

Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage

Update for January 1 – December 31, 2023

April 2024



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THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD INVESTMENTS

The Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage helps ensure that children across Kent County are ready to learn and succeed when they start school. That begins with babies being born healthy and families having the skills and resources to provide a strong foundation. Over the next five years, young children must have experiences that support the whole child and enable each child to take full advantage of the opportunities and demands of school and life.

Young children who participate in high-quality early childhood programming are less likely to repeat a grade, require less special education throughout school, have fewer behavioral concerns, and graduate at a higher rate than those who do not. National research about the long-term public benefit of investing early shows fewer individuals enter the criminal justice system (juvenile and adult) and more adults are successful in the workforce. Many of the models currently funded by the Ready by Five Millage have well-documented evidence of effectiveness or returns on investment based on long-term studies.

Ready by Five-funded programs are available to all children five-years-old and younger in Kent County, with an intentional focus on communities that have been historically under resourced or under served. The goals of the Ready by Five Early Childhood millage are to:

- Support parents so they can ensure their children are healthy, thriving, and ready for kindergarten,
- Increase access to high-quality early learning experiences that build a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation, and
- Support early identification of delays and disabilities so children get the treatment they need.

First Steps Kent and Ready by Five partners are delivering what was promised. More than 12,000 children and families a year are now engaging in millage-funded programs – programs that would not be available to them without Ready by Five. The investments are driven by evidence of effectiveness, best practices, and local data.

While service delivery has returned to – and exceeded – expectations over 2022 and 2023, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic continues to be felt by young children. They spent key developmental years without home visits, play groups, and preschool. They delayed well-child visits, vaccinations, and the first trip to the dentist. They watched their families deal with loss – of a loved one, a job, or the feeling of security.

An effect of the Covid-19 pandemic is that the needs of children are deeper and broader than they've been in the past. Early childhood professionals report the following are still higher than they were before the pandemic:

- Speech, language, and developmental delays.
- Behavioral challenges.
- Family mental health issues.
- Basic needs not being met.

READY BY FIVE SERVICES IN 2023

OUTREACH, SCREENING, AND NAVIGATION

The Ready by Five Millage has allowed for the creation of an outreach and navigation network by developing a multi-agency strategy to reach and engage families in a coordinated way.

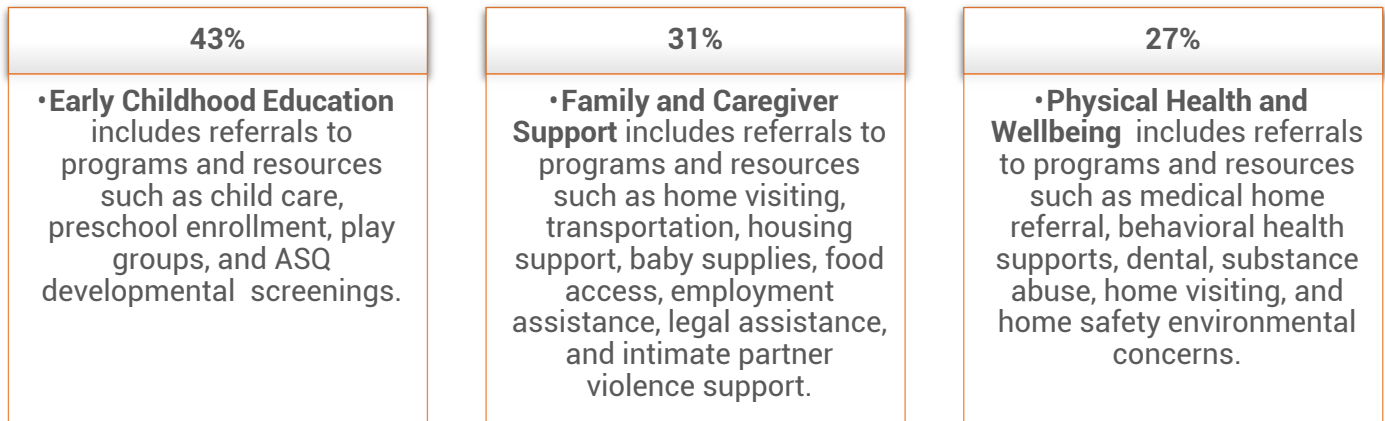
Outreach aims to increase the usage of early childhood programs and community resources through strategic outreach strategies to connect with future parents and families with young children who are not currently engaged in services or are unaware of services. As families are reached then engaged, programs work to identify the needs of families through formal screening as well as conversation with the individuals served. As specific needs are identified, individualized navigation addresses barriers to accessing services, information, and resources to ensure families are successfully connected to referrals and information.

Amount Spent: \$2,160,032

Cost Sharing is not required for participation in this service type.

In 2023, Ready by Five Millage funded three Outreach and Navigation programs that reached all communities in Kent County. Agencies provided over 7,200 screenings in 2023, resulting in 4,504 referrals to a wide range of resources and programming.

Referrals by Category:



Impact: Research is beginning to emerge on the impact of such screening and referral networks for people with social needs. Services ensure families are connected with information about child development and quality early learning opportunities. These services are crucial in supporting families, ensuring that families are connected to services and resources within the five social determinates of health domains: healthcare access, economic stability, education access, safety, and social support.

