



First Children's Finance

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First Children's Finance Announces Make Way for Kids Infant/Toddler Capacity Building Grant Recipients and Upcoming Funding Opportunities

Vergennes, Vermont — First Children's Finance VT is happy to announce the recipients of the Fall 2024 Make Way for Kids Grants. These grants, totaling \$641,107 to 29 projects in 13 counties, are designed to help Vermont's early childhood educators meet their local demand for high-quality, affordable child care. These projects are projected to create or maintain 117 infant slots, 148 toddler slots, and 118 preschool slots, supporting families across the state.

The new grantees include **Little Wildflowers Child Care**, a new program in Enosburg Falls owned by Kelsey Caforia; and **The Growing Tree**, a future full-day, year-round program in Addison led by Michelle Bishop. Both programs are committed to the mission of these grants: Creating innovative child care solutions that meet the needs of their communities.

“Our goal is to make child care accessible to every family in Vermont by providing financial support to child care businesses to help them achieve long-term sustainability,” said **Erin Roche**, Director of **First Children's Finance VT**. “The Make Way for Kids grants play an important role in entrepreneurs in Vermont to start up and expand their child care businesses.”

Kelsey Caforia, owner of Little Wildflowers Child Care in Enosburg Falls, said, “The Make Way for Kids grant has allowed me to open a new registered child care program in my home with engaging activities, the equipment necessary for multiple children, and an engaging space for kids of multiple ages without having to worry about the large expenses when opening a new program. This grant will support my new business in many ways over the next year, including general expenses, supplies, equipment, and small projects.”

Michelle Bishop, Director of The Growing Tree, said, “This grant will help us provide much-needed full-day early education in an underserved area of Addison County. This will allow us to move forward with our plans to offer care for toddlers and preschoolers, including children with specialized needs. We're also excited to create local high-quality

programming that migrant communities with limited transportation may be able to access closer to home.”

Other Fall 2024 grantees include (by county):

- **Addison:** Martha Kashkin Grollier Family Child Care Home; The Growing Tree; Otter Creek Child Center, Inc.
- **Bennington:** Curious Kids Childcare LLC; Myers Prouty Children's Campuses Inc - River Road Campus
- **Caledonia:** Taylor Brink Family Child Care Home
- **Chittenden:** E.J.'s Kids Klub Inc.; Marissa Green Family Child Care Home; VIP Roots Child Development Center
- **Essex:** Guildhall Early Education and Childcare
- **Franklin:** Alayna West Family Child Care Home; Baby Spark Academy; Briana Chambers Family Child Care Home; Kelsey Caforia Family Child Care Home; Mikaela Flanagan-Bruley Family Child Care Home
- **Lamoille:** Cubs Child Care Center; Puffer Child Care Center
- **Orange:** Jessica Russo Family Child Care Home
- **Orleans:** Ashley Griffith (Peters) Family Child Care Home; Nakitta Lathe Family Child Care; Sonia Koehler Family Child Care Home
- **Rutland:** Amanda Stone Family Child Care Home
- **Washington:** MacKenzie Kasper Family Child Care Home; ONE Arts Inc.; Rainbow Gardens
- **Windham:** Starr Gutierrez Family Child Care Home
- **Windsor:** Chelsea Chase Family Child Care Home; Dawna Starve Family Child Care Home; Immersion Montessori School

Funds for these grants are provided by the State of Vermont Department for Children and Families Child Development Division. **Janet McLaughlin**, Deputy Commissioner of the Child Development Division, said, "We've been really excited to work with First Children's Finance as a partner on these grants for capacity building. With the passage of Act 76 many programs are rethinking their business models, expanding the number of children they can serve, or adding locations. First Children's Finance has been excellent in providing advice directly to programs."

Last year, the Make Way for Kids Infant/Toddler Capacity Building Grant Program awarded over \$1.8 million in grants to projects that created 751 child care slots and 226 new jobs across Vermont. By investing in care for infants and toddlers, these grants meet the immediate needs of young families and build a stronger foundation for Vermont's future.

First Children's Finance will support more grant-funded projects in early 2025.

Applications for grants to support a new or expanded child care program are due on February 3, 2025. For more information or to apply, [visit First Children's Finance Vermont](#) or email vtgrants@firstchildrensfinance.org.

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About First Children's Finance VT

First Children's Finance VT supports the growth and sustainability of child care programs by providing business resources, technical assistance, and access to capital. FCF partners with the Vermont Child Development Division and other state agencies to help ensure equitable access to high-quality early childhood education. Learn more: www.firstchildrensfinance.org/vermont.