



FIRST 5 SANTA CRUZ COUNTY



ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT



July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

October 2024

Acknowledgements

First 5 Santa Cruz County would like to thank Nicole Young, of Optimal Solutions Consulting, who managed Santa Cruz County's Triple P - Positive Parenting Program for over 15 years, as well as her invaluable collaboration in the evaluation of this program.

In addition, First 5 Santa Cruz County would like to thank the staff and participants of the funded partner agencies, whose commitment to data collection has facilitated the gathering of the robust data included in this report.



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EQUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS

First 5 supports all young children and their families in Santa Cruz County, while prioritizing efforts that are responsive to the needs of the county's diverse community, and which have been shaped by community voice, and focus on eliminating disparities based on race, ethnicity, language, income, and other characteristics. In that context, First 5 seeks to strengthen the early childhood system of care by:

- **Leveraging** Prop 10 resources to create, strengthen, or fill gaps in service delivery systems;
- **Supporting** community initiatives, training, data sharing, community events, and capacity-building projects;
- **Implementing** and **evaluating** evidence-based and research-informed programs and practices;
- **Facilitating** collaboration among public, nonprofit, and private partners in order to connect siloed systems and services;
- **Serving** as the backbone for collective impact collaboratives, such as Quality Counts Santa Cruz County and Thrive by 5;
- **Advocating** for policies and budgets that prioritize early childhood; and
- **Convening** partners to implement local solutions that address and integrate systems and policy changes initiated at the local, state, and federal levels.

For over 20 years, these service integration and systems building functions have become a cornerstone of First 5's strategy to promote and create an equitable and sustainable early childhood system of care in Santa Cruz County. Central to that strategy is the role that First 5 plays leading the coordination and evaluation of the county-wide Thrive by 5 initiative in partnership with the Human Services Department and the Health Services Agency, with guidance from an Advisory Committee established by the First 5 Santa Cruz County Commission. In addition to Thrive by 5, First 5 has expanded the implementation of its communications plan, supported multiple community engagement activities, and continues to play an active role in systems-building efforts led by First 5 partners.



- Increased coordination and integration among organizations and sectors serving young children and families
- Increase in local, state, and federal policies and legislation that prioritize prevention, early intervention, and equity for young children and their families
- Increase in local, state, and federal funding to sustain and institutionalize investments in the early childhood system of care

Thrive by 5



In January 2017, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors established the **Thrive by Three (TbT) Early Childhood Fund** as a dedicated funding source and a comprehensive local initiative to improve the following outcomes and indicators for the County’s youngest children (prenatal – 3) and their families:

Babies are born healthy

- Prenatal care in the first trimester
- Full term births and healthy birthweight

Families have the resources they need to support children’s optimal development

- Access to high-quality care and early learning opportunities
- Access to economic and self-sufficiency supports

Young children live in safe, nurturing families

- Improved parental confidence, parenting practices, and parent-child relationships
- Parent and caregiver emotional well-being

Children are happy, healthy, and thriving by age 3

- Prevention of child maltreatment and entries into foster care

In May 2022, the Board of Supervisors approved a proposal to expand the scope and purpose of the TbT Fund to **Thrive by 5 (Tb5)**. This created greater consistency and opportunities for alignment with other early childhood initiatives and funding streams. Since that time First 5 and its Thrive by 5 partners have:

- Adopted a Thrive by 5 theory of change (see Appendix B) that articulates a shared vision of thriving children and families in a resilient, just community and acknowledges that achieving this requires addressing the root causes of the “Pair of ACEs,” or Adverse Childhood Experiences that occur in Adverse Community Environments, a concept originally developed by the Center for Community Resilience at The George Washington University (<https://ccr.publichealth.gwu.edu/>).
- Expanded the Thrive by 5 Advisory Committee’s membership to include people or agencies representing CORE Conditions for Health and Well-Being not previously represented on the committee (e.g., Healthy Environments, and Community Connectedness). In addition, four seats on the Advisory Committee were added specifically for Parent Leaders with young children.
- Expanded the Thrive by 5 Community-Level outcomes and indicators and aligned them with the CORE Conditions for Health and Well-being to provide a more cohesive strategic framework for the Thrive by 5 initiative.

