

First 5 Solano Children and Families Commission

Minutes of Retreat – Saturday, November 14, 2009, 9:30 AM Joseph Nelson Community Center 611 Village Drive, Suisun City, CA

Attendance

Commissioners: Norma Thigpen, Chair; Debbie Gossell, Vice-Chair; Dee Alarcón; Dan Ayala; Stephan Betz; Dana Dean; Elaine Norinsky; Linda Seifert.

Staff/Public: Commission staff and approximately 20 members of the public were present.

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at: 9:48 AM by Chairperson Thigpen.

I. Greetings, Introductions, Public Comment

Commissioners introduced themselves.

There was no public comment.

II. Approve the Commission Meeting Agenda for November 14, 2009

Motion: Approve the Commission Meeting Agenda for November 14, 2009.

Commissioner Alarcón moved to approve the agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Opening Remarks

Commissioner Thigpen welcomed the Commissioners and members of the public to the retreat and briefly reviewed the agenda for the day. The topics and discussion for the day will be focused on the changes in the economy during the past year. She explained that even though the future is uncertain, decisions still need to be made. She thanked staff for making the retreat possible and Commissioners for coming today.

Christina Arrostituto, Executive Director for First 5 Solano, thanked staff, Commissioners and members of the public for coming out on a Saturday to join the retreat. She explained that there will be some sobering news regarding the economy, but also a lot of good news regarding everything the First 5 Solano grantees had accomplished in the past year. The work done in prevention and early intervention has made a huge difference in Solano County. Ms. Arrostituto commented that she appreciates the privilege of working for the Commission and feels blessed that she gets to do the work she loves every day with such a wonderful staff.

IV. Changing Environment

Steven LaFrance, founder and principal of LFA Group, First 5 Solano's evaluator, reviewed a PowerPoint presentation on community indicators in Solano County.

Commissioner Seifert arrived at the meeting at 10:10 AM.

Commissioner Dean asked if the higher incidence of children receiving emergency room care was due to a higher rate of accidents, or less people with health care. Also, with the increase of children entering foster care in 2009, she asked if that was due to more incidents being reported or that more children are being identified.

Ms. Arrostuto explained that while staff can try to obtain this information specifically for Solano County, the briefs she has been reading state that the majority of people receiving services in the emergency room have insurance. She believes it's an access issue. Solano County is indeed doing a better job of reaching out to families regarding foster care, which could be resulting in more cases being reported. Nevertheless, higher numbers of children in foster care is a concern.

Kim Thomas, Director for Children's Network, informed the Commission that Kaiser Permanente has reduced and/or eliminated their after hours clinics and have been redirecting patients to the emergency room. This could be one reason for the rise in visits.

Ms. Arrostuto informed the Commission that First 5s across the state are still at risk for attempts to reduce, divert or even eliminate their funds due to the cuts in the state budget. County services and education depend on property tax as their main revenue, which has decreased sharply in the past two years and will not be back up to the levels needed for at least ten or fifteen years. Unless another major revenue source is found, there will continue to be a dislocation of services for the foreseeable future.

V. World Café

Francesca Wright, facilitator, gave a brief background on how the concept of the World Café was developed and how it works. The Commission, staff and members of the public conducted a World Café, which consisted of 3 rounds of small group (4-5 persons per table) discussion on three topics: 1) How would you describe the impact of the recession in Solano County? 2) Budgets are down and service demand is up. How are community service providers coping? What changes, if any, have we made to meet these challenges? 3) What are the most innovative ideas we can offer to keep us on track to achieve the goals of First 5 Solano's Strategic Plan? Between rounds, participants reported the highlights of their conversations. For each round, participants sat at new tables to ensure learning across a wide variety of points of view.

The ideas that came out of questions one and two were:

- Cross-training, multi-agency training
- Connect parents to parents/mutual assistance
- Listen to parents/families and what they need/want
- Handling "If we build it, but they don't come"
- Pool resources
- Focus efforts on economic stability ("teach a man to fish")
- Early identification of need for services
- Tenacity
- Do less with less
- Affirm the level of commitment
- Growing collaboration, formalize
- Build community hubs, make visible
- Build on existing strengths
- Shift paradigm re: who/how people are reached
- Shift responsibility to improve community indicators to the community
- Leverage resources (i.e., collaborate)

The ideas that came out of question three were:

- Identifying and training community health educators in faith-based organizations that bring people in to start doing community education. Going out and doing school readiness programs with people in the home. Add components to the "hub" such as financial planning, literacy, nutrition, social development, school readiness/preschool.
- In Solano County, providers collaborate.