Unmet needs within the social determinants of health domains are often a primary source of family stress, including the stress of young children in the family. Early life stress in a child's life as well as adverse events can have long term consequences on health and wellbeing into adulthood. Early consequences of stressors can impact a child's social emotional development resulting in inadequate coping skills, difficulty with regulating emotions and have reduced social functioning¹.

While all families can benefit from these services, cost savings and community benefit are most significant when those with the greatest needs are engaged and served.

Partners: Agencies providing services in this area include:

- Family Futures, Connections Program – In addition to providing outreach and navigation services, this program works to promote universal ASQ screenings throughout Kent County.
- Health Net of West Michigan, Continuation and Expansion of Early Childhood Outreach and Navigation at Clinical Delivery Sites – specializes in outreach and navigation through the co-location of services with the health care system and closely aligned community partnerships.
- Kent ISD, Help Me Grow – partnership with Kent ISD and Great Start Collaborative ensures children engaged in early education programs have access to information and resources to support a child's healthy development and well-being.

HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

Healthy Development programs and services ensure expectant parents and those with young children have access to ongoing comprehensive, coordinated care that maximizes the child's physical and emotional health and regular screenings to identify developmental delays, disabilities, and emotional concerns.

Amount Spent \$2,674,440

Cost Sharing and Donations Collected: \$4,759 (19 individuals)

In 2023, Ready by Five programs enrolled more than 850 participants within Healthy Development Services.

Program Type 1: Developmental, Social Emotional Screenings, and Referral Programming: Programs offer ongoing specialized behavioral health or early childhood development focused support provided by clinically trained professionals. Additionally, this type of programming ensures that children have regular developmental screenings to identify concerns as early as possible and as needed, follow-up referrals to services and information. Services support children and their families in one or more of the following ways:

- Promote positive social and emotional development of children served.
- Ensure children and their caregivers have access to clinical interventions that specifically support a healthy parent-infant attachment.

¹ Source: <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/early-childhood-development-and-education>

- Address parental well-being through facilitated groups to support the acquisition of new coping skills and resources to strengthen the parent's overall well-being.

In 2023, programs enrolled 272 participants who were young children or expecting parents. Partners also provided behavioral health consultation and support to early education professionals in 44 classroom locations to create plans of action that address concerns identified in the classroom setting, ensuring teachers and parents are equipped with strategies to support children within the classroom setting and at home.

Impact: Early developmental screening is a national best practice that is recommended by both the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Center for Health Care Strategy as earlier intervention is more effective and has been proven to reduce special education costs in the long-term.

According to the CDC, about one in six children aged 3-17 have one or more developmental or behavioral disabilities, such as autism, a learning disorder, or a language delay.² The agency adds, "Many children with developmental disabilities are not identified until they are in school, by which time significant delays might have occurred and opportunities for treatment might have been missed."³

Partners: Agencies providing services under this program type include:

- Arbor Circle's Keep Early Education Positive (KEEP) program partners with parents, teachers, and child care providers to provide intervention and support that promote positive social emotional development of children and ensures a successful early learning experience.
- Arbor Circle's Infant Toddler Developmental Services is a clinical intervention that works with families with young children to build strength and skills, increase bonding between the parent and child, and create a sense of emotional security within the family.
- Easterseals MORC's Healthy Development program includes treatment for behaviors such as trauma specific infant mental health, intergenerational trauma-treatment, and child-parent psychotherapy.
- Cherry Health's Heart of the City added a position to its pediatric healthcare team that ensures all children who have a possible developmental concern identified were successfully referred and connected to early intervention services.
- The Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative (ELNC) support increased program capacity to ensure children with a developmental concern or identified disability were successfully connected with resources and early intervention services. (Note: Payments for ELNC services were discontinued in July of 2023.)
- Family Futures' Learning Kits provide age-appropriate learning materials to over 1,500 three- and four-year-old children throughout Kent County.

Program Type 2: Healthy and Safe Home Environment Programming: Families have access to support that addresses environmental home health in Kent County. Environmental health hazards in

² Cogswell ME, Coil E, Tian LH, Tinker SC, Ryerson AB, Maenner MJ, Rice CE, Peacock G. Health Needs and Use of Services Among Children with Developmental Disabilities—United States, 2014–2018. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. 2022; 71(12):453–458.

³ Center for Disease Control, Developmental Screening and Monitoring, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/screening.html#:~:text=In%20addition%2C%20many%20children%20have,treatment%20might%20have%20been%20omitted.>

the home can contribute to lead poisoning in young children, which can lead to birth defects, developmental delays, and more. These Ready by Five providers work on issues related to lead and other environmental hazards that children can be exposed to in Kent County.

Services include, but are not limited to, environmental home health screening (to reduce home-based hazards regarding lead, asthma, accidental injury, etc.), child blood lead screening, and case management for addressing lead and environmental hazards, including referrals to lead remediation resources. (Note: funds may not be used to cover costs related to home repairs or lead remediation services.)

