways. Dedicated to education, Barry has spent the last three years as a weekly volunteer in our Preschool P.A.L.S. classroom. When asked why he chooses to spend his free time in the busy environment of a classroom, he replies, "When I retired I asked myself, 'Who am I to think that I can take the rest of my life off?'"

"Mr. Barry" as he is known in the classroom, dove headfirst into his work with the children. Working off verbal cues from the teachers and incorporating learning opportunities into playtime, he really feels like he is making a difference. "I've heard people think that volunteering with children at this age is babysitting. That is definitely not the case. It didn't take me long to discover that they are really bright young individuals," Barry explains.

His favorite moments at Way to Grow are the ones when the children have a "big-eyed" moment. "They have that epiphany, that moment of discovery and connection of what they learned and that they can actually use it. That feeling leaves me flying high for four to five days," he notes.

"Muhammad Ali once said, 'Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth,'" Barry reflects. "These children count on me. If I can fulfill my soul and improve the future of a child at the same time, I know I will have done my part."



Mr. Barry at Preschool P.A.L.S.



Sydney and her family

*Our Community Promise:*

## Access to Resources, Connection to Culture

Shared culture creates a bond that transcends everyday interactions, as culture resides in the heart and soul. This kind of deep connection can be found between Sydney and her family, and their Family Educator, Alison. Native American tradition and identity have always been important to Sydney and her husband. In fact, it's what brought them to Minneapolis—they wanted to learn the Dakota language and traditions so they could immerse their future children in their own culture.

After giving birth to her first child, Sydney pursued a degree in psychology. However, after having her second child a year later, she began to feel the pressure of all her responsibilities. "I would be given the choice to interact with my children or do my homework. Sometimes I would even have to work my part-time job, so some nights I would be doing homework until 2 a.m., and then I would have to wake up early in the morning and do it all over again with a smile. It wasn't working well," Sydney recalls. She credits a strong support system that included her Family Educator, Alison, and her husband as essential to getting through that tough time. Since then, the three have continued to work together to ensure the couple's now four children have access to opportunities.

"If I need something, have a question, or want some advice, I pick up my phone and give Alison a call, and she always has an answer for me," Sydney explains. Yet Alison is more than just another resource for the family—she truly understands Sydney and the goals she has for her family. "Having Alison, having a native person as my Family Educator, has positively contributed to my experience at Way to Grow. There is something about sharing a culture; she just understands where I am coming from and what I am going through," Sydney expresses. "She makes it easy and comfortable."

Knowing that other cultures and community opportunities are abundant in Minneapolis, it was important for Sydney to have her family experience as many as possible, something Alison and Way to Grow have helped them to do. "Alison and Way to Grow give us access to resources, opportunities, and events that we never would have been able to experience otherwise. They have been able to show us what community really is, and we are so grateful."





Deborah and Patty

*Our Community Promise:*

## Building Confidence

"I couldn't sit and do nothing," explains Deborah as her daughter Patty plays around her. Patty, a rambunctious eight year-old, was born with a genetic abnormality that affects her ability to communicate and concentrate. "She struggles with learning, but she has such a high level of empathy," says Collette, their Way to Grow Family Educator.

Deborah herself struggled in school and was a victim of bullying as a child. Looking back, she realizes this deeply affected her confidence. As a mother, she was adamant about creating a better life for her daughter and knew she needed resources to help make that happen, especially considering Patty's specific needs. Determined to support her daughter in every possible way, Deborah tirelessly researched and contacted resources to help Patty progress and grow. In early 2015, a referral from Healthy Families brought Deborah and Patty to Way to Grow.

Fast forward to today, and Collette says Patty has made significant progress in her reading. What's more, together she and Deborah have continued to build Patty's social skills while connecting her with environments and mentors that are helping her thrive. Reflecting on her time with Way to Grow, Deborah also recognizes that Patty was not the only one growing these past few years. By attending education and advocacy events, Deborah has expanded her own social skills, increased her confidence, and has become one of Way to Grow's most active parent champions. "Collette and Way to Grow have been a godsend to our lives. I cannot wait to see what our future holds!"

