



report to the community

greetings Holland/Zeeland community

The following material is the 2nd Annual Ready for School Community Report distributed for your information. Established in 2008 Ready for School is a local non-profit agency that supports and encourages pre-school preparation for children from birth to five-years old. This report encompasses the progress of our community organization over the past 18 months and includes a family-friendly calendar for the 2011/2012 school year highlighting information and events beneficial to parents and their children.

The past eighteen months have been significant and symbolic in terms of the growth of community engagement with Ready for School. Roughly 200 community leaders volunteered over 8,500 hours of their time to the initiative of the agency. Thanks to their dedication and commitment, children and families in the community, were able to benefit directly from additional services and resources.

Three major events occurred that were signs that the community owned and embraced Ready for School. First the initiative found a home at the Anderson Werkman Building with the help and support of Hope College. Second, we became a non-profit agency further signifying to the community that we were here to stay. Third, we received recognition for our work through the W. K. Kellogg Foundation with a \$398,894 grant award.

Although we have much to celebrate, much more work is required. In 2010, 45 percent of children entering kindergarten in our community were considered not ready. They did not have the pre-literacy and number recognition necessary to enter school prepared to succeed. Our goal at Ready for School is to increase readiness to 75 percent by 2015. To achieve that goal, many of the pilots and demonstration projects that were successfully developed will need to be brought to size and scope within the community. There is much work ahead of us and we are confident that this community can and will get it done.

In closing we would like to thank and congratulate the Holland/Zeeland Community Foundation on its 60th anniversary. We'd like to thank the Board of Trustees for their vision in creating an environment that gave birth to Ready for School. We'd like to thank our donors, the leaders and community volunteers who have given of their time, talents and treasures. The children of this community are truly blessed because of you.

We trust you will find this report informative and educational. Getting our kids ready to attend school is a community effort. In fact parents told us that their first choice for getting advice and information regarding children is to ask their family, friends and neighbors. This means you! Will you know what to tell them? Consider getting involved with Ready for School and together we will create a community that provides a better beginning for all children.




Bruce Los
President, Board of Directors


Patricia Sosa VerDuin
Executive Director, Ready for School

readiness council

The Readiness Council initially appointed in 2008 by the Trustees of the Community Foundation of the Holland/Zeeland Area. Created to oversee the infrastructure, systems and contracted services that support the development and implementation of the Ready for School initiative. The council is comprised of highly accomplished professionals from all sectors who are committed to the success of the Ready for School Initiative. They are respected leaders and trusted advocates for the community sectors they represent and are ethnically representative of the community. Each Council member commits a significant amount of their personal time each month. Every year the Frost Research Center at Hope College conducts an email survey of the Readiness Council asking for feedback about their experiences as council members. In November, 2010 council members were asked to answer various questions regarding the composition of the council, the importance of council activities and general satisfaction with Ready for School. 100% of the council members responded to the survey. When asked to rate their level of satisfaction with Ready for School using a 5 point scale with 1=very dissatisfied and 5=very satisfied 95% were satisfied with the initiative overall. Comments include: "The paid staff and the volunteers are a great strength to the program. The task of school readiness is enormous and the collaboration at every level of this initiative is incredible. It is a great strength to have the engaged army of volunteers that we do". Issues needing additional attention were community outreach and funding. Only a quarter of the respondents felt the initiative has the resources to carry out its mission, goals and objectives.

Jim Bishop, Bank of Holland • James Bultman, Hope College • Sonja Trent-Brown, Hope College • Thun Champassak, West Michigan Realty of Holland* • Dan Clark, Grand Rapids Junior College • Brian Davis, Holland Public Schools • Janet DeYoung, Community Foundation of the Holland Zeeland Area • Robert Ellis, RVE Consulting • Matthew Floding, Western Theological Seminary* • Jodi Gogolin, Holland Hospital • David Gough, West Ottawa Public Schools • Domingo Hernandez-Gomez, Holland Public Schools • Linda Holtrop, Holland Hospital • Jeanette Hoyer, Pathways Michigan • Linda Jacobs, Good Samaritan Ministries • Bruce Los, Gentex Corporation • Nancy Miller, Dean Ermerita – Hope College • Patrick Moran, Greater Ottawa County United Way • Scott Remenschneider, Huntington Bank • Carol Rickey, Community Volunteer • Loren Snippe, Dept of Human Services* • Vonnie Vanderzwaag, Ottawa Area Intermediate School District • Ellen Westveer, Holland Public Schools • Amy Ziel, Macatawa Bank

