

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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Contact: Steve Todd, Health Officer
517-279-9561, ext. 148
Theresa Christner, Health Ed./Health Promotion Dir.
517-279-9561, ext. 144

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Two Years Running!

(Coldwater, MI) For the second year in a row, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency was one of three local health departments recognized for its outstanding programming by the Michigan Department of Community Health. This year the health department was recognized for its Healthy Beginnings Program. Healthy Beginnings is an early childhood/parent education, and family support program offering an array of services for expectant parents and parents with children birth to five years old in need of support and guidance. The award was presented to Steve Todd, Health Officer during the 2012 Michigan Premier Public Health Conferences' Awards Ceremony held on October 3, 2012 at the Holiday Inn Hotel and Conference Center, in Big Rapids, Michigan. An announcement regarding the award was made to the Agency's Board of Health at the October 25th meeting.



From Left to Right: Rod Olney, Branch County Commissioner and Board of Health Chair, Steve Todd, Health Officer, Andrea Bricker, Program Coordinator, Brad Benzing, Hillsdale County Commissioner and Board of Health Vice Chair.

The Healthy Beginnings Program utilizes the Parents as Teachers curriculum which is an evidenced based model. It offers information and support that begins at pregnancy. Through lessons and activities, it promotes an understanding of child development and assists parents/children in developing healthy attachments. In addition, the program encourages families to make social connections and meet other parents in the community to share in the joys and challenges of raising children through the Circle of Parents Group meetings, Dance Class, and other community playgroups. Throughout the program, enrolled children receive ongoing developmental and health assessments and hearing and vision screenings.

This Hillsdale County-based program is part of an early childhood collaborative network that strives to maximize state and local resources. The Program receives funding from multiple sources including; the State of Michigan Children's Trust Fund Direct Service Grant, Hillsdale County Child Abuse and Prevention Awareness Council (CAPA), Department of Human Services, Hillsdale County Intermediate School District, Hillsdale County Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition and PNC Bank. In addition, the program actively partners with many community-based organizations, including: Hillsdale Human Service Network, Great Start Collaborative, Early On, Community Action Agency, Hillsdale Community Health Center and Community Mental Health, as well as accepts referrals from these partners, area physicians and local schools.

According to Steve Todd, Health Officer, "We are so very proud of this program and its great staff. These hard working individuals are fully energized to do their very best to address the many needs of families with your young children. Often times, young families can find themselves in life's storms, needing assistance to navigate to safer waters. This program can help by giving people better options and tools to cope, parent and live."

The Healthy Beginning Program has been in existence since 2000 at the Health Department and is coordinated by Andrea Bricker, LPC. Last year, the program was recognized by the Southwestern Michigan Perinatal Association (SWMPA) for its many contributions to improving the outcomes of pregnant women and infants. For more information about this program, please contact Andrea Bricker at 517-437-7395, ext.

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