



“Kasserian Ingera? And How Are the Children?” This daily greeting among the Masai people of East Africa is met with the traditional response “All the children are well.” In other words, if the youngest and most valuable and most vulnerable in our community are thriving, then so is our community as a whole.

This is the work of First 5 – to ask and answer the call “And How Are the Children?” We are a public agency, charged with the honorable and challenging mission to use state tobacco tax revenues toward “support and advocacy for quality programs and services for children and families prenatal to aged five, to ensure that every child is healthy and ready to learn.” We believe deeply that the wellbeing of children and families during the first five critical years of life is both an indicator of our current status as a society, and also a strong predictor of our future.

A growing body of research points to the unique importance of what happens during a child’s first 5 years. More than 80% of our brain is fully developed by the time we reach our third birthday. Our ability to read and do well in school is connected to the number of words we hear during our early years through talking, reading, and singing with those around us. When our communities spend money to build high quality preschools, they save big in the long run – more successful school beginnings are correlated with lower high school dropout rates, lower crime rates, and higher wage potential.

Over the next four years, First 5 SLO County will continue its legacy of investment and leadership to reinforce the all-important beginning years of life for the youngest members of our community. Our nine First 5 Commissioners have approved nearly \$9 million during this strategic planning period toward advocacy, capacity building, and direct service in four key Priority Areas: Perinatal Readiness, Child Health and Development, Early Learning, and Family Strengthening. The following pages describe First 5 SLO County’s strategic planning story – our purpose, our values, our history, our roles and resources, our decision-making process, and our strategic framework that guides our work into the future.

First 5 SLO County is but one of many organizations in this county and across California with a commitment and responsibility to help families and young children get the optimal start in life. We rely on community partnerships to ensure that the spotlight on early childhood remains ever-bright, and that together we find the means to sustain our investment in this critical life stage. So that 10 – 20 – 50 – 100 years from now, future generations will naturally ask one another, “And how are the children?” And the natural and true answer will be “The children are well.”

Yours in Service,



Bruce Gibson  
Commission Chair, First 5 San Luis Obispo County

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*One generation plants the tree;  
another gets the shade.*  
Chinese Proverb

## Proposition 10

Proposition 10 was passed by California voters in November 1998. Entitled the *California Children and Families First Initiative*, it added a 50-cent per-pack tax on cigarettes and tobacco products. The tax was earmarked to **promote the early health, learning, and family support for children from the prenatal stage through five years of age.**

Most of the money (80%) is channeled into the 58 county commissions. The annual amount each county receives each year is calculated using its birth rate. The rest of the funding goes to the State Commission (First 5 CA).

The Act identifies three Focus Areas:

- 1) Health
- 2) Early Childhood Education
- 3) Family Support

Each commission prepares a strategic plan that outlines its efforts to address the local needs of young children and their families. These plans are reviewed annually, and are revised periodically.

## Why is First 5 Important?

### The Critical Foundation of Early Childhood

We know that the first few years of a child's life are critical. Relationships are established, connections are made, lessons are learned, and habits begin to form. Experiences young children have and the conditions in which they live greatly influence the kind of adults they will become, and the kind of lives they will lead. The premise behind First 5 is that, as a society, we must concentrate on giving our children a good start in their first five years of life.

The research proves – we cannot begin too early. A child's brain is more than 80% developed by the age 3, and 90% by age 5. That's why early education, literacy experiences, and serve-and-return interaction – from birth – is paramount to a child's brain development and cognitive growth – as well as emotional health.

But, in order to even create the possibility of developing young minds – we must first provide the basic essentials our children need to thrive: a stable home, good nutrition, clothes, safe surroundings, physical activity, and care.

Stable and healthy families provide children with a nurturing and positive environment, which is associated with success, prosocial behavior, and good health. By establishing adequate support systems for parents, we greatly increase the likelihood of putting children on the right path. We also seize the opportunity to flag problems, correct them, and arm caretakers with vital tools and resources – whether it's breastfeeding assistance, dental or vision treatment, postpartum counseling, or expert advice for parents of little ones with special needs.