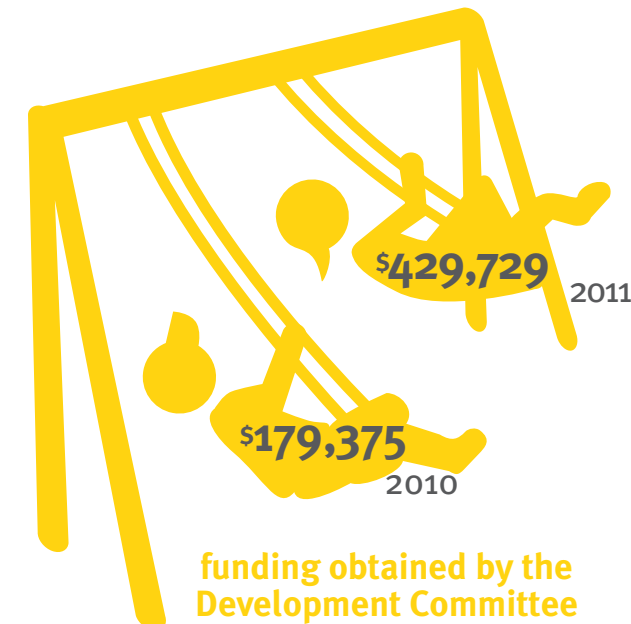
*We would like to thank those that have served and retired from the council.

development committee

The objective of the Development Committee is to identify and procure sources of funding to support and sustain the on-going Ready for School initiative monetary needs. The strategic focus is to research and apply for available grants, cooperative funding opportunities and local private support to secure funding and commitments to fund the on-going activities of the Ready for School initiative. Fund Development is staged over a three tier funding strategy

1. 2008–2010: Startup funding focused on the development of a venture capital fund of local community support raised by the Ready for School Development Committee.
2. 2011–2013: Three years of mezzanine support from public and major foundations to scale up the pilot and secure sustainable sources of revenue.
3. 2014–on-going: A variety of sustainable potential funding sources, including contracts with schools, public revenue, area wide millage, United Way, endowment, franchising the model and social impact bonds.

The fiscal year adopted for Ready for School as a non-profit is July to June.



disbursement committee

The Disbursement Committee is responsible for expanding early childhood learning opportunities by assuring prudent stewardship of public and private resources through strategic investment in high impact evidenced based programs, activities, or materials that will enable all children to enter kindergarten prepared to succeed.

The process for tuition assistance is one that facilitates placement of children first at area Head Start, Great Start Readiness and local school district offered at no charge. Frequently these programs with some of our most at risk children have waiting lists. The challenge has been accessing the families whose children would benefit from a preschool experience. Marketing has been stepped up for the fall of 2011 by using Max Bus posters and distribution of flyers at local community events. The following represents the number of children who benefitted from tuition assistance.

Spring 2010: \$10,150 (21 children)

Fall 2010: \$33,272 (44 children)

Spring 2011: \$7,237 (19)

Early childhood professional scholarships were provided to assist current professionals in improving their credentials. The program was offered in April of 2011 to date two recipients received awards totally \$1,000. Ready for School continues to seek early childhood professionals interested in enhancing their skills.

from our task forces

CHILD CARE

The Child Care Task Force exists to enhance early childhood services by partnering with 188 home-based licensed child care providers. The task force focuses on providing professional development and collaborative opportunities unique to this specialized community. Starting in September of 2010, monthly Roundtables were established the first Monday of each month at 6:30 p.m. to allow child care providers the opportunity to discuss and share ideas on getting our children ready for school.

A nine-week professional development series for 40 licensed home-based child care professionals using the Parents as Teachers curriculum was provided. An estimated 240 children were impacted as a result of this series. The task force also offered 30 providers a seminar on kindergarten expectations in the area of literacy.