In 2023, 376 children and expecting parents were enrolled in programming. More than 300 home health screenings were provided and through referrals to lead remediation services, a total of 39 homes have been resolved of lead-based home hazards. Programming also provided funding to support a Health Educator position who is tasked with service partner coordination and facilitating work of the County's Lead Action Team.

Impact: Lead in the home is a silent and prevalent danger in Kent County. According to Kent County's Lead Taskforce this is a county-wide issue. Four out of five homes in Grand Rapids, and nearly three out of five homes in Kent County, were built before 1978, the year lead was banned from paint. The primary source of lead in Kent County's homes is deteriorating lead-based paint – whether on an interior surface or paint that has chipped from exterior surfaces.

The fallout of lead poisoning in young children is often long term, especially if the issue is not identified early. There is no known safe blood lead concentration. Exposure to low amounts may be undetectable but a cause of irreversible neurological, developmental, and long-term health issues. As lead exposure increases, the range and seriousness of symptoms also increase - children may be left with severe intellectual disability and behavioral disorders for the remainder of their lives.

Partners: Agencies that provided programming in this area include:

- Heathy Homes Coalition of West Michigan provides in-home services with a trained Healthy Homes Specialist completing a home screening for lead, asthma, and accidental injury risk. Families are also served by a navigator who connects the family to resources based on the family's identified additional needs.
- Kent County Health Department offers comprehensive Lead Inspection Risk Assessments (LIRA) that identify the source of lead hazards in a home. Funding also supports the coordination of multiple community partners working to reduce lead-based home hazards and community education that increases awareness around the dangers of lead paint in Kent County.

Program Type 3: Niche Family Supports: This program type funds agencies who have experience reaching, supporting, and connecting families who benefit from specific services and support. This area includes specialized services for families with varying circumstances such as being a New American or refugee, families engaged in an intervention-type service such as child welfare, those experiencing housing insecurity, or those otherwise engaged in any program serving adults with young children who would benefit from supports. These programs will ensure families with the most

specialized needs, who may not otherwise be reached by programming, receive early childhood information and support to ensure the healthy development of their young children.

In 2023, 288 children and expecting parent participants were enrolled in services. Agencies were successful in reaching and serving niche populations including families with young children who are newly arriving refugees, parents with young children engaged in foster care system, families living in predominantly Latinx neighborhoods, and families experiencing homeless.

Impact: Programming in this area recognizes that there are groups or communities throughout Kent County that experience additional barriers to accessing programs and resources. Families are successfully served by agencies who understand the unique communication needs of vulnerable or underserved populations; and are positioned as trusted agencies who can conduct outreach or programming in locations where these populations may work, live, or access community services. Leveraging these community partners ensures equitable access and improved long-term outcomes for all families in Kent County.

Partners: Agencies that provided programming in this area include:

- Bethany Christian Services provides programming within the Hands Connected Program. This program connects children and families to a Refugee Navigator, who provides comprehensive support in navigating available community resources.
- Family Promise provides Family Service Coordinators that support families with young children who are experiencing homelessness using a trauma-informed approach.
- The Hispanic Center of Western Michigan ensures families have access to resources and programs that enhance the development of their young children. They focus on the whole family and assist with their basic needs to help them reach self-sufficiency.
- The West Michigan Partnership for Children provides peer-support to parents navigating the child welfare system, working to equip, engage, and support parents to prevent re-entry into the foster care system and support timely reunification.

Program Type 4: Healthy Development Infant Health– Fetal Infant Mortality Review Network Lead

The Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) Network is a collective community effort working to ensure Kent County is addressing the social, economic, and health factors that contribute to healthy births in Kent County. Through a rigorous review process of infant death records, the FIMR Network seeks to identify factors contributing to infant deaths and develop action-oriented recommendations to eliminate infant deaths in Kent County.

The Fetal Infant Mortality Review Network published an [Analysis of Infant Deaths in Kent County](#) in 2022. Throughout 2023, the network continues to analyze new infant death data and provide quarterly updates to maternal child health partners in Kent County.

Impact: Investment in the Fetal Infant Mortality Review Network provides insight and understanding of the factors that contribute to infant mortality, as well as understanding the factors that contribute to the disparities with mortality rates among babies of different race and ethnicities. This knowledge will further inform Kent County's early childhood network on what key programs and initiatives are necessary to support the healthy development of all babies and infants.

Partner: The Kent County Health Department leads the FIMR network and uses an approach that is community-based, action-oriented, and designed to bring together local health providers, consumers, advocates, and leaders.

Ready by Five Network Training Lead

Organizations funded under Healthy Development – Network Training Lead increased knowledge in the Ready by Five network by providing training for all direct service professionals funded by the millage and their direct supervisors.

Amount Spent: \$20,750

Number of Training Sessions Completed: 61

Number of Attendees: 261

The goal of programming in this area is to increase knowledge in the Ready by Five professional network. Training is available for all direct professionals funded by Ready by Five and their supervisors. Topics addressed the following areas:

- Responding to family needs with a trauma-informed approach
- Quality program practices to improve services to families with young children

Impact: Investing in professional training has been shown to offer many benefits to the workforce including:

- Helping employees stay up to date with industry best practices
- Offer the opportunity for professionals to sharpen or learn new skills
- Boost a professional's confidence
- Improve overall workforce retention rates
- Ensuring there is a common base of expertise among all programs funded by Ready by Five

Partners: Agencies providing training services included Health Net of West Michigan and Family Promise.

