

way to grow™
2025 ANNUAL REPORT



Our Mission

Working closely with parents and communities, we ensure that children 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.





“

This work is deeply personal and profoundly impactful. It changes what's possible for the children we serve today and for the long-term strength of our communities.

”

Coco Du,
Way to Grow CEO

Dear Friends,

At Way to Grow, we understand families need both a plan and a trusted partner.

Every day, we support families to ensure children are ready for school and life. This work is deeply personal and profoundly impactful. It changes what's possible for the children we serve today and for the long-term strength of our communities. When a child enters kindergarten ready to learn, the ripple effects last a lifetime by lifting up our future workforce, neighbors, and community leaders.

Why Way to Grow?

Because our work is not one-size-fits-all. It is relationship-based, community-centered, and grounded in proven practices that deliver real results. It's the head and the heart working together to build a system of support that empowers families and strengthens communities.

In 2025, we saw both the urgency of this moment and the power of our model. More families than ever sought support, and together, we took steps to meet that need, expanding our reach while maintaining the quality and trust that defines Way to Grow. Our approach is unique. Rooted in home visiting, we meet families where they are, connect them to a broader network of resources, and walk alongside them as they pursue their goals.

Sustaining and growing this impact requires continued investment. With strong momentum, we are poised to strengthen outcomes for the families we serve while expanding our reach where the need is greatest. None of this happens alone. It happens because of you: our partners, supporters, and advocates.

Together, we are creating opportunities, changing trajectories, and building a stronger tomorrow. Thank you for being part of this movement.

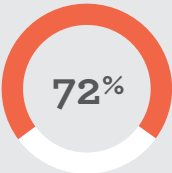
Coco Du
Chief Executive Officer

Our Impact
in 2025



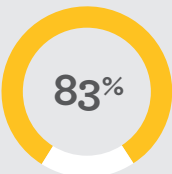
HEALTH EDUCATION

100% of newborns born at or above healthy birth weight*



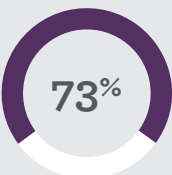
EARLY CHILDHOOD

72% of Way to Grow children prepared for kindergarten**



ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

83% of K–3 students demonstrated growth in reading level assessments**



LITERACY SUPPORT

73% of parents read to their children 3x or more per week**



PARENT ENGAGEMENT

88% of families attended parent-teacher conferences**

*Enrolled prior to 28 weeks,
**2024-25 school year metric

THE CASE FOR WAY TO GROW

Strong Starts Matter

Too many children enter school already behind. Way to Grow is here to help.

Kindergarten readiness is one of the clearest predictors of long-term academic success. Yet in Minnesota, roughly half of children arrive at kindergarten without the skills they need to succeed.¹ Left unaddressed, that early gap tends to compound: children who are not reading proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to leave high school without a diploma than proficient readers.² In 2025, more than half of Minnesota third graders failed to meet grade-level reading standards.³ In Minneapolis, that gap runs deeper still, with reading recovery among the furthest behind nationally since the pandemic.⁴

