



Parenting Communities – Program Evaluation 2023-4

Prepared by Avenue ISR

February 12, 2024

Executive Summary

Avenue ISR is an independent research and strategy consultancy based in Traverse City, Michigan contracted to provide an evaluation of the Parenting Communities program operated by the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department.

Avenue ISR examined extensive survey data collected from parents and other caregivers between January, 2023 and January, 2024 in preparing this program evaluation report. Avenue ISR also reviewed relevant historic data from 2021 and 2022 for comparison purposes.

Based on this analysis, it appears that despite the real challenges that many Leelanau County parents and caregivers continue to face, Parenting Communities is providing an essential role in supporting parents and families, enhancing parenting, connecting families to resources and otherwise setting up young children (0-6) and their families to thrive.

“They have made such an impact on us and my family. I can’t imagine how many other families they have made an impact with and touched. I believe they are building a better future for our children and helping families in general to cope.” – Parenting Communities Parent/Participant

Detailed findings are as follows:

- The underlying stressors on parents and caregivers remain significant.
 - In 2023 and 2024, only 55% of parents and caregivers surveyed would be categorized as experiencing “minimal anxiety” according to the General Anxiety Disorder assessment. 28% were experiencing mild anxiety, 12% were experiencing moderate anxiety and 6% were experiencing severe anxiety
 - Similarly, in 2023 and 2024, 65% of parents and caregivers would be categorized as experiencing “no symptoms” of depression according to the PHQ9 depression assessment. 25% were experiencing minimal symptoms of depression and 10% more severe gradations of depression
- Parenting Communities may be having a direct impact on the mental health of parents and caregivers. For those parents who have participated in multiple rounds of assessments:
 - The percentage experiencing moderate or severe anxiety (combined) has fallen from 33% in 2021 to 21% in 2022, 18% in 2023 and 11% in 2024.
 - The percentage experiencing symptoms of depression has fallen from 63% in 2021 to 48% in 2022 to 35% in 2023 and 44% in 2024.
- Parenting Communities program participants agree that being involved in Parenting Communities:
 - Helps them feel less isolated (100% strongly or somewhat agree with this statement)
 - Helps them navigate the ups and downs of life (84% agree)
 - Helps them learn about resources and supports to help them as parents/caregivers (98% agree)

- Makes them better parents or caregivers (100% agree)

These are dramatic results that imply that the vast majority of parents and other caregivers recognize that the connections, information and support they gain from Parenting Communities literally make them better parents.

- For those parents who are receiving Home Visiting Services from Parenting Communities, program participants report receiving both tangible and intangible supports through the program. These respondents agree that Home Visiting Services:
 - Helped them learn about their children’s development (100% strongly or somewhat agree with this statement)
 - Helped get help from community resources (97% agree)
 - Helped them improve their parenting skills (97% agree)
 - Helped get medical, dental or mental health care (71% agree)
 - Helped find ways to improve their families’ financial situation (63% agree)

So, the vast majority of parents and caregivers who are benefiting from Home Visiting Services are not only gaining parenting skills and knowledge, but they are also getting connected to supports that can create pathways for improved family circumstances.

- For the most part, program participants continue to have few complaints or requests for changes to the way Parenting Communities is operated in Leelanau County. Survey respondents are grateful for program staff and would like to see current program activities continued. Some would like additional options for evening and weekend events.

In its first three years of full implementation in Leelanau County under the auspices of the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department, Parenting Communities appears to be having a dramatic and positive impact on families in Leelanau County, providing the knowledge, connections and community support to help these Leelanau families navigate challenging times. The positive impact of Parenting Communities is likely to have long-term benefits for participating children and families, and for their communities in Leelanau County, for years to come.

“Parenting Communities is an amazing hub of resources and education about how to parent and how to do things.” – Parenting Communities Parent/Participant

Sources and Methods

Program Evaluation

In evaluating the effectiveness of parenting communities, Avenue ISR relied primarily on survey data collected from parents and other caregivers (e.g. grandparents) responsible for caring for young children (0-6 years old) in Leelanau County. Surveys typically involved both prompted questions and free-response (open-ended) questions to allow respondents to share their detailed opinions and experiences regarding Parenting Communities. Surveys and number of respondents are as follows:

- Family Check In and Home Visiting Satisfaction Survey (50 responses from 2023) – a survey rating overall impact of Parenting Communities in the lives of program participants including Home Visitation Services, for those who are taking part in home visiting
- Home Visiting Questionnaire (69 responses from 2023-24) – an assessment of parent and family dynamics, parent anxiety, parent depression and overall presence of protective factors¹ among parents and caregivers. *Note: To lessen the completion time of the survey, 20 questions related to protective factors were dropped from the Home Visiting Questionnaire beginning in December, 2023. Other questions related to family dynamics, parental stress, parent anxiety and parent depression were retained.*

Respondents to all surveys live in Leelanau County.

In addition, Avenue ISR conducted in-depth telephone interviews with four parents currently participating in Parenting Communities. Interviews were conducted in January, 2024.

In all cases, survey and interview research participants were promised that their remarks would be confidential and anonymous for any public reporting so that they could feel comfortable answering questions frankly.

Program and Participant Metrics

Metrics related to the number of families and children served, both overall and for the specific types of programs operated by Parenting Communities, are summarized from quarterly Parenting Communities Numbers Reports generated by the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department.