PARENT EDUCATION AND SUPPORT

Parent Education and Support programming ensures parents have the knowledge and skills to support their children's health, development, and learning. Services provide in-home and/or community-based support and education.

The service type includes programs offering ongoing individualized parent education through home visiting as well as ancillary support that addresses the preventable causes of infant and child mortality. As a result of services, expectant parents and families with young children will have access to the information, resources, and social support they need to be more confident and empowered to make informed choices for themselves, their children, and their families.

Amount Spent: \$2,376,852

Cost Sharing and Donations Collected: \$0

In 2023, more than 2,287 enrollees that included children and expecting parents received Early Learning and Education focused programming:

Program Type 1: Home Visiting Programming includes programs that support a two-generation, preventative approach that matches expectant parents as well as parents with young children with a trained early childhood or maternal infant professional. Programming is holistic and designed to meet the specific needs of each family being served and ensures parents are equipped with timely information about their child's development as well as connection to community resources and support. Services are provided in the home environment and include ongoing parent education, developmental screenings, health support, and referrals to community resources.

Impact: Home visiting is among the most researched and effective social programs, providing a two-generation approach that addresses multiple factors related to child success. Ready by Five funding has increased the capacity of evidence-based parenting education that improves outcomes beginning in infancy, with benefits that grow as children grow. Examples of a few home visiting programs with documented impact:

Healthy Families America (HFA) is an evidence-based home visiting model designed to work with overburdened families who are at-risk for adverse childhood experiences, including child maltreatment. This program supports the parent-child relationship, promotes healthy childhood growth and development, and enhances family functioning. *The return on investment is estimated to be \$1.46 for each dollar invested, with greater benefits (\$3.16) for families involved with child welfare services.*

Strong Beginnings Healthy Start home visiting supports participants from pregnancy until their toddler is 18 months old. Individuals enter the program with multiple risk factors related to their physical and psychosocial health and within the social determinants of health. The most recent evaluation showed a:

- 40 percent reduced risk for very preterm births.
- 15 percent reduced risk for preterm births.
- 87% rate of completion for postpartum exams 60 days after giving birth.

Partners: Agencies providing Home Visiting programming include:

- Cherry Health's Maternal Infant Health program offers additional support for new and expecting parents including nutrition and lactation consultation to improve maternal health outcomes and new parent wellbeing.
- Corewell Health's Baby Scholars programming strengthens the bond between parent and child and provides parent coaching on methods to stimulate early language, cognitive, and increase social emotional development.
- Corewell Health's Strong Beginnings program provides culturally responsive support and local implementation of initiatives that aim to eliminate the disparities in maternal health outcomes for parents of color in Kent County.

- D.A. Blodgett-St Johns specializes in working with families engaged in the foster care system. They provide services to caretakers and their young children to increase attachment and strengthen a child's social emotional skills.
- Easterseals MORC's Incredible Years provides home-based services to families with young children that supports parental skills that in turn strengthens children's social emotional skills.
- Family Futures' Healthy Families program provides higher intensity programming that supports maternal health and well-being as well as prevent the abuse and neglect of children through family-focused support.
- Kent ISD's Bright Beginnings Home Visiting program provides proven methods that help caregivers understand their child's early development, identify possible developmental concerns, and build a foundation for later academic success.
- Momsbloom Hands-on Postpartum Support is provided by trained, community volunteers who offer support with a new parent's emotional wellbeing as well as connections to long term support as they transition to life with a newborn.
- Vibrant Futures' Little Scholar's program provides a preventive intervention program that strengthens the bond between parent and child and stimulates early language, cognitive, and social emotional development.

Program Type 2: Child Safety Initiatives funds services to support child safety – specifically safe sleep and automobile safety. Services ensure there is increased availability of cribs for families who are unable to afford a safe sleep environment. Professionals provide education to parents so they can learn the ABCs of Safe Sleep to reduce the number of infant deaths due to unsafe sleeping environments. Services also ensure babies, infants, and children (through age five) are secure in the appropriate car seat when being transported by automobile. In addition to providing families who are unable to afford a car seat, a certified professional is available to train parents on proper installation of the car seat.

In 2023, 761 car seats were installed by certified professionals and 460 safe sleep education sessions that provided a crib were provided.

Impact: Programs under this program type increased the number of qualifying children and expectant parents engaged in child safety supports. According to the Kent County Health Department, around 5.7 infants die for every 1,000 live births in Kent County each year. Data from the county medical examiner showed that 11% of infant deaths in 2023 were due to unsafe sleeping environments, compared to 17% in 2022 and 23% in 2021. This percentage is the lowest it has been in a decade according to the Kent County Health Department.

Partners: Agencies providing programming in this area include Bethany Christian Services, Cherry Health Services, and Family Futures.

Translation and Interpretation

More than 12 percent of families in Kent County speak a language other than English at home. Translation and interpretation services ensure that millage funded programs are culturally relevant and accessible to all families, regardless of the language a family speaks.

Amount Spent: \$103,501

Cost sharing is not required for this program type.

