



First 5 Alameda County

Neighborhoods Ready for School Interim Evaluation Brief

June 2021



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Community Centered Evaluation and Research (Community CER) and Clarity Social Research Group are deeply grateful to Neighborhoods Ready for Schools' lead agencies, their community partners, First 5 Alameda County Staff, and parents/caregivers for sharing their time, insights, knowledge, and wisdom.

Neighborhoods Ready for School Grantees

Lead Agency	Agency Staff
<p>Lincoln</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Letitia Henderson, Director of Strategic Partnerships ▪ Chris Nguon, Supervisor, Mandela Family Resource Center ▪ Kerry Stimpson, Family Navigator ▪ Shaunice George, Family Navigator
<p>San Antonio Family Resource Center (SAFRC)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Jessica Blakemore, Youth and Family Systems Analyst, ALL IN ▪ Carla Jasso, Director of Family Navigation/Community Initiatives ▪ Andrew Park, Executive Director, Trybe ▪ David Kakishiba, Executive Director, East Bay Asian Youth Center (EBAYC) ▪ Nancy Caro Garcia, Family Navigator ▪ Deprece Bonilla, Family Navigator
<p>Roots Community Health Center, Stay Ready for School Project (Roots Stay Ready for School)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Andria Batise, Program Coordinator ▪ Jamaica Sowell, Director of Programs and Policy ▪ Shalon Jones, Manager of Programs and Policy ▪ Dr. Noha Aboelata, Founder and CEO
<p>Union City Family Center</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nancy George, Executive Director, Union City Family Center ▪ Jennifer Hawkins, Manager, Union City Family Center ▪ Imelda Rivas, Early Childhood Community Specialist ▪ Maria Lazo, Family Navigator, Union City Family Center

Community Partners Interviewed

Please note this is not a complete list of grantee partners; it is a list of those who participated in key stakeholder interviews.

- **Andrea Talley**, Mandela Grocery Co-Op
- **Lourdes Jimenez**, San Antonio CDC
- **Damaris Dominguez**, Family Resource Specialist Outreach and Enrollment Coordinator, East Bay Agency for Children
- **Alfredo Molina**, SparkPoint Financial Coach/ Human Services Specialist II, City of Fremont / Human Services Department
- **Alfredo Alvarez**, Community Health Outreach Worker, Cultura y Bienestar Program / Behavioral Health Department, Tiburcio Vasquez Health Center

FOREWORD

In 2018, First 5 expanded our place-based efforts and invested millions of dollars into four communities. We did this because of the undeniable connections between neighborhood, family, and child well-being, and in recognition that those living and working within communities are best positioned to define the need, the response, and the policy advocacy. Our funding, as directed by community, has supported:

- family leadership and civic engagement
- coordination of family services across systems
- early childhood programs and services
- economic supports and basic needs
- physical infrastructure to promote safe play for young children
- partnerships among community organizations and government
- policy advocacy catalyzed and led by residents.

With this cross-site evaluation, our hope is to add to the body of evidence that connects community conditions (i.e., poverty and access to jobs, health care, child care, housing, transportation, environment, etc.) to early childhood development, and long-term outcomes for individuals and communities.

- First 5 Alameda County's [kindergarten readiness studies](#) consistently point to the socioeconomic underpinnings of educational readiness and success and the associated links between poverty and conditions of scarcity that disproportionately impact communities of color.
- Data from the Advancement Project RACE COUNTS study shows that Alameda County ranks as the fourth most racially disparate county in California overall, the first for food security, and the second for access to early childhood education.

By documenting results and analyzing the work and experience of NRFS grantees, First 5 aims to further influence policymaking that results in more just, equitable community conditions setting every child on a path for educational achievement and lifelong physical, mental, and financial well-being.

Thank you to the Neighborhoods Ready for School grantees and their partners, First 5 Alameda County staff, and our evaluation partners for their contributions.



Kristin Spanos

Kristin Spanos, CEO

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AT-A-GLANCE: FIRST 5 ALAMEDA COUNTY'S NEIGHBORHOODS READY FOR SCHOOL

Early childhood outcomes create the fabric of our communities.

Early childhood development, community and family conditions, and lifelong health and well-being are deeply intertwined. In recognition of these links, First 5 Alameda County launched its Neighborhoods Ready for School (NRFS) strategy in 2018. This innovative, place-based strategy aims to address barriers to resources for families, support cross-system service coordination, and inform policy advocacy and service delivery for First 5 and other public systems. With more than \$6 million in investments—led and defined by four underserved communities in Alameda County: the San Antonio neighborhood of Oakland, West Oakland, East Oakland, and Union City—the NRFS program model centers on four key components, supported by a strong foundation of local partnerships, organizational infrastructure, and policy (as depicted in Figure 1). Together, these components are intended to promote child- and family-friendly communities, support families, and increase kindergarten readiness. Below we share initial findings and recommendations.



Figure 1: Neighborhoods Ready for School Program Model



Staff from Union City Family Center.

Initial Findings

The NRFS program model's strong foundation in community partnerships, organizational infrastructure, and policy advocacy enabled a nimble, effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The accomplishments of NRFS grantees are inextricably linked to the pandemic, the consequences of which continue to disproportionately impact neighborhoods furthest from opportunity. Initial findings begin to document how NRFS sites responded to the existing and emerging unprecedented needs of families. However, it is important to note that the disparities amplified by COVID-19 were deeply rooted in the NRFS service areas prior to the pandemic and were in fact the impetus behind the NRFS strategy from its inception. *Specific issues, findings, and recommendations are shown in more detail in the table below.*



Issues Impacting NRFS Families

NRFS families continue to face myriad challenges and barriers that prevent them from reaching their full potential. The pandemic exacerbated many needs, shed light on others, and created new challenges that families continue to navigate.



Support and Role of the NRFS Sites

Due to **pre-pandemic investments in staffing, capacity building, and facilities, NRFS sites were well-positioned** to become neighborhood support hubs, building on existing community partnerships to connect families with needed resources and reduce social isolation.



Recommendations

For Lead Agencies (Grantees): Continue to build on and expand connections to early childhood stakeholders, including parents/caregivers, early learning sites, K-12 schools, and providers serving families.

For First 5: Continue to partner with the community on strategy and investment. Foster flexible approaches to data reporting. Leverage systems connections to support NRFS policy and program priorities.

For Public Systems: Invest in place-based strategies by increasing the availability of culturally and linguistically appropriate services, strengthening connections to neighborhoods, and supporting neighborhood improvement efforts.



OVERVIEW OF ISSUES, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

 <p>Issues Impacting NRFS Families</p>	 <p>Support and Role of the NRFS Sites</p>	 <p>Recommendations</p>
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Economic Resources and Financial Supports

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families have intensified need for financial support. Recovery from deepened financial instability will be a long journey. Loss of household income from underemployment or complete loss of work. Increased food insecurity. Lack of or limited childcare options. Unsafe work environments. Increased levels of anxiety and stress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NRFS sites were uniquely positioned to become centralized hubs providing families financial resources, supplies, and other basic needs, including increased food and diaper distributions. Provided direct cash-aid; particularly needed to support undocumented families not eligible for federal cash assistance. 	<p>For Lead Agencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforce mutual aid collaborations* as a critical component of the place-based network. <p>For First 5 Alameda County:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to trust NRFS lead agencies as stewards of NRFS funding and explore additional opportunities for unrestricted funding. Provide more structure and consistency to Results-Based Accountability (RBA) reporting. <p>For System Partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Double-down on place-based strategies and intentional partnerships with other public systems, philanthropy, and community-based organizations to sustain this investment.
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Coordination, Navigation, and Location of Program and Services

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need easily accessible basic services and supports that are conveniently located. Essential to have community-based organizations with established roots in the community that families trust. Mental health needs are elevated. Families' emotional wellness is a rising concern among parents/caregivers and NRFS staff. Families need counseling and emotional support services that are culturally relevant and responsive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NRFS sites conducted informal and formal community needs assessments to identify needs of families in the community. The flexible NRFS funding helped lead agencies swiftly respond to the specific needs of families. NRFS funding helped establish new and informal partnerships and helped solidify coordination and communication structures. Mutual aid partnerships NRFS sites established with local and statewide organizations were successful in meeting the needs that emerged during the pandemic. NRFS grantees are interested in developing an easy-to-use, up-to-date directory that users can quickly access for any emerging client need. NRFS sites offer individualized support to families through wraparound case management approach models. 	<p>For Lead Agencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to establish formal partnerships with local service providers and strengthen coordination and communication structures. Look for opportunities to braid funding and resources. <p>For First 5 Alameda County:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide additional resources for grantee outreach efforts to reach hard-to-engage populations. To improve service delivery, work with grantees to identify strengths and needs in their current referral systems and determine what is needed to enhance efforts to create a centralized, up-to-date countywide referral system. <p>For System Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support collaborative efforts to ensure culturally and linguistically appropriate access to a variety of services.
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Issues Impacting NRFS Families



Support and Role of the NRFS Sites



Recommendations

Family Leadership Opportunities and Civic Engagement

- The COVID-19 pandemic increased levels of social isolation and disconnect.
- Parents/caregivers are eager to connect with other families in the neighborhood and build their leadership skills.
- Safe parks and play structures for children are lacking. Neighborhood safety and access to safe and well-maintained parks and play structures are priorities for families.

- NRFS sites created programs designed to increase parents' and caregivers' leadership, advocacy skills, and civic participation.
- Virtual programming helps parents/caregivers reduce the impact of social isolation.
- NRFS parent/caregiver workshops provide a safe and trusting space to connect with other parents/caregivers.

For Lead Agencies:

- Continue to offer programming to build social connections.
- Create more opportunities to build leaders in NRFS neighborhoods.

For First 5 Alameda County:

- Continue to explore opportunities to support NRFS lead agencies in policy advocacy.
- Provide additional training and technical assistance to build NRFS capacity for civic engagement.

For System Partners:

- Increase funding for culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health services.
- Support neighborhood improvement efforts.

Early Childhood Programs and Services

- Access to laptops, internet connection, and training to navigate virtual platforms.
- Parents/caregivers and NRFS staff are concerned about the learning loss that may have resulted during the pandemic due to school closures and distance learning.