¹ Protective factors are characteristics or strengths of individuals, families, communities or societies that act to mitigate risks and promote positive well-being and healthy development. Most often, we see them as attributes that help families to successfully navigate difficult situations. Source: <https://www.bldhd.org/what-is-parenting-communities/>

Current State: Parent/Caregiver Mental Health

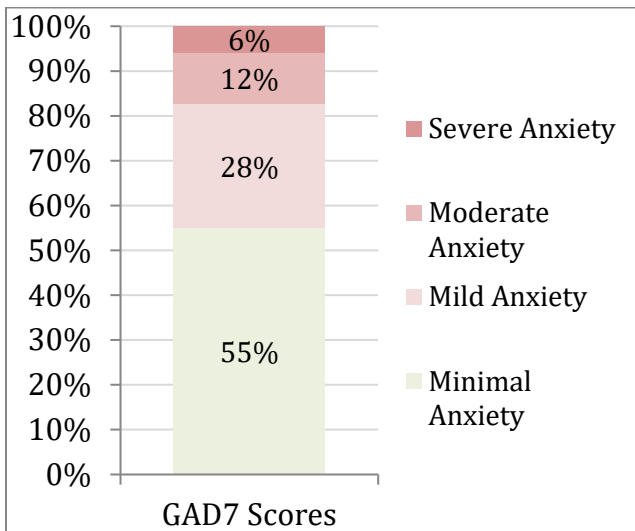
Parent/Caregiver Mental Health

As **Chart 1A** shows, in 2023 and 2024, only 55% of parents and caregivers surveyed would be categorized as experiencing “minimal anxiety” according to the General Anxiety Disorder assessment. 28% were experiencing mild anxiety, 12% were experiencing moderate anxiety and 6% were experiencing severe anxiety.

As **Chart 1B** shows, in 2023 and 2024, 65% of parents and caregivers would be categorized as experiencing “no symptoms” of depression according to the PHQ9 depression assessment. 25% were experiencing minimal symptoms of depression and 10% more severe gradations of depression.

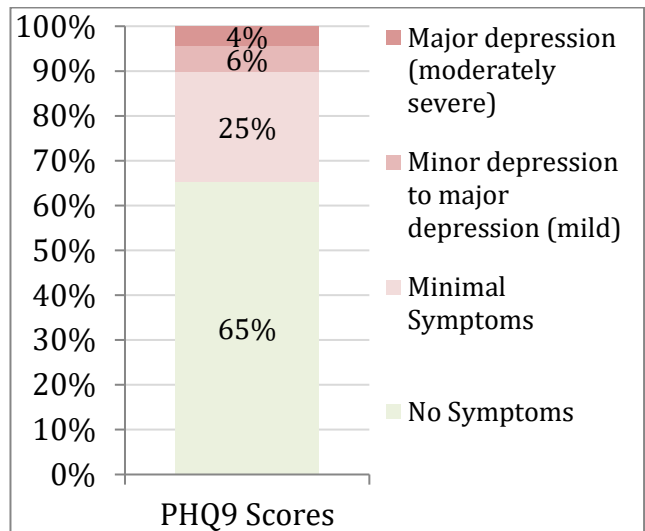
These results are broadly consistent with the results reported in 2022, when 59% of parents were experiencing minimal anxiety and 57% were experiencing no symptoms of depression, suggesting that underlying stressors affecting parents are similar to what they were in the recent past.

Chart 1A – Parent and Caregiver GAD7 (General Anxiety Disorder) Scores 2023/2024



Source: Parenting Communities Home Visiting Questionnaire 2023-2024 (69 respondents)

Chart 1B – Parent and Caregiver PHQ9 (Personal Health Questionnaire) Depression Scores 2023/2024



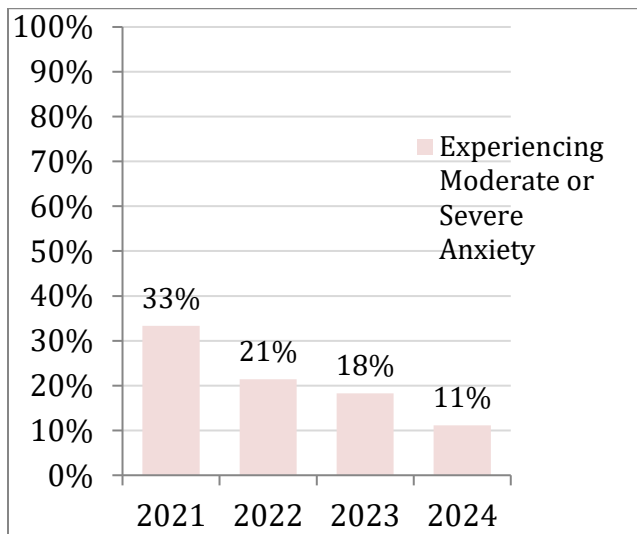
Source: Parenting Communities Home Visiting Questionnaire 2023-2024 (69 respondents)

However, participating in Parenting Communities appears to have a positive impact on both anxiety and depression. **Chart 2A** shows that for parents that participated in multiple rounds of assessments the incidence of anxiety is declining. The percentage of respondents experiencing moderate or severe anxiety (combined) has fallen from 33% in 2021 to 21% in 2022, 18% in 2023 and 11% in 2024. **Chart 2B** shows that for parents that participated in multiple rounds of

assessments the incidence of depression is generally declining. The percentage of respondents experiencing symptoms of depression has fallen from 63% in 2021 to 48% in 2022, to 35% in 2023. That symptoms of depression have crept back up to 44% in 2024 (based on 9 respondents surveyed in January, 2024) is worth monitoring, but this level is still below the 48% recorded in 2022.