Services were provided in 61 different languages or dialects. The most common languages included: Spanish, Kinyarwanda, Swahili, Haitian Creole, Pashto, Burmese, Arabic, Karen, and French.

Service Description	Encounter Count by Type of Service
Audio Interpretation	380
Document Translation	48
In Person Interpretation (Home Visit)	221
In Person Interpretation (Play Group)	12
In-Person Interpretation	216
On Demand Interpretation	288
Other	111
Phone Interpretation	844
Telephone Confirmation	58
Total	2178

Translation and interpretation providers included Bethany Christian Services, Hispanic Center of West Michigan, and Liaison Linguistics.

EARLY LEARNING

The area includes programming that supports early learning and development and responds to the diverse families and children residing in Kent County. All programming incorporates elements from the [Michigan Department of Education's Early Childhood Standards of Quality](#) (ECSQ). Early Learning programs offer any number of nationally recognized, evidence-informed models.

Amount Spent: \$1,123,896

Cost Sharing and Donations Collected: \$0

Program Type 1: Play and Learn Community Programming offers children ages birth through five an avenue to community-based early learning programming. These services reach and connect with all types of caretakers to strengthen their understanding of how age-appropriate activities enrich holistic development of a child's social, emotional, and cognitive skills while demonstrating age-appropriate activities for the children in their care. In addition to play-based sessions, programs may offer workshops and training for families and caretakers. Topics may include child development, health, and social emotional well-being.

In 2023 over 8,600 attendees participated in Play and Learn programming. Programming occurs in collaboration with numerous community partners throughout all areas of Kent County. Locations are hosted at many local public schools, the Kent District Library, locations and at the Grand Rapids Public Library.

Impact of Programming: The aim of these programs is to engage all types of caretakers in supporting their child's development through age-appropriate, play-based activities that enhance holistic growth in social, emotional, and cognitive skills. Each session offers caretakers valuable information on supporting their child's early learning development, facilitated by professionals with expertise in early childhood education. Structured around defined learning objectives for both child and caretaker, sessions provide opportunities for play-based engagement reflecting various learning domains linked to Michigan Department of Education Learning Expectations for Pre-K.

Play and Learn Groups provide:

- Information about child development, early reading strategies, and positive discipline.
- Developmentally appropriate activities and fun ideas that parents can take home to enhance their child's early learning.

Partners: Agencies offering programming in this area include Comprehensive Therapy Center, Grand Rapids Community College, Kent ISD, and Vibrant Futures.

Program Type 2: Early Literacy and Learning Programming is a broad area that encompasses programming that supports improved language ability, listening, and communication skills in young children. Agencies must describe how programming meets one or more expectations as defined by the Michigan Department of Education's Early Childhood Standards of Quality (ECSQ).

Over 31,200 Early Learning and Literacy services were provided in 2023. Reach Out and Read partners with pediatricians to advise parents about the importance of reading aloud and provides developmentally appropriate books during regular pediatric check-ups.

Impact: National results from this model show that parents are 2 1/2 times more likely to read with their infants, toddlers, and preschoolers; and children show improved language development by 3-6 months and continue to improve with consistent exposure to Reach Out and Read.⁵

Partners: The agency in this program type is Ready for School's Reach Out and Read.

ADDITIONAL READY BY FIVE FUNDING ALLOCATIONS

Technology and Equipment

This was a one-time funding opportunity for agencies to request the technological equipment necessary to support staff positions funded by Ready by Five Millage. Examples of technology equipment include computers and complementary hardware (e.g., monitor, keyboard) having a total value that exceeds the threshold defined in the Ready by Five Service Provider Manual -- property

costing more than over \$1,000 per unit. Equipment is not an allowable cost as agencies apply for funding under other service type categories.

Amount Spent: \$82,525

Partners: Agencies receiving funds included: Family Futures, Family Promise, Health Net of West Michigan, Kent ISD, and MomsBloom.

Prioritizing Parents Fund

For the 2023 funding cycle, the Resident Proposal Review Board created the Prioritizing Parents Fund. Ready by Five partner agencies had the opportunity to apply for additional funding to implement parent-focused initiatives to enhance their scope of work already funded by the millage.

Amount Spent: \$267,767

Impact: As families look different across different cultural, economic, or geographic circumstances, the needs of parents and their children can vastly vary. Ensuring parents have a voice in program design and implementation is a way to ensure services are meaningful and responsive to the needs of all families.

Early childhood programs and services that prioritize parental involvement create opportunities for families to engage with each other and build supportive relationships. This fosters a sense of community and belonging, which is essential for children.

The fund supported agency responsiveness to the need of families with young children in Kent County in the following ways:

- To have a better understanding of parent needs,
- Offer opportunity to support parents as their child's first teacher,
- Strengthen strategies to support parent leadership,
- Improve processes to serve parents, or
- Equip staff with professional development to better support parent engagement.

Partners: Seven Ready by Five partner agencies were awarded funds that supported the following initiatives.

Kent ISD's program utilized funds to expand their annual Laugh and Learn event and provide an additional parent-focused conference to offer learning opportunities for families.

