

# Michigan Reconnect Communications Toolkit

MARCH 2025



### Introduction

### Purpose of the Toolkit

This communications toolkit empowers adult education professionals and community partners to share compelling, relatable stories about MI Reconnect, equipping them with the resources needed to inform and inspire adult learners. By highlighting the transformative impact of the MI Reconnect program through real-life testimonials and relatable narratives, this toolkit helps create a personal connection to the benefits of upskilling and pursuing higher education.

#### **Toolkit Audience**

The audience of this toolkit includes:

Workforce development organizations

Adult education professionals

Nonprofit partners

### Why is KConnect Developing the Toolkit?

KConnect is uniquely positioned to create this toolkit for several reasons.

#### System Leadership and Expertise

As a backbone organization driving collective impact, KConnect excels at aligning cross-sector partners, coordinating efforts, and addressing system-level barriers. This expertise ensures that the toolkit will be rooted in a strategic approach that meets the needs of educators, workforce development professionals, and adult learners.

#### **Grant Support and Community Partnership**

Through a grant partnership with Kent Intermediate School District from Michigan College Access Network, KConnect has the resources and collaborative relationships to develop practical and impactful tools.

#### Focus on Lived Experience and Storytelling

KConnect prioritizes amplifying the voices of those directly impacted by systemic challenges. By centering on lived experience voices from adult learners, this toolkit incorporates authentic, relatable narratives to inspire and motivate others.

#### Track Record of Systems Work

With experience developing community-led strategies and aligning stakeholders around shared goals, KConnect is well-positioned to operationalize a toolkit that empowers educators and workforce development organizations to drive enrollment in Michigan Reconnect.

#### Commitment to Equity and Access

As an organization committed to equity, KConnect ensures the toolkit will be inclusive and accessible.

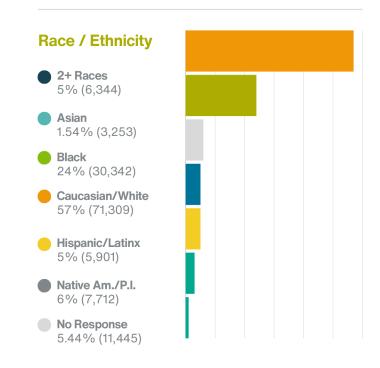
### Overview of MI Reconnect

Michigan Reconnect is a statewide initiative that provides tuition-free community college education for adults seeking to earn a degree or skills certificate. Designed to address Michigan's workforce needs, it helps residents gain in-demand skills for better career opportunities. www.michigan.gov/reconnect/about

### Impact:

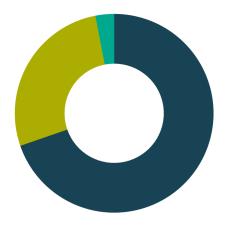
5,595

Reconnecters have received a certificate or degree



#### Gender

- Female 86,651 (69%)
- Male 34,237 (27%)
- No Response 3% (3,873)

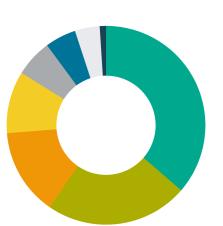


#### Age

- **25-29** 36% (44,424)
  - **40-44** 10% (12,136)
- **50-54** 4% (4,527)

- **30-34** 23% (28,927)
- **45-49** 6% (7,841)
- **60+** 1% (1,014)

- **35-39** 14% (17,981)
- **21-24** 5% (5,724)



### Financial Aid Award Received

91,733

Received a Reconnect Award

58,327

**Financial Needs Already Fully Met** 

(Reconnect Data Dashboard, 2025)

150,060

enrolled (NOT applications) at a MI community college since its inception



5,595

graduates with the Reconnect program since it began



Kent County 4th in the state for applications

13,095

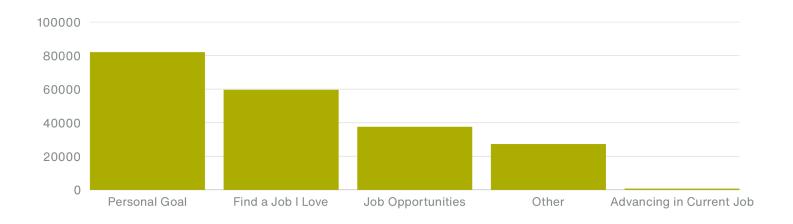
since inception



## Why MI Reconnect Matters

#### Why did you decide to apply to Reconnect?

(Reconnect Data Dashboard, 2025)



