

Steelcase Foundation Investment in Families Initiative partners with Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, hires two staff

New partnership, team members will help cohort navigate current systems

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – The Steelcase Foundation has partnered with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and the Women's Resource Center to fill two new positions as part of their \$10-million, 10-year Investment in Families Initiative. The Initiative will partner with a group of 30 Black and Latina mothers in Kent County to identify changes to existing systems and policies that will positively impact the well-being of Michigan families.

"Since announcing the Investment in Families Initiative in early 2024, each month has continued to bring new partners and collaborators to the forefront of this collective effort to reimagine and improve the systems supporting mothers and families," said Stacy Stout, director of family-centered philanthropy at the Steelcase Foundation. "With the combined efforts of MDHHS, the Women's Resource Center and the Steelcase Foundation, we're thrilled about our recent additions to the team and the promise they hold for supporting the Initiative."

To extend additional supports to the cohort of mothers in the Initiative, MDHHS and the Steelcase Foundation have partnered to employ a full-time caseworker based out of the Women's Resource Center. This individual, Jenny Gomez, will support both the cohort, as well as the broader [Women's Resource Center](#) clients and work throughout the community. Gomez will be instrumental in maximizing benefits for families, helping to navigate MDHHS systems and policies, receiving and analyzing data from MDHHS, and being proactive in predicting any approaching "benefits cliffs" participants may face.

"When the Steelcase Foundation came to us about the prospect of collaborating on the Investment in Families Initiative, we knew this would be crucial and impactful work," said Elizabeth Hertel, MDHHS director. "This initiative holds immense potential for children and families across the state, and we are excited about the prospect of being part of that positive change."

Within the Women's Resource Center, new Investment in Families Initiative Coordinator Gina Lucia Abbas will work as a full-time coach, systems navigator, and strategic thought partner to the cohort, helping them identify and achieve self-determined goals. Beginning in May, Abbas will be responsible for the cohort gatherings, collecting and helping analyze data, sharing insights, supporting the

overall Initiative efforts, and maintaining regular contact with cohort partners to offer support and opportunities in service to their goals. A grant from the Steelcase Foundation to the Center has made the funding for this position possible.

"With the addition of Gina as coordinator, we know our work with the Steelcase Foundation is one step closer to creating lasting impacts for families across West Michigan and beyond," said Michelle Bryk, program director at the Women's Resource Center. "We look forward to getting the cohort off the ground in the coming months and watching this Initiative continue to evolve."

The Steelcase Foundation's Investment in Families Initiative is a 10-year-long effort aimed at bolstering the well-being of Black and Latina mothers in Kent County, Michigan. By prioritizing the evolving needs of families, particularly those with children aged 12 or younger, the initiative seeks to provide wraparound support to address challenges within the current systems that exist and foster resilience by creating policy change. The Initiative aims to alleviate cognitive burdens, increase economic stability, and empower families to pursue their self-defined goals. By partnering with cohort mothers, community stakeholders, and a research team, the initiative not only aims to enhance individual well-being but also to identify and advocate for systemic changes that better serve Michigan families. Through this multifaceted approach, the Steelcase Foundation endeavors to create lasting positive impacts on family dynamics and community resilience.

To learn more about the Investment in Families Initiative, visit www.steelcasefoundation.org/investment-in-families-initiative.

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