

We are the guardians of hope and promise. **Every child is born with hope** and promise. We need to help them be who they are meant to be. **The brain is developing very quickly during early childhood** making it a critical time to support healthy brain development. Learning does not start when a child walks through our door. **That learning takes place the moment that child is born** and has the opportunity to interact with their world, with parents, with other kids. We sometimes have male pride and think we know it all, but when it comes to raising a little one, **the more knowledge you have the better off you will be.** **Early childhood programs are essential** to support children and help parents catch health and developmental issues early. **Investing in early childhood isn't just the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do.** Studies show that investing in early childhood programs saves money in the long run and ensures better outcomes for health, education, and employment. **Kent County has the opportunity to be a leader** in addressing Michigan's talent gap by investing early in services that are critical to future academic and economic success.



Decisions that you and I make today, we may not actually be able to see the full fruits of those decisions, **but we lay that foundation for our children so tomorrow is a better day for them.**

— DR. BILL PINK , president, GRCC

VISION TO VOICE

People across Kent County are raising their voices for our youngest children.

Our community vision is that every young child in Kent County will enter kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed in school and life. We aren't there yet, but we are making progress. A diverse chorus of voices is loudly and clearly exclaiming *"This is a community that cares about our kids. This is a community in which every child and family should thrive."*

Raising our voices means advocating for public policies that increase access to high quality, affordable child care, as many business leaders in West Michigan are doing. Quality child care is critical for the workforce of today and tomorrow.

It's providing information to parents about what they can do – at the dinner table, in the grocery store, during bath time – to build a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation for their kids.

It's parents practicing the Kent County Great Start Collaborative's Success Basics: to love, talk, count, play, and read with their young children.

It's bringing attention to longstanding disparities in health, education, and quality of life and developing policies and programs that promote equitable outcomes.

It's supporting the Ready by Five Early Childhood Proposal, which, if approved, will raise approximately \$5.7 million a year to support early childhood programs, so that all children in Kent County are healthy and ready to learn when they start school.

We thank our community members who are doing those things and many others to raise their voices for our youngest children. We always have room in the chorus for anyone else who wants to join us!



Annemarie T. Valdez
President & CEO
First Steps Kent



Lew Chamberlin
Co-chair
First Steps Kent



Kate Pew Wolters
Co-chair
First Steps Kent

FIRST STEPS KENT COMMISSION

- Doug DeVos, Emeritus
- Lew Chamberlin, Co-Chair
- Kate Pew Wolters, Co-Chair
- Bob Herr, Secretary-Treasurer
- Ron Caniff
- Alejandra Contreras
- Kristina Donaldson
- Lynne Ferrell
- Maureen Hale
- Steve Heacock
- Melinda Johnson, MD
- Sue Jandernoa
- Karen O'Donovan
- Dr. Juan Olivarez
- Julie Ridenour
- Milt Rohwer
- Joan Secchia
- Michelle Van Dyke
- Carl Ver Beek
- Amanda Winn
- Sean Welsh

FIRST STEPS KENT STAFF

- Annemarie Valdez
President / CEO
- Heather Boswell
Senior Director of Operations & Projects
- Kate Parr
Operations Manager
- Ashley Greenberg
Office Coordinator
- Shelby French
Finance Coordinator
- Kara Bilkert*
Data and Outcomes Project Manager
- Anissa Eddie*
Pritzker Early Childhood Fellow

* Shared roles with KConnect.

4,100

children of any one age level are economically disadvantaged

20,500

children under age five are economically disadvantaged

44,500

total children under age five live in Kent County

17,000

children under age five have public health insurance

We can't prepare them for everything, but we can prepare them for success, and success starts early.

- JESSICA TURK
Great Start Parent Coalition

Ready by Five Vote on November 6

The Ready by Five Early Childhood Proposal will create a dedicated source of funding for community-based early childhood programs proven to work in Kent County. First Steps Kent submitted the Ready by Five Early Childhood Proposal to the Kent County Board of Commissioners, which approved it to be on the countywide ballot. Local early childhood professionals, parents, and community leaders launched the Yes Ready by Five campaign in September.