- Convened four meetings per year of the Thrive by 5 Advisory Committee focusing on key topics, including updates on the Nurse Family Partnership program as well as implementation of the HealthySteps program within Santa Cruz Community Health and Salud Para La Gente. The Committee also continued to provide oversight and guidance to a multi-year effort to develop a Comprehensive Fiscal Analysis of early childhood systems in Santa Cruz County focused on home visiting and early care and education.
- Continued to convene the Learning Collaborative sessions for Thrive by 5 partners, focused on a range of topics including Motivational Interviewing; oral health and coordinated entry into local housing programs; nutrition for families; support for families with children with disabilities; and intimate partner violence.
- Continued to convene a Coordinated Entry Workgroup focused on supporting and enhancing the process of referring CalWORKs participants to the four home visiting programs in Santa Cruz County.
- Enrolled 356 families of children from prenatal to age 5 in one of four home visiting programs in the County (Nurse Family Partnership, Field Nursing, Families Together, or Early Head Start Home Visiting).
- Continued to support integration, growth, and improvement of the HealthySteps program within the Thrive by 5 system of care. HealthySteps is an interdisciplinary, evidence-based pediatric primary care program that served 3,029 children in FY 2023-24 at Salud Para La Gente and Santa Cruz Community Health clinics.
- Delivered Early Learning Scholarships (ELS) to 114 infant and toddler care providers serving families who are eligible for state child care subsidies. The ELS are designed to help providers close the gap between the high cost of quality care and subsidies provided by the State of California. To learn more, visit: <https://www.first5scc.org/thrive-by-5>

Communications and Community Engagement

During FY 2023-24, First 5 Santa Cruz County continued to expand and implement its communications plan that focused on increasing awareness of early childhood development, offering resources for families and early care and education providers, and promoting the agency's programs and partnerships both locally and state-wide. First 5 has continued to address equity and access by consistently engaging Spanish language translation and interpretation services for its website, newsletter, additional outreach materials, and community engagement.

First 5's website hosted 5,481 unique visitors totaling 9,211 site sessions over the fiscal year. Of these visitors, 96% were new to the website and 4% were returning visitors. The most visited section of the website was the Triple P program pages, which provided program information and class registration options. In the fall of 2023, First 5 launched a Community Dashboard page, featuring demographic and strategic impact data from the First 5 Santa Cruz County *Annual Evaluation*

Report. First 5 also continued publishing its monthly bilingual e-newsletter and increased the list of community resources included within it. By the end of the fiscal year, the e-newsletter had a distribution reach of over 1,150 individuals.

In the space of social media, First 5 launched a LinkedIn account in the fall of 2023. Its Instagram and X (formerly known as Twitter) accounts grew to over 150 followers each over the fiscal year. On Facebook, First 5 gained 53 new followers for a total of 723. On this platform, First 5 both expanded its content reach by 100% as well as increased its content interactions by 50%. First 5's Facebook audience is 84% women and 16% men, with a majority being between the ages of 35-44 years old. Two of our largest social media campaigns during the year were our Triple P Positive Parenting Month in January, and our campaign with members of Oral Health Access Santa Cruz highlighting National Children's Dental Health Month in February.

First 5 strives to be a conduit of information for families to increase access to health care and family supports. Funded by our recent CCHI Navigator grant, First 5 placed a 30-second bilingual Medi-Cal renewal video in rotation at our county's two DMV locations beginning in May of 2024 (this video will continue to run until November). This campaign reaches a monthly average of 13,658 people at the Capitola location, and 11,366 people at the Watsonville location.

In 2023, First 5 contracted with Miller Maxfield (a local strategic communications and public relations firm) to develop bilingual Thrive by 5 collateral materials with localized messaging to increase awareness about where families with young children can go, or who they can contact for assistance with accessing key resources, such as home visiting, child care, and parenting support. This project included the development of a social media toolkit, featuring video testimonials from local parents who had participated in home visiting programs, as well as a resource pocket guide for families. This Thrive by 5 pocket guide contains program and contact information for the four current home visiting programs in the county, Triple P, the 2-1-1 program,³⁸ and the Child Development Resources Center. In the late spring of 2024, First 5, in partnership with Cradle to Career Santa Cruz County, coordinated a bilingual informational webinar with representatives from each of the resources listed in the Thrive by 5 pocket guide, who provided more in-depth program information to local *promotoras* and parent leaders. The purpose of the webinar was to encourage utilization and distribution of the pocket guide within *promotora* and parent networks. In total, First 5 coordinated the distribution of over 1,600 pocket guides throughout the county during the fiscal year. Prior to the printing and distribution of the pocket guide, First 5 engaged Miller Maxfield to develop a Thrive by 5 resource webpage that mirrored the content and look of the pocket guide. This webpage was included in the new Thrive by 5 website that was created and launched by First 5 in the fall of 2023.

