

# SONOMA COUNTY STRENGTHENING FAMILIES NETWORK: A WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH

by Community Action Partnership of Sonoma County

Region 9 • Santa Rosa, California  
www.capsnomoma.org



## Whole Family Approach

### INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

Our initiative's goal is to **streamline how low-income people in our community access public and private resources by better understanding the roles of each service entity** and sharing a common context of the Whole Family Approach across the County. With an alliance of several County Family Resource Centers (FRCs) creating the Sonoma County Strengthening Families Network, we are actively building collective impact and strengthening the partners' efforts to mitigate long-term negative impacts for low-income families.

Our current internal strategy uses the five gears of the Whole Family Approach and an enhanced family-centered coaching model at our Family Resource Center. We have developed metrics to record and analyze individual-level impact to improve the lives of working families.

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With the Family Resource Center collaborative, there are several community-based organization stakeholders, as well as the Sonoma County Human Services Department and two funding partners: First 5 Sonoma County and the Community Foundation. The Whole Family Approach can be a long-term solution to poverty mitigation caused by disasters, pandemics, or inequitable policies.



### LOCAL NEED ADDRESSED BY INITIATIVE

The October 2017 North Bay wildfires were the most destructive and devastating disaster that Sonoma County has ever experienced. The fires destroyed 5,300 homes in Sonoma County and damaged 7,776 more structures, displacing over 100,000 people. Thousands of families lost homes, property, pets, and in some tragic cases, loved ones, to the wildfires.

There are also hundreds of thousands of residents who, although they may not have lost their home, were profoundly impacted. The grief from the loss and destruction of homes, businesses and entire Santa Rosa neighborhoods continues to be felt by the victims' teachers, friends, classmates, co-workers, relatives, and the community at large.

These devastating events came with a silver lining: the need for community members to address recovery efforts together.

During the same time as the first set of wildfires struck our community, we began our two-year Community-Wide Needs Assessment. The top two concerns for families in poverty were the high cost of housing and access to affordable childcare. Families stated both of these areas led to family instability and uncertainty.

Shortly after the fires, we began our participation in the National Community Action Partnership's A Whole Family Approach to Economic Mobility from the Poverty Initiative Community of Practice (COP) cohort. We found value in cohort learning and lessons learned allowed us to not have to reinvent the wheel. We discovered a long-term approach to helping these families and the community recover from the disaster was to implement our multi-year effort incorporating the whole-family approach into our business model and provision of services for the low- and very low-income families we serve, especially to build community side resilience after devastating disasters.

## ROLE OF CSBG FUNDS

Over the last several years CSBG has helped fund staffing at our Family Resource Center in order to help achieve the goal of Whole Family Approach implementation. In addition, CSBG has helped fund the travel needed to attend conferences and meet with other Community Action Agencies that participate in the Community of Practice. CSNG funds are also used to conduct our biannual community needs assessment and the strategic planning process when needed.

## TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT

The Sonoma County Strengthening Families Network comprises four Family Resource Centers across different geographic areas covering most of the entire county. Family Resource Centers help mobilize families to successfully respond to challenges and improve the well-being of children, youth, families, and communities. By acting as a hub for the family support and safety net systems that exist within a community, FRCs foster community connections,

improve access to resources, and empower families to become self-sufficient.

Internally CAP Sonoma developed an innovative model to implement the Whole Family Approach across the entire agency. This process was started with multiple internal stakeholders, staff, and participants. We started by creating a new Theory of Change and educating ourselves in the Aspen Two-Gen playbook and outcomes bank. We then worked on a more specific logic model and evaluation plan. As an agency, we had two ah-ha moments. The first moment was the need to implement a strong coaching model to assist families beyond vulnerability. Using family-centered coaching, the participants lead the discussion, create their own goals and our staff guides them along the way. We focus on addressing all five gears of the two-gen model to thoroughly remove all barriers.

The second ah-ha moment was that we cannot do it alone. Using the Sonoma County Strengthening Families Network and working with all the Family Resource Centers we can have a collective impact and see community-wide change over time.

In order to create and use a shared language and guiding frameworks for the FRCs, representatives from each FRC shared existing program and evaluation strategies. After collecting and sharing information on FRC service delivery and outcome tracking methods, the group then examined a number of potential frameworks to organize their common work. Ultimately, the FRCs decided to utilize the Protective Factors Framework as a starting point in selecting shared outcomes and indicators. The Protective Factors Framework, a much researched and documented family support model, provided the FRCs an opportunity to capture and organize their very diverse and extensive menu of services and outcomes into a common language to which all groups could agree.