- NRFS sites worked around the clock to restructure their programming to virtual platforms.
- The switch to virtual platforms helped increase the number of families that enrolled and participated in NRFS programming.
- Personalized attention families receive from Family Navigators plays a central role in building trusting relationships with families that keep them engaged.
- Parents/caregivers appreciate the culturally relevant, linguistically appropriate, and enriching childhood programming NRFS sites offer.
- Educational materials delivered to families' homes helped children maintain a routine, continue their learning, and supported their social-emotional wellbeing.

For Lead Agencies:

- Focus on the conditions needed for a smooth transition to kindergarten and early learning in-person settings.
- Increase connections and communications with neighborhood K-12 public schools.

For First 5 Alameda County:

- Continue to increase access to neighborhood-based preschools.
- Further explore the supply and unmet need for childcare centers in the four NRFS neighborhoods.
- Continue to measure kindergarten readiness in the county. The Alameda County Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA), which has been instrumental in predicting kindergarten readiness. The recent KRA also found that "neighborhood assets, like parks, libraries, and mutual support among community members, significantly boosted children's readiness."

For System Partners:

- Increase connections and communications with NRFS lead agencies and community partners.

For this report **mutual aid is defined as a reciprocal exchange of support and aid between agencies – through the establishment of informal or formal partnerships. Distribution of aid includes basic needs, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and cash-aid among other supports to meet the needs of families.*

INTRODUCTION

About First 5 Alameda County

First 5 advocates for, and in partnership with, communities in Alameda County to build an early childhood system that promotes optimal health and development, narrows disparities, and improves the lives of children and their families. In 1998, California voters passed Proposition 10, which added fifty cents per pack to the cost of cigarettes and established First 5 commissions in every county to “facilitate the creation and implementation of an integrated, comprehensive, and collaborative system of information and services to enhance optimal early childhood development and to ensure that children are ready to enter school.”

In alignment with First 5’s focus on early childhood and its role as the county’s leading public system voice and funder for young children and families, **First 5 serves as a bridge between public systems and private organizations to strengthen, integrate, and create more sustainable systems that promote conditions for familial, social, economic, and physical health and well-being.**

First 5 builds and invests in an equity-centered early childhood system that prioritizes children and families who have been underserved due to racist and classist policies, setting every child on a path for success.

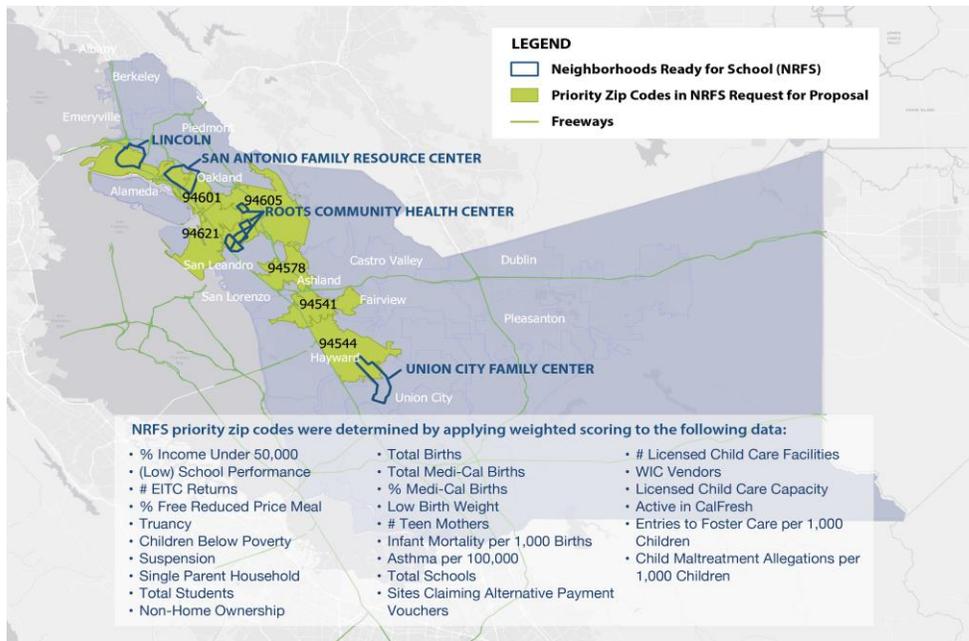
First 5 Alameda County’s 2017-22 Strategic Plan Equity Statement

Equity gives all children from birth to age five, families, and communities the best opportunities in life despite historic patterns of racial and economic exclusion. In public policy, equity is operationalized by focusing programs and investments on the people and places that face the greatest barriers.

First 5 Alameda County is committed to promoting programs and public policy that seek to achieve equity. Specifically, F5AC intends to take an active role in the movement to eradicate poverty as a means to achieving their mandate that all children in Alameda County are born healthy and reach their full potential. This requires the strategic and creative use of investments, programs, partnerships, engagement with parents and communities, and advocacy for policy and systems change.

About Neighborhoods Ready for School

Priority Zip Codes in NRFS Request for Proposal and Selected NRFS Sites



Place-based Work

Persistent inequities throughout Alameda County and connected economic, health, and well-being conditions, including their influence on children’s long-term outcomes, have been well documented by national and local research firms, public systems, community-based providers, parent advocacy organizations, and philanthropy. We know from a variety of place-based initiatives ranging from the early years of Community Block Grants during the Ford Administration to more recent efforts under the Obama Administration, for example, that place-based strategies that address the physical, social, structural, and economic conditions of a community improve the quality of life for the children, families, and individuals who reside there. Recent and ongoing evaluations of the Promise Neighborhoods initiative demonstrate the effectiveness of place-based work. In the Mission Promise Neighborhood, just across the San Francisco Bay from Alameda County, more children were ready for kindergarten, 47% more children participated in an early learning program, and children’s access to a medical home increased under the initiative.¹

First 5 Alameda County launched its Neighborhoods Ready for School (NRFS) program in 2018 to support a resident-led network of early childhood services and community supports, informed by national place-based efforts, the Family Resource Center movement, the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework², and consultation with community members. As part of NRFS, First 5 also aims to address inequities in neighborhood infrastructure by investing in development and land use that enhances and creates community assets, such as Family Resource Centers, to provide safe places for families to learn, play, and achieve their goals.

¹ Source: https://promiseneighborhoods.ed.gov/sites/default/files/FactSheets_MissionPN_Final.pdf

² [Strengthening Families | Center for the Study of Social Policy \(cssp.org\)](https://www.cssp.org/strengthening-families)

Together, these services and supports are intended to:

- Strengthen Family Protective Factors (parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete supports, social and emotional wellbeing of children)
- Promote community-building with a child and family focus
- Advance policies centered on the needs of children and families
- Increase kindergarten readiness
- Inform First 5's Policy Agenda, as well as program design and future investments

NRFS grantees use neighborhood-defined and led approaches to provide early childhood and two-generation family supports and inform policies and systems.



This includes cultivating parent leaders who will explore new ways to make their neighborhoods, both built environment and services, child-friendly, deeply rooted, and connected. NRFS grants are not intended solely to build and create neighborhood service centers, but rather to bring together disparate resources unique to each neighborhood.

First 5 provided a framework of the NRFS model, which grantees may have already had in place and are now using NRFS funding to fill in gaps or expand their reach. The model centers on four key components, as depicted in the figure above, supported by a strong foundation of local partnerships, organizational infrastructure, and policy.

First 5's Approach to Funding NRFS

Since 2018, First 5 has invested more than \$6 million in resources across four neighborhoods to implement its NRFS strategy in traditionally disinvested regions of Alameda County. While the initial contracted amount for each NRFS site was approximately \$470,000 annually, each contract was expanded to support facility upgrades, training and technical assistance support, and other non-monetary resources. In addition, to help NRFS grantees mitigate the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and families, supplemental funding was distributed to sites through First 5's Community Resilience Fund. The table below describes the total funding each NRFS site received from March 1, 2018, through June 30, 2021.

NRFS Site	Funding (March 2018 – June 2021)	Additional Facility Grants	Community Resilience Fund*
Lincoln	\$1,362,824	\$19,144	\$150,000
Roots Stay Ready for School	\$1,363,000	\$53,222	\$100,000
San Antonio Family Resource Center	\$1,362,760	\$50,000	\$225,900
Union City Family Center	\$1,363,000	\$47,776	\$300,596

*First 5's [Community Resilience Fund](#) included multiple types of grants. Each Alameda County Supervisor was asked to designate two grantees serving their districts; Lincoln and New Haven Unified School District/Union City Family Center received additional funds from their respective Board members. School districts in the county were funded for kindergarten transition supports using an equity index; Union City Family Center, as part of the New Haven Unified School District, was the designated contractor for that district.

Neighborhoods Ready for School Grantees



Lincoln launched an Early Childhood Initiative and Mandela Family Resource Center designed by West Oakland residents and informed by partnerships with the West Oakland Zone of Excellent (W.O.Z.E) founded by Lincoln and community organizations servicing West Oakland families.



The **Stay Ready for School Network** is a neighborhood network of nonprofits, community members, and organizations in East Oakland led by Roots Stay Ready for School.