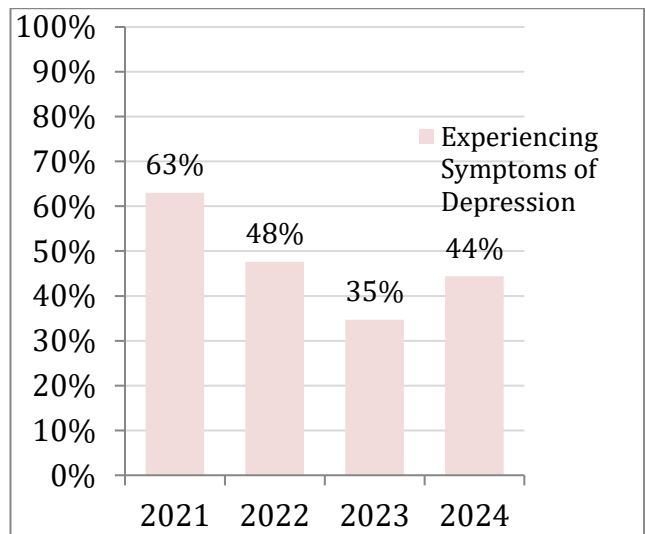
A positive impact on parent anxiety and depression would be consistent with the Parenting Communities approach to both teach skills to deal with behavioral health and to connect parents and caregivers with each other and with sources of support.

Chart 2A – Parent and Caregiver GAD7 (General Anxiety Disorder) Scores, Trending 2021-2024: For Respondents Who Participated In Multiple Assessments



Source: Parenting Communities Home Visiting Questionnaire 2021-2024 (116 respondents who participated in multiple survey cycles)

Chart 2B – Parent and Caregiver PHQ9 (Personal Health Questionnaire) Depression Scores, Trending 2021-2024: For Respondents Who Participated In Multiple Assessments



Source: Parenting Communities Home Visiting Questionnaire 2021-2024 (116 respondents who participated in multiple survey cycles)

“I was struggling mentally, and the social worker put me in touch with a therapist here in my town. It was literally a life-saver.” – Parenting Communities Parent/Participant

The Parenting Communities Approach

Parenting Communities is a program provided by the citizens of Leelanau County (through the 2019 EC millage) and the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department. Parenting Communities of Leelanau County seeks to promote healthy children living in stable, nurturing families, supported by strong communities that provide comprehensive supportive services.

In practical terms, Parenting Communities uses multiple points of contact to help parents and families build connections within their families, with other Leelanau County families and with potential resources that can help them. These points of contact include:

- **Newsletters** with information about parenting, upcoming events, family activities, and other resources that connect families in Leelanau County.
- **Home Visits** by community health workers, social workers, and public health nurses who provide positive direct support to parents and other caregivers in their homes.
- **Developmental Screenings** to help parents and other family members understand children's development, learn activities in the home that can be done to support children's development, and provide early identification and referral for developmental delays.
- **Playgroups** in which children are engaged in fun, developmentally appropriate activities while parents and caregivers build social connections and learn about important information and resources to support parenting.
- **Families Together** – monthly gatherings for families to join together with one another and Parenting Communities staff. Dinner is provided, as well as activities for families to do together. Then, while children engage in play with each other and designated caregivers, parents move to another room where they have the opportunity to learn and grow together while exploring topics related to early childhood development, parenting and collective well-being.
- **Community Events** – fun celebrations such as the Summer Street Fair, Harvest Fest and Holiday Gatherings that provide fun, developmentally appropriate activities for young children while parents build social connections and connect to the broader community.

Not every family takes advantage of every Parenting Communities activity and program. The programs are designed to create a web of support for parents and families that can adapt based on the needs of any one family. But the collective whole works to help families be more resilient, more supported and better connected to potential resources.

Table 1 shows that Parenting Communities provided programming and services for 212 unique (non-duplicated) Leelanau County families with a total of 377 unique children in 2023. This equates to Parenting Communities supporting the families of approximately a third of all children 0-6 in Leelanau County in 2023 alone². 48 families participated in home visiting and 107 families participated in play groups.

² According to the American Community Survey: 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables there were about 1,100 children 0-6 years old in Leelanau County in 2022, based on statistical modeling. 377 nonduplicated children served divided by 1,100 is 34%.

Table 1 – Parenting Communities Program and Participation Report, 2023

Program/Activity	Program and Participation Detail	2023 Annual Metrics (January 1 to December 31, 2023)
Enrollment	Unduplicated Children Enrolled, ages birth through 6	377
	Unduplicated number of Families Served (all programs)	212
Home Visits	Number of Home Visits Conducted	348
	Unduplicated number of Children receiving home visits	90
	Unduplicated number of families receiving home visits	48
Playgroups	Number of playgroup events held in Leland, Suttons Bay, Northport, Maple City or Greilickville	170
	Unduplicated number of children attending playgroups	144
	Unduplicated number of families attending playgroups	107

“Playgroups have provided a great opportunity for my child to interact with other children within the area. It would otherwise be challenging to make acquaintances and form playgroups with other parents without this program. Home visits provide an individualized assessment/discussion of my toddler’s milestones and progress. As a parent, being able to talk to an experienced individual has provided me age-appropriate strategies to help my toddler’s development.” – Parenting Communities Parent/Participant