- The Laugh and Learn event, held annually at Frederick Meijer Gardens, is for parents currently involved with all Kent ISD early childhood programs. Funding expanded on the current event by adding a parent booth to offer parents information on activities that support early learning and development as well as evaluation services to better assess individualized parent needs. Other upgrades to the funds were music and art therapy, musical instruments, and interpreters to make the program accessible to more families.

- Kent ISD's Empowering Parents Conference. This event was designed by parents, for parents. The agenda included breakout sessions that were identified based on parent feedback and included Self Care for Parents, Supporting Positive Behaviors, Raising a Successful Eater, Communication, and Kindergarten Readiness.

Outcomes that were achieved:

- ✓ Have a better understanding of parents' needs.
- ✓ Offer opportunity to support parents as their child's first teacher.
- ✓ Strengthen strategies or systems to support parent leadership.

Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) provided additional opportunities for caregivers to develop a deeper understanding of how their interactions with their child impact their child's development and a way for caregivers to gain strategies that empower them to implement what they have learned at home. GRCC offered this support in the following ways:

- A half-day caregivers conference to support parent learning on how they can support their child's development.
- A series of sessions that engaged caregivers in "adult play". During each session, adult participants explored the activities that support early development, subsequently learning the underlying rationale of how each activity supported early learning.
- Adult-child pairs had opportunities for extended playgroup experiences that allow additional time for caregivers to receive instruction from facilitators on a specific learning topic and then rejoin the playgroup to practice the new skill with their child.

Outcomes that were achieved:

- ✓ Offer opportunity to support parents as their child's first teacher

The Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan reached 35 new households consisting of 151 individuals. Healthy Homes Coalitions' Ready by Five funded program focuses on educating families about ways to identify and reduce lead-based hazards in their home. While lead-based dangers in Kent County are commonly linked to lead-based paint, an earlier community survey results showed that many individuals believed that lead-based dangers in their home were related to water and were unaware of lead-based paint hazards. Healthy Homes Coalition built a communication strategy around this data point. They offered families water testing and water filters that were accompanied with information to further educate individuals about the prevalence of lead-based paint.

Outcomes that were achieved:

- ✓ Have a better understanding of parents' needs.
- ✓ Equip staff with professional development.

MomsBloom reached out to reconnect with parents that had exited services within the last three years. The goal was to learn from the parent's perspective how the organization could improve the family's experience when enrolled in services, reduce barriers in accessing programming, and increase engagement of parents in the future. Some changes that were implemented as a result of parent feedback included adding social media posts that highlight different engagement opportunities, increased direct contact and info sharing to clients that received services within the last 3 years, and the addition of a general newsletter with information about programming.

Outcomes that were achieved:

- ✓ Have a better understanding of parents' needs.
- ✓ Strengthen strategies or systems to support parent leadership.
- ✓ Improve processes to serve parents.

Family Futures established a parent café model, a nationally recognized facilitation model that supports peer-to-peer learning, participants learning about the Protective Factors, and creating strategies from their own wisdom and experiences to strengthen their families. Funding allowed Family Futures to send 25 people to a *Be Strong Families* parent cafe training. This included 20 Family Future staff and five community partners. Family Futures then hosted four parent cafes in Kent County – two in Cedar Springs and two in Grand Rapids. The cafes included child care for the parents and refreshments or dinner depending on the time they were scheduled. The cafes were held for two hours and featured conversations about the Strengthening Families Protective Factors, parent-to-parent sharing, and other parent-led topics.

Outcomes that were achieved:

- ✓ Have a better understanding of parents' needs.
- ✓ Strengthen strategies or systems to support parent leadership.

Health Net of West Michigan utilized Prioritizing Parents Funds to establish two groups of parents through the COFI (Community Organizing and Family Issues) training in Chicago in April 2023. This training focused on community advocacy and activism, teaching parents how to communicate with community members about challenges and mobilize strategies for solutions. The COFI training laid the groundwork for parent listening sessions and the formation of a parent advisory council, which will contribute to Health Net's quality control efforts by advocating for specific issues. The council aims to engage parents in community advocacy groups, providing education and a structured approach to lead the parent group effectively. Through sessions and interviews, the initiative gathered feedback and shared insights with other organizations and continues to work towards enhancing the overall experience for parents who are navigating the healthcare system.

Outcomes that were achieved:

- ✓ Have a better understanding of parents' needs.

- ✓ Strengthen strategies or systems to support parent leadership.
- ✓ Improve processes to serve parents.
- ✓ Equip staff with professional development.

Vibrant Futures gathered parents to amplify their voices around issues related to finding quality child care. Parent feedback was used to design a community survey. Direct feedback from parents supported with the development of survey questions and the strategies to distribute the survey, tapping into their social networks and recommending the institutions of trust that could support survey distribution.

Results of the survey showed affordability related to child care was the number one issue. Forty-four percent of respondents said they are struggling to find child care and 56% said that the child care issue is creating stress and impacting their productivity. This parent survey is informing the work of a regional child care plan that will focus on strategies around affordability.

Outcomes that were achieved:

- ✓ Have a better understanding of parents' needs.
- ✓ Strengthen strategies or systems to support parent leadership.
- ✓ Improve processes to serve parents.

