

Early Childhood – What we know.

We know the formula for success! Infants and young children need to have regular health care and good nutrition. They need parents who are nurturing, patient, accepting, and emotionally available. They need to be read to. They need to be talked to, listened to, and played with. They need consistent caregivers. They need to hear music and see and make art. They need to feel safe and loved and worthy. All of these components are necessary to build the physical framework in the brain which allows all future learning to occur.

If a family and a community can insure these things for all infants and children under 5, the community will change over time in fundamental ways. We will see children arrive at school ready to learn. Schools will notice fewer behavior problems. Teen pregnancies, welfare roles and unemployment rates will drop. The crime rate will decrease and jails and prisons will see a decrease in population. Families will rise above poverty and become skilled workers and consumers. Human service agencies across the board will experience a decreased need for the services they provide.

It sounds like magic. It's not. It's smart investing. Research shows that providing support for positive early childhood experiences for *all* children is a solid long-term investment strategy for communities who wish to improve their economic development and the quality of life for their residents. Every dollar invested yields an average of a \$7-\$13 return in economic productivity for the community.

Anyone who owns a car knows the value of preventive maintenance. Investing in regular maintenance normally costs a fraction of a major repair cost. The same goes for kids. A dollar invested to improve the lives of young children today represents many dollars not spent on fixing problems tomorrow.

As individuals, families, and communities, our problems will never disappear completely. However, when children begin their lives with these tools, they stand a fighting chance of breaking the cycles of poverty and failure. High quality early childhood experiences help to build the foundations in the brain which will allow kids to learn and make positive contributions to their community for the rest of their lives.

If you would like to be a part of a caring community that is building a sustainable system to support kids and families in St. Joseph County, please join us. The future depends on what we do today!

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