Impacts of Parenting Communities

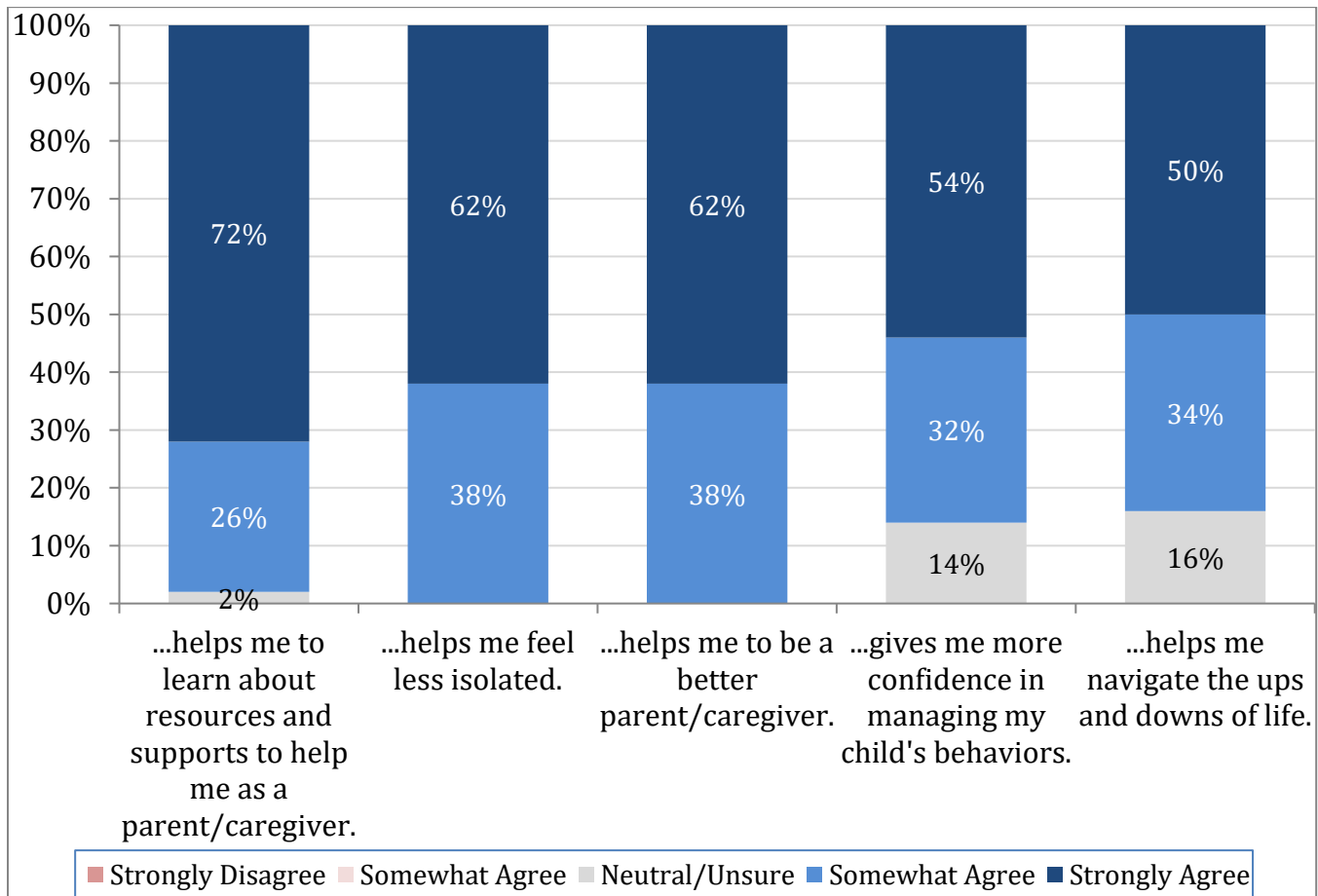
Overall Impact

As **Chart 3** shows, the vast majority of these parents and other caregivers participating in Parenting Communities report significant and important impacts arising from the program. 100% of respondents would agree (strongly or somewhat) that being involved in Parenting Communities makes them better parents or caregivers. This is profoundly positive that parents and other caregivers would recognize that the connections, information and support they gain from Parenting Communities literally make them better in their caregiving role. In addition, **Chart 3** shows that 98% of respondents would agree (strongly or somewhat) that being involved in Parenting Communities helps them learn about resources and supports to help them as parents/caregivers. This ensures that whenever parents experience difficulties, have questions about their children's development or have other needs, they have some ideas of where to turn for help.

“Parenting Communities in general has really helped my family. They provide literature on milestones helping us understand as parents how she’s doing and progressing developmentally. This helps me and my husband feel more at ease. They’ve given us all kinds of tools and developmentally appropriate activities for her, helping us to be the best parents we can be. They’ve just helped us be better parents for our daughter.” – Parenting Communities Parent/Participant

Chart 3 further shows that 100% of respondents would agree (strongly or somewhat) that Parenting Communities helps them feel less isolated and 84% would agree that Parenting Communities helps them navigate the ups and downs of life. These strong results show that the program is helping to build resilience in parents and caregivers. Parental resilience is an important protective factor in families because parents who can deal with the stresses of everyday life, as well as occasional crises, are able to reduce the stress these events can cause for young children. Finally, **Chart 3** shows that 86% of respondents would agree (strongly or somewhat) that Parenting Communities gives them more confidence in managing their children's behaviors. No parents (0%) disagree (strongly or somewhat) that Parenting Communities has given them confidence in managing children's behaviors, suggesting that the 14% who were neutral or unsure on this question did not need this additional confidence in managing children's behaviors.

