

# Faith-Based Community Initiative

First 5 San Joaquin

April 2011

The First 5 San Joaquin Faith-Based Community Initiative (FBCI) is a county-wide effort designed to strengthen the role of faith-based organizations in preparing children to enter school ready to learn and succeed. This initiative strives to increase partnerships between First 5 and faith-based organizations, to increase parent/caregiver knowledge about the importance of school readiness among hard-to-reach populations, and to increase capacity of the faith-based organizations, fostering organizational change.

First 5 San Joaquin began partnerships with faith-based organizations in 2007 through the Leading Ladies School Readiness Project (LLSR). LLSR was a statewide campaign by First 5 California, First 5 San Joaquin, and several other counties throughout the state designed to outreach to African American parents and caregivers with school readiness messages. Through LLSR, women involved in church leadership were trained as school readiness advocates to help parents and caregivers prepare children for school. Since February 2008, First 5 San Joaquin has been providing mini-grants to faith-based organizations to support the promotion of school readiness messages, and to provide additional support services and programs for their congregations and community. As a trusted information source, faith-based organizations serve as important learning communities for their members.

To reach faith communities not served by LLSR, the project was expanded in 2010 as the Faith-Based Community Initiative to include outreach to Latino, Southeast Asian, and other underserved populations, in addition to African American churches. This funding was made available to faith-based organizations with nonprofit status that have been in operation for at least a year and demonstrate the ability to reach one or more of the First 5 San Joaquin target populations in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner. To promote this initiative, First 5 staff met with priests of local parishes and other faith community representatives, sent funding announcements to faith organizations, advertised in publications targeting the Latino community, and conducted outreach through First 5 funded programs.

Presented here are the relevant findings from both the LLSR and FBCI, with a focus on FBCI and the 2010 to 2011 fiscal year to date.



LLSR Training Workshop, November 2007

## Key Highlights

- Since 2007, First 5 San Joaquin has partnered with 29 different faith-based organizations, including six multi-year partnerships.
- School readiness messages are making a difference in the lives of families outside, as well as within, the funded partner congregations.
- More than 500 Kits for New Parents have been distributed, including kits in both English and Spanish.
- This initiative is successfully reaching predominately African American congregations.

Data sources for this newsletter include First 5 program information and Application Forms, seven key informant interviews at six funded projects, two parent interviews, and two site visits. In addition, 33 Activity Reports were received from 18 churches and two community organizations.

"I thought it was interesting that First 5 would tap into churches—that is the heart of the community...You can reach so many young families at an age when information will be valuable, and they respect the information from the church."

-FBCI mini-grant recipient

## Partnerships Between First 5 and Faith-Based Organizations

Through this initiative, First 5 San Joaquin seeks to increase the number of partnerships between First 5 and faith-based organizations.

- Since 2007, First 5 San Joaquin has partnered with 29 different faith-based organizations, including six organizations with multi-year partnerships.
- Fourteen faith-based organizations received mini-grants for the 2010 to 2011 fiscal year (FY).
- First 5 San Joaquin staff provided one-on-one onsite project orientations for all mini-grant recipients.

"Our traditional assistance comes from churches, or people we deal with all the time, and that's why Mommy & Me reaches families who wouldn't reach out."

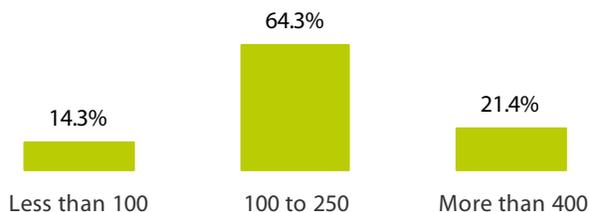
-Parent, Hilliard Chapel AME Zion

### Faith-Based Mini-Grant Recipients and Community Partners, FY 2010 to 2011

- Front Line Soldier Worship Center
- Greater Christ Temple Church
- Hilliard Chapel AME Zion
- Little Flock Baptist Church
- Love Fellowship Baptist Church
- New Greater Love Church
- San Joaquin First Nations Fellowship
- Shiloh Delta Valley Church
- St. Linus Church
- Tabernacle of Faith Community Church
- The Congregation of Zion
- The Salvation Army of Lodi
- Victory in Praise Church
- Wings of Healing Christian Center