#### Which of the following are important reasons why you are considering continuing your education?

% Among those considering enrollment who selected each reason



### **Achieving Your Dreams**

Through focus groups and interviews we heard time and time again that obtaining a degree was not about upskilling, but instead, was about achieving a personal goal or dream. Going back to school to pursue a career through MI Reconnect can significantly improve your life for several reasons:

#### 01 Sense of Purpose and Fulfillment

When your education aligns with personal goals, you work toward a career that brings joy and fulfillment. Knowing you're on a path toward meaningful work can boost self-worth and overall life satisfaction.

#### 02 Increased Self-Confidence

Gaining knowledge and new skills makes you feel more capable and competent. This can reduce anxiety and improve resilience in handling life's challenges.

#### 03 Social Connection and Support

School provides opportunities to engage with likeminded peers, professors, and mentors, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness. Support networks play a crucial role in maintaining good mental health.

#### 04 Better Stress Management

Pursuing education often improves problem-solving skills and time management, which can help in handling stress more effectively in other areas of life.

#### 05 Enhanced Career Prospects and Stability

A well-planned career path can lead to financial stability, reducing worries about job insecurity and financial stress, which are two major contributors to mental health struggles.

#### 06 Personal Growth and Achievement

Progressing toward a degree or certification fosters a growth mindset. Celebrating small wins along the way provides motivation and reinforces the belief that challenges can be overcome.

#### O7 Hope and Future Outlook

Having a clear direction in life creates optimism about the future. A career you enjoy isn't just about making a living; it's about crafting a life that aligns with your passions and values.

## The Realities for Adult Learners

### Why Students Are Going Back to School

"Unenrolled adults who are contemplating enrolling are most likely to identify obtaining knowledge or skills (64%), gaining personal fulfillment (57%), helping them get a higher-paying job (56%) and allowing them to pursue a more fulfilling career (49%) as important reasons why they are considering enrolling."

(Gallup & Lumina Foundation, 2023)

"All groups of unenrolled adults, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age or whether they have stopped out or never enrolled, name the top attractions of higher education — knowledge, pay and purpose — as the top reasons they are considering enrollment."

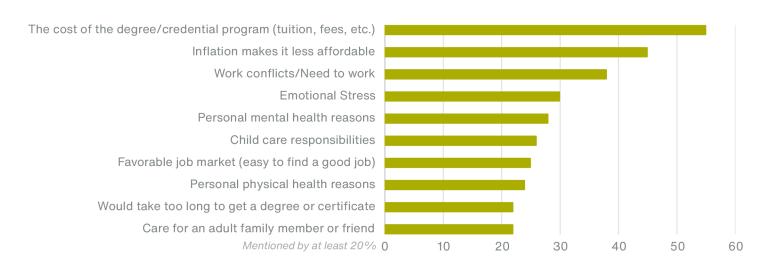
(Gallup & Lumina Foundation, 2023)

### Common Challenges

### Top Reason Why Unenrolled Adults Are Not Enrolled

Gallup & Lumina Foundation, 2023

Thinking now about some reasons why people may not enroll in the degree or certificate program, how important are each of the following as reasons why you are not currently enrolled? % Very important



#### Barriers from stories:

- First-generation college students don't have knowledge or access to resources and tools.
- There is a lack of knowledge around technology and platforms for returning students, including issues with online/hybrid learning.
- If you owe a balance from previous tuition, Reconnect doesn't cover those previous costs, and you can't reenroll until the balance is paid.
- There is limited program information provided online no direct point of contact given.
- · Need more counseling services around admission and educational planning.

### Challenges Identified:

- · Balancing work and life responsibilities.
- Cost concerns, including textbooks and other expenses.
- Language barriers (translation needs).
- Lack of guidance on navigating the enrollment and college application processes.