Chart 3 – Impact of Being Involved in Parenting Communities on Parents: Agree or Disagree with Statements (all statements begin with “Being involved in Parenting Communities activities...”)



Source: Parenting Communities Family Check In Survey 2023 (50 respondents)

Home Visiting Services

Not every family participating in Parenting Communities receives home visiting services. However, those who do appear to be gaining significant tangible and intangible benefits.

As **Table 2** shows, 100% of respondents would agree (strongly or somewhat) that Parenting Communities Home Visiting Services have helped them learn about their children’s development in 2023. 97% would agree that Home Visiting Services have helped them improve their parenting skills, 97% would agree that Home Visiting Services have helped them learn about children’s health and an additional 94% would agree that Home Visiting Services have helped them learn about their own health. 89% would agree that Home Visiting Services have helped them learn and use strategies to manage stress. 80%, still a strong majority of respondents, would agree that Home Visiting Services have helped them learn about nutrition for themselves and their families. In all cases, this enhanced knowledge about development, parenting, health, stress reduction and

nutrition helps create a strong foundation for children to begin their first 6 years of life in a healthy and supportive environment.

As **Table 2** further shows, 97% of respondents would agree (strongly or somewhat) that participating in Parenting Communities Home Visiting Services has helped them to get help from community resources. 71% would agree that Home Visiting Services have helped get medical, dental or mental health care. And 63%, still a strong majority of respondents, would agree that Home Visiting Services have helped find ways to improve their families’ financial situation. So, in addition to learning valuable skills, the parents and caregivers who are benefiting from Home Visiting Services are getting connected to tangible supports that can create pathways for improved family circumstances. As **Table 3** shows, Parenting Communities home visitors are seen as trusted, knowledgeable and caring individuals in the eyes of families. They can therefore help families navigate choices to improve. **Table 3** further shows that respondents agree (strongly or somewhat) that home visitors are good listeners who are available, organized and on time, among many other positive attributes.

Table 2 – Family Impact of Home Visiting Services: Agree or Disagree with Statements (all statements begin with “Home visiting services have helped me/my family...”)

Benefit	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree (Strongly or Somewhat)	Neutral/ Unsure	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Learn about my child's development	69%	31%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Get help from community resources	69%	29%	97%	3%	0%	0%
Improve my parenting skills	69%	29%	97%	3%	0%	0%
Learn about my children's health	66%	31%	97%	3%	0%	0%
Learn and use strategies to manage stress	57%	31%	89%	11%	0%	0%
Learn about my own health	57%	37%	94%	6%	0%	0%
Learn about nutrition for myself and my family	54%	26%	80%	14%	6%	0%
Get medical, dental, or mental health care	49%	23%	71%	26%	3%	0%
Find ways to improve our financial situation	43%	20%	63%	37%	0%	0%

Source: Parenting Communities Family Check In Survey 2023 (50 respondents)

“If I need anything – diapers, wipes, etc. – they will help. They always bring age-appropriate learning tools. Through Parenting Communities I got signed up with Leelanau Christian Neighbors for food baskets once a week – milk, meat, beans (with a chili recipe), that kind of thing.” – Parenting Communities Parent/Participant

Table 3 – Ratings of Home Visitors: Agree or Disagree with Statements (all statements begin with “My home visitor...”)

Attribute	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree (Strongly or Somewhat)	Neutral/ Unsure	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Is a good listener	96%	4%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Is knowledgeable	96%	4%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Accepts me	96%	4%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Is caring	94%	6%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Encourages me	94%	6%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Is trustworthy	94%	6%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Is sensitive to my cultural beliefs	94%	6%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Is available	92%	8%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Is organized	92%	8%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Provides information that is easy to use	92%	8%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Is on-time	90%	10%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Visits often enough	88%	12%	100%	0%	0%	0%

Source: Parenting Communities Family Check In Survey 2023 (50 respondents)

Downstream Impacts of Home Visiting Services

High quality home visiting programs like Parenting Communities Home Visiting Services have been associated with a wide range of positive long-term impacts for both the parents and the young children in the households visited. These include reducing the negative impact of a parent’s adverse childhood experiences³, reducing the potential of child abuse⁴, improving school readiness for children and increasing educational attainment for mothers participating in the program⁵. While it’s difficult to prove a direct connection between Parenting Communities and these types of outcomes, Parenting Communities Home Visiting Services was designed and implemented using close fidelity to high quality and evidence-based models. It seems likely that

³ Riggs, J. L., Rosenblum, K. L., Muzik, M., Jester, J., Freeman, S., Huth-Bocks, A., Waddell, R., Alfara, E., Miller, A., Lawler, J., Erickson, N., Weatherston, D., Shah, P., Brophy-Herb, H., & Michigan Collaborative for Infant Mental Health Research (2022). Infant Mental Health Home Visiting Mitigates Impact of Maternal Adverse Childhood Experiences on Toddler Language Competence: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *Journal of developmental and behavioral pediatrics* : JDBP, 43(4), e227–e236. <https://doi.org/10.1097/DBP.0000000000001020>

⁴ Julian, M. M., Muzik, M., Jester, J. M., Handelzalts, J., Erickson, N., Stringer, M., Brophy-Herb, H., Ribaud, J., Huth-Bocks, A., Lawler, J., Stacks, A., Rosenblum, K. L., & The Michigan Collaborative for Infant Mental Health Research (2021). Relationships heal: Reducing harsh parenting and child abuse potential with relationship-based parent-infant home visiting. *Children and youth services review*, 128, 106135. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2021.106135>

⁵ Retrieved from National Conference of State Legislatures, <https://www.ncsl.org/human-services/home-visiting-improving-outcomes-for-children>

Parenting Communities will have a positive impact on these young children, their families and their communities in Leelanau County for years to come.

