

# Mentors for At-Risk Mothers

Michigan business leaders know it pays to invest early

The actions of new parents have far-reaching consequences for their children's abilities to become productive adults. These actions affect business by influencing both the future workforce and important outcomes for parents and young children, such as child abuse and crime, that also affect economic vitality.

Imagine how business could benefit if severely disadvantaged parents, who often have few supports or good role models, had a trusted mentor to teach them how to care for their young children.

Fortunately, imagination is not required. **Home visiting programs hire trained professionals to offer voluntary services to severely at-risk expectant and new parents (typically single, teen mothers).** The mentors teach expectant mothers to take better care of their health, improve their own lives and provide nurturing and responsible parenting that gives their children a good foundation for success.

Research shows that certain high-quality home visiting programs,

“Proven early childhood development programs, like home visiting, help lay a solid foundation for children to succeed in school and prepare for the knowledge- and technology-based jobs of the future. This will also help drive economic growth so that we can remain globally competitive.”



**Nancy Moody,**  
Director - Federal Affairs,  
DTE Energy

starting before birth and continuing into the early years, can benefit two generations—transforming both mothers' and their children's lives.

**They also show a solid return on investment.** A financial analysis of one such program, Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), showed it improved children's health, reduced child abuse and neglect, increased their readiness for school and reduced their future crime so much that it produced **a benefit-cost ratio of almost three to one, with an average**

**benefit – net savings minus costs – of \$17,000 for every family served.<sup>1</sup>**

Reaching at-risk children early provides a foundation for success, but additional educational support is crucial. At-risk children who received educational help along with their parents when the children were babies and continuing until they entered kindergarten were four times more likely to complete college and 42 percent more likely to be consistently employed at age 30.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past few years, states as diverse as Michigan, Iowa, Vermont and Kentucky have enacted new home visiting legislation with support from their business communities. Business leaders know it pays to start early with

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## WHO WE ARE

ReadyNation is the nation's preeminent business organization working to strengthen business and the economy through effective investments in children and youth.



## The Nurse-Family Partnership:

- Improved children's health;
  - Reduced child abuse and neglect;
  - Increased their readiness for school; and
  - Reduced their future crime so much that it produced
- An average net benefit of \$17,000 for every family served.**

high-quality mentoring of parents *and* early education for their children.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The majority of our nation's fourth and eighth graders are not proficient in either math or reading.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, there is a large and growing mismatch between the skills future jobs will require and the education level of our workforce.<sup>4</sup> To solve these issues, we need to start early.

The period from before birth to age five is a time of rapid development, when 700 new connections form in the brain every second.<sup>5</sup> This "wiring" becomes the foundation on which all later learning is built. Young children who are raised in an environment that consistently does not respond to their needs can experience "toxic stress" that hinders brain development and their later ability to learn. Mothers' health during pregnancy and parents' actions during early childhood can permanently affect their children's abilities, if efforts are not made to remediate the early damage. This applies not only to basic cognitive achievements but also the behavioral skills – self-control, patience,

perseverance and problem-solving – that make employees successful.<sup>6</sup>

Because this period of development is so intense, the achievement gap can show up early – well before kindergarten entry. Studies have found differences in cognitive processing in disadvantaged infants as young as nine months old.<sup>8</sup> For example, by age two, children with professional parents already have a larger vocabulary than children of lower-income parents. One study found that by age three, the more affluent children knew twice as many words.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, children show different math scores by kindergarten entry—by race, family income and parent education.<sup>10</sup>

High-quality home visiting programs that support parents and children

**"Long before most children step foot into a classroom, neurons are building networks, cognition is exploding, language is developing, and the foundations are being laid for a lifetime of learning. Outside of that five-year window, you lose opportunities you may never get back."**<sup>7</sup>



**Former Senator Bill Frist,**  
M.D. (R-TN)

benefit business in two ways: by helping to build a productive workforce and by preventing expensive outcomes that waste public resources and hinder economic vitality. These two-generation impacts are below.

