



ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT

JULY 2022 - JUNE 2023



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report serves as a retrospective document, a pause to assess the impact of First 5 San Luis Obispo County's work and how that work moves First 5 toward its larger goals for children and families. The report describes high-level themes across the efforts of First 5's staff, Commissioners, and partners during the 2022-23 fiscal year and the contributions of these efforts to building a healthy community where all children to thrive. The report is designed to support First 5 staff and Commissioners as they:

1. Reflect on the full picture of First 5's work and how that work has influenced change in the community, and
2. Consider ways in which the findings shape First 5's strategies moving forward.

To develop this report, First 5's evaluation team, Carsel Consulting Group, synthesized information from interviews with key stakeholders, staff, and partner organizations, data collected from funded partners on a twice yearly basis, and public documents (see Appendix 3 for data collection detail).



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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

First 5's Roles to Support Children & Families

As a public agency with unusual flexibility, First 5 San Luis Obispo County uses three key strategies to support children and families:

- **Funding for direct services and programs** including filling critical gaps in services, investing in innovative programs, and expanding existing resources in order to equitably meet the needs of our youngest children
- **Place-based network building** including cross-sector efforts that engage community members and partners to address issues by forging relationships that can be leveraged over time
- **Policy, advocacy, and systems change** to contribute to long-term outcomes with local, regional, and statewide partners

Together, these strategies leverage First 5 monies and staff time to create long-term changes while meeting immediate needs.

Selection of Funded Partners

To leverage existing community expertise and capacity, First 5 San Luis Obispo County enters into contracts with partner agencies in order to fund direct services, network building, and policy and systems change initiatives. These contracts are determined based on priorities identified in the strategic plan and emerging community needs. New projects are added as issues arise that require an immediate response; project funding is sunsetted either when the project is no longer core to the strategic plan, the need has declined, other funding is secured, or the project is completed. Partners and projects are chosen based on well-established, documented success in the local community, with larger projects undergoing bidding in an RFP process or emerging through a strategic collective impact partnership. The majority of contracts are funded on a reimbursement basis. Some contracts are funded at a flat rate to allow partners to maintain staffing levels through fluctuating community needs.

During the 2022-23 fiscal year, most of First 5's 16 funded projects provided direct services to address gaps. Several projects addressed policy and advocacy goals, worked to expand system capacity, or included a combination of these and direct services.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

First 5's Approach to Evaluation & Learning

First 5 San Luis Obispo County conducts an internal evaluation process with the aim of understanding the entire agency's progress and holistic impact. Key features of this evaluation approach include:

- A Theory of Change that illustrates how First 5's current and future efforts contribute to proposed outcomes (see page 6). The Theory of Change ensures common understanding of the work across stakeholders, supports planning, and provides a foundation for more in-depth evaluation work.
- An annual evaluation report that focuses on the year's key themes across the work of First 5's staff and partners and the contributions of this work to large-scale outcomes.
- Case studies that allow staff, Commissioners, and other stakeholders to reflect more deeply on specific components of First 5's strategy.
- Reporting from funded partners that is aligned with this evaluation lens and reflects First 5's values to support community organizations.
- An alignment of evaluation practices and strategic planning to ensure a consistent approach to setting goals and monitoring outcomes.

Strategic Planning Preview

During the first half of 2023, First 5 San Luis Obispo County staff and Commissioners began a strategic planning process to develop a new multi-year Strategic Plan that will begin in July 2024. First, staff conducted a needs assessment to better understand current needs and gaps and how First 5 can best support these areas. They compiled relevant data sets and reports and shared them with the Commissioners to inform their understanding of the profile and needs of the county's prenatal to five-year-old population and their families. Then, First 5 staff, Commissioners, and the evaluation team conducted a series of key informant interviews and focus groups with community leaders, Commissioners, family service providers, and families regarding county needs, disparities, and First 5's role. This included more than 40 conversations with stakeholders across the county's geography, populations, and sectors.

Next, using this information and the Theory of Change, First 5 staff and Commissioners will identify the issues where First 5 can have the greatest impact and select priority strategies and goals in each of those areas. Once the Strategic Plan is complete, the evaluation team will align evaluation efforts with the new plan.

Needs assessment findings

The main needs that surfaced from the primary and secondary data collected as part of the strategic planning process were as follows (not in any prioritized order):

- Child care
- Social support and connection
- Medical and dental care
- Early learning/literacy
- Mental health support (including substance use)
- Trauma (including neglect, violence, and lack of safety)
- Childhood obesity/nutrition
- Basic needs (including housing, food security, transportation, and livable wages)

FINDINGS FOR 2022-2023

In this section, First 5 San Luis Obispo County's Theory of Change serves as a lens for understanding the findings from 2022-2023, providing a high-level view of the collective contributions made by internal and external projects to advance short and medium-term

outcomes. The information is divided into three parts, one for each of First 5's three key strategies, and includes a description of progress, facilitating factors, and barriers. It is important to note that some projects employed multiple strategies and supported multiple outcomes.

What is the Theory of Change?

A Theory of Change is a planning tool that is used to better understand how an organization's capacities and strategies contribute to outcomes in order to set priorities. The First 5 San Luis Obispo County Theory of Change explores how First 5's capacities—including funding, and staff's time, expertise, leadership in the community, and local partners—support the three core strategies of funding for direct services and programs; place-based network building; and policy, advocacy and systems change. The Theory of Change then examines how these strategies contribute to the short, medium, and long-term outcomes needed for children to thrive. The Theory of Change is a living document. As First 5 monitors community needs and learns more about what works, strategies may change and new outcomes may be identified. The Theory of Change also guides First 5's ongoing evaluation approach.



