

Healthy Children Ready for School

The Impact of First 5 in California's Northwest Region



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

April 2009

In 1998, California's voters passed Proposition 10 to provide the state's first funding stream dedicated to helping children from the prenatal state to age five grow up healthy in all respects and ready to succeed in school when they enter kindergarten. This movement is now known as "First 5" to emphasize the importance of the first five years of life.

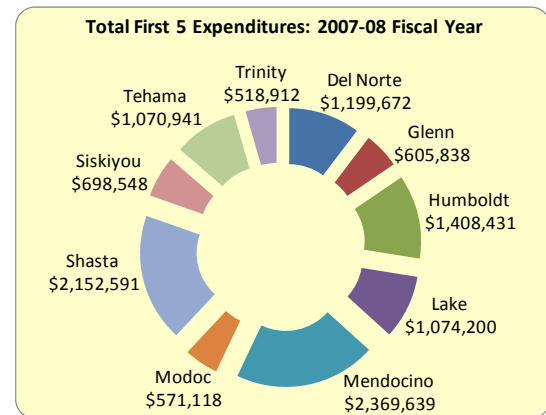
After a startup period to form County Children and Families Commissions, develop strategic plans and create the infrastructure needed to effectively administer First 5 funds, counties have had about seven years as of 2008 to invest in programs and improved systems of services. A study was conducted to understand the impact First 5 has had during those years within the ten counties of California's Northwest Region: Del Norte, Glenn, Humboldt, Lake, Mendocino, Modoc, Shasta, Siskiyou, Tehama and Trinity Counties.

The Northwest Region is home to over 47,000 children age 0-5, spread across a territory larger than the state of South Carolina. Families here can face many challenges including geographic barriers that make it difficult to access the limited services that are available, social isolation, and insufficient numbers of pediatricians, dentists, child care providers and other professionals. In every county in the region, half or more of all families with children age 0-5 have incomes below the level necessary to meet their basic needs.

First 5 has made remarkable progress in the Northwest Region during the past seven years. By the 2007-08 fiscal year, programs had grown to the point of being able to serve over 22,000 children age 0-5 throughout the region as well as over 31,000 parents, other family members and service providers like early care and education providers and medical professionals. **An estimated 45% of all children age 0-5 in the region were served last year by at least one First 5 funded program** – at a child care site, school, doctor's office, library, community-based organization or in some other way.



First 5 invested a total of \$11,669,890 across the region in fiscal year 2007-08 to benefit children and families.



The Del Norte County total includes a special one-time expenditure of \$524,590 for a capital project

In each county, First 5 is working to achieve four overall strategic results: Improved Child Health, Improved Child Development, Improved Family Functioning and Improved Systems of Care. First 5's impact in each of these areas within the Northwest Region is summarized below, followed by an overview of how First 5 has ensured accountability in the use of resources and what makes First 5 a unique force for children within the region.

Improved Child Health

There are many different factors that lead to good health. First 5 has invested in a coordinated system of proven methods to address these factors in order to improve children's health in the Northwest Region.

- **Access to health services.** The lack of health insurance is a major barrier to receiving health care services. First 5 programs enrolled over 600 children age 0-5 in Medi-Cal or Healthy Families last year that likely would not have been reached otherwise. Universal health insurance for children 0-5 is now available in three counties, covering 500 more previously uninsured children. In Mendocino County

alone, the Healthy Kids initiative has saved local hospitals more than \$330,000 by reducing the number of hospital visits by uninsured children.

- **Maternal health.** To enable more babies to be healthy at the start of life, perinatal education or breastfeeding support services have been provided to more than 6,000 mothers during the past five years. Nine out of the ten counties in the region had breastfeeding rates above the state average in 2007.
- **Oral health.** Tooth decay is the most common preventable disease affecting California's children, causing pain, illnesses and problems with eating, sleeping and learning. First 5 is working in every county to improve oral health in many ways. Over 5,300 children age 0-5 received oral health screening, treatment and education services in the past three years because of First 5 programs. More than 5,000 parents and child care providers received information on proper oral health practices for children. Over 2,000 children were enrolled in dental insurance programs, improving ongoing access to dental care. As a result, many more children reach kindergarten without tooth decay. Lake County, for example, showed a 25% improvement in the number of school children without tooth decay from 2003 to 2008.
- **Mental health.** Five counties have best practice programs to train service providers to detect and address early childhood mental health (ECMH) issues as well as help families affected by these issues. Almost 400 child care and medical professionals received specialized ECMH training during the last two years.
- **Nutrition and fitness.** Over one-third of California's children ages 2 to 5 are already significantly overweight or are at risk of obesity. First 5 is fighting back; every county now has programs to address childhood obesity through nutrition education and physical fitness activities. 1,500 parents and 350 child care providers were reached by nutrition education programs last year. 93% of parents and providers surveyed said they will serve healthy foods as a result of these programs.