*Our Community Promise:*

## Lasting Partnerships: NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center

Making sure our families are healthy and ready to learn is a team effort. Since 1991, Way to Grow has partnered with NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center in Minneapolis to ensure that every child is physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively ready to succeed in kindergarten—and beyond.

NorthPoint is a pillar of North Minneapolis and has been serving families in the area since 1967. Located just down the road from Way to Grow, they provide a broad range of medical, behavioral health, dental, and social services to our community. Way to Grow has partnered with NorthPoint for over two decades to support families and children, referring clients, and helping them to access this high-quality care.

As part of this partnership, NorthPoint's OB/GYN care team of clinical staff and social workers refer their patients to Way to Grow. While NorthPoint provides medical and social work services, Way to Grow works closely with parents on healthy living and early education skills and follows up on the progress of each referral. Together we weave a net of security for Minneapolis families, making sure all of our families' needs are met.

"It is vital that our parents and children receive wrap-around services, including follow-up," explains Way to Grow Program Director Ronel Robinson. "No one agency can do it all."

NorthPoint and Way to Grow also work together on broader community outreach, cross-promoting our programs and services. Each year, Way to Grow participates in several NorthPoint events to reach even more families, including the Outdoor Market and their annual Fit for Fun event. Our staff also attend regular networking events at NorthPoint, resulting in positive, collaborative relationships between our teams.

"NorthPoint's mission of 'Partnering to Create a Healthier Community' is also our strategy for improving health and creating sustainable change in our community," said NorthPoint CEO Stella Whitney-West. "Our work with Way to Grow families and children in the early years of growth and development is critical to creating a foundation of healthier families living in healthier communities."

Way to Grow is proud to partner with NorthPoint as we work together to create a healthier community!



Our Community Promise:

## Empowerment, Independence

With a desire for a better life, Siham\* moved her family to America. But life didn't get better, it got worse, at least at first.

Siham became aware of the developmental difficulties of her three-year-old identical twin daughters, Aliyah and Samiirah, when she brought them to their yearly checkup. The doctor noticed that the girls were not only delayed, but that they communicated through emotion and a language of utterances between them that didn't resemble English, Spanish, or Arabic. No one could understand them. Between the language barrier and increasing instances of fits and tantrums, Siham knew she had to take action.

She was referred to a speech pathologist and searched for resources to help her work with her daughters, but met with many challenges. Unfortunately, her own husband discouraged and demeaned her, and created barriers for the family to receive services. "During a home visit," Siham recalls, "my husband texted me from the other room, telling me to kick out the home visitors." He deliberately worked to isolate them from the community. "He kept us pent up in the apartment most of the time, and I felt alone and hopeless," Siham shares, as other agencies dropped them because of the immense obstacles in the way.

Everything changed with a referral to Way to Grow in 2015 when she began working with Family Educator Collette. "The first time we met," remembers Collette, "I could feel her hopelessness and emptiness. But I could also feel her strength, potential, and love for her daughters."

Their strong bond transcended education. "Collette was the first person to make me feel comfortable here, and I knew she cared about us," reflects Siham. "She gave me hope and kept reminding me of my strength." Collette visited regularly, bringing diapers and food, even though Siham's husband became angry and threatened to call the police if Collette returned.

Finally, after several instances of physical abuse, Siham gained the courage to leave her husband and seek



independence, a better life, and a brighter future for her daughters. "Collette and Way to Grow helped empower me to realize my strength, ask for help, and leave."

Today, Siham is an American citizen, and she and her daughters are living in transitional housing. Aliyah and Samiirah, now six, are thriving in school, have many friends, and love the creative arts. Siham seeks permanent housing, a stable job, and a return to school once settled. "I want an education and a good job so I can provide for them, and then give back because Way to Grow has given me so much," she shares. "My mom told me once, 'It is not enough to receive help, but to give it too.'" She dreams of a beautiful home and her daughters coming home from school with awards.

Siham admits they still have a long way to go to reach their goals, but success and change is no accident. It is the culmination of hard work, perseverance, community, and a burning spirit to become and create something more.