THEORY OF CHANGE - OVERVIEW



First 5's work supports positive long-term outcomes for our community that we can plan on and build on.

CAPACITIES	STRATEGIES	SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES	LONGER-TERM OUTCOMES	GOAL
STAFF TIME, EXPERTISE & COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP: Including direct engagement in convening, coordination, coalition building & strategic communications.	<p>Funding for direct services and programs</p> <p>Place-Based network building</p> <p>Policy, advocacy, and systems change</p>	<p>Stronger evidence base for needs, gaps, and solutions exists, and best practices are translated for the County in collaboration with partners and the community</p> <p>Proven programs deliver needed services to children 0-5 and their families equitably</p> <p>Emerging or under-addressed issues are identified, including those that emerge from crises</p> <p>Increased media coverage of priority needs, gaps and solutions leads to greater awareness among the community and cross-sector partners</p> <p>New partners are identified, existing partners are activated, and champions and influencers highlighted</p>	<p>Increased cross-sector alignment and awareness on needs and gaps</p> <p>Increased public will to call for action on priority issues</p> <p>Increased political will to take action on priority issues</p> <p>Changes in business practices support 0-5 children and their families</p> <p>Collectively the community and cross-sector partners are able to address emerging or under-addressed issues and crises</p> <p>Policy changes increasingly reflect community-wide 0-5 and their families</p> <p>Needed programs are sustainably supported by public or partner investment</p>	<p>Families' basic needs are met and fewer families face financial insecurity</p> <p>Local care and support systems are more equitable, coordinated and aligned on core functions, and able to provide improved support</p> <p>Equitable, stable, affordable, high-quality supports like child care are available</p> <p>Strong and empowered place-based cross-sector networks that prioritize children 0-5 and their families exist</p> <p>Community and cross-sector partners collectively prioritize and expect support for children 0-5 and their families (norms change)</p> <p>Children 0-5 experience less trauma and improved early education outcomes</p> <p>All employers offer comprehensive family friendly practices that support a healthy work life balance</p>	<p>Children thrive in equitable, nurturing, respectful environments, & every child is healthy, developing to optimal potential, & ready to learn</p> <p>LONG-TERM IMPACT</p> <p>Healthier communities, a more competitive workforce, lower healthcare costs, stronger economic growth and greater equality of opportunity</p>

FINDINGS FOR 2022-2023

FUNDING FOR DIRECT SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

This year, as in past years, the strategy of funding direct services and programs continued to support shorter-term outcomes, providing needed services and filling gaps through proven programs. Children prenatal to age five and their families accessed parenting classes; mental health counseling; developmental screenings and supports; preschool programs; breastfeeding support; basic goods and services (e.g., rental assistance, food, diapers); and dental and vision screening, treatment, and education (see Appendix 1 for list of funded programs). Across these services, the estimated number of encounters with children five years old and younger was about 5,400, an increase of almost 700 over the previous year (see Appendix 2 for service delivery detail).¹ This continues a trend of increased encounters after a significant drop in 2020-21 because of COVID-19.

The organizations that First 5 San Luis Obispo County funds to provide services and programs continued to expand their partnerships. Almost all of them reported that they worked with new organizations this year and/or deepened relationships with existing partners. These connections strengthened programs and services in a variety of ways including expanding reach, providing resources and meeting space, expanding capacity, and increasing coordination across services.

¹ For estimated encounters, each funded program reports an unduplicated number of children reached, but children may be counted twice if they accessed services at multiple agencies.

The most consistent challenge across organizations was staffing, mirroring local and nationwide trends. First 5's funded partners struggled with staff turnover and had difficulty filling open positions, which also meant existing staff members were more likely to experience overwork and burnout. Those organizations that were finally able to fill open positions saw a big increase in momentum. Relatedly, several organizations reported that the continued lack of services for young children in the county (e.g., early childhood mental health providers, occupational therapists) made it more difficult to connect participants to needed supports.

Funded partner approaches to equity

First 5 addresses inequities in a variety of ways, including through the organizations that it funds. These organizations employ many strategies to tackle disparities internally and externally including connecting with trusted leaders in marginalized communities to expand outreach; ensuring a presence in rural parts of the county; prioritizing those most in need when providing services; hiring bilingual providers (and compensating them competitively); providing low and no-cost services; and tracking demographic data.

FINDINGS FOR 2022-2023

PLACE-BASED NETWORK BUILDING

Two efforts that began several years ago continued to have an impact, creating pathways for community members, local agencies, and businesses to come together on critical needs facing children 0-5 and their families.

UndocuSupport, which started as a community-led COVID response effort by a collaboration of local organizations, community leaders, and concerned individuals, provides and connects resources, support, and advocacy for and with undocumented and other immigrant families in SLO County. With ongoing support from First 5 staff on the Leadership Council, UndocuSupport became a formalized program within the The Community Foundation San Luis Obispo County, hired full-time staff and received funding from the County of San Luis Obispo Public Health Department to dig deeper into community needs. UndocuSupport is now working to include undocumented residents on the Leadership Council, formalizing a key role for community advocates with lived experience.