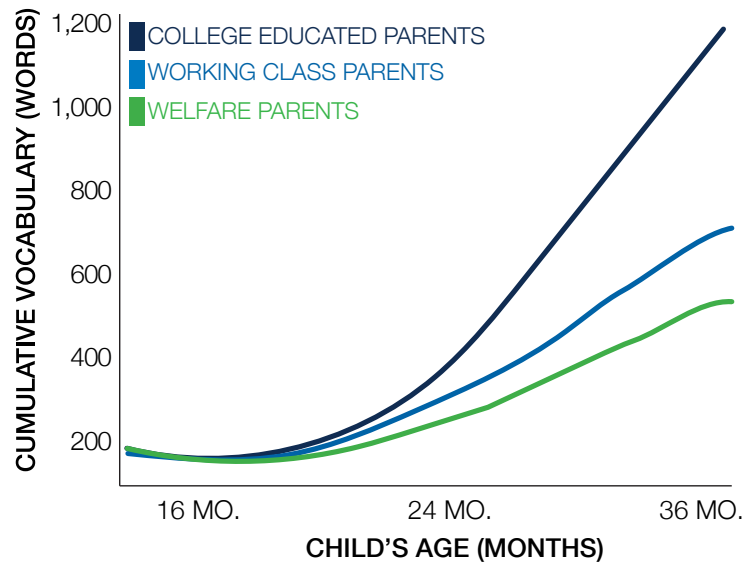
### BETTER HEALTH

- Mothers in the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) home visiting program smoked less during pregnancy and were more likely to delay any subsequent births, according to rigorous randomized trials.<sup>12</sup> Both promote better child health.
- One study of NFP showed mothers were half as likely to abuse or neglect their children, and another showed participating children had 39 percent fewer injuries.<sup>13</sup>
- In Cincinnati, the mortality rate for infants receiving either Healthy Families America or NFP was 60 percent lower than for the comparison group.<sup>14</sup>

### BETTER PREPARED FOR SCHOOL

- In a randomized trial in Alaska, Healthy Families America (HFA) increased the number of children with normal cognitive development and reduced the number with behavior problems, while an HFA program in New York helped reduce the number of children who

## Vocabulary Gap Emerges Early



needed special education.<sup>15</sup>

- In randomized trials in Memphis and Denver, the most high-risk mothers served by NFP had children who were more likely to avoid language problems by age two, had better language development by age four, and had better grade point averages and test scores in reading and math throughout elementary school compared to children of similar mothers who did not receive NFP.<sup>16</sup>

### INCREASE IN PARENTS' PRODUCTIVITY

- A randomized trial found that Early Head Start, when it included a strong home visiting component, improved the education and training of mothers and increased their earnings by \$300 a month.<sup>17</sup>
- Randomized trials found that NFP reduced families' reliance on food stamps and welfare. In Memphis, for example, NFP families relied

on welfare for \$1,000 less per year on average than families not in the program.<sup>18</sup>

### REDUCTIONS IN CRIME

- The mothers who did not participate in NFP were three times more likely to be convicted of a crime, and by age 19, the children who did not participate in NFP had more than twice as many convictions as those who

received NFP, according to a randomized trial.<sup>19</sup> A criminal record can disqualify mothers or their children from many jobs.

