

## 5 to One Executive Summary

It is often said that it takes a village to raise a child. For those of us working in early childhood, no catchphrase says it better. An infant's first experiences are the nurturing relationships and deep attachments she forms with parents and caregivers. Growing up, a healthy young child expands his sphere of relationships to include playmates and friends, teachers and other trusted adults, eager to learn and ready to succeed. Paralleling the child's development, parents and guardians are building trusted relationships with community resources that support their role as their children's first and best teachers. From the very beginning, a child is at the center of a web or network of relationships that contribute to her/his optimal development. The village is different for different children, but there is one for every child. Or there should be...

In 2011 this Great Start Collaborative (GSC) began evaluating our local and regional early childhood system from a community-builder perspective, believing that a strong and highly visible early childhood system plays a fundamental role in our region's economic prosperity and contributes to the vibrancy of our communities. But we soon identified barriers and disparities in access to services across our region, and we asked ourselves: *Is this good enough? Is this the best we can do? What would a better system for rural northern Michigan look like—a system intentionally designed and built based on parent input and family level decision-making? A system that strengthened families? A system worth investing in because it delivered great results for kids?*

*5 to One: A Project of the Great Start Collaborative of Traverse Bay* is our way of finding answers to these questions. The project seeks to identify the critical characteristics of a community-based early childhood system and network that is available to any family, founded on deep understanding of the challenges of raising young children in our rural region. Our project began with a request for proposal (RFP) distributed nationally. We sought a consulting team that could combine expertise in early childhood systems, community engagement, economic analysis, and design to develop a unique and multifaceted perspective. Three teams responded to the RFP, and the team headed by Tom Nemitz of Cornerstone Architects was selected.

In the first step, the Cornerstone team worked with the GSC to identify three top system priorities, then conducted a review of existing, evidence-based models that achieve outcomes similar to our goals: improved kindergarten readiness, reduced incidence of abuse and neglect, and improved access to childcare and parenting education. In Step Two, the community was engaged through surveys and focus groups to help us understand the needs, barriers and successes families and caregivers experience as they raise young children. Their input was used to identify the best model, and any necessary modifications, for our system/network. Step Three will engage the full community in committing the resources and leadership needed to bring the model to sustainable life, leading to the implementation of a three-part system of resources that includes: a no-wrong-door network for connecting families to programs and services; local "satellites" that are convenient for families and provide access to the network; and a center that serves as a hub to support the network and satellites.

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For more information contact Mary Manner, GSC Coordinator at [mumanner@tcchamber.org](mailto:mumanner@tcchamber.org) or 231-995-7114