



Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage

Update for January 1 – December 31, 2020

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Supported by the Kent County Ready by Five Millage.

From January through December 2020, thousands of young children across Kent County benefited from the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Kent County staff, First Steps Kent, and service providers worked collaboratively and creatively to ensure the continuation of programming that supports the health, school readiness, and well-being of young children. Ready by Five service providers walked alongside families to help them address needs that arose or were exacerbated by the pandemic.

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; and
- Supports early identification of speech and hearing impairments, autism, or delays and disabilities so kids get the treatment they need.

Since voters approved the millage in November 2018, \$13 million has been allocated to 21 community-based organizations and agencies. The categories of services funded by Ready by Five include parenting education, early learning, and healthy development. The millage also supports outreach and navigation services to help families know what resources and programs are available and how they can access them.

Much of 2019 was focused on establishing procedures and processes to plan and successfully implement allocation of millage funding. After the Kent County Board of Commissioners selected First Steps Kent to administer and oversee Ready by Five in May 2019, we:

- Established a Ready by Five Resident Proposal Review Board;
- Laid the groundwork for a system of performance-based contracts that focuses on evidence and outcomes, promotes measurement, and rewards organizations that successfully “move the needle” in community priorities; and
- Awarded the first round of funding, focusing exclusively on outreach and navigation services.

Through 2020, First Steps Kent:

- Awarded two rounds of funding and executed data sharing agreements with 16 agencies. The agreements allow child-specific data to be sent from all funded service providers to the Kent County Health Department and deidentified data to be shared with First Steps Kent.
- Executed 23 new contracts with 16 agencies. Contracts went into effect March 1, 2020.
- Completed the first annual assessment for all funded service providers.
- Completed the allocation for a third round of funding with an additional 12 contracts beginning January 1, 2021. Translation and interpretation services were added to ensure language is not a barrier for children and families to engage in early childhood programming.

At the start of 2020, our emphasis was on increasing the capacity of quality early childhood services so more children and families could participate. In January, the Kent County Board of Commissioners approved \$7.6 million in grants to expand home visiting, play and learn groups,

developmental screenings, and other research-based programs. Service agreements began March 1 – just weeks before the pandemic brought much of Michigan to a halt.

Most Ready by Five services are based upon an in-person, face-to-face delivery model, which was not possible during the Stay-at-Home orders issued by the state. Physical distancing requirements that remained in place through 2020 continued to limit in-person services. Maintaining these vital services required flexibility and new ways of doing things from First Steps Kent, the County, and the organizations that receive funding. We agreed millage payments to grantees would continue and allowable expenses would be temporarily expanded to include virtual programming, purchases of technology, distribution of early education materials for clients to use at home, and other modified services to support families.

Despite the unusual circumstances of 2020, thousands of children and expectant parents received Ready by Five services. That includes 2,116 who engaged in Outreach and Navigation services, which then connected them to primary care offices, parenting education and/or early learning programs, and community resources that help them provide a safe and nurturing environment for their child(ren). Most families served live in the core cities of Grand Rapids, Walker, Wyoming, Kentwood, and Grandville, but the Ready by Five reach extended to hundreds of families in suburban and rural communities throughout the county. Find additional demographic and geographic information in Attachment 1.

Most services remained virtual throughout 2020. A limited number of agencies phased in face-to-face programming during the milder seasons that allowed programming to happen outdoors, if it could be done safely and the families receiving services felt comfortable with it.

To ensure programs were continuing to serve and connect with families, Service Providers were authorized to provide additional specific outreach services during the pandemic. These included family support outreach, professional development, and early development activity deliveries to ensure families had information and materials to support continued learning at home.

In addition to further developing a provider network, we have also worked to establish a robust data and evaluation system to measure the impact of Ready by Five, both for the children and families served and the broader community. We are taking a multi-faceted approach to collecting and assessing data that includes:

- An external evaluation of Ready by Five. (We are soliciting proposals for evaluation services in 2021). The evaluation will assess how millage investments are impacting contributors to kindergarten success, including:
 - Parents having increased access to resources and information,
 - Improvement in mothers' health and wellbeing,
 - Increase in children developmentally on track, and
 - Increase in children who are healthy.
- Analysis of program-level data for Ready by Five service providers, including numbers and demographics of those served and program outcomes.
- A community needs assessment completed every two years.

