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**Photo:** Seamus McCarthy, Ph.D.

**Caption:** Yamhill Community Care President and CEO Seamus McCarthy, Ph.D.

**It’s time to make a difference in the well-being of our community**

This week is the Week of the Young Child, an annual celebration hosted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children to spotlight young children, their teachers, families and communities. This becomes a perfect opportunity to highlight the importance of investing in the early years of our community’s young children and the benefits it will bring for generations to come.

According to a Health Report published by the Centers for Disease Control in 2015, the United States spends more than $2 trillion a year on healthcare.1 It has also been estimated that 95 percent of the money spent on healthcare is spent providing treatment versus prevention.2 It’s time that more awareness and support of preventative programs come to light, and more specifically the benefit of programs focusing on young children.

By supporting and investing in evidence-based programs in the home, schools and in parent education, we can make a difference in preventative health and continue to build a community that reaps the rewards of holistic wellness.

Yamhill Community Care (YCCO)’s Community Prevention and Wellness Committee brings partners together to identify some of these evidence-based interventions. The group also develops innovative funding models to facilitate investment in these programs that address social determinants of health such as transportation, housing, peer and social support, as well as income and equity disparity. While we may never be able to eliminate some of these issues that prevent people from receiving quality healthcare and education, we can begin to pave the way for a better society.

One such program is the PAX Good Behavior Game (GBG), currently in six Yamhill County school districts. PAX GBG improves children’s self-regulation and reduces psychological and behavioral problems. Over thirty years of studies have shown this program to be highly effective in increasing graduation rates and in lowering substance abuse, delinquency and even suicidal ideation rates.

Programs like PAX GBG build up the protective factors (conditions or attributes in individuals, families or the larger society that mitigate or eliminate risk) and help a community reduce rates of child abuse and neglect. Protective factors enable adults to find resources, outside support, or coping strategies allowing them to parent effectively (even under stress) and build resilience in children

YCCO’s Early Learning Hub helps bring together some of these resources through collaboration between medical providers, educators, social service providers, business people, and law enforcement. Community partners are working together to create a coordinated system that supports and strengthens healthy families and prepares children to arrive at kindergarten ready to succeed.

You may be asking what your part is in what may seem like an insurmountable task. Opportunities to volunteer, invest in and support these worthy programs and initiatives are endless. Consider volunteering in schools, donating food for children to take home for weekend meals, providing financial support or voting for tax measures that will help fund these programs.

You may also want to join one of the Service Integration Teams that are held monthly in each school district to address the concrete needs of individuals and families who would otherwise fall through the cracks. *(For more information, visit* [*https://yamhillcco.org/about-us/service-integration-teams/*](https://yamhillcco.org/about-us/service-integration-teams/)*.)* We can all make a difference to protect our children, strengthen our families, and build up the community we share.

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1Health, United States, 2015 (PDF). www.cdc.gov 2017-06-27. Retrieved 2017-09-05.

2McGinnis, JM, Williams-Russo, P, Knickman, JR. 2002. The case for more active policy attention to health promotion. *Health Affairs, 21*, 78-93