The We Are the Care coalition (WATC), which mobilizes committed individuals and agencies to support the local child care system, transitioned out of being managed by First 5 to become part of the Early Care & Education Planning Council. WATC's grassroots advocacy in support of better child care options for the county was cited by the County of San Luis Obispo in their reporting on the initial expenditure of American Rescue Plan Act (APRA) funds for child care as one of the local partners who drafted the initial child care sector proposal. That proposal paved the way for a \$3 million county allocation to bolster the child care sector. In addition, WATC's Cross-Sector Collaboration

Task Force continues to play an advisory role to the San Luis Obispo County Chamber of Commerce's Family-Friendly Workplace program.

As a result of WATC's focus on connecting child care to economic development, First 5 and its partners are now part of other regional networks that are concentrating on revitalizing the region's economy with a focus on children. For example, First 5 staff are part of the Cal Poly Local Economic Development Committee, where they advise the president of the university on using child care as part of an economic development strategy. First 5 is also part of Uplift Central Coast, an initiative of six counties brought together by REACH Central Coast, an inclusive economic development coalition, to distribute \$5 million in funds from California's Community Economic Resilience Fund (CERF). First 5 supports the implementation of CERF funds by highlighting the importance of investing in early childhood and working families as a core strategy for economic development in the region.

POLICY, ADVOCACY, AND SYSTEMS CHANGE

First 5 San Luis Obispo County staff and funded partners continued to use policy, advocacy, and systems change strategies to support changes in business practices and allocate new funding to support child care options, as well as strengthen home visiting and pediatric networks to improve systems of care.

New public financing through the federal APRA that resulted from advocacy efforts by First 5 staff and local partners was allocated to increase child care capacity in the county so that there are more providers delivering more services to families in

FINDINGS FOR 2022-2023

need. The Family-Friendly Workplace Program based out of the SLO Chamber of Commerce expanded to over 100 organizations from the public, nonprofit, and private sectors throughout the county. (See Ongoing Impact section for detail on these two initiatives.)

Provider voices

A participant of SLO Thrive's 'Lunch and Learn' networking events noted, "I liked that we got to share our services, analyze problems, and discuss the topic within our group table. I got to understand the system better."

Collaborations between funded partners and other agencies continued to focus on making systems more connected and efficient through data sharing and peer to peer connections across agencies. The County of San Luis Obispo Public Health Department Maternal and Adolescent Child Health Division's *SLO Thrive Home Visiting Coordination Project (SLO Thrive)* worked to improve home visiting in the county through improved collaboration across agencies. SLO Thrive created a series of "Lunch and Learn" networking events with programming on home visiting, homelessness, and mental health. The reported impact of these sessions was progress toward reducing duplicated services and improving service delivery. While implementation of the shared database to support home visiting agencies has been slower than expected, SLO Thrive is creating an implementation committee to guide the process of using the new system to improve cross-agency collaboration.

In another systems change/network building effort, First 5 convened a Pediatric Town Hall to engage cross-sector partners, increase alignment on community resources, and highlight champions as examples of best practices. (See Pediatric Town Hall Highlight below for more detail.) The Help Me Grow Steering Committee, organizational partners who each serve children ages 0-5 and together coordinate to improve child health and development systems, was a driving force behind the Pediatric Town Hall, and also continued to meet quarterly to share information about issues and opportunities to improve systems.

As with the organizations First 5 funds to provide direct programs and services, staffing was a significant barrier for those working on systems change. With ongoing shortages, organizations were not able to devote as much time to strengthening relationships, which are needed for deeper collaborations on systems-wide issues.

In addition, staff turnover at partner agencies meant that organizations had to spend time re-establishing relationships. Local jurisdictions were not immune to this trend. Staffing changes at city halls and local Chambers of Commerce made tracking the impacts of some of the efforts noted above, particularly the dissemination of ARPA funds, more difficult.

HIGHLIGHTS

Each year, the evaluation report highlights different programs and initiatives that First 5 San Luis Obispo County supports. This year, the evaluation team looked more closely at the Pediatric Town Hall event that First 5 staff coordinated and the South County Youth Coalition Parent-Child Participation Learning Pods funded by First 5.

PEDIATRIC TOWN HALL 2023

Theory of Change outcomes supported

- New partners are identified, existing partners are activated, and champions and influencers highlighted
- Increased cross-sector alignment on needs and gaps

Because First 5 San Luis Obispo County is a county-wide agency and tackles a wide variety of issues that affect young children, it is in a unique position to make cross-sector connections and support coordination across systems. First 5 staff often bring together people and organizations with this goal in mind. This year's Pediatric Town Hall, which First 5 hosted on March 21, 2023, is a key example of this work.

The Town Hall focused on early childhood mental health. It was held at the Courtyard Marriott San Luis Obispo and co-sponsored by CenCal Health, Help Me Grow SLO County, Dignity Health, American Academy of Pediatrics California Chapter 2, SLO Medical Education & Research Foundation, and the County of San Luis Obispo Public Health Department. Nearly 90 people attended, 23 of whom were pediatricians and pediatric nurse

practitioners. Other attendees were affiliated with early childhood health referral agencies, family support agencies, Cuesta College, pediatric provider offices, and First 5. To encourage attendance, one credit of California Medical Association continuing medical education was available for physicians through French Hospital Medical Center.



This event was designed to increase pediatric providers' connections with each other and with community resources while increasing providers' knowledge of important topics related to children prenatal to age five. It filled a gap in the county, as there had been no formal gatherings of pediatricians since the last First 5 Pediatric Town Hall in 2018, which was the first convening of its kind.