*\*Names have been changed*



The Carpenter Family

Our Community Promise:

## Education as a Foundation

Regina, Ju'vane, and their six children have been a part of Way to Grow for more than a decade due to a promise Ju'Vane made his mother. "In 2007, before my mom passed away, I promised her that I would change my life for the better. I moved to Minneapolis and joined the FATHER Project when my daughter was two years old," explains Ju'Vane. It was at one of the FATHER Project's classes that Ju'Vane was encouraged to pursue a referral to Way to Grow.

The Carpenter's first Family Educator, Tonia, made such an initial impact on the family. "When Tonia came to our house, the original purpose was to work with Jayda, but the other children became so curious that they would sit and listen to what was going on as well," Ju'vane recalls. Over time, the family's relationship evolved into a lifetime bond keeping them close to Tonia. "I built such a strong relationship with Tonia over the years," says Regina. "While Tonia has retired and we now work with Carmen, we still keep in touch. Two of my children even play sports with her grandchildren."

With six children at home, Regina and Ju'Vane clearly have a busy life, but they have made education a family priority by making time to read together and spending lots of time outdoors away from screens. "We've been empowered and have learned so much from working with Tonia and Carmen. From working with us in our home and even attending school conferences with us, they've been by our side every step of the way and helped us become better parents," Regina explains.

Through the support of Way to Grow, the Carpenters have laid an educational foundation for all their children, prioritizing family time and learning together. In fact, despite being so busy, they have become one of Way to Grow's most active families. Beyond regular home visits, three of their children have attended Preschool Pals, they have taken Cooking Matters courses, participate weekly in Play to Grow at Lucy Laney, and attend every Family Engagement Night and special event they can.

Education is such a powerful tool. It brings families together and sets a precedent for bigger and brighter futures—and the Carpenters truly reflect that.



*Our Community Promise:*

## Empowering Parent Champions

Our parents want to have their voices heard at the school level and beyond, yet many do not have the resources, support, or confidence to do so. We consistently hear that parents want to know whether their child is enrolled in the best school for them or how to partner with the school to communicate about their child's education. We also know that there are specific community voices that need to be heard, such as a call for culturally appropriate education for African American, Native American, Hmong, and Somali communities. Yet in order to be empowered to speak up and be heard, our families must first become more educated and engaged in education, policy, and advocacy. Way to Grow is working to do just that.

Launched in August 2017, with funds from MN Comeback, Way to Grow's *My Voice Matters* initiative amplifies the voices of some of the most isolated families in Minneapolis and works to address the lack of information available to parents. A parent engagement and advocacy initiative, *My Voice Matters* involves parents in advocacy and empowers them to make the best choices for their children. Through our Parent Champion Workshop Series, field trips, resources, and additional experiences to familiarize parents with the legislative process and advocacy, *My Voice Matters* aims to create a lasting impact on the lives of our families and children.

For the past year, Way to Grow has been working with key partners—including the Children's Defense Fund, Joyce Preschool, MinneMinds, Northside Achievement Zone, Think Small, Greater Twin Cities United Way, and the YWCA—to assist in planning, family recruitment, and workshop facilitation. Together we are making the concerns and questions of our families heard at the school level and all the way to the Capitol.

"I am so impressed with parents showing up at public policy events and using the skills they learned in our trainings," says Way to Grow Program Director Megan McLaughlin. "It's so exciting to watch parents who feel they don't have a voice become champions for not only their children, but for issues that face all young children."



*Way to Grow families and staff at the Minnesota State Capitol*

*Our Community Promise:*

## Inspiring Opportunity and Building Legacy

Always driven and confident in her abilities, Mina graduated high school in 2010, ready to continue her schooling. However, a year later she found it difficult to balance her new motherhood with her education, so she put school on hold to raise her young son, Itachi.

Early on, Mina discovered that Itachi was struggling with education fundamentals and lacked social skills. In 2013, her sister first mentioned Way to Grow, but Mina was skeptical. "I thought I didn't need help and that this meant I was doing something wrong as a mother," she explains.

After suffering the tragic loss of her second child shortly after birth, Mina enrolled in Way to Grow and gained the support of a Family Educator. "I learned that sometimes as a parent you don't know it all, and Way to Grow is there to help further your skills to improve your child's life," she recalls. Itachi entered Way to Grow's Preschool P.A.L.S. the following year and flourished in his new learning environment, surpassing Mina's expectations.

