

**First Children's Finance Launches Growth Fund
in Southern Minnesota**
Encouraging and Rewarding Quality Child Care

Minneapolis (July 27, 2009) – First Children's Finance (FCF) today announced it has selected seven child care centers in southern Minnesota to participate in the fourth class of its Growth Fund initiative to enhance quality care and strengthen business practices. Through a competitive process, the centers demonstrated their track record of success, a commitment to quality and the potential to serve low-income children. Selected centers are listed below.

“Minnesota children deserve the best possible experience -- learning and growing as much as possible,” said Mara O’Neill, FCF director of capital investments. “Quality care during their early years assists in brain development and prepares them for life long learning.”

As participants in FCF's Growth Fund, center directors will develop plans to identify and tackle critical business issues in finance, marketing, human resources, strategic planning, leadership and facilities development. Centers will receive grants to fund planning and quality improvement. They will also gain business expertise from training opportunities and the support of volunteer business advisors.

“The Growth Fund is unique, because we combine the passion of a group of highly effective child care providers with the expertise of volunteer business and child care leaders,” added Gerald M. Cutts, FCF president and chief executive officer. “The center directors can count on the nine business advisors as essential partners in their growth.”

The Growth Fund, launched in Minnesota in 2006, recognizes that quality care for children in their earliest years yields tremendous human, economic and social

benefits — and reduced costs to individuals and communities later.

First Children's Finance, a national nonprofit organization, is an expert in the business of child care. It helps expand the availability of quality child care providing loans, technical assistance, consulting and training. For more information about First Children's Finance in southern Minnesota contact Mara O'Neill at mara@firstchildrensfinance.org. For more information, you may also log onto www.firstchildrensfinance.org.

First Children's Finance
Southern Minnesota Growth Fund Participants

Good Shepherd Child Care, Rushford. Good Shepherd Child Care was started in 1985 to provide child care for staff at the Good Shepherd Nursing Home. Since that beginning, the center has more than doubled in size and now serves the entire community. Along with providing child care, Good Shepherd also provides intergenerational activities to the children and nursing home residents.

Kids Avenue Learning Center, Faribault. Licensed for 127 children from infancy through school-age, Kids Avenue was started five years ago by Amy Schak. As a mother of three and a public health nurse, Amy knew how hard it can be to balance the demands of work and family. She envisioned easing parents' burden by establishing a child care program families could trust. In addition to its child care services, Kids Avenue offers respite care to families with special needs children and a youth learning center for Faribault and the surrounding area.

Wee Pals Child Care Center, Inc., Owatonna. Providing child care for nearly 40 years, Wee Pals Child Care Center is located in the historic Merrill Building in Owatonna. Licensed for 104 children from infancy through school-age, Wee Pals offers a preschool program on site to fully prepare children for kindergarten. The center offers full and part time care, drop in care, and emergency and back up care for participating companies.

Fairmont Kids Kamp dba Stepping Stones Learning Center, Fairmont. Stepping Stones Learning Center is the only licensed child care center in Martin County serving children from infancy through school age. Licensed for 84 children, the seven-year-old center provides a needed community service the demand for which continues to increase.

St. John's GrandKids, Springfield. St. John's GrandKids began in 1988 to meet the need for childcare of the staff of St. John Lutheran Home. Guided by the philosophy that older adults and children benefit through interaction with each other, the program now serves the entire community. Licensed for 43 children, the program serves children from six weeks to 12 years old with child care, a school readiness curriculum, after school care, and full-time summer care. The St. John's GrandKids program has been recognized by both the Early Childhood Educators Conference and Aging Services of Minnesota.

Under the Rainbow Child Care Center, Red Wing. In 1994 Under the Rainbow Child Care Center was created to provide the Red Wing community with a high quality child care program. The center is licensed for 71 children from six weeks to 12 years of age and offers basic Spanish

and sign language as part of its curriculum. After leasing space for nine years, Under the Rainbow took a huge step and in 2003 designed and built a new facility.

Nicollet Early Childhood Center, Nicollet. Nicollet Early Childhood Center opened in August 2006 after the town of Nicollet passed a referendum to build an early childhood addition onto the Nicollet Public School. The center is licensed for 67 children aged six weeks to preschool. In a time when small towns are closing or consolidating their schools, Nicollet is striving to grow and promote local education to its youngest citizens.