Executive Summary

In 2010, F5FC commissioned Harder+Company Community Research to conduct a three-year Parent Interview Longitudinal study to identify the benefits of First 5 Fresno County funded programs that provide direct services to children ages zero to five and their families. The study was guided by the following research questions:

- Are programs funded by F5FC serving the children and families most in need?
- Have F5FC programs improved the lives of participating children and families?
- What are the best practices in each strategy and which of these practices are related to greater positive impacts on families?

This report summarizes the changes families reported during this three-year period.

Family Characteristics & Services

Families who participated in the study were largely Latino and Spanish-speaking. Most participants had less than a high-school education and were living below the Federal Poverty Level. In addition, most families had at least one of the following socioeconomic risk factors: poverty, low levels of parent education, and one-parent families.

On average, families in the study received 3.3 different types of F5FC-funded services. Parent education and support was the most common service received, followed by developmental screenings and assessments and early childhood education programs.

Year Three Findings

Participating families reported improvements across a number of measures, including:

- First 5 Fresno County’s service providers serve families most in need of support. F5FC families faced more risk factors including low-educational attainment, poverty, single- and teen-parenthood, than the Fresno County at large.

- F5FC families engage in more literacy and educational activities and take more steps to prepare their child for kindergarten than in prior years. In addition, the highest risk families narrowed the gap between families with low- and high-socioeconomic status.

- Children in Fresno County, including children receiving services from F5FC-funded programs, continue to attend preschool at rates lower than the California average. Parents of F5FC children remain the first educators and primary care givers for their children.

- F5FC children have access to and utilize preventive care services. This includes going to the ER less frequently and getting screened to ensure healthy development more frequently.

- Children with confirmed developmental delays receive more services than in past years. While the percentage of children with a confirmed delay remained constant, the number of service types and service hours they received grew.
**Recommendations**

The following recommendations provide guidance for F5FC and Fresno County as a whole as they look for strategies for improving outcomes for young children and their families in the coming years.

- **Target F5FC services and funding** to families most in need for the largest impact.

- **Engage the Fresno County community as advocates** for early learning and bolster the network of support for children as they age and enter elementary school.

- **Promote the importance of preschool** and quality preschool alternatives by remaining a key advocate of high-quality early learning opportunities.

- **Promote and encourage universal routine well-child visits** across Fresno County.

- **Connect children to developmental screenings** and children with delays to early intervention support and special needs services.
**Introduction**

Guided by an extensive body of research that demonstrates the importance of young children’s environments and early learning experiences on developmental outcomes and academic success, First 5 Fresno County (F5FC)\(^1\) works in partnership with agencies and programs that support and nurture young children to achieve optimal social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. More importantly, F5FC is keenly aware that disparities in young children’s development are evident by the time they enter kindergarten, and are strongly associated with social and economic circumstances. This is critical to Fresno County as it has the highest poverty rate of any California county—37 percent of families with children under the age of five are living in poverty—and the largest racial/ethnic disparity gap among 3rd grade students. Despite these challenges, F5FC is committed to improving the outcomes for the county’s youngest children. Since its inception it has invested $177.3 million in Fresno County. Currently, F5FC funds three primary focus areas\(^2\):

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**Health: Improve Child Health**
Focus is on preventative care and the early identification of special health needs that are critical to the health and development of children from a prenatal stage through age five.

**Early Care and Education: Optimize Child Development**
Holistic approach to children’s education supported through partnerships among parents, child care providers, and other supportive members of a young child’s life.

**Family Strengthening: Provide Optimal Environments for Children**
Aim is to support the healthy development of relationships between parents and their young children.

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**Parent Interview**

In 2010, F5FC commissioned Harder+Company Community Research (Harder+Company), a California-based consulting firm that provides evaluation and planning services to nonprofits, local government agencies and philanthropies, to conduct a three-year Parent Interview Longitudinal study to identify the benefits of funded programs that provide direct services to children ages zero to five and their families.

The study followed a cohort of families who received F5FC services, interviewing them in three consecutive years and collecting information on family characteristics, use of F5FC services, and child and family outcomes in areas such as child health, home educational activities, parenting skills and early care and education. The study was designed to answer the following questions:

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\(^1\) In 1998 California voters passed Proposition 10, the California Children and Families Act, based on research showing the importance of early development and the role that parents and caregivers play during the first five years of life. Proposition 10 added a 50 cent tax on tobacco products to fund early childhood development, health care, parent education, and other programs that improve services for children from prenatal through age five and their families. Funds from Proposition 10 are distributed to local counties based on the number of babies born in that county.

As depicted below, a total of 205 families participated in the study at baseline. At Year 2, 175 families participated in the study followed by 161 families in Year 3. The Parent Interview sample is representative of the families that participate in all of the direct service programs that F5FC funds. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. FY 2012-13 is the final year of interviews with these families.

First 5 Fresno County’s substantial investment in services for young children translated into families receiving an average of 3.3 different types of services during this three year period. Parent education and support was the most common type of service received with 85 percent of interviewees participating in these programs. A majority of families also received developmental screenings and assessments (65 percent) and early childhood education programs (61 percent).

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3 Please refer to Appendix A for further information on the Parent Interview Longitudinal study methodology.
Since its establishment, F5FC has sought to provide quality early childhood experiences to Fresno County’s most underserved families, helping to level the playing field for families most in need. The 2012-13 parent interview demonstrates that F5FC-funded programs serve their intended target population.

**Ethnicity and Language.** Children represented in the interview were predominantly Latino (75 percent) and Spanish-speaking—40 percent of parents spoke Spanish exclusively to their children and 32 percent spoke a mix of Spanish and English. These percentages are significantly higher than those found in Fresno County as a whole where 51 percent of residents are Latino and 35 percent speak Spanish.

**Immigrant Status and Education.** F5FC programs served a high percentage of immigrant parents—64 percent of mothers and 68 percent of fathers in FY 2012-13. 68 were immigrants compared to 22 percent of adults over 25 in the county. The difference in levels of educational attainment is also stark: half of F5FC parents did not obtain a high school diploma compared to 28 percent in the county at large. Only nine percent of F5FC mothers and five percent of fathers reported that they had a bachelor’s degree or higher; in the county, 19 percent of adults have a BA or above. Research has shown that children of mothers with higher levels of education are more ready for school and have better school outcomes. These differences between F5FC County families and other Fresno County families may, therefore, have implications for the extent to which children from these families are ready for kindergarten.

**Employment.** Despite lower educational attainment, F5FC fathers had higher levels of employment and experienced greater growth in employment during the three years of the parent interview than their peers in the county (Exhibit 1). In the first year of the parent interview, 76 percent of fathers reported working full- or part-time; by year three it jumped to 94 percent. Meanwhile, part- and full-time employment for adult men in Fresno County remained constant at about 67 percent. Among

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4 2012 American Community Survey: http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_12_1YR_DP05&prodType=table
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 http://www.commonwealthfund.org/usr_doc/ChildDevChartbk.pdf#page=86
women in the county, employment also remained steady at about 57 percent\textsuperscript{11}. F5FC mothers, however, were much less likely in all three years than their peers to be employed; only 20 to 30 percent of F5FC mothers were working part- or full-time in any given year, though this increased slightly from FY 2010-11 to FY 2012-13.

**Poverty Status.** Increases in employment likely contributed to a rise in the percentage of F5FC families living above the federal poverty line which increased from 25 percent in