Healthy Homes
Coalition of West Michigan

Executive Summary
Healthy Homes for Educational Success

Overview

In Michigan, preschool programs and quality childcare have been key strategies to increase school readiness and reading by the third grade. The State and philanthropists have made significant investments in these strategies. Yet to be successful, early childhood programs must also look beyond the 25% of the day when children are in care or preschool. An informed strategy will look at what happens the other 75% of the time—when children are at home.

The Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan and dozens of partners are working together to develop ***Healthy Homes for Educational Success***, a collaborative program to promote safe and healthy housing for preschool-aged children and their younger siblings in Kent County, Michigan. By improving housing for families with children, the program seeks to improve child and family health and wellbeing, thereby improving children's success in school.

The Need

Many families with children in Kent County struggle economically. In Kent County, 39% of families struggle to meet their basic needs. In Grand Rapids that number rises to 52%. Housing is typically the family's second largest budget item[1] (after childcare). The *How Housing Matters to Families and Communities Initiative* found that poor housing quality is the strongest predictor of emotional and behavioral problems and poor academic performance (out of five housing characteristics studied in relation to children and education).[2] Clearly, addressing home environmental hazards must be a part of the strategy to promote children's health, wellbeing, and educational success.

Early childhood programs in Kent County require teachers to make home visits for each child. This project will capitalize upon that opportunity by connecting these home visits to intervention where housing is substandard. Programs with home visiting teachers include Great Start, Head Start, the Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative, and Baby Scholars.



Project Description

To accomplish this, preschool staff will be trained to introduce the program and provide hazard education for families in an appropriate and supportive manner. The program will also include a home health and safety screening for all families.

Households identified as high-risk through the screening will be referred to the Healthy Homes Coalition for in-depth home hazard assessment. Staff from Healthy Homes will work with the family to create a family-centered action plan, provide education, and fix the hazards with interventions that include consumable supplies as well as targeted home repairs. Whenever possible, the program will leverage existing resources to fix hazards and will rely upon code enforcement in rental housing.

Impact and Evaluation

The program will target hazards that contribute to lead poisoning, asthma, and unintentional injuries—the three health concerns identified in the MDHHS Strategic Plan for Healthy Housing[3] that pertain to children. Program evaluation will look at health outcomes related to these—blood lead levels, emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and Asthma Control Test scores. Family wellbeing will be measured by housing-related parental stress and missed days of work. Similarly, the program will measure school success through evaluating attendance, kindergarten readiness (through Teaching Strategies Gold scores), special education status, third grade reading, and teacher satisfaction.

Collaboration

The Dyer-Ives Foundation has generously funded initial program development, allowing the Healthy Homes Coalition to engage many partners to determine practical approaches to program design and implementation. Insight from these conversations will allow ***Healthy Homes for Educational Success*** to be tailored to the needs of home visitors and families, ensuring effective program implementation.

Healthy Homes for Educational Success is seeking to initiate program activities for the 2016-2017 school year.

[1] United Way of Michigan's ALICE data
[2] MacArthur Foundation
[3] MDHHS Strategic Plan for Healthy Housing

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Program Design Partners:

Baby Scholars
City of Grand Rapids
City of Wyoming
Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative
First Steps
Grand Rapids Public Schools
Grand Rapids Urban League
Grand Valley State University
Grand Rapids Public Schools - Great Start Readiness Program
Head Start for Kent County
Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan
Home Repair Services of Kent County
Kent County Health Department
Kent Intermediate School District - Great Start Readiness Program, Early On
Kent School Services Network
Governor's Office of Urban and Metropolitan Initiatives
Rental Property Owners Association
The Salvation Army Social Services
South End Community Outreach Ministries
Wayne State University – Center for Urban Affairs