There can be no question that experiences in infancy and early childhood can affect a child throughout his/her lifetime. By giving children a strong foundation in the first 5 years, we help to ensure they have bright futures – and that benefits everyone.

### Healthy Development

Children are born with all of the brain cells they are ever going to have. It is the connections between the cells that grow and develop over time. From the moment a child is born, each time she is stimulated her brain makes new connections. Talking, reading, singing, hugging, rocking, and dancing with the child all help the brain develop.

When dad sings with his son, or hugs him, or plays catch, dad is building his son's brain. And, it can't start too soon. By age three, a child's brain is already more than 80% developed.

"Serve and return" interactions – such as what happens when a child coos and a parent responds – is one of the most important functions for early brain and social-emotional development.

Serve and return interactions start simple and become increasingly complex over time. When it comes to emotional development, serve and return interactions can help children:

- Develop self-confidence
- Cope with stress in a healthy way
- Learn the difference between right and wrong
- Develop compassion
- Form friendships

These interactions play the critical role of strengthening brain connections between all of the different areas of the baby's brain—helping them develop the emotional and cognitive skills they need for life.

## Who is First 5 San Luis Obispo County?

### A Brief History

First 5 San Luis Obispo County's steady 17-year history supporting young children and families has laid a solid foundation for the strategic planning process of the last 18 months. The agency was founded in 1999 under the original name, "Children and Families Commission of SLO County." Two years later, upon implementation of an initial Strategic Plan, *Raising Our Future*, we funded our first partners with nearly 20 programs covering a wide range of needs in child health, early education and development, and family support.

In the 15 years that followed, First 5 SLO County developed local comprehensive programming; e.g., Children's Health Initiative, Martha's Place and the Perinatal Substance Abuse Initiative, and Oral Health Initiative, as well as state-driven initiatives supporting quality preschool and school readiness.

The Commission decided to aim narrower and deeper, as reflected in the Strategic Plan of 2011-2015, *What Future for Our Children?* It identified five Initiatives targeting areas of need in SLO County: Health, Oral Health, Perinatal Substance Abuse Prevention, Special Needs, and School Readiness.

The 2011-2015 Plan also included the Commission's first Policy and Advocacy Platform. While First 5 SLO County has always advocated for young children and their families, and taken formal positions on specific policies, the Platform became our concrete statement articulating our conscious commitment to increasing our active role to push for systems change.

The Children's Bill of Rights for San Luis Obispo County was the first crowning achievement of that commitment, and became a critical cornerstone for our purpose – the "why" behind our work. This signature effort further elevates and exemplifies First 5 SLO County's commitment to carrying out the intentions of the *Children and Families First Act* – providing advocacy, capacity building, and outcome-based prevention and early intervention programs aimed at contributing to a seamless, comprehensive, and coordinated system of care in SLO County. It is our hope that our work through this next Strategic Plan, *And, How Are the Children?*, will continue our community's legacy of commitment to its young children and their families.

*If we don't stand up for children, then we don't stand for much.*

Marian Wright Edelman



The Children's Bill of Rights for San Luis Obispo County became a critical cornerstone for the purpose behind the "why" of our work.

Dozens of individuals of all ages, representing different facets of early childhood, spent months working together to craft this locally-focused aspirational framework designed to demonstrate that our youth are our highest priority.

The Rights, adopted and unveiled in 2013, emphasize the importance of all aspects of development: physical, cognitive, behavioral, social and emotional.

Their ultimate purpose? ...to raise awareness and provide a unifying foundation and collective voice for the specific needs and interests of children in our communities.

## Vision Statement

*Children in San Luis Obispo County thrive in nurturing, respectful environments, and enter school healthy and ready to learn.*

## Mission Statement

*The Children and Families Commission of San Luis Obispo County allocates funds and advocates for quality programs and services, supporting children, prenatal to age 5, to ensure that every child is healthy and ready to learn in school.*

## Guiding Principles

- **Respect** Recognize throughout our endeavors the value and respect due to children as individual human beings, and embrace a comprehensive view of child development that encompasses physicality, cognition, behavior, social interaction, and emotions.
- **Collaboration** Mobilize the community around critical issues affecting young children and their families, and identify approaches that begin to meet their highest or broadest needs.
- **Best Practice** Engage in strategies that are supported by evidence, and ensure positive outcomes for children and their families by evaluating program impacts on children and families.
- **Focus** Target specific priority areas, and concentrate activities in order to maximize outcomes. Go “narrow and deep.”
- **Diversity** Recognize and honor the cultural diversity among us by providing outreach to all communities in San Luis Obispo County, including families with special needs or those socially isolated.
- **Design** Engage in an ongoing, dynamic, inclusive, and evolving strategic planning process to meet the changing needs of all communities.