The overall goal is to provide opportunities for and meet the needs of children and their parents together, building education, economic assets, social capital, health, and well-being to create a legacy of economic

security that passes from one generation to the next.

Long-term, we would like to see:

- Sustained parent, child, and family results;
- Multiplier effects across generations;
- Lifting the whole family to success; and
- The family has increased financial assets.

## EVIDENCE-BASED OUTCOMES

As explained earlier, the FRC's all agreed to use the Protective Factors Framework. Strengthening Families is a research-informed approach developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) to increase family strengths, enhance child development, and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. It is based on engaging families, programs, and communities in building five key Protective Factors:

- 1. Parental resilience:** Managing stress and functioning well when faced with challenges, adversity, and trauma.
- 2. Social connections:** Positive relationships that provide emotional, informational, instrumental, and spiritual support.
- 3. Knowledge of parenting and child development:** Understanding child development and parenting strategies that support physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development.
- 4. Concrete support in times of need:** Access to concrete support and services that address a family's needs and help minimize stress caused by challenges.
- 5. Social and emotional competence of children:** Family and child interactions that help children develop the ability to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate their emotions and establish and maintain relationships.

Internally, we have also used the Your Money, Your Goals curriculum created by the Consumer Protection Finance Bureau to help build financial literacy and long-term financial capacity for families. The Financial Management Behavior scale is a pre and post-test used to track the change in financial behavior for the families.

## EQUITY LENS

Our Family Resource Center is based in the hub of the largest city and serves low-income Spanish-speaking families primarily with children 0-5. Ninety-five of the participants identify as Latinx families. CAP Sonoma has always been deeply rooted in Latinx communities, providing outreach, education, and advocacy to local leaders. We believe strongly and steadfast in the power of collective voice, and the importance of partnering with other organizations to make a positive impact in the community. Systemic barriers work against Latinx communities, and in order to reform these systemic barriers, organizations must effectively collaborate to reform the systems and practices that prohibit equity.

In order to truly understand the systemic inequities we hire culturally competent staff and give them the tools needed to equitably serve the participants. Staff at our family resource center participated in a leadership development program specifically for Latinx direct service staff; a cohort-based leadership development program that supports emerging leaders in building knowledge, clarity, and strength at the personal, interpersonal, and professional levels. Through the year-long cohort, the emerging leaders worked to promote the framework of "self-healing communities" where people are able to come together, build authentic relationships and reflect honestly about things that matter, share democratic leadership and take collective actions that assure social and health equity for all residents.

## CUSTOMER VOICE

The initiative has used customer satisfaction data to ensure the customer's voice is valued and a part of the program implementation. We have been able to do this in three main areas:

- 1. Community Needs Assessment.** Every two years our agency conducts a community needs assessment to capture our participants' voices, research data, and demographics of the community and ultimately enhance our services. The family resource center holds several classes that we were able to collect satisfaction surveys as well and conduct listening interviews.
- 2. Listen for Good.** CAP Sonoma worked with other partners in the community to implement an initiative called Listening for Good. Listen for

Good (L4G) is an initiative dedicated to building the practice of listening to the people we seek to help. L4G is focused on applying a semi-standard survey instrument, which includes using the Net Promoter System (NPS®) employed widely in customer feedback circles, to the nonprofit beneficiary context. CAP Sonoma L4G worked with our early childhood education programs; AVANCE, Head Start, and Pasitos programs held at our resource center to explore participant/client feedback as a means to improve programs and services. The L4G steps are Survey Design, Survey Administration, Interpreting Results, Responding to Feedback, Closing the Loop. The idea is to take the results and use them to change systems in the entire agency.

**3. Participant Internship project.** At our Family Resource Center, we wanted to build leadership among some participants that had taken several classes but were unable to enter the traditional work field due to immigration status. We created an intern-based program where some participants who had graduated from classes then became teaching assistants. Some interns were using the program to reverse credits at the local institutions, some just wanted to build their skill set.

## PARTNERSHIPS

This initiative is based solely on community-wide support. The other several Family Resource Centers involved in the collaborative are based in other nonprofit agencies. Multiple county departments are involved in the Whole Family Approach effort. All of the agencies involved pull resources and funding to support the community-wide work. We often apply for funding together as a collaborative effort to show full collective impact. Not one agency can do the work alone. Together, as a community, we can build resilience.

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