### More than 700 Children 0 to 5 Belong to 2010 Funded Faith-Based Organizations

Approximate Size of Faith-Based Organizations, FY 2010 to 2011 (n=14)



- The majority of funded faith-based organizations in 2010 were mid-size with 100 to 250 members.
- These partners serve approximately 735 children ages 0 to 5 within the congregation/parish. The average number of children 0 to 5 in the congregations was 54.

### Strategies to Increase Partnerships between First 5 and Faith-Based Organizations

Interviewees' responses fell into the following categories when asked what would help increase partnerships and collaboration between First 5 and faith-based organizations: continuing the open line of communication, convening an introductory meeting to provide information about resources available through the initiative, inviting First 5 staff to attend community advisory meetings and community collaboration meetings to advertise the project, having more informational items available in Spanish, and continued understanding from First 5 about the cultural barriers that may limit program use for families.

FBCI mini-grant recipients also report that First 5 has provided a range of resources including:

- Information—helpful reading materials, information on what is available for children 0 to 5, statistics related to school readiness, and printed information for distribution;
- Materials—Kits for New Parents in English and Spanish, supplies, magnets, baby T-shirts, onesies, toothbrushes, and cookbooks;
- Guidance and Ideas – suggestions and guidance for how to communicate with parents, ideas and activity recommendations;
- Visits—First 5 staff attended events and arranged visits from a Head Start program leader;
- Communication—First 5 staff were available and quick to respond with any needed support.

In addition, an interviewee described the opportunities through LLSR to participate in round table meetings, network with other Leading Ladies to gain a broader vision, and present to the Commission.

# School Readiness Messages

## Four Key School Readiness Messages Are Delivered through FBCI

FBCI mini-grant recipients have used a variety of activities to promote four key school readiness messages, and in FY 2010 to 2011 applicants at each site selected at least four activities to implement conveying the key messages.

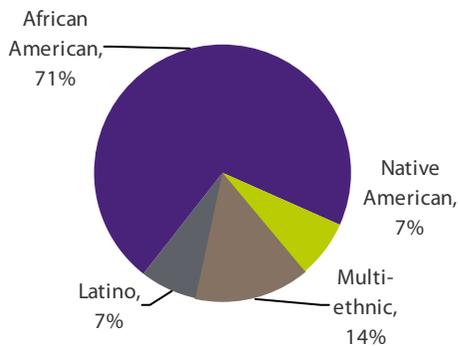
- **Health and Nutrition.** “A Healthy Baby = A Healthy Start”: Accessing prenatal care, getting well-baby check-ups and immunizations, and promoting healthy eating and physical activity.
- **Preschool.** “The Power of Preschool”: Enrolling your child in quality preschool programs.
- **Parent involvement.** “School Readiness Begins with You!”: Parents are their child’s first teacher.
- **Early Literacy.** “You Can Help Your Child Learn to Read”: The importance of reading to your child.

**Health and Nutrition—First Nations Fellowship:** First Nations Fellowship provided nutrition workshops to educate the community about healthy portions and nutrition, and help translate that information to shopping and food preparation. Of particular concern were the high rates of diabetes among Native American families. As the grant facilitator described, food replicas were used to create three plates: [1] a balanced plate; [2] a heavy plate with large amounts of unhealthy foods; and [3] a spiritual plate as an offering of blessing and gratitude. Staff reported that the activity was successful because it involved participants, allowing them to see the portions while incorporating relevant cultural elements. In the words of one interviewee: “Being able to present a complimentary workshop that is culturally relevant—it is instilled deeper in their daily practices because they can see the worth it has for families.”