HIGHLIGHTS

A planning committee that included local pediatricians, community providers, and First 5 staff identified behavioral health as a top area of urgency among pediatricians. The committee designed the agenda to provide pediatric providers and community partners with more resources and connections to help families experiencing early childhood behavioral and mental health issues. The Town Hall included a regional resource fair, dinner, a keynote speech by the Immediate Past President of the American Academy of Pediatrics on mental health in the context of early childhood, and a panel discussion that featured pediatric providers and community resource providers discussing topics related to early screening and

mental health. Well-respected pediatricians and related providers introduced different parts of the agenda to reinforce the Town Hall as a medical space. Several groups held meetings before and after the Town Hall, leveraging the event to connect further.

The event was successful in engaging pediatric providers, increasing alignment on community resources, and highlighting champions. Attendees appreciated hearing from people in other sectors and exploring ways to connect in support of young children and their families. They also reported that the event was well executed and useful for their practice, and they were interested in attending more events like it.



HIGHLIGHTS

Planning committee members thought there was enough interest to consider hosting an annual event. In response to input they received, the First 5 team will navigate pediatricians' interest in topics related to children over age five, possibly by co-hosting or inviting others to host events focused on older children. First 5 will continue to explore opportunities to build connections between pediatricians and early childhood educators and care providers and provide information on key issues.

PARENT-CHILD PARTICIPATION LEARNING PODS

Theory of Change outcomes supported

- Proven programs deliver needed services to children 0-5 and their families equitably
- Children and families are healthier, more resilient, and more prepared for school success as a result of access to proven programs
- Emerging or under-addressed issues are identified, including those that emerge from crises

First 5 San Luis Obispo County began funding South County Youth Coalition's (SCYC) Parent-Child Participation Learning Pods in 2020 to address the ongoing shortage of programs that support parent education and connection, which was exacerbated by the pandemic when preschools and playgroups shut down. Through the Learning Pods, parents and their young children meet once a week for 90 minutes across six or seven weeks. Families hear from presenters and participate in



activities covering a variety of topics related to child development and bonding. Some elements are for parents only and child care is provided, and some elements are for both parents and children. The groups are divided up by age (0-12 months, 12-24 months, 24-36 months, 3-5 years) to ensure the content is developmentally appropriate. The sessions are held in comfortable, public places like parks and libraries and are often outdoors. Some Learning Pods are facilitated in English while others are in English and Spanish. In addition to providing valuable skills and information, the Learning Pods allow parents to meet each other and develop bonds with other families.

HIGHLIGHTS

In 2022-2023, SCYC held three Learning Pod series, two in English and one in English and Spanish. A total of 114 children and 101 caregivers participated. Each Learning Pod series covered nutrition, gross motor skills, imaginative play, art, music, mindfulness, and brain-based parenting. Sessions were held at Strother Park, Ramona Garden Park, Nipomo Library, and sometimes other city Parks and Recreation buildings when the weather was bad.

The program has become more well known over time and has grown to a point where there are waitlists for some groups. The data SCYC collected this year showed that parents were pleased with the Learning Pods, appreciated getting to know other parents and bonding with their children, and benefited from the program. Parents reported that the Learning Pods:

- Increased their knowledge and understanding of their child's development, parenting, and relationships
- Gave them new skills for parenting their child
- Improved their bond with their child
- Helped them feel less stressed about their home life.



Participant story

A mom of two who has attended several Learning Pod series shared how valuable the experience has been. When her second child was born in April 2020, parent groups had shut down because of COVID-19 including the one she attended with her first child.

Through the sessions, she has been able to spend quality time with her younger child, troubleshoot parenting challenges with experts and others who are in a similar place, and develop ongoing friendships with other parents, despite pandemic restrictions. She is glad this resource has been available to support her family, and she has recruited other parents to join as well.



HIGHLIGHTS

The Learning Pods were especially important to families that were feeling isolated because of the pandemic and those that do not have extended family nearby and need to find other ways to build a network of support.

In the years since Learning Pods began, SCYC continues to test and adapt the program to meet the informational and social needs of local families. They have tested different outreach strategies, locations, time slots, topics, and formats. In their experimentation, they have learned a lot about the ideal content and location for this type of program and how to effectively recruit and engage Spanish-speaking families:

- **Ideal content:** SCYC staff found that topics and activities that actively engage both caregivers and children (e.g., movement, art) work best for the Learning Pods. Although the program provides child care during each session, the children tend to wander back to their parents throughout the session, making it hard for the adults to concentrate on in-depth topics. As a compliment to the hands-on learning provided by the Learning Pods, instructors give parents materials to take home and SCYC staff refer parents to another program they offer (Coffee Talk), which is an adults-only parenting class and support group. Staff reported seeing many caregivers attend both.
- **Best location:** As a response to COVID-19, the Learning Pods were originally held outside only (and masks were required). Now, as the pandemic wanes, there are more options available. SCYC staff have seen the most success with sites like Ramona Garden Park where sessions are held in a comfortable indoor space (the community center) and the

group can venture outside when weather permits. The sites also have ample parking and are accessible via public transportation.



- **Effectively recruiting Spanish-speaking families:** After experiencing low turnout for an initial Learning Pod series conducted in Spanish, the SCYC team asked people they knew who work with Spanish-speaking families for guidance on how to proceed. As a result of those conversations, the team revamped the Spanish Learning Pods (e.g., combining age groups to better accommodate siblings, having one instructor throughout the series rather than multiple instructors to support relationship-building between participants and the instructor). SCYC staff also leveraged their existing network and developed relationships with new organizations to conduct more extensive outreach and promotion of the program. These efforts resulted in increased attendance at the Spanish Learning Pod series in 2022-2023 and this series is expected to continue to grow.

