

**From:** [Chet Janik](#)  
**To:** [Alison Middleton](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Parenting Communities  
**Date:** Tuesday, September 21, 2021 5:47:06 PM

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**From:** Sherwood Smith <[ssmith@avenueisr.com](mailto:ssmith@avenueisr.com)>  
**Sent:** Monday, September 20, 2021 10:35 AM  
**To:** Board of Commissioners <[boc@leelanau.gov](mailto:boc@leelanau.gov)>  
**Subject:** Parenting Communities

Dear Members of the Leelanau County Board of Commissioners.

Thank you for carrying out the hard work of representing the residents of Leelanau County.

My name is Woody Smith and I am a researcher and business owner based in Traverse City. Over the last 25 years of my career, I have completed projects for the following organizations, among many others: The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Munson Healthcare, 3M, the Great Lakes Commission, DePaul University, Hagerty, Northwestern Michigan College, Bill Marsh Auto Group, St. Francis, Traverse City Area Public Schools and Traverse City Christian Schools. I pride myself on being a neutral and independent actor who works to help businesses, organizations and communities make good decisions and well-informed investments.

To be fully disclosed, I am currently under contract with the Benzie-Leelanau Health Department to provide assessment of the Parenting Communities Program. However, I would be happy to return any funds associated with this work if it will help my input be taken seriously.

The Parenting Communities approach is designed to support parents and families as they raise their young children in Leelanau County. Parents and other caregivers get connected with each other, and if they need help are supported through the challenges of raising young children. The specific steps the Health Department staff are using have been shown in Michigan and throughout the U.S. to reduce child abuse and neglect as well as to set children up for success in school and life.

In a study I did with Munson Healthcare in 2018, we found that regular home visits from health department nurses meaningfully increased rates of breastfeeding and improved access to medical care for mothers. Both of these changes can have a substantial impact on the long term health of children and families. In addition, the play groups, home visits and other pieces of Parenting Communities can help parents identify and understand developmental delays in their young kids. It's a really comprehensive set of supports that in no way displaces the critical role of parents in the lives of their young kids.

In a study my firm did in Northwest Lower Michigan in 2010, we found that these types of investments in early childhood could generate at least a 6:1 return on investment in terms of reduced need for services further down the road.

We have a number of evaluations under way that should give a really good picture to the Board of Commissioners of the impact this program, invested in by the taxpayers of Leelanau County, is having to impact the future health and success of young children and their families. But Parenting Communities needs some time to run and show just how it can help Leelanau County families. Please retain funding for the program so we can all see just what benefits it can bring.

Sincerely,

- Woody

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