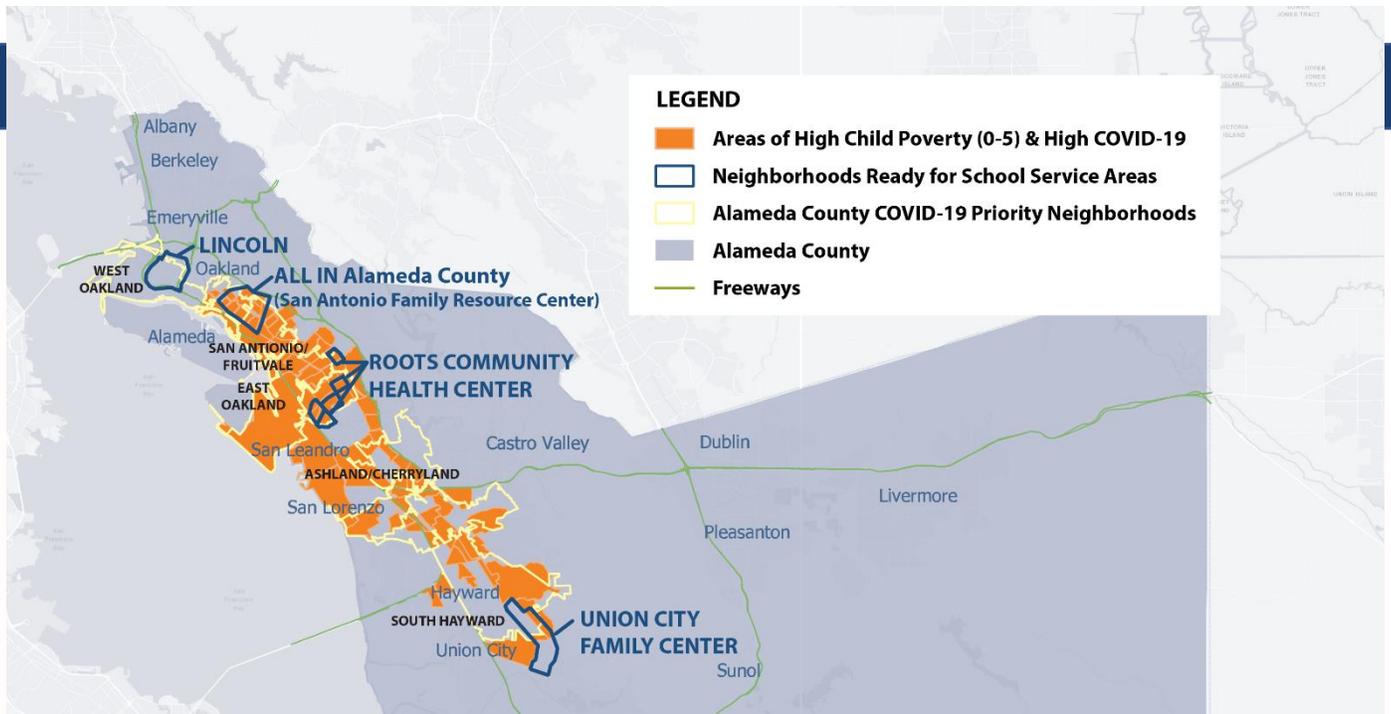


San Antonio Family Resource Center (SAFRC) is a community-led Family Resource Center project led by a collaborative partnership between ALL IN Alameda County, Lotus Bloom, East Bay Asian Youth Center (EBAYC), and Trybe.



Union City Family Center (formerly Kids' Zone) provides a community school model, collaborating with more than 40 regional partners to increase resources and programming to support the Decoto community from cradle to retirement.

CHILDREN IN ALAMEDA COUNTY



Shifting Demographics

There are an estimated 113,000 children under the age of six in Alameda County. Between 2000 and 2020, the number of children in this age group decreased by approximately 4%, with an ongoing decline estimated through the year 2030.³

About half of all households in the county speak a language other than English at home, similar to statewide. Live births to mothers who identify as Asian/Pacific Islander are now the largest racial/ethnic group, accounting for nearly 1 in 3 births—while the number of mothers who identify as White or Black/African American declined between 1998 and 2016.⁴

Alameda County's High Cost of Living Puts a Strain on Families, Exacerbating Racial Disparities

Families with children ages birth to five increasingly face economic struggles. While the median household income is 1.4 times higher than the rest of California (\$75,277) and the poverty rate has been decreasing, the number of children under age six enrolled in at least one public assistance program increased from 28% in 2006 to 34% in 2020.⁵

³ California Department of Finance, Population Estimates and Projections (May 2020)

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. 2018 American Community Survey

⁵ CA Department of Health and Human Services. <https://data.chhs.ca.gov/dataset/eligible-individuals-underage-21-enrolled-in-medi-cal-by-county/resource/08ecb2a4-1e1d-45d2-8354-cbd5389cd43d>

The gap between the income needed to meet a family's basic needs (\$117,975) and the income of a family living at the Federal Poverty Level with a maximum of 2021 tax credits is over \$80,000. Housing costs continue to grow and child care is an ever-increasing economic burden for families with young children. As of 2020, the average monthly cost of full-time infant/toddler care ranged between \$1,500 for licensed family child care to over \$1,900 for center-based care.⁶

Subsidies can reduce these costs for families. In 2018, 11,722 children under age six utilized a public subsidy for child care.⁷ Yet, distressingly, roughly 32,000 children ages birth to five who qualify for subsidized care do not receive it.⁸

Alameda County ranks as the fourth most racially disparate county in the state. It is the first most racially disparate county for food security and the second for access to early childhood education.⁹

Kindergarten Readiness

The insights gained from the KRA are an important marker of children's kindergarten readiness skills and the readiness of families, communities, and schools to support children's overall development. As of the most recent countywide Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (2019), only 44% of children were fully ready for kindergarten.¹⁰ For the past several years, nearly half of children with developmental issues were not identified prior to entering kindergarten.¹¹

⁶ October 2020 Alameda County Child Care Program Survey conducted by the Alameda County Early Care and Education Program Local Planning Council and First 5 Alameda County

⁷ 2018 Early Learning Needs Assessment Tool (ELNAT) and Alameda County Social Services Agency

⁸ CA Department of Health and Human Services. <https://data.chhs.ca.gov/dataset/eligible-individuals-underage-21-enrolled-in-medi-cal-by-county/resource/08ecb2a4-1e1d-45d2-8354-cbd5389cd43d>

⁹ Advancement Project California. (2021). RACE COUNTS project. Retrieved from <https://www.racecounts.org/>

¹⁰ <http://www.first5alameda.org/2019-alameda-county-kindergarten-readiness-assessment>

¹¹ California Department of Education: Data Quest Special Needs.

SNAPSHOT OF NRFS NEIGHBORHOODS



Lincoln West Oakland

3,961 people served by the NRFS grantee in FY2019-2020*

361 estimated births in 2017**

29 new referrals to Help Me Grow for families residing in the neighborhood for CY 2020***

2 child care centers and **10** family child care homes, licensed capacity of **696** children ages birth -12

3 WIC authorized vendors

5 park and recreation facilities

**Counts refer to any person served by First 5 NRFS investment (low intensity to high touch)*

***Source: Alameda County Public Health Department. Counts generated by combining census tracts within or partially within NRFS neighborhoods*

**** Help Me Grow Central Access Point*

Demographics of OUSD kindergarten students residing within the neighborhood*

Race/ethnicity: primarily Black (44%) and Latinx (24%), followed by Asian (11%), White (7%), multiracial (7%), and other (6%)

Primary languages: English (64%), Spanish (18%), Arabic (14%), Cantonese (1%), and other (3%)

34% English Learner classification

80% qualify for free/reduced meal

*Source: 2019-20 OUSD Kindergarten Student Data



Roots Stay Ready for School East Oakland

417 people served by the NRFS grantee in FY2019-2020*

550 estimated births in 2017**

99 new referrals to Help Me Grow for families residing in the neighborhood for CY 2020***

9 child care centers and **30** family child care homes, licensed capacity of **394** children ages birth -12

8 WIC authorized vendors

8 park and recreation facilities

**Counts refer to any person served by First 5 NRFS investment (low intensity to high touch)*

***Source: Alameda County Public Health Department. Counts generated by combining census tracts within or partially within NRFS neighborhoods*

**** Help Me Grow Central Access Point*

Demographics of OUSD kindergarten students residing within the neighborhood*

Race/ethnicity: primarily Latinx (64%) and Black (23%), followed by Asian (3%), multiracial (3%), White (1%), and other (6%)

Primary languages: Spanish (49%), English (39%), Mam (8%), Arabic (3%), and other (2%)

58% English Learner classification

75% qualify for free/reduced meal

*Source: 2019-20 OUSD Kindergarten Student Data



San Antonio Family Resource Center (SAFRC) Oakland

2,781 people served by the NRFS grantee in FY2019-2020*

609 estimated births in 2017**

119 new referrals to Help Me Grow for families residing in the neighborhood for CY 2020***

15 child care centers and **17** family child care homes, licensed capacity of **776** children ages birth -12

8 WIC authorized vendors

8 park and recreation facilities

*Counts refer to any person served by First 5 NRFS investment (low intensity to high touch)

**Source: Alameda County Public Health Department. Counts generated by combining census tracts within or partially within NRFS neighborhoods

*** Help Me Grow Central Access Point

Demographics of Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) kindergarten students residing within the neighborhood*

Race/ethnicity: primarily Latinx (43%) and Asian (33%), followed by Black (14%), White (5%), multiracial (4%), and other (3%)

Primary languages: English (40%), Spanish (30%), Cantonese (8%), Mam (4%), and Arabic (2%)

56% English Learner classification

65% qualify for free/reduced meal

*Source: 2019-20 OUSD Kindergarten Student Data



Union City Family Center Union City

1062 people served by the NRFS grantee in FY2019-2020*

400 estimated births in 2017**

31 new referrals to Help Me Grow for families residing in the neighborhood for CY 2020***

13 child care centers and **21** family child

care homes , licensed capacity of **950** children ages birth -12

2 WIC authorized vendors

4 park and recreation facilities

*Counts refer to any person served by First 5 NRFS investment (low intensity to high touch)

**Source: Alameda County Public Health Department. Counts generated by combining census tracts within or partially within NRFS neighborhoods

*** Help Me Grow Central Access Point

Demographics of TK and Kindergarten students attending Hillview Crest and Searles elementary schools*

Race/ethnicity: primarily Latinx (64%) and Asian/Pacific Islander (24%), followed by Black (5%), White (5%), and Native American (2%)

