

Significant Issues Report — November/December 2004

Children's Network News

Coordinator for Constructing Connections Program Hired

The Children's Network recently hired Steve Dodini as the new Child Care Facilities Development Coordinator for the Constructing Connections Program. Steve's office will be located at Solano Family and Children's Services in order to be more accessible to child care providers. The Constructing Connections Program will create a local, streamlined process for child care facilities financing and development, and improve access to quality child care and child development services. The project's ultimate goal is to ensure a strong local economy in the future, reduce future government spending, and produce an overall higher quality of life for members of the community.

Constructing Connections is also designed to create and/or strengthen partnerships between the child care community and businesses, real estate developers, government agencies, community developers and others for the purpose of a more efficient and cost-effective development of quality child care spaces. The program will also integrate child care facilities development into cities and county land use planning, community development programs, zoning and permit processes, and transportation plans.

Constructing Connections is part of the Affordable Buildings for Children's Development (ABCD) Project and is made possible by funds and in-kind contributions from First 5 California, First 5 Solano, the California Department of Education, Solano Family and Children's Services, and The Children's Network of Solano County.

Children of Incarcerated Parents to Benefit From Two Local Programs

- Last July, The Children's Network submitted a proposal to Craig Abaya, head of San Francisco State's Digital Video Intensive Multimedia Studies program, suggesting featuring the Children's Network in a student promotional video and/or public service announcement. In November, Mr. Abaya selected as a video subject The Reading Connections Project instituted by the Children of Incarcerated Parents program, and assigned the video project to DVI student Allison Kristal. Allison met with members of the Children of Incarcerated Parents (ChIP's) program on December 8th, and has already begun initial filming at the Solano County Jail. Allison will continue working with the ChIP's committee until the completion of the grant project in April.
- Barnes & Noble of Fairfield has selected the Children of Incarcerated Parents program as recipients of their book gift giving tree in November and December. So far, over 2000 books have been donated to Solano County children of incarcerated parents.

November Council Meeting Highlights Local Mentoring Programs

In order to increase stakeholder knowledge about mentoring programs available to Solano County Children, Arthelle Porter-Davis from Fighting Back Partnership in Vallejo presented information on the Solano Mentor Collaborative at the Council's November meeting. Arthelle noted that the Mentor Collaborative began in 1997 in collaboration with Fighting Back Partnership, and their role is to recruit, screen, train and certify mentors for other organizations within the county. To date, they have recruited over 300 mentors who volunteer one to two hours per week for a one year commitment and serve within two basic categories: assistance and transformative. Most mentors fall into the category of assistance mentoring, which is non-intensive, such as help provided in after-school programs. Transformative mentoring is more intensive and requires much more experience in dealing with challenged youth. Identified mentoring service gaps and challenges in Solano County are in the areas of foster youth, emancipated youth and special needs youth.

Becky Billing also presented information about the Special Friends Program of Benicia Unified School District. This program, which has been in existence in Benicia for almost 20 years, builds resilience in children by linking at-risk students in kindergarten through third grade with a caring adult in a school-based, non-directive play setting. These adults are trained, supervised paraprofessionals who meet with the children for 40 minutes per week for approximately 12 weeks. Due to budget cuts, the program is currently being financially supported by the City of Benicia. The school district was recently able to use this funding as a match to secure additional program funds from the California Department of Mental Health, Early Mental Health Initiative. At different times through the years, as monies became available, other school districts within the county have utilized similar programs; however, it appears that Benicia is the only district currently using this model. *For further information, contact Becky Billing at cares@childnet.org.*

Solano Children's Alliance Update

- A Request for Proposal (RFP) for child abuse prevention mini-grants was issued in December, with a January 2005 filing deadline. Through this RFP process, \$110,000 from the Solano County Children's Trust Fund will be allocated for one-time only grants up to \$25,000 to community-based child abuse prevention programs that provide services to children ages 0-18. RFP's can be downloaded from the Children's Network website: www.childnet.org. Completed RFP's must be received by the Children's Network by 5:00 p.m. on January 21, 2005 in order to be considered.
- Members of the Alliance continue the planning process for the next funding cycle for CAPIT/PSSF/CTF/CBCAP funds. In November, the Alliance received a report from members of the Family Resource Center Network on the accomplishments and results of the past 3-year funding cycle. In December, the Alliance focused their discussion on community priorities, opportunities and challenges, gaps in services, and opportunities to enhance community partnerships. The next step is to convene a smaller planning group in January to discuss funding priorities in detail, then return to the Alliance meeting in February, 2005 with recommendations for funding and priorities for the next three year cycle. *For further information, contact Rosemary Kennedy at cnc@childnet.org.*

United Way Awards Grant to Family Resource Centers

The United Way of the Bay Area granted \$25,000 to the Children's Network and two Family Resource Centers to pilot a campaign called *Earn It! Keep It! Save It! Solano* that will assist low income families in filing their taxes and obtaining the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and child tax credit. Fighting Back Partnership's Sereno Village FRC and Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District's Fairfield FRC will utilize certified volunteers to provide families with free tax assistance from February 1 to April 15, 2005. The Internal Revenue Service estimated that, in the 2002 tax year, at least 6,000 families living in Solano County who were eligible to receive EITC did not apply for it, resulting in a loss of an estimated \$8.9 million for Solano families. *For more information on the pilot project or EITC, please contact Jenny Ocón at cnfrv@childnet.org.*