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NEWS

First 5 helps get kids out of poverty

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Nearly one in four Yolo County children live in poverty. For children 0 to 5 years of age, living without adequate nutrition, health care, parental support, or early learning opportunities means they start school at a disadvantage and often never catch up.

Research shows a child's brain develops most dramatically during the first five years and children exposed to healthy, loving, early learning environments enjoy greater academic achievement, are more likely to graduate from high school and college, and are less likely to be involved in crime.

During the past 15 years, First 5 Yolo invested more than \$26.5 million in the well being and early development of Yolo County's youngest children.

Through partnerships and collaborations with other local organizations, these investments have enabled tens of thousands of families and children to receive needed medical and dental care, fresh food, preschool opportunities, library reading programs, parenting classes, home visits and other valuable services.

First 5 Yolo is one of 58 county First 5 children and family commissions that came about as a result of Proposition 10 passed by California voters in 1998. This affirmation in support of young children transformed the landscape of children's services in California and Yolo County.

This unprecedented investment in California's youngest children has made First 5 the most significant and effective funder of early childhood development programs in the state.

Outcomes achieved through First 5 Yolo funded programs and services include:

- Since 2006, 3,651 West Sacramento children received free preschool.
- The number of Yolo County licensed foster parents increased from 38 in 2006 to 80 in 2012.
- Between 2010 and 2013, the percent of children aged 0-5 placed by agencies or placed out-of-county decreased by nearly 50%. Last year alone, this saved Yolo County \$420,000.
- Since 2008, First 5 Yolo investments have contributed to 3,778 dental visits for pregnant women, 10,513 dental visits for children ages 0-5 years and 5,352 fluoride varnish applications.
- The percentage of low-income children ages 0-5 with active dental disease decreased by 12 percent countywide since First 5 Yolo began investing in oral health services in 2008.
- Since 2008, over 1,500 children ages 0-5 have been enrolled or re-enrolled into a health insurance program.

- Last year, 1,213 families received support, referrals, parent education and case management through F5Y's Family Resource Center Initiative.
- Since 2009, over 200 high-risk mothers received home visitation support and education. Outcomes include:
 - Despite initial high risk factors, all children remained in parental custody;
 - 98 percent to 100 percent have health insurance; and
 - Breastfeeding rates exceed Healthy People 2020 goals.
- From 2004-2012, 182 Family Childcare Homes and 61 Childcare Centers increased their quality through:
 - 30 hours of intensive training and technical assistance each; and
 - New equipment and facilities improvements.

We are proud of these successes. However, we recognize that tobacco tax funding is declining due to effective educational programs that have helped to decrease tobacco use. This will lead to reduced funding for First 5 Yolo and therefore our partner agencies and community organizations.

We sincerely hope the future includes the formation of new community partnerships and collaborations that keep children at the forefront of policy and budgeting decisions. We invite local child advocates to not only keep informed about the funded programs through First 5 Yolo, but to also get involved in the Yolo Children's Movement which will be launched in 2014 through a partnership between First 5 Yolo and the Yolo County Children's Alliance.

It has been a privilege to serve as chairpeople of First 5 Yolo and be intimately involved in identifying critical needs for young children in our community and to support and work side by side with the incredibly dedicated individuals and organizations who are making such a difference in thousands of young lives.

Together we will continue to strive to ensure every Yolo County child has the opportunity to reach his/her full potential.

-- Yolo County Supervisor Don Saylor has served as the current chairman of First 5 Yolo since 2011. Contributing to this story were state Sen. Lois Wolk, who served as the first chairwoman of First 5 Yolo during the years 1999-2002; and former Yolo County Supervisor and state Assemblywoman Helen Thomson, who served as chairwoman of First 5 Yolo during the years 2002-2010.