## The People of First 5 SLO County

First 5 SLO County is a “village” it takes to raise our children. In addition to the Commissioners and staff listed on this page, we are made up of community partners (i.e., agencies, organizations, and individuals who work in the various fields that comprise child and family services), parents, and children. All of those involved in our work inform and participate in the activities of First 5 SLO County.

### Commissioners

Bruce Gibson, Chairperson  
Designated Representative  
SLO County Board of Supervisors

Penny Borenstein, M.D., Vice Chairperson  
Designated Representative  
SLO County Public Health Agency

James Brescia, Ed.D.  
Designated Representative  
SLO County Office of Education

Janet Murphy  
Representative at Large  
Community

Lee Collins  
Designated Representative  
SLO County Department of Social Services

Melinda Sokolowski  
Designated Representative  
SLO County Child Care Planning Council

James Forester, D.D.S.  
Medical Representative  
Central Coast Dental Society

Tracy Schiro  
Designated Representative  
SLO County Children’s Services Network

Bob Watt  
Representative at Large  
Coast Unified School District



### Staff

Wendy Wendt  
Executive Director

Jason Wells  
Program Officer

Misty Livengood  
Communications Officer

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*

Margaret Mead

## Snapshot of the First Five Years in SLO County

If you are a child, aged 0-5, living in San Luis Obispo County as of 2015, you are one of 15,691 in that age range, who represent about 6% of the county's population of 280,000. You are as likely to be female as male. Your peers are 50% White, 40% Hispanic/Latino, 4% Multi-Racial, 2.8% Asian, 1.2% Black/African American, 1% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.5% Native American or Native Alaskan.

Your home is nestled mid-way between Los Angeles and the Bay Area in the 15<sup>th</sup> largest county in California. Much of your county is rural and uninhabited, which can make it a challenge to get services like health care and education.



Most of your peers live in two-parent households (83%), while one-in-six live with a single female parent. About half of your age group (53%) live with brothers and/or sisters older than six, and the others (47%) are only-children or live with siblings under six.

Your parents' jobs are probably in retail sales, the service industry, or agriculture. The median income in SLO County in 2014 was \$59,454, or slightly lower than the state as a whole, but the cost-of-living here is quite high. The housing market in SLO County was the eighth least affordable in the country in 2010. Your parents probably rent, and the rent is higher than in many places, because, in SLO County the vacancy rate is 1.7%, compared to 3.7% in Los Angeles or 2.9% in San Francisco.

One-in-eight of your peers' families (12%) in SLO County lived in poverty in 2014, which is up slightly from one-in-ten (10%) four years earlier. The rate for two-parent households was 5%. If you live with a single-parent mom, it's about an even split (47%) that you live in poverty. There almost 780 children your age whose families are enrolled in CalWORKS in SLO County.

*Let us put our heads together,  
and see what life we shall make  
for our children.*

Sitting Bull

### Protective Factors

Evidence shows that families are stronger, more healthy, and better equipped to raise thriving children if the following "protective factors" are in their lives:

Parental Resilience – the capacity to solve problems, sustain trust in relationships, keep a positive attitude, and find help when needed.

Social Connections – a network of friends, family, neighbors and other community members to provide support, wisdom, companionship, and reinforcement of positive relationships.

Concrete Support in Times of Need – access to help during difficult times or in an emergency.

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development – accurate information, and appropriate expectations related to raising children as they grow.

Social and Emotional Competence of Children – support for young children to develop healthy behaviors and relationships, and to be able to communicate emotions and experiences with peers and caregivers.

