

PARENTING COMMUNITIES

funded by the Leelanau County Early Childhood Millage



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Growing Stronger
Together

Parenting Communities: Built by and for Leelanau Families

Parenting Communities was first established in the 1990s after Leelanau County parents shared that they needed more support close to home. Families had questions about parenting and child development, felt isolated from one another, and often had difficulty learning about or accessing available resources. Parenting Communities was created in response, providing families with local opportunities for connection, information, and encouragement.

Over time, changes in funding significantly limited the program's ability to serve families. Recognizing the continued importance of early childhood support, the Leelanau County Early Childhood Work Group came together in 2019 to examine the needs of families with young children and identify gaps in local services.

The work group's efforts led to a proposal for a dedicated Early Childhood Millage. Leelanau County voters approved the millage in 2019, allowing Parenting Communities to be re-established in 2020 with stable local funding and an expanded ability to reach families throughout the county.

Parenting Communities is now housed within the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department. Being part of the health department allows us to connect families more easily with its other programs, professionals, and services, creating additional opportunities for coordinated support and care.

In 2024, Leelanau County voters once again demonstrated their strong support for young children and families by overwhelmingly renewing the Early Childhood Millage. This continued investment ensures that Parenting Communities can remain responsive to families, strengthen community connections, and provide free early childhood support close to home.



Throughout 2025, Parenting Communities supported Leelanau County families, helping parents and caregivers feel informed, encouraged, and connected.

Our trained professionals met families where they were and offered:

- Individualized parenting support in families' homes or the office
- Information about child development and developmental screenings
- Weekly drop-in playgroups and community events
- Professional feeding, nutrition, and wellness guidance
- Connections to schools, libraries, literacy programs, community services, and other trusted local resources

Grounded in the Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors model, Parenting Communities work focused on strengthening parent-child relationships, supporting children's social and emotional development, and helping parents feel confident and connected.

Thanks to the Leelanau Early Childhood Millage, all programs and events were provided free of charge to Leelanau County families with children from birth through age six.

..... The People Behind Parenting Communities



Courtney is a social worker specializing in maternal and infant mental health. On home visits, she supports families with parenting, child development, family wellbeing, and mental health. You'll also see her in the community helping out at our special events and co-hosting groups like Families Together and Mom Power.

"I absolutely love what I do. Getting to join families in this phase of life – the beginning years of parenting and a child's life – it's so important and I am honored to meet and be with families during this special time. The thing I most enjoy is the connection – connecting with families, supporting the parent-child relationship, and seeing families connect with one another to build a strong and supportive community. It feels like magic."

Theresa is a Community Health Worker who builds meaningful relationships with families, creating welcoming spaces where parents and children feel supported, connected, and valued. Through home visits, playgroups, and partnerships throughout the community, she helps strengthen connections between families and the people and resources that support them. She believes strong relationships are the foundation for healthy children, confident parents, and thriving communities.

"I believe every family deserves to feel connected, supported, and empowered. The most rewarding part of my work is building relationships that help families recognize their strengths and know they don't have to navigate parenting alone."



Nikki is a Public Health Nurse and has worked with families in Early Childhood programs at the Health Department since September 2021. She has a bachelor's degree in Nursing and has worked with a variety of age ranges and specialties during her nursing career. Nikki enjoys connecting with families to help support and advocate for the Leelanau County community!

"What I love most about working with families is that it creates an environment that allows me to support the entire foundation of the family's lives, not just a single piece of it. There truly is nothing more rewarding than helping a family realize their strengths and create a stronger future together."

Adriana, who goes by Adri, is a Community Health Worker who hosts playgroups, conducts home visits, supports special events, and provides hearing and vision screenings. She offers encouragement, resources, and a welcoming space where families feel heard and supported throughout the beautiful and sometimes challenging journey of parenting.

"I love working with families because the relationships we build help me grow both personally and professionally. It is a privilege to support families throughout their parenting journey. I always tell the families I work with, "We're all on the same team." Building a strong community helps all of us grow, connect, and thrive together."



Hannah is the Personal Health Supervisor for Parenting Communities. She leads the program's planning and development, supports the Parenting Communities team, and builds partnerships that strengthen services for families throughout Leelanau County. She works to identify community needs, develop responsive programs, and bring people and organizations together so that families can more easily access meaningful opportunities, resources, and support.

"What I love most about this work is seeing what becomes possible when we truly listen to families and work together as a community. I am proud to lead a team that cares deeply about the families we serve and is always looking for new ways to help them feel connected and supported. Knowing that our work can make parenting a little easier and help families recognize that they are not alone is deeply meaningful to me."