- “Inoculate.” Use family resource centers as community hubs, then promote them through the parent-to-parent connection. Connect the centers to multiple services as well as parents.
- Spread the net wider. Expand the welcome baby program to everyone, not just those that are identified as high-risk. Get everyone screened. Set up a warm line for new moms that might not have been identified as high risk, but need help working through the problems they are experiencing.
- Expand prevention and early intervention, as well as the programs that keep families out of crisis.
- Better utilize volunteers and college interns.
- Encourage First 5 Solano to think about how to sustain First 5. Encourage seeking resources at the state level for additional First 5 Solano funds.
- Find a way for people to all realize the roles they have in communities. Go back to the family values and get a common message out on how the entire community needs to pull together.

The Commission took a short break at 12:30 PM and reconvened at 1:00 PM.

VI. Annual Review of the First 5 Solano Strategic Plan

Mr. LaFrance explained to the Commission that it is an annual requirement that they review the First 5 Solano strategic plan. He reviewed the priority, goal and result areas of the plan.

Commissioner Dean asked if there was a shift in funding that indicated some of the result areas have a higher level of priority than others. She asked if some of these should be removed from the plan, or if there are other items that should be added.

Ms. Arrostuto reviewed the history behind the establishment of the strategic plan and the legal requirements of the annual review. She informed the Commission that if they would like to update the strategic plan, they can do so at any time. She explained that if the Commission is looking for opportunities to address the current economic needs, the Community Stability Funds and/or the Discretionary funds can both be deployed without needing to update the plan.

Commissioner Seifert commented that when she looks at the currently-funded initiatives and strategies, the only result area she doesn't see is R7¹. In the World Café discussion earlier in the retreat, the common thread was that the area result 7 is something that is very important to the community and grantees. With the available funding streams going forward, she feels it will be necessary to be more selective about what the Commission funds.

Commissioner Gossell explained that some of the initiatives are getting more funding than others, but it's because other funds are being leveraged. She would like to work on collaboration and cross-training. She feels changes will need to be made, based on what is best for the community First 5 Solano serves. She would also like to look at a way to focus on a collaborative involving G5², including providing funds for housing, food and electricity for families.

Commissioner Dean commented that, given the recent changes in the economy, she feels a strategic plan that was developed in “better days” would probably need some modifications at this point.

Commissioner Betz commented that if the Commission decides a result area is going to have less funding, there should be two basic criteria: 1) how effective the program is in producing a result; and 2) the greatest demand in the community for the services. He would also like to focus on R7.

¹ In the strategic plan framework, R7 is: Community members support children's learning and development.

² In the strategic plan framework, G5 is: All families are safe and stable.

VII. 2009 First 5 Solano Evaluation Report

A. Motion: Discuss key findings and accept the First 5 Solano FY2008/09 Evaluation Report.

Discussion: Mr. LaFrance reviewed a PowerPoint presentation regarding the First 5 Solano FY2008/09 evaluation report. He informed the Commission that there is a process currently underway with the School Readiness initiative to reduce the number of systems data must be entered into by the grantee. However, other grantees still have multiple data systems that must be used.

[NOTE: One of the data points presented was later found to be incorrect. The slide that said "Over 1300 babies born to high-risk mothers were far less likely to need ICU time because BabyFirst Solano helped moms get prenatal care in the first trimester" should have read "347 babies born to high-risk mothers were far less likely to need ICU time because BabyFirst Solano helped moms get prenatal care in the first trimester."]

Commissioner Alarcón moved to approve the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The Commission took a short break at 2:10 PM and reconvened at 2:15 PM.