### How MI Reconnect Addresses Barriers

#### Cost

Michigan Reconnect (Reconnect) is a last-dollar scholarship program that pays for you to attend your in-district community college tuition-free or offers a large tuition discount if you attend an out-of-district community college.

#### Work/Time

Reconnect offers scheduling flexibility with the minimum of 12 completed credit hour requirement per academic year. This equates to two classes per semester, allowing for a part-time schedule.

GRCC offers a wide range of course offerings between evening classes, online, virtual and hybrid. They also help students determine if they can receive course credit through our Prior Learning Assessment.

#### Emotional/ Mental Health

GRCC has counselors on campus in their Counseling and Career Development Office. They offer services by appointments and walk-ins. Students are also assigned to a GRCC Success Coach to help them with their emotional/mental health.

#### Child Care

At this time, there is no support for child care related to MI Reconnect.

## Key Program Elements



#### To be eligible, you must:

- Have a high school diploma, high school equivalency (GED), or certificate of completion
- Have not yet completed a college degree (associate or bachelor's)
- Be at least 25 years old when you apply
- · Have lived in Michigan for a year or more

www.michigan.gov/reconnect/about



### Program Benefits

#### Costs Reconnect Cover

Reconnect will ensure that when you get your semester bill from the community college, the following items will be free to you:

- · In-district tuition Free
- Mandatory fees (fees charged to all students per semester or per hour) Free
- Contact hours (extra charges for certain courses and programs) Free

Reconnect is a last-dollar program, which means that any Pell grant funds you receive are applied to your tuition and fees bill first, with Reconnect paying what's not covered by Pell. If you don't qualify for a Pell grant, Reconnect will pay the full cost of tuition, mandatory fees, and contact hours.

#### Costs Reconnect Does Not Cover

Even as a Reconnect student, you will be responsible for the following items:

- · Out of district tuition costs
  - If you live outside the district of the community college you plan to attend, your tuition bill will have an out-of-district tuition charge on it.
  - · Reconnect only pays the in-district tuition for any of Michigan's public community colleges, so you will be responsible for covering the difference between the in-district and out-of-district tuition of the community college you plan to attend if you live out of their district and if you do not have other scholarships or awards to cover the difference.
  - Check with the community college you plan to attend to see if you are considered in-district or out-of-district, and how you can cover the out-of-district cost if needed.
  - Attending your local community college is the best way to ensure free tuition.



- · Application and graduation/commencement fees
- Lab fees and course-specific fees
- Fees not charged to all students (i.e., parking fees, fitness center, athletic fees, non-mandatory fees, etc.)
- Textbooks and other course materials

### Steps to Apply

To participate in the Reconnect scholarship, you must complete four steps:

- Apply online for Michigan Reconnect. The application takes less than five minutes to complete and can be done on a mobile phone. If you are having difficulties on your mobile device, it is recommended to use a different browser or computer.
- Apply to a Michigan public community college. All public community colleges, including tribal colleges, in Michigan qualify. If
  you're already enrolled at a public community college this step is completed. If you're not, remember your tuition is free at an indistrict community college, but that Reconnect only pays part of the tuition if you attend an out-of-district community college.
   See What costs does Reconnect cover?
- Submit your FAFSA. This is free financial aid provided by the federal government.
- Enroll in an eligible program and start classes. You can enroll in any Pell-eligible skill certificate or associate degree program.

www.michigan.gov/reconnect/about

## Storytelling Framework

How to effectively get the message across

### Why Stories Matter

Stories connect us. They humanize challenges, highlight triumphs, and make abstract ideas tangible.

For adult learners, real-life stories provide a sense of possibility and belonging, showing that others like them have faced and overcome similar challenges.

### How Stories Inspire and Encourage Adult Learners

#### 01 Building Relatability

Sharing stories of individuals from similar backgrounds creates and emotional connection and reduces feelings of isolation.

#### 02 Demonstrating Success

Highlighting real achievements helps adult learners visualize their own potential for success.

#### 03 Empowering Through Overcoming

Narratives of overcoming similar challenges inspire perseverance and resilience.

