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MEDIA CONTACT:

Adrienne Cooley

adrienne@gethappypr.com



*West Michigan Partnership for Children celebrates “Reunification Month” and
new Parent Engagement Program*

More than 40 parents in Kent County screened for Parent Engagement Program

GRAND RAPIDS, MICH. (June 2, 2021) – [West Michigan Partnership for Children](#) is celebrating the launch of its Parent Engagement Program just in time for National Reunification Month. The program is part of WMPC’s commitment to supporting timely reunification of families and preventing children from re-entry to foster care.

The trauma-informed Parent Engagement Program engages and equips Kent County parents with children ages 0-5 entering the foster care system by:

- Building relationships
- Providing emotional support, mentoring and modeling
- Encouraging case plan responsibilities
- Supporting parents in court and family team meetings

“Through this new program, parents are receiving increased peer-to-peer mentorship and encouragement from individuals who have been in their shoes,” said Nakia Kyler, Chief Engagement & Equity Officer at West Michigan Partnership for Children. “WMPC is proud to implement these efforts that support timely reunifications and prevent re-entry to foster care.”

The program employs Parent Engagement Specialists who provide support and mentoring to parents. Family engagement and peer support are known strategies to promote the safety, wellbeing, and permanency of children in foster care.

“With this program, we’re hoping to see an increase in timeliness reunification, an increase in engagement between birth parents, foster care workers, foster parents, and service providers,” said JeRae’ Sommersell, Parent Engagement Program Manager. “It is important that we bring to light that parents navigating the child welfare system are more than the sum of their mistakes or behaviors and are just as human as you and me.”

Launched on March 31, 2021, the Parent Engagement Program was made possible by Kent County taxpayers and the voter-approved Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage. The millage funds allow WMPC to provide services for two years and are distributed and overseen by First Steps Kent.

WMPC has been operating a community-based foster care model for three years through a contract with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and is currently the first and only performance-based child welfare model in Michigan. More information is available at [WMPC’s website](#).