All children should have the opportunity to grow up in a healthy home that is free from environmental hazards.

Happy at Home

Noah is now staying at home instead of in the hospital.

We first met Cristina Escalera in 2013 when our Healthy Housing Specialist Jennifer Spiller visited her home to install smoke and carbon monoxide alarms and to share information about preventing lead poisoning. Cristina learned how to recognize lead-based paint hazards, safely clean lead dust, and about repairs the house would need to be more lead-safe.

Remembering that visit, Cristina reached out to Healthy Homes in November 2015 after the newest member of her family, 1-year-old Noah, had been to the emergency room multiple times to control his breathing. Cristina knew firsthand the importance of addressing asthma triggers in the environment.

Although the home now had newer windows and siding to prevent lead hazards, a new healthy homes assessment focused on looking for asthma triggers that were causing Noah to struggle to breathe. Mold was growing in a bathroom that had no ventilation, the family was battling mice and roaches, and the rooms that Noah spent the most time in had older carpet, which holds dust mites, pollen, and other allergens.

Thanks to all who support our work, Healthy Homes was able to provide expertise, education, and supplies to help Cristina eliminate the asthma triggers that were making little Noah sick. Healthy Homes removed the old carpet and replaced it with hardwood flooring that is easier to clean and holds much less dust. We also abated the mold in the bathroom and installed a fan to ventilate the bathroom and keep the mold away.

After receiving these repairs and supplies, Cristina has noticed that Noah is breathing easier and he has not returned to the emergency room.

Lead in Grand Rapids

In 2015, the number of children poisoned by lead in Grand Rapids rose for the first time in more than a decade...

See more details inside.
Healthy Homes Assessments
Trained staff assess the home for a wide variety of children’s environmental health concerns, including lead, asthma triggers, radon, Carbon monoxide, unintentional injury, and more. Assessments are followed-up by the development of an action plan, education, and connection to resources.

Smoke and CO Alarms
Free smoke and Carbon monoxide alarms installed in the home for families with children living in Grand Rapids, Kentwood, and Wyoming.

Radon Testing
Free radon testing kits will be available during the month of January. Do-it-yourself kits available for $5 at other times (free for families participating in Healthy Homes Assessments).

Pest Management
Help eradicating cockroaches, mice, and rats using child and environmentally friendly tactics.

Eligibility
Most of Healthy Homes’ programs are restricted to low-moderate income families with young children living in Grand Rapids, Kentwood, and Wyoming. Call (616) 241-3300 for details.

Kent County Ranks Second to Detroit in Lead Poisoning

After the city of Detroit, Kent County had the most lead poisoned kids in the State of Michigan in 2015. Kent saw 611 kids poisoned. That’s more than twice as many as Wayne County (outside of Detroit) at 307, three times as many as third place Oakland county, and four times as many as Genesee County, home of the Flint water crisis.

And in 2015, lead levels in Grand Rapids rose for the first time in more than fifteen years. What’s going on?

Healthy Homes has worked diligently with the State of Michigan and the Kent County Health Department for the past two months to figure out why the increase. Water is ruled out. Climate is not a factor. And we looked in-depth at testing sites to make sure there were no discrepancies there. We came up empty handed.

Our next step is an in-depth look at the relationship between the uptick in poisoned kids (which is concentrated in low-income 1-2 year olds living in three high-risk zip codes, 49503, 49504, and 49507) and the changing housing market. Is a tight housing market causing families to rent housing that was formerly deemed too substandard? Are rising rents driving families into more marginal housing?

The takeaway is that the successful strategies that greatly reduced lead poisoning rates for the past fifteen years have reached the end of their effectiveness. We’ve picked all the low hanging fruit. We also need new strategies that double-down on lead. Learning from Flint, we need to get even more focused on eliminating the environmental sources of exposure. And we need to stop using children as canaries in the coalmine.

#LeadFreeGR

Thank you to everyone who donated to #LeadFreeGR. Thanks to you, the Healthy Homes Coalition hosted a Grand Rapids town hall meeting on lead poisoning and started a volunteer-run Peer Education program to educate families on lead hazards in the home.