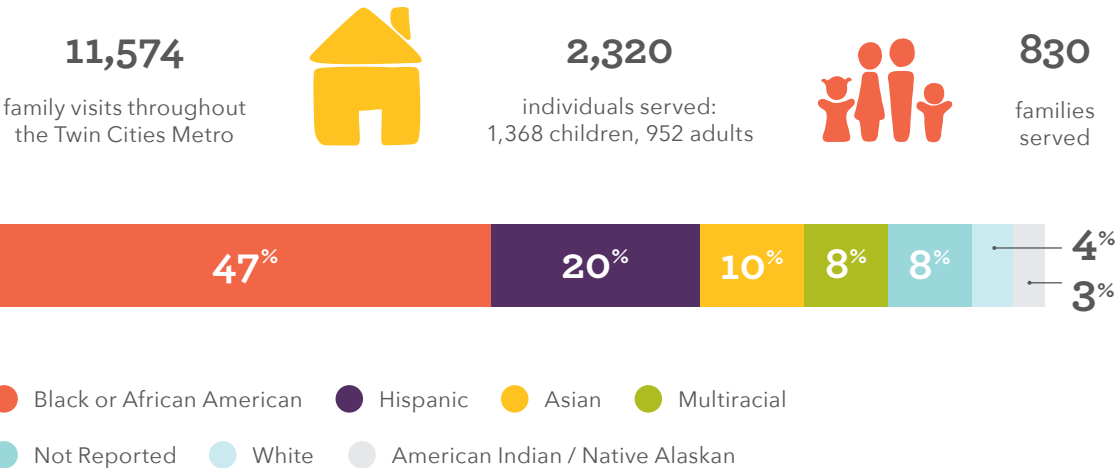
The effects ripple well beyond the classroom. Children who fall behind early are more likely to need remediation and intervention throughout school, and are less likely to enter Minnesota’s workforce prepared to compete.

Way to Grow has spent more than three decades working to close that gap for families across the Twin Cities. We believe every child deserves an equal opportunity to succeed in school and life, and we deliver on that belief by investing in the whole family beyond the classroom. Our Great by Eight program connects families with a Family Educator, from pregnancy through third grade, providing consistent, individualized support that shifts as each family’s circumstances and goals change. It is this sustained model, not a single service or intervention, that positions Way to Grow to change a child’s trajectory long before kindergarten begins.

Closing Minnesota’s readiness gap takes more than one organization, it takes a whole community. Way to Grow is proud to work alongside a growing network of families, Family Educators, community partners, and supporters who share our conviction that every child deserves the chance to start school ready, confident, and supported.

1. Minnesota Department of Education, school readiness data.
2. Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*, 2011.
3. Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA), Minnesota Department of Education, 2025.
4. Education Scorecard, 2026.

Families Served in 2025



Family Story

WAY TO GROW VOICES

A Letter from Nakesha

When I first connected with Way to Grow, I was navigating the beautiful, yet often overwhelming journey of motherhood—times three! As a single mother, resources felt stretched, the days were long, and the pressure to provide every opportunity for my children was a constant hum in the background. Then came Way to Grow. They didn't just offer a program, they offered unwavering support and a profound belief in my children and me.

Way to Grow became a foundational stone, not just in my success as a mother but in the very fabric of my family's story. They understood something fundamental: children thrive when they are seen, celebrated, and supported at every single stage.

In fact, Way to Grow's support extended far beyond celebrations. They equipped me as a parent, offering encouragement and practical tools: thoughtfully curated reading materials, engaging games, and creative learning strategies that reshaped our daily routines at home. Way to Grow also opened doors to experiences we might not have otherwise had access to, inviting us into moments of joy through tickets to events, adventures, and cultural experiences. For us, these weren't just outings. They were sparks of wonder, learning, and lasting connection for my children.

One of the most transformative chapters involved my daughter. She started in a Spanish immersion daycare, and while it was a wonderful experience, transitioning to an English-speaking school presented challenges and reading became a daunting task. She struggled, and as a mother juggling so much, I felt the weight of needing to bridge that gap but lacked the bandwidth to do it alone. This is where Way to Grow stepped in; not just with a helping hand, but with a lifeline. They provided Ms. Bella, a dedicated tutor, four days a week.

Witnessing my daughter's journey from needing significant support to soaring to the top of her reading class wasn't just academic progress, it was a transformation in her confidence. That spark, that belief in herself, is the priceless gift Way to Grow gave her. Their support didn't just help my daughter read, it helped her believe she could.

Way to Grow isn't just a program. It's the foundational stones of countless families like mine. It's celebrations that make children feel seen and valued, tutoring that unlocks a child's confidence, and experiences that broaden limitless horizons. Way to Grow empowers parents to be their best and creates ripples of success that uplift our entire community, one incredible child at a time.