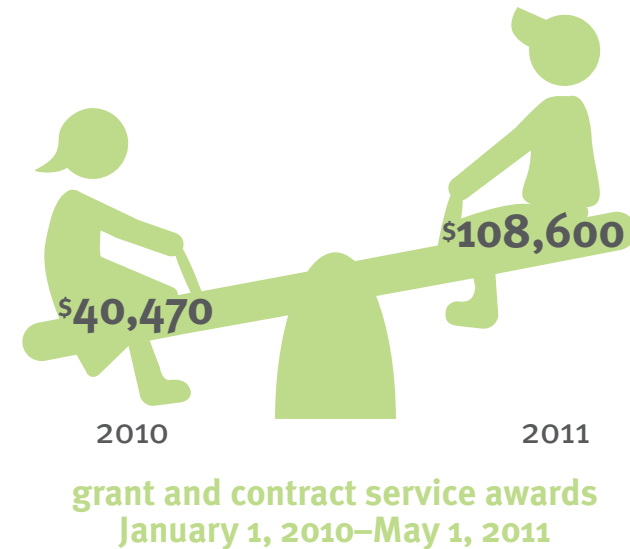
PRE-K

The Pre-K Task Force exists to enhance existing early childhood programs by partnering with center based pre-k teachers and directors through the use of professional development, parent training and community events. Several monthly informational events were offered to area parents free of charge. The project impacted over 200 parents and caregivers.

Ready for School conducted a survey of the 28 area licensed preschool centers in order to identify obstacles they encounter. Our goal is to partner with centers in order to enhance the educational experience.

Professional development opportunities were made available impacting 120 early childhood professionals. Training on classroom management lead by Professor Linda Jordan, Outdoor Discovery provided a curriculum entitled “Growing up Wild,” and “Music and Movement” presented by Bobbi Kearns and Maxine DeBruyn were among the trainings. Rounding out the training opportunities are the monthly Roundtables that center Directors attend each month.

Finally the idea of a calendar for families that would assist them in practical ideas on what it means to have their children ready for school was the brainchild of the Pre-K Task Force. The calendar provides parents with activities that exist in the community that are free or low cost.



SCHOOL

The purpose of the School Task Force is to utilize all school systems in the Holland/Zeeland community to engage and inform parents on the importance of early childhood education. Their objective is to build bridges with area early childhood professionals that lead to a seamless transition from the pre-k experience to kindergarten and beyond. Since 2008 area schools have agreed to use the “Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills” (DIBELS) as the consistent tool to screen incoming kindergartners for readiness. This process screens a child’s letter and number recognition as they enter kindergarten. Last year, 1554 students were screened using DIBELS. Fifty-five percent proved to be ready. As we move forward, this number will be the number we look to improve as we work together toward improved readiness of 75% by 2015.

Two pilot projects worth noting; “Building Bridges” and “Kinder Camp.” The first, “Building Bridges” is professional development for area early childhood professionals provided by a kindergarten cadre. The goal: to prepare children for school by providing professional development about kindergarten expectations. The first “Building Bridges” in 2010 focused on literacy. The upcoming 2011 fall session will focus on math.

The second pilot project, “Kinder Camp” worked in collaboration with Outdoor Discovery and Holland Public Schools. Approximately 25 kindergartners participated in the 4 half day sessions that was designed to get the children into the school classroom and allow them to adjust to their new surroundings before the formal school year began. Research indicates that achieving a comfort level in the classroom very early in the educational career has a profound positive impact on students’ long term learning abilities. In the fall of 2011 ten sites will be identified impacting over 300 incoming kindergartners.

GOVERNMENT/COMMUNITY AGENCIES

The purpose of the Government and Community Agencies Task Force is to engage and influence families on the significance of early childhood education by working with the respective community agencies. The task force utilized the combined efforts of the Greater Ottawa County United Way and the Ottawa County Great Start Collaborative to create Whole Family Connection, wholefamilyottawa.com, an on line resource program that helps parents and families identify needs and challenges and links them to available services for support.

This task force is responsible for creating the vision behind the Ready for School video. The video is informational and provides practical instruction for parents on readiness. Material is presented by area experts and local families with a touch of our own home town flavor. The video is being produced and directed by Professor Choonghee Han of Hope College and will make its debut in local doctors’ offices and social service agencies this fall.

EMPLOYER

Parents in the Holland/Zeeland community tell us they see their employer as a trusted institution and a resource for information. The purpose of the Employer Task Force is to underscore the importance of early childhood development to Holland/Zeeland employers and employees by citing the benefits to the employees, employer workforce and community overall. To date, 20 area employers have joined the task force. Two area employers will be recognized as “Readiness Employer of the Year”, through their demonstrated community leadership in the area of early childhood readiness. The first of these awards will be presented at the annual meeting on December 6, 2011. Employers collaborated together in support of Ready for School by creating a float for the 2011 Tulip Time’s Children’s Parade. Looking toward the future, the task force will be developing supportive on-line tools for area employers.