Each funded partner has a data sharing agreement in place with the Kent County Health Department and submits demographic, service, and referral information about each child and

expectant mother reached by the program. The Kent County Health Department houses all data collected by Ready by Five funded partners. The Kent County Health Department shares deidentified data sets with First Steps Kent to allow monitoring of program delivery and plan for future funding allocations.

In 2020, First Steps Kent raised \$52,329 in 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% allocation we receive. The additional costs are used for necessary staff time to support development and implementation of all Ready by Five millage components including data collection, allocation, and contract oversight.

While the events of 2020 were unexpected, our community was better able to meet the challenges of the last year because of the programming that has been established with Ready by Five. Families received ongoing and consistent support and had help navigating the pandemic's uncertainty. We expect to significantly increase the number of families engaging in services in 2021, as we anticipate more typical in-person programming to resume. We will carry forward the lessons learned from the last year and integrate into Ready by Five the most effective elements of the modified programming, recognizing the pandemic provided an opportunity to serve and support families in new, meaningful ways.

Attachments:

- **Attachment 1** responds to specific information required by the County. As stipulated in the Agreement with the County effective May 1, 2019, First Steps Kent is to provide the data for the calendar year including program data on units of service provided and outcomes, dollars expended, and cumulative expenditures by service and category, summary client data including number, geographic distribution, and summary characteristics including age and family income, and accounting of funds received through cost sharing.
- **Attachment 2** is a timeline of milestones since the beginning of the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage along with a list of all programs and organizations funded to date, segmented by category of service.

Attachment 1: Overview of Funded Programs and Allocations for 2020

PARENTING EDUCATION PROGRAMS ensure parents have the knowledge and skills to support their children's health, development, and learning. Services provide in-home and/or community-based support and education.

- Amount allocated for 2020: \$1,309,094
- Amount spent in 2020: \$1,058,489

2020 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 and Strong Beginnings)*
- *Vibrant Futures (Little Scholars)*

Most of these organizations provide home visiting, an evidence-based strategy that research shows leads to improvements in parent-child attachment, health, and education outcomes. Home visiting services are most effective when targeted to vulnerable families, beginning prenatally or shortly after the birth of their baby. As these services are typically delivered face-to-face in the family's home, modifications to program delivery were required over the last year, including virtual visits and phone calls.

Despite the challenges, 372 families participated in home visiting services in 2020. Approximately 68 percent of families served had an annual income below \$25,520. About 78 percent lived in the core urban center, including Grand Rapids, Wyoming, Kentwood, and Walker. Services were heavily concentrated on families with infants and toddlers.

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 2020: \$761,645
- Amount spent in 2020: \$581,122

2020 Providers (Programs):

- *Arbor Circle (Keep Early Education Positive (KEEP) and Infant Toddler Developmental Services)*
- *Cherry Health (Maternal Infant Health Program)*
- *Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative (Promote, Refer, Educate - Keep Early Education Positive (PRE-KEEP))*
- *Family Futures (Connections)*

- *Family Promise of Grand Rapids (Family Engagement and Stabilization Program)*
- *Ready for School (Reach Out and Read)*

A variety of services belong in this category, including developmental screenings (such as the Ages & Stages Questionnaire, which is a universal service for all families of young children). There are also more intensive services that intentionally target children and families in marginalized communities.

There were 635 families that participated in healthy development programs last year. Annual income is unknown for approximately 40 percent of them. Of those for whom it is available, approximately:

- 30% were below \$25,520,
- 38% were between \$25,521 and \$70,320, and
- 32% were above \$70,321.

Services were again concentrated in the urban core but less so than with home visiting, with 70 percent of participants living in Grand Rapids, Kentwood, Wyoming, and Walker. There was also extensive reach in Grandville, Comstock Park, Plainfield Township, Grand Rapids Township, and Cascade Township. Services were again most intensively focused on expectant parents and those with children ages zero through two.

HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT – HEALTHY AND SAFE HOMES FOCUS PROGRAMS address environmental concerns include lead awareness and screenings.

- Amount allocated for 2020: \$493,241
- Amount spent in 2020: \$179,253

2020 Providers (Programs):

- *Cherry Health (Increase finger prick lead screenings)*
- *Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan (Training community partners on how to screen for environmental hazards in the home)*
- *Kent County Health Department (Home Lead Assessments)*

These services are intentionally focused on neighborhoods with older housing stock, which is at greater risk of having lead paint and other environmental hazards. Safe and Healthy Homes programs served 367 families last year, most of them in Grand Rapids and Wyoming. Of those for whom annual family income is available, 76 percent were below \$25,520 and another 19 percent were between \$25,521 and \$43,440. These programs were quite successful at reaching families in the earliest years of their child's life, as 82 percent of those served have children ages one or two.

EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS nurture a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Examples of services include play and learn groups, supports for caregivers, and linkages to early intervention services.

- Amount allocated in 2020: \$705,406

- Amount spent in 2020: \$578,847

2020 Providers (Programs):

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

Many of these programs are focused on in-person play to support learning that happens in a group setting. These programs had to pause for much of the year. Program modifications included virtual sessions and the delivery of learning and developmentally appropriate activity materials that parents could use at home with their children. Approximately 1,500 families participated in virtual programming in 2020.

Since COVID-19 social distancing requirements went into effect in March of 2020, agencies sent by mail or dropped off nearly 4,000 age-appropriate activities to approximately 1,200 children across Kent County. These Ready by Five Early Development Activity Kits ensured children had the supplies and information to continue engaging in play-based learning while at home.

Play and learn groups are intentionally targeted to slightly older children; 69 percent of those served were three or older. Approximately 47 percent of participants had an annual family income of \$25,520 or below.

OUTREACH AND NAVIGATION services connect expectant parents and parents of young children to early childhood information and programming and resources to help them provide a healthy, safe, and nurturing environment.

- Amount allocated for 2020: \$1,109,666
- Amount spent in 2020: \$857,457

These 2020 Ready by Five providers worked as a network to ensure families receive the services they need:

- *Family Futures*
- *Family Promise of Grand Rapids*
- *Help Me Grow Kent (Kent ISD)*
- *Health Net of West Michigan*

Outreach and Navigation services are available to all families with young children in Kent County and can range from a series of phone calls to more intensive support that helps families assess their needs and engage with the programs and resources that will best serve them. As in-person activities – where outreach and navigation providers would often connect to families – were canceled, they worked collaboratively with First Steps Kent to do more virtual outreach. In all, 2,116 expectant parents or parents with young children were served by Outreach and Navigation last year. Services were most concentrated prenatally through age

one.

Outreach and Navigation has the broadest geographic reach and income distribution of all Ready by Five services. The family's annual income was unknown for around 66 percent of participants. Among those for whom it was available, approximately:

- 32% were below \$25,520,
- 28% were between \$25,521 and \$61,360,
- 14% were between \$61,361 and \$88,240, and
- 26% were above \$88,214.

Families across Kent County connected to Outreach and Navigation services, with significant participation from families in Grand Rapids, Kentwood, Wyoming, Walker, Grandville, Cedar Springs, Sparta, Rockford, Plainfield Township, Caledonia, Byron Center, Lowell, and the communities that comprise Forest Hills Public Schools.

The largest share of referrals from Outreach and Navigation services was for food or housing assistance and child care resources. There were significant referrals to additional early childhood services, such as home visiting, developmental screenings, early intervention, play and learn groups, preschool, and behavioral health services for parents and children.

