



For Immediate Release

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Leadership Program to Engage Families in Education Reform

Support from Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan

LANSING – Michigan’s Children is proud to announce a new advocacy training and opportunities program for parents and youths living in Detroit’s near-east side neighborhood.

The “Are Your Eyes Open?” leadership program will target Detroit families residing on the eastside who are caring for children ages 13-17. Programming will be designed for both youths and adults, and focus on the three “I’s” of civic engagement: Information, Input, and Influence.

The program is a collaborative effort of Michigan’s Children and the Detroit Parent Network aimed at increasing civic participation among Detroit parents and youths in order to address the educational challenges of students attending schools on the east side of Detroit, and to influence federal, state and city leadership’s response to existing education reform efforts.

“Families living on Detroit’s eastside face multiple challenges that necessitate attention from state and local elected leaders,” said Jack Kresnak, President & CEO of Michigan’s Children. “Half of the children here live in poverty, families have limited access to quality housing, child care, medical treatment and mental health care. The quality of Detroit schools is also an enormous concern for many families, and the ability to learn is severely hampered by all of these issues.

“Let’s face it, the decks are stacked against eastside youths and without some big changes their chances of success are minimal.”

Support for the program comes from the Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan.

Participating families will have opportunities to engage in federal, state and local level policy debates in community education forums, participate in advocacy trainings, and learn more about federal, state and local level policy discussions affecting them. They also will be able to influence positive change in their community on school safety and other education reform issues through participation in public hearings, and individual meetings with decision makers.

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Three community forums will be held over the next year at various schools and youth-serving organizations served by the Riverfront Village Initiative, a collaborative effort between Communities In Schools of Detroit and the Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan with a goal of bringing change to struggling schools and surrounding neighborhoods on the near eastside of Detroit. The project will work closely with Communities In Schools of Detroit, Inc., which has been serving schools, students, and families in low-income Detroit communities for 14 years.

Participating parents and youths will be recruited and trained to serve in leadership roles in the community. These parents and youths then will serve as knowledgeable local resources for other parents and youths in their neighborhoods and schools.

The Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan is a permanent community endowment built by gifts from thousands of individuals and organizations committed to the future of southeast Michigan. The Foundation works to improve the region's quality of life by connecting those who care with causes that matter. The Foundation supports a wide variety of activities benefiting education, arts and culture, health, human services, community development and civic affairs. Since its inception, the Foundation has distributed more than \$415 million through more than 35,500 grants to nonprofit organizations throughout Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Monroe, Washtenaw, St. Clair and Livingston counties. For more information, please visit www.cfsem.org.

Established in 2002, Detroit Parent Network (DPN) is an independent, nonprofit membership organization whose mission is to strengthen parental involvement in homes, schools and communities, and to connect parents to existing services and resources. Serving families in Detroit, Highland Park, and Hamtramck, DPN has reached nearly 50,000 parents and children through leadership training, parent organizing, education, and support and referral services since its inception. With a current membership of 1,800, DPN works to provide opportunities for parents to network and connect with each other, and offers workshops, support groups, and trainings to build parents' skills, knowledge and confidence.

Michigan's Children is a statewide, nonpartisan and nonprofit organization committed to speaking out for the well-being of children and their families at the federal, state and local levels of government. Since 1992, Michigan's Children has become a recognized leader in the development of public policy, a source of reliable information on a wide range of issues affecting children and families, and a strong partner for communities. We believe in equal opportunity, prevention, civic engagement, and collaboration to create a Michigan where all children have the opportunity to thrive. For more about Michigan's Children, go to www.michiganschildren.org.

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We work with lawmakers, business leaders and communities to make Michigan a place where all
children have the opportunity to thrive.***