

**Building Relationships  
and Strengthening  
Families through the  
Strengthening Families  
Model**

**Parenting Communities  
of Leelanau County**

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**How did we get here?**

- We've always been a community driven and focused organization
- Recognition that we weren't able to do what we felt called to do when we focused entirely on children
- We are embedded in a strong community which values connectedness
- Best practices and research were compelling

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**What were our assumptions  
going into this work?**

- All parents deserve excellent support, but they do not require a didactic parent education approach
- Home visitors are not teachers of children, but must build relationships and provide support to parents.
- All families are different BUT we wanted to create a Universal approach, so that no family felt segregated or identified as in need of special services.
- We talked about this work in terms of a non-geographical neighborhood.

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**We began with a philosophy of open doors and shared programming**

We named this aspect of our work...

**Parenting Communities ...**

in the hopes that they name would convey our values-community shaped around the interests, needs and realities of the parents

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**We hired people who looked like the people they would work with:**

- Parents
- people who have had lived through tough circumstances
- people who are native language speakers of the families they work with

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**Here's where we are today:**

Parenting Communities, staff of 6, operate in conjunction with preschools in every school district in the county.

We provide some level of service to about 90% of Leelanau families with children under the age of 5.

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**Out and about, you'll see**

**Parenting Communities staff at :**

- The Baby Pantry, where they are holding babies, chatting with parents
- The Laundry Project, where they are playing with children and talking to parents
- Playgroups, where they are playing with children and talking with parents
- Parents' Together nights, where they are leading discussions
- Home visits, where they are responding to the needs and interests of parents
- At local schools, working with the CORE team
- At Wrap Around meetings, helping families
- At preschools, chatting with kids, teachers, parents

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**Sounds like a lot of chatting eh?**

It is!

Our work is not prescriptive, it is responsive.

Families direct the shape of our interactions-  
- all aspects of the program are voluntary and flexible in design. For example:

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**A home visit may be a time to:**

- Play with the baby and celebrate her new teeth
- Talk about the rough experiences of the last week
- Explore some of the concepts in the book we are reading together
- Take a walk and feel the warm breeze
- Problem solve toward a change the parent seeks
- Assess the child's development
- Help the parent make an appointment (or take him/her to the appointment)

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**As the program has evolved,**

we discovered that all of our work is aimed at building supportive factors for families, hence we have adopted the Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education framework

<http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net/>

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**Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education framework.**

The five protective factors:

- 1) social connections
- 2) knowledge of child development and parenting
- 3) Concrete supports in times of need
- 4) Social emotional competence of children and families
- 5) Parental resilience

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**social connections**

- Playgroups
- Home visits
- Wrap around
- Center-based program connections
- Laundry Project
- Baby Pantry

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## knowledge of child development and parenting

- Parent lending libraries
- Monthly newsletter
- Parents' Together events
- Playgroups
- Home visits
- Developmental assessments
- Daily chats with parents
- Parent teacher conferences

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## Concrete supports in times of need

- Family support team
- Wrap around
- 'no blind date' and 'no wrong door' philosophy
- scholarships

Help families sort out what they want and help them identify the steps to get there.

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## Social emotional competence of children and families

- Philosophy that recognizes that social emotional development is **KING**
- Curriculum that support the philosophy
- People who love and are fascinated by children and families
- Tools such as the DECA
- Friends such as Infant Mental Health folks

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## **Parental resilience**

This is what it's all about--

The family who can wake up glad to see another day and hopeful that today, things will improve is far healthier than the family who awakens feeling down-trodden and hopeless.

The five protective factors each help parents develop, maintain or regain resilience.

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