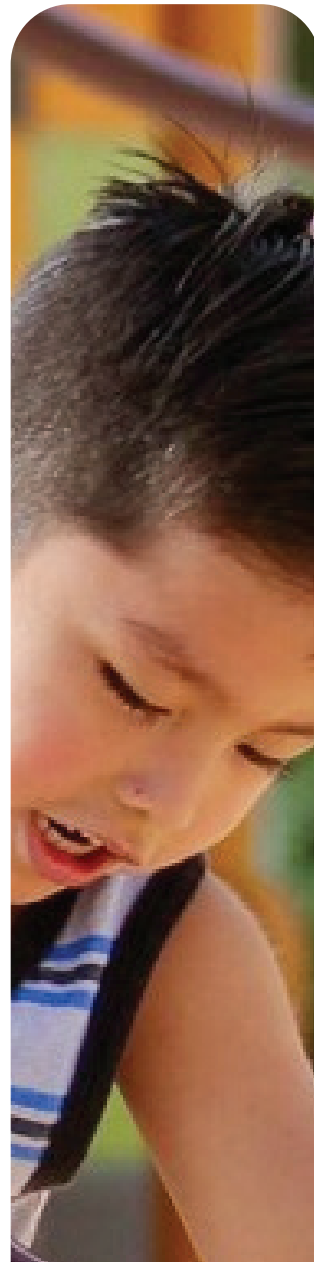
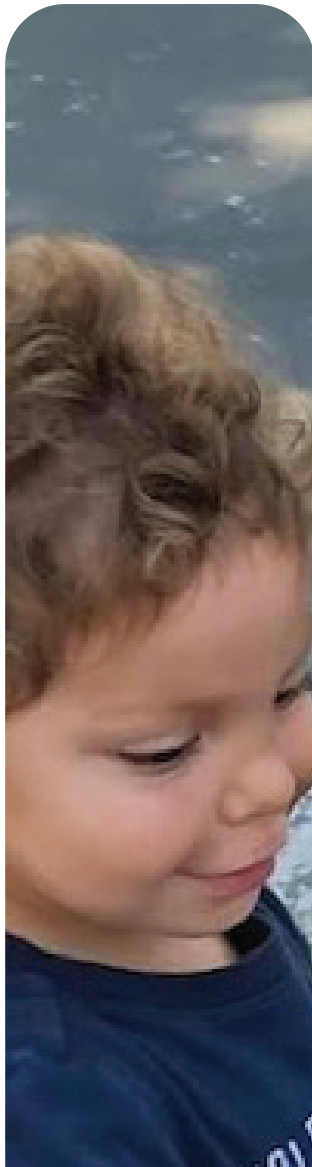
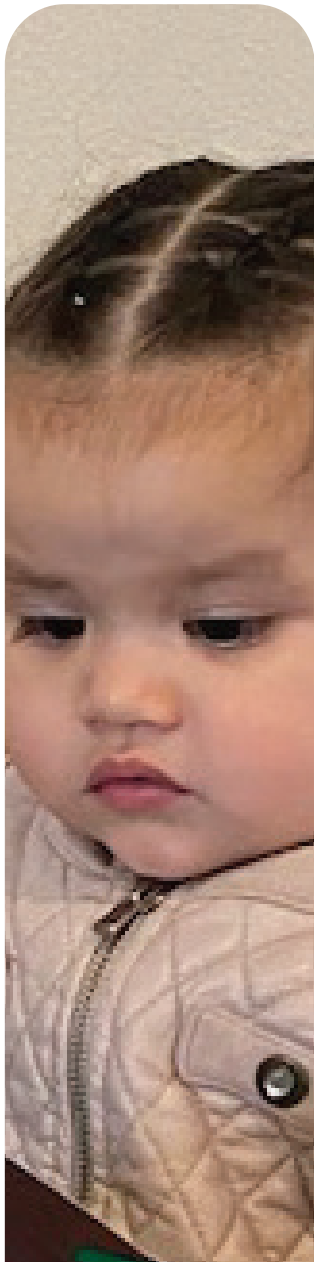
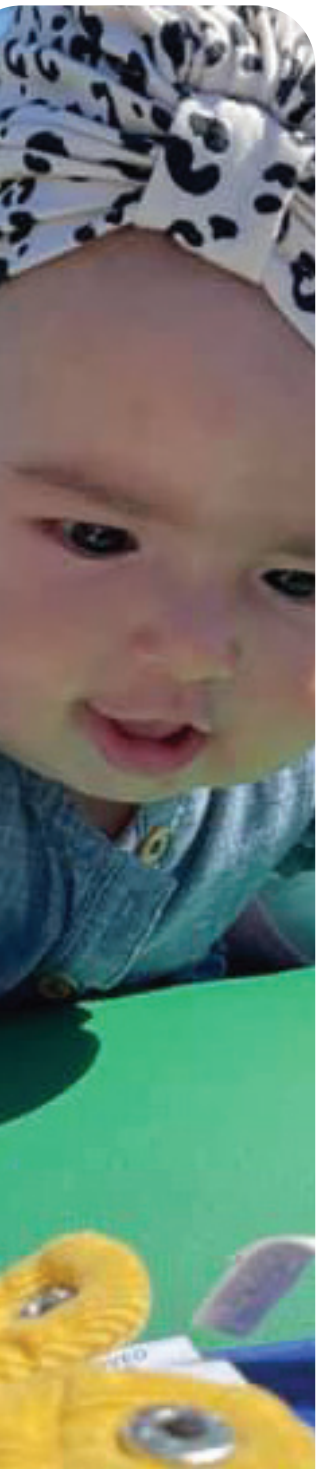




## ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT

JULY 2020 - JUNE 2021



# ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report outlines key evaluation findings across First 5 San Luis Obispo County's work in 2020-2021. It is designed to highlight accomplishments, challenges, and lessons learned for the organization's Commissioners as they reflect on the year and plan for the future. The report synthesizes information from interviews with key stakeholders, staff, and partner organizations as well as data collected from funded partners on a quarterly basis.

## BACKGROUND: THE EVOLVING ROLES OF FIRST 5

For more than two decades, First 5 San Luis Obispo County has invested in great organizations that serve families and young children. These investments, combined with other funding streams, have allowed many essential programs to be there for each generation of young families who need support. More recently, First 5 has also taken on a role as convener, bringing together stakeholders to imagine and implement new responses to enduring challenges. This new role has created opportunities to make impacts at a policy level, improving the quality of life for far more young children and families than can be reached through program investments alone.



## Selection of Funded Partners

First 5 San Luis Obispo County enters into contracts with partner agencies based on needs identified in the strategic plan and emerging needs such as pandemic response. New partners are added as issues arise that require a more immediate response and projects are sunsetted when they are no longer core to the strategic plan, the need has declined, other funding is secured, or the project is completed. Partners are chosen based on well-established, documented successes in the local community, with larger projects bidding in an RFP process. The majority of contracts are funded on a reimbursement basis, based on actual time spent on the project. Some contracts are funded at a flat rate to allow partners to maintain staffing levels through fluctuating community needs.

Currently, First 5 San Luis Obispo County funds a mix of projects, with some providing direct services to address gaps while others address policy and advocacy goals of the Commission and/or work to expand system capacity.



# 2020-21 FINDINGS

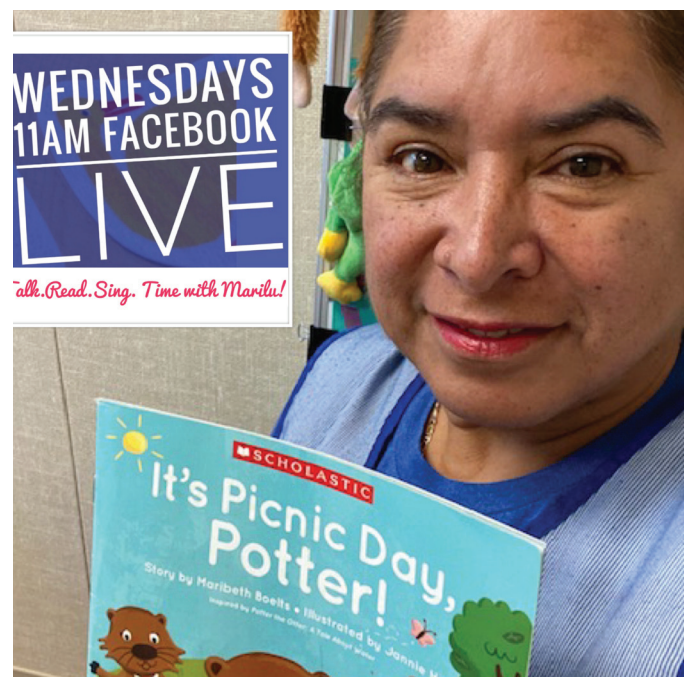
The pandemic was the dominant theme for First 5 San Luis Obispo County projects and partners in the June 2020 - July 2021 fiscal year.



