



For immediate release:  
August 19, 2009

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The First Steps Commission is pleased to announce Rebekah Fennell has been selected to serve as the new Executive Director of First Steps.

"Rebekah comes to us with a wealth of non-profit and business experience," said Kate Pew Wolters, co-chair of the First Steps Commission. "Her passion for improving the lives of children and families and her experience with collaborative efforts will be a tremendous benefit to our community as we work to ensure all children in Kent County have the opportunity to reach their full potential."

Fennell has spent the last five years working as a consultant in non-profit management, grant writing, and strategic planning in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Prior to that, she was President of the Kalamazoo County Health Plan, which provides healthcare coverage to thousands of low-income, uninsured adults. She has also served as Executive Director of Healthy Futures in Kalamazoo, a public/private partnership focused on collaboration to improve the health and well-being of community members. In that role, she was directly involved in several innovative programs to support the healthy development of young children.

Fennell began her professional career in Washington, D.C., where she served as Director of the League of Women Voters Education in the 1990's. She holds a BA from Michigan State University and earned an MS in Applied Management from the University of Maryland.

"I am honored to be chosen to continue the groundbreaking work of First Steps," Fennell said. "Science tells us that a child's brain is 90% of its adult size by age five. This represents a unique opportunity to impact a child's development and underscores the essential role of First Steps' holistic, collaborative approach to nurturing the physical, social and emotional health of children from birth. I am eager to work with our many community partners in Kent County to ensure that all children are ready to succeed in school and life."

Fennell is scheduled to begin her new role on October 1. She replaces Ben Emdin, who has served as Executive Director of First Steps (previously the Early Childhood Children's Commission) since its inception in 2005.

“On behalf of the many people who have been involved in our work over the last few years, I would like to thank Ben for his strong commitment to the children of Kent County,” Pew Wolters said. “We all know there’s still a lot more to do, but under Ben’s leadership, we have taken huge steps forward in our work to develop a coordinated and comprehensive early childhood system.”