Another measure of the economic pressure on your family is the number of your older siblings who are in free or reduced lunch programs. The schools call that *socio-economically disadvantaged*, and just under half of the older kids who are in school (44%) qualify in SLO County.

If you are old enough to talk, you probably speak English, but one-in-six of you (16%) is learning both English and Spanish. Speaking Spanish will be a great asset later in life, but will present challenges to success in school in the short term.

If your family needs childcare for you or your siblings, they find it difficult to get and expensive. In 2012 there were only 4,567 slots in licensed facilities for the 13,208 families of children, 0-5, with parents in the workforce. Breaking the ages down, less than half (47%) of preschoolers found a seat in a licensed preschool, and less than one-quarter (22%) of the families with infants/toddlers (those of you who are 2 years and under) found a licensed childcare slot.

If you are in childcare or preschool, it costs your family considerably. Full-time childcare can range from \$9,300 to \$15,000 per year, and preschool can cost between \$6,660 and \$8,900.



*It is easier to build strong children than it is to repair broken men.*

Frederick Douglas

### The Economics of First 5

Investing in our youngest children is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do.

Research shows that high quality early learning programs provide benefits to society of roughly \$8.60 for every \$1 spent. Early childhood education can increase earnings in adulthood. Earnings gains from increased enrollment in early childhood education provide benefits that outweigh the costs of the program.

Early childhood education programs can strengthen parents' attachment to the labor force and increase their earnings potential by providing a safe and nurturing environment that furthers the education and development that parents are providing at home. High-quality, affordable child care can help parents balance work and family responsibilities.

Children who enter school at higher levels of readiness have higher earnings throughout their lives. Any current investment we make now in children will be paid back by the next generation through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship.

Investment in early childhood health can prevent problems before they start, which saves money in the long run. Prenatal care, home visiting programs, developmental screening and referral – these types of efforts are correlated with improved health outcomes for children, by preventing or catching and addressing problems early, resulting in huge cost savings to families and communities.

# How Does First 5 Make a Difference?

## First 5 SLO County's Roles

First 5 SLO County plays a number of roles in working to ensure that our youngest citizens get the best start possible in life. In different contexts we are leaders, followers, listeners, vocal advocates for change, payers, recipients, doers, observers, appraisers, and dreamers.

### Community Convener

First 5 SLO County plays a leadership role, bringing together constituents from throughout the county to address emerging issues. From our first Strategic Plan through efforts such as the School Readiness Initiative, Home Visitation Roundtable, Children's Bill of Rights, public screenings of the documentary, *The Raising of America*, and this current planning process, we have involved our community in all aspects of our work, including needs assessment, planning, advocacy, capacity building, implementation, and evaluation. We have also joined other conveners in projects such as the SLO County Tobacco Coalition, Children's Health Initiative, Martha's Place - Children's Assessment Center, HEAL-SLO, and Quality Counts, SLO County's QRIS initiative.

*While we try to teach our children all about life, our children teach us what life is all about.*

Angela Schwindt

### Advocate

Children don't vote. Those of us who care about and work to benefit children and families need to represent them in the worlds of public opinion and policy. First 5 SLO County works with our communities to develop a strong and focused voice to move systems to adopt child and family-friendly policies and procedures. We desire to mold social norms that actively support investments in the health and wellbeing of children and families. And, we want to ensure that policy makers take concrete actions that put children and families where they belong: at the front of the line.

### Funder



Funds from the *Children and Families First Act* and, occasionally, from other sources, (e.g., First 5 California and private foundations) enable First 5 SLO County to be a major source of support for locally-developed activities that serve children, 0-5, and families. We take this responsibility seriously, and have worked diligently to fund effective activities that contribute to a comprehensive and coordinated system of care to meet unmet needs. We also evaluate all of our activities both to determine their effectiveness and to measure their impacts.

## Strategic Planning Process

The *Children and Families First Act* mandates that a local commission “periodically review its strategic plan, and revise the plan as necessary and appropriate.” First 5 SLO County reviews its strategic plan annually. Revisions come at predetermined intervals. The previous plan, *What Future for Our Children?*, spanned the five-year period from 2011 to 2015. The Commission authorized staff in September 2014 to develop a process and timeline for creating a new strategic plan to begin in 2016.