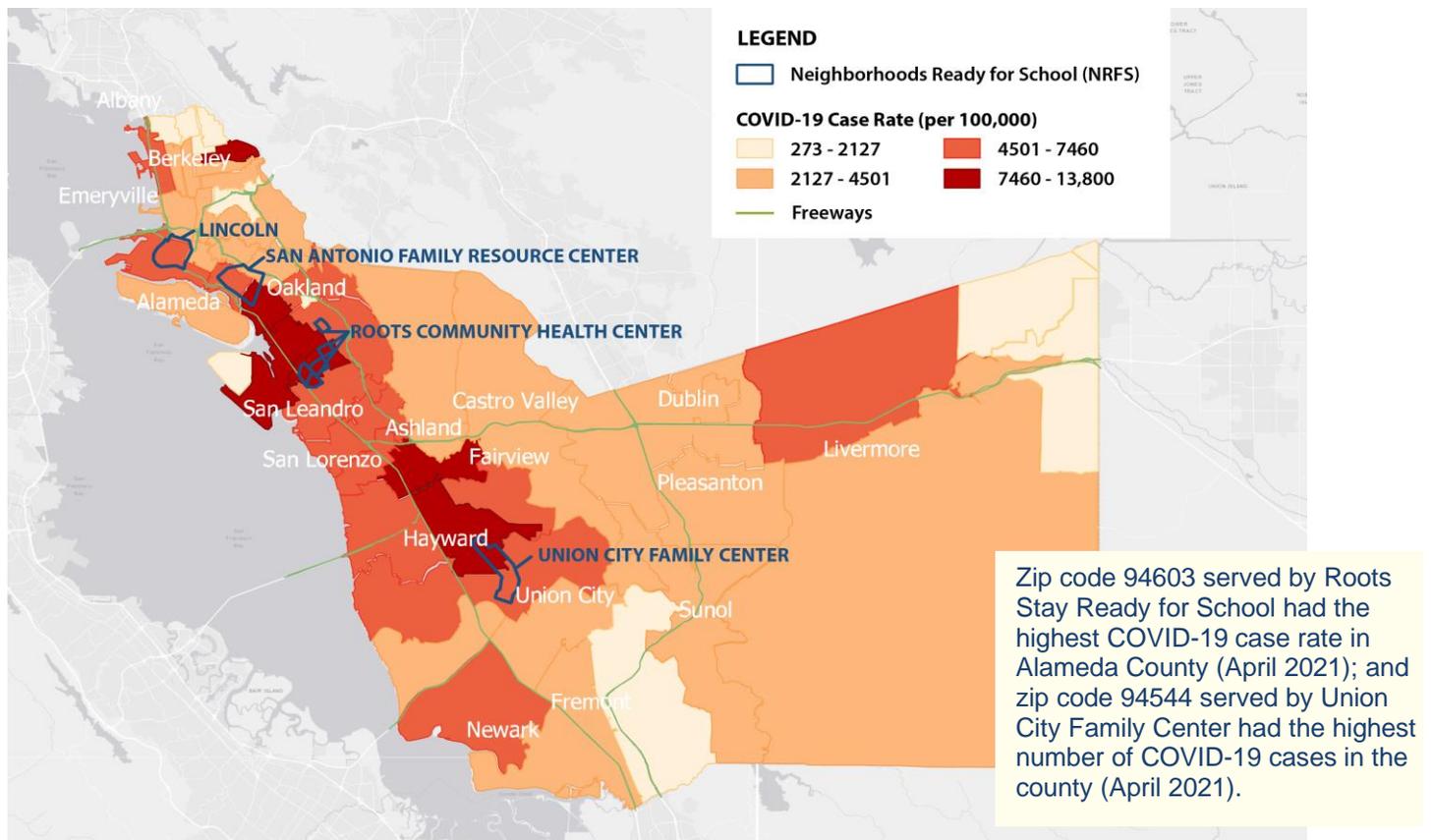
Primary languages: English (48%), Spanish (39%)

41% English Learner classification

*Source: 2020-21 New Haven Unified School District Student Data

FIRST 5 ALAMEDA COUNTY'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

With families navigating historic levels of job loss, childcare and school closures, healthcare challenges, and food and housing insecurity, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated persistent health and economic inequities. Together, these societal, economic, and health conditions pose a particular threat to the wellbeing of children, especially children of color, with long-term implications for the health and development of children, families, and communities.



As an initial response to the devastating impact of COVID-19, F5AC launched the [Community Resilience Fund](#) in April 2020 and has distributed more than \$10 million county-wide to help children, families, and childcare providers cope with the heightened challenges of the pandemic.

In alignment with First 5’s equity framework and commitment to social justice, the [Community Resilience Fund](#) grants priority to African American/Black, Southeast Asian/Asian Pacific Islander, Latino, Native American, immigrant, and undocumented families and those experiencing poverty. Due to structural race and class bigotries, these communities have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, and resources were allocated to mitigate the deepening inequities. To further support local neighborhoods as the pandemic unfolded, First 5 re-purposed existing contracts, formed targeted partnerships with philanthropic and public agencies to increase direct funding streams to families and pulled funding from existing reserves to support the pandemic response. Recognizing First 5’s nimble response to infrastructure and expertise investing in early childhood, the County of Alameda partnered with First 5 to administer CARES funding.

Supplies Delivered to Partner Sites from April 2020 to June 2021

BOOKS AND TOTE BAGS

- 4,485 books
- 6,100 tote bags for supply distribution

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND MEDICAL SUPPLIES

- 8,640 packs of alcohol wipes
- 30,868 bottles of hand sanitizer
- 10,392 bottles of hand soap
- 6,250 digital thermometers
- 379,700 face masks (KN95, non-medical grade, and cloth)
- 47,500 gloves

KINDERGARTEN READINESS MATERIALS AND TOYS

- 1,224 sets of dry erase boards, markers, and erasers
- 2,120 activity books
- 5,520 coloring books
- 5,674 boxes of crayons
- 3,504 pre-school flash cards
- 1,200 puzzles
- 4,080 packs of Play-Doh
- 2,000 LCD tablets
- 1,200 STEM toys
- 1,960 pre-school learning backpacks
- 800 youngest reader backpacks
- 936 packs of census materials for kids

HOUSEHOLD SUPPLIES AND PERSONAL HYGIENE PRODUCTS

- 53,180 packs of diapers and baby wipes
- 60,000 packs of toilet paper
- 17,384 bottles of cleaning solution
- 2,109 feminine hygiene products
- 4,844 containers of floss
- 8,912 tubes of toothpaste
- 8,768 toothbrushes

Source: First 5 Alameda County

Cross-Site Evaluation Approach & Methodology

The cross-site evaluation of the NRFS strategy is guided by the Empowerment Evaluation¹² approach and uses a multi-case study design to examine the implementation, evolution, and effectiveness of NRFS across the four neighborhoods. It is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the evaluation, initially halting all data-gathering efforts to help ensure lead agencies and their partners were available to respond to the emerging needs of the neighborhoods. When appropriate, the cross-site evaluation resumed, and the methodology shifted, to accommodate re-imagined NRFS service, delivery models.

Data Gathering Activities

- **Lead Agency Site Visits:** Data gathering efforts began in late Winter 2019 and into early Spring of 2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, with *site visits* conducted at each NRFS site¹³ to learn about neighborhood environments and meet lead agency staff and their partners.
- **Key Informant Interviews:** Interviews with two lead agency staff were conducted during each site visit to understand the needs, assets, and systemic issues embedded across neighborhoods and to hear their general perceptions of the NRFS model design and implementation.
- **Key Stakeholder Interviews:** Lead agency partner organizations and First 5 Alameda staff participated in interviews to gather their perspectives on how the strategy unfolded and to identify early successes and challenges and future policy implications. The interviews started in Spring 2020 and culminated in Spring 2021. A total of 10 interviews were conducted.
- **COVID-19 Network Response Survey:** A COVID-19 Network Response Survey was administered to lead agency staff and some key community partner agency staff in the Winter of 2020 to capture the emerging needs of families and the overall impact of the pandemic on the service delivery system.
- **Virtual Focus Groups:** Parents/caregivers shared their experiences and perspectives through virtual focus groups. A total of 38 parents/caregivers participated in the virtual focus groups across all NRFS sites.
- **Additional Data:** Additional data sources were reviewed and incorporated into the Interim Report to situate each neighborhood's context and environment. Data sources include, but are not limited to, NRFS Results Based Accountability contract reports, F5AC Help Me Grow data, NRFS information captured through monthly funder-grantee meetings, participation in F5AC NRFS Learning Communities, and First 5's population data.

¹² Fetterman, D.M. & Wandersman, A. (2004). Empowerment evaluation principles in practice. New York, NY: Guildford Press.

¹³ Three site visits were conducted in-person prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The last site visit was conducted virtually as a result of the pandemic. Subsequent data gathering efforts were all conducted virtually.

Guiding Questions

1. Looking across the four grantee sites, how were residents and other stakeholders engaged in identifying family, neighborhood, and system needs and assets? What were the key needs and assets that surfaced at each site?
2. What were the main services and resources provided by the grantees and their partners and how did they align with local needs and assets? What barriers, if any, did grantees encounter in addressing local needs? What were the characteristics of the families, providers, and partners served? What worked well at each site, and what were the unmet needs or barriers that families and providers encountered, and how do these inform city, county, or state policy agendas?
3. What were the short- and longer-term outcomes for children and families, providers, neighborhoods, and systems?
4. Overall, how effective was First 5's investment and support (financially, as well as in the administration of funding and T/A capacity building efforts)? What are the recommendations going forward for the NRFS investment and for First 5's policy advocacy work?

INITIAL FINDINGS OF THE NRFS CROSS-SITE EVALUATION

NRFS Strategy

The accomplishments of the NRFS sites are interlinked with the multiple crises caused by the pandemic, the consequences of which continue to reverberate across neighborhoods furthest from opportunity. This section documents how NRFS sites responded to the emerging and unprecedented needs of families in their respective neighborhoods. It is important to call out that the disparities amplified by COVID-19 were deeply rooted in the NRFS neighborhoods prior to the pandemic and were the impetus behind the NRFS community grantmaking strategy from inception.

The NRFS community grantmaking strategy is designed to address barriers and disparities by building a network of early childhood services and community supports through a neighborhood-based approach.

Pre-Pandemic Focus on Foundational Elements

The NRFS sites' initial pre-pandemic work was focused on foundational elements (partnerships, infrastructure, and policy) and included the expansion of 0-5 programming and family-friendly facility enhancements.

Building Out of 0-5 Programming

While each NRFS site has a rich history of serving their community through holistic services provided by the lead agency or community partners, the NRFS funding allowed the lead agencies to develop their programming specifically for children 0-5 and their families and caregivers.

Because the NRFS work was intended to be driven by the grantees along with the community, each site conducted formal and informal needs assessments to understand the needs of families with young children in the neighborhood. For some of the NRFS sites, the funding helped them “add the early childhood component” to their work and thus center the needs of their youngest residents.