VIII. Result Areas at Risk

Ms. Arrostuto explained that in 2008, some funds were harvested from the long term financial plan to augment existing initiatives. This year, the Commission set aside \$1 million in a Community Stability Fund to help address the economic downturn. At the last Commission meeting, the Commission informed staff that, before moving toward deploying these funds, they would like to review the strategic plan (against community need information that was presented at that meeting) to determine what areas of its strategic goals might most need to be augmented.

Commissioner Seifert commented that she feels the Commission should be a leader in developing less burdensome accounting and reporting measures. The grantees would have more time and money to provide services. There is also a need to involve the community and widen the circle of people who are engaged in the First 5 Solano services being provided.

Commissioner Gossell sees R7 and R12³ as being joined. The Commission needs to work on ensuring families are informed about the services available to them.

Commissioner Betz explained that he is not sure if he sees a big rush to deploy the Community Stability Funds this year, considering that there will be another large deficit in the state budget next year. He suggested sending out a survey to grantees to find out how much time they spend on paperwork related to funding contracts. He asked that when the community engagement strategy is being developed, the whole Commission be involved, not just the Community Engagement Committee.

Commissioner Dean commented that she is all for reducing the burden on grantees, however, seeing as the Commission is the responsible party, she is very reluctant to move forward on blanket reductions. She would like to separate the Community Stability funds from the issue of whether the strategic plan currently in place is still pertinent. She would like to get the message through that there is a need to focus on R7 and R12. If she had to decide today on how to spend additional funds, she feels it should be spent on community outreach and the community health concept.

³ In the strategic plan framework, R12 is: Families access necessary support systems and community services.

Commissioner Seifert explained that a priority for her would be ensuring health insurance and adequate health care for children. Her next priority would be school readiness.

Commissioners Norinsky and Ayala agreed with Commissioner Seifert. Commissioner Ayala would also like to focus on educating parents on how to manage their finances and other matters.

Commissioner Alarcón would like to see every child ready to learn and safe at home with a full tummy. She would like to continue with the school readiness, while still expanding the availability of preschool opportunities. If the Commission decides to reach out more to the community, she suggested being very specific on what messages are being used to reach out.

Commissioner Gossell would like to ensure basic needs are met for children, which would involve shoring up the family support initiative.

Commissioner Thigpen commented that she feels strongly that very wise decisions were made when establishing the strategic plan. It is a long process to start over with the plan, and she feels the Commission should stay the course. At the same time, there is a need to identify real criteria for distributing Community Stability funds and how to approach revamping the strategic plan further down the road. She would like to look at the child care and family support areas when discussing expanding funding.

Commissioner Betz suggested earmarking \$200,000 for efficiency measures and a survey to ask grantees specifically how much time they spend on entering data and completing paperwork related to the grants they receive. The \$200,000 could be used to establish one data entry point for all programs. He also suggested earmarking another \$200,000 for community engagement measures to be deployed before the end of 2011.

Commissioner Seifert requested looking at how the Commission could partner or lead the effort to reduce the administrative work related to grants. She feels \$200,000 is excessive for this. However, she does like the \$200,000 set aside for community engagement.

Commissioner Seifert commented that this all needs to be thought through very thoroughly. She, too, does not see a big rush for these items.

IX. Looking Toward the Future

This agenda item was discussion in conjunction with item VIII.

X. Commissioner Remarks

Commissioner Seifert commented that she thought the evaluation report was very professional.

Commissioner Alarcón appreciated the way the numbers were synthesized for the evaluation report and easy to understand.

Commissioner Norinsky thought the evaluation report was very nicely designed.

Commissioner Betz thanked staff for getting the packets to the Commissioners a week and a half in advance of the retreat. He also commented that the California Budget Project pages were very helpful. He enjoyed the transformation that happened in the World Café.

Commissioner Ayala thanked the grantees for coming today.

Commissioner Thigpen thanked the Commissioners for coming to the retreat.

XI. Future Agenda Items, Meeting Time/Date/Location

The next regularly-scheduled Commission meeting will be held on December 1, 2009 at 5:30 PM, Multi-Purpose Room at 2101 Courage Drive, Fairfield, CA 94533.

Meeting adjourned at 3:12 PM.


Heather Devaney, Administrative Secretary

Approved: *December 1, 2009*