



FIRST 5 SANTA CRUZ COUNTY



ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT



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EQUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS

First 5 supports all young children and their families in Santa Cruz County, while prioritizing efforts that are responsive to the needs of the county's diverse community, and which have been shaped by community voice, and focus on eliminating disparities based on race, ethnicity, language, income, and other characteristics. In that context, First 5 seeks to strengthen the early childhood system of care by:

- **Leveraging** Prop 10 resources to create, strengthen, or fill gaps in service delivery systems;
- **Supporting** community initiatives, training, data sharing, community events, and capacity-building projects;
- **Implementing** and **evaluating** evidence-based and research-informed programs and practices;
- **Facilitating** collaboration among public, nonprofit, and private partners in order to connect siloed systems and services;
- **Serving** as the backbone for collective impact collaboratives, such as Quality Counts Santa Cruz County and Thrive by 5;
- **Advocating** for policies and budgets that prioritize early childhood; and
- **Convening** partners to implement local solutions that address and integrate systems and policy changes initiated at the local, state, and federal levels.

For over 20 years, these service integration and systems building functions have become a cornerstone of First 5's strategy to promote and create an equitable and sustainable early childhood system of care in Santa Cruz County. Central to that strategy is the role that First 5 plays leading the coordination and evaluation of the county-wide Thrive by 5 initiative in partnership with the Human Services Department and the Health Services Agency, with guidance from an Advisory Committee established by the First 5 Santa Cruz County Commission. In addition to Thrive by 5, First 5 has expanded the implementation of its communications plan, supported multiple community engagement activities, and continues to play an active role in systems-building efforts led by First 5 partners.



Equitable,
Sustainable Early
Childhood System

- Increased coordination and integration among organizations and sectors serving young children and families
- Increase in local, state, and federal policies and legislation that prioritize prevention, early intervention, and equity for young children and their families
- Increase in local, state, and federal funding to sustain and institutionalize investments in the early childhood system of care

Thrive by 5



In January 2017, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors established the Thrive by Three (TbT) Early Childhood Fund as a dedicated funding source and a comprehensive local initiative to improve outcomes and indicators for the County's youngest children and their families. In May 2022, the Board of Supervisors approved a proposal to expand the scope and purpose of the TbT Fund to Thrive by 5 (Tb5). This created greater consistency and opportunities for alignment with other early childhood initiatives and funding streams. Since that time First 5 and its Thrive by 5 partners have adopted the following updated set of strategic goals and community-level impacts and indicators:

Children and families are healthy

- Early access to prenatal care
- Healthy births
- Preventive health care
- Access to nature, open space

Children and families are ready for kindergarten

- Access to quality child care and early learning programs

Children live in safe, nurturing families

- Assets that promote resilience
- Safe families and home

Families have resources to support children's optimal development

- Economic security and stable housing

In fiscal year 2024-25, First 5 and its Thrive by 5 partners have:

- Convened four meetings of the Thrive by 5 Advisory Committee focusing on key topics, including updates on the Nurse Family Partnership program as well as implementation of the HealthySteps program within Santa Cruz Community Health and Salud Para La Gente. Other topics the Committee focused on during the year included the Santa Cruz County Oral Health Access Strategic Plan, the Semillitas college savings account program, the Families Together program, supporting immigrant families with young children, and the First 5 Santa Cruz County Strategic Plan. In addition to serving as the Community Advisory Board for the Nurse Family Partnership program, the Advisory Committee served in a similar advisory role for the Trauma Informed Approach (TIA) Field Nursing program, both run by Santa Cruz County Public Health.
- Continued to convene the Tb5 Learning Collaborative for Thrive by 5 partners, focused on a range of topics including the Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program, Cabrillo College Student Services, financial literacy, the Semillitas program, collaboration between early care

and education programs and home visiting programs in the County, and partnering to support families experiencing homelessness.

- Continued to convene a Coordinated Entry Workgroup focused on supporting and enhancing the process of referring CalWORKs participants to the four home visiting programs in Santa Cruz County.
- Enrolled 414 families of children from prenatal to age 5 in one of four home visiting programs in the County (Nurse Family Partnership, TIA Field Nursing, Families Together, or Early Head Start Home Visiting).
- Continued to support integration, growth, and improvement of the HealthySteps program within the Thrive by 5 system of care. HealthySteps is an interdisciplinary, evidence-based pediatric primary care program that served 3,515 children in FY 2024-25 at Salud Para La Gente and Santa Cruz Community Health clinics.
- Delivered Early Learning Scholarships (ELS) to 111 infant and toddler care providers serving families who are eligible for state child care subsidies. The ELS are designed to help providers close the gap between the high cost of quality care and subsidies provided by the State of California. To learn more, visit: <https://www.first5scc.org/thrive-by-5>

Communications and Community Engagement

In FY 2024-25, First 5 Santa Cruz County continued to develop and implement its communications plan with a focus on increasing awareness of early childhood development, offering resources for families and early care and education providers, and promoting the agency's programs and partnerships both locally and state-wide. First 5 has continued to address equity and access by consistently engaging Spanish language translation and interpretation services for its website, newsletter, additional outreach materials, and community engagement.

In FY 2024-25, First 5's website hosted 4,801 unique visitors totaling 8,190 site sessions. This was an overall 11% decrease in traffic compared to the prior fiscal year. Of these visitors to First 5's website, 95% were new visitors and 5% were returning visitors. The website's most visited sections were the Triple P program pages, which provided program information, classes overviews, and registration links. During the fiscal year, First 5 also continued publishing its monthly bilingual e-newsletter and maintained a distribution reach of over 1,000 individuals.