The foundational focus on programming for children 0-5 was crucial during the early onset of the COVID-19 pandemic when early childhood centers closed and families with young children needed a trusted place to turn for access to food, diapers, cleaning supplies, and other basic needs. According to several lead agency staff, having built up their programming for young children helped them quickly shift to online programming and become a valuable resource for families. Union City Family Center, for example, was able to adapt its storytimes and parent-child playgroups to an online format. Nearly all NRFS sites reported increases in the number of families they served through their early childhood programming. In addition, community partners came to rely on the programming that NRFS sites were able to provide during the pandemic. As one lead agency staff shared, “[Our partner agencies] relied on us more than ever to connect to our community during the pandemic.”

Family-Friendly Facility Enhancements

Along with programming for children 0-5 and their families, NRFS grantees were also invited to assess their infrastructure needs to create more family-friendly spaces specifically for young children in their neighborhoods. First 5 provided over \$170,000 in funding to NRFS sites to improve or build out the infrastructure for their in-person programs and services. Each site took a different approach to facility enhancements. While COVID-19 has impacted in-person programming and services, these programs have greatly expanded resources for young children and their families in the neighborhoods and have served as neighborhood access points for basic needs distribution during the pandemic.

- The work of **Stay Ready for School** helped evolve the Roots physical space from one that focused on health access and deep individual work, to one that provides a safe space to do deep family and community work, healing, connection, and transformation. Converting the physical space into a kid-friendly environment sent a strong message that children, youth, and multiple generations of families are welcome; it established Roots as a resource for families with young children. Roots staff and leadership report seeing different generations of families attending play and learn activities, motherhood and fatherhood circles, and other programming.
- At the onset of the NRFS initiative, **Lincoln's Mandela FRC** was “just a blueprint.” The NRFS funding was instrumental in transforming the “blueprint” into a reality with a fully operational resource center with meeting and play space easily accessible by families living in the adjacent apartments. Mandela FRC is now an integral component of Lincoln. Engaging parents as partners, Mandela FRC helps parents strengthen and build new early education skills that can be reinforced in their homes. During the shelter-in-place, Mandela FRC hosted virtual circle time to help families connect with one another, share resources and activities, and create a space to help children continue to learn and practice age-appropriate early education skills.
- **UCFC** had previously focused on family self-sufficiency and supportive services; a specific focus on young children was not a part of their strategy. With the NRFS funds, UCFC created an early learning room on their campus and a more family-friendly environment for their center overall.
- NRFS funding allowed for the creation of the **SAFRC**. The funding helped form a solid partnership among implementing partners — Lotus Bloom, Trybe, EBAYC, and ALL IN. Facility funding helped augment and update the portables at Garfield Elementary School that prior to the pandemic SAFRC staff used to deliver programming such as playgroups to families of young children.

FINDINGS – MAJOR COMPONENTS OF THE NRFS MODEL

This section shares the early learnings from the NRFS strategy across each of the four major components of the NRFS model. For each component, recommendations are included for lead agencies, First 5, and system partners. Recommendations related to partnerships, infrastructure, and policy are woven into the four major components.

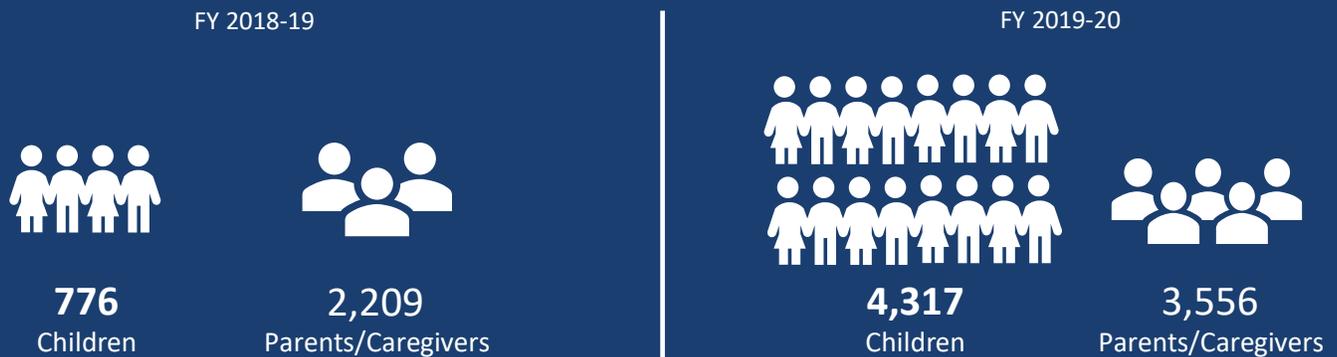
A NOTE ABOUT THE ORDER OF THE FINDINGS

The disruptive and transformative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on grantee operations and impact cannot be overstated. As such, we have taken the liberty of re-ordering the four major elements of the NRFS model in order of priority for communities that reflects on-the-ground implementation and achievements of the NRFS strategy.

- Economic Resources and Financial Supports
- Coordination, Navigation, and Location of Program and Services
- Family Leadership Opportunities and Civic Engagement
- Early Childhood Programs and Services

SNAPSHOT OF CHILDREN AND PARENTS/CAREGIVERS SERVED

In FY 2018-19 a total of 776 children and 2,209 parents/caregivers were served by NRFS lead agencies and community partners. The number of children and parents/caregivers increased dramatically as NRFS sites finalized their programming and activities in FY 2019-20 serving 4,317 children and 3,556 parents and caregivers.



ECONOMIC RESOURCES AND FINANCIAL SUPPORTS

Issues Impacting NRFS Families

As COVID-19 exposed and intensified existing structural and entrenched systemic inequities, NRFS sites served as **lifelines for many neighborhood families** by providing **basic needs and financial support** that kept families nourished and housed.

- Parents and caregivers who participated in virtual focus groups described how the shelter-in-place order led to a substantial **loss of household income from underemployment or a complete loss of work**. As a result, food and housing insecurity rose to an all-time high for many families, particularly for low-income families.
- According to all NRFS staff that participated in the COVID-19 Network Response Survey, **food security and financial assistance to help pay bills were the two most pressing issues families faced during the COVID-19** pandemic. Additionally, an overwhelming majority of NRFS staff reported that the pandemic exacerbated the challenges of maintaining stable housing, safe affordable childcare, and mental wellbeing.
- As families' food and housing insecurity increased, so too did **anxiety and stress levels**. One NRFS partner shared a common sentiment among providers, "A lot of our families were already facing house, job, and mental health inequities prior to COVID-19; all of those needs and inequities have magnified the stress and anxiety in our community."

"The biggest inequities affecting families are the lack of work [that leads to] trying to catch up with overdue bills, not having safe childcare for their children, continued job loss, forced to work in unsafe settings [as essential workers], and the never-ending uncertainty of COVID-19."

-NRFS Lead Agency Staff

Households Behind On Rent

According to the Bay Area Equity Atlas,* 11% of renters across the Bay Area were behind on their rent totaling an estimated rent debt of \$488 million, as of January 2021. In **Alameda County** nearly 31,000 renters were behind on their rent, within the same timeframe, with an estimated \$116.5 million in rent debt. This amounts to an approximate \$3,428 rent debt per household in Alameda County. Importantly, a high proportion of renters that were behind on their rent (63%) are low-income households. These households are carrying an average rent debt of \$2,928.

*The Bay Area Equity Atlas is a partnership between the San Francisco Foundation, Policy Link, and the USC Equity Research Institute (ERI). www.bayareaequityatlas.org

Spike in Unemployment Rate

Alameda County unemployment spiked from 3.0% in February of 2020 to 14.0% just two months later, as the pandemic unfolded.*

*<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/CAALAM1URN>

Support Provided by the NRFS Sites



- Because each of the **NRFS grantee agencies were deeply embedded in the neighborhoods they serve, they were uniquely positioned to become centralized hubs to provide families with financial resources, supplies, and other basic needs** that quickly emerged as the pandemic unfolded. Families came to rely on the lead agencies as their local neighborhood source for information, social support, basic needs, and other resources. Partner agencies relied on NRFS leads to be the connectors of CBO services to the families in need.
- In light of the devastation the pandemic wrought, NRFS sites rapidly responded to emerging needs in the community by **increasing food and diaper distributions** to families.
 - Across the NRFS sites, **staff served more than 1 million meals** and all sites significantly ramped up their food distribution efforts.
 - Together, NRFS sites distributed more than **106,000 diaper packs and baby wipes** to families across their neighborhoods from April 2020 through January of 2021.¹⁴



“[There is a need for] more resources within walking distance of homes, options for delivery of resources, more basic need resources.”

-NRFS Lead Agency Staff

“Even though legal status is not a requirement to get services, many of our families with citizen children, and who pay taxes with an ITIN number, did not receive the stimulus check from the government. In addition, many of them can't provide utility bills or rent contracts, so they could not receive the assistance they need.”

-NRFS Lead Agency Staff

“[The NRFS site] improved my wellbeing by assisting me with my cable bill which was a big help to me and my family because we needed access to the internet so that my kids [were able] to continue their learning during this pandemic.”

-Parent/Caregiver

[The financial aid] helped [with] bills that I am still behind on due to COVID-19. It allowed me to have some financial stress [relief].

-Parent/Caregiver

“People are financially hurting and providing aid so that THEY can identify where the money goes – bills, electricity, food, etc., – enables them to feel empowered and as if these entities trust them to make decisions for their families and not agencies telling them what to do with the aid.”

-NRFS Community Partner

¹⁴ Data retrieved from: First 5 Alameda County NRFS Supply Distribution Data, April 2020 – June 2021

- Nearly **all families voiced that direct cash assistance helped alleviate financial stress** brought on by their loss of income during the pandemic. Cash assistance is particularly needed to **support undocumented families** who are ineligible for federal cash assistance programs. **Providing cash assistance empowers families** to determine for themselves how to address their needs.¹⁵

Universal Basic Income

We know from a recent experiment in Stockton, CA just east of Alameda County, that universal basic income (UBI) of \$500 a month stabilizes household income, doubles household capacity to pay utility bills, allows families to pay down debts and even extends to help friends and neighbors, thereby lifting up their broader community.¹ The UBI in Stockton also helped stabilize individuals so they could find meaningful employment: full-time employment rose 12% among recipients, as compared to just 5% in the control group in the study.