Mariah is a registered dietician and lifelong resident of Northern Michigan. She holds a bachelor's degree in Nutrition and Dietetics and has been a Registered Dietitian since 2019. Mariah is passionate about supporting families, with a special focus on breastfeeding and helping young children establish healthy eating habits from the start. Her mission is to empower parents with the knowledge and tools they need to raise confident eaters.

"I love building meaningful relationships with families and supporting them as they help their children learn, grow, and thrive. As a parent myself, I understand how busy and demanding daily life can be. Working with families in their homes allows me to meet them where they are, recognize their unique strengths, and provide individualized support that naturally fits into their everyday routines."



Congratulations to **Kathy** on her retirement and an outstanding career in early childhood and family support. Kathy has worked with families for more than 25 years as a certified Parents as Teachers Parent Educator and Community Health Worker with Parenting Communities. Her work was honored with the 2022 Parents as Teachers Parent Educator of the Year Award, recognizing her leadership and dedication to strengthening families.

Thank you, Kathy, for your years of service and the positive difference you've made in so many lives. Wishing you a joyful and fulfilling retirement!

..... Bringing Families Together

IN 2025, 383 CHILDREN IN 279 FAMILIES WERE ENROLLED IN PARENTING COMMUNITIES.



PLAYGROUPS

Playgroups give young children the opportunity to learn, grow, and build relationships through play. While children explore and develop important social, emotional, physical, and communication skills, parents and caregivers connect with one another, share experiences, and build supportive relationships. Each group is facilitated by a certified Community Health Worker who creates a welcoming space and offers helpful information about parenting, child development, health, nutrition, and other topics important to families.

We saw 594 children and 458 adults attending the 149 playgroups held in 2025.



HOME VISITS

Home visits allow families to receive one-on-one support centered on what matters most to them. Our team listens to each family's needs and can provide developmental screenings, parenting and child development information, connections to helpful resources, and support through the everyday challenges and ups and downs of parenting.

To make this individualized support comfortable and accessible to even more families, we created a welcoming "living room" at our office. Families can now choose to meet with us in their own home or in a relaxed, family-friendly space at Parenting Communities.

In 2025, 386 home visits were conducted, serving 71 children in 55 families.



FAMILIES TOGETHER

Families Together is a monthly gathering that brings families with young children together for a shared meal, meaningful connection, and practical support. Parents and caregivers explore topics related to child development, parenting, and family well-being while children enjoy activities and time with others.



Led by Courtney, our social worker and infant mental health specialist, and Adri a certified Community Health Worker, each gathering creates a welcoming space where families can learn, ask questions, share experiences, and build lasting relationships.

Throughout the two seasons of Families Together in 2025, there were 31 children from 15 families participating.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Throughout the year, we create free community events based on what Leelanau County families tell us they want and need. Events such as the Harvest Festival in partnership with the Leland Library, the Holiday Gathering hosted at the Friendship Center in Suttons Bay, Art Together with the Northport Art Association, and our Family Street Fair give families time to have fun together, build relationships, and connect with local programs and resources.

The Family Street Fair is our largest event, bringing families and community partners together for a day filled with activities, play, information, and connection. It gives families an easy and welcoming way to learn about the many organizations available to support them while celebrating the people and partnerships that make Leelanau County such a special place to raise a family.

In 2025 the Street Fair gathered 119 children from 60 families. The Harvest Fest was another hit with 104 children and 65 adults in attendance. The Holiday Gathering filled the Friendship Center with 37 children and 30 adults celebrating the season together.



Stronger Mothers, Stronger Families

In spring 2025, 11 mothers and their 14 young children came together at Lake Ann United Methodist Church for Mom Power. Over 10 weeks, participants found a warm, welcoming place to connect with other mothers, better understand their children's needs and strengthen the relationships at the heart of their families.

Mom Power is an evidence-based program created by Zero to Thrive at the University of Michigan. Through parent education, group discussion, hands-on activities and supported parent-child interaction, mothers explore attachment, stress, self-care and emotional regulation. The program helps mothers recognize what their children's behavior may be communicating while also developing tools to care for themselves during the demanding early years of parenting.

Breakfast and on-site child care removed two common barriers to participation and gave mothers dedicated time to learn, reflect and build meaningful relationships with one another.

"You guys rock
and this event
means a lot to
me!"

- Mom Power parent



WHY IT MATTERS

Strong roots support healthy growth. Mom Power uses the image of a tree to help parents understand children's need both to branch out and explore and to remain connected through strong, secure roots.



While mothers participated in the group, the children spent time with a dedicated child team in a safe, nurturing environment. Team members took time to build trusting relationships with each child through play, comfort, and consistent care. This allowed the children to practice separating from their mothers while knowing they were safe and supported.

Separation and reunion were meaningful parts of the Mom Power experience. At the end of each session, mothers and children came back together for supported activities that encouraged connection and helped mothers put what they were learning into practice. These moments gave mothers new ways to recognize and respond to their children's cues, helping both mother and child feel more secure and connected.