ONGOING IMPACT

Leveraging ARPA funding to support child care

Theory of Change outcomes supported

- Increased public and political will to take action on priority issues
- Needed programs are sustainably supported by public and partner investment
- Increased cross-sector alignment on needs and gaps

Affordable, quality child care continues to be a critical need in the county. First 5 San Luis Obispo County has seen successes with its efforts to convene partners and build local networks that advocate for better child care support, including public financing.

In 2021, First 5 San Luis Obispo County and a core group of partners—both new and established—came together to advocate for allocating 5% of local American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to support the 5% of San Luis Obispo County that is made up of children ages 0–6 – “5% for the 5%.” This concerted effort built on previous legwork that was carried out to make the case for improving child care in the county. As a result of these coordinated efforts, in 2022 four local jurisdictions allocated a total of \$3.2 million dollars to bolster child care in the county.

First 5’s ongoing contribution

First 5 staff continues to serve as a grant program implementation partner. They are part of a “collaborative consortium of local child care sector organizations” created to distribute and monitor the county’s ARPA child care funds.² Over \$2 million in allocated funds have yet to be awarded. This future funding will focus on continued outreach for non-competitive business stabilization grants; the release of the competitive expansion grants; and reinvigorating the child care workforce through the Ticket2Teach apprenticeship program and the Quality Counts program, which will focus on advancing skills among child care professionals to increase wages.

² As described in the County of San Luis Obispo Recovery Plan State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds 2023 Report.



HIGHLIGHTS

Where are they now?

Key takeaways

The funds have had an impact, especially in smaller cities.

In smaller cities, funds have all been allocated and requests far exceeded what was available.

So far, less than one-third of the funds have been spent as a result of the County of San Luis Obispo's multi-year implementation.

Although not all the dollars allocated have been spent, there are already signs of impact. In its 2023 report on ARPA spending for child care, the County of San Luis Obispo reported that its funding to 262 providers – 84% of county providers – resulted in increased capacity, improved quality, equitable access to resources, and stabilization of local child care businesses, which was the focus for the first round of funding.³ The first round in which any licensed providers could apply for rapid response grants between \$2,500-\$6,000, accounts for less than a third of the County's total funding allocation, and remaining grants are scheduled for the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

In Grover Beach and Arroyo Grande, applications for funding far outpaced available funding, signaling the ongoing and unmet needs across the county. In Arroyo Grande, ARPA funding could only support \$100,000 out of \$160,958 that was requested. In Grover Beach, \$50,000 in available funds were no match for over \$120,000 in requested funding.

Family voices

A caregiver in Pismo Beach who received funding stated, "I am applying for child care so that I am able to afford before and after school care. Since the pandemic, my work schedule has gotten less and less. I am currently down to just two days a week, but I have the opportunity to work more if I was able to have child care..."

Another family that received funding highlighted the burden faced by parents of special needs children, "I have been working as many small jobs as possible through COVID-19 as I lost my main source of income during COVID. I have a son with special needs, and I couldn't work at a 9 to 5 when COVID hit and schools were closed as finding care for him would cost more than I could earn."

Grover Beach and Pismo Beach took a different approach to awarding funding than the other jurisdictions, and allowed both service providers and families to apply for funding. Service providers received the bulk of the grant dollars and used them for expansion of space to accommodate more children, outdoor spaces, and specialized equipment, including features to serve special-needs children. In their applications, families that applied for and received grants noted that the support was critical after years of hardship due to the pandemic.

³Ibid.

HIGHLIGHTS

Arroyo Grande awarded all of its nearly \$100,000 to bolster local providers by:

- Assisting with child care business start-up/obtaining state licensing status for existing child care businesses
- Increasing the capacity of existing child care facilities
- Ensuring retention of current child care businesses
- Funding recruitment, attraction, and retention of child care staff.

ARPA child care spending: by the numbers

Jurisdiction	Funds allocated*	Applications received	Amount requested	Grants awarded	Amount awarded
City of Arroyo Grande	\$100,000	14	\$160,958	12	\$98,400
City of Grover Beach	\$50,000	16	\$123,195	9	\$49,095
City of Pismo Beach	\$50,000	9	\$35,500	6	\$30,000
County of San Luis Obispo	\$3,000,000	N/A	N/A	262	\$741,954 *as of May 2023
TOTAL	\$3,200,000				\$919,449



HIGHLIGHTS

Making workplaces more family-friendly

Theory of Change outcomes supported

- Needed programs are sustainably supported by public and partner investment
- Increased cross-sector alignment on needs and gaps
- Changes in business practices support children 0-5 and their families

Strategies to engage businesses county-wide as partners in supporting child care are bearing fruit. Over 100 local employers have engaged in learning about options for providing more comprehensive family-friendly workplace policies and creating a “culture of care.”