Way to Grow was an asset to Mina and her family, but it also taught her that as a parent she had to advocate for her child and be active in their education. For example, she saw a change in her interactions during parent-teacher conferences. "At first I was uncomfortable. It's easy to just show up, get the report, and leave," Mina explains. "I learned how 'what to ask' translates into 'what more I can do for my child.' It really put emphasis on the value of being proactive in my child's education."



*Mina*

Continuing that proactive momentum, Mina decided to become one of Way to Grow's strongest parent champions by attending multiple events and hearings at the State Capitol, as well as speaking on behalf of Way to Grow's families at the annual Children's Day at the Capitol. "It is always about coming from a place of 'yes' when it comes to being proactive in early education. There is always something to do," Mina shares.

Inspired by the growth and development of her son, Mina decided to return to school, and in 2017 she completed the community health worker program at Summit OIC and became a certified nursing assistant. Mina has since joined Way to Grow's staff as a new Family Educator. Congratulations, Mina!



*Our Community Promise:*

## People to Look Up To

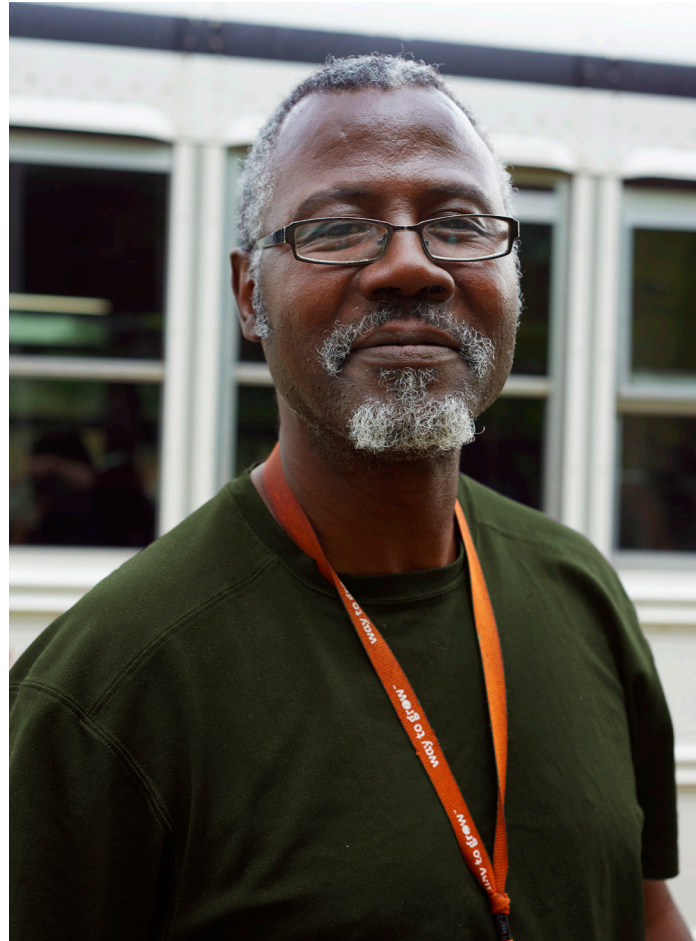
Many a day for the past nine years, a little white bus has rumbled through the streets of Minneapolis carrying precious cargo to and from preschool. Billowing with energy and enthusiasm, the man behind the wheel is more than a bus driver—he is a caretaker, a friend, and a role model to each and every child that boards his bus.

Described as “humble” by his colleagues and “fun and interesting” by the children, Mr. Willie’s unique and special flare makes him a very special and incredibly important part of the Way to Grow team. Transportation is a hardship for many of our families, and Mr. Willie works four days a week to help eliminate that barrier, always with a smile and wave, a story, and laughter.

Often the first and last Way to Grow employee our preschool students see, Mr. Willie makes it a point to be not just a driver, but an integral part of their lives every day. “My first priorities are the safety of the kids and making sure they get to school on time, but in that hour that I have those kids, I take advantage of any opportunity to engage with them. Engagement is education in and of itself, and that is important,” Mr. Willie shares. “We bond because I listen to them. Sometimes they have problems, sometimes they have concerns, and sometimes they just want someone to talk to.”