The Commission directed that the process: 1) begin with the current plan as a foundation, and examine data from the evaluation and other sources; 2) assess community trends regarding gaps in and/or changes in needs related to services; and 3) address areas of interest to Commissioners and their constituents.

The planning that took place between October 2014 and December 2015 occurred at regular Commission meetings, one special meeting, and two separate meetings of four Commission workgroups organized around specific content areas. The plan was:

- **Built on History/Accomplishments**  
Planning began with the foundation of the five current Initiatives and gains made during the past four years.
- **Informed by Data**  
Discussions included data presentations from: Commissioners, the Outcome Evaluation Report, community partners, and public input.
- **Refined through Community Engagement**  
Commissioners engaged in conversations with community partners, other experts in the fields of study, and members of the public.
- **Dynamic and Evolving**  
The Commission intends for the plan to evolve during its four-year duration to adapt to changing needs of conditions in the community.
- **Time-Frame Defined**  
The plan calls for two two-year funding cycles for current partners. New-funded activities will span one and a half years with a potential two-year renewal. The Commission will review the Advocacy Agenda annually, selecting objectives for each year.

*I have found the best way to give advice to your children is to find out what they want to do, and then advise them to do it.*

Harry Truman

### Ongoing Planning

A number of Activities are still in the preliminary stages of planning. Developmental Screening, Home Visitation, and Parent Education & Support will be executed according to the following schedule:

Spring 2016:

- Collect data & conduct meetings with key stakeholders

Spring-Summer 2016:

- Develop plan for support and/or new activities

Summer-Fall 2016:

- Seek consensus and approve plan
- RFP, if necessary

Oct & Dec 2016:

- Develop and approve contracts

Jan 2017:

- Implement activities

This timeline may need to be adjusted based on issues that may arise during the planning process.

# What Does First 5 SLO County Do?

## Strategic Framework

Planning discussions over the course of the past year with Commissioners and stakeholders have built directions and decisions around the following Strategic Framework and that will shape the work of the next four years at First 5 San Luis Obispo County:

### Strategic Framework 2016



*Children see magic because they look for it.*

Christopher Moore

**Common Themes:** These emerged throughout the discussions reflecting the values the Commission embraced for all of their endeavors.

**Asset-Based:** Activities should be positive, and should build upon the strengths of children and their families.

**Early and Sustained:** Activities should be aimed at children as young as possible, and should be sustained throughout early childhood.

**Preventive:** Action should be taken to prevent negative impacts before they occur.

**Shared Investment/Commitment:** Whenever possible activities should be collectively supported in terms of action, resources, and funding by First 5 SLO County, its community partners, and others local stakeholders.

**Social-Emotional Development:** Understanding and expressing one’s own feelings and recognizing and responding to those of others are the basis of establishing and maintaining positive relationships with family, teacher, and peers.

**Whole Family:** All members of the family contribute to a child’s development, and activities that support the family are valuable and to be encouraged.

**Priority Areas:** The following broad categories emerged from early conversations, and were used to organize subsequent planning.

- 1) **Perinatal Readiness:** Efforts that span pregnancy planning through the first six months of life.
- 2) **Child Health and Development:** Efforts that support all aspects of the health of children, ages 0-5 (e.g., physical, oral, mental, etc.)
- 3) **Early Learning:** Efforts that support children, ages 0-5, in learning and in reaching their maximum potential.
- 4) **Family Strengthening:** Efforts that support parents and families in creating supportive and nurturing environments during the first five years of a child's life, and that encourage parent-child interactions that facilitate learning and development.

**Results:** Positive impacts that are desired in health, behavior, and/or circumstances of children and families in each Priority Area.

**Strategies:** Broad groups of activities identified by the Commission that are intended to produce the Results in each Priority Area. Strategies are divided into three complementary types of activities:

**Advocacy:** activities that encourage awareness of the importance of the Priority Areas, and that promote policy and systems change that will lead to a Result.

**Capacity Building:** activities intended to increase the capacity of organizations or individuals to achieve a Result.

**Direct Services:** activities designed to help children and families achieve a Result.

**Resources:** The plan identifies four different sources of the human capital and funding necessary to the implementation of the Strategies.