Employers have a key role to play as part of a multi-sector approach to child care. Harvard Business Review found that prior to the pandemic, “inadequate child care was costing working parents \$37 billion a year in lost income and employers \$13 billion a year in lost productivity.” In a 2022 study, The US Chamber of Commerce Foundation found that one in three businesses felt that child care issues factored “a great deal” into loss of productivity for employees. In that same study, the foundation also found that 66% of employers were willing to increase child care supports.⁵

SLO County Family-Friendly Workplaces (FFWP) Program was designed to capitalize on this willingness to provide better options for employees. Now in its second year, the FFWP is



still based out of the SLO Chamber of Commerce and sponsored by First 5 San Luis Obispo County and the County of San Luis Obispo. The purpose of the program is to help businesses throughout the county attract and sustain a strong, inclusive local workforce through the implementation of family-friendly workplace policies. Research has found that businesses that have family-friendly policies see business growth and are able to attract, motivate and retain employees, improve employee satisfaction, and strengthen productivity. This in turn improves a community's economic growth.⁶

⁵ US Chamber of Commerce Foundation, “Employer Roadmap: Child care solutions for working parents”: https://chamber-foundation.files.svdcn.com/production/documents/ECE-Employer-Roadmap_March-2022_web.pdf?dm=1697134496

⁶ UNICEF, Family-Friendly Policies Redesigning the Workplace of the Future: A Policy Brief

HIGHLIGHTS

First 5's ongoing contribution

First 5 continues to fund and support the Family-Friendly Workplaces Program.

Where are they now?

Key takeaways

- The FFWP continued to expand its reach across sectors and across the county; staff also spoke with policymakers about business needs related to supporting child care.
- Among participating employers, common HR benefits included dependent care flexible spending accounts, child care referrals, and on-site services and subsidies.
- Almost 20 businesses have moved to a higher award category in the last year, meaning they offered more family-friendly policies.

The FFWP's signature assessment, which serves as a tool to gauge an employer's family-friendly policies, has now been filled out by more than 125 organizations from the public, nonprofit, and private sectors. Using the assessment tool, close to 80 organizations have opted to be recognized with a SLO County Family-Friendly Workplaces Award. Over 60 have completed one-on-one meetings with FFWP staff to discuss their results and options to improve their policies. Chamber staff provided employers with a personalized dashboard of their results, education on various family-friendly practices, recommendations for further changes, and resources to assist them. Beginning in 2023, the FFWP rolled out an updated and expanded assessment. Staff encouraged new contacts and those who had taken the assessment previously to complete the new version.

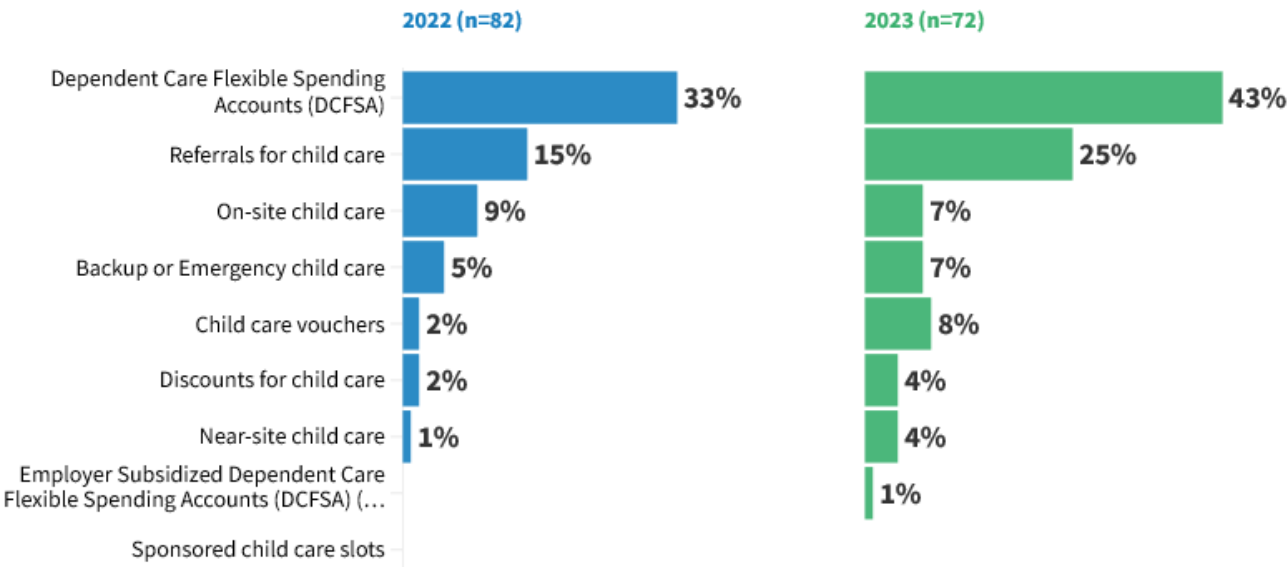


HIGHLIGHTS

Over the past two years, employers from a wide array of industries have responded to the assessment, and data from the assessment tool provide a window into the ways that businesses in the county support children and families through their workplace policies and benefits. In 2023, fewer private sector businesses and more nonprofit and public sector employers took the assessment. The majority of businesses over both years were located in the City of San Luis Obispo, followed by employers in northern parts of the

county. Staff from the FFWP noted that although many employers are recorded as being in the City of San Luis Obispo because their headquarters are there, some have satellite offices in other areas of the county. Eighteen percent of organizations were from North County, and 6% were from South County. That said, staff are planning to expand their outreach. They are also partnering with other Chambers in the region on outreach events to expand the program’s reach.

