



Making Minneapolis a Child Friendly City

By Ann DeGroot

November 20 is World Children's Day - and a good time to reflect on the world's promises to our children and what we can do to better support children here in Minneapolis.

World Children's Day launched more than 30 years ago, in 1989, when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention of the Rights of the Child with four overarching goals: children should be free from discrimination; government policies should be based on the best interests of the child; governments must help children survive and develop to their full potential; children's views and perspectives are important. (The full version and child friendly formats are here: <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention>.)

Out of 196 eligible member nations of the United Nations, the United States remains the only nation that has not ratified the Convention.

In 1989, Minneapolis Mayor Don Fraser signed onto the Convention on behalf of the City of Minneapolis. Today on World Children's Day 2022, we continue on the path that Mayor Fraser set us on – to strive to make Minneapolis the best city for children:

- **We're working to achieve UNICEF designation as a Child Friendly City.** In 2020, Mayor Frey signed an MOU for the City of Minneapolis to be one of the first pilot cities in the U.S. working to earn this designation from UNICEF USA.
- **We prioritize youth voice in decision-making.** The Minneapolis Youth Congress, whose motto is "No decision about us, without us," formed in 2007 by the Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board. The Youth Congress allows policymakers to hear directly from young people on key issues impacting them. This has resulted in policy and practical changes driven by youth such as changes in tobacco sales policy, use of city bus passes by Minneapolis Public School students and the establishment of a Citywide Youth Master Plan.
- **Our city is in a state which has one of the highest children's rights ratings.** Human Rights Watch gives Minnesota one of the highest grades among states in the country on the issue of children's rights. Unfortunately, that grade is a C. This perhaps is a convenient reflection on how Minneapolis is perceived – a city with a welcoming and warm vibe relative to other places, but one which that still has much work to do to help our children thrive.
- **A system to support immigrants.** Over 10% of Minneapolis area K-12 students are immigrants and refugees and over 37% are the children of immigrants and refugees. Over 900 children are in immigration court proceedings in Minnesota and are at risk of

deportation. Access to free immigration legal services through the City of Minneapolis is an important way to ensure that children's rights are advanced and enforced.

Renew our commitment

Let's use World Children's Day 2022 to renew our commitment to the children of Minneapolis.

Our city does certain things well, but is also failing some of our children. We have one of the largest educational disparities in the country. According to the 2020 census, there are 85,422 children in Minneapolis ages 0 - 18 years. Approximately 38.2% live at 150% of the poverty level. At any given time in the Twin Cities, about 3,000 children are homeless.

Here's how you can help:

- Create opportunities to invite input from and authentically listen to children. Listening to, guiding and acting on those voices will create the leaders of tomorrow and the future for our city.
- Act in ways that foster an inclusive society. Model the behavior that we want to see in all our children. Treat fellow humans of all ages with respect.
- Use your vote and actions to support children-friendly policies, educational opportunities, and safe and just neighborhoods.
- Financial support for nonprofits like Children's Law Center, Advocates for Human Rights, Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota, and Mid Minnesota Legal Aid help immigrant and refugee children access support otherwise not possible.
- Extreme Minnesota winters impact the most vulnerable communities the most. Identify and support organizations that offer housing, food, shelter, and clothing.
- Read the convention, watch, and read stories of youth. They will move you. Talk about what you learn with others including children.

Let's make Minneapolis a city in which children thrive. Together, Better.

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