

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



CONTACT:

Megan Streng
Communications Manager
616.528.4552 | 616.450.8521
mstreng@firststepskent.org

BACKPACKS FOR KINDERGARTNERS

Two local organizations team up to make a difference in the start to the school year

(Grand Rapids, Mich., January 23, 2020)—With so much uncertainty in children's lives right now, parents want to make sure they are set up for the best possible start to school. Whether they are starting kindergarten at home, online, or in the school building, they still need basic supplies. Making sure they have those resources won't be an added burden to families, thanks to a couple of local organizations and the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage. Reach Out and Read West MI and Family Futures have teamed up to deliver more than 750 Kindergarten Readiness Toolkits to five- and six-year-old children in Kent County.

Family Futures operates a program called [Connections](#), which helps parents grow stronger and more confident by helping them recognize and support appropriate developmental milestones for young children. Children are screened for developmental delays or concerns, and if any are identified, families are connected to community resources. All parents in the program learn how to play, interact, and nurture the bond with their child.

Holland/Zeland based [Ready for School](#) is the West MI Affiliate of Reach Out and Read, a national program that gives young children a foundation for success by incorporating books into pediatric care and encouraging families to read aloud together. Ready for School was preparing to expand the program to Kent County earlier this year after receiving funding from the Ready by Five Millage. Those plans were temporarily disrupted by COVID-19, so the organization looked for a new approach to reach local families. It turned to the Connections database to find children most in need of Kindergarten Readiness Kits.

Earlier this month, the Ready for School team got together to assemble 757 of the kits, which include pencils, glue sticks, books, markers, and resources for parents to continue to play and interact with their kindergartner. The team at Family Futures will deliver the kits to each child's home in hopes that it will set up the family for a successful school year.

"Thank you to an incredible crew of staff, volunteers, family members, neighbors for pitching in to equip kids for success in kindergarten and in life," said Donna Lowry, MD President & CEO for Ready for School.

"We are thrilled to provide resources to local children which we know will successfully launch them into their educational journey," said Candace Cowling, Executive Director for Family Futures.

Although the school year looks a lot different than we all imagined, thanks to the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage and these two organizations, hundreds of local children will be better prepared for kindergarten this year.

###

About Ready by Five: The Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage provides dedicated and sustainable funding for programs that improve the health, school readiness, and well-being of children under age five. It allows more children and families from across the community to participate in programs that are proven to increase their likelihood of success in school and beyond. Kent County voters overwhelmingly approved the Ready by Five Early Childhood Proposal in November 2018, making Kent County the first county in Michigan with tax dollars collected specifically to support early childhood programming.