



Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage

Update for January 1 – December 31, 2021

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Supported by the Kent County Ready by Five Millage.

Toddlers are back together again, playing and learning with each other and their caregivers, building the skills that will prepare them for school success. Nurses, community health workers, and early childhood educators are going back into living rooms, working with parents to help them ensure their babies are healthy, developmentally on track, and thriving. By the latter part of 2021, programs funded by the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage began transitioning from offering virtual services during the pandemic to a more typical model of service delivery. Rather than simply returning to normal, they are emerging from the pandemic with a better understanding of families' needs, new and innovative strategies to engage families, and the flexibility to respond to change and uncertainty.

Throughout 2021, the number of young children and expectant parents participating in Ready by Five funded programs steadily grew, with 3,300 clients served in the month of December compared to 2,400 in January – an increase of more than 35 percent. In all, about 11,400 young children and parents engaged in millage-funded services in 2021 – up from 3,400 the previous year. The current trajectory puts us on a path to reach the participation levels we had expected prior to the disruptions caused by COVID-19 pandemic.

Thanks to the community's historic investment in Ready by Five, families who otherwise would not have participated in early childhood services are now receiving the support they need to provide their babies and toddlers a great start in life. The intentional focus on outreach and navigation means we are engaging families in all areas of the county – urban, suburban, and rural – to provide information about parenting and child development and connect them to community resources and early childhood programs. Part of the outreach process is an assessment of each family's unique needs. The most common requests last year included support with child care and/or preschool, early intervention services for developmental delays, baby supplies, and the essential needs of housing and food.

The families served in 2021 represent every zip code in Kent County, with the largest concentration in the core cities of Grand Rapids, Grandville, Kentwood, Walker, and Wyoming. Services are available to all expectant parents and families with children five years old and younger, with an intentional focus on serving those with the greatest needs and in communities that are most under-resourced and/or geographically isolated. Additional demographic and geographic information can be found in Attachment 2.

The Resident Proposal Review Board – a nine-member board that includes four parents, two Kent County Commissioners, and community volunteers – awarded \$7 million to fund 29

The Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage:

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

programs run by 17 community-based organizations last year, all of which was approved by the Kent County Board of Commissioners. Services supported by the Ready by Five Millage include:

- Outreach, Screening and Navigation
- Healthy Expectant and New Parents
- Developmental Screenings and Connection
- Healthy and Safe Home Environment
- Fetal Infant Mortality Review Network
- Play and Learn Communities
- Early Literacy and Learning
- Home Visiting
- Child Safety Initiatives
- Translation and Interpretation

The translation and interpretation services added in 2021 include a new “on-demand” component that allows Ready by Five service providers to engage with an interpreter almost immediately for phone calls and virtual visits, making participation possible for many more families across the community. Descriptions of all program categories and a list of organizations that received funding can be found in Attachment 1.

Over the last year, as the COVID-19 pandemic continued, organizations provided services in person, virtually, and using a hybrid of both approaches. While face-to-face interaction is often most desirable, we have found video conferencing offers an opportunity to engage with families who may be reluctant to open their door to a home visit or otherwise participate in person. Organizations may continue to incorporate effective virtual components or options into their programs, as warranted.

In addition to expanding services and increasing participation, another significant focus of 2021 was establishing a process to evaluate the impact of Ready by Five. The external evaluation firm Basis Policy Research was selected to provide an independent and neutral assessment for how millage investments are impacting contributors to kindergarten success. The four contributing indicators being assessed are:

- Parents’ access to resources and information
- Mother’s health and wellbeing
- Children are developmentally on track
- Children’s health

The first report of evaluation findings will be available in 2024 and will inform future programming decisions and funding allocations, ensuring the most effective use of public dollars. The evaluation has an equity component to assess how well funds are being utilized to improve outcomes for

Fast Facts:

- *Voters approved Ready by Five in November 2018 for six years.*
- *At .25 mills, it generates approximately \$5.7 million every year through 2024.*
- *Kent is the first county in Michigan have tax dollars solely dedicated to preventative, early childhood services.*

marginalized communities. The evaluation with the work of Kent County government to rid its systems of inequity, discrimination, and racial injustice.

