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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Greater Kalamazoo United Way Awards \$100,000 Grant
to Kalamazoo County Ready 4s**

KALAMAZOO, MI – Kalamazoo County Ready 4s (KC Ready 4s) received another significant financial boost this week when the Community Investment Cabinet of the Greater Kalamazoo United Way announced that it has awarded the program a grant for \$100,000.

The funds will provide coaching and mentoring to private pre-kindergarten programs in achieving high quality, provide professional development for pre-kindergarten teachers, cover full or partial tuition for qualifying families, and pay for conducting student assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of pre-kindergarten.

KC Ready 4s was launched in 2011 to make high-quality early childhood education accessible to every 4-year old in Kalamazoo County. During the first year of the two-year pilot, KC Ready 4s is working with five high-quality providers who enrolled 65 children. For Year 2, the goal is to double the number of children served as well as to increase the number of public and private pre-kindergarten providers who offer high-quality programs for 4-year olds.

“There is clear and compelling evidence that children who are enrolled in a high-quality pre-kindergarten program are better prepared for K-12 education and are better prepared for life as adults,” said KC Ready 4s’ Executive Director Sandy Standish. According to research conducted by Tim Bartik, senior economist with the W.E. Upjohn Institute and author of *Investing in Kids* (2011), children who are enrolled in a high-quality pre-kindergarten program see an increase in school readiness by 10 to 25%, an increase in graduation rates by 10 to 20%, and will increase their earnings as adults by 7 to 20%.

“We are pleased to be able to provide this grant to KC Ready 4s”, said Mike Larson, President & CEO of the Greater Kalamazoo United Way. “This is a natural fit given United Way’s continued focus on EDUCATION, INCOME and HEALTH”.

Shirley Johnson, Board President of KC Ready 4s, noted, “Not only is pre-kindergarten important to a child’s future, but investing in education is also one of the most powerful economic development investments that can be made.” Regarding the United Way grant, she added, “We are very grateful for the tremendous ongoing support from GKUW and their recognition of the strong link between high-quality early education and the economic progress of our community. This funding is crucial as we look to expand high-quality opportunities for the 4-year olds throughout our county.”

For more information on Kalamazoo County Ready 4s, visit www.kcready4s.org. or contact Dr. Sandra Standish at 269.366.9140.

About the Greater Kalamazoo United Way: GKUW advances the common good by creating opportunities for a better life for all. Our focus is on education, income and health, because these are the building blocks for a quality life. We recruit the people and organizations from all across the community, who bring the passion, expertise and resources needed to get things done. We invite you to be part of the change. You can give, you can advocate and you can volunteer. That's what it means to LIVE UNITED. For more information, please go to www.gkuw.org.

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