**First 5 SLO County Funding:** The Commission has allocated funding for each of the Strategies identified in the plan.

**First 5 SLO County Human Capital:** Commissioners and staff will work to provide advocacy for those issues identified in the Advocacy Agenda, as well as overseeing the implementation of Capacity Building and Direct Service activities by community partners funded through First 5 SLO County.

**Community Partners:** Agencies, organizations, and individuals, both funded and unfunded by First 5 SLO County, will provide both human capital and funding to support the Strategies.

**First 5 California Funding:** The State Commission has allocated matching funding for use in implementing activities under the IMPACT SLO program to support quality in early care and education programs.

## PRIORITY AREA: PERINATAL READINESS

Reinforcing the earliest stages of parenthood, from pregnancy planning through the first six months of life.

### RESULTS: Evidence that Families are Ready

- Healthy Newborns
- Healthy Mothers & Families
- Homes Prepared for Newborns (family housed, parent(s) employed, infant essentials available, healthy family relationships)

### STRATEGIES: How First 5 Will Help Get Families There

#### Advocacy – raising public awareness

- Promote Community Supports for Maternal Mental Health
- Prevent Substance Use During Pregnancy
- Increase Prenatal Care during First Trimester

#### Capacity Building – enhancing systems of support

- Home Visitation System Study and Needs Assessment
- Perinatal Mental Health Supports

#### Direct Service – investing in effective programs

- Breastfeeding Support
- Smoking Cessation
- Perinatal Home Visitation



## PRIORITY AREA: CHILD HEALTH & DEVELOPMENT

Promoting young children’s wellness and access to quality care

### RESULTS: Evidence that Children are Thriving and Developing Toward their Individual Potential

- Optimal Physical Health (oral, vision/hearing/speech, mobility, weight)
- Optimal Mental Health (behavioral, cognitive, social/emotional)

### STRATEGIES: How First 5 SLO County Will Help Children Get There

#### Advocacy – raising public awareness

- Build Stronger Developmental Screening and Referral System
- Improve Access to Dental Care for Young Children
- Build Resiliency in Young Children and Protect from Trauma/Abuse/Neglect

#### Capacity Building – enhancing systems of support

- Developmental Screening/Referral Needs Assessment
- Community Education on Early Access to Health Care
- Collaborations in Early Childhood Oral Health



#### Children’s Rights...

... to be and feel safe, everywhere we go

...to visit a doctor dentist or counselor when needed to help us stay physically and mentally healthy

#### Direct Service – investing in effective programs

- Developmental Assessment & Treatment
- Oral Health Screening & Preventive Services
- Vision Screening

#### Adverse Experiences

If nurturing and stimulating experiences produce healthy children, it follows that traumatic and neglectful experiences can harm children. What we are just now learning is that adverse experience in early childhood can have lasting effects throughout a person’s life.

The risk for negative outcomes in later life is directly related to the number of adverse experiences in childhood. These negative outcomes can include: chronic health conditions; risky and antisocial behaviors; and lack of success in education, vocation, and wellbeing.

Providing safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments can prevent, or at least reduce the effects of adverse experiences in childhood.



## PRIORITY AREA: EARLY LEARNING

Ensuring that From Birth, Children Have Rich and Varied Opportunities to Develop Their Minds

### RESULTS: Evidence that Children are Strong, Enthusiastic Learners

- Children Are Developing to Their Unique Learning Potential
- Children Are Ready for School/Community Life and School/Community Is Ready for Children

### STRATEGIES: How First 5 SLO County Will Help Children Get There

#### Advocacy – raising public awareness

- Build Quality and Affordability for local early childhood education; partner with school districts and private sector
- Promote “parent as first teacher” through Talk. Read. Sing. and other campaigns

#### Capacity Building – enhancing systems of support

- Early Childhood Educator Professional Development Network
- Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)
- Expansion of Family Literacy Programs

#### IMPACT SLO

During the next five years First 5 SLO County will be participating in a First 5 CA IMPACT (Improve and Maximize Programs so All Children Thrive) initiative to support quality standards in early care and education (ECE). Helping ECE programs to achieve high-quality standards ensures that more children enter school with the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary to be successful.

