



Learning Community Update

Promoting Child and Family Well-being

Summer 2013

Best Start is Alive and Well

On June 26, 2013, Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas hosted a special meeting of the First 5 LA Commission focusing specifically on Best Start implementation. Best Start, a cornerstone of First 5 LA's Strategic Plan for 2009-15, is intended to improve the lives of young children and their families by positively impacting the systems and environments in which they live, learn and play. Since its adoption in 2010, Commission support for this place-based initiative has appeared to waver and work in some of the Best Start communities seemed to have stalled. As a result, there was a high level of interest in this meeting and attendees included Commissioners, representatives of community-based agencies, County departments, parents, and community stakeholders.

At the close of the meeting, there was a renewed commitment to Best Start and the Commission adopted the "*Building Stronger Families*" framework. This framework represents important refinements to Best Start, including a focus on intermediate outcomes and strategies informed by research and experience to support the relationship between activities and family- and child-level outcomes, achievable within the proposed five to ten years time-frame, promotes active participation of parents and communities in creating change, and allows measurement of progress.

Building Stronger Families Framework

Research by the Center for the Study of Social Policy has shown that families thrive when the Protective Factors are robust in their lives and communities. Strong families provide the context for children's optimal growth and development. The *Building Stronger Families* framework incorporates the Protective Factors into the *core family results*:

1. Families demonstrate resilience, parental knowledge and positive relationships that support their children's social and emotional competence.
2. Families participate in positive social networks that provide multiple opportunities for mutual support and leadership development.
3. Families access concrete supports that meet their needs.

Similarly, families thrive in the context of neighborhoods and communities that support parents in raising their children by enhancing their social connections and offering concrete supports and opportunities. Best Start will work in communities to develop the following *core community results*:

1. Neighborhoods and communities establish a common vision and act collectively to improve the policies, services and environments that build family protective factors and influence the availability of concrete services.

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Strengthening Families Learning Community Members

Chief Executive Office
Child Care Resource Center
Department of Children and Family Services
First 5 LA
Friends of the Family
Department of Health
Department of Mental Health
Department of Parks and Recreation
Department of Public Health
Department of Public Social Services
Los Angeles County Office of Education
Magnolia Community Initiative
Policy Roundtable for Child Care
Probation Department
Public Library
In partnership with
Casey Family Programs

The Protective Factors

*are the foundation of the
Strengthening Families
Approach*

- ◆ Parental resilience
- ◆ Social connections
- ◆ Knowledge of parenting and child development
- ◆ Concrete support in times of need
- ◆ Social and emotional competence of children

Research has shown that children and families thrive when the Protective Factors are robust in their lives and communities.

2. Neighborhoods and communities establish and sustain opportunities for families to interact regularly in positive social networks and safe community spaces that encourage social interaction and promote healthy living.
3. Neighborhoods and communities develop and sustain services and supports that meet family needs, including high quality services and opportunities for educational success.

Accountability Framework

First 5 LA will define and use an Accountability framework anchored in the core family and community results in order to ensure that the investment in the *Building Stronger Families* framework is making a positive difference. This Accountability framework includes four levels:

Level One: Population Conditions – Monitoring population-based indicators for Los Angeles County and each of the Best Start communities. While these broad measures such as health status, poverty and environmental conditions are beyond the scope of Best Start, they provide stakeholders with an understanding of the context.

Level Two: Core Results for Communities – Tracking progress toward the core community results and movement toward collective action that contributes to the building of stronger families.

Level Three: Core Results for Families – Tracking progress made in strengthening family capacities, social connections and concrete supports.

Level Four: Performance Measures and Learning – Tracking performance milestones and understanding what was done, who was involved, and what happened.

Implementation Considerations

It is anticipated that under the *Building Stronger Families* framework, First 5 LA will continue to support activities in the areas of parent/community collaboration, organizational capacity building, and policy and systems changes. In addition, a “direct family strengthening services” category may be added to support the *Building Stronger Families* framework. Should funding become available under this new category, specific parameters will be established to guide funding decisions.

Next Steps

Consistent with Board direction, First 5 LA staff will be reporting back in September on three things: 1) an implementation timeline; 2) an initial analysis of community partnership readiness; and 3) a recommended approach to Best Start community plan funding. More information on the results of the June 26th and the upcoming September 12th meetings are available at www.first5LA.org.

I now see the goal of Best Start is not a band aid; it's a cure.
- Best Start Parent

Best Start communities:

Central Long Beach
 Metro LA
 Compton
 East Compton
 East Los Angeles (includes City Terrace, Commerce and parts of Monterey Park)
 El Monte
 South El Monte
 Lancaster
 Pacoima
 Palmdale
 Panorama City
 South Los Angeles/Broadway-Manchester
 South Los Angeles/West Athens
 Southeast L.A. County Cities (including Bell, Cudahy, Bell Gardens and Maywood)
 Watts
 Willowbrook
 Wilmington

Recommended Viewing

THE RAISING OF AMERICA is producing an ensemble of documentaries and multimedia tools linking early child development to a more prosperous and equitable nation. The television documentary for PBS broadcast and the shorter episodes will be supported by interactives, discussion guides, handouts, action toolkits and other companion materials. For more information, visit www.raisingofamerica.org/documentary-and-online-learning-center.

How do We Know if We are Making a Difference?

We are working hard, our hearts are in the right place, yet it is not always easy to answer the question – are we making a difference? Are we working as effectively as we can with children and families? On a good day – we offer a resounding yes... and on the not such a good day we may just duck the question all together.