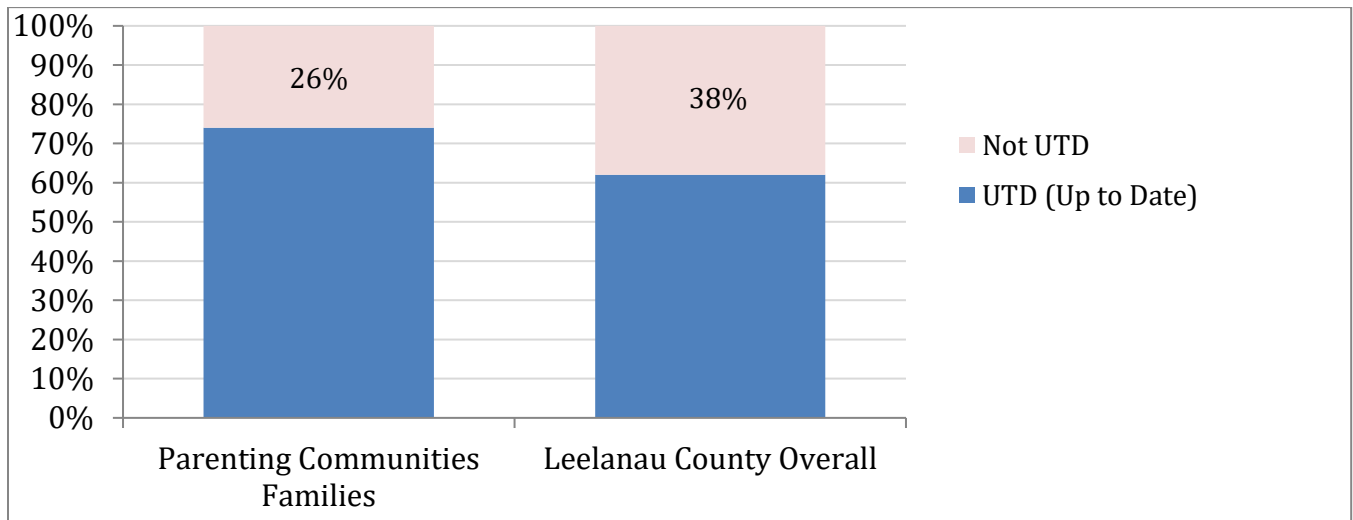
Immunization Rates

Childhood vaccination has proven to be one of the most effective public health strategies to control and prevent disease in the United States and across the globe. Vaccination is often considered as the most cost-effective public health intervention after clean water⁶. In 2013, it was estimated that 103 million cases of childhood diseases in the United States were prevented by the use of vaccines since 1924⁷.

Parenting Communities provides objective information to families about immunizations while ultimately respecting parent choice in the decision. The impact of this approach appears to be a higher rate of immunization among Parenting Communities families.

“The most important years in a child’s life are the first years. If we can support parents, it’s the best way to have happy and healthy children for our future.” – Parenting Communities Parent/Participant

Chart 4 – Relative Rates of Immunization at 19-36 Months (Up To Date (UTD) Indicates: 4+DTaP, 3+Polio, 1+MMR, 3+Hib, 3+HepB, 1+Varicella)



Source: Parenting Communities Numbers Report Q4 2023

⁶ Rémy, V., Zöllner, Y., & Heckmann, U. (2015, August). Vaccination: the cornerstone of an efficient healthcare system. *Journal of Market Access & Health Policy*. 2015; 3: 10.3402/jmahp.v3.27041.

⁷ Whitney C., MD, Zhou F., Singleton, J., Schuchat, A. (2014, April). Benefits from Immunization During the Vaccines for Children Program Era — United States, 1994–2013. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*. 63(16);352-355. Retrieved from The Center for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6316a4.htm>

Points of Pride and Potential Improvements

Points of Pride

Following are select open-ended verbatim comments from parents and caregivers in response to the question “What about Parenting Communities have you found most helpful?” These comments showcase just how meaningful Parenting Communities is in the lives of these families.

