

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES REPORT – June 2010

Children's Alliance Solano County Children's Report Card Update

The Children's Network of Solano County has been producing a Children's Report Card periodically since 2000 with the intention of providing a document to the Solano County Board of Supervisors to provide a big picture perspective of how Solano children are fairing and that that can be widely utilized for needs assessments, advocacy, and strategic planning purposes. In May of this year, the 2010 Children's Report Card Update was released.

The Report Card notes:

- A recent report by the United Way documented that 23.7% of Solano households have incomes below the Self-Sufficiency Standard, the second highest of all Bay Area counties.
- The current economic recession has resulted in a loss of 766 licensed child care slots in Solano county. There are currently enough to meet 27% of the county's overall need, as reported by the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network.
- The high school graduation rate in Solano county fell to 75% as the state's fell to 80%. 27% of Solano high school graduates met UC/CSU requirements as compared to 32% statewide.

While the county may currently be in the worst of the economic crisis, there is a way to put people first while considering budget decisions in difficult times. The Report points to seven steps developed and recommended by the Children's Alliance that decision makers can consider in making future budget decisions to lessen the burden of families and strengthen the future.

- Preserve the basic infrastructure of health and human service programs for children.
- Increase the full spectrum of family support services.
- Invest in prevention and early intervention.
- Base funding on program effectiveness and client outcomes.
- Include Community Based Organizations and Board Appointed Advisory Councils in the visioning and planning process.
- Work with the community to set programmatic priorities and standards.
- Balance the budget with a balanced strategy; look for ways to raise revenues as well as reducing expenses.

The full 2010 Children's Report Card can be downloaded at www.childnet.org.

Child Abuse Prevention Council

Children's Memorial Day Observance in Solano County

Sixty-six Solano county children who died in 2009 were honored on Friday, April 23, as part of the sixth annual Children's Memorial Flag Day observance at the Health and Social Services Children's Memorial Site at 275 Beck Ave. The event was co-sponsored by the Child Abuse Prevention Council and the Office of Family Violence Prevention.

The loss of any child is tragic and while not all of these deaths could have been prevented, the observance focused on eliminating the loss of children as a result of abuse, neglect, and unintended injuries.

Annually, on the fourth Friday in April, people from across the nation join together in remembrance of the thousands of children who've lost their lives to violence and other preventable deaths. The symbol of this observance is the Children's Memorial Flag. The flag depicts the figures of six children holding hands. The middle child is represented by a chalk outline, symbolizing the devastating loss of a young life.

The ceremony included raising the flag, a few brief speeches by Supervisors Kondylis and Siefert, Patrick Duterte, Aaron Crutison, Carolyn Wold and Rosemary Kennedy and participants placing wishes for the protection, health and safety of all children in the garden of hope that is cared for by the Master Gardner's of Solano County.

Solano County's Forum on Creating a Platform for Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention

On Wednesday, April 14, 2010, 25 representatives from a variety of child serving public and private non-profit agencies met in Vallejo to participate in a forum on the prevention of child abuse and neglect sponsored by the Children's Network and the Child Abuse Prevention Council. This forum, facilitated by Candace Carroll and Annette Marcus of Strategies, was funded through a grant awarded to the Children's Network. The group began discussing the creation of a community-wide platform for the prevention of child abuse and neglect in Solano county. The first of many follow-up meeting was held in Fairfield on June 21, 2010, to begin the brainstorming process about what this platform might look like. There is strong community support for the process, and an excitement surrounding the year-long planning and implementation of the platform.

Blue Ribbon Events Held During Child Abuse Prevention Month in April 2010.

Blue Ribbon events were held throughout the County during Child Abuse Prevention Month in April. The Vallejo Family Resource Center (FRC) Blue Ribbon Fighting Back Against Child Abuse Event was held on April 10th at the JFK Library. Dixon FRC sponsored the 15th annual Dixon Community Block Party on April 24th. The Rio Vista Walk for Safety was held on Thursday, April 22nd. Community agencies, such as Child Start, North Bay Medical Center, the FRC's and others, recognized the importance of children by participating in the "recognize children's worth" sticker campaign all month. The Board of Supervisors and all seven cities adopted Child Abuse Prevention Month resolutions presented to members of the Child Abuse Prevention Council and the local FRC's.

Child Care Planning Council **Total Loss to Solano County if Governor's Child Care Cuts Enacted: \$23,322,098 and 4,641 Children Will Lose Their Child Care**

If the cuts to CalWORKS, and state funded child care proposed by the Governor Schwarzenegger in his May Revise are enacted, **Solano county would lose over 85% of its subsidized child care. An estimated 4,641 Solano county kids would be without child care,**

and the County would lose over \$23.3 million in child care funds. These funds would be lost from the General child care and Alternative Payment programs and the CalWORKS program. Additionally, hundreds of thousands of dollars would be lost from the Child Care Resource and Referral program and other local programs designed to assure child care accessibility and quality.

The impact to low income families, who would simply no longer be able to afford to work, is obvious. Low income working parents would be forced to make no-win choices to either quit their jobs to care for their children and then likely end up homeless, or to continue to work and leave their children without adult supervision, and likely attract Child Welfare involvement and even possibly jail terms for child neglect.

As bad as that would be, it still does not describe the full impact. As documented in First5 Solano's Economic Impact Study, child care is a major employer in this county. The loss of funds that would result from the governor's proposal constitutes about a quarter of the total funding in this industry locally. We can thus assume that at least a quarter of the jobs in this industry would be lost – an estimated total of **650 jobs lost**. So great a loss of funding for the child care community would undoubtedly cause the closure of dozens of child care centers and hundreds of child care homes, in turn causing an additional spillover effect on the local economy, and on local employers whose staff will have difficulty finding the child care they need in order to work.