The proposal will:

- Support new parents so they can make sure their children are healthy and ready for kindergarten.
- Provide all young kids in Kent County with developmental screenings, which are critical for early identification of speech and hearing impairments, autism, and other learning disabilities or delays.
- Increase access to high-quality early learning experiences that provide a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation for Kent County kids.

If approved, the millage will raise about \$5.7 million a year for six years. A homeowner with an average home value of \$150,000 will pay about \$18.75 per year, or \$1.56 per month. All millage dollars will be publicly reported to Kent County and go through an independent audit every year to ensure taxpayer funds are spent wisely and transparently.



Ready to Learn

Learn about the Ready by Five Early Childhood Proposal on Nov. 6, 2018



Children who enter school with the intellectual, social and emotional skills gained in early childhood programs are more likely to be successful through school, while children who start behind stay behind.

If approved, the Ready by Five Early Childhood Proposal will:

- Provide health and developmental screenings for all Kent County kids, which are essential in early detection of speech or hearing impairments, autism or learning disabilities so kids get the treatment they need.
- Support new parents so they can ensure their children are healthy and ready for kindergarten.



- Increase access to high-quality early learning experiences that build a strong social, emotional and intellectual foundation for Kent County kids.

What you need to know:

- All millage dollars will go through an independent audit and be reported to Kent County every year to ensure taxpayer funds are spent wisely and transparently.
- The proposed rate of .25 mills means a homeowner with an average home value of \$150,000 will pay about \$18.75 per year, or \$1.56 per month.
- Studies show that a dollar invested in early childhood development saves \$6 down the road with reduced costs for health care, education and prisons.¹

READY BY FIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD PROPOSAL

Shall Kent County levy .25 of one mill which is equal to 25 cents per \$1,000 of the taxable value on all real and personal property subject to taxation for the period 2018 through 2024 and providing early childhood development services to persons up to age 5 and their parents? The amount raised by the levy in the first calendar year is estimated at \$5,702,887.

first steps
growing every child's potential
First Steps Kent
678 Front Avenue, Suite 100
Grand Rapids, MI 49504
firststepskent.com

Visit www.firststepskent.com for more information.
Vote Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2018



Lew Chamberlin
Campaign Kick-off

#TogetherWeCanDoBetter

The community is missing an opportunity to prepare children for success at the time when it can have the greatest impact.

That was a key finding of a report First Steps Kent released in November 2017 entitled *Re:Focus – Analyzing Gaps in Early Childhood Services and Funding in Kent County*. Community partners have identified the comprehensive programs and supports that should be

available from the time parents are expecting a baby to the time that child enters kindergarten.

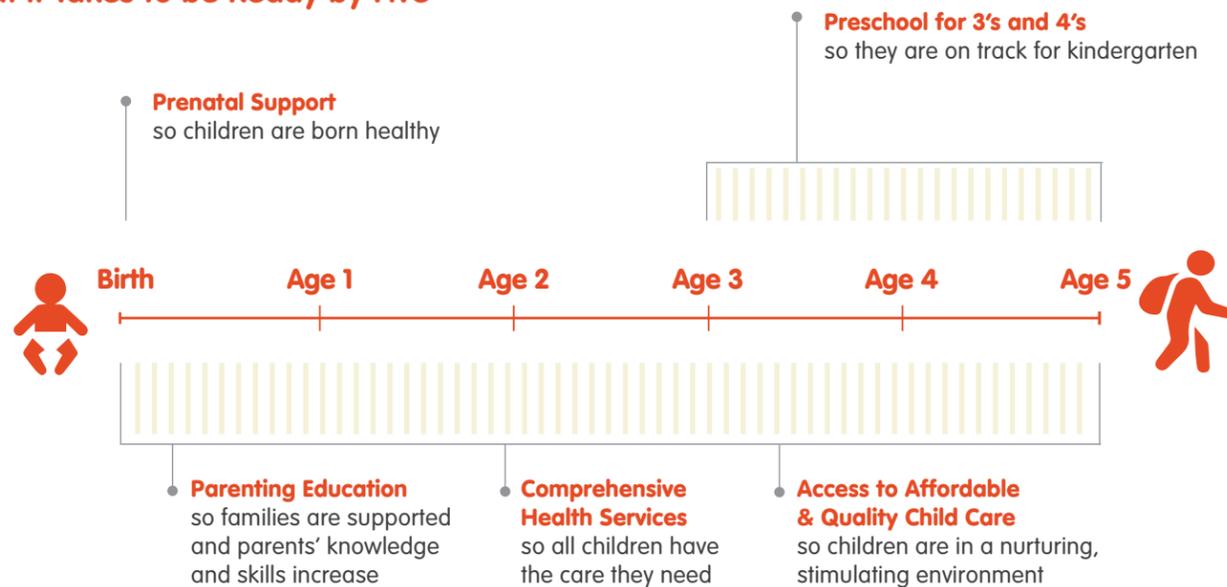
The gap analysis found there is space available in most programs to serve only a fraction of Kent County children – in many cases, far fewer than half of eligible

