

WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH DESIGN BRIEF SERIES

LAKES & PRAIRIES COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP (CAPLP)

Moorhead, Minnesota

Program Design

CAPLP began its Whole Family Approach (WFA) journey in 2016, sparked by a leadership transition that opened the door for agency-wide transformation. What started as a pilot initiative evolved into a comprehensive approach to serving families more holistically. CAPLP's early milestones included dismantling internal silos, establishing shared case management, and improving communication across systems and teams. These efforts marked a key shift from operating as multiple divisions to functioning as one integrated agency.

The approach was originally called the "Whole Family Program," and later rebranded as Flourishing Families, reflecting a more intentional focus on supporting entire families in achieving stability and success. In 2020, CAPLP joined the NCAP Regional Community of Practice (COP), which became another turning point in refining and expanding the approach. Being part of the Community of Practice helped deepen learning and implementation through peer exchange and collaboration.

Over time, CAPLP's WFA has evolved from a programmatic pilot to a foundational framework that now informs the agency's overall culture, training, partnerships, and service delivery. This evolution reflects a sustained investment in learning, systems change, and family-centered practices.

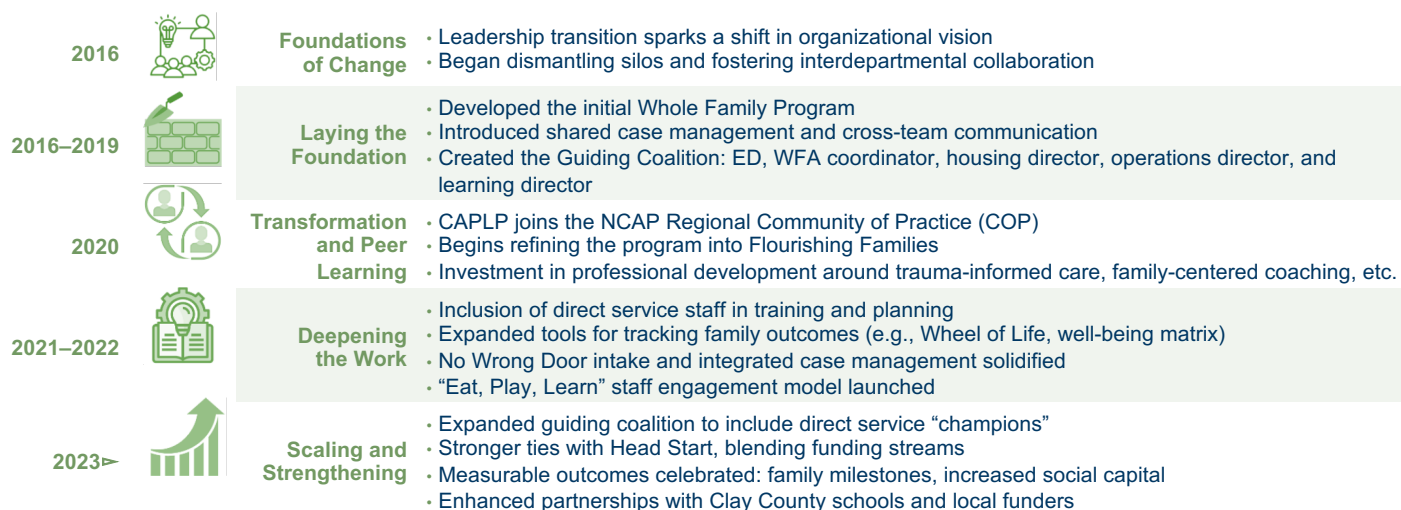
Guiding Coalition

CAPLP's guiding coalition has played a central role in the development and ongoing implementation of WFA. Internally, the coalition began with the Executive Director, Whole Family Approach Coordinator, Housing Director, Operations Director, and Learning Director. This leadership-driven group was tasked with breaking down internal silos, building shared case management, and fostering a culture of collaboration and learning across the agency.

In 2023, the guiding coalition expanded to include direct service staff—those working most closely with families and often serving as the "cheerleaders and champions" of customer success. Their inclusion helped bridge the gap between leadership decisions and on-the-ground experience, ensuring that policies and practices are informed by the realities families face.

While the guiding coalition currently consists of CAPLP staff only, the agency recognizes the importance of expanding it to include voices outside the organization. External collaborations so far include key partners such as the Clay County School District—CAPLP's primary referral source.

WFA Timeline



A Whole Family coach is supporting a single mom working toward her GED. Initially, she faced barriers, including a lack of transportation and childcare, delaying her start. When school began in the fall, she enrolled in GED classes while her children attended Jumpstart and elementary school. She has already passed her Math and Science tests. With help from the program, she received a laptop for schoolwork and a donated car through Fix It Forward, removing key obstacles. Inspired by the state's North Star Promise program, she's now focused on completing her GED and continuing her education.