Solano EDC Breakfast

On March 31, 2010, the Solano Economic Development Corporation (EDC), a non-profit collaboration of private and public investors that provides a confidential leadership role for economic development marketing in Solano county, hosted its monthly business breakfast. The subject of the March meeting was child care and quality preschool programs and their relationship with business success. Titled, *Business and Children – They are more connected than you think!*, the event was an opportunity for those in attendance to hear how investing in early care and education- the first 5 years of a child's life- helps businesses and communities prosper. Nineteen elected officials or their representatives and 134 leaders from business, education, health services, social services, child care and the military attended.

First 5 Solano and the Children's Network worked collaboratively with staff of the Solano EDC to plan and financially support the EDC breakfast. Scott Reynolds, Solano EDC Chairperson, welcomed the attendees and introduced Mike Ammann, President of Solano EDC, and Dee Alarcon, Superintendent Solano County Office of Education, who provided opening remarks and context.

The keynote speaker was Ken McNeely, president of AT&T California and chair of the Bay Area Council's Early Childhood Education Committee. Mr. McNeely talked about his own experiences as a father of two young children and stressed the importance of educating all children in the early years in order to produce positive results in later years. Those positive results, he knows, directly benefit business and the economy.

Matt Regan, Vice President Government Relations of the Bay Area Council, followed Mr. McNeely and provided real-life examples of how investing in early childhood education can

positively impact business and commerce. Concluding remarks were provided by Solano County Supervisor Linda Seifert. Supervisor Seifert challenged the business community to step up to the plate and to both support early childhood education and participate in efforts aimed at creating and maintaining a supportive environment for child care programs.

Staffs of both the Children's Network and First 5 Solano were extremely pleased with the attendance at the EDC breakfast, but even more so by what was judged to be the response to the message.

Family Resource
Center Network

2010 Earn It! Keep It! Save It!

Solano's Earn It! Keep It! Save It! Campaign brought in \$2,950,099* in total refunds to Solano's families and communities through this year's county wide efforts. This is a sixteen (16%) increase from 2009. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is the largest and most effective federal aid program for low-to-moderate income workers. Recognizing EITC's potential economic benefit to both families and communities, the Children's Network has partnered with the United Way of the Bay Area and the Internal Revenue Service to conduct this annual campaign. The Children's Network coordinates marketing, outreach, over 100 volunteers, and income tax assistance sites and provides on-going support services to the agencies that participate throughout Solano county. In addition, the participating Family Resource Centers (Dixon, Vallejo-Elsa Widenmann Healthy Start and Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District Healthy Start) have worked diligently to increase family participation in this program.

The 2010 tax season for Solano county has come to a close and the final results were announced at a Volunteer Appreciation and Recognition event on June 9, 2010 at the Fairfield Civic Center Library. Umpqua Bank and First 5 Solano joined the coalition as new funding partners in this year's campaign.

*Preliminary reporting – number subject to change

Family Economic Success Strategies Moving Forward – SparkPoint Initiative

Resources are scarce and we are in an economic crisis in Solano that could last a generation. We need to figure out new ways to work together to help families make ends meet, and our belief is that the SparkPoint Initiative can provide that vehicle for change.

Over the past several years, Solano's FRCs have been inundated by families requesting assistance to meet their basic needs. While the Children's Network and the FRCs make every effort to draw down funds for basic needs assistance, the demand consistently far outweighs the supply. The majority of families served at the FRCs simply do not have adequate income to meet their needs. The SparkPoint approach of building on existing family strengths aligns with FRC philosophy. The concept of bundling services together, so that current needs are addressed, and a road to long term financial stability is built through job training, credit repair

or similar strategies, promises to make the work of the FRCs and Children's Network more sustainable and their clients more equipped to meet the needs of their families.

The United Way of the Bay Area (UWBA) intends to operate at least one SparkPoint Center in each of the seven counties it serves as part of its Community Impact Agenda for 2009-2013, with the goal of helping families and individuals create financial plans that help them achieve self-sufficiency. Spark Point centers are already in place in Oakland, Marin and American Canyon.

In Solano, two SparkPoint Centers are proposed. SparkPoint pilot programs, which will be housed at the Fairfield and Vallejo Family Resource Centers, will focus on assisting SparkPoint clients in United Way of the Bay Area's four priority issues: achieving economically stable family incomes, improving credit scores to at least 650, accumulating savings equivalent to three months of living expenses, and reducing debt-to-income ratio to less than 40% (and ideally zero). The infrastructure to provide bundled services across the service delivery domains of building income, reducing debt, and increasing savings/assets does exist in Solano.

A SparkPoint kick-off event took place on January 29, 2010. Over thirty potential community partners ranging from representatives from local banks and credit unions to the Department of Health and Social Services were invited to learn about the SparkPoint model, and the progress in Solano up to this point.

Solano county's next step towards operating fully functional SparkPoint Centers has been advanced through a Phase 2 grant from the UWBA which will focus on planning. The goal is that over the next eight to ten months, with the funding from UWBA:

- Community service providers will be engaged throughout Solano county to partner with Vallejo and Fairfield SparkPoint Centers;
- Parents and community members will be integrated into the planning process to ensure that Solano's SparkPoint Centers are community specific;
- A strategic plan will be developed highlighting agreed upon mission and vision statements, target population, short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals, and participating partner roles;
- Funding will be secured for operation and sustainability of these new SparkPoint Centers and;
- FRC staff will be hired and trained to provide quality long-term case management services to SparkPoint clients.

Contact Rhonda Smith at the Children's Network, 421-7229, for information about how you can support or participate in this effort.