“

Their support didn't just help my daughter read, it helped her believe she could.

”

Nakesha Caldwell,
Way to Grow Parent

WHAT WE DO

Great by Eight

Home visiting is at the heart of Way to Grow's programming. Through our Great by Eight program, families are paired with a Family Educator who visits regularly, adapting to each family's goals and daily realities. Whenever possible, that Family Educator shares the family's language and culture, a match that builds trust from the start and helps them understand what each family truly needs. Our curriculum and programming support these critical relationships as they evolve over weeks, months, and years. That connection and consistency are what make the difference for our families, and why our program works.

Our Work

EARLY LEARNING + ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Learning begins long before a child starts school and continues through third grade and beyond. Using the Parents as Teachers® curriculum, Family Educators work with parents on early literacy, language, and social-emotional growth, turning everyday moments at home into learning opportunities. As children move into elementary school, families get help with reading development, academic confidence, and staying engaged with teachers. Parents also get support with school enrollment and screenings so they can confidently advocate for their child's education.

HEALTH EDUCATION + FAMILY WELLNESS

A child's health starts before birth and shapes everything that follows. Way to Grow guides families through pregnancy with prenatal education across all three trimesters, support for healthy births, and guidance on newborn care, safe sleep, home safety, and healthy routines. As children grow, families get help with nutrition, developmental screenings, well-child visits, and connections to healthcare providers. Health isn't a separate goal. It's the foundation everything else is built on.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT + FAMILY SUPPORT

Parents shape a child's development, and that role looks different for every family depending on what they're navigating. Family Educators work one-on-one with parents to set goals, solve problems, and adjust as circumstances change, connecting families to resources like housing, employment services, food, and financial education. Parents also get opportunities to learn from and connect with one another. We help create a community where no parent has to do it alone.

SYSTEMS NAVIGATION + ADVOCACY

Families juggle multiple systems at once, including education, healthcare, and social services. None of these are easy to navigate alone. Family Educators help with referrals, explain options, and stay engaged over time so families get connected to what they need. Parents also build their voice and confidence to advocate for their children, with opportunities to engage directly with schools, connect with community leaders, and take part in conversations about the systems that shape their families' lives.



HIGHLIGHTS

A Look Back at 2025

Celebrating Graduates

Each year, Way to Grow celebrates two important milestones: our Early Learners as they head into kindergarten, and our third graders as they graduate from the program. In May, nearly 200 students, families, and staff gathered at North Mississippi Regional Park to celebrate Third Grade Graduation, recognizing years of literacy growth and partnership with their Family Educators. Three months later, over 600 family members, staff, and supporters celebrated as our Early Learners graduated in a cap and gown for the first time, ahead of kindergarten. Both days were filled with pride, not just for the students being celebrated, but for the families and Family Educators whose partnership made these moments possible.



Neighbors Who Care

In 2025, we launched Neighbors Who Care, our initiative for bringing individuals, businesses, and community groups together to support Way to Grow families through drives, donations, and everyday generosity. Together, our neighbors provided over 1,000 backpacks and thousands of school supplies, 100 hygiene kits, baby essentials for new parents, winter clothing for dozens of families, and hundreds of books for our youngest readers. Many more gave individually, shopping directly from our wishlist throughout the year and showing that every act of generosity can make a difference.



Shine Celebration

On October 3, nearly 500 supporters filled The Depot in Minneapolis for our annual Shine Celebration, raising over \$450,000 for families across the Twin Cities. Author Kao Kalia Yang delivered the keynote and read from her children's book *From the Tops of the Trees*. She reflected on resilience, belonging, and community, in honor of the 50th anniversary of Hmong refugees arriving in Minnesota. The night was proof of what's possible when a community shows up for its families.