Does your workplace offer any of the following childcare benefits? (Check all that apply)

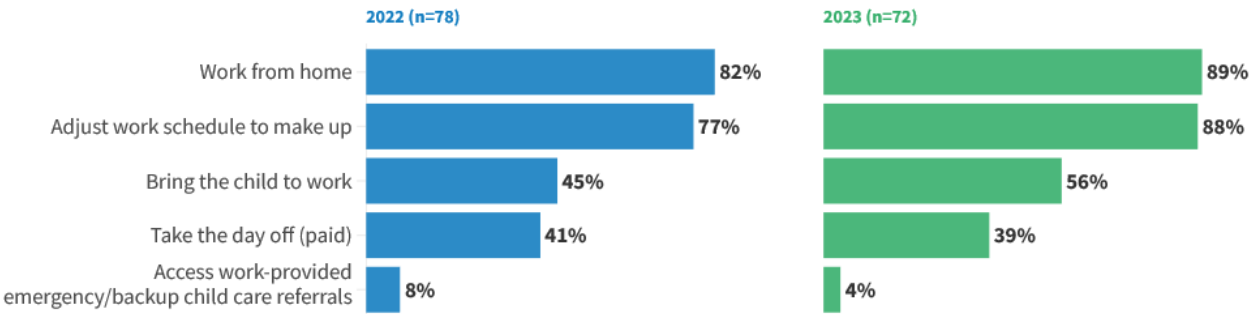


HIGHLIGHTS

The most common benefits that organizations offered were dependent care flexible spending accounts, followed by child care referrals, and then on-site services and subsidies. The Workforce Development Manager for the FFWP noted that there are additional considerations with promoting child care referrals. It may seem like immediate support but if there are no child

care options available, it may be a benefit in name only. Organizations also offered flexibility in certain circumstances. For example, a majority of organizations over both years provided employees the flexibility to work from home when schools close unexpectedly. In 2023, a majority of responding employers allowed employees to bring their children to work.

If school is closed unexpectedly, are employees permitted to do any of the following (check all that apply)?



HIGHLIGHTS

In addition, a majority of employers who responded to the assessment in 2023 provided a range of leave options for employees, including unpaid time off and personal leave. However, offering an array of options for new and breastfeeding mothers was harder to come by.

Twenty-two organizations received an award for the second time in 2023, and of those, 17 businesses (nearly 80%) moved to a higher award category, meaning they offered more family-friendly policies. One business went from offering only one family-friendly policy in each of the five categories being tracked to offering six and supporting at least one high impact practice. In doing so, it moved from the lowest to the highest award category. Twenty employers that applied for an award for the second time gave examples of changes that they adopted over the past year. New policies included a focus on flexible and remote work options, including reduced work weeks. In addition, they expanded benefits like family leave and flexible spending accounts to all employees including those who work part-time. Other changes included creating more private spaces for new mothers by instituting an office sharing program and supporting the transition back to work for new parents.

Employer voices

One employer who participated in Family-Friendly Workplaces noted, "We just added a new paid leave component. In 2022, we only had full paid leave for one benefit class. Now all employees who experience birth/adoption/foster who qualify for CFRA/FMLA receive cash awards that are applied outside of benefit periods for EDD so they get funding from us and CA."

In addition to working to expand the FFWP geographically, representatives from the program have also spoken with policymakers about business needs related to supporting child care. For example, staff met with Representative Salud Carbajal as part of his listening tours in the region that informed the Child Care Investment Act of 2023, a bill that was introduced in July. If enacted, this bipartisan child care affordability legislation would improve a tax credit aimed at helping employers provide child care options to their employees, allow multiple businesses to partner to create a new child care option, and expand federal tax write-offs that already exist to offset child care expenses.⁷

⁷ Press release: <https://carbajal.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=1591>



APPENDIX 1: TABLE OF PROJECTS

This table outlines all of First 5 San Luis Obispo's projects in the 2022-2023 fiscal year including the lead organization, a brief description of the work, and associated strategies from First 5's Theory of Change.

			Strategy		
Project	Organization	Description	Funding for direct services and programs	Policy, advocacy, systems change	Place-based network building
Child Health & Development					
BABES	County of San Luis Obispo Public Health Department	Provided breastfeeding education and support and peer counseling for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers at WIC clinics throughout the county.	✓		
Help Me Grow Centralized Access Point	CAPSLO	Provided a one-stop shop where families and providers connected with resources needed to assess concerns related to early development and get help addressing them. It included a Family Resource Center, call line, and a care coordination system.	✓		
Kits for New Parents	First 5 San Luis Obispo County	Distributed kits to new parents that included a Parent Guide, "What to Do When Your Child Gets Sick" book, baby touch-and-feel book, and a directory of local community resources and services for young children and families.	✓		
Oral Health Prevention for Children	Tolosa Children's Dental Center	Provided preventive services for children 0-5 including oral health screening and assessment, parent education, dental exams, and cleanings.	✓		
Oral Health Program Manager	County of San Luis Obispo Public Health Department	Coordinated children's oral health services, including dental screenings, referrals, and connecting clients with providers. Provided education about children's preventive dental care to parents of children 0-5.	✓		