We are hopeful 2022 will largely be uninterrupted by COVID-19 – this would be the first year that services are fully open and operational since programs funded by the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage began programming in March of 2020. Service providers have demonstrated their adaptability to respond to uncertainty caused by the pandemic or other unexpected factors. Regardless, we know thousands of families and young children continue to feel the impact the last two years have had on their physical health, emotional wellbeing, economic stability, and learning and development. The Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage has, and will continue to meet, families where they are, providing the support, information, resource connection, and early experiences that will allow our youngest children the opportunity to thrive and reach their fullest potential.

In 2021, First Steps Kent raised \$52,329 in additional philanthropic funding to underwrite the costs of administering the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage as the cost of the work exceeds the 5.7% of annual millage revenue allocation First Steps Kent receives to cover millage administration costs. The additional costs are used for necessary staff time to support the development and implementation of all millage components including data collection, procurement, allocation, and contract oversight.

Attachments:

- **Attachment 1: Overview of Funded Programs and Allocations – FY 2021**
- **Attachment 2: Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage Trends – FY 2021**

Attachment 1: Overview of Funded Programs and Allocations - FY 2021

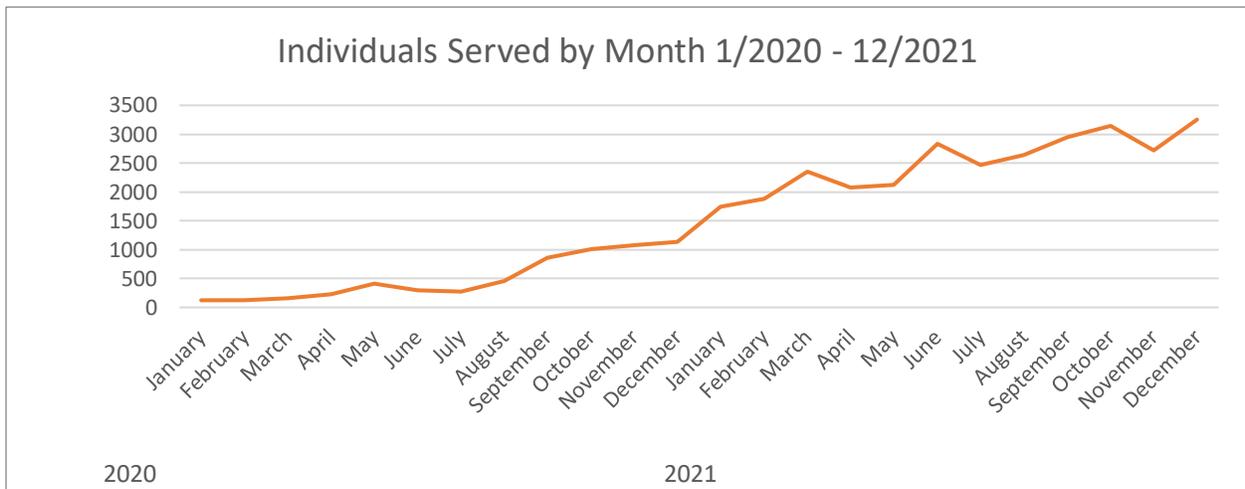
Throughout 2021, programs funded by the Ready by Five Millage began to re-establish partnerships within healthcare and education, two key sectors that provide necessary connections and referrals to the network of early childhood programming in Kent County.

Challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic continued. Following the workforce trends in all sectors, agencies experienced significant issues with maintaining consistent staffing in the earlier part of 2021. As programs operated with fewer staff, the overall cost of staffing programs was less than projected. This contributed to the underspending of funds in 2021.