When asked about his favorite part of the job, Mr. Willie easily replies that it is the children who fill those seats. “Each child is different, and they are so intelligent and energetic. When I look at our bus, I see that we have the makings of future lawyers, doctors, politicians—almost every type of position that will contribute to our community in the future,” he expresses.

While most people dread the beginning of the work week, Mr. Willie is the exact opposite. “I can’t wait until Monday. I love my job.”



*Mr. Willie, picking up Way to Grow preschool students*



*Monica Little and Mark Abeln*

## A Brand & A Hand

Among Way to Grow’s closest friends are Monica Little and Mark Abeln. This dynamic couple is committed to spreading their passion for early childhood education.

Monica first came across Way to Grow when Little & Company, the design and branding agency she founded, sought to establish an ongoing pro-bono relationship with a nonprofit. She was energized by Dr. Art Rolnick’s conviction that early childhood education is the best way to make a profound and lasting difference in a community, and Way to Grow not only aligned with the firm’s values, “they also had a clear strategic plan, great leadership, and a strong track record showing significant impact,” recalls Monica.

In seven years of partnership, Little & Company served as the primary marketing agency for Way to Grow, creating a powerful new brand for the organization and building it out across touchpoints to elevate brand awareness. They also created guidelines that empower Way to Grow’s staff to manage and maintain brand integrity in the years to come.

Way to Grow found its way into Mark’s and Monica’s hearts as well. Their steadfast and generous financial support, volunteerism, and their joy in introducing others to the organization have made a world of difference. Says Way to Grow CEO, Carolyn Smallwood, “Their support has given us wings and helped many, many children and parents to blossom.”

They hope others will support Way to Grow as well. “My mother taught me that you don’t have to be wealthy to give,” Monica says. “If you have a nickel to give away, you can be a philanthropist.”



# Thank You!

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*Thank you to all our donors and community partners! We have made every effort to ensure 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.*





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## Our Finances

### OPERATING REVENUE & EXPENSES

REVENUE	2017	2016
Contributions	\$254,979	\$151,103
Government	\$857,388	\$934,405
Foundations	\$987,725	\$1,141,450
United Way	\$180,780	\$132,202
Program Service	\$111,483	\$108,745
Annual Celebration	\$332,954	\$162,630
Interest & Other Income	\$3,713	\$2,569
<b>Total Operating Revenue</b>	<b>\$2,729,022</b>	<b>\$2,633,104</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
Program Services	\$1,779,887	\$1,856,408
Administrative Services	\$218,671	\$218,636
Fundraising Services	\$484,087	\$390,728
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>\$2,482,645</b>	<b>\$2,465,772</b>

### FINANCIAL POSITION

ASSETS	2017	2016
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Cash	\$920,459	\$707,160
Receivables	\$343,592	\$336,462
Prepays	\$43,393	\$46,337
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>\$1,307,444</b>	<b>\$1,089,959</b>
<b>Property &amp; Equipment</b>		
Furniture & Equipment (net of depreciation)	\$21,514	\$50,735
<b>Total Property &amp; Equipment</b>	<b>\$21,514</b>	<b>\$50,735</b>
<b>Other Assets</b>		
Long-term Receivables	\$0	\$0
Deposits	\$10,906	\$10,906
<b>Total Other Assets</b>	<b>\$10,906</b>	<b>\$10,906</b>
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$1,339,864</b>	<b>\$1,151,600</b>



LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS	2017	2016
<b>Current Liabilities</b>		
Accounts Payable	\$11,794	\$27,730
Accrued Expenses	\$81,542	\$67,994
Unearned Revenue	\$0	\$0
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>\$93,336</b>	<b>\$95,724</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>		
Unrestricted	\$0	\$0
Undesignated	\$419,028	\$225,651
Board designated	\$694,000	\$641,000
Temporarily Restricted	\$133,500	\$189,225
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>\$1,246,528</b>	<b>\$1,055,876</b>
<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Net Assets</b>	<b>\$1,339,864</b>	<b>\$1,151,600</b>

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