children. For instance, only 14 percent of economically disadvantaged 3-year-olds are enrolled in free preschool, and 47 percent of the target population for home-based parenting education (known as home visiting) is participating currently. First Steps Kent and its community partners

continue to advocate for the resources to support all of Kent County's youngest children. Together, we can do better.

You can read the *Re:Focus* report at www.firststepskent.org/making-the-case.

What it Takes to be Ready by Five



We know that children are resilient. They can bounce back, they can respond to smart social programs. We also know you pay a greater cost to do that, and you don't get the same result as from the very beginning ensuring that no child slip through the cracks.

A Committed Community

Community Breakfast

More than a hundred early childhood advocates gathered last fall to sharpen their focus on Kent County's youngest children. First Steps Kent hosted a community breakfast to unveil the findings of the *Re:Focus* report and invite participants to be part of the solution in filling the gaps it identified. Grand Rapids Community College President Dr. Bill Pink opened the breakfast by talking about the importance of investing in early childhood to develop a talented workforce. Several parents shared their experiences with early childhood programs that have helped get their kids the start they need to be successful in school and beyond.



Dr. Renee Boynton-Jarrett
Keynote Speaker

Ready by Five Conference

Early childhood professionals, parents, and supporters came together for the one-day Ready by Five Conference First Steps Kent hosted in the spring. About 250 people attended the day of presentations, panel discussions, and breakout sessions on early childhood learning and health. The panel featured national experts from King County, WA and Los Angeles, two communities that have dedicated funding to support early childhood in their communities.

Dr. Renee Boynton-Jarrett, a leading early childhood health expert and practicing primary care pediatrician at Boston Medical Center, was the keynote speaker for the conference. She spoke about the link between environment and child wellbeing and how open communities in which children and families feel connected and supported have better health and education outcomes.

2018 Ready by Five Conference sponsors:
Amway Foundation, Heart of West Michigan United Way, Kate Pew Wolters, Meijer, Mercantile Bank, O'Donovan Family Foundation

– DR. RENEE BOYNTON-JARRETT, pediatrician

National Foundation Invests in Kent County's Youngest Children

Kent County is one of 29 communities across the country participating in a new initiative to increase the number of children who are healthy and developmentally on track by kindergarten. The National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers (NCIT) is a nationwide effort to priori-

tize a strong start for infants and toddlers by ensuring a healthy start at birth, stronger support of families with young children, and expanded access to high-quality care and learning environments. Funded by the Pritzker Children's Initiative, a program of the J.B. and M.K. Pritzker

Family Foundation, this effort brings together national partners, early childhood leaders, policymakers, and practitioners to create and strengthen promising policies and programs and share what works.

The effort focuses on communities that are demonstrat-

ing a commitment to increasing high-quality programs and services for children from birth to age three.

The Pritzker Children's Initiative is investing more than \$6.5 million across the 29 communities during the one year pilot – with additional funding to follow.

"The selection of Kent County is evidence that our community is recognized nationally for our commitment to providing babies and toddlers with a strong start in life," said Annemarie Valdez.



Anissa Eddie
Kent County's Pritzker Fellow

Local Early Childhood Leader Selected as Pritzker Fellow

The Pritzker Fellows Program is a component of NCIT and is providing communities with additional leadership to advance early childhood systems building efforts. Anissa Eddie is Kent County's Pritzker Fellow and brings to the role years of experience. As Associate Director of KConnect, Eddie has focused on early childhood, equity and inclusion, and community engagement – all of which are part of her work as the Pritzker Fellow. This is a cooperative arrangement, as First Steps Kent is leasing Eddie from KConnect for the two-year fellowship. The partnership will advance both organizations' work to ensure the community has the systems in place to prepare children for success in school and beyond.