A big thank you to Justin Sharrow and Taylor Vanderveen for making #LeadFreeGR possible!
How Do We Solve the Problem of Childhood Lead Poisoning?

With ten years of history behind us, the Healthy Homes Coalition clearly knows what needs to be done to end childhood lead poisoning in Michigan. To be effective, we must triage the situation by testing children and helping those who are poisoned. However, a significant amount of our energy must be focused on removing sources of lead from children’s environments. It is this latter issue that is the utmost priority for Healthy Homes. Here’s how we get the job done:

TEST CHILDREN
- Screen ALL children for risk.
- Provide a blood lead test for ALL at-risk children.
- Free-to-the-patient lead testing by all insurance companies.
- Increase the Medicaid reimbursement rates for lead testing.
- Promote testing and prevention education through early childhood home visiting programs.

HELP CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN POISONED
- All poisoned children should be given developmental assessments.
- Poisoned children should receive educational support and intervention pre-K through graduation.
- Children should have ongoing access to nutritional food, both in response and preventively.

FIX HAZARDS
- Increase the Medicaid reimbursement rates for intervention and case management.
- All poisoned children should receive a free environmental investigation to identify and remediate the source of the poisoning.
- Authorize the use of EPA-certified sampling protocols to proactively check for lead dust in homes.
- Provide relief resources to assist property owners with repairing lead hazards in homes.
- Prevent future exposure by requiring that residential properties receive lead clearance before rent or conveyance.

Following the Flint water crisis and given the increase in the number of children poisoned by lead in Kent County in 2015, the Healthy Homes Coalition has taken the following action steps:
- Appointed to help with the State’s Child Lead Poisoning Elimination Board
- Held a Town Hall Meeting on Lead Poisoning in Grand Rapids
- Volunteers have been canvassing high-risk neighborhoods to provide parents with information and answer questions
- Trained volunteers have initiated a Peer Education program to support at-risk parents
- Joined the Michigan Alliance for Lead-Safe Homes to talk to elected officials in Lansing
- Advocating for a joint City and County task force to look at the issue locally
- Enlisting the support of churches to reach out to both parents and decision makers
- Working to advance a policy agenda on lead (left side of this page)

Did You Know...there are more lead poisoned kids in Grand Rapids’ 49507 zip code than all of Flint.

Peer Educators Alex Markham and Guadalupe Diaz are teaching families how to identify and reduce lead hazards.
Catalysts for Change: The Next 10 Years

The Healthy Homes Coalition held a special event in May for consistent three-year donors at Catalyst Partners, a sustainability firm that owns “the greenest building in the universe”. Thanks to all who were able to join us! We learned more about the history of lead poisoning in Grand Rapids and how, if we have the will, we can completely eliminate this problem in the next generation.

The first step to truly eliminating lead poisoning requires that we need to stop using kids like canaries in a coalmine.

A huge thank you to Catalyst Partners for hosting us and to Gail Heffner and Amy Roeda-Borst for their generous gifts that made this event possible!
Save the Date!

Building Healthy Futures Luncheon

Wednesday, October 5th
Noon-1pm

Prince Conference Center
at Calvin College

Thank you to everyone who donated in recent months!

616 Realty LLC
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Scott & Sarah Baar
Dianna Baker
Michelle Behrenwald
Craig Benjamin
Jonathan & Grace Bradford
Gail Brink
Susan Broman
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Thank you to our volunteers!

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Alex Markham
David May
Tim Novak
Jack Puricelli

Ready for Life Volunteers
Jane Royer
Justin Sharrow
Taylor Vanderveen
Jasmine Ward
Tabitha Williams
Al Yanosik

Did You Know...it costs less to provide environmental interventions for asthma than for a child to visit the emergency room 3 times.
Lead Safety Tips

Keep your family safe from lead when you’re taking on home repairs!

Assume that homes built before 1978 have lead-based paint.

Lead dust is dangerous! Spray surfaces with water before sanding or scraping. Cover your work area with a protective sheet.

No kids allowed! Keep kids away from your work area until you’ve cleaned up and taken dust wipe samples.

Request your free copy of the “Lead Paint Safety” field guide from Healthy Homes.

Find more resources about protecting your family from lead at www.HealthyHomesCoalition.org/Lead