



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 9, 2008

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EAST YAKIMA SET TO HELP YOUNGEST RESIDENTS THRIVE

Ready by Five Kicks Off with \$5 Million for Expanded Early Learning Services and Planning Capital from Gates Foundation and Thrive by Five Washington

YAKIMA – Thrive by Five Washington and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced today \$5 million for the first round of funding for Ready by Five, a community partnership that will substantially increase access to high-quality early learning opportunities for children from birth to age 5 in the partnership's project area of East Yakima.

Ready by Five (formerly known as the East Yakima Early Learning Initiative) will provide parents and caregivers with education and support to help develop children's potential and creativity, helping to ensure that all children in this community are ready to succeed in school and thrive in life.

With this grant, Ready by Five will be able to deliver a continuum of programs for children from birth to age 5, their parents and caregivers that includes home visitation programs for expectant families and families with young children, parenting support activities, and a kindergarten transition program that will help young children adapt to their new surroundings. In addition, a quality improvement system will be developed to improve the care of children attending licensed child care centers. About \$500,000 in design and planning funds for the construction of a new early learning center for the project also are included in the grant.

Proposals submitted by the communities of East Yakima and White Center, located south of Seattle, to design community-wide early networks for children from birth to age 5 were chosen by the Gates Foundation and Thrive by Five Washington more than a year ago. Plans and funding for White Center were announced this past February. The two communities will field test the best early learning approaches for children and families and serve as models for what can be done at the local and state levels to improve early learning opportunities for all children.

"One of my priorities is to help ensure that children get the support they need to succeed in school and in life," said Gov. Chris Gregoire, co-chair of the Thrive by Five Washington board of directors. "It's exciting to see the Yakima community come together to support its young children and their families."

Stakeholders from 42 organizations in the Yakima area spent more than 18 months convening and developing business plans for Ready by Five to make high-quality early learning opportunities in their community – whether at home or in child care centers – available to families with young children. This grant funds the first phase of those plans. Educational Service District 105 will administer the funds.

"East Yakima is a community with great promise," said Dr. Graciela Italiano-Thomas, president and CEO of Thrive by Five Washington. "The strong partnerships among parents, the Yakima School District, health, social service, and community organizations, caregivers and public agencies are a testament to the city of Yakima's dedication to ensuring all young children in their community enter school ready to succeed."

THRIVE BY FIVE is a trademark of financial literacy programs for preschoolers supported by Credit Union National Association, Inc. ("CUNA") and is not affiliated with Thrive by Five Washington. Learn more at http://www.creditunion.coop/pre_k/index.html

“Providing high-quality, stimulating early learning opportunities for young children is one of the smartest investments we can make in our state’s future,” said Bill Gates Sr., co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Thrive by Five Washington board of directors. “We’ll take what we learn in Yakima and share those lessons throughout our state, so that families across Washington will benefit from this investment.”

Education and outreach services in the East Yakima project area also will include an early learning center for which the state Legislature allocated \$100,000 this year. Additional funds for construction will come from a capital campaign managed by Ready by Five. Using the Educare model first developed in Chicago, the center will include space for preschool programs and parenting classes taught by credentialed instructors and will also provide a focal point for the community. Details concerning the construction of the center are still being finalized and will be announced later this summer.

Located in south central Washington, Yakima is renowned as an agricultural center. Of Yakima’s 83,000 residents, 35 percent are Hispanic or Latino. An additional 5.4 percent of residents are African American, Native American or Asian. More than half of the city’s nearly 9,000 children under age 5 live in poverty. As is true throughout the nation, significant numbers of children here start kindergarten without the skills needed for success.

Ready by Five (www.readybyfive.org) marks an important next step in Thrive by Five Washington’s efforts to improve the state’s early learning infrastructure. Today, as many as half of Washington state’s kindergartners begin school without the basic skills they need, such as the ability to recognize letters of the alphabet or the ability to follow directions and play well with others. Researchers have found that children who start school behind their peers – unless helped with specific programs – often stay behind and are more likely to drop out of school altogether.

A 2007 survey by the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University ranks Washington state 29th in the nation in the percentage of 4-year-olds who have access to preschool. Ready by Five and other Thrive by Five Washington programs are taking steps to address this need.

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Thrive by Five Washington

Thrive by Five champions positive early learning opportunities for every child, from birth to age five, so that they are ready to succeed in school and thrive in life. Thrive by Five partners with parents, communities, philanthropic organizations, business and government to develop a sustainable system for statewide, early learning improvement.
www.thrivebyfivewa.org

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people’s health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, the foundation is led by CEO Patty Stonesifer and co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.