- *A support that is unbiased and confidential*
- *Access to tracking my child's development, and resources to address any concerns*
- *Always knowing that I have a great support team behind my family and me for any issues that may come up. I'm excited to have them all on my team, especially now that I am having another baby in 2 weeks. I know that I will be able to get the help and support I need.*
- *Community and parent connections*
- *Community. Relating to other parents.*
- *Connecting with other parents and health dept employees. It's really nice to socialize with other adults who have or are focused on working with young kids because I'm the only one in my social group with an under 2-year-old.*
- *Connection to tools and resources that help my family with our current struggles*
- *Connections with other families in the community*
- *Events and classes, specifically music classes and yoga classes*
- *Everything*
- *Feeling less isolated and giving my kids a safe environment to socialize*
- *Having an understanding ear to listen to me in my isolation*
- *Having resources outside of family that can help.*
- *Having somebody to talk to when I need it*
- *Having someone who is caring and kind if needed.*
- *Help connect with other families in the community, but it has helped me the most to connect with other Spanish Speaking families to continue the legacy for my son, which is so important to me.*
- *Home visits*
- *Home visits and breastfeeding support when I first had my son*
- *Home visits and parents together*
- *I guess I would have to say amazing that you have somebody to turn to. Kathy has been there 110% for any of my questions. Being your new mom is kind of hard, and Kathy has been there.*
- *I like that consistency of the play group. Also, that it provides opportunities for my child to be included in things with other kids.*
- *I love that we are able to meet new people. Since COVID, it has been difficult for my kids to socialize with others their age and this gives them the opportunity to do so.*
- *I really enjoy the newsletters on developmental milestones. It's an easy way to receive information on my child's stage of life.*
- *In home support feels so much more personal and stressless*
- *Inclusive atmosphere creating community*
- *Information*

- *It has been so wonderful to have contact with someone who gets it and encourages me to be the best version of myself. Both as an individual and as a parent. I had postpartum anxiety and depression and Courtney's visits were such a light to look forward to. She helped remind me that in order to take care of my kids, I have to take care of myself. She was instrumental in helping check in on me to get through some pretty dark times.*
- *Just being available, walking alongside me in everything, having social opportunities, giving resources if needed*
- *Knowing I ALWAYS have someone I can go to for really anything. And to have other moms that I can relate to as well.*
- *Meeting new mom friends!*
- *Opportunities to meet other families*
- *Playgroups*
- *Playgroups have provided a great opportunity for my child to interact with other children within the area. It would otherwise be challenging to make acquaintances and form playgroups with other parents without this program. Home visits with Kathy have also been beneficial as they provide an individualized assessment/discussion of my toddler's milestones and progress. As a parent, being able to talk to an experienced individual has provided me with age-appropriate strategies to help my toddler's development.*
- *Resources*
- *Resources, resources, resources!! I love that if I have a need, my PC worker jumps into action and helps me find a solution to any problem! And the fact that playgroups are always available!*
- *That it is a community and we all try to help each other in some way*
- *The abundance of resources.*
- *The community*
- *The community energy and just knowing support is there if I might need it!*
- *The flexibility of meeting with me.*
- *The home visits*
- *The home visits are invaluable to me.*
- *The ongoing plans we have to be better and do better, not only for me but for my child. It's nice to have someone in your ear that cares outside of family n friends:)*
- *The social interaction with other moms*
- *The support*
- *The teachers, workers are so beyond helpful and just so reassuring*
- *Variety of opportunities for community*
- *We really enjoy having a weekly activity to look forward to that gets us out of the house and with other families*
- *Weekly visits, love the free books, helping us find diapers saving us money*

Source: Parenting Communities Family Check In Survey 2023 (50 respondents)

Following are select open-ended verbatim comments taken from in-depth interviews with parents currently participating in Parenting Communities.

- *Whether you have a newborn or 4-year-old, they can help you navigate anything about being a new parent. They support us and help us grow and thrive as parents.*
- *Parenting Communities is an amazing hub of resources and education about how to parent and how to do things.*
- *Parenting Communities gives families an opportunity to learn about parenting and children in general in a wide sense. They provide parent support for being a parent and help with children's preparedness for going to school.*
- *I've never had a kid before and I didn't know what I was doing. The MOM Power portion alone made me open my eyes more and have a connection with my daughter when I didn't before.*
- *It's an amazing support group. They have resources for you with breastfeeding and really anything. They tell you about parent workshops that can help out a lot. Mom Power in 2021 helped tremendously. We were finally able to get out, and it was really big. We met other moms who were in the same situation. The support just continues. I could call the Parenting Communities staff up about anything and they would help or point me to where I need to go for help. It's such an amazing thing.*
- *The thing that has helped me the most is having my home visitor come out to the house. I thought they were going to come to an end and they didn't and I cried when she told me she would keep coming out to the house. Her being a nurse adds another element. I can text her if my daughter has a rash or a fever.*
- *Parenting Communities in general has really helped my family. They provide literature on milestones helping us understand as parents how she's doing and progressing developmentally. This helps me and my husband feel more at ease. They've given us all kinds of tools and developmentally appropriate activities for her, helping us to be the best parents we can be. They've just helped us be better parents for our daughter.*
- *We aren't from here and we moved here recently. It was so valuable that they provided an opportunity for kids to interact with other children, especially in a rural area. It can be challenging to find other moms to connect with and discuss parenting things. We don't really know who is who and which families have kids.*
- *When my daughter was about 4 months old, she wasn't quite rolling over yet. Gave me activities on the floor. Had this certain toy she enjoyed...put it at an angle so that she wanted to roll over to see it.*
- *If I need anything – diapers, wipes, butt cream – they will help. They always bring age-appropriate learning tools. They give me fliers for other things going on in the community (Jamboree sorts of thing). Through Parenting Communities I got signed up with Leelanau Christian Neighbors for food baskets once a week – milk, meat, beans (with a chili recipe), that kind of thing.*
- *My daughter has had trouble with her speech, so having extra resources was really helpful. She is in a Montessori program. I continued to ask the school about her speech therapy. A Parenting Communities staff member facilitated the conversation – went in and found out who the speech therapist was. We talked all three of us about what we could do at home to support her speech.*
- *I've allowed myself to self-regulate when someone's throwing a fit. Even learning the term "self-regulation" was a game changer for us honestly. That I need to bring myself down before I can help bring her down.*