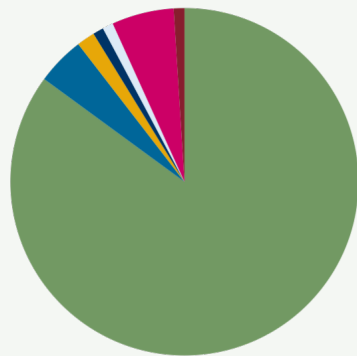


Agency Overview

Mission	We eliminate poverty by empowering families and engaging communities.
Agency Type	Nonprofit
Customers Served Annually	4,024
Service Area	Clay & Wilkin Counties, Minnesota
Annual Budget	\$11.5 Million
Staff	120
Programs	Early Childhood Education, Job Training/Employment Services/Workforce Development, Financial Empowerment, Child Development Services, Food and Nutrition, Housing and Homelessness, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (Vita), Weatherization, Utility Assistance, Infant Nutrition and Education, Home Visiting, Case Management, Coaching, Behavioral/Mental Health

Area Demographics

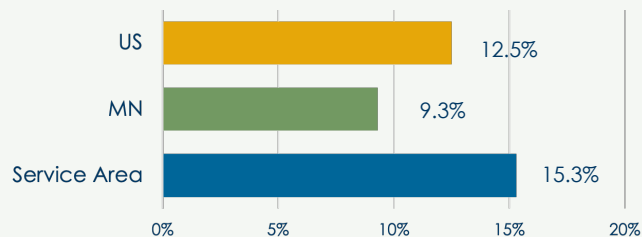
Population Distribution by Race



White (85.5%)
Black/African-American (4.5%)
American Indian & Alaska Native (1.7%)
Asian (1%)
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (<1%)
Two or more races (5.8%)
Some other race (1%)

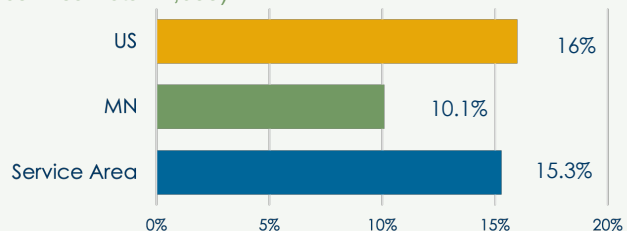
People Living Below 100% FPL

(Service Area Total: 10,059)



Children in Poverty (Ages 0–17)

(Service Area Total: 2,655)



Source: 2023 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau

CAPLP's WFA, Flourishing Families, was initially supported through funding from the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) and the local United Way—both of which recognized the importance of serving the whole family. CAPLP is currently in the fourth year of funding, reflecting sustained investment in the approach.

Additional funding was secured through state-level support, including grants from Minnesota Housing and the Minnesota Homeownership Center, which help fund CAPLP's Homebuyer Education Program. This program pairs well with Flourishing Families, especially since homeownership is a common goal among participating families. Coaches are trained to deliver both workshops and one-on-one advising related to this initiative.

CAPLP also utilizes the Family Assets for Independence in Minnesota (FAIM) matched savings program. Through this program, participants' savings are matched 3:1 to help them acquire assets such as a home, vehicle, education, or small business—key components in building family stability and economic mobility.

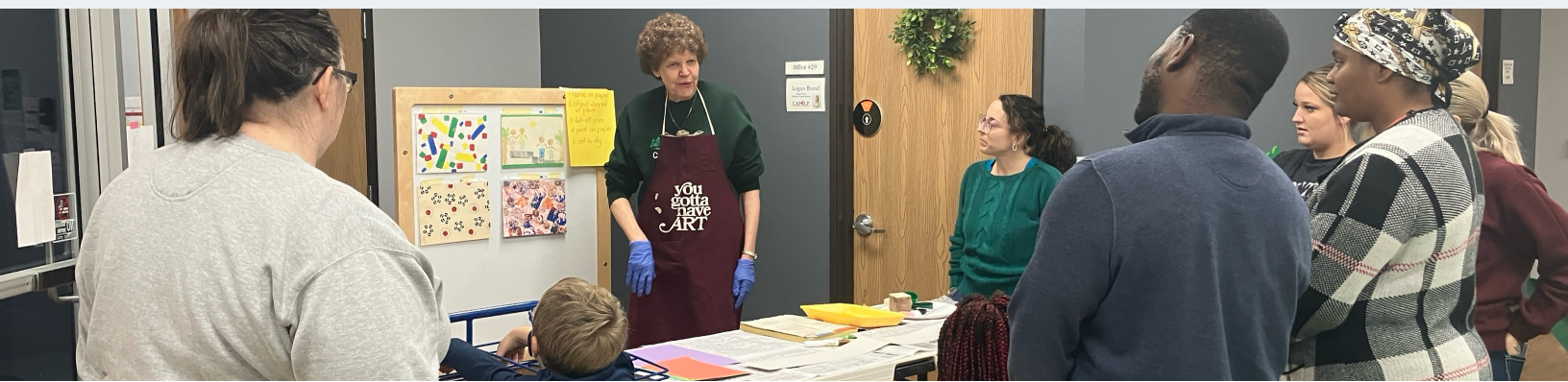
While some Flourishing Families coaches are paid through Head Start, to support long-term sustainability, CAPLP is actively seeking new funding opportunities that align with its early childhood education efforts—including Head Start and related programs. In addition, a local foundation has provided funding to support CAPLP's WFA efforts.

