

Significant Issues — October/November 2005

Solano County Among America's 100 Best Communities for Youth

On September 26, 2005, America's Promise – The Alliance for Youth named Solano County as one of America's 100 Best Communities for Young People as a result of its nationwide search for communities working to help young people succeed. In this issue, we report on the on-going and collaborative efforts of The Children's Network and its various partners within our community that have contributed to this esteemed recognition.

Children's
Network

Children's Network

According to America's Promise, Solano County was selected as one of America's 100 best communities for young people “in part, because Solano residents support the value of collaboration,” and noted the work of “The Children's Network, a private nonprofit organization that is designated by the County Board of Supervisors to advise on children's issues and produce the Solano Children's Report Card and the Solano Children's Budget to aide in decision making for programs for young people.” The most recent Solano County Children's Report Card was produced in 2004 under a grant from The California Endowment. Children's Network is currently preparing an update that we anticipate will be available in December, 2005.

Work of other key partners include the Solano Coalition for Better Health, the agency responsible for taking the lead in making Solano the county with the highest rate of children covered by health insurance, Solano County Health and Human Services, First 5 Solano, and The Children's Network's three Board appointed councils: the Children's Alliance, the Local Child Care Planning Council, and the Child Abuse Prevention Council.

The Family Support Services Initiative

As stated above, Solano County was selected as one of America's 100 best communities for young people “in part, because Solano residents support the value of collaboration.” Criteria for determining the 100 Best Communities included the existence of “one or more standing, cross-sector collaborations working on behalf of children and youth.” The Family Support Services Initiative (FSSI), a First Five funded collaborative, is one such collaborative now in it's fifth year of operation in Solano County. FSSI is a multidisciplinary, countywide effort to provide seamless family support services through home visits to isolated, at-risk families and their children ages 0-5. The collaborative, coordinated by the Children's Network, includes representatives from each of the Family Resource Centers, Child Protective Services, Public Health, and 26 additional child serving agency and organizational partners throughout Solano County.

In addition to the referral process and services currently offered, the Family Support Services Initiative is working toward incorporating new, First Five funded mental health components provided by Families First, Children's Nurturing Project and Child Start. Additional steps are being taken to adopt proposed First Five funded Substance Abuse Services and collaborative participation in the Child Welfare Services Differential Response/Breakthrough Collaborative Team and Family to Family Planning, as well as coordination efforts with the Solano Pre-Natal Collaborative and SPAV/Kaiser Domestic Violence Project.

Solano Parenting Partnership

Promise One of the five “America's Promises” is for all young people to have ongoing relationships with caring adults who offer youth support, care, and guidance. Quality parenting education programs give parents tools to care for their children with support, love, and appropriate discipline. The Solano

Parenting Partnership utilizes research-based parenting programs and best practice approaches to help parents make safe homes and healthy environments in which their children can grow and thrive.

Because all families are different, the Parenting Partnership networks with practitioners from many fields. Membership is drawn from schools, the courts, probation, mental health, child welfare, substance abuse prevention & treatment, family resource centers, early childhood education, law enforcement, city & county government, and community based organizations.

The Solano Parenting Partnership fosters collaboration through:

- General meetings to network, increase appropriate referrals, and share best practices.
- The creation & maintenance of an on-line, searchable Parenting Database, available at www.childnet.org. Children's Network maintains the database and provides training in its use; providers at agencies throughout the county enter and update their classes in the database, and practitioners and families county-wide utilize the database to match families to appropriate parenting classes according to their needs.
- Institutionalization of research-based parenting curricula. In October 2005, in partnership with Youth & Family Services and with funding from First 5 Solano Children & Families Commission, the Solano Parenting Partnership trained 30 local child-serving professionals to facilitate the evidence-based Nurturing Parenting Program. In exchange for Partnership-sponsored training assistance, nationally-recognized Trainer/Consultants Sue Galvez and Debbie Welinske of Youth & Family Services have provided training to the Partnership at no charge.

The Solano Parenting Partnership is made possible in part by a grant from First 5 Solano Children and Families Commission. For more information, contact Nicole Bandy, (707) 421-7229 x108, nicole@childnet.org.

Children's
Alliance

Children's Alliance

When Solano County applied for recognition as one of the 100 Best Communities for Young People, the application noted that the Solano Board of Supervisors receives input from the county-wide Children's Alliance "which bring(s) together policy leaders and practitioners to articulate the Board's vision in the form of services that are ever more integrated, collaborative, holistic and inclusive." In Solano County, the Children's Alliance is the agency established under SB 997, the Presley-Brown Interagency Children's Services Act. In this role, the Alliance analyzes budgets and policies, makes recommendations to local and state leaders and apportions funds earmarked for Solano children and families. For instance, the Alliance is responsible for planning and directing PSSF, CAPIT, CBCAP and CTF allocations, supporting community-based Family Support Services throughout the County.