"I am honored to support Kent County's efforts to improve equitable outcomes for young children and their families through this role," said Eddie. "I sense a building momentum when it comes to collaboration in the early childhood space, and I believe we are positioned well to generate positive and sustainable impact."

This partnership is just one example of efforts to work collaboratively and maximize resources. First Steps Kent and KConnect also are sharing the position of Data and Outcomes Project Manager, as the two organizations' data collection and analysis is closely aligned. Kara Bilkert joined the staffs in June.

Building a More Equitable and Inclusive Early Childhood System

Equity and Inclusion

An equitable and inclusive early childhood system is one that helps all children and families thrive. It builds on each child's unique set of individual and family strengths, cultural background, languages, abilities, and experiences. It addresses existing disparities in outcomes and opportunities.

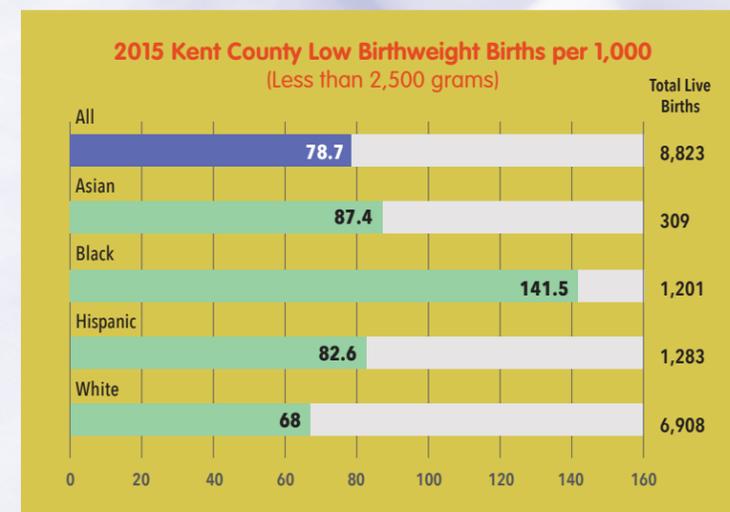
First Steps Kent is working to advance equity and inclusion within the organization and throughout the community's early childhood system. The organization is developing an equity and inclusion plan that outlines specific policies, practices, and behaviors that help to ensure equitable pathways to early childhood supports regardless of race or ethnicity. The plan focuses on both internal operations of the First Steps Kent staff and board as well as the broader early childhood system.

Born Healthy

One important indicator of kindergarten readiness is how healthy a child is at birth. It's an outcome for which significant disparities exist between white infants and infants of color.

Babies born at a healthy birth weight are more likely to be developmentally on track and ready for kindergarten. The chart below shows that for every 1,000 babies born in Kent County in 2015, 79 were low birthweight. The rate of low birth weight among African American infants is twice what it is among white infants. The gap has been as high as four times that rate but has been steadily declining thanks to the efforts of community partners, who continue to work collaboratively to address it.

The Born Healthy indicator is an example of the community's focus on shared data and outcomes. Born Healthy is a key indicator of KConnect, First Steps Kent, the Great Start Collaborative, the Infant Health Action Team, and other community partners working to improve maternal and infant health.



A child's health and wellbeing is greatly impacted by their parent's health and wellbeing. **Our strategies have to move us toward equitable outcomes,** so that all children and families have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

