

# Highlights From Grand Challenges Regional Visits

## NORTHWEST REGION TACKLES POVERTY AND HEALTH DISPARITIES

The Northwest Region features prairie and grasslands, lakes, forests, and farms. However, behind the beautiful lakes and countryside lie counties with the highest rates of poverty and chronic health issues. This region has the highest percentage of household recipients receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) dollars in Minnesota. Read more at <http://z.umn.edu/11vc>.

## SOUTHWEST REGION TAKES ON EDUCATION, IMMIGRATION, AND EBT ISSUES

Staff reported many outstanding needs among people with mental health issues or developmental disabilities in the Southwest Region. These audiences often need basic education and training in areas such as life skills, nutrition, and general health - areas in which Family Development shines. Read more at <http://z.umn.edu/11nw>.

## NORTHEAST REGIONAL CHALLENGES SPAN THE SPECTRUM

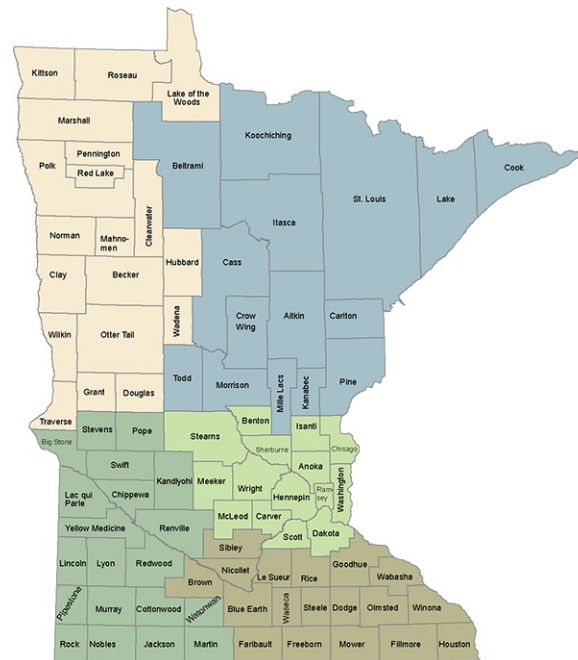
In the Northeast Region, FD staff cover vast areas with only a few partner organizations. Throughout the region, residents exhibit a strong "pull yourself up by the bootstraps" mentality, even when people are experiencing food scarcity, unemployment, and mental health issues. Read more at <http://z.umn.edu/122o>.

## CENTRAL REGION: WHERE THE ONE THING IN COMMON IS DIVERSITY

The expanding diversity of the Central Region offers many opportunities to engage diverse populations in such areas as cross-cutting health promotion efforts and financial literacy. At the same time, the region faces challenges. Health, economic, and educational disparities was a common theme. While Minnesota overall is seen as a healthy state, we have pockets with great inequities. Read more at <http://z.umn.edu/13c3>.

## SOUTHEAST REGION: FOR RICHER, FOR POORER

Growing diversity in the Southeastern Region creates great opportunities as well as challenges. Families of Latino, Somali, Karen, and other cultural heritages are moving to southeastern Minnesota to work in the health care and food processing industries. In some communities in the region, up to 90 percent of immigrant families are recent arrivals. Read more at <http://z.umn.edu/127a>.



### Contact us to Learn About Our Programs

To learn more about the University Of Minnesota Extension Center for Family Development, visit us at <http://www.extension.umn.edu/family/> or contact Karen Shirer, Associate Dean, at [shire008@umn.edu](mailto:shire008@umn.edu) or 612-626-3971.

# Center for Family Development 2015 Annual Report





## ADDRESSING GRAND CHALLENGES FOR MINNESOTA FAMILIES

### A message from Associate Dean Karen Shirer

All of us face “grand challenges” in our personal lives from time to time — the serious, seemingly unsolvable problems that fundamentally change our lives. We also face grand challenges in our communities, organizations, and professional lives. University of Minnesota has a focus on grand challenges facing the broad communities of the state, the nation, and the world. Family Development sharpened our own focus in 2015 when we discussed and reflected on the grand challenges of Minnesota communities during a series of regional visits. I encourage you to read the regional highlights in this report and dive into the rich discussions on our website.

By focusing on how we can transform our existing programs and community relationships, we use our collective strengths to discover innovative and meaningful ways of addressing Minnesota’s grand challenges.

2015 also marked the expansion of our work to incorporate policy, system, and environment (PSE) approaches into our overall work. The regional visits highlighted the importance of PSE work around the impact of healthy food choices, physical activity, and improving mental health. The visits magnified that local, regional, national, and international policies affect Minnesota families in multiple ways. For example, we heard in Northeast Minnesota how national trade policies impact the mining industry, which in turns impacts employment opportunities for families. We also discussed the growth of new immigrant and refugee populations across Southern Minnesota — again all influenced by various aspects of policy, systems, and environments. We worked with our Extension partners in Iowa and South Dakota on the human side of avian influenza to provide research-grounded information and resources to help families recover from the 2015 avian flu outbreak.

Focusing on the grand challenges through our programmatic and PSE work, Extension Family Development deepens its promise to help Minnesota families make informed decisions leading to better health and well-being.

Sincerely,  
Associate Dean Karen Shirer, Ph.D.  
Extension Center for Family Development