READY BY FIVE EVALUATION AND DATABASE

Beginning in 2021, First Steps Kent contracted with Basis Policy Research (Basis), a research and evaluation firm focused on education and human services, to evaluate the implementation and impact of the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage. Also included in this expense is the reimbursement paid to the Kent County Health Department to cover staff costs related to the monthly maintenance of the Ready by Five database.

Amount Spent: \$230,777

The evaluation researchers are using a mixed-methodology approach to provide evidence of how Ready by Five impacts young children and their families across the lifecycle of the millage. The Ready by Five evaluation will address the following questions:

- To what extent did Ready by Five providers implement services with fidelity?
- What types of Ready by Five services are related to improved health and academic outcomes?
- What is the impact of Ready by Five services on participants' health and academic outcomes?
- How do the benefits of Ready by Five services compare to the financial investment of the Ready by Five Millage?

Phase One (January 2022- December 2022)

In phase one, results will inform the support First Steps Kent offers Ready by Five providers in the shared pursuit of becoming more inclusive and equitable, giving key insights into how different

stakeholder groups benefit from the millage. This includes understanding of the services provided and enhanced recruitment efforts in communities that have hesitated to use services in the past. Parent voice is being included through a series of in-person, phone, and/or virtual interviews with families selected from a stratified random sample of those served. The interviews explore how families learned about the services, how accessible services were, how well the services were delivered, and how services could be improved to better meet individual needs.

Phase Two (January 2023 – September 2024)

Beginning in phase two, additional data analysis will explore the relationship between Ready by Five programming and related health, wellbeing, and early academic outcomes of children and expecting parents served. Researchers will conduct a cost benefit analysis that will begin to measure the benefits of services funded by the Ready by Five Millage. This part of the evaluation will include analysis of the children who have enrolled in Ready by Five- funded services that are of the age of kindergarten entry. recognizing that will be a relatively small sample of children by the end of 2023. Early childhood research has consistently established that many of these programs contribute social and financial benefits over the course of a child's lifetime. While the evaluation is not a longitudinal research project, this analysis will include estimates of the potential long-term value through three main indicators: kindergarten literacy, the likelihood of proficiency in third grade reading, and outcomes such as the likelihood of the participant enrolling in Algebra I in middle school.

Ready by Five Evaluation Team

Agencies selected to support the Ready by Five evaluation include:

- Basis Policy Research has extensive experience evaluating publicly and privately funded education and human services initiatives in numerous states and more than 50 local communities, including Kent County. Locally, Basis has completed a quantitative evaluation and return on investment analysis for the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation Learning Educators Initiative. Basis has also evaluated the impact of the Believe 2 Become Baby Scholars program in Kent County and Ottawa County's Great Start Readiness Program, a state-funded preschool for four-year-old children. At the state level, Basis evaluated the Michigan Department of Education's Statewide System of Support, which works with Intermediate School Districts.
- Advancing Communities for Equity is supporting equitable evaluation practices of all aspects of funding allocations; program content, methodology, and outcomes; power dynamics; decision making; and communications. Principal Emmy O'Dwyer is nationally recognized for her expertise in early childhood education, organizational development, and strategic planning. Her work is focused on advancing equity and access for children, youth, and their families.
- Dr. Christina Weiland is associate professor at the School of Education at the University of Michigan and the Ford School of Public Policy, will serve as a technical advisor on the project, providing guidance on proposed methodologies, including measure development and analytic strategy, and reviewing all major deliverables. Dr. Weiland's research focuses on the effects of early child interventions and public policies on children's development, especially on

children from families with low household incomes. She is an expert in quantitative research methods, educational measurement, and developmental process research. Currently, she is the principal investigator and co-director of a study of the implementation of Boston Universal Pre- kindergarten funded by the Heising-Simons Foundation and the Foundation for Child Development.

More information and updates about the Ready by Five Evaluation can be found at:
<https://www.firststepskent.org/ready-by-five-evaluation>

