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**SUPPORT FOR CHILD CARE PROVIDERS WILL IMPROVE  
ACCESS TO CARE FOR KENT COUNTY FAMILIES**

*W.K. Kellogg Foundation funds a pilot to provide business support to local child care providers*

(Grand Rapids, Mich., August 14, 2019)—First Steps Kent received a \$750,000 grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to develop an Early Childhood Shared Services program in Kent County. Shared Services is an innovative approach to strengthen the child care industry by helping providers share costs and deliver services in a more streamlined and efficient way.

"Shared Services sounds like something that could benefit early child care providers," said Joanne Sweedyk, local in-home child care provider. "It is difficult to make phone calls and figure out logistics during the daytime hours, as there are children in my care. It would be wonderful to have downtime in the evenings and weekends to spend with my family. I love my job, but it is often all-consuming with the business aspects that go into it."

This three-year grant will allow First Steps Kent to pilot a Shared Services model to offer more support and backend services to childcare centers and family homes. The tangible benefits that would come along with Shared Services are group insurance, buying power, training and professional development and basic business management support. The expenses and time associated with running a childcare business force many providers out of the industry. Research shows easing those burdens helps stabilize the pool of providers, giving families more options.

"We've found that the early care providers who are serving our youngest children need advocacy and support," said Anissa Eddie, Kent County's Pritzker Fellow. "The research shows that high quality childcare is critical to the development of children and their readiness for Kindergarten. People start caring for babies and children because they are passionate about it, but too often they end up closing their doors due to isolation, low compensation, and the stress factors that come with running a small business."

This pilot was developed by a broad group of early childhood stakeholders including Dr. Nkechy Ezech, CEO of Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative, Gayle Orange, CEO of Camp Fire West Michigan 4C, and representatives from the Frey Foundation, Steelcase Foundation,

Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation, Kent ISD, Grand Rapids Community College and the Early Childhood Investment Corporation.

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**About First Steps Kent:** *First Steps Kent is an independent nonprofit organization that works with parents, service providers, funders, advocates, and other stakeholders to build a comprehensive early childhood system in Kent County. Our community vision is that every young child in Kent County will enter kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed in school and life. First Steps Kent is working with our community partners to make that vision a reality. Learn more at [www.firststepskent.org](http://www.firststepskent.org).*

**About the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (GENERAL FOUNDATION INFORMATION)** *The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF), founded in 1930 as an independent, private foundation by breakfast cereal pioneer, Will Keith Kellogg, is among the largest philanthropic foundations in the United States. Guided by the belief that all children should have an equal opportunity to thrive, WKKF works with communities to create conditions for vulnerable children so they can realize their full potential in school, work and life. The Kellogg Foundation is based in Battle Creek, Michigan, and works throughout the United States and internationally, as well as with sovereign tribes. Special emphasis is paid to priority places where there are high concentrations of poverty and where children face significant barriers to success. WKKF priority places in the U.S. are in Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico and New Orleans; and internationally, are in Mexico and Haiti. For more information, visit [www.wkkf.org](http://www.wkkf.org).*