

# Pre-Birth Through Age Three Community *Special Report*



a group of toddlers, hand-in-hand with their caregivers, slowly navigates the steps up to The Family Place, a renovated library in Detroit, Michigan, that houses an Early Head Start program. The group has just returned from a field trip to the Real Life Farm in Canton, Michigan. Only 20 miles from their city homes, the farm seems a world away to these children. For most, this has been their first exposure to the joys of rural life. From the hayride to bottle-feeding the pigs, the trip is a formative experience. More than simple entertainment, however, the exposure to a different setting is part of a community effort to help young children thrive.

The Family Place serves families in the north-central part of Detroit that is near Northern High School. The area includes the smaller communities of Central, Davison, and Rosa Parks. The children from Head Start are fortunate because this program provides a wide variety of activities not available to many young people in the area. While the demand for services is high, the capacity for the Head Start program is limited to approximately 95 children.

The demographics of the Detroit-Northern area illustrate the challenges facing its citizens. Forty-four percent of adults in the area have no high school diploma, and fewer than eight percent have a college or professional degree. Forty-one percent of the population live below the poverty level, and 69 percent of children under four live in poverty.

“When the area became a designated Empowerment Zone in the mid-1990s, members of the community felt that they would be able to revitalize the area and do something positive for the children of the community,” says Carole Quarterman, who grew up in the neighborhood and is now executive director of “4C’s” organization, that is, the Child Care Coordinating Council for Detroit and Wayne County, Inc.



With Empowerment Zone funding and earlier grants from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, an early childhood collaborative of 11 public and private partner organizations was formed. The collaborative developed a renovation plan to re-open the closed Detroit Public Library’s Utley branch located on Woodward Avenue as an early childhood/family development support center to serve pregnant women and families with young children (birth through age nine). The 30,000-square-foot

building was transformed into The Family Place. Under one roof, staff members from 11 public and private agencies provide assistance to pregnant women and families with young children. There are child care and full-day Head Start programs and Early Head Start for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. Parents can take advantage of computer skills training, GED classes, child/family development education, and parental support groups.

Opening a new facility was only the beginning. Detroit-Northern was selected as one of nine sites in the Midwest to participate in a new initiative called  
*(continued)*

## DID YOU KNOW . . .

. . . In the Detroit-Northern area, less than 10 percent of eligible children currently attend Head Start because of that program's limited space and capacity.

. . . The effort to help pre-birth through age three children thrive is housed in The Family Place, a renovated former library that is a centralized home to more than a half dozen community social service agencies.

. . . Average annual child care costs are \$5,000, while the average income of most Detroit-Northern families is only about \$13,000 per year.

. . . In the Detroit-Northern community, more than 40 percent of the population live below the poverty level; and 69 percent of children under age four live in poverty.

. . . The early childhood work of the PB3 Initiative has built on previous Kellogg Foundation investments in the Detroit-Northern community. The Kellogg Youth Initiative Partnerships have supported more than 60 youth programs in Detroit, including scholarship and entrepreneurship projects, church-led youth partnerships, child care, teen health clinics, and programs for teenage mothers and fathers.



Pre-Birth Through Age Three (PB3), a Kellogg Foundation effort designed to help young children in their communities.

During the first phase of the initiative, a group of about 13 community members, including parents, grandparents, and service providers, volunteered to serve as part of a core planning team. The group engaged members of the community in a dialogue process and conducted several focus groups. Participants discussed how to improve the lives and futures of children in the Detroit Northern area.

*"It was informative as well as empowering for families because it emphasized the important role they play in their children's early development years."*

Carole Quarterman, a member of the PB3 core planning team, says that the community dialogue process was valuable because it gave parents a way to express a variety of needs and wishes for their children.

"We have been energized by this model to engage the community," she says. "It was informative as well as empowering for families, because it emphasized the important role they play in their children's early developmental years."

The dialogue process highlighted several community concerns. Focus group participants were particularly worried about the apparent lack of paternal participation in the area. A number of factors have contributed to the situation, including the lack of employment opportunities, low-wage employment, and the high level of incarceration of African-American men from the area. For whatever reasons, Detroit-Northern fathers are frequently absent from their children's lives, creating additional financial and personal burdens for those who care for their children.