Both conventional ECE providers and “alternative sites,” such as libraries, home visiting programs, family resource centers, and non-profits will participate in IMPACT SLO.



Children's Rights...

... to learn ideas and skills that help us understand and be ready for our place in the world

...to explore experiences that illuminate the world's natural beauty, richness, and human creativity – arts, nature, culture, music

#### Direct Service – investing in effective programs

- School Readiness Neighborhoods: *Family Literacy, Activities with local schools, Summer Enrichment*
- Quality Preschools
- All-day Child Care



**PRIORITY AREA: FAMILY STRENGTHENING**

Supporting Parents and Families to Build Stable, Nurturing and Enriching Home Environments for Young Children

**RESULTS: Evidence that Young Children are Being Raised in Safe, Nurturing, Enriching Homes**

- Effective Parenting
- Family Resilience and Health
- Family Self-Sufficiency

**STRATEGIES: How First 5 Will Help Families Get There**

**Advocacy – raising public awareness**

- Support Anti-poverty Initiatives (e.g., affordable housing, minimum wage)
- Promote Family-friendly Workplaces
- Prevent Child Abuse/Neglect

**Capacity Building – enhancing systems of support**

- Needs Assessment to Expand Parent Education and Support

**Direct Service – investing in effective programs**

- Early Childhood Family Advocates
- Individual Family Counseling
- Parent Peer Support/Education Groups
- Peer Support for Parents of Children with Special Needs

*If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales.*

Albert Einstein

**The Word Gap**

Research into the disparity in academic achievement between well-off families and families on welfare found that children in the well-off families heard an average of 2,153 words per hour of conversation.

The children living in families on welfare heard an average of 616. By the age of 4 this difference translates into a cumulative gap of some 30 million words.

The children who were spoken to more often had higher IQ test scores at age three, and performed better in school at ages nine and ten. This suggests significant and lasting impacts of the amount of time parents spend talking, reading, and singing with their children.

Couple these findings with brain development research, and it is reasonable to conclude that the interaction with caregivers helped the well-off children develop more connections in their brains. Just by talking.



**Children's Rights...**

... ..to know that our families and other adults listen and support us while we grow, and respect our diverse cultures, backgrounds, circumstances, talents and sparks



## Summary of Strategic Plan Attachments

### Financial Plan Summary

The Commission takes seriously its role in ensuring First 5 sustainability while maximizing community program funding. The Commission understands that only through strong partnerships and cooperative investments can long-term support of services continue. To that end, the 2016-20 Financial Plan establishes annual program investments beginning in 2016/17 at \$1,808,404 per year. There will be matching funding available from the State Commission for IMPACT SLO, an effort to support quality early care and education. The Commission is proud to support investments in the following priority areas.

Priority Area	Annual Funding
Perinatal Readiness	\$349,071
Child Health & Development	\$438,000
Early Learning	\$602,488
Family Strengthening	\$275,382
Miscellaneous	\$143,517

The complete Financial Plan, 2016 (Attachment A) outlines the ways the commission will use manage its fiscal resources, and invest in community programs/services.

### Advocacy Agenda Summary

The Commission is committed to advancing an advocacy agenda to further strengthen its voice and position as a champion of young children and families. Each year, we will identify one or two issues for significant advocacy efforts during the course of that year. We will continually review ideas and issues related to our priority areas, prioritizing them and, possibly, adding new ones to our Advocacy Agenda. Commissioners, staff, and funded community partners will then engage in advocacy activities for those issues through public speaking, public awareness and information campaigns, social media, and the Commission’s website, etc. The complete Advocacy Agenda, 2016 (Attachment B) outlines the ways the Commission will use its voice to educate and advocate on issues we care deeply about. The Children’s Bill of Rights, Oral Health, Health Access, Family-Friendly Work Places, and our Talk. Read. Sing. campaign have and will continue to be areas where the Commission advocates for positive change.