Families with young children remained the most cautious with returning to in-person activities as vaccinations for COVID-19 have not been approved for children under the age of five. However, as schools began to reopen in the fall, the demand for programs dramatically increased, and spending of millage funds increased to match this demand.

By the end of 2021, of the \$7,490,589 of Ready by Five Millage funds allocated, a total of \$5,191,695 was spent. Programs collected \$3,296 in cost sharing and donation funds. A plan to allocate unspent funds in future years allocations will be implemented in 2022.

About 11,400 young children and parents engaged in millage-funded services in 2021 – up from 3,400 the in 2020. The current trajectory puts us on a path to reach the participation levels we had expected prior to the disruptions caused by COVID-19 pandemic going into 2022.



OUTREACH AND NAVIGATION services connect parents to early childhood information, programming, and community resources to provide a healthy, safe, and nurturing environment for their young child.

- Amount allocated for 2021: \$2,054,413
- Amount spent in 2021: \$1,534,169

In 2021 these Ready by Five providers worked as a network to ensure families receive information and referrals to the services they need:

- Family Futures
- Health Net of West Michigan
- Help Me Grow Kent
- Hispanic Center of Western Michigan (Specializing in serving Spanish-speaking families)
- The Hands Connected Network, Bethany Christian Services (Specializing in serving families who are refugees)
- Family Promise of Grand Rapids (Specializing in serving families experiencing homelessness)
- West Michigan Partnership for Children (Specializing in serving families engaged in foster care services)

Outreach and Navigation services are available to all families with young children in Kent County and can range from individualized support by phone to more regular, in-person support that helps families assess their needs and successfully engage with the programs and resources that will best serve them. Through the Outreach and Navigation network, we have connected with 4,195 children and expectant parents. The most frequent requests during 2021 included assistance with finding child care, housing, food, and transportation.

HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS ensure expectant parents and those with young children have access to comprehensive, coordinated care that maximizes the child's physical and emotional health.

- Amount allocated for 2021: \$2,192,470
- Amount spent in 2021: \$1,325,577

2021 Providers (Programs):

- Arbor Circle (Keep Early Education Positive)
- Arbor Circle (Infant Toddler Developmental Services)
- Cherry Health (Increase finger prick screenings for lead)

- Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative (Promote, Refer, Education – Keep Early Education Positive)
- Family Futures (The Connections Program)
- Family Promise of Grand Rapids (The Family Engagement and Stabilization Program)
- Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan (Training community partners on how to screen for environmental hazards in the home)
- Kent County Health Department (Fetal Infant Mortality Review Network)
- Kent County Health Department (Home Lead Assessments)
- Ready for School (Reach Out and Read West Michigan)

Healthy Development services expanded both mental health services as well as literacy-focused initiatives. This area also funds programs addressing environmental health hazards in the home that can contribute to lead poisoning in young children, which can lead to birth defects, delays, and more.

All programs in this area served 2,486 individuals in all areas of Kent County throughout 2021. In addition, the Reach Out and Read West Michigan distributes books to parents and children during pediatric visits. During 2021, this program was able to re-establish relationships that were paused during the COVID-19 pandemic and successful in distributing more than 10,000 books to nearly 4,000 children in Kent County through partnerships with Spectrum Health, Kent Pediatrics, and Mercy Health.

EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS nurture a child’s cognitive, social, and emotional development. Examples of services include Play and Learn Communities that offer supports for caregivers and parents.

- Amount allocated in 2021: \$880,649
- Amount spent in 2021: \$588,936

2021 Providers (Programs):

- Cherry Health (EatPlayGrow)
- Comprehensive Therapy Center (Therapeutic Play and Learn Groups)
- Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative (Play to Learn)
- Grand Rapids Community College (Play and Learn GRCC)
- Vibrant Futures (Little Learners)

Early Learning programming in 2021 focused on Play and Learn Communities, which are facilitated playgroups that guide young children along with their parents and/or caregivers

through play-based activities that model age-appropriate learning opportunities while building the caregiver's understanding of child development. Four hundred and sixty-one children in Kent County participated with in-person Play and Learn Communities. Participants were evenly distributed among children ages 1, 2, 3, and 4; from all geographic regions of Kent County.