First 5 contributed multiple fiscal sponsorships for community events and endeavors over the year. In October of 2023, First 5 sponsored the pilot launch of the Santa Cruz Children's Museum of Discovery's Museum Month Pass, which granted free or reduced entry fees for families to visit

³⁸ 2-1-1 is a program of United Way of Santa Cruz County that provides comprehensive information and referral services to County residents. It is a phone and text service that is available 24/7—and in 150 languages—that connects callers and texters to the health and human services available to them. During times of disaster, 2-1-1 also provides incident-specific information.

several local museums during the month of October. In addition to sponsorship, First 5 coordinated the distribution of over 3,100 of these passes to local families. Subsequent sponsorships included Ventures’ Semillitas College Savings Account Program, Dientes Community Dental’s Oral Health Summit, County Park Friends’ Treasure Cove Park Universally Accessible Playground project, The Queer Youth Leadership Awards, and United Way Santa Cruz County’s United in Purpose Celebration.

During FY 2023-24, First 5 provided free children’s books (in English and Spanish) to local partners such as Cradle to Career, Nurse-Family Partnership, and Santa Cruz County’s Health Services Agency for distribution to families with young children.

Collective of Results and Evidence-based (CORE) Investments



Beginning in 2015 and initially focused on the transition of the City and County of Santa Cruz’s Community Programs funding model, CORE Investments is both a funding model and a broader movement to create the conditions for equitable health and well-being across the life span – prenatal through end of life. While not limited to the well-being of young children and families, CORE has emerged as a substantial and critical initiative designed to help create the type of equitable, integrated services and systems originally envisioned by the authors of Prop 10. First 5 serves on the CORE Steering Committee, helping guide the project through a multi-phase, collaborative planning process, which has resulted in defining eight interdependent “CORE Conditions for Health and Well-being.” To learn more, visit: <https://www.corescc.org/>

CORE Conditions for Health and Well-being



DataShare Santa Cruz County



In September of 2017 the Health Improvement Partnership of Santa Cruz County (HIP) initiated a collaborative effort to develop a county-wide data sharing system designed to share data on a variety of factors that affect the well-being of residents in the county. In 2021, management of the system was turned over to four administrative partners: the County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency, the United Way of Santa Cruz County, the Community Health Trust of Pajaro Valley, and CORE Investments.

DataShare’s mission is to provide an accessible, comprehensive, and reliable resource for local, regional, and national data available to everyone. DataShare Santa Cruz County envisions an equitable, thriving, and resilient community where everyone shares responsibility for creating the social, economic, and environmental conditions necessary for health and well-being at every stage of life. The website, www.datasharescc.org, is an interactive data platform with local, state, and national data that allows users to explore and understand information about our local community. The site holds robust data and indicators in the areas of health, economy, education, environment, government and politics, public safety, transportation, and social environment. To learn more, visit: <https://www.datasharescc.org/>

Central Coast Early Childhood Advocacy Network



Building on a series of successful legislative visits and policy wins for early childhood in 2017, First 5 Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz Counties joined forces in FY 2017-18 to help form the tri-county Central Coast Early Childhood Advocacy Network (CCECAN). Representing over 94,000 children ages 0-8, CCECAN is a collaboration of organizations and individuals in the tri-county area committed to strengthening and advocating for policies and systems change at the state and local level that will support thriving children and families. To learn more, visit: <https://www.ccecan.org/>

Cradle to Career



Building on the success of the Live Oak Cradle to Career place-based initiative, the effort has now expanded county-wide and is simply known as “Cradle to Career” (C2C). Grown from a nascent idea in 2013 championed by former Supervisor John Leopold, to a vibrant results-based collaboration between parents and local education, health, and social service leaders in four school districts across the county, C2C’s mission is to work collectively to empower families, deliver resources, and advocate for equitable and inclusive support systems to eliminate disparities and ensure all Santa Cruz County children thrive in their education, health, and character. To learn more, visit: <https://c2csc.org/>

Oral Health Access



Oral Health Access Santa Cruz County was created in 2016 as a steering committee made up of community leaders and organizations, dental and medical clinics, and educators to address oral health needs in Santa Cruz County. Led by Dientes Community

Dental, the County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency Public Health Division, and numerous community partners, the committee’s mission is to improve the oral health of Santa Cruz County residents by uniting stakeholders and advocating for sound, measurable strategies that increase access to care and education.

In addition to continuing to serve as a champion of the “First Tooth, First Birthday” campaign strategy, in the spring of 2024 First 5 Santa Cruz County Executive Director David Brody agreed to serve as Co-Chair of the Santa Cruz County Oral Health Access Initiative, helping oversee the implementation of its new 2024-2028 Strategic Plan. To learn more, visit: <https://oralhealthsc.org/>