In 1995, the Alliance created a county-wide network of Family Resource Centers (FRCs). Working closely with organizations that reach families (such as the FRCs), and with government to set spending priorities, the Alliance identifies emerging and continuing areas of need for children's services.

Specifically, in 2000, the Alliance was responsible for developing the County's Master Plan for All Children Ready to Learn, and is presently in the process of reviewing that document, evaluating outcomes, and developing a new plan that builds synergistically on the planning efforts of community partners including First 5 Solano, SCBH and SKIP, MSA, MHSA, MCAH, CWS Redesign, Substance Abuse Redesign, the FRC Network, and others.

Family Resource Center Network

In keeping with the 100 Best Communities criteria, Solano County offers one of the best examples of community collaboration around the priority of children and families — the Family Resource Center Network. There are currently nine Family Resource Centers (FRCs) located in each of Solano's seven cities. Each practice a set of Family Support Principles which make children and the families that care for them their top priority. Culture, diversity, openness, fairness, dignity, accountability and teamwork are their core principles and the key to FRC Networks' success. The FRCs' focus on community partnerships, cutting edge technology, and shared best practices is one reason Solano County is drawing national recognition. Many of their success stories were specifically referred to in the 100 Best Communities award.

As mentioned in the 100 Best Communities application, Vallejo's Fighting Back Partnership FRCs provide a forum for youth voices and engagement in a host of community projects and issues. Teens from FBP have partnered with local police and the Alcohol Beverage Control Board to ensure local merchants refrain from selling alcohol and tobacco to underage youth. Vallejo's FRCs also collaborate with local schools on an annual Calendar Art Contest. This is an arena for youth to develop their own anti-substance abuse message for their community. Their Youth Partnership hosts a Candidates Forum to address issues presented by members of various Vallejo youth groups. "Project TOKEN" (Teen Outreach: Knowledge & Education for Neighbors) is a research-based, youth-driven project with the goal of promoting the healthy futures of youth ages 12-18, in collaboration with the 4-H program and other partnerships. A corps including ten teens will be recruited to develop a logo, poster design, website, PowerPoint presentation, issue booklet and pocket resource guide as well as a PSA media campaign. A team will also train others to do teen-to-teen outreach to increase awareness and share information about health services.

Other FRC success stories were also mentioned in the application. Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District maintains a long-term Healthy Start site at the Anna Kyle Elementary School in Fairfield, offering a multitude of family support services.

Through the Rio Vista Family Resource Center, "My Rio Vista" engaged parents and youth in a successful effort to establish a radio station for interns from the local high school to learn broadcasting skills. On January 28, 2005, the radio station went live, with a professional DJ (from 96.1 FM) guiding two Rio Vista High School Seniors through a live show.

The home visiting program, supported through the Family Resource Center Network, helped 22 families in crisis move from "high-risk" to "stable" in the Family Development Matrix assessment in 2003-04. Altogether, the FRCs served over 4,000 families last year. When asked to rate the outcome/impact of the service, for both the participant and the participant's family, 96% reported an excellent, very good, or good impact/outcome as opposed to a fair or poor result. Testimonials like these demonstrate the FRCs' positive effect on Solano County residents:

"Thank you! I didn't know the Family Resource Center had such referrals for schooling, parenting issues and food, rent, etc. This is a great program for opportunity and growth." (Vacaville First FRC)

"They helped me when nobody else would." (Fairfield Healthy Start FRC)

Bringing stability to families is a crucial aspect of ensuring the safety of children. Through tracking and sharing research data, the FRCs have identified the extent to which the issue of poverty affects the stability and functioning of the families they serve. Two programs are now in place to assist families who struggle with poverty -- the "Earn It! Keep It! Save It!" program and the Investing in Families program.

This year, two FRCs piloted the “Earn It! Keep It! Save It!” project with the United Way of the Bay Area and Wells Fargo, resulting in over \$117,700 in aide for Solano County's low-income working families. The Investing in Families program is designed so FRCs can better assist low income families in accessing economic resources, achieving self-sufficiency, and building assets which in turn will ultimately promote the economic vitality of our local communities. Through networking, the FRCs will continue to respond to urgent symptoms of poverty, and use programs like these to develop systems of prevention and policy change.

Child Abuse Prevention Council

Promise Two of the five “America’s Promises” is for all young people to have safe places to learn and play. Giving children a safe start in life is everybody's business and community members must partner with families and public child protection and other agencies to give families the services and support they need. In Solano County, partnerships of public and private agencies, professionals, and residents are working together to help prevent abuse and neglect, respond quickly and effectively when it does occur, and reduce the re-occurrence of child maltreatment through individualized family interventions.

