

**First
Steps
Kent**



Supported by the Kent County **Ready by Five** Millage

Societal Benefits and Return on Investment

Impact of Ready by Five Millage Funded Programs

July 2023

In 2022, more than 12,000 children and expectant parents in every zip code of Kent County participated in quality early childhood services that would not have been available without the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage. While many of these services are universally accessible to all families, our intentional focus on children with the greatest needs and, thus, the potential for greatest impact is proving successful.

- 57% of families served in 2022 are from historically marginalized groups.
- 45% are in households with incomes below \$40,000 a year.
- Participation in programming increased 55% in the six zip codes that are most economically disadvantaged, both urban and rural.

The scale and reach of Ready by Five benefits not only the individual children served, but also their parents and the greater community. National research shows quality early childhood programming has immediate and long-term benefits, including:

- Healthier babies.
- Prevention of child abuse and neglect.
- Better family relationships.
- Less grade repetition and need for special education.
- Improved high school graduation rates.
- Reduced criminal behavior and interactions with law enforcement.
- Adults who are more likely to be in the workforce and be better parents to their own children.

To be awarded Ready by Five funding, programs must provide evidence of their effectiveness. Many of the models currently funded by the millage have been researched for decades with well documented evidence of the impact and long-term return on investment. These are highlights from some of those programs.



Effective Programs that Work

Home Visiting 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.

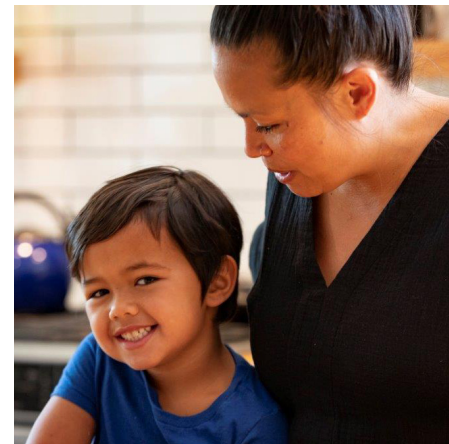
Healthy Families America (HFA) is an evidence-based home visiting model designed to work with overburdened families who are at-risk for adverse childhood experiences, including child maltreatment. This program supports the parent-child relationship, promotes healthy childhood growth and development, and enhances family functioning. *The ROI 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 shows a:

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

Collectively HFA and Strong Beginnings served an **additional 220 babies, toddlers, and young children** with Ready by Five funding last year.

*Endnotes 1 Healthy Families America ROI information is available at www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/HFA-ROI-Brief.pdf 2 Flax JF, Realpe-Bonilla T, Roesler C, Choudhury N, Benasich A. Using early standardized language measures to predict later language and early reading outcomes in children at high risk for language-learning impairments. *J Learn Disabil*. 2009 Jan-Feb;42(1):61-75. 3 Think Babies, The State of Babies Yearbook, accessible online at <https://www.thinkbabies.org/state-of-babies/> 4 Parents as Teachers ROI info available at: <https://www.pat-mitelternlernen.org/wp-content/uploads/PATNC-fact-sheet-Return-on-Invest-1.pdf> 5 Reach Out and Read, The Evidence, available at <https://reachoutandread.org/why-we-matter/the-evidence/> 6 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. 7 Center for Disease Control, Developmental Screening and Monitoring, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/screening.html> 8 Kent ISD. Note: The costs per student included are for illustrative purposes. The actual cost per student can vary depending on the individual diagnosis and circumstances 9 James Heckman, information available at <https://heckmanequation.org/>*



Early Learning is Crucial to Later Success

Language comprehension at age three – largely developed by being in an environment rich with words, conversation, and books – is the best predictor of future language-learning status. Data shows that the percentage of all Michigan parents who read to their children daily is 37.8, compared to 26.8 percent for families in low-income households. Ready by Five funds programs that have evidence of success improving early literacy.

