



RALPH C. WILSON, JR.
FOUNDATION

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Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation Bringing National Campaign to Southeast Michigan and Western New York to Help Keep Kids From Quitting Sports

Foundation joins Aspen Institute's Project Play and ESPN in localizing #DontRetireKid campaign

Surveys show 62% of kids don't play sports, and many sports lose most kids by age 11

(Detroit, MI /Buffalo, NY - September 5, 2019) – Following the distribution of more than \$57 million in grants to bolster youth sports access and participation in Southeast Michigan and Western New York since 2015, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation has announced the launch of a localized national public service campaign. The program draws attention to the issues surrounding the decline in childhood sports participation and provides an array of resources for communities currently available through the corresponding local Project Play initiative websites - ProjectPlaySEMI.org and ProjectPlayWNY.org.

[Project Play](#) was first developed by the Aspen Institute's Sports & Society Program in 2013 with the goal of making sports accessible to all kids, regardless of zip code or ability. The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation has since adopted that initiative and framework with the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan and Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo to engage our respective communities around the importance of sports in children's lives.

The campaign, entitled "*Don't Retire, Kid,*" was formulated by the Aspen Institute's Project Play and debuted nationally on ESPN's Sunday morning *SportsCenter* on August 4, 2019. The segment, which featured a 9-year-old announcing his retirement from sports, was followed by an in-depth interview with former NBA star Kobe Bryant, lead spokesperson for the #DontRetireKid campaign.

[According to new research](#) released by the Aspen Institute, the average child in the United States spends less than three years playing a sport, most often quitting by age 11, with a primary cause being that they no longer find athletics fun. Parents report that kids as young as first grade are feeling stress related to sports, while families are under increasing pressure to cover rising costs of participation.

"Kids are dropping out of sports at an alarming rate nationwide and in the two regions we serve," said David O. Egnor, president & CEO, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation. "Over the past several years, we have worked with numerous partners to support and build up places, programs and resources to help parents, coaches and the community-at-large get kids active and change the culture of the youth sports system. This campaign and Project Play initiatives further these efforts in an important, timely and impactful way."

The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation has focused its grantmaking to support capacity needs for local youth sport programs, as well as capital needs, to provide the critical places and environments that are necessary to create greater access to sports, particularly in underserved communities.

In 2018, the Foundation launched a "[Built to Play](#)" initiative in partnership with the Tony Hawk Foundation and KaBOOM! to increase the development of skateparks and play spaces across Southeast Michigan and Western New York. In partnership with local community foundations, the

Foundation is also piloting youth sport equipment sharing and lending, as well as various coaches training programs.

“Access and interest are not the only issues that our communities face either,” continued Egner. “Overall costs also negatively impact participation rates and weigh heavily on the families and children that bear these burdens.”

According to studies conducted by Utah State University’s Families in Sports Lab, American families are annually spending an average of nearly \$693 per child/per sport, with some parents paying tens of thousands of dollars for camps, equipment, training, lessons and team registration.

“Thanks to the investments and collaborative actions taken by the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, Southeast Michigan and Western New York are both sites of the nation’s most ambitious experiments in recent decades to build healthy communities through sports and recreation,” said Tom Farrey, executive director of the Aspen Institute’s Sports & Society Program. “We know that kids who are physically active do better in school, are more likely to go to college, are less likely to be obese, and generally have better health and life outcomes that they will pass on to the next generation.”

“‘*Don’t Retire, Kid*’ truly reflects the shared belief of ESPN, the Aspen Institute and the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation that sports should be accessible to every child,” said Jimmy Pitaro, president of ESPN. “We’ve all begun a constructive national conversation, and we applaud the Wilson Foundation for bringing the campaign to its local markets. We wish them much success.”

On September 17 and 18, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation is sponsoring the Aspen Institute’s annual Project Play Summit in Detroit to help stakeholders take next steps in building healthy communities through sports. The Summit is the nation’s premier gathering of national youth, sports and health leaders, where local leaders from both Southeast Michigan and Western New York will be present to participate in panels and discuss solutions for youth in their regions. General attendee registration is available [here](#). Media may apply for a credential [here](#).”

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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.

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