The Child Abuse Prevention Council informs, trains and advises the community on keeping children safe from harm. The Council's purpose is to: provide a forum for interagency cooperation and coordination in the prevention, detection, treatment, and legal processing of child abuse cases; promote public awareness of the abuse and neglect of children and the resources available for intervention and treatment; encourage and facilitate training of professionals in the detection, treatment, and prevention of child abuse and neglect; recommend improvements in services to families and victims; and encourage and facilitate community support for child abuse and neglect programs.

On October 17, the Council held a Strategic Planning Session at the Solano County Administrative Center in Fairfield to discuss how best to ensure the safety, well being and protection of all children and families in Solano County through effective child abuse prevention and support of intervention and treatment. As a result of this session, the Council will create a positive, workable, collaborative plan of action, timeline, and membership commitment for 2005-2006. In addition, the Council will establish priorities in order to facilitate better integration of child abuse services within Solano County, and will utilize this plan to provide advice and recommendations to the Board of Supervisors throughout the year regarding the necessary adoption and implementation of policies and actions. (All planning on behalf of the Child Abuse Prevention Council will take into account its reduced resources resulting from the county’s decrease in funds to support the work of the Council.)

The Affordable Buildings for Children’s Development (ABCD) Constructing Connections Program of Solano County

“Constructing Connections,” a local effort led by The Children’s Network to strengthen the child care facilities infrastructure, was one of the programs identified in Solano County’s application for consideration as one of the 100 Best Communities for Youth. The Solano County Child Care Planning Council created the Constructing Connections Subcommittee in February of 2005. The charge of this committee is to create more efficient and cost effective strategies for the development of more quality child care spaces by forming strong connections and collaborations between the child care community and other key stakeholders. The collaborative currently consists of representatives from transportation, affordable housing, the Small Business Development Center, the Community College, City Planning Departments, City Economic Development Departments, Solano County Health and Social Services, real estate developers, funders, a variety of child care groups, and others.

The collaborative has met four times to identify the current resources and barriers to facilities

development, and is working toward determining the target areas for new child care centers in the community. The Child Care Facilities Development and Financing Resource Guide is the most recent product of the collaborative and is available at the Children's Network website, www.childnet.org. This guide was created to take interested parties through the facilities development process and provide them with resources that can help along the way.

Children's Network staff has also met with a variety of city and county representatives and most recently provided a project overview and recommendations at the City & County Planning Directors meeting. Members of the collaborative will join staff at future meetings with individual jurisdictions to determine the best strategy for each community.

The Constructing Connections program of Solano County is made possible by ABCD Constructing Connections, a program of the Low Income Investment Fund with major funding from First 5 CA, and by a grant from First 5 Solano Children and Families Commission, and contributions from Solano Family and Children's Services, the California Department of Education (CDE), and the Children's Network. For more information, contact Kim Johnson, Child Care Programs Director, (707) 421-7229.

Solano Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Educational Standards (CARES)

The Solano CARES Initiative, a project of the Child Care Planning Council and administered by The Children's Network, is gearing up for its fifth program year. As cited in the America's 100 Best Communities application, this program has reduced the early childhood education workforce turnover among program participants to 4 percent annually (compared to 26 percent for the child care workforce overall.) During the course of the past four years, over 1,372 stipends have been issued to 650 members, or over twenty-five percent, of the licensed child care and development workforce. The stipend provides an incentive to increase educational levels as well as remain in the field, thereby improving the quality of child care and development services available to children and families throughout Solano County.

Over the past year, First 5 California has redesigned the structure of the program as they move toward their goal of Preschool for All in California (which includes a bachelor degree requirement for teachers.) The more prescriptive program design has included a list of supports that CARES programs must offer participants, such as tutoring assistance, translation services, assistance with applying for a Child Development Permit, developing professional growth plans, links to financial aid and scholarship, more accessible training/education, and more.

The Child Care Planning Council has utilized the CARES Advisory Committee, which they created in 2001 when the program began, to improve the programs' policies and procedures and determine how to best implement the new program design. The Advisory Committee is composed of Center Directors, teachers, family child care providers, representatives from the local community college, representatives from the Early Childhood Education Advisory Committee, Child Care Resource and Referral staff, and others. Together, this collaborative has been successful in making the transition as smooth as possible for members of the workforce. Over 320 center staff and family child care providers have indicated an interest in participating in the program this year.

Solano CARES is made possible by grants from the First 5 Solano Children and Families Commission, First 5 California, and the California Department of Education. For more information, contact Kim Johnson, Child Care Programs Director, (707) 421-7229.