Parent Engagement

Parent engagement went far beyond home visits in 2025. Across the Twin Cities, Way to Grow hosted 43 Together We Grow parent-child groups with 731 attendees, along with workshops, literacy nights, and Dream Tracks groups for young parents. These programs gave families more ways to learn and connect outside their regular visits. In partnership with organizations like Sabathani Community Center, our Community Baby Showers extended that same network to expectant and new parents, offering maternal wellness guidance, connection, and the essentials needed to welcome a new baby. Together, these groups reflect what parent engagement looks like at Way to Grow: a year-round network parents can lean on.



"At the Mall of America® Community Foundation, we believe every child deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential, regardless of the circumstances they are born into. Way to Grow's commitment to empowering families through early childhood education, literacy, and parent engagement aligns perfectly with our belief that strong families build stronger communities. Investing in this partnership means investing in brighter futures for children across our community, and that's exactly the kind of impact we are proud to support."

SARA DURHMAN

Corporate Social Responsibility Director, Mall of America®

"Both of our families come from a long line of teachers, and we grew up experiencing the world through the pages of books. Julia first got involved with Way to Grow as a grant writer and got to see firsthand that the deep care the team brings to every child and family is matched by solid data. We believe that every child deserves the opportunity for an excellent education, and we love seeing how Way to Grow helps do that by meeting each family where they are."

JULIA AND DAN MIGLETS-NELSON

Monthly Donors to Way to Grow



"Way to Grow's mission is grounded in research showing that improving children's health and education has benefits for healthier and more opportunity-rich futures. After spending a little time with their staff, we saw quickly that the organization is packed with passionate, committed, and professional people who breathe life into the mission through their work every day. Way to Grow's outcome data show that the approach works; investments in their mission reap measurable, sustainable results."

ALLISON CORRADO

Senior Program Officer, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation

"When I first learned about Way to Grow, I had young children and was navigating the elementary school system. Coming from a family of educators, I understood both the importance of quality education and the challenges many families face in accessing and thriving within that system."

I was deeply impressed by the results Way to Grow was achieving through its home visiting model and wanted to learn more and contribute in any way I could to support its mission. My experience supporting Way to Grow has been incredibly rewarding, and I continue to be inspired by the dedication of its staff, the strength of its mission, and the impact of its work. I am proud to be associated with such an exceptional organization."

BRIAN CROSBY

Way to Grow Board of Directors



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Thank You!

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Donor Story



IGNITING GENEROSITY

Maureen Bazinet Beck

A former principal in Minneapolis Public Schools and community advisor to the Superintendent, Maureen Bazinet Beck witnessed Way to Grow being formed in its early days by Mayor Don Frazer with the Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board and United Way. "Mayor Frazer had a dream that every child would be ready for school," says Maureen. "Parent educators could help mothers understand the importance of reading to their child."

Way to Grow emerged as a home visiting program bringing skilled Family Educators to families in many languages and cultures to coach parents on preparing their children for school. "Way to Grow produced confident parents and children succeeding in school, so we supported it," Maureen recalls.

In 2025, buoyed by Way to Grow's success metrics, and with growing concern for immigrant families, Maureen gathered her friends at a lovely reception to hear about Way to Grow's work with families and CEO Coco Du's own immigration story. Maureen's friends were taken with the strong literacy outcomes as well as Coco's leadership and determination, and they made generous gifts which were matched by Maureen. Way to Grow is truly grateful for Maureen's passion for early education, concern for our neighbors, and her generosity that ignited joyful giving across her circle of friends.