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			Strategy		
			Funding for direct services and programs	Policy, advocacy, systems change	Place-based network building
Project	Organization	Description			
Vision Screening	Optometric Care Associates	Screened children 2-5 for vision problems at early childhood development and care sites and referred them to local providers for treatment if indicated.	✓		
Health Access Trainer	Carsel Consulting Group	Provided professional development activities to increase provider capacity to connect children 0-5 with healthcare services.	✓	✓	
Help Me Grow Steering Committee	First 5 San Luis Obispo County	Convened partners to support a community system that ensures timely support for families related to developmental milestones in early childhood.		✓	
Home Visiting Coordination	County of San Luis Obispo Public Health Department	Conducted an environmental scan to determine the existing scale of home visiting services, researched platforms for a shared data system, and convened home visiting programs to build unified home visiting system of care.		✓	
Early Learning					
California State Preschool Program	San Luis Obispo County Office of Education	Provided high quality early childhood education for families that would not otherwise qualify because they were above state income eligibility limits.	✓		
Early Childhood Nature-Based Experiences	San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden	Expanded access and programming to increase nature-based experiences, education for parents, wellness for young children, and professional development for providers.	✓		

APPENDIX 1: TABLE OF PROJECTS

			Strategy		
			Funding for direct services and programs	Policy, advocacy, systems change	Place-based network building
Project	Organization	Description			
Shared Services Alliance	CAPSLO	Coordinated services for Family and Center based child care providers to strengthen their business practices.	✓		
We Are the Care	First 5 San Luis Obispo County	Focused on raising public awareness, cross-sector collaboration and local government engagement to address the challenges involved in early care and education in our communities.		✓	✓
Resilient Families					
Basic Needs Family Support	CAPSLO	Provided and distributed resources and support to meet the basic needs of families with children 0-5 including rental assistance, food, and child care.	✓		
Emergency Response	The Community Foundation San Luis Obispo County	Provided emergency funds for organizations to deliver care and supplies in the wake of the flooding in early 2023.	✓		
Event Sponsorships	First 5 San Luis Obispo County	Sponsored local events that focused on young children and families and were in line with First 5's mission, strategic plan, and guiding principles.	✓		
Family Resource Centers	Parents Helping Parents	Provided information, referrals, training, family support, and outreach to families of children with special needs.	✓		

APPENDIX 1: TABLE OF PROJECTS

			Strategy		
			Funding for direct services and programs	Policy, advocacy, systems change	Place-based network building
Project	Organization	Description			
Family Support Counseling	MP Health	Provided bilingual individual, family, and couples mental health counseling and education to people caring for children 0-5.	✓		
Parent-Child Participation Learning Pods	South County Youth Coalition	Provided classes in Spanish and English where caregivers had real-time experiences with their children, developed a social network, and received age-appropriate information about their children.	✓		
Partnership for Resilient Families	Link Family Resource Center	Provided resources and support services for pregnant women, caregivers, and families with children ages 0-5 throughout North County.	✓		
Perinatal Mental Health Support Services	Pregnancy & Parenting Support of SLO County	Provided counseling for pregnant women and new parents to address heightened uncertainty, stress and perinatal mood and anxiety challenges (via a collaborative partnership with the Community Counseling Center).	✓		

APPENDIX 1: TABLE OF PROJECTS

			Strategy		
			Funding for direct services and programs	Policy, advocacy, systems change	Place-based network building
Project	Organization	Description			
Family-Friendly Workplaces	SLO Chamber of Commerce	Provided resources and support to businesses to help assess their current business practices, identify opportunities for change, and adopt family-friendly policies (including investments in quality child care) that help to support parent employees, sustain a strong local workforce, improve quality of life, and bolster the economic vitality of our communities.	✓	✓	
Hands-on Heroes	First 5 San Luis Obispo County	Recognized dedicated individuals who make a difference in the lives of children and youth while communicating about First 5 policy initiatives.		✓	

APPENDIX 2: NUMBERS SERVED

The following data is collected from First 5 partners who provide direct services to children and families. First 5 staff compiled the data and submitted it to First 5 CA, and shared it with Commissioners in the fall of 2023. While each agency reports on unduplicated individuals served, the aggregate data likely has duplication due to families obtaining services from more than one First 5 partner. Because of the unknown overlap in numbers served, any conclusions drawn from the data should be made with extreme care.

Age of Individual Served	Numbers Served
Children Less than 3 Years Old	1,285
Children from 3rd to 6th Birthday	4,092
Children – Ages Unknown (Birth to 6th Birthday)	144
Primary Caregivers and Siblings Ages 6+ years old	6,445
Total Population Served	11,966

Race/Ethnicity of Individual Served	Numbers Served
Unknown	5,534
Hispanic/Latino	3,963
White	1,755
Other	333
Two or more races	228
Alaska Native/American Indian	95
Asian	42
Black/African-American	11
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	5
Totals	11,966

APPENDIX 3: EVALUATION METHODS

To generate the findings in this report, First 5 San Luis Obispo County's evaluation team gathered, analyzed, and synthesized information from the following sources:

Funded Partner End-of-Year Reports

First 5's funded partners submitted a written report at the end of the fiscal year that included relevant numerical data (e.g., number of children served, number of counseling sessions conducted) and their reflections on the successes, challenges, and impact of their funded work as well as broader community needs. The evaluation team also analyzed additional data shared by funded partners (beyond the written report) including assessment and survey data.

Interviews

First 5's evaluation team conducted one-on-one interviews with First 5 staff, Commissioners, partners (funded and non-funded), and other community stakeholders, including policymakers. These interviews explored experiences and perceptions of First 5's work broadly and around specific strategies and initiatives.

Document review

The evaluation team reviewed an array of documents aside from funded partner reporting to explore First 5's contribution to outcomes. Documents included press releases; research reports; city and county records; and local government websites, including applicable grant program information.