The California Network of Family Strengthening Networks (CNFSN) confronted this challenge and produced the *Standards for Quality for Family Strengthening & Support*. These Standards are designed to be used by a broad range of programs, and can inform the processes for planning, implementing and assessing the quality of services.

CNFSN devoted 18 months to developing and vetting the standards. This was seen as a strategic investment towards defining and promoting quality practice for organizations working with families. The work paid off and the standards were unanimously approved by the CNFSN membership in 2012. The standards build on the work of the Center for the Study of Social Policy and Family Support America and are organized into the following five sections:

- *Family Centeredness*: Working with a family-centered approach that values and recognizes families as integral to the program.
- *Family Strengthening*: Utilizing a family strengthening approach to support families to be strong, healthy and safe, thereby promoting their optimal development.
- *Embracing Diversity*: Acknowledging and respecting families' diversity, supporting their participation in a diverse society, as well as engaging in ongoing learning and adaptation to diversity.
- *Community Building*: Contributing to building a strong and healthy community by facilitating families' social connections, developing their leadership skills, and by collaborating with other programs.
- *Evaluation*: Looking at areas of program strength, as well as areas for further development, in order to guide continuous quality improvement and achieve positive results for families.

Drilling down within these sections, there are 17 standards and each standard has a set of indicators for "minimum quality" and "high quality". The accompanying Program Self-Assessment Tool is designed to be used in reflective processes that asks how the minimum and high quality indicators are met, what potential action items are related to each indicator and, finally, mapping where the program falls on the continuum with respect to each indicator, ranging from "Not yet addressed" to "Meets Minimum and Meets High Quality".

The standards go a long way to connecting theory to practice and also connect practice to the "movement for social change that urges policymakers, service providers, parents and employers to take responsibility for improving the lives of children and families and for ensuring that they get what they need to succeed." For more information on these standards, including certification training opportunities, visit the California Network of Family Strengthening Networks website at www.cnfsn.org.

More Resources

- The Center for the Study of Social Policy recently released *Core Meanings of the Strengthening Families Protective Factors* available at www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families/2013/Core-Meanings-of-the-SF-Protective-Factors.pdf, a companion piece to the new *Protective Factors Briefs*, downloadable from www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families/2013/SF-All-5-Protective-Factors.pdf. The documents delve deeper into the meaning of each of the Protective Factors.
- The May 2013 edition of the ZERO TO THREE Journal is all about early childhood mental health consultation as a strategy to support professionals working with young children and their families across a variety of settings and disciplines. To order, visit www.zerotothree.org.

Affordable Care Act

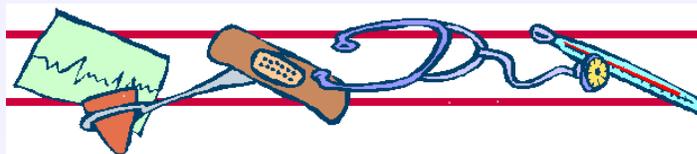
At the June 18, 2013 meeting of the Strengthening Families Learning Community, Karen Bernstein with the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services presented information on local implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Committee members walked away from this presentation with new information and a much deeper appreciation for the administrative challenges confronting the Department of Health Services!

The ACA will provide many families with access to health services, a critically important concrete support that has been out of reach for many. Starting in 2014, Medi-Cal eligibility will expand to all adults under 138 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) who are citizens or legal residents for five years. Children up to 250 percent will be eligible for Medi-Cal (children currently enrolled in Healthy Families are now being transitioned into Medi-Cal). Individuals with income between 133 and 400 percent FPL will be eligible to participate in the Health Benefit Exchange under “Covered California”, which will offer different plan levels through existing insurance providers. Subsidies will be based on family size and income.

Additional ACA provisions effective January 1, 2014 will prohibit annual coverage limits, may not exclude adults with pre-existing conditions, will limit waiting periods for coverage to 90 days, and will maintain Medicaid eligibility for foster children aging out of the child welfare system through age 26. Other ACA provisions are already helping families. Parents now receive coverage for their children up to age 26, there is a prohibition on lifetime benefits limits, and insurers may not refuse coverage based on pre-existing conditions in children.

Because the ACA includes expanded benefits for Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder services, collaborative efforts between DHS, Public Health and Mental Health are underway. There is much more to come on this issue and we will bring that information as it becomes available.

Covered California is California’s new insurance marketplace through which millions of Californians will be able to choose affordable, high quality health coverage. Information on the various health care plans is currently available for review at <http://www.coveredca.com>.



Upcoming Events

Early Intervention Training Institute, a project of the Los Angeles Child Care Guidance Center, is offering a training opportunity—*Core Competency: Brain Development, Attachment and Trauma*—on August 22, 2013 from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Early interventionists, clinicians, and others who work with children 0-5 are encouraged to attend. Cost to attend is \$109 (\$99 before July 31, 2013). For more information and to register, visit www.eitraining.org.

Grandparents as Parents will be hosting their 11th Annual Professional Conference, “Trauma Informed Care: Through the Lens of Relative Caregivers” on October 21, 2013 from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Special keynote speaker is Father “Greg” Boyle. Cost to attend is \$80 (\$70 by August 20, 2013). For more information and to register, call (818) 264-0880 or e-mail Carmen Garcia at cgarcia@grandparentsasparents.org.

Your Thoughts

Learning Community Update is a publication of the Office of Child Care located within the Service Integration Branch of the Chief Executive Office. Comments? Send to msartell@ceo.lacounty.gov.