Successes

- Agency-Wide Cultural Shift** Transitioned from working as isolated divisions to a unified team focused on family well-being. Improved communication, collaboration, and consistency in family support.
- Strong Leadership Commitment** Executive Director and leadership fully endorsed the WFA (Flourishing Families). Prioritized ongoing staff training in trauma-informed care, motivational interviewing, family-centered coaching, poverty simulations, and other related areas.
- Family Impacts and Outcomes** Families achieved short-term and long-term outcomes such as college enrollment, securing employment, reinstating driver's licenses, academic recognition (e.g., making the dean's list), and kindergarten readiness.
- Growth in Social Capital** Friendships and support networks were built through Flourishing Families gatherings.
- Family-Defined Success** Tracked through tools like the Wheel of Life and a customized family well-being matrix. Success is defined by each family's goals. Families have started to dream bigger and set new goals after reaching initial ones.

Challenges

- Limited Guiding Coalition** The current guiding coalition is CAPLP staff. The need to expand to include parents and external partners is critical for broader engagement and sustainable change.
- Staff Mindset Shift** Staff had not previously explored leveraging current funding systems in new ways. The shift required learning and adaptation.
- Capacity Constraints** Funding exists, but staffing capacity limits the ability to provide coaching at levels needed. Ultimately, this results in a waitlist of families seeking support to break generational cycles.
- Staff Buy-In** Some staff were initially hesitant about the Whole Family Approach (WFA). This challenge was addressed through honest, one-on-one conversations to explain the purpose, differences from existing work, and their role in the bigger picture.
- Employer Partnerships** Formal relationships with potential employers has not been established and limits integration of WFA into workforce development.



For organizations beginning or deepening this work, CAPLP offers the following advice:

- Be patient.** Change does not happen overnight. It takes time to build the right systems, hire the right people, and develop the right tools to support families effectively.
- Give yourself grace.** Not everything will go according to plan. If something doesn't work, don't be afraid to pivot and try another approach.
- Don't give up.** Even when progress feels slow or unclear, keep going. Small wins add up, and long-term impact takes time to emerge. Invest in staff learning. Ongoing training across all staff levels ensures a shared understanding and strengthens the agency's ability to serve families holistically.
- Break down silos intentionally.** Use relationship-building strategies to foster communication and connection across departments. Include everyone in the journey. This is not the responsibility of one person or department. Sustainable transformation happens when everyone—leadership, frontline staff, and partners—feels ownership of the work.
- Stay connected to the “why.”** The stories from direct service staff and the dreams that families begin to pursue are the heart of the work.

When you hear a parent say they finally have someone to call for help or they're dreaming beyond basic needs, it's a reminder of why this approach matters.

Lessons Learned

- Staff buy-in is critical.** Getting leadership fully onboard and communicating clearly how WFA differs from traditional service models is essential.
- Ongoing training is necessary.** Training helps build a shared language and understanding across all staff levels, from leadership to direct service providers.
- Direct service staff should be included in planning.** Their frontline insights shape more responsive and effective strategies and ensure decisions are grounded in real family experiences.
- Build relationships across departments.** This strengthens WFA implementation and enhances overall service delivery across programs.

Next Phase Of Growth

- Expanding the guiding coalition to include voices outside of CAPLP
- Increasing staff capacity to reduce the waitlist
- Identifying and securing additional funding
- Deepening partnerships—especially with potential employers—to support family economic mobility

aligning the pieces

Drawing from the **WFA Readiness Assessment** and **Building Block Resource Guide**, what insights or patterns do you notice in CAPLP's journey—and how might they inform or challenge your own approach to designing and implementing a Whole Family Approach?

For more Whole Family Approach resources, feel free to reach out to our team at WFA@communityactionpartnership.com



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