TOTAL ALLOCATIONS AND SPENDING FOR JAN - DEC 2023

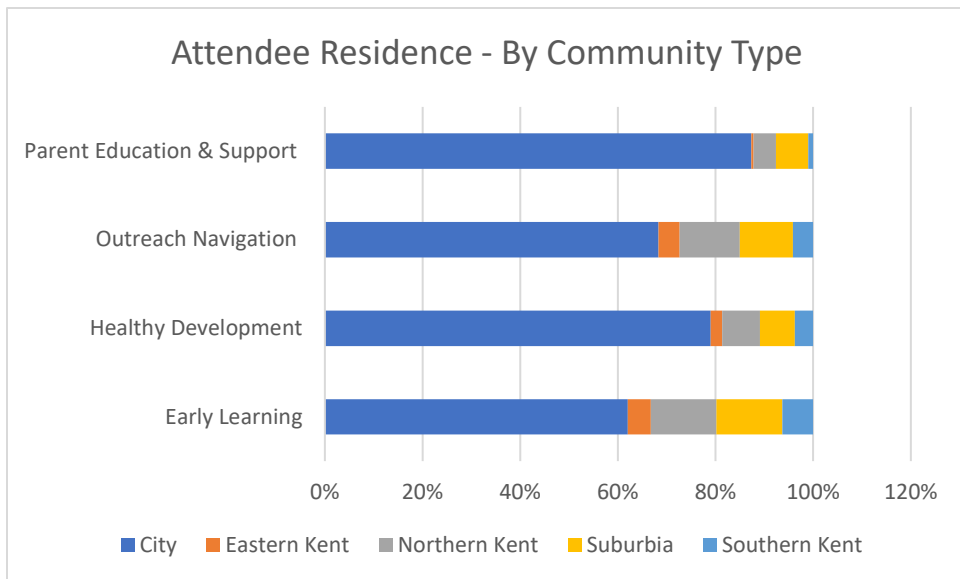
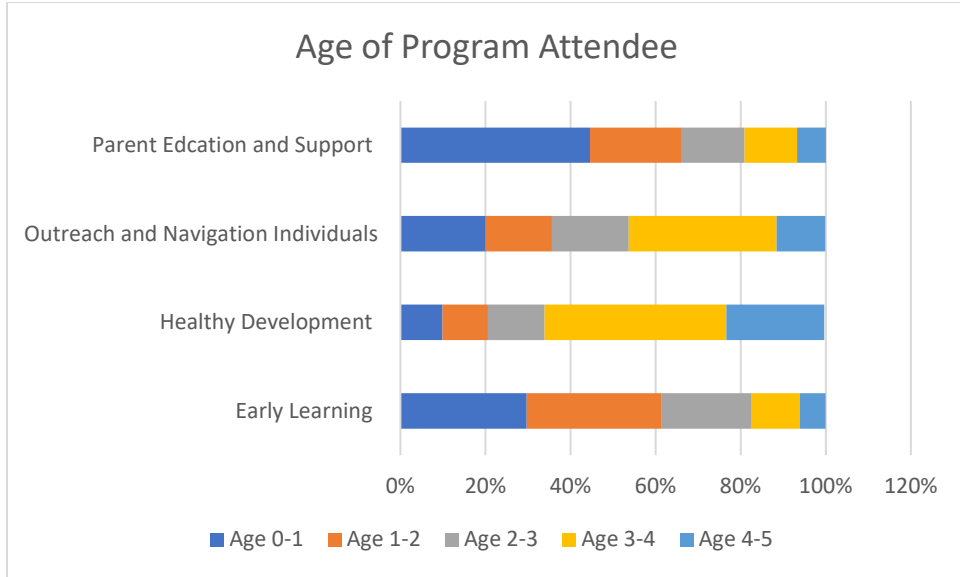
Total Ready by Five Allocations: \$10,187,012

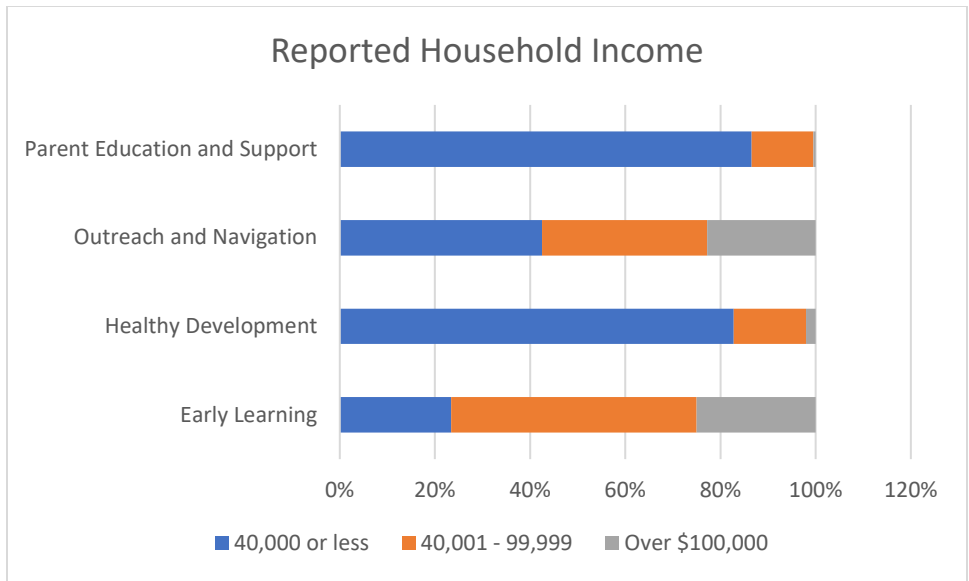
Total Ready by Five Spending: \$9,040,541

The administration and oversight of the Ready by Five Millage costs more than what First Steps Kent receives based on the contract with Kent County. First Steps Kent was paid 414,810 in 2023 and raised an additional \$96,399 in philanthropic funding to underwrite the actual cost of administering funding.

OVERVIEW OF DEMOGRAPHICS

First Steps Kent is transitioning to an updated data dashboard system. For the purposes of this initial report, First Steps Kent is reporting the number of attendees participating in each service type. This shows the zip code, income, the age at the time a child attends a program. Additional demographic features will be shared once the data system transition is complete later this month.





These programs and services were made possible because of the generosity of Kent County taxpayers and the voter-approved Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage.

For more information about the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, please visit:
<https://www.firststepskent.org/millage>

