

# Evaluation Report Brief

## United Way of Southeast Michigan: Ready Children Ready Communities

### What is the community challenge?

Over the years, Southern Macomb County and Wayne County in Michigan have experienced sharp declines in income, sharp decreases in academic achievement at the third-grade level, drastic demographic changes, and large losses of a sense of local community and school/neighborhood pride.

#### Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund

Intervention: Ready Children Ready Communities

Grantee: United Way of Southeast Michigan

Intermediary: Macomb Intermediate School District (MISD), Leaps & Bounds Family Services, and Macomb Family Services.

Focus Areas: Youth Development

Focus Population: Children ages 0-5 and their families.

Communities Served: Macomb and Wayne Counties, MI.

### What is the promising solution?

Ready Children Ready Communities is an integrated set of community-based interventions aimed at identifying and serving high-risk children from birth to five years to assure that they are ready for kindergarten. The program uses a triage approach, where more at-risk families will receive at home visits, access to mental health screenings for their children, and Play and Learn Groups. Families with lower risk factors will receive Play and Learn Group services. In addition, the program provides socio-emotional mental health counseling to parents and teacher of pre-school children displaying emotional and/or behavioral problems. The program's goal is to increase parents' understanding of child development, increase parents' awareness of community resources and demonstrate the value of reading daily to their children.

### What was the purpose of evaluation?

The United Way of Southeast Michigan's evaluation of Ready Children Ready Communities began in 2013 and completed research in June 2017. This study sought to determine if the implementation of the Ready Children Read Communities PAT program improves kindergarten readiness. The approach relied on the Parents as Teachers (PAT) curriculum home visits and PAT Play and Learn Groups. The evaluation of Ready Children Ready Communities documented the implementation of the three primary interventions (PAT, Play and Learn Groups, socio-emotional health counseling) and studied their impact.

### What did the evaluation find?

As a grantee/subgrantee of the Social Innovation Fund, the subgrantee engaged SPEC Associates to conduct an independent evaluation of the program. The evaluation found:

- Both parents who received home visitation services and parents who received Play and Learn services only showed statistically significant increases over time in how much they valued reading to their children, in their knowledge of how to access community resources, and in their knowledge of child development. However, parents in the home visitation services group improved more over time than parents in the Play and Learn only group.

- There was also a statistically significant improvement from the first visit to the last visit in the quality and quantity of stimulation and support in the home environment (as measured by the Infant and Toddler HOME) with 100 percent of families reporting improvements.
- Similar improvements were reported for six of the eight subscales of the Early Childhood HOME (learning materials, language stimulation, responsivity, academic stimulation, modeling, and variety, all  $p < .001$ ) and with two subscales showing no statistically significant change (physical environment and acceptance). Overall, 55 percent of families receiving home visits reported improvements on the Early Childhood HOME.
- Eighty-seven percent of children receiving intensive early childhood mental health services improved on at least one protective factor (initiative, self-control, attachment) or decreased on behavioral concerns.

## Notes on the evaluation

Because the matched quasi-experimental pairwise comparison that had been planned was impossible, the study was unable to fully address threats to internal validity, and so did not conclusively determine whether stand-alone Play and Learn Groups were less effective than home visits with play and learn groups.

### How is the community using the evaluation findings to improve?

Since the program began, the kindergarten camps have increased from seven to 25 classrooms. Many other populations are now being served with Play and Learn Groups, mental health screenings and even home visits. In addition, a valuable lesson was learned when Ready Children Ready Communities persistently worked to reach underserved communities even when doors were initially closed to untrusted outsiders. In Hamtramck’s Arabic community, the PAT home visit staff successfully engaged the community using the gatekeeper model discovered through participating in the SIF grant, after trial and error showed that traditional recruiting methods of flyers and events did not work.

#### Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design: Non-experimental design

Study Population: Parents of children aged 0-5

Independent Evaluators: SPEC Associates

This Evaluation’s Level of Evidence\*: Preliminary

\*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.



The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit [nationalservice.gov/research](http://nationalservice.gov/research).

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.