**Preschool—Front Line Soldier Worship Center:** Quality preschool and early childhood experiences are important for success in school. Front Line Soldier Worship Center has demonstrated its commitment to preparing African American children for kindergarten. After learning of statistics related to school readiness provided by First 5, Front Line Soldier Worship Center used the pulpit and parent workshops to share messages about the importance of early learning, especially emphasizing the message that parents are the child’s first teacher and the need for quality preschool. One workshop participant, a mother of seven, was given a Head Start referral and shared with her faith-based organization that her young child “has grown so much from stories,” and that he now “comes home and says, ‘read to me.’”

## Low-Cost Investment Enables School Readiness Messages to Reach Target Populations

**Funded Project Target Populations ,  
FY 2010 to 2011\***



\*Due to rounding, percentages do not total 100.

- A total of \$13,805.00 in mini-grants was awarded in 2010.
- This initiative reaches predominately African American congregations, some of which have growing Latino populations. Of the churches serving African American communities, more than half have congregations with 90 percent, or greater, African American members.
- At a low cost, funded projects reach a greater percentage of African American participants than other First 5 projects. 2010 Detailed Demographic Data for First 5 San Joaquin indicate only 6 percent of parents receiving intensive services identified their child’s ethnicity as African American.
- One funded partner serves a 100 percent Native American population base, and another congregation, 100 percent Latino. A few projects, including those with multi-ethnic target populations, indicated a small percentage Southeast Asian membership.

“Every little bit helps. Every bit truly helps. It doesn’t sound like a lot of money, but we wouldn’t be able to do what we do without it and be focused more on school readiness.”

-FBCI mini-grant recipient

## Outreach and Education

### The Most Common School Readiness Activities Relate to Outreach and Education



Clergy for Kids Workshop, August 2008

- The most commonly selected activities used to emphasize the four messages were those related to outreach and education.
- More than 500 First 5 Kits for New Parents have been distributed to parents and providers since the fall of 2007, including kits in both English and Spanish. All 2010 applicants indicated they will provide kits to parents and providers.
- All applicants in 2010 planned to distribute school readiness information to their congregations. Common formats include church bulletins, message/bulletin boards, and resource tables.
- Other common outreach and education activities include providing “Messages from the Pulpit” and parent workshops.
- Parent workshops have been provided to more than 197 parents on topics of school readiness.

“We always get the information we need, or didn’t always know we needed.”

-Parent, Hilliard Chapel AME Zion

### FBCI Activities Increase Parent Knowledge about the Importance of School Readiness

Interviews with mini-grant recipients and participating parents reveal that parent/caregiver knowledge about school readiness and its importance has increased as a result of project participation.

- Before participation many parents considered education to be the school’s responsibility and were not aware of the importance of early learning and their role in shaping their child’s school readiness. “[They] didn’t know they were supposed to do that at that young age. It increases knowledge going to the workshops.” Parents have also expressed surprise at the early age children can learn, brush teeth, and attend preschool. “A lot say, ‘I didn’t know babies could do that,’ or ‘they do that at that age?’ They are pretty blown away, especially the first-time moms.”
- Interviewees cited many reasons for activities being useful including the ability of parents to “hear and see” school readiness activities through examples, as well as information being provided in both English and Spanish. According to interviewees, activities that were considered most useful, and those that will facilitate the greatest increases in knowledge among hard to reach populations, included: conducting parent workshops; developing staffed child play areas; and providing information about available programs in English and Spanish through church bulletins and handouts.

Interviewees also indicated that for many parents, faith-based organizations are their primary source for school readiness information. A parent explained that for some parents, “it was the first time they heard about it...some get information elsewhere but most get information from [this project].”

**Parent Involvement and Early Literacy—Wings of Healing Christian Center:** Wings of Healing Christian Center (WHCC) demonstrates the value of modeling activities so that parents can see through hands-on examples how to support their child’s early learning at home. According to a staff member, “There is some common sense like playing with the child, but we show *how* to play with the child.” Through partnership with First 5, WHCC has created a play space for children 3 to 5 years old called the “JAM Zone,” and hopes to create a similar space for children 0 to 2 with additional funding. The area includes foam letters, books, crayons, and a play area. Lessons focus on skills children will need to be ready for kindergarten such as learning shapes and colors, as well as writing letters and numbers. As one staff member explains, “Since we now have an area, they see us reaching out to children and preparing them. With the grant we can reach out to parents as well as children.” Parents have shared how much they love the books, and books are now given to families who attend parent workshops so that they are able to read to their children at home. One staff member describes the thoughts of many by saying, “The JAM Zone has so many shapes, colors, toys, so much learning—I am so happy there is so much learning. It has such a positive benefit on the congregation and parents of children 0 to 5.”