#### 04 Amplifying Role Models

Stories of relatable role models demonstrate what's possible.

## Student Stories

### **Stories**



#### From Refugee to Future Project Manager: A Congolese Student's Journey with Michigan Reconnect

When 24-year-old Aline\* moved to Michigan in 2019, she knew she wanted more for her future. After graduating from a Kent ISD school, she found herself juggling multiple jobs, trying to save enough money for college. The dream of becoming a project manager seemed distant until she discovered Michigan Reconnect.

"I first enrolled at Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) with an additional scholarship," Aline shares. "But later, I found out about Michigan Reconnect through GRCC and realized I could have most of my tuition covered."

Now, Aline is thriving in her classes, building the skills she needs to enter the project management field. She knows firsthand how financial worries can prevent people from pursuing their education, which is why she encourages others to explore the program.

"Take advantage and go back to school! Money should not be a barrier," she advises. "I wish more people knew about this opportunity sooner."

\*name changed

## Student Stories

### **Stories**



#### Rebuilding After Incarceration: A Second Chance Through Michigan Reconnect

For 30-year-old Mike\*, education represents more than just a degree; it's a fresh start. Three years ago, he was released from jail with a vision: to rebuild his life, grow his new business, and launch a nonprofit to help others with similar pasts.

"I knew I needed more skills to really make my business successful," Mike says. "I kept hearing about Michigan Reconnect on the news, so I did my own research. The process was a little challenging at first, but GRCC's Financial Aid Office helped me figure it out."

Now enrolled at Grand Rapids Community College, Mike is balancing school, business, and community work. He encourages others to take their time when making the decision to go back to school.

"Weigh your options and don't rush into it," he advises. "There can be a lot of stress and responsibility—know why you're doing it."

Despite the challenges, Mike is grateful for the opportunity Michigan Reconnect has given him. "This program is changing lives," he says. "It gave me the chance to change mine."

\*name changed

## Student Stories

### **Stories**



#### A Second Chance for a New Beginning

When Lucia\*, a mother of two from Mexico, moved to Michigan six years ago, she knew she wanted to build a better life for her children. But without a high school diploma, job opportunities were limited.

"I worked long hours in a factory, but I always felt stuck," Lucia says. "I wanted more for myself and my kids."

Encouraged by her family, Lucia enrolled in Kent ISD Adult Education to earn her GED. While attending classes, she learned about Michigan Reconnect.

"At first, I thought it was just a program to help find jobs," she admits. "But once I understood that it could help me go to college for free, I knew I had to take advantage of it."

Now, Lucia is taking courses at Grand Rapids Community College, balancing her studies with work and family.

Her advice to other adults thinking about returning to school? "It's never too late. Just do it. Education is the key!"

\*name changed

## Student Stories

### **Stories**



#### From Auto Repair to a Dream Career

For James\*, a 28-year-old from Detroit, working in an auto shop was a way to make ends meet, but not a long-term career.

"I love working on cars, but I knew I needed more skills to really grow in this industry," he explained.

"There's a lot to figure out when you're going back to school as an adult," he says. "Between work, bills, and school, it's tough. But GRCC's support staff helped me through the process."

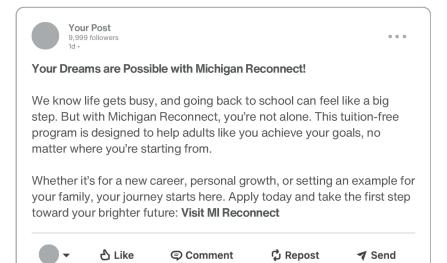
Now enrolled in an automotive technology program at GRCC, James is gaining the expertise he needs to turn his passion into a business.

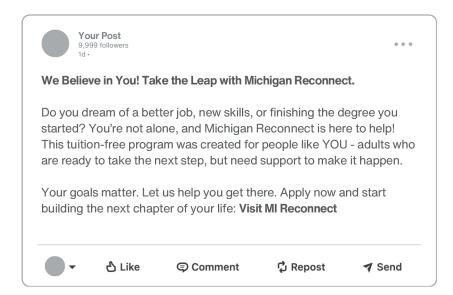
His message to others? "Education opens so many doors. Don't be embarrassed to go back. Just do it."