The **Parents as Teachers** (PAT) model (Bright Beginnings) enhances child development and school readiness by providing parents with knowledge and resources to prepare their kids for a stronger start in life and greater school success. The model includes:

- Personal home visits by parent educators,
- Group meetings for parents,
- Developmental screenings for children, and
- A resource network for families.

Ready by Five funding increased PAT programming to reach an **additional 130 expectant parents and young children** in 2022. *Research estimates the ROI is \$1.23 for each dollar invested.*

Reach Out and Read partners with pediatricians to advise parents about the importance of reading aloud and provide developmentally appropriate books during regular pediatric check-ups. 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. More than **10,000 young children** were served across Kent County in 2022.

Successfully Connecting Families

Ready by Five funding allowed for the creation of an **Outreach and Navigation** network, which is critical to connecting families to evidenced-based programs and other community resources. Outreach and Navigation providers help families assess their needs and then access health services; support for housing, food, and other essential needs; and evidenced-based early childhood programs. Outreach and Navigation providers navigated more than 3,500 families in 2022, helping them find a wide range of programming, including 1,000 referrals to home visiting programs. Research is beginning to emerge on the impact of such screening and referral networks for people with social needs. While many families can benefit from these initiatives, **cost savings are most significant when those with the greatest needs are served.**

First Steps Kent and partners recognize an opportunity to **expand the Outreach and Navigation network to help families navigate the child care system**, ensuring they maximize all assistance for which they are eligible and helping them find affordable quality care. That will require additional Ready by Five funding and would bring **significant benefit to local families** struggling amidst the national child care crisis and to local business owners losing employees who don't have child care.

"While reaching women with more complex risk factors, Strong Beginnings has achieved statistically significant reductions in preterm, very preterm, and very low birthweight births, especially for Black women, and increased rates of adequate prenatal care and postpartum visit completion compared to women on Medicaid not in the program."

Published in JAMA Peds, a peer-reviewed Journal (Journal of the American Medical Association Pediatrics). July 25, 2023.

Addressing Developmental Concerns

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 needs** in the long-term.

Ready by Five funds **Connections** which offers **developmental screenings throughout early childhood** and helps families access **early intervention services** if a delay or disability is confirmed. 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.⁶ 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."**⁷ The Connections program was successful in completing 3,207 screenings for 1,701 children in 2022, **identifying 730 children with a potential concern.**

During the 2021-2022 school year, for the 1,084 infants and toddlers enrolled in Early On services (IDEA Part C funding); the overall average cost was \$7,428 per infant/toddler. Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) (IDEA Part B funding that serves ages 3-5) for the 1,185 students served showed an average cost of \$5,932 per student. In Kent County the average cost for a child to receive three years of Early On and two years of ECSE totals \$34,148. As developmental delays and concerns are identified in later grades, the overall average cost is higher, standing at \$12,996 per student per year.⁸

Investing Earlier is Better

The famed Nobel Laureate economist Dr. James Heckman advises communities take the approach of the Ready by Five Millage: **invest early, starting before birth whenever possible, and stack a variety of comprehensive programming and interventions** for children and families facing the biggest disadvantages. "Providing health, early learning and care from birth produces a 13% return on investment per child, per annum, significantly higher than just preschool alone," Heckman explains.

The exact numbers associated with the ROI vary based on which interventions were included in the analysis, but numerous studies demonstrate quality early childhood programs provide one of our greatest opportunities to address longstanding disparities in health, education, and employment, ultimately saving communities far more money than they have spent.⁹

While we are not going to know the full ROI for Ready by Five for years to come, we are gaining some early indication of its impact through the evaluation process. Basing success on the empirical measure of kindergarten readiness, the evaluation will begin to determine the impact for children who are school aged and have engaged in Ready by Five funded services. Initial evaluation results showing impact on k-readiness will be available sometime in fall of 2023, with additional results of ROI to follow in coming years, as children receiving services as infants and toddlers start kindergarten.