*"The pandemic put a huge spotlight on child care and family struggles. Those struggles are typically hidden, but with the pandemic that was upended, those invisible systems became visible, and the crisis was hitting more people." - Organizational Partner, We Are the Care*

## COVID-19 SHAPES THE YEAR: KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1** Staff and funded partners exhibited tremendous resilience, doing their best to sustain vital programs during a time of incredible disruption. Many projects had low reimbursement rates during this time due to their inability to provide services during the shut-down. Others continued paying staff and reaching out to families to ensure continuity of programming once the stay-at-home order was lifted.
- 2** Short-term projects that were funded to address emerging needs had varying levels of success in connecting with families but all were able to provide some assistance.
- 3** In contrast to constraints on funded programs because of COVID, the disruption of the pandemic created opportunities for new policy and advocacy responses to both ongoing and emerging problems. First 5 continued to build strong cross-sector ties and connected with grassroots organizations through new partnerships to broaden the network of aligned partners committed to advancing 0-5 goals.





## DIRECT SERVICE AGENCIES PIVOT

Ongoing partner projects continued during this time, though they often had to serve a very reduced number of individuals during the lockdown phase and while schools were closed. Some partners were able to pivot to virtual services, while others reopened as soon as possible to continue working directly with children and parents. The new Help Me Grow Centralized Access Point that has been planned for years also launched amidst the pandemic.

Challenges for programs during this period included the inability to meet face-to-face with families and even to find families; staff getting sick and having to stay home with children whose care providers and schools were closed; and families experiencing very high levels of grief, loneliness, overwhelm, and financial crises.

### Partner Experiences: Help Me Grow CAP

The Help Me Grow Centralized Access Point (HMG CAP) received a referral from Head Start for a 4-year-old boy who had been screened for developmental issues; screening indicated concerns related to Behavior and Parent Support. HMG staff reported that the many initial conversations with his mom were tearful and difficult as she was transitioning out of an unsafe relationship and working on help for herself as well as getting help for her son.

Through the HMG CAP, this family received referrals to mental health and family support services for the mother and son. During a scheduled follow up call, the mom was feeling positive about the future and was excited to share significant behavior improvement in her young child. She noted that her extended family is also supporting his progress by implementing strategies they were encouraged to practice.



Despite the challenges of COVID-19, there were many successes. Agencies pivoted to remote work and virtual ways to connect with families to maintain services despite the pandemic. New programs were even started, and the Commission responded to pandemic needs by adding funded partner projects to support parents' mental health, social support, basic needs, child care expansion and safety and their children's learning at home. These projects worked to fill gaps in services during a time of high uncertainty and fear. Though in some cases they had less reach than hoped for, these projects were successful in connecting with and supporting parents, children and providers, providing critical services during the pandemic.

In addition to investing directly in partner services, First 5 invested emergency funds in the Community Foundation of San Luis Obispo County's Disaster Response Support Fund, designed to swiftly address urgent needs related to the pandemic. First 5 then partnered with the

Community Foundation to disburse these funds throughout 2020 and into 2021 to non-profits, supporting a wide breadth of children- and family-serving agencies across our county.

### Partner Experiences: MP Health

MP Health provided counseling for parents during the pandemic. One client was a parent of two young children. The parent recently lost their spouse due to COVID and was unable to process this grief. The MP Health counselor worked intensively with them in individual therapy; over time they were able to work on their grief.

Once individual therapy was no longer needed, services were modified to include parenting support and check-in phone calls. The parent reports that the family is now doing much better.





## FIRST 5 DEEPENS POLICY WORK

First 5 staff engaged in several advocacy and capacity expansion efforts to support both policy and systems change. These projects were able to address ongoing family needs that were exacerbated by the pandemic, harness public and political will to create innovative responses to emerging issues, and leverage the strength of existing networks to advance child care. In addition, where possible, First 5 staff continues to create synergies between funded programs and policy and advocacy work to fully leverage partnerships and respond to needs and gaps that are identified in their systems change work. Following are three highlights that capture policy successes of the 2020-21 year.