– ANNEMARIE VALDEZ
president/CEO, First Steps Kent

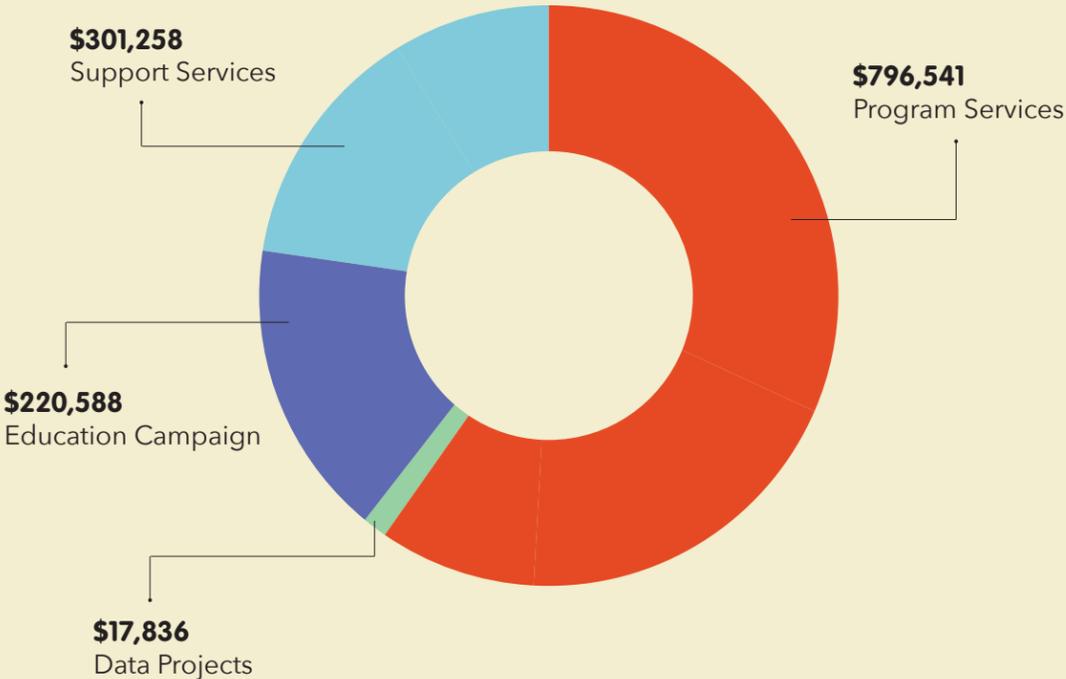
Financials: September 30, 2017

Revenue and Support

Total revenue, support, and net assets = \$1,720,903

Expenses

Total = \$1,336,223



We need to say **we believe** that every child in this community should have the opportunity to participate in a quality early childhood program.

- TERESA WEATHERALL NEAL, superintendent, GRPS

Our Funders

- Consumers Energy Foundation
- Great Start Collaborative
- Sebastian Foundation
- Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation
- Jandernoa Foundation
- Secchia Foundation
- Frey Foundation
- Kate & Richard Wolters Foundation
- Steelcase Foundation
- Grand Rapids Community Foundation
- Keller Foundation
- W. K. Kellogg Foundation
- Kent County Prevention Initiative

Front cover "voices", top to bottom:
 Nancy Lim, National League of Cities
 Gwenden Dueker, PhD, psychologist
 Brook Veldkamp, Kindergarten teacher
 Anthony Queen, Great Start Parent Coalition
 Linda Pickett, PhD, early childhood professor
 Lew Chamberlin, First Steps Kent Co-chair
 Mike Jandernoa, business leader and philanthropist

Back cover "voices", top to bottom:
 Lynne Ferrell, Frey Foundation
 Sue Jandernoa, First Steps Kent Commissioner
 Destiny Willis, parent
 Doug DeVos, President of Amway
 Birgit Klohs, The Right Place
 Kate Pew Wolters, First Steps Kent Co-chair
 Dr. Renee Boynton-Jarrett, pediatrician

The gaps are significant, but the way you get across a gap is to leap, and that's what we're doing. **As a community, we're coming together, we're joining arms, and we're going to leap. I think this time we're going to get it done.** There were bigger and more expensive gaps than I ever imagined, and I think Kent County needs to invest in early childhood. **When you inform West Michigan, Kent County does rally for what's right.** Even though **my children are benefitting from these programs,** it's very sad to say that there are children that are home right now that are not benefitting from these programs. Hopefully we can put our minds together and make sure that they do. **When we start working with the youngest of children at the very early stages, you will get better results, and it will cost less.**

Talent is the driver of economic development today. **The talent pipeline starts way, way, way down the road when children are small. This is a workforce development and a social justice issue.** We have an opportunity to ensure that all Kent County children have the start they need to be successful. **It's really now an issue of who do we want to be as a society** and how will future generations judge our decisions that we make now.