In March 2021, Oakland Resilient Families UBI program launched as a collaboration between Family Independence Initiative and the national Mayors for a Guaranteed Income. According to the City of Oakland, the Oakland Resilient Families UBI is the largest UBI in the country that will enroll 600 families of color with low incomes and at least one child under the age of 18. Documentation status will not disqualify families who apply. The 600 families who are accepted will each receive \$500 per month over 18 months to spend however they choose.**

*<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/03/stocktons-basic-income-experiment-pays-off/618174/>

**<https://www.oaklandca.gov/news/2021/mayor-schaaf-announces-guaranteed-income-pilot-oakland-resilient-families>

¹⁵ First 5 used funds from partnering philanthropic institutions to support direct cash assistance to families.

Spotlight on NRFS Partners

SAFRC's Trybe collaborative partner increased food distribution in the community by 10X.

Through an innovative community distribution model, Trybe increased its food and produce distribution from 3,000 lbs. each week to 30,000 lbs. with support from an Alameda County Social Services contract. Trybe leveraged existing community connections cultivated over the last two years by the Trybe Parent Leaders including a network of teachers, librarians, aides, recreation directors, and parent leaders to support outreach and connect neighborhood families. With support from First 5 Alameda County, Trybe acquired the necessary infrastructure to expand their food distribution as well as provide gift cards, Chromebooks, and hotspots for families with children under 6 years of age.

East Oakland Ready for School creates the EORFS Resilience Fund.

Using adjusted funding from First 5 Alameda County, EORFS created a *Family Community Fund* to provide cash assistance to fill in some gaps their families face. Providing much-needed cash assistance has helped families through the unemployment, underemployment, and illness that has characterized this period and the impacts that will reverberate in myriad ways and for some time to come. Fund recipients work with a Navigator to help plan and act on individualized goals to build and sustain financial resilience.

* First 5 used funds from partnering philanthropic institutions to support direct cash assistance to families.



Recommendations: Economic Resources and Financial Supports

For Lead Agencies

Reinforce mutual aid* collaborations as a critical component of the place-based network. As the pandemic evolved, communities in crisis found relief through mutual aid partnerships where NRFS lead agencies became the trusted distributors of critically urgent basic needs that were provided by partnering agencies. Continued support for such collaborations, such as F5AC's work with HAMO and the Alameda County Food Bank will help to build strong safety networks to nurture strong communities.

For First 5

Continue to trust NRFS lead agencies as stewards of NRFS funding and explore additional opportunities for unrestricted funding. NRFS lead agencies appreciate the “hands-off” approach First 5 has taken in the implementation of the NRFS model. The “hands-off” approach helps build trust and is essential to creating transformative funder-grantee relationships. Exploring opportunities for unrestricted funding, within the current financial policies and requirements, can help simplify grantmaking, reduce reporting burdens, and communicate trust in grantees’ ability to allocate funding to serve the needs of their constituents.

Provide more structure and consistency to Results-Based Accountability (RBA) reporting. Recognizing that grantees were quickly and nimbly pivoting their programming and services to respond to their communities’ needs, First 5 substantially reduced grantees’ reporting burden by eliminating survey data collection and minimizing the content, amount, and frequency of reporting required of grantees. However, this trade-off has come at the expense of having reliable and consistent data to accurately represent the hard work being done. We applaud the reduction in reporting and recommend that it remain minimal and simple. While some aspects of regular reporting will resume soon more structure and guidance should be built into a reporting template to enable grantees to report on unduplicated numbers served consistently to enable meaningful evaluation across sites.

For System Partners

Double down on place-based strategies and intentional partnerships with other public systems, philanthropy, and community-based organizations to sustain this investment. A central learning from the COVID-19 pandemic locally, is that place-based strategies work. Each of the NRFS grantee agencies are embedded in the neighborhoods they serve and are uniquely positioned to become centralized hubs to provide families with financial resources, supplies, and other basic needs that quickly emerged as the pandemic unfolded.

For this report **mutual aid is defined as a reciprocal exchange of support and aid between agencies – through the establishment of informal or formal partnerships. Distribution of aid includes basic needs, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and cash-aid among other support to meet the needs of families.*

COORDINATION, NAVIGATION, AND LOCATION OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Issues Impacting NRFS Families

As basic needs increased during the COVID-19 pandemic so did the need for the essential services and supports that community-based organizations provide.

- NRFS grantee agencies are **embedded in the neighborhoods** they serve and are uniquely positioned to support families. Because of the NRFS agencies' **centralized locations and established roots in their communities**, grantees and their partners became central hubs as COVID-19 unfolded, providing families with basic needs and resources.

“With this model we can focus on the entire household, we can focus on food, focus on other needs. That is the best outcome that I see because it’s new and refreshing.”

-NRFS Lead Agency Staff

- Families noted that the distribution of food, diapers, PPE, and early educational materials were **conveniently located**, and they appreciated that they did not have to travel long distances to get to distribution sites. For families that were not able to visit the food distribution locations, NRFS lead agencies and their partners coordinated **home deliveries**.

Effective Elements of the NRFS Model

- Holistic support services that center the economic, social-emotional, and early learning needs of the whole family.
- Central and easily accessible locations within neighborhoods.
- Culturally responsive support services the needs of multiple community groups.
- Established trusting relationships with local service providers that have similar lived experiences and backgrounds.

Role of NRFS Sites

Lead NRFS agencies recognized the key role they played as lifelines during the pandemic and reinforced the need to **trust local community-based organizations**.

- From inception, the **NRFS strategy was set up to follow the lead of funded organizations that are rooted in the neighborhoods**. First 5 achieved this goal by having lead agencies identify the pressing needs of their respective neighborhoods early in the design of the programming and

“One of the best ways to address these inequities [that have been exacerbated by COVID-19] is to lean into CBOs that have a direct connection to the community they serve. Lean in and actually listen and make adjustments based on those conversations.”

-NRFS Lead Agency Staff

New Approach to Capacity Building

NRFS grantees appreciate the approach to trainings F5AC embarked on as part of the NRFS strategy. The approach is focused on taking the lead from sites to identify the capacity building site staff need to support the children and families in their respective neighborhoods. F5AC training staff work closely with NRFS sites to obtain training requests, organize trainings at NRFS sites, and identify the most appropriate trainers that meet the capacity and cultural needs identified by NRFS staff.

Training topics include positive discipline techniques, financial education, importance of play for children, parenting styles, pandemic parenting toolkits, and yoga and mindfulness.

36 Capacity Building Trainings

across all NRFS between July 2020 and February 2021

activities, through community needs assessments and engaging in dialogue with community members. Based on the needs identified, programming was developed to respond to the most pressing issues and challenges.

- According to conversations with lead agency staff and community partners, **NRFS agencies are best situated to understand and respond to the needs of their communities.** The “hands-off” approach F5AC took, which is central to the NRFS model, puts trust in lead agencies and gives greater flexibility and latitude to respond to the specific needs of families in their own neighborhoods.
- Several staff identified **First 5’s “hands-off” approach as key to the success of the NRFS strategy.** This approach allowed lead agencies and their partners to build trusting relationships with neighborhood families in their own ways.
- **NRFS grantees would benefit from additional resources to further expand their outreach efforts.** Lead agency staff and their community partners shared that parents/caregivers are not always aware of the resources available to them in their communities and often are mistrustful of local agencies. For example, only 29% of kindergarten parents surveyed (as part of the 2019 Kindergarten Readiness Assessment) at Prescott Elementary School within Lincoln’s catchment area indicated that they know where to go for help in their community when they encounter difficulties.

“All the people I’ve worked with [on NRFS] I’ve known for years. We always said, ‘we have to work together.’ With NRFS it was very organic and not too many efforts prioritized the level of service needed as with this opportunity. It was a no-brainer for me; these were people I had already been wanting to work with. The people, the flow, it’s my favorite collective.”

-NRFS Lead Agency Partner

“We knew about Roots based on the work they were doing, and we had also internally talked about bringing our work to the Deep East. We met at one of the First 5 funding orientations and started talking about partnering right away.”

-NRFS Lead Agency Partner

NRFS funding helped solidify informal partnerships between neighborhood agencies and, in some cases, strengthened pre-existing relationships.

- Although NRFS lead agencies had pre-existing relationships with local community agencies in their neighborhoods before receiving NRFS funding, the **NRFS funding helped establish new and informal partnerships and helped solidify coordination and communication structures.**
 - San Antonio Family Resource Center established an Executive Leadership Team that meets monthly and is composed of all four partner organizations: All In Alameda County, East Bay Asian Youth Center, Lotus Bloom, and Trybe.
 - The NRFS strategy served as an impetus for the establishment of the West Oakland Zone of Excellence (W.O.Z.E)—a partnership between Lincoln and community organizations serving West Oakland families including those that are part of the West Oakland Community Collaborative.
- NRFS funding also helped **strengthen connections among grantees’ larger networks.** East Oakland Stay Ready for School partners, for example, either knew a little about each other or had pre-existing relationships that were strengthened through the NRFS partnership. At Union City Family Center, pre-existing relationships with Tiburcio Health Clinic were strengthened further with F5AC funding that supported the development and implementation of a virtual fatherhood engagement series. Originally offered in Spanish only, English-language groups began in early 2021, based on the resounding success of the Spanish-language groups.
- NRFS site staff also provided **individualized support to families through wraparound case management** models. Through this approach, parents and caregivers receive one-on-one assistance to update resumes, conduct job searches, locate local and affordable preschools, search for housing assistance, and address other needs specific to their family.
- NRFS lead agencies and community partners alike indicated that a silver lining of the pandemic was the **increased coordination and communication that emerged among local agencies**, which was attributed to a shared desire to center and support neighborhood families that have been devastated by the pandemic.

“[Collaboration between agencies] has been positive. This has been a significant change. I really feel the support from other agencies. The problem before [the] pandemic [was that] everyone was doing their own thing, and nobody really knew what was going on in each agency. And now, we know more about what’s happening with each other. We are better at connecting families to food, to medical support, to getting help with kids, online learning, etc. We’re doing more holistic supportive services. That’s the way as community based orgs, this is how we’re supposed to work.”

-NRFS Community Partner

Mutual aid became critical to the place-based network during the pandemic.

- As the pandemic evolved into a crisis across NRFS communities, **mutual aid from partner organizations became critical in attending to the needs that quickly emerged.** Partnering with organizations such as the Alameda County Food Bank, Mandela Grocery Cooperative, Supplybank, and Help a Mother Out (HAMO), NRFS agencies have been able to **meet increasing needs around food, supplies, and other basic goods,** as the trusted neighborhood distributors of critical necessities.