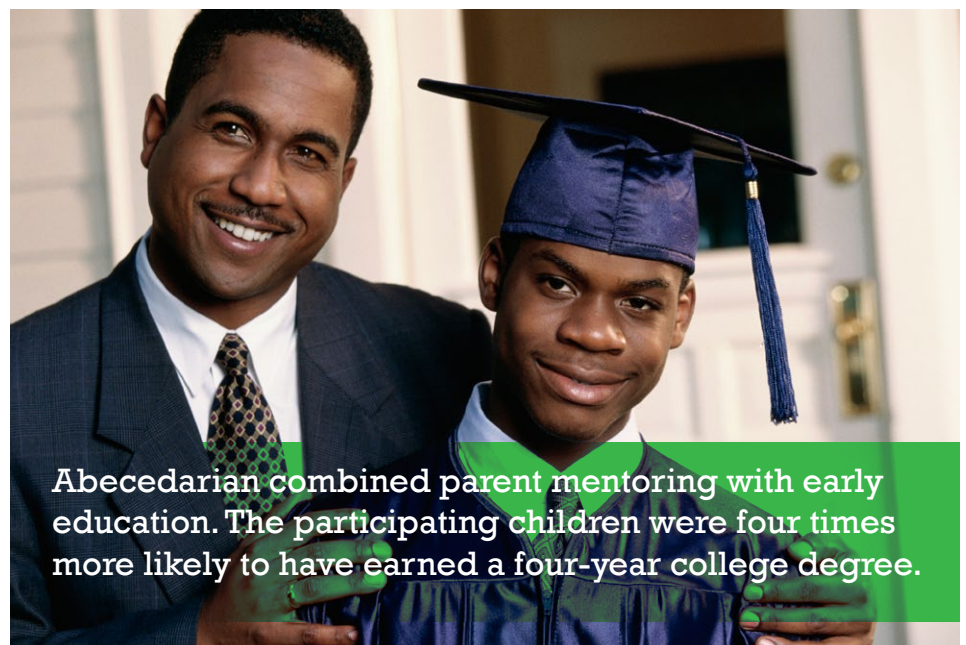
### COST SAVINGS

- An independent financial analysis of NFP, the stand-alone home visiting program that followed the children it served up to age 19, concludes that it produced a benefit-cost ratio of almost three to one and average net savings of almost \$17,000 per family served.<sup>20</sup>

### A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN

It is critical that at-risk children receive necessary supports that do not stop after their first two years of life or are only available later when they are three- or four-years-old.

The Abecedarian Project demonstrates this. It served at-risk children with high-quality early education in North Carolina starting at six months and continuing to age five. In both the original study where parents learned







about how to improve their children's development from seeing what the preschool was doing and attending presentations, and in a smaller replication that added on home visiting, the program produced strong results on education, employment and health into adulthood:

- By age 30, the children participating in the original Abecedarian were four times more likely to have earned a four-year college degree; and<sup>21</sup>
- They were 42 percent more likely to be consistently employed.<sup>22</sup>
- Then, by their mid-30's, health outcomes were measured and they had significantly lower risk factors for heart disease, stroke and diabetes.<sup>23</sup>

**“The education process begins long before school....even back to the prenatal period...One of the things that can really help a young mother or young father take care of their child is help from a home visitor.”<sup>25</sup>**

**General Colin Powell (USA, Ret.),**  
Former Chairman,  
Joint Chiefs of Staff

For funders, see our website.

ReadyNation is a membership organization of business leaders that operates under the umbrella of the non-profit Council For A Strong America.

## Add your voice.

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## TIME TO INVEST WISELY

America's business leaders are calling on state and federal policymakers to invest in high-quality home visiting and other proven supports in order to protect children and put them on the path toward successful lives. Without the right start in life, at-risk children can be far behind before they even enter kindergarten.

We are currently paying far too much for remedial education, welfare, prisons and the other costs of failure. For example, Americans pay \$124 billion a year for the costs of abuse and neglect alone, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, Wilder Research (2015) found that “the lifetime economic value of investing in school readiness

**“Proven early childhood programs like home visiting deliver well-prepared minds to our schools and eventually into the workforce, driving economic growth and prosperity.”<sup>11</sup>**



**Bill Thornton,**  
President and CEO,  
Ft. Worth, Texas  
Chamber of Commerce

for just one more child at risk of academic failure in Detroit is conservatively estimated at \$96,000, and about \$47,000 over the lifetime of a child in Michigan.”<sup>26</sup>

Business leaders routinely face challenges finding employees who have the critical training, academic and team-building skills our companies need to grow. Investments in high-quality home visiting and early childhood education are necessary for the U.S. to create the highly-productive workforce needed to maintain its competitive position in an increasingly dynamic global economy. If we invest wisely now, our companies and nation will reap greater benefits from a prosperous economy in years to come.

**ReadyNation** 

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## ENDNOTES

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