Improved Child Development

First 5 has been a leader in raising awareness about the many facets of child development and in creating a region-wide focus on the early detection and treatment of developmental concerns and preparing children to succeed in school.

- **Child development screening and referral.** Children who receive early treatment for developmental delays are more likely to graduate from high school, hold jobs, and avoid teen pregnancy and crime. These improvements in life outcomes produce savings to society ranging from \$30,000 to \$100,000 per child. Early screening is crucial, as well over one-third of children age 0-5 in the Northwest Region are at moderate to high risk of developmental delays. Because of First 5, over 1,300 children had a complete developmental screening last year. Twenty percent had developmental concerns and were linked to services, producing \$7.5 million in expected long-term social savings from early identification of special needs.
- **Children with special needs.** More than 80% of the region is covered by new programs to assist families who have a child with special needs.
- **Early care and education.** Quality early care and education (ECE) programs are important to foster the intellectual, social and emotional development of children. Strong economic benefits are proven through multiple long-term studies that show quality preschools saved taxpayers \$2.69 - \$7.14 for every dollar invested by reducing special education, law enforcement and other costs. First 5's impact on ECE quality and availability includes:
 - ▶ Almost 800 ECE providers received professional development support, affecting the quality of care for an estimated 4,700 children in their classes. In Shasta County, 81% of participants said they would not have continued their professional development or would have waited if First 5 support was not available.
 - ▶ An additional 1,150 unlicensed care providers received training and support over the past five years to improve the quality of care.
 - ▶ 228 more preschool slots were created last year.
 - ▶ Over 100 ECE providers got quality improvement grants.

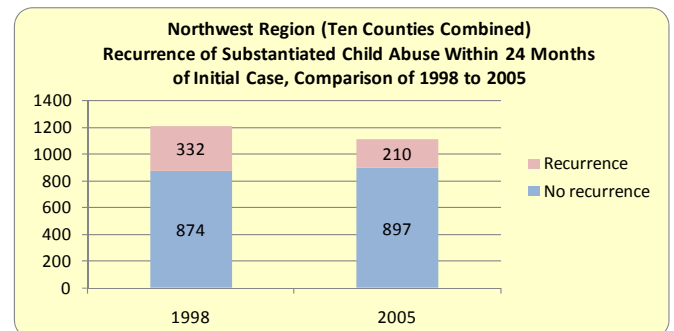
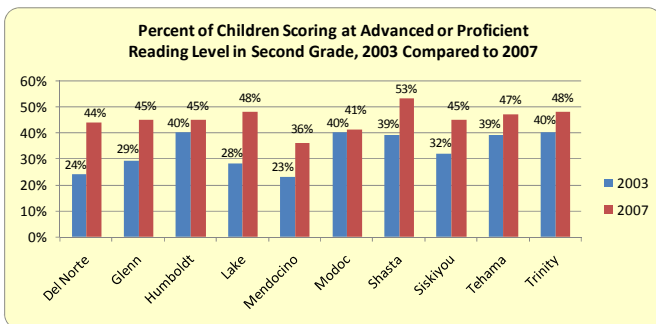
- **Readiness for school.** Readiness for school upon entering kindergarten is vital to later success in school. A recent California study shows children who are solid in their early academic and social-emotional skills significantly outscore their peers in English and math tests at third and fifth grades. First 5 efforts are having a clear impact on school readiness.



- ▶ Early literacy programs reached 5,000 children and also distributed over 20,000 books for young children.
- ▶ Comprehensive School Readiness programs served over 4,150 children last year. Kindergarten teacher assessments show children in First 5 School Readiness programs are much more prepared for school than non-participating children. Tehama County recorded an 18% jump in the percent of kindergarteners ready to learn upon school entry from 2000 to 2008, the period of First 5 school readiness program investments.
- ▶ Second grade reading scores are higher in every county, with six counties showing increases of 13% to 20% from 2003 to 2007 in the percent of children proficient in reading.



- **Parent education and support.** First 5 is working to reach as many parents as possible through information, parent education programs and more intensive family support services like home visiting programs. Over 3,900 Kits for New Parents were distributed last year. Over 1,400 families were served by parent education or home visiting programs. Across all counties, two-thirds or more of parents surveyed after participating in First 5 parent support programs report being able to deal much better with parenting issues as a result of the First 5 program.
- **Child safety.** Child abuse prevention is a major focus of First 5. When abuse does occur, First 5 funded programs often have a large role in improving family situations so abuse is not repeated. These efforts, in partnership with many other local agencies, are having a clear effect. For the region as a whole, the percent of cases with a recurrence of abuse or neglect within 24 months dropped by 31% over the seven year period after First 5 was established. The total number of substantiated cases of abuse also dropped by 8.2% even though the region's population had increased by 7% during this period.