## CASE STUDY: A Life-Course Approach

The Mommy & Me Program and Boutique is run through Hilliard Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion and provides an example of a more established church using FBCI funding as seed money to develop a comprehensive community intervention to address health disparities. Research has demonstrated the importance of addressing social, environmental, and economic stresses across the life-course for improving health and educational outcomes for the next generation of children. Health disparities are evident in San Joaquin County (SJC) where SJC Public Health Services reported an infant mortality rate of 16.1 per 1,000 live birth among African American infants from 2000 to 2008. This is over three times the rate for White and Asian infants, and more than 2.5 the rate for Latino infants. "It is alarming," the executive director reflects. The Mommy & Me Program is reaching predominately African American families, and has begun outreach to schools and the surrounding neighborhood with large Latino populations using staff fluent in Spanish. The Mommy & Me Program seeks to address health disparities by promoting and fostering the development of a healthy baby, as well as a healthy pregnancy, a healthy mom, and a healthy community.

When asked what led Hilliard Chapel AME Zion to apply for First 5 funding, staff explained, "we wanted to grow, and build community and community capacity." First 5 San Joaquin FBCI provided the original grant that allowed the Mommy & Me program to grow from its initial operations in a small walk-in closet of the church to a separate trailer that houses the program and boutique. Hilliard Chapel AME Zion has continued to apply for the FBCI mini-grant since first participating, and has complimented this with additional sources of funding to grow and expand their program.



Community Event, October 2010

The Mommy & Me Program promotes school readiness through a variety of activities including community events, parent workshops, messages from the pulpit, Mommy & Me bucks, Back-to-School rallies, and highlighting child accomplishments during church services. A community event was held last fall promoting preschool, health, and nutrition. The event included Head Start enrollment, as well as presentations on lead prevention, car seat safety, immunizations and well baby exams from San Joaquin Public Health Services representatives and a nurse.

The "Mommy & Me Time" parent workshops promote parents as the child's first teacher and parent-child bonding through reading. In addition to encouraging parent involvement and early literacy, the workshops teach moms to "love yourself and think positive." "We take care of the moms through the process and give them hope and education and empower them to have a healthy pregnancy, to have healthy babies," explains the program coordinator. She describes that through parent workshops staff share how children learn and grow, discuss health and nutrition, and the importance of doctor visits and prenatal care.

When asked what activities were most useful, a parent from the Mommy & Me program explained, "In the end we had a graduation, I said a poem, they had the place decked out, I didn't know it was that important...[it was] very humbling, and it gave me a lot of motivation...Out of all the information to go here, go there—we were all in tears—what stuck was advice that came from another single mom, she related to what we go through, [and we can] see where she is at today, and it gave us hope."

The executive director noted, "we treat them like the ladies they are and we nurture and [provide] education and that trickles down, and they take that, and use that, and we see that, and that gives us the drive to seek more funding to keep the excitement going, and one day the disparities will decrease. If we just touch one or two ladies at a time then we have made a difference."



Mommy & Me Program Graduation Ceremony, September 2010

## Organizational Change

Organizational change activities that promote school readiness include adopting “child development friendly” policies, conducting outreach to other faith-based community leaders to promote school readiness, and establishing parent incentive programs. First 5 San Joaquin supported networking and outreach during the Leading Ladies School Readiness Project (LLSR 2007 to 2010) by organizing two Leading Ladies Project Launch Meetings, four Quarterly Roundtable Leading Ladies Meetings, three Group Planning Meetings for the Clergy for Kids Conference held in August 2008, and five First Link Group meetings with representatives from partnering churches, serving as an Advisory Group for LLSR.