Another concern identified by the focus groups was the need to increase community and neighborhood cohesion. Discussions revealed that many Detroit-Northern neighbors do not know each other, leading to a high level of mistrust. With little or no contact, people hesitate to let others into their lives. The insular nature of the community becomes particularly self-defeating when it comes to child rearing. Many parents feel that they are "on their own" when it comes to raising their children.

*The team discovered that efforts such as Early On, Early Head Start, and the Zero to Three secondary prevention program serve only a small portion of Detroit-Northern's at-risk families with very young children.*



Nor are public support programs considered sufficient. Through the dialogue process, it became obvious that many parents do not feel that they receive adequate parental support from neighborhood organizations. In fact, as Dr. Donald Softley, project director of the PB3 Initiative states, "there are very few programs in the area that specifically target children age zero through age three."

In order to determine exactly what local services and programs did exist for zero through three children, the core planning team conducted an environmental scan. The team discovered that efforts such as Early On, Early Head Start, and the Zero to Three secondary prevention program serve only a small portion of Detroit-Northern's at-risk families with very young children.

Few programs were found to provide comprehensive services of any kind. In some cases, families are left unsupported as their children age beyond three years. Prenatal and maternal support programs such as Detroit Healthy Start and Healthy Babies have made an impact in reducing the infant mortality rate, but these programs end after the child's first birthday.

## **Why do we care about child development in the first three years of life? We care because . . .**

- . . . the human brain grows to 90 percent of its adult size in the first three years of life.*
- . . . babies who do not get enough love and attention in infancy are less likely to be well-adjusted adults.*
- . . . parents who talk and read to their babies are helping them develop important language skills.*
- . . . parents who respond sensitively to their baby's cries are building the emotional connections that lead to healthier relationships.*
- . . . the more cohesive a community is, the more it has to give to families.*
- . . . a measure of a community's well-being is how well the community takes care of its children.*
- . . . the way we treat an infant today will determine the kind of child and adult he or she will become.*

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As the environmental scan demonstrated, the capacity of the few services and programs that do exist for infants and toddlers is not currently adequate to meet the needs of the community. In the Detroit-Northern area alone, nearly 2,000 children are eligible for Early Head Start and Head Start, but the current size of the program allows only 112 children to obtain the support they need. Fewer than 200 infant and toddler daycare slots are available for the nearly 3,000 area children.

Even if the capacity were adequate, the increasing cost of day care makes it inaccessible to most families in the area. Average annual day care costs are \$5,000, while most families in Detroit-Northern have an average annual income of only about \$13,000. No “off-hour” child care exists in the area for those parents who work as shift employees in the local service and manufacturing sector.

Armed with the knowledge of the scope of their challenges, however, the community has begun to fight back. The Family Place partners intend for the facility to be a catalyst for change in Detroit-Northern. They share the vision of the Detroit Youth Foundation that includes a six-block village—with the Family Place at its core—designed to serve all youths in the area and to improve their quality of life.

“We are committed to prevention,” says Quarterman, “through a neighborhood family support model.”

So, the trip to the farm for the group of Detroit-Northern toddlers was more than a pleasant outing. The efforts of community organizations such as The Family Place demonstrate that local families and caregivers are providing opportunities for their children which will help shape life-long patterns of emotion and thought.

The Family Place partners and the PB3 core planning team of diverse community representatives continue to seek to establish relationships with others who share their vision of a brighter future for the children in Detroit Northern. As Quarterman says, “Together we can do more than singularly.”

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**The Pre-Birth Through Age Three Initiative** is an initiative of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation ([wkkf.org](http://wkkf.org)). The initiative's goal is to create systems of services reflecting state-of-the-art knowledge about how best to serve children, pre-birth through age three, while simultaneously building the capacity of the community sites to plan, implement, operate, and manage their work using a systems change perspective that leads to continuous refinement and sustainability.