## Policy Highlights

**Note:** Descriptions of all 2020-2021 work are included in the Table of Policy, Advocacy and Systems Change Projects.

### 1 Moving Businesses from Alignment to Action on Child Care with We Are the Care

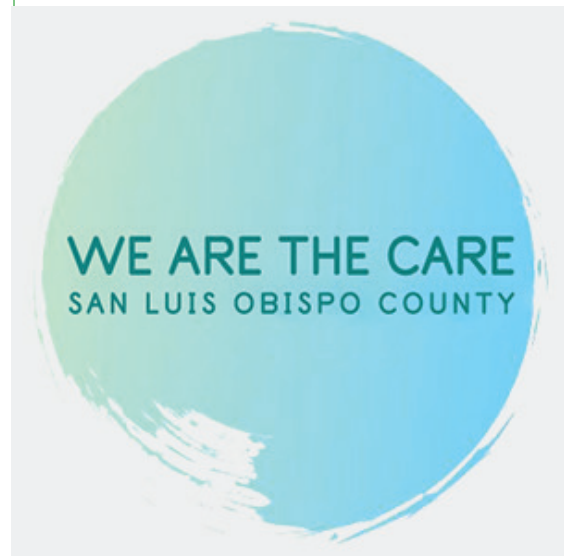
Formed in 2019 as a result of a highly successful Town Hall meeting on how to address the challenges of early care and education, the We Are the Care initiative continues to advance childcare issues. First 5's cross-sector coalition building and the work of the initiative's dedicated task forces, which includes a focus on local government engagement, successfully raised awareness of the childcare crisis in the county as an economic issue and a business issue, as well as an issue for families.

Championing and activating practical tools like the Family-Friendly Workplace Toolkit helped lay the groundwork for the development of the Family Friendly Workplace Accelerator Program, a partnership between First 5, the County of SLO and the SLO Chamber of Commerce. This free initiative, housed within the Chamber, will provide resources for SLO County businesses to foster a strong local workforce and support working parents' balance between job and home life through family-friendly practices and policies.



*"As an agency, First 5 brought people together around the table to focus on how we can collectively solve these issues, not just address them. That coalition building, having organizations at the table, that took First 5 taking the initiative, putting themselves out there."*

- Organizational Partner,  
We Are the Care



**75%**  
of moms

Seventy-five percent of US mothers say they've passed up work opportunities, switched jobs, or quit to care for their children.

**50%**  
of dads

Fifty percent of US fathers say they've passed up work opportunities, switched jobs, or quit to care for their children.

## 2 Adapting Best Practices to Increase System-Wide Efficiencies with Help Me Grow



SLO's Help Me Grow program was built on a successful national model and efforts in other counties and states that address barriers to early intervention by increasing care coordination, education, and outreach. First 5 staff convened local partners to explore how to translate best practices to the unique challenges in SLO, and to see where there was alignment with existing efforts and priorities. One best practice was to engage multiple partners throughout the system in a steering committee to guide and coordinate the work.

First 5 staff convened a Steering Committee to leverage shared data from the Central Access Hub (a funded program), to create stronger relationships between providers, public health, and other agencies, and to support system-wide awareness and alignment on needs and gaps. By engaging multiple partners and helping them see their role in a coordinated system that centers patients and clients, Help Me Grow has increased the availability of resources and options for patients and families and empowered them by making them aware of those resources.

*"For 25 years in SLO, in the pediatric realm there has been a hesitancy to refer to someone they don't know without a personal connection. That has now opened up much wider and there is greater availability of resources, so many more options for patients."*

- Provider, Help Me Grow

## 3 Mobilizing Support and Action on an Emerging Issue with UndocuSupport



When COVID hit and state and federal relief dollars were being sent out, vulnerable immigrant families that were critical to communities were being left out. First 5 staff convened and facilitated a group of concerned agencies and grassroots organizations to create the SLO UndocuSupport fund to accept community donations for families who could not access government financial supports.

UndocuSupport expanded SLO's system-wide capacity to support families in crisis and brought together a new network of aligned community members and organizations concerned about immigrant issues. As a result, children and their families were able to stay housed, keep their utilities on, maintain transportation to work, and pay for medical care and other basic needs. By coordinating efforts across multiple organizations and agencies, First 5 was able to help avoid duplicating efforts and defusing support, which cleared the way for a more effective and cohesive community response.





## TABLE OF FUNDED PARTNER PROJECTS: FY 20-21

These activities and programs from the reporting period are direct services that are generally provided by contracted partners.

