

About KIDS PLUS

It started with one simple idea: to do more to actively improve the well-being of children and youth in northeastern Minnesota. In 1990, the Northland Foundation began researching ways to work with communities to make our rural region a more nurturing place for children and young people to live, learn, and grow. As a result, we developed and honed, over time, a step-by-step process to help local communities join together to focus resources on children, birth to age 18.

Today KIDS PLUS consists of a family of programs widely recognized for innovation, advocacy, and impact. The Northland Foundation's KIDS PLUS team continually asks questions and listens to input from community stakeholders to leverage strengths and bridge gaps in our region. KIDS PLUS is funded entirely through the support of foundations, businesses, civic organizations, and individual donors. Their generosity empowers positive, lasting impacts on children, youth, families, and communities.

The KIDS PLUS focus areas are:

- Early childhood development & quality early care and education;
- Youth leadership, volunteerism, and philanthropy;
- Connecting youth with older adults and the generations-in-between;
- Technical assistance and support to communities; and
- Convening and training.



Accomplishments

Building resources for children and youth

The Northland Foundation, along with the 26 KIDS PLUS Communities and 12 Early Childhood Coalitions, Thrive Action Team, and 16 AGE to age sites has leveraged resources totaling over \$50 million in resources to benefit children and youth.

Engaging young people in leadership opportunities

Thousands of young people each year hone their leadership experience and give back to their schools and communities with the support of KIDS PLUS.

Strengthening local capacity to support children, youth, and families

More than 50,000 young people and 25,000 adults and older adults have worked together to identify specific local needs and design grassroots activities and programs to meet those needs.

Creating opportunities for young people to build friendships with older adults

Through initiatives such as AGE to age: bringing generations together and Reading Pals, people of all ages connect across the generations to break down barriers, learn from each another, and drive change.

Establishing partnerships to sustain children and youth programming

The Northland Foundation and our regional networks of community coalitions have developed public and private partnerships at the local, state, and national levels to promote the sustainability of this work.

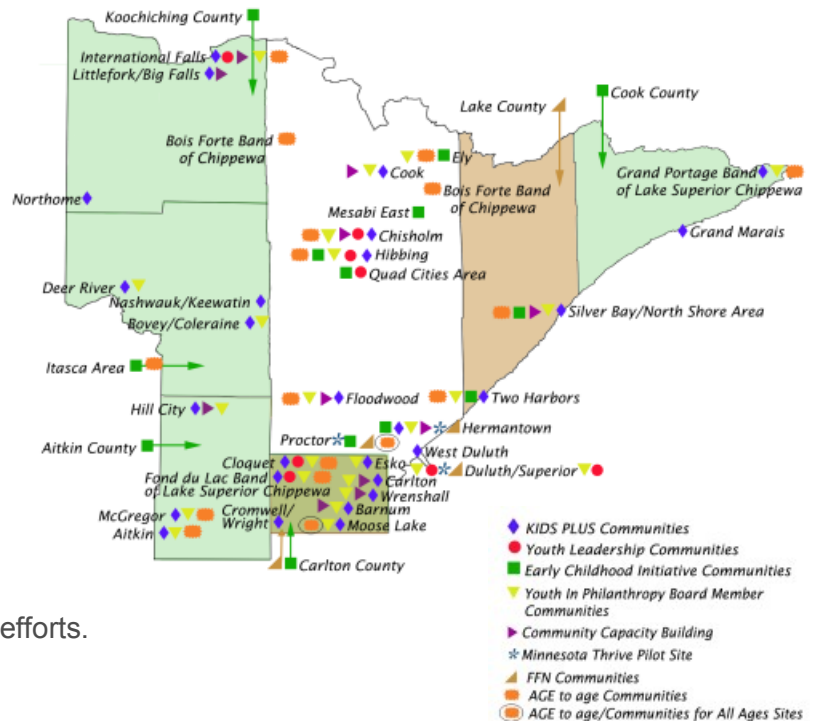
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The KIDS PLUS Community Planning Model

The planning model used to help communities organize around the needs of children and youth was first put into practice by the Northland Foundation in 1992. This process has been used more than 50 times by our KIDS PLUS Program, as well as for two statewide initiatives. It is based on our belief that people living in the community know best.

With guidance throughout the process, making sure to include different ages, sectors, and viewpoints, community members create a shared vision and bring it to life.

An important part of the model that has evolved with time is the establishment of regional learning communities for KIDS PLUS initiatives. The Northland Foundation regularly convenes leadership teams from, for example, all of the Early Childhood Initiative communities, or all of the AGE to age sites, to network, learn, exchange ideas, and support one another's efforts.



The Six Steps of the Planning Process

1. Build a Diverse Team of All Ages

Invite young people, adults, and older adults to the table to share their ideas. Include people from all sectors such as education, government, public safety, and business.

2. Explore Local Needs and Resources

Gather information about the community's strengths, resources, needs, challenges, and opportunities. List the formal and informal efforts that already exist. Identify where there are gaps.

3. Hold a Speak-Out

Host a public event for all community members to share their insights, stories, and ideas.

4. Create a Vision and an Action Plan

As a group, write a vision statement with everyone's input that will guide action planning. Brainstorm quick-start projects and longer-range plans that leverage strengths, bridge gaps, and fit the vision.

5. Move to Action

Tap the ideas, talents, energy, and connections of engaged community members. Develop and carry out activities, projects, programs, and policy changes.

6. Keep It Going

Support, encourage, and re-energize local community members to keep the momentum going. Be inclusive and invite new people to join in the effort.