“The commitment and mutual support that collaborating agencies are doing is permitting the access to community services in a much more effective way than pre-pandemic.”

-NRFS Lead Agency Staff

- According to HAMO enrollment data, a total of **316 parents and caregivers and 377 children were enrolled in the HAMO diaper bank at NRFS sites** between January 2020 and December 2020. [A HAMO Bay Area Diaper Bank in Alameda County Client Survey](#), conducted by Public Profit between February and March of 2021, found that “before being in the diaper program, only 8% of diaper bank clients reported that they always had enough diapers. But since being in the diaper program, 54% reported that they always have enough diapers.”





• And while the pandemic has broadly increased needs around food security, **for families with small children, the need for diapers has compounded their crisis during this time.** In acknowledgment of this dire need, F5AC’s partnership with HAMO and Supplybank has provided a critical safety net for families.

“Partners with basic need supplies (food/diapers/etc.) are very crucial at this time.”

-Respondent to the COVID Network Survey

Spotlight on NRFS Partners

Lincoln’s Mandela FRC establishes new partnerships with local food providers.

The West Oakland Zone of Excellence (W.O.Z.E.), founded as a partnership between Lincoln and community organizations serving West Oakland families, was essential to the formal collaboration between Lincoln and the Mandela Grocery Worker-Owned Cooperative (Mandela Co-Op). As a result of the collaboration, Family Legacy Project families received home delivery of groceries provided by the Mandela Co-Op. Shortly after the shelter-in-place order was lifted, Mandela Co-Op began giving Family Legacy Project families a \$100 monthly grocery credit.

Parents/caregivers that participated in virtual focus groups appreciated being able to shop for groceries so close to their home and shared they are incorporating more organic food in their meals.



A robust referral system is a work in progress.

- In the COVID Network Survey, respondents were asked to consider how well their current referral system works to support children 0-5 in Alameda County. While respondents commented on the strength of the relationships they currently have with their own circle of partner agencies, several respondents pointed out that **being able to identify resources and provide a warm hand-off for their clients can often be challenging outside of that inner circle.**
- NRFS site staff **are interested in developing an easy-to-use, up-to-date directory that users can quickly access for any emerging client need across the county.** NRFS staff would also like to increase community awareness about the programming and services NRFS sites provide families across the county. New resources must also be more accessible. Importantly, other respondents noted that the **current referral system can be quite limited by a lack of language translation services, as well as services being tied to social security numbers or other such barriers.**

Recommendations: Coordination, Navigation, and Location of Programs and Services

For Lead Agencies

Continue to form and strengthen partnerships with local and statewide agencies. Lead agencies are encouraged to continue to establish formal partnerships with local service providers and strengthen coordination and communication infrastructure among existing partnerships.

Look for opportunities to braid funding and resources. The pandemic response required lead agencies and partners to work collaboratively to meet shared goals of addressing emerging community needs. Build on this experience to continue expanding opportunities to amplify each other's impact through braided funding and/or mutual aid.

For First 5

Provide additional resources for grantee outreach efforts to reach hard-to-engage populations. Particularly during the pandemic, access to basic needs and other resources within walking distance and having options for delivery of resources have been critical in supporting some of NRFS neighborhoods' most vulnerable residents. Because parents are not always aware of the resources available to them in their communities, NRFS grantees need additional support to further expand their outreach efforts.

To improve service delivery, work with grantee partners to identify strengths and needs in their current referral systems and determine what is needed to enhance efforts to create a centralized, up-to-date countywide referral system. While grantees each have established partnerships with other agencies that they regularly make referrals to and receive referrals from, several grantee/partner survey respondents expressed a need for a centralized referral system that is up-to-date, readily accessible, and easy to use so that more options are available to better serve families with diverse needs. Particularly during the pandemic when grantee agencies are providing services to families across the county, having a centralized system to access services countywide would improve service delivery—and family outcomes—everywhere.

For System Partners

Support collaborative efforts to ensure culturally- and linguistically appropriate access to a variety of services. As grantee agencies responded to the COVID crisis by expanding programmatic offerings to meet their neighborhoods' emerging and ever-changing needs, grantees voiced a need to further amplify their outreach efforts to serve more children and families, particularly culturally and linguistically appropriate ways. Building trust in NRFS neighborhoods through community outreach is essential to serve more children and families, while the need for culturally appropriate services and information in multiple languages is substantial. Meanwhile, it is also essential that community and system-level partners have the resources and services available to provide support for the ongoing, emergent, and changing needs of community members.

FAMILY LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Issues Impacting NRFS Families

Parents/caregivers are eager to connect with other families in the neighborhood and build their leadership skills.

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus of parents/caregivers was on meeting their family's basic needs and supporting their children through distance learning; however, parents/caregivers that participated in focus groups shared a growing need to **establish connections with other parents to mitigate the impacts of social isolation**.
- Prior to the pandemic, some NRFS **families were already dealing with social isolation and disconnection**. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened financial strains and isolated families from their support networks, resulting in **increased levels of anxiety and stress**.
- **Families' emotional wellness is a rising concern** among parents/caregivers and NRFS staff. Families need counseling and emotional support services that are culturally relevant and responsive.

Safe community spaces are a top priority for neighborhood families.

- Focus group participants elevated **neighborhood safety as a top concern**. Families recounted the **increased violence and illegal activities** taking place in their neighborhoods, particularly at or near local community

"[As part of the group] we often discuss issues [happening] at the schools and on the streets. We come up with recommendations and reflect on them. [That is how we] show our leadership role in this community [...] through discussion we attempt to influence policies and reflect our point of view to the government."

-Parent/Caregiver

"As a community organizer, I improved my leadership and am encouraging families that I work with to advocate for the resources that they need the most."

-Parent/Caregiver

"We need clean safe indoor play spaces for kids. I don't feel safe taking them outside. It's unfair that we have to travel outside of our community, like Berkeley or Castro Valley, if we want to have a nice play area. We need spaces where kids can have fun, like a play café for kids in East Oakland."

-Parent/Caregiver

spaces, including parks. The F5AC-funded 2019 KRA¹⁶ also confirms the concerns parents have about safety and the lack of public resources in the NRFS neighborhoods.

- Parents/caregivers of Prescott Elementary School kindergarteners, located in the Lincoln neighborhood, were least likely among the NRFS parents surveyed to indicate that their neighborhood is safe.
- In the East Oakland Stay Ready for School neighborhood, only 15% of respondents indicated that their neighborhood has a park, playground, or recreation center.
- In the SAFRC and Union City areas, only about one-third of parents indicated there is a library or bookmobile in their neighborhood.
- Parents/caregivers and NRFS staff stressed that having **access to safe and well-maintained parks and play structures is vital to children’s early development**. The isolating impacts of the pandemic called for the support of safe play spaces, both physical and virtual, for children and families. The communities’ lack of access to safe spaces for children is a key barrier to physical movement and activity.

Role of NRFS Sites

NRFS sites offer a variety of opportunities for parents/caregivers to build their leadership skills and advocate for families in their neighborhoods.

- A key aim of NRFS sites is to support and nurture parents’ leadership skills. With input from community residents,¹³ **NRFS sites created programs designed to increase parents’ and caregivers’ leadership, advocacy skills, and civic participation.**
- A key aim of NRFS sites is to support and nurture parents’ leadership skills. With input from community residents,¹³ **NRFS sites created programs designed to increase parents’ and caregivers’ leadership, advocacy skills, and civic participation.**¹⁷
- In addition to the early childhood education programming offered to children ages 0 –5, sites offer **opportunities for parents/caregivers to expand their advocacy and leadership skills alongside their neighbors** through financial education workshops, monthly virtual support groups, and cohort-based groups. Parents and caregivers who participated

“[We] value identifying parents [and caregivers] in all our spaces and helping cultivate leadership skills. A lot of time [parents and caregivers] become substitute teachers, then a teacher, then a family advocate. [We also] identify natural leaders and support them through their [leadership] journey.”

-NRFS Lead Agency Staff

¹⁶ Source: Parent Information Form, 2019 KRA

¹⁷ http://www.first5alameda.org/files/First5DataSheets_NRFS_InfoSheets_Roots_2019_final.pdf

in the virtual focus groups applauded NRFS sites' dedication to helping build leadership skills. One parent recounted her leadership journey as an immigrant woman from a war-torn country. She started as a participant in a leadership workshop series and was later recruited by NRFS site staff to become a Family Navigator.

- To nurture and support the development of parents/caregivers as leaders and advocates, the SAFRC created **Trybe Parent Leaders** and a **Parent Participatory Research Project**. These cohorts are composed of parents/caregivers in the community and focus on strengthening the skills of parents/caregivers through workshops and trainings.
- At the onset of the pandemic, NRFS sites switched to virtual programming to continue to support children's early learning, and importantly, to **help parents/caregivers reduce the impacts of social isolation**. Virtual programming emphasized the importance of self-care as a pathway to continuing to support young children. Participants expressed appreciation for this because as caregivers, they often forget to take time to focus on their own needs.
- Parents/caregivers who participated in the focus groups expressed that the virtual **NRFS parent/caregiver workshops provided a safe and trusting space to connect with other parents/caregivers** and share their worries about their financial instability and how to support their children's learning during the pandemic.

NRFS programming increased parents' and caregivers' awareness and confidence to become leaders and advocates in their communities.

- In the first six months of FY 2020-2021, **NRFS sites offered a total of 78 virtual parent/caregiver leadership workshops**, and as one parent explained, *"I like that the [NRFS] program is designed for real people in the community."*

Snapshot of Key Services Provided

Between July 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020, NRFS sites provided **258** programs / workshops / story-time sessions including, but not limited to:

- ✓ **78** virtual parent /caregiver leadership workshops.
- ✓ **117** virtual community engagement events.
- ✓ **44** new and enhanced early childhood programs and services developed and implemented.

Source: First 5 Alameda County Results Based Accountability Data

Recommendations: Family Leadership Opportunities & Civic Engagement

For Lead Agencies

Continue to offer programming to build social connections. As the pandemic required months of isolation, providing opportunities for families to connect virtually helps decrease social isolation and builds a connected parent community.

Create more opportunities to build leaders in NRFS neighborhoods. Many parents have expressed appreciation for how they have benefitted from learning more about how to navigate resources and help their children, families, and fellow community members. Expand opportunities for parents to build leadership and advocacy skills.