*The soul is healed by being with children.*  
Fyodor Dostoyevsky

#### Talk. Read. Sing!

*Talk. Read. Sing.* is a First 5 CA public-awareness campaign to promote communitywide understanding of the importance of early and continual interaction between children and their parents and caregivers. The campaign highlights the importance of early brain development, attachment, and bonding.

It uses local media (e.g., radio, television, billboards, social media, bus ads) that tie into statewide advertising. It uses educational materials (e.g., parent and educator toolkits). It uses promotional goodies (e.g., books, musical toys, baby clothes). And, it engages families, businesses, and community leaders.

*Talk. Read. Sing.* encourages parents and caregivers to take time to interact with their young children every day. Beginning at birth!

First 5 SLO County has already begun to engage the community in getting us all to *Talk. Read. Sing.*

## Evaluation Plan Summary

One of the mandates from the Children and Families First Act was for local commissions to conduct an outcome-based evaluation of all of their activities. First 5 SLO County has been dedicated to collecting and providing information on program implementation and program impact.

First 5 SLO County strives to answer the following evaluation questions:

- 1) WHY does this priority/service/investment matter in the world of early childhood?
- 2) WHAT might improve/change as a result of or in correlation with our investment?
- 3) HOW much service/effort/contacts does our investment produce?
- 4) HOW WELL are we delivering the priority/service/investment?

First 5 SLO County develops specific measurable objectives to use as benchmarks for measuring performance. The two major data types we collect are: descriptive data about both the activities undertaken and those who are served by those activities; and outcome data that reflect the impacts of the activities. The complete Evaluation Plan (Attachment C) outlines the ways we work closely with our partners to identify data that answer these questions.



## Acknowledgments

### Thanks to our Strategic Planning and Evaluation Consultant

Thomas Keifer Consulting

### Thanks to Our Former Commissioners

K. H. "Katcho" Achadjian, René Bravo, Carol Capito, Julian Crocker, Don Dennison, Joel Diringer, Stephen Hansen, Ellen Harper, Adman Hill, Debbie Jeter, Mary Kern, Laura King, Kathy Long, Michael Mc Nerney, Julia Miller, Rosalinda Rodriguez, Elizabeth "Biz" Steinberg, and Gregory Thomas

### Thanks to Our Former Staff

Susan Hughes, Christine Burkett, Season Conlan, Armando Corrella, Vanessa DeBum, Deb Hossli, Pam Ray, Anne Tognazzini-Collins, and Amanda Wilson,

### Thanks to All of Our Community Partners, Staff, & Programs

ALPHA Pregnancy & Parenting Support Program; ASI Children's Programs; Best Care Pharmacy; Boyle Construction; Brooks Childcare; Cal Poly Foundation; California HealthCare Foundation; Center for Family Strengthening; Child Care Planning Council; Child Care Resource Connection; Children's Health Initiative of SLO County; City of Arroyo Grande; Community Action Partnership of SLO County; Community Health Centers of the Central Coast; Consumer Credit; Cuesta College Foundation; Easter Seals, Tri-Counties; General Hospital; Head Start; EOC Homeless Shelter; Even Start; French Hospital; Gary Englund; Hopkins Family Childcare; Julie's Family Childcare; Kaleidoscope Kids; Life Steps Foundation; Lion's Club of SLO; Literacy Council of SLO; Little Blossoms; Little Steps; Lucia Mar Unified School District; Magda Williams; New Dawn Center; Nipomo Recreation Center; Parents Helping Parents; Partnership for the Children of SLO County; Paso Robles Housing Authority; Paso Robles Library; Paso Robles Public Schools; Patrick J. Spalding; Pediatric Physical Therapy Services; Project H.O.P.E.; Ramsey Family Daycare; RS Productions; S.T.A.R.S. Preschool; SLO Symphony; Shooting Stars; SLO County Behavioral Health; SLO County Dept. of Social Services; SLO County Drug & Alcohol Services; SLO County Libraries; SLO County Office of Education; SLO County Preventive Health Program; SLO County Public Health Dept.; Step by Step Childcare Center; The California Endowment; Tolosa Children's Dental Clinic; Treehouse Kid Kare; University of California Extension; and Village Children's Center.



And, Thanks to the Children, Their Parents, Siblings, Caregivers, Families, Friends, and Neighbors!