



## Healthy Peninsula

# How Are the Children?

In Kenya, the Masai people often greet friends and travelers with the phrase “kasserian ingera”, which means “and how are the children?” Even those with no children of their own answer “all the children are well”, expressing the traditional priority of protecting the young and vulnerable in their communities.

**How Are The Children?** is a new, local informational campaign, based on cutting edge research and age-old wisdom. It is a campaign developed by trusted people living in Blue Hill peninsula and island towns who care about children and how they grow—parents and grandparents, childcare providers, teachers, healthcare workers, and others who work with children and families every day.

This campaign has been created as a series of messages about the value of supporting families with young children, from before birth to three years old. This critical period of a child’s life is when their brains are developing the fastest and they are learning how to navigate the world. Research shows us that how babies are cared for in infancy affects their health, their ability to learn new information, cope with stress, and manage their emotions and behavior throughout their entire lives, not just in childhood.

Starting in January, look for new postings from **How Are The Children?** every month on social media, websites, school newsletters, and newspapers, in libraries, banks, businesses, churches, and on community billboards. Each month will bring a concise message, a short ‘promotion’, and a longer, more detailed article. These messages will focus on different aspects of four main areas important to keeping babies healthy and thriving: family support, community resources, early child care and education, and investment in families—economic, community-based, and public policy. Messages will keep babies’ and their parents’ needs visible; short promotions will highlight the issues; and, articles will explain the research, tell illustrative stories from our communities, and promote actions we can take to make a difference.

**How are our children?** In the best of times, raising families in our rural towns has become more complicated with both parents often working, varying availability of childcare, transportation issues, and lack of employment opportunities. With the added stress of the COVID pandemic, families are struggling—job loss or underemployment, feelings of isolation or depression, stress of home-schooling, problems paying for housing or childcare, anxiety about getting sick, worry about having enough food. Every family is facing some kind of challenge and every child is feeling the effects of family stress and separation from grandparents, neighbors, and school friends.

Why should we care? Because, in some way, every child living in our peninsula and island towns is our child. Every child grows up to be a valuable member of our community—neighbor, co-worker, business owner, caregiver, parent, volunteer, friend. Every child has the potential to thrive at home, succeed in school, and live a meaningful and productive life. Every child deserves this chance.

There is so much for all of us to learn about babies’ brain development, parents’ natural gifts and skills as their babies’ first teachers, and the kinds of investment needed to help families thrive—from local resources and community programs to public policy. Parents and caregivers, as well as neighbors, schools, churches, businesses, and local and state government all play a role in how our children grow, flourish, and achieve.

**How are the children?** The more we ask this question of ourselves and others, the more we care about the answer. The more we care as a community, the more potential we have of ensuring all the children will be well.

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