- *I was struggling mentally, and the social worker put me in touch with a therapist here in my town. It was literally a life-saver.*
- *Because my mom was in child care, I grew up knowing a lot about child care and child development. The information that my home visitor brings is useful to me but I can see how it would be even more important to a parent that didn't have that information.*
- *They are there for the girls' development. Sometimes they do a survey with me on their development. They'll bring toys that are learning tools along with books.*
- *The types of activities we do with Parenting Communities are important for development. Children at this age are exploring social norms and social development...what we do in the playgroups helps strengthen that exploration.*
- *They helped me with my journey with nursing and breastfeeding with both pregnancies.*
- *I really, really like [the Parenting Communities team member who facilitates playgroups] – the experience she's provided and the comfort she's provided for the children who have attended the playgroup is really beneficial.*
- *The support of our young parents and new parents is paramount to the support of our young children. The most important years in a child's life are the first years. If we can support parents, it's the best way to have happy and healthy children for our future.*
- *Parenting Communities really does strengthen our bonds with other families and the community. It has helped us foster that social development for my son and for us as parents. They help us through lots of challenges.*
- *What I like best is the support – knowing that I can call Parenting Communities staff about anything if I am struggling in any way.*
- *Every single person that works there is absolutely wonderful. I've always felt really safe and secure with them. Parenting Communities is amazing.*
- *We spend so much money on frivolous things. \$6 for a cup of coffee in the morning. It's beyond measurable to spend it on the children who are supposed to be running the world. The future.*
- *They have made such an impact on us and my family. I can't imagine how many other families they have made an impact with and touched. I believe they are building a better future for our children and helping families in general to cope. I would love to see it keep going. If they weren't here for us, it would be a lot harder.*

Source: Parenting Communities In Depth Interviews 2024 (4 respondents)

Potential Improvements

Following are select open-ended verbatim comments from parents and caregivers in response to the question “What improvements can we make to better meet the needs of you and/or your children?” These comments showcase that for the most part parents and caregivers appreciate the program exactly the way it is designed. Several would like more evening and weekend events, and there are a handful of additional comments that could be considered by Parenting Communities staff to refine programming.

- *None/Nothing/No Improvements (17 comments)*
- *Not sure/Unsure (3 comments)*
- *A once a month “themed” activity during playgroup would be fun!*

- *Activities that are outside of working hours.*
- *Anything to help with independent financial stability*
- *Fresh snacks*
- *Having a list of the resources available, whether it be medical, dental, mental health, other financial or food needs, etc.*
- *Having more consistent music classes or yoga classes. Play groups are at a difficult time for my daughters age since it's at nap time but I'm hopeful to attend when her nap schedule changes*
- *Honestly, nothing that I can think of*
- *I believe what you are doing is fantastic and can't think of any improvement*
- *I don't think any*
- *I feel like the program does a very good job already.*
- *I think everything is great as is*
- *Idk you guys have pretty good setup*
- *Mailing out the newsletters instead of bringing them at home visits. I sometimes miss things because my visit usually falls toward the middle of the month.*
- *Make registration available through a URL as well as a QR code. It would be super helpful if there were a database of all kids' activities in the county somewhere (so not just health dept playgroups and library time but the times and locations of all kid library events, kid gym at the Children's museum, etc.). That would save having to constantly check many different websites to see what my options are for activities.*
- *Make the events on Friday*
- *Maybe offer more infant groups rather than play groups. It's out of the question to take my baby that can't do anything to a play group.*
- *More activities for older kids too*
- *More community events.*
- *More playgroups available during school year for the older kids too*
- *None I am very satisfied*
- *none that I can think of right now-sorry!*
- *None!*
- *None! This program works well for our family as is*
- *Nothing that I can think of.*
- *Nothing. Honestly.*
- *Offer morning or evening adult events*
- *Playgroups in Leland or Lake Leelanau M, T, W, or Thursday*
- *Possibly more frequent weekend events*
- *So far, we are loving everything!*
- *The only thing that has stopped us from going to the playgroups were nap time schedules. But now that he is older and transitioning down on therapy, we are hoping to make some!*

Source: Parenting Communities Family Check In Survey 2023 (50 respondents)

Following are select open-ended verbatim comments taken from in-depth interviews with parents currently participating in Parenting Communities.

- *Dealing with post-partum depression, I wanted more visits and check ins, but I understand that may not be practical*
- *They've done some of this, but maybe having events that are more accessible for working mothers. Stay-at-home parents are able to attend events midday. But having more events that are available after working hours would help working parents - 6:00 or 6:30 pm start times with some food. I've seen evidence that Parenting Communities has worked on that.*
- *I've been so overwhelmed by the amount of support from Parenting Communities. I'm not sure how we can improve upon it. I've gotten so many resources.*
- *There's nothing they could do more of or better.*
- *I wish it was available in more places outside of Leelanau County. I have a girlfriend who would severely benefit from the resources and knowledge, but she isn't in the County.*

Source: Parenting Communities In Depth Interviews 2024 (4 respondents)