For First 5

Continue to explore opportunities to support NRFS lead agencies in policy advocacy. NRFS neighborhoods are crying out for safe public, open spaces for children and families. F5AC is encouraged to support lead agency sites in developing policy recommendations that increase access to safe and well-maintained parks and play structures.

Provide additional training and technical assistance to build NRFS capacity for civic engagement. While each lead agency is engaged in their own, very local organizing and advocacy, some may need assistance with leveraging additional resources and partners to engage in the types of policy action that would provide solutions to their neighborhood concerns.

For System Partners

Increase funding for culturally- and linguistically-appropriate mental health services. Across all data gathering touchpoints, respondents indicated nearly universally that mental health needs are pressing and have escalated during the pandemic. The need for mental health services is crucial for parents/caregivers and young children alike. Respondents also observed that mental health resources available are often culturally inappropriate and not accessible across NRFS neighborhoods, once again highlighting the importance of place.

Support neighborhood improvement efforts. Public safety is a basic need that was raised in policy discussions across NRFS grantees. In all neighborhoods, more resources are needed to develop and clean up public playgrounds for young children, support bookmobiles, and create safe spaces for recreational activities. Moreover, many NRFS families live in apartments with no access to yard space, making the need for safe outdoor spaces even more pressing during a pandemic year where everyone sheltered in place.

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Help Me Grow – Alameda County

Help Me Grow (HMG) Alameda County is a system that collaborates with agencies, families, and providers across the county to help ensure children ages birth to – 5 years reach their optimal development. *

NRFS sites rely on HMG as a resource for child development expertise, technical assistance for development screening, child development presentations, and support identifying other resources in the county. HMG partners with NRFS staff to support the activities and programming offered to children and parents/caregivers. In CY 2020, there were more than **600 new referrals** into the HMG Central Access Point **for families living in the NRFS neighborhoods.****

The HMG and NRFS partnership consisted of the following activities:

- HMG Mini Child Development presentations;
- HMG Child Development checklist training;
- ASQ Online training;
- Hosted HMG Connection Cafes;
- Child referral data of children who live in NRFS boundaries
- HMG participation in NRFS site partnership meetings.

*First 5 Alameda County website: first5alameda.org/help-me-grow.

** Help Me Grow Central Access Point, 2020.

Issues Impacting NRFS Families

In addition to laptops and internet connection, families needed training focused on how to navigate virtual platforms. The switch to virtual platforms at the beginning of the pandemic left many families in need of laptops to connect to NRFS virtual programming and high-speed internet service to stream NRFS programming. Families that did not have access to a laptop relied on their cellular phones to connect to the NRFS virtual programming. **Navigating virtual platforms such as Zoom and Google Hangouts** was another huge hurdle families faced.

Parents/caregivers and NRFS staff stressed the importance of increasing early learning supports to mitigate the learning loss that resulted from the pandemic.

- As COVID cases decline and vaccinations increase, families are anticipating transitioning back to school in the fall. Given the lost time for learning, development, and social interaction, many children and **families will need support preparing to return to in-person school and care settings.** NRFS staff are concerned about learning loss that resulted from school closures and distance learning and families struggle with limited access to affordable, high-quality early childhood education programs.

Access to quality early childhood education programs continues to be a need for families in NRFS neighborhoods.

- According to parents/caregivers, community partners, and administrative data, **access to high-quality early care and education (ECE) programs is limited.** Although NRFS neighborhoods are dotted with ECE programs throughout, families within the neighborhood catchment areas often find themselves squeezed out of an ECE slot for their child by children from outside of their neighborhoods.

- **Parents, families, and providers need to be properly resourced** to ensure that families have meaningful choice in the selection of the care setting that is best for their child. For

many families, Family Child Care is the preferred ECE setting because of the home-like environment, a small number of children, flexible hours, lower cost, and/or cultural or language preferences.¹⁸ Continued and deepened investment in technical assistance, professional development, and other supports to ensure high quality in these childcare settings will help prepare NRFS children for a successful transition to kindergarten.

Role of NRFS Sites

Virtual programming offered by NRFS sites increased family engagement.

- The COVID-19 pandemic struck as NRFS sites were in their second year of setting up their programs and services. In response to the needs emerging as a result of the pandemic, sites ramped up their distribution of basic needs while also **working around the clock to restructure their programs and activities to move to virtual platforms.**
- NRFS sites stepped in to support families, issuing over **2,000 LCD tablets across all NRFS sites**¹⁹, and helping families learn how to navigate virtual platforms such as Zoom and Google Hangouts. Interestingly, NRFS staff noted that an unexpected silver lining of the switch to virtual platforms was an **increase in enrollment and participation in their virtual programming**, as well as increased tech-savviness among families.



Family Navigators play a central role in building trusting relationships with families that keep them engaged.

- NRFS site staff all agree that **building trusting relationships** with parents and caregivers **takes time and dedication** and is key to successful outcomes. Family Navigators tailor programming to meet their families' needs, build trusting relationships and reduce barriers to participation.
- Parents/caregivers that participated in virtual focus groups recounted stories of the **personalized attention they receive from Family Navigators.** Additionally, parents/caregivers explained that Family Navigators help foster a sense of community among participating families. Parents/caregivers rely on their trusted network of families for mutual support. By sharing their experiences and challenges with each other, parents realized that they are not alone. As one parent shared, "These groups are helpful. You feel like you're the only one going through something. [Now] I feel like I'm not the only one."

¹⁸ Source: <https://www.childcare.gov/index.php/consumer-education/family-child-care-homes>

¹⁹ Source: First 5 Data 3.10.21

Parents and caregivers are confident that NRFS activities and programs are preparing their children to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

"I am very pleased to have Story Time and now they have a 45-minute [learning] session for kids. That has been helpful for me. It is a mental release for me and [helps get the] stress off my shoulders."

-Parent/Caregiver

- Nearly all parents who participated in virtual focus groups reported that the NRFS early childhood educational program their children engage in help prepare them for kindergarten. Prior to the pandemic, **parents/caregivers appreciated the culturally relevant, linguistically appropriate, and enriching early childhood programming** NRFS sites offered.

- Despite the learning curve that the switch to virtual programming demanded of parents/caregivers, all welcomed the online offerings and educational materials sites delivered.

These **resources helped children maintain a routine, continue their learning, and supported their social-emotional wellbeing.** The virtual programming also helped ease the added stress and pressure the pandemic brought to all families.

Spotlight on Union City Family Center

Union City Family Center (UCFC) deepens family engagement via virtual programming.



Just before the pandemic, UCFC held the grand opening of their "Little Hands Learn n' Play Room" for tots. Weekly Story & Tot Times, parent workshops, parent cafes, parent leadership development through art and play, the second round of Abriendo Puertas, and more were planned. Once the pandemic hit, efforts shifted to helping families with essential necessities like diapers, food, PPE, and cleaning and sanitizing products; assistance with access to federal COVID 19 relief funds, and to maintaining and deepening engagement with families through virtual programming. Staff expanded storytime offerings (read-aloud and music and movement) in English and Spanish, as

well as parent offerings around stress management, self-regulation, fatherhood, and building resilience during this challenging time.

Recommendations: Early Childhood Programs

For Lead Agencies

Focus on the conditions needed for a smooth transition to kindergarten and early learning in-person settings. As COVID-19 cases decline and more vaccinations are disseminated, families are anticipating transitioning back to in-person school in the fall. Given the lost time for learning, development, and social interaction, many children and families will need support preparing to return to in-person school and care settings.

Increase connections and communications with neighborhood K-12 public schools. Each of the NRFS catchment areas is served by several public elementary schools, including several charter schools. Parents noted that strong connections between families and public schools are lacking. Greater and more intentional alignment between Pre-k sites and neighborhood public schools is necessary to support children's successful transition to kindergarten. Moreover, given the limited availability of preschool slots, greater efforts must be made to reach out to and connect with neighborhood families to prepare both families and schools for their children's kindergarten entry.

For First 5

Continue to increase access to neighborhood-based preschools. Although NRFS neighborhoods are dotted with preschools throughout, families within the neighborhood catchment areas often find themselves squeezed out of a preschool slot for their child. Given the abundance of family childcare homes in NRFS neighborhoods, continue efforts to build provider capacity, resources, and quality to support children's school readiness. As part of a comprehensive policy to improve school readiness in the NRFS catchment areas, efforts might also focus on ensuring adequate compensation and benefits for ECE educators.

Further explore the supply and unmet need for childcare centers in the four NRFS neighborhoods. This will help (1) Prepare and guide First 5 as they prepare to administer [Measure C: Children's Health and Child Care Initiative for Alameda County](#),²⁰ (2) Support community-based decisions on integrating ECE resources with the early childhood hub, and 3) Provide confirmation for policymaking around childcare issues.

Continue to measure kindergarten readiness in the county. The Alameda County Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA), launched in 2015 by First 5 Alameda County, has been instrumental in predicting kindergarten readiness and highlighted how ECE participation can "significantly narrow readiness gaps" for African-American and Latinx children. The recent KRA also found that

²⁰ Measure C creates a half percent (0.5%) sales tax, raising an estimated \$150 million per year to provide expanded access to free and low-cost health care and emergency services in Alameda County and improved access to affordable quality child care, prioritizing high-need families.

"neighborhood assets, like parks, libraries, and mutual support among community members, significantly boosted children's readiness." The insights gained from the KRA are an important marker of children's kindergarten readiness skills and the readiness of families, communities, and schools to support children's overall development.

For System Partners

Increase connections and communications with NRFS lead agencies and community partners. As children and families prepare to return to schools and childcare settings after a year of isolation and virtual classes, addressing the potential learning loss provides an opportunity for creating intentional alignments in programming and curricula across Pre-K settings and their neighborhood elementary schools to better support children, families, and communities in school readiness.

Moving Forward

As NRFS sites continue to serve and support the neighborhoods and re-imagine their service delivery models after the COVID-19 pandemic, First 5 is also working closely with sites to support policy advocacy—using the NRFS programming to identify successes worthy of scale, sustainability, replication, etc., and barriers to address through policy change, funding, and systems coordination. The Cross-Site Evaluation is a tool to capture the outcomes and impact of the NRFS strategy to inform both First 5's ongoing investment as well as broader advocacy around community-led place-based investments to support young children, their families, and their neighborhoods.