LLSR Quarterly Roundtable meeting, February 2008

**Organizational Change — School Readiness Earning Programs:** At Hilliard Chapel AME Zion parents earn coupons or “bucks” doing activities that support their child’s growth, development, and school readiness. The “bucks” reward and encourage parents for participating in activities such as attending parent workshops and doctor’s appointments. A parent explained, “Every time you attend you get coupons. They have a store and it helps a lot. I saved up, and my daughter was born, and I got diapers and other things I couldn’t afford. It is very beneficial.” Another parent shared that she appreciated earning “bucks” doing what needed to be done for the family and appreciated that the items were not given away, nor were parents forced to participate. The program coordinator emphasized that parents do not leave without having their needs met, regardless of whether they have enough “bucks.” The program balances empowerment with taking care of families, helping to meet the needs of families.

### The Reach of School Readiness Messages Extends Beyond the Congregation

- Many partners offer social services and community events that reach families beyond their own congregational membership. Through grocery, meal, and shelter services, among others, the Salvation Army of Lodi served 3,434 families in 2010, including 770 children 0 to 5 years old. According to an interviewee, “We have so many opportunities to actually distribute materials!...We see so many families -so many families in poverty- that may not be aware of resources [that are] available.”
- School readiness activities were credited with making a difference in the lives of community members outside the congregation. In addition to the direct community outreach, congregation members share resources and set an example among friends, neighbors, and family members.

#### Increased Capacity through First 5 Partnership

- Interviewees also shared that their capacity to serve as a resource for parents children 0 to 5 has changed tremendously as a result of the partnership with First 5. Through this initiative, mini-grant recipients now have the resources and information to promote school readiness within their congregations, as well as incentives to eliminate barriers that prevent involvement.
- Of those interviewed, most agreed that parents see them as a school readiness resource now, and all interviewees indicated that their faith-based organization will be seen as a resource to parents five years from now through continued partnership with First 5.

#### Addressing Challenges to Parent Involvement

Barriers to parent involvement identified by interviewees include: transportation, limited time, work schedules, the need for childcare, and a lack of social support, particularly for single parents. Solutions being implemented by funded projects include offering the use of a church van for transportation, providing childcare and food for events, and offering social support. As one parent reflected, “I felt like I had no one and they were really there for me.”

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✦ **Promote further funding to faith-based organizations to provide activities that support school readiness, based on funding availability and priorities established by the Commission.** School readiness messages are reaching target populations through a variety of activities with this initiative. Interviews with funded partners have demonstrated the value of both parent workshops and staffed children's areas for promoting school readiness messages. Both of these activities allow staff to model school readiness promotion, through a format where parents and caregivers may participate and/or observe, and replicate activities in the home. Staffed children's areas also provide an environment that fosters early learning for children of parents who may have limited time and resources. Through the promotion of parent workshops and staffed children's areas, for all target audiences of funded partners, First 5 San Joaquin can extend the reach of school readiness messages to parents in an accessible format that has been considered useful by both parents and caregivers and funded partner staff.
- ✦ **Continue current partnerships and further promote outreach and funding opportunities to faith-based organizations serving Southeast Asian and Hispanic/Latino populations.** The current initiative primarily reaches African American communities, which are underserved by other First 5 programs. Findings suggest that these partnerships should continue. Additionally, outreach to congregations serving larger Southeast Asian and Latino populations could be expanded. Providing more resources in Spanish may improve the reach of school readiness messages and allow organizations that serve Spanish-speaking populations to allocate more resources to outreach rather than translation.
- ✦ **Continue to explore opportunities for capacity building and organizational change in combination with direct services.** This initiative supports the provision of direct services and at the same time increases the capacity of partnering organizations. In 2010, the primary activities were outreach and education, while activities related to organizational change were less common. Organizational change activities to be developed and explored include conducting ongoing outreach to other faith-based community leaders to promote school readiness projects; raising awareness of school readiness as a topic for their congregations; supporting the faith based communities' commitment to providing child development, early learning activities, and community education; and providing networking and collaboration opportunities that support school readiness in the faith-based community.