Total allocations and spending:

- Amount allocated for 2020: \$4,430,323 (\$51,271 for performance-based payments)
- Amount spent in 2020: \$3,255,167 (\$6,200 for performance-based payments)
- Cost-Sharing/Donations Collected: \$100

READY BY FIVE

Early Childhood Millage
Provider Network



Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage Highlights

May 2019 -
First Steps Kent
officially named the
administrator of the
millage funds



September 2019 -
Kent County Board of
Commissioners
approves first round of
funding for \$2.4 million



January 2020 -
Kent County Board of
Commissioners approves
second round of
funding for \$7.6 million



June 2020 -
Data sharing agreements
between First Steps Kent,
Kent County Health
Department, and service
partners went into effect



December 2020 -
Kent County Board of
Commissioners
approves \$2.6 million to
12 additional programs



November 2018 -
Kent County
voters approved the
Ready by Five Early
Childhood Millage
for 0.25 mils for six
years



June 2019 -
Resident Proposal
Review Board
established



Ready by Five
funded services
begin



May 2020 -
First Steps Kent and
Kent County work
with providers to
reach families during
COVID-19



August 2020 -
Evaluation assessment
team established

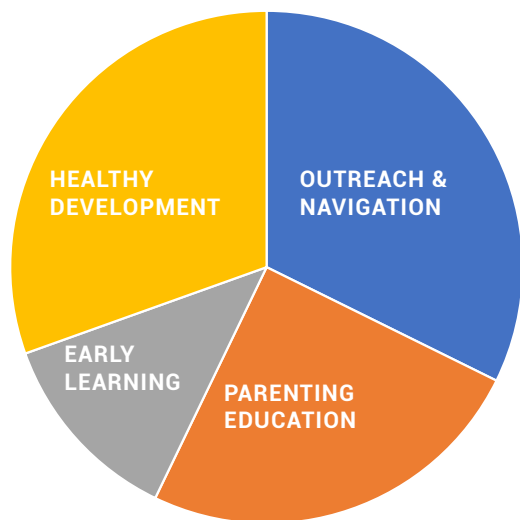


January 2021 -
Contracts begin for
additional navigation
services, translation
services, and healthy
development
programs



The Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage Provider Network

As of April 2021, **\$13 Million** has been awarded to **21 organizations** across **36 programs**.



OUTREACH AND NAVIGATION services connect expectant parents and parents of young children to early childhood information and programs. Outreach and Navigation service providers have been awarded \$4.1 million.

These Ready by Five providers work as a network to ensure families receive the services they need:

- Family Futures
- Family Promise of Grand Rapids
- Hands Connected Network
- Help Me Grow Kent (Kent ISD and Great Start Collaborative)
- Health Net of West Michigan
- Hispanic Center of Western Michigan
- West Michigan Partnership for Children

PARENTING EDUCATION PROGRAMS ensure parents have the knowledge and skills to support their children's health, development, and learning. Services provided include in-home and/or community-based support and education. Parenting Education providers have been awarded \$3.2 million.

Ready by Five Home Visiting providers include:

- D.A. Blodgett - St. John's
- Easterseals Michigan
- Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative
- Family Futures
- Kent ISD (Bright Beginnings)
- MomsBloom
- Spectrum Health System (Baby Scholars and Strong Beginnings)
- Vibrant Futures

These groups provide Translation and Interpretation Services to fellow Ready by Five agencies to allow a broader reach:

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



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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. Healthy Development providers have been awarded \$3.9 million.

Ready by Five Healthy Development providers include:

- Arbor Circle
- Cherry Health
- Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative
- Family Futures
- Family Promise of Grand Rapids
- Kent County Health Department (Fetal Infant Mortality Review)
- Ready for School

Programs that address environmental concerns include lead awareness and screenings. Ready by Five Healthy and Safe Home providers include:

- Cherry Health
- Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan
- Kent County Health Department

EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS nurture a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Examples of services include play and learn groups, supports for caregivers, and linkages to early intervention services. Early Learning providers have been awarded \$1.6 million.

Ready by Five Early Learning providers include:

- Cherry Health
- Comprehensive Therapy Center
- Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative
- Grand Rapids Community College
- Vibrant Futures

Learn about the Ready by Five Provider Network and what each organization can offer families in Kent County at www.firststepskent.org/providers