In the social media space, First 5 continued to remain active on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. First 5's Instagram account grew to over 180 followers, and LinkedIn grew to 33 followers since its launch in October 2024. On Facebook, First 5 grew to over 740 followers, and the audience maintained its same demographic percentages from the last fiscal year at 84% women and 16% men, with the majority being between the ages of 35-44 years old. The largest social media campaign during the year was the Thrive by 5 social media tool kit launch in March 2025.

In the beginning of the fiscal year, First 5's local informational campaign, funded by a CCHI Navigator grant, placed a 30-second bilingual Medi-Cal renewal video in our county's two DMV locations beginning in May 2024 and ending in November 2025. This campaign reached a monthly average of 13,658 people at the Capitola location, and 11,366 people at the Watsonville location.

In an effort to support the community, First 5 contributed fiscal sponsorships for several community events and endeavors during FY 2024-25. In the fall, First 5 sponsored the Santa Cruz Children's Museum of Discovery's (MOD) Potter the Otter Exhibit. MOD staff shared, "Your partnership made a huge impact—helping us bring healthy eating skills to 1,000s of Santa Cruz children through our Potter the Otter traveling exhibit." First 5 also sponsored the "All Kids Play" campaign (a fundraising initiative by Santa Cruz County Park Friends to provide scholarships for low-income youth to access Santa Cruz County Parks and Recreation programs), Cabrillo College's "Make a Circle" Documentary Screening, The Diversity Center's Queer Youth Leadership Awards, Santa Cruz Community Health's 50th Anniversary, DataShare, and United Way Santa Cruz County's United in Purpose Celebration.

In continuing to provide the community with resources, First 5 coordinated the distribution of over 1,860 Thrive by 5 pocket guides (*"A Parent Guide to Thrive by 5"*) during FY 2024-25, and gave the Nurse Family Partnership program bilingual children's books for their 26 program graduates.

Collective of Results and Evidence-based (CORE) Investments



Beginning in 2015 and initially focused on the transition of the City and County of Santa Cruz's Community Programs funding model, CORE Investments is both a funding model and a broader movement to create the conditions for equitable health and well-being across the life span – prenatal through end of life. While not limited to the well-being of young children and families, CORE has emerged as a substantial and critical initiative designed to help create the type of equitable, integrated services and systems originally envisioned by the authors of Prop 10. First 5 served on the CORE Steering Committee, helping guide the project through a multi-phase, collaborative planning process, that resulted in defining eight interdependent "CORE Conditions for Health and Well-being." In April 2025, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors voted to establish a Supervisor-led subcommittee to review the existing CORE Investments funding process. To learn more, visit: <https://www.santacruzhumanservices.org/Home/FundingOpportunities/COREInvestments>

CORE Conditions for Health and Well-being

DataShare Santa Cruz County



In September of 2017 the Health Improvement Partnership of Santa Cruz County (HIP) initiated a collaborative effort to develop a county-wide data sharing system designed to share data on a variety of factors that affect the well-being of residents in the county. In 2021, management of the system was turned over to four administrative partners: the County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency, United Way Santa Cruz County, the Community Health Trust of Pajaro Valley, and CORE Investments.

DataShare's mission is to provide an accessible, comprehensive, and reliable resource for local, regional, and national data that is available to everyone. DataShare Santa Cruz County envisions an equitable, thriving, and resilient community where everyone shares responsibility for creating the social, economic, and environmental conditions necessary for health and well-being at every stage of life. The website is an interactive data platform with local, state, and national data that allows users to explore and understand information about our local community. The site holds robust data and indicators in the areas of health, economy, education, environment, government and politics, public safety, transportation, and social environment. To learn more, visit: <https://www.datasharescc.org/>

Central Coast Early Childhood Advocacy Network



Building on a series of successful legislative visits and policy wins for early childhood in 2017, First 5 Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz Counties joined forces in FY 2017-18 to help form the tri-county Central Coast Early Childhood Advocacy Network (CCECAN). Representing over 94,000 children

ages 0-8, CCECAN is a collaboration of organizations and individuals in the tri-county area committed to strengthening and advocating for policies and systems change at the state and local level that will support thriving children and families. To learn more, visit: <https://www.ccecan.org/>

Cradle to Career



Building on the success of the Live Oak Cradle to Career place-based initiative, the effort has now expanded county-wide and is now known as “Cradle to Career Santa Cruz County” (C2C). Grown from a nascent idea in 2013 championed by former Supervisor John Leopold, to a vibrant results-based collaboration between parents and local education, health, and social service leaders in three school districts across the county, C2C’s mission is to work collectively to empower families, deliver resources, and advocate for equitable and inclusive support systems to eliminate disparities and ensure all Santa Cruz County children thrive in their education, health, and character. To learn more, visit: <https://c2csc.org/>

Oral Health Access



Oral Health Access Santa Cruz County was created in 2016 as a steering committee made up of community leaders and organizations, dental and medical clinics, and educators to address oral health needs in Santa Cruz County. Led by Dientes Community Dental, the County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency Public Health Division, and numerous community partners, the committee’s mission is to improve the oral health of Santa Cruz County residents by uniting stakeholders and advocating for sound, measurable strategies that increase access to care and education.

In addition to continuing to serve as a champion of the “First Tooth, First Birthday” campaign strategy, in the spring of 2024 First 5 Santa Cruz County Executive Director David Brody agreed to serve as Co-Chair of the Santa Cruz County Oral Health Access Initiative, helping oversee the implementation of its new 2024-2028 Strategic Plan. To learn more, visit: <https://oralhealthsc.org/>