Community Connections

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 Anishinaabe Academy
 Aquila Elementary, St. Louis Park Public Schools
 BDH
 Birth Equity Community Council (BECC)
 Blessed Trinity Catholic School
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 Broadway Family Medicine Clinic, University of Minnesota
 Bundles of Love Charity
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 Catholic Charities Twin Cities
 Center for Early Education and Development (CEED),
 University of Minnesota
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 CommonBond Communities
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 Dresses from Ella
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 Schools
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 Schools
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 Everyday Miracles
 Rotary Club of Excelsior
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 (EFNEP), University of Minnesota Extension
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 FATHER Project, Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota
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 Generation Next
 Give Kids a Smile
 Great MN Schools
 Guy Bowling Enterprises
 Head Start, Parents In Community Action (PICA)
 HealthPartners
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 Help Me Grow Minnesota
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 Hennepin County Public Health
 Hennepin Healthcare
 Kids in Need Foundation
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 Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ)
 Northside Culture
 NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center
 Northwest Family Resource Collaborative
 Osseo Area Schools
 PACER Center
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 Parent Support Outreach Program (PSOP),
 Hennepin County
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 Park Nicollet Health Services
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 Minnesota
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 Richfield Community Center
 Rise Early Learning Center
 Rise on 7 Apartments
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 Sabathani Community Center
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 St. David's Developmental & Therapeutic Services
 St. Louis Park Emergency Program (STEP)
 St. Louis Park Community Education
 St. Louis Park Early Childhood Screening
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 Urban Strategies Inc (USI), Heritage Park
 VocalEssence
 Wayside Recovery Center, St. Louis Park
 Willow Lane Elementary, White Bear Lake
 Women, Infant, and Children (WIC), Hennepin County
 YouthLink
 Zanewood Recreation Center, Brooklyn Park
 Zero to Three
 80x3, Greater Twin Cities United Way

“

I have seen firsthand how Way to Grow shows up for families, especially through our Community Baby Showers, consistently providing valuable educational opportunities for parents and children that support family well-being and growth.

Way to Grow's commitment to serving all communities is reflected in the diversity of its staff, creating a welcoming and inclusive environment where families feel seen, valued, and supported.

”

Rebekah Floyd,
Community Health Navigator,
Sabathani Community Center

Financial Review

Operating Revenue & Expenses

REVENUE	2025	2024
Contributions	\$678,198	\$734,592
Government	\$833,257	\$938,219
Foundations	\$1,141,591	\$2,479,500
United Way	\$129,569	\$135,770
Program Service	\$330,091	\$298,178
Annual Celebration	\$459,485	\$520,197
Interest & Other Income	\$721,360	\$593,239
Total Operating Revenue	\$4,293,551	\$5,699,695
EXPENSES		
Program Services	\$3,244,246	\$3,008,583
Administrative Services	\$579,861	\$481,170
Fundraising Services	\$834,744	\$859,191
Total Operating Expenses	\$4,658,851	\$4,348,944

Financial Position

ASSETS	2025	2024
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash	\$2,600,364	\$3,616,330
Cash Restricted	\$465,000	\$498,333
Investments	\$1,193,308	\$4,833,434
Receivables	\$471,293	\$797,861
Prepays	\$107,338	\$119,155
Total Current Assets	\$4,837,303	\$9,865,113
PROPERTY & EQUIPMENT		
Furniture & Equipment (net of depreciation)	\$107,465	\$140,412
Total Property & Equipment	\$107,465	\$140,412
OTHER ASSETS		
Cash – Board Designated	\$2,110,048	\$942,907
Cash – Restricted Long-Term	\$2,004,946	\$461,741
Long-Term Receivables	\$0	\$150,000
Right to Use Lease	\$458,465	\$594,326
Investment – Endowment	\$3,901,205	\$1,888,131
Other Assets	\$22,854	\$22,854
Total Other Assets	\$8,497,518	\$4,059,959
Total Assets	\$13,442,286	\$14,065,484

LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS	2025	2024
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Accounts Payable	\$21,782	\$72,232
Accrued Expenses	\$140,231	\$197,804
Operating Lease Liabilities – Current	\$160,996	\$149,646
Unearned Revenue	\$0	\$0
Total Current Liabilities	\$323,009	\$419,682
OPERATING LEASE LIABILITIES – NON-CURRENT		
Operating Lease Liabilities – Non-Current	\$358,341	\$519,566
Total Liabilities	\$681,350	\$939,248
NET ASSETS		
Unrestricted	\$0	\$0
Undesignated	\$2,294,950	\$1,871,420
Board Designated	\$8,135,236	\$8,063,742
With Donor Restrictions	\$2,330,750	\$3,191,074
Total Net Assets	\$12,760,936	\$13,126,236
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$13,442,286	\$14,065,484