PARENTING EDUCATION PROGRAMS ensure parents have the knowledge and skills to support their children's health, development, and learning, and linkages to early intervention services. Programs provide in-home and/or community-based support and education. In 2021, we added translation and interpretation services, which help all programs engage with more families.

- Amount allocated for 2021: \$1,676,463
- Amount spent in 2021: \$1,204,924

Home visiting involves trained providers, such as nurses or parent educators, regularly visiting families in their home or another comfortable meeting place to offer a variety of one-on-one education and support.

2021 Providers (Programs):

- D.A. Blodgett - St. John's (Early Childhood Attachment Services)
- Easterseals Michigan (The Incredible Years Home Coaching)
- Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative (Flourish at Home)
- Family Futures (Kent County Healthy Families)
- Kent ISD (Bright Beginnings)
- MomsBloom (Hands-On Post-Partum Support)
- Spectrum Health System (Baby Scholars)
- Spectrum Health (Strong Beginnings)
- Vibrant Futures (Little Scholars)

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued throughout 2021, home visiting services – either in the home, virtually, or at a community location – provided parenting education to 875 parents and caregivers. The providers modified how they delivered services based on the families' preferences and flux of COVID-19 cases throughout the year. Phone and virtual contact accounted for 62 percent of all services in 2021.

Translation and Interpretation services (in-person, telephone, and written) were added to the Ready by Five provider network in 2021. This means that any program funded by Ready by Five is able to request translation and interpretation services. Languages include, but are not limited to, Spanish, Nepali, Kinyarwanda, Serbo-Croatian, Swahili, Burmese, American Sign Language, Vietnamese, and Karen.

Translation and Interpretation services are offered by:

- Bethany Christian Services
- Hispanic Center of West Michigan
- Liaison Linguistics

The addition of this millage component served nearly 1,000 individuals. The most requested languages include Spanish, Kinyarwanda, and Swahili.

Attachment 2: Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage Trends – FY 2021

The data tables below show overall reach by geographic areas, family income, race, and the ethnicity of individuals served in 2021.

TYPE OF INDIVIDUAL SERVED

Type of Individual	Jan – Dec 2021
Child	9,305
Expecting Parent	771
Not Specified	1,401
Total	11,398

DEMOGRAPHICS - RACE AND ETHNICITY

Race	Jan – Dec 2021
American Indian or Alaska Native	.5%
Asian	2.6%
Black / African American	22.8%
Multi-Racial	10.5%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	.1%
White	59.2%
Other	4.4%

Ethnicity	Jan – Dec 2021
Hispanic or Latinx	21%
Not Hispanic or Latinx	79%

GEOGRAPHY

Community Type	Jan – Dec 2021	Communities Including:
Urban Communities	75%	Grand Rapids, Kentwood, and Wyoming
Eastern Kent County	4%	Forest Hills, Alto, Freeport, and Lowell
Northern Kent County	8%	Belmont, Greenville, Cedar Springs, Kent City, Rockford, Sand Lake, and Sparta
Southern Kent County	4%	Byron Center and Caledonia
Suburban Communities	10%	Comstock Park, Grandville, Northview, and Walker

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Household Income Range*	Jan – Dec 2021
\$0-25,520	46%
\$25,521-\$34,480	10%
\$34,481-\$43,440	5%
\$43,441-\$52,400	4%
\$52,401-\$61,360	6%
\$61,361-\$70,320	2%
\$70,321-\$79,280	2%
\$79,281-\$88,240	6%
\$88,241 or more	20%

*According to the [2021 Kids Count in Kent County Data Profile](#), the average median household income sits at \$66,560. Just over 70% of individuals served by Ready by Five funded services had a household income less than the average median household income.