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Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation and Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan unveil 'State of Play' report on youth sports in the region

More than 1,000 local voices informed Aspen Institute analysis, which reveals the bright spots, gaps and opportunities to get more kids in the game

Detroit, MI (June 28, 2017) – Today, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation and the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan released “*State of Play*,” an independent assessment conducted by the Aspen Institute’s Sports & Society Program that examines access, quality, and participation in youth sports in Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Washtenaw, Livingston, Monroe, and St. Clair counties.

“Research shows active children do better in life,” said Tom Farrey, executive director, Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program. “They’re healthier, more often go on to college, and as they move into adulthood are more likely to raise active kids. So how do we get more kids off the couch, without running them into the ground? It starts with a clear-eyed account of how well a community is currently serving kids through sports. We hope this report -- the first of its kind nationally -- provides valuable insights that can help mobilize stakeholders.”

Among the 40-plus findings in the report, which can be downloaded at RCWJRF.org/StateofPlay:

- **Not Enough Kids Active at a Healthy Level:** *While 82 percent of parents believe it’s important to have their children regularly involved in sports, only 13 percent of youth across Southeast Michigan are physically active one hour a day, the level recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*
- **It’s About More than Sports:** *A Johns Hopkins University analysis projects that if stakeholders in the region can get and keep just 25 percent of youth active daily, 34,227 fewer youth would be overweight and obese, saving the region more than \$1 billion in direct medical costs and workplace productivity losses.*
- **Where Have the Neighborhood Games Gone?:** *The sports experience has changed dramatically over the past generation or so, with children participating in fewer sports and activities near their homes. Casual/pick-up play has become far less common, with more youth primarily playing in organized team settings.*
- **Many Bright Spots, but We Can Do Better:** *Youth sport providers and other stakeholders across Southeast Michigan gave the region a C+ in getting kids active through sports, according to an online survey. The grade aligns with research by the Aspen Institute, which found many innovative organizations and grassroots champions dedicated to youth, but also gaps in program access, especially in low-income and rural areas.*

“Our vision is to have a Southeast Michigan community in which all children, regardless of ZIP code or ability, have the opportunity to be active through sports,” said David O. Egner, President & CEO, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation. “The *State of Play* report identifies the challenges we face as a region, but more importantly, it also shares the opportunities that all of us in the community – parents, educators, funders, and leaders – can pursue for improvement.”

The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation commissioned the report and partnered with the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan to create and oversee a local task force of youth sports practitioners and leaders who provided insights, expertise and feedback throughout the eight-month research process.

“For the first time ever, we have a clear picture of what the state of youth sports looks like in our region,” said Mariam Noland, president & CEO, Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan. “*State of Play* is a playbook that will drive community conversation and action around how we can collectively address youth sports for years to come.”

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More than 1,000 local adults and youth informed the State of Play report through interviews, roundtables, focus groups and surveys. With the help of a George Washington University research team, the Aspen Institute analyzed the region through its existing framework of eight strategies, or “plays,” designed to increase sport participation with urban, suburban and rural youth.

The eight “plays” include:

1. **Ask Kids What They Want:** *Understanding the needs of kids by building their voice into the decision-making process around sports*
2. **Reintroduce Free Play:** *Making room for less-structured activity*
3. **Encourage Sports Sampling:** *Exposing kids to a variety of sports, and not asking them to specialize early in any one sport*
4. **Revitalize In-Town Leagues:** *Supporting community-based options*
5. **Think Small:** *Being creative in the use and development of play spaces*
6. **Design for Development:** *Delivering age-appropriate programs*
7. **Train All Coaches:** *Training in key competencies in safety and working with kids*
8. **Emphasize Prevention:** *Preventing brain and other injuries*

While the *State of Play* report will help to inform grantmaking strategies for the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation and Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, the broader hope is that the region’s communities will begin to engage in this early conversation and collectively rally around our youth. Beginning this fall, the two foundations will partner to host a series of community roundtables and discussions to improve youth sports.

Southeast Michigan’s *State of Play* is one of three regional youth sports and recreation studies commissioned by the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation and conducted by the Aspen Institute’s Sports & Society Program, in partnership with local community foundations. Studies were also conducted and reports were developed in Western New York and Greater Rochester and the Finger Lakes, the Foundation’s primary regions for investment. These communities were the home and adopted home of the Foundation’s namesake and founder, the late Ralph C. Wilson, Jr., a Detroit area native and lifelong resident, and the founder and long-time owner of the Buffalo Bills professional football team.

To view the full *State of Play* report, and to receive updates and learn more about upcoming efforts to improve the local state of play, visit RCWJRF.org/StateofPlay.

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About the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation:

The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation is a grantmaking organization dedicated primarily to sustained investment in the quality of life of the people of Southeast Michigan and Western New York. The two areas reflect Ralph C. Wilson, Jr.’s devotion to his hometown of Detroit and greater Buffalo, home of his Buffalo Bills franchise. Prior to his passing in 2014, Mr. Wilson requested that a significant share of his estate be used to continue a life-long generosity of spirit by funding the Foundation that bears his name. The Foundation has a grantmaking capacity of \$1.2 billion over a 20-year period, which expires January 8, 2035. This structure is consistent with Mr. Wilson’s desire for the Foundation’s impact to be immediate, substantial, measurable and overseen by those who knew him best. For more information visit www.rcwjrf.org.

About the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan

The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan is a full-service philanthropic organization leading the way to positive change in our region. As a permanent community endowment built by gifts from thousands of individuals and organizations, the Foundation supports a wide variety of activities benefiting education, arts and culture, health, human services, community development, and civic affairs. Since its inception, the Foundation has distributed nearly \$902 million through more than 60,000 grants to nonprofit organizations throughout Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Monroe, Washtenaw, St. Clair, and Livingston counties. For more information, please visit www.cfsem.org.

About the Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program

The Sports & Society Program convenes leaders, facilitates dialogue and inspires solutions that help sport serve the public interest. Its signature initiative is Project Play, which provides stakeholders with resources and opportunities to build healthy communities through sports.

More: www.SportsAndSociety.org

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