GOVERNANCE

2025 Board of Directors

Michael Garrett, Chair

Retired, Senior Vice President, Human Resources and Inclusion,
Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis

Julia Halberg, Vice Chair + Secretary

Adjunct Assistant Professor, Dean's Cabinet,
School of Public Health, University of Minnesota

Darrell Ellsworth, Treasurer

Senior Investigator, Minnesota Department of Education

Bob Barnett

Senior Fellow & Principal Consultant, MDA Leadership Consultants

Janis Clay

Retired, Executive Director, Board Chair, Civic Caucus

Karen Contag

Community Volunteer

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Director, The Corridoni Foundation for Agency and Self-Determination

Brian Crosby

Vice President, Community Accountability Officer,
Associated Bank

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Chief Marketing Officer, SFM Mutual

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Allina Health Minneapolis

Vickie Mattys

Community Volunteer

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Luis Moreno

Co-Founder, The TCBPN

Dave Nassif

Retired

Anusha Nath

Senior Research Economist, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis

Jeanne Ravich

Founder, Books to Grow

Art Rolnick

Associate Economist, University of Minnesota

Frank Schweigert

Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, Metropolitan State University

Angela Slaughter

Vice President, Deputy General Counsel,
Chief Compliance Officer, UCare

Lisa Walker

Originating Branch Manager, The Walker Group,
CrossCourty Mortgage

Yohuru Williams

Distinguished University Chair, Professor of History and
Founding Director of the Racial Justice Initiative,
University of St. Thomas

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Director, Pharmaceutical and Biotech Vertical,
Evoqua Water Technologies

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Julie Baker

Community Volunteer

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President, James R. Boyle & Associates

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University of Minnesota

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Chief Executive Officer,
The African Development Center of Minnesota

Randy Sauter

Assistant Vice President, Information Security, U.S. Bank

Jaime Stilson

Partner, Dorsey & Whitney

2026 Directors

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CEO, YWCA of St. Paul

Delphanie Daniels

Inclusion and Community Director, Inclusion and Belonging,
Human Resources, Best Buy

Heather Larson

Adjunct Instructor – Supply Chain & Operations Department,
Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota

Nancy Nelsen

Early Childhood Special Education Teacher,
Minnetonka Public Schools

“The combined impact of equipping parents to guide their children through school and connecting families to community support is Way to Grow’s metrics-driven model for improving health and education outcomes. I’ve seen its success here in the Twin Cities, and I believe it is a formula that could be applied nationally.”

Dr. Julia Halberg, Way to Grow 2026 Board Chair



Remembering Jim Boyle

Jim Boyle was a stalwart supporter of early childhood education and school readiness for every child. He served for over three decades as a consummate board member, leader, donor, and friend to Way to Grow since its inception in 1989.

As a marketing executive with United Way (one of three entities that sparked Way to Grow's founding), Jim generously shared his expertise in strategic communications, organizational development and marketing counsel to strengthen Way to Grow's reach in the community. These strategic plans and initiatives helped lead us to sustained growth year after year.

We are thankful for Jim's wisdom, keen insight, dedication, friendship, and many contributions that have been vital to our cause of children's literacy and family well-being. He is deeply missed.



READ MORE ONLINE:

Scan the code and visit
waytogrow.org/2025-annual-report



As one of the Twin Cities' leading advocates for early learning, Way to Grow empowers parents to be their children's first and most important teachers. Our goal is to ensure every child has an equal opportunity to succeed in school and life.

Learn how you can help us do even more at waytogrow.org!





SCAN FOR MORE

Read this report and more at
waytogrow.org/2025-annual-report



way to grow™

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

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