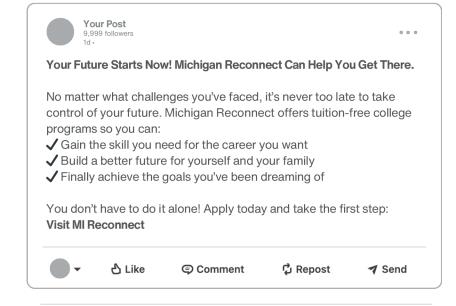
\*name changed

## Toolkit Assets

### **Example Messaging**







## Toolkit Assets

### Call to Action Examples

Social media post content and email subject lines.

- Ready for a change? Michigan Reconnect offers free college tuition for adults like you. Start your journey now!
- It's never too late. Join thousands of Michiganders who've returned to school with Michigan Reconnect. Apply now!
- Unlock new opportunities with Michigan Reconnect's tuition-free college program. Take the first step and apply today!
- Dreaming of a degree? Michigan Reconnect makes it possible at no cost. Begin your application now.
- Achieve your dreams; Michigan Reconnect can help you earn your degree tuition-free. Start today!
- Take control of your future! With Michigan Reconnect, you can reach your career and education goals. Apply now!
- Turn your passion into progress; Michigan Reconnect supports you in reaching your personal and career goals. Begin your journey today!
- Your goals are within reach. Apply for Michigan Reconnect and take the first step toward a brighter future.
- Invest in yourself! Michigan Reconnect provides the resources you need to achieve your goals. Apply today.
- Make your goals a reality! Michigan Reconnect offers the support you need to succeed. Get started now!
- It's time to focus on you! Michigan Reconnect can help you achieve the education and career goals you've always dreamed of.

### Partner Resources

### **Implementation**

Familiarize yourself with the toolkit

Educators and workforce development organizations should review the toolkit, attend the training session, and customize its resources to fit their unique needs.

Integrate into daily activities

Incorporate toolkit messaging and materials into classroom settings, advising sessions, and communications like social media and emails.

Conduct targeted outreach

Leverage the toolkit's templates and strategies to reach potential learners online.

Sustain momentum

Continue using the toolkit resources to engage new audiences and build awareness about Michigan Reconnect as an ongoing opportunity.



### Visual Assets

Scan the QR code to instantly access our partner resources, including ready-toshare flyers for community events, social media graphics, and other customizable templates.

### Partner Resources

### Tracking and Metrics

To effectively measure the impact of the MI Reconnect social media and email campaign, you will track key performance indicators (KPIs) across awareness, engagement, conversion, and retention.

#### O1 Awareness (Reach & Impressions)

Sharing stories of individuals from similar backgrounds creates and emotional connection and reduces feelings of isolation.

#### 02 Engagement (Interaction & Interest)

- Social Media: Likes, shares, comments, saves, and click-through rates on posts.
- Email: Click-through rates, responses, and time spent engaging with content.

#### 03 Conversion (Action & Enrollment)

- Social Media: Link clicks to MI Reconnect application pages and GRCC enrollment pages.
- Email: Conversion rate (applicants who clicked from emails), form submissions, and inquiries.

#### 04 Retention & Follow-Up

- Social Media: Continued engagement with MI Reconnect content (returning users, shares over time).
- Email: Follow-up engagement on nurture campaigns, unsubscribes, and re-engagement rates.

### **Contact Information**

For questions about **this toolkit** or how to implement it:

For questions about **KConnect's work:** 

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## **Appendix**

#### Bibliography

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https://www.michigan.gov/reconnect/about/reconnect-data-dashboard

#### Acknowledgments

Kent ISD
Well Design Studio
Osofomaame
Grand Rapids Community College
To College Through College Initiative/
T2C Studio: GR Center for College Success
Grand Rapids Community Foundation
Grand Rapids Public Schools
Cultivating Futures
Grand Rapids Center for
Community Transformation
Michigan Department of Lifelong
Education, Advancement, and Potential

Michigan College Access Network (MCAN)