Creating Space for Fathers to Connect & Grow

A PLACE DESIGNED FOR FATHERS

While mothers gathered on Friday mornings, eight fathers and their children came together on Monday evenings for Fraternity of Fathers. Dinner, interactive activities and a supportive group environment created a space where dads could learn, connect and strengthen their relationships with their children.

Fraternity of Fathers is a 10-week program created by Zero to Thrive specifically for fathers of young children. It uses adventure therapy principles to introduce attachment-based concepts in a way that is active, practical and engaging. Fathers learn more about child development and behavior, explore how their own experiences influence their parenting and practice new ways to build connection, trust and security with their children.

WHY IT MATTERS

Children benefit when fathers feel confident, connected and supported. Fraternity of Fathers gave dads opportunities to build parenting skills while developing relationships with other fathers navigating many of the same experiences.



COLLABORATION ACROSS COUNTY LINES

This program was made possible through a partnership among organizations serving Leelanau, Benzie and Grand Traverse counties, with the space to meet provided by Lake Ann United Methodist Church. Programs from each county covered the cost of participants who lived in its service area, allowing families to attend one shared regional program.

By combining funding, outreach, staff expertise and a centrally located community space, we were able to bring together a strong group of mothers that no single program could reach on its own. The result was a richer experience for participants and a more efficient use of community resources.

THANK YOU

Michigan Association for Infant
Mental Health - NW Chapter

Great Start Collaborative

Grand Traverse County DHS

Leelanau County DHS

Benzie Cares for Kids

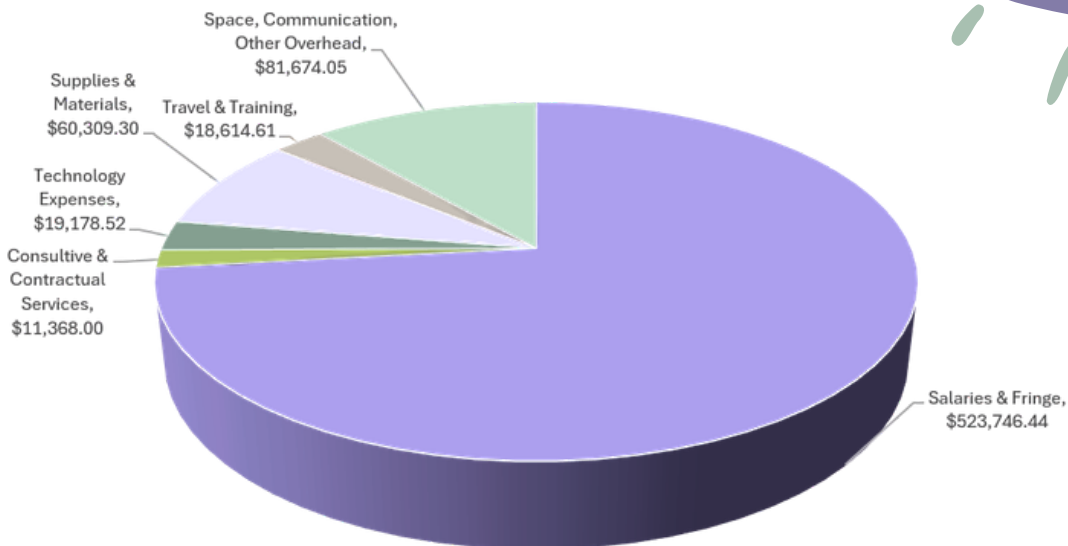
Powered by Partnership and Community Investment

Community investment and strong partnerships make it possible for Parenting Communities to serve and support more local families.

The Parenting Communities team is thankful for the Leelanau Early Childhood Millage and the many partnerships and volunteers that help support Leelanau County families.

- Great Start Collaborative
- Dolly Parton Imagination Library
- PoWer! Book Bags
- Leelanau Christian Neighbors
- Suttons Bay Bingham District Library
- Glen Lake Community Library
- Leland Township Library
- Leelanau Township Library
- Glen Lake Community Reformed Church
- Keswick United Methodist Church
- Lake Ann United Methodist Church
- NW Chapter MI-AIMH
- Northwest Ed
- St. Mary's School
- Northport Public School
- Glen Lake Community Schools
- Suttons Bay Public School
- Leelanau Montessori
- Leland Public School
- Benzie Cares for Kids
- Local Childcare Providers
- And you!

Financial Information
2025 Parenting Communities Expenses
Total Expenses \$ 714,891



"I have connected with PC staff well and feel they are a source of support for my parenting."
-Families Together parent



PARENTING COMMUNITIES

**For more information & our
Community Calendar visit:**

parentingcommunities.org