Improved Family Functioning

Parents truly are their children's first teachers, and often can benefit from information and support to meet their families' needs. First 5 has been the catalyst to greatly expand parent and family support services in the region.

- **Family access to services.** Thirty new or expanded Family Resource Centers (FRCs) give families local access to services in many more communities. An estimated 7,000 more families with children 0-5 now have access to an array of family support services through the FRCs and other outreach programs. Surveys in different counties show 70% or more of parents using FRCs say the FRC has had a significant positive effect on their children or family.



Improved Systems of Care

The impact of First 5 goes far beyond increasing the type or amount of services for children and families. A critical role of First 5 is to help make services work better so that they are more accessible and effective for families.

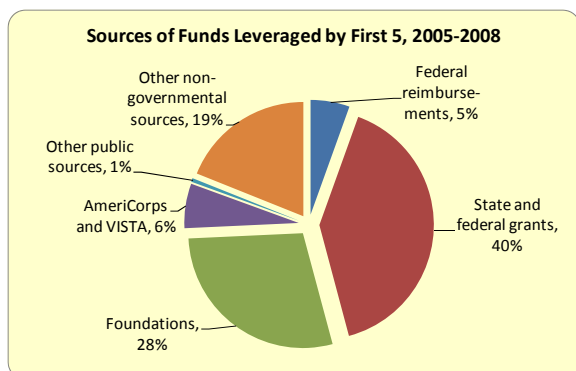
- **Integration and coordination of services.** Every county is working to improve the linkages across different types of children and family services. Although hard to quantify, each county has multiple examples of fundamental changes in how services are delivered because of First 5. As just one example, First 5 funded FRCs typically have six to ten different public and nonprofit agencies working together to provide services at the FRC, making it is much easier for families to access services.

- **Building service capacity.** First 5 has enhanced the capacity of community services through training and technical assistance to over 2,600 service providers during the past five years, investments in physical infrastructure to improve child care facilities, FRCs, playgrounds and medical equipment, and other investments to enhance service capacity.
- **Community awareness.** First 5 has sought to increase public awareness and knowledge of the practices and policies that enhance early childhood development. The impact is seen in many ways – through new community events reaching thousands of families across the region, increased school involvement among over half of parents participating in Lake County school readiness programs, education of 675 employers in Shasta County about creating a family friendly workplace, and much more.

Fiscal Accountability

First 5 is highly effective at investing in what works, holding service providers accountable to produce results, evaluating the results of investments and getting the most value possible out of available funds. Accountability is maintained through long-range program and financial planning, contracting and monitoring of funded programs, strong fiscal systems and annual audits. All counties in the region received clean audit opinions from independent auditors, with no adverse audit findings related to fiscal controls, use of funds or other matters of fiscal accountability.

For the three year period from 2005 to 2008, a total of \$7,057,565 in additional funds have been secured as a direct result of leveraging First 5 funds. This does not include First 5 California matching funds; it represents “new” resources from federal and private sources that would not have been received otherwise. Compared to total expenditures during this period, First 5 funds were extended by an additional 20% through fiscal leveraging.



What Makes First 5 Unique?

Some of the attributes that are vital to the success of First 5 have already been noted, such as commitments to partnership, leveraging of funds and accountability. Other characteristics that make First 5 special include:

- **Champion for children 0-5.** First 5 is uniquely focused on the first years of life, and addresses the full range of issues that lead to healthy, well developed children.
- **Catalyst for change.** First 5 focuses on results for children, not specific types of services, and is able to drive changes in services to create better results.
- **Local flexibility.** Each county is able to decide how to best use First 5 funds in order to meet unique local needs and complement what already exists.
- **Holistic approach.** First 5 works across disciplines and acts as the “glue” to bring services together and fill critical gaps that no other funding source is able to address.
- **Prevention and early intervention focus.** First 5 is committed to preventing child health/development problems and addressing issues early.
- **Inclusiveness.** First 5 works to help all children age 0-5, not just some income or demographic groups.

This study shows that communities throughout the Northwest Region have been profoundly affected in many positive and measurable ways because First 5 is there as champions for young children that have local control of the resources to turn visions into reality.



The study was conducted by Social Entrepreneurs, Inc. The complete report is available from the First 5 Association of California website at www.fsac.org.