MEDICAL

In annual parent surveys, parents of incoming kindergartners told us that their physicians are second to their friends, families and neighbors for being a trusted resource for early childhood information. The Medical Task Force exists to engage and inform parents by utilizing the medical community to inform parents about the importance of their role in the early years. Strategies include the identification and referral of children and families to community and Ready for School resources, such as use of a parent educator and the distribution of informational R.E.A.D.Y. Kits (1,200) to families of newborns at Holland and Zeeland Hospitals. A second strategy includes assuring that all children, infant to five-years, have a medical home. In March of 2011 a W. K. Kellogg Foundation grant, contributions from an anonymous corporate foundation and a Howard Hughes Grant, obtained by Hope College on behalf of Ready for School made it possible to implement “Healthy Beginnings – Ready for School”. This project ensures that free health clinics, Holland Community Health Center and InterCare work through a designated RN and Community Lay Health Worker to ensure that every child has access to a medical home.

FAITH

The Faith Task Force is made up of partners in the faith community who engage and inform families on the importance of early childhood. We have learned that trust is an issue for parents when seeking services for their children. We have also learned that neighborhoods are much smaller than the traditionally defined neighborhood. Families define a neighborhood as an apartment complex or a trailer park. This requires resources to go to where the families live and to be delivered in a language that they understand. The faith community is uniquely positioned to serve parents and families in this way. An example of this would be St. Francis De Sales Catholic Church offering parent training sessions on readiness after the Spanish mass. Eighty families and their children participated in the training series. Parents indicate that they believe their neighbors would benefit from additional playgroups to assist them with hands on parenting information and resources. As a result, eight additional playgroups were made available to parents in local churches, trailer parks, apartment complexes and in area schools.



Parent educators play an important role through home visits, assisting parents with hands on activities, information and resources. Local volunteers from the community participated in an intensive week-long training through Parents as Teachers. Three additional parent educators were provided with scholarships and trained in the last 18 months for a total of 8 parent educators. Thirty-five families involving 57 children have benefitted from having a parent educator. We'd like to thank our parent educators for their support and care of area families and children.

board of directors

In 2011 Ready for School became a non-profit the following individuals are currently serving as the Board of Directors. Many thanks goes to these individuals for their vision and leadership.



Bruce Los
President



Janet DeYoung
Vice President



Nancy Miller
Secretary



Jim Bishop
Treasurer



Bob Ellis
Board Trustee

donate

MONTHLY THROUGH eGIVE

Click on the “eGive” button on the readyforschool.org website or go to egive-usa.com. Create a giving account. Add a bank account and select the timing and amount for your gift.

ONE TIME CONTRIBUTIONS

Visit cfhz.org and click the “Give Today” tab to use PayPal for a credit card donation. A PayPal account is not required. Please specify Ready for School as the fund name under “Make a Donation” and also under “Special Instructions” when you review your payment.

marketing & community outreach

The objective of communications and marketing is to facilitate the vision and values of Ready for School through comprehensive strategic marketing and communication. The strategy is to position Ready for School as the community brand that provides readiness information that increases the percentage of children deemed ready for school as measured by readiness testing in the Holland/Zeeland area.

Areas that are currently under development are the reconstruction of the website and newsletter that will allow more access to resources. A portal will provide advanced technological resources to an expanding volunteer force in order to create efficiencies. As we look to the future parents will have opportunities to enroll their children in the “Ready for School University”.

Marketing materials have been developed with a new uniformed looked. Some materials are provided in English, Spanish, Laotian and Cambodian.

The Frost Center for Social Research recently completed a community survey involving over 500 families. The purpose of the survey was to obtain baseline data on the number of households that were familiar with Ready for School. Currently, just 16% of households in the Holland/Zeeland area (18% of households with children aged 0–5) are aware of Ready for School. After hearing a description of Ready for school, 86% considered it to be of great value in helping children better prepare for Kindergarten, and 22% wanted to be contacted with more information.



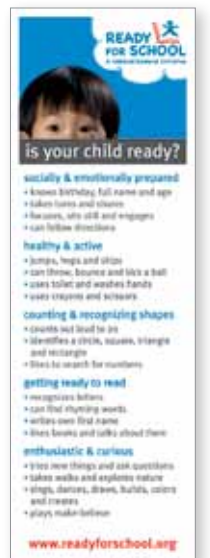
Pamphlet – English and Spanish



Tuition assistance flier – English, Spanish, Cambodian and Laotian



Poster series – English only



Tuition assistance flier – English, Spanish, Cambodian and Laotian