Project	Organization	Description
<i>Health &amp; Development</i>		
3 by 3 Developmental Screening Partnership	First 5 San Luis Obispo County	Pediatricians at two local clinics integrated routine early development screening, guidance, and referrals into well-child visits at 9 months, 18 months, and 24-30 months. Funded by a County of San Luis Obispo Behavioral Health Department MHS Innovation grant.
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.
Baby's First Breath (no longer funded)	County of San Luis Obispo Public Health Department	Provided tobacco cessation services for pregnant women, parents, and other family members of children 0-5.
BEST PALS (no longer funded)	Pediatric Physical Therapy and Services, Inc.	Provided developmental and behavioral assessments and short-term treatment for children with mild or moderate delays who do not qualify for services elsewhere.
Dental Access	Tolosa Children's Dental Center	Provided preventive services for children 0-5 including oral health screening and assessment, parent education, dental exams, and cleanings.
Health Access Trainer	Carsel Consulting Group	Provided professional development activities to increase provider capacity to connect children, 0-5, with healthcare services.

Project	Organization	Description
Help Me Grow	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 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.
Vision Screening and Treatment	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.
<b>Early Learning</b>		
California State Preschool Program	San Luis Obispo County Office of Education	Subsidized high-quality early childhood education for families who are low income.
Child Care Stipends	CAPSLO	Awarded stipends to FRCs and Centers.
Site Coordinator (no longer funded)	Paso Robles Joint Unified School District	The site coordinator worked as a single point of contact with families, assisting parents and families as they transition into Kindergarten.

Project	Organization	Description
<b><i>Resilient Families</i></b>		
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.
Early Childhood Family Advocate Services (no longer funded)	Center for Family Strengthening	Funded family advocates in three different communities who provided case management services for families with children 0-5.
Family Advocate (no longer funded)	Paso Robles Joint Unified School District	Funded a family advocate who provided case management for families with children 0-5.
Family Resource Centers	Parents Helping Parents	Provided information, referrals, training, family support, and outreach to families of children with special needs at three centers.
Family Support Counseling	MP Health	Provided bilingual mental health and wellness support counseling and education to people caring for children 0-5 in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Parent 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.
Perinatal Mental Health Support Services	Pregnancy & Parenting Support of SLO County	Provided outreach and support counseling for new parents to address heightened uncertainty, stress and perinatal mood and anxiety challenges (via a collaborative partnership with the Community Counseling Center).



## TABLE OF POLICY, ADVOCACY AND SYSTEMS CHANGE PROJECTS: FY 20-21

These activities and programs from the reporting period are driven by First 5 staff and are separate from funded programs.

Project	Description	Strategies
<b><i>Health &amp; Development</i></b>		
Help Me Grow	Convened partners in a steering committee to support a community system that ensures timely support for families related to developmental milestones in early childhood.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convening</li> <li>• Public education</li> </ul>
<b><i>Early Learning</i></b>		
We Are the Care	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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raising awareness</li> <li>• Building public and political will</li> <li>• Convening</li> <li>• Coalition and network building</li> <li>• Policymaker education and engagement</li> </ul>
<b><i>Resilient Families</i></b>		
ARPA Funding Engagement	Worked with an array of partners and local governments to advocate for allocation of Federal ARPA funding for child care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building political will</li> <li>• Policymaker education and engagement</li> </ul>
Child Care Feasibility Study	Researched local public policies that ease and incentivize the creation of child care programs, funded by four public entities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building the evidence base</li> <li>• Policymaker education and engagement</li> </ul>
Family Friendly Workplaces	Worked to change the business culture to make it the most family-friendly county in California in partnership with local Chambers and We Are the Care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Champion development</li> <li>• Building public and political will</li> <li>• Policymaker education and engagement</li> </ul>
Hands-on Heroes	Recognized dedicated individuals who make a difference in the lives of children and youth while communicating about First 5 policy initiatives. Topics for 2020-21 were We Are the Care (2020) and Help Me Grow (2021).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raising awareness</li> <li>• Building public will</li> <li>• Media advocacy</li> <li>• Strategic communications</li> <li>• Champion development</li> </ul>
SLO County UndocuSupport	Convened and facilitated a coalition of local organizations, community leaders, and concerned individuals working to support local immigrant families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building public will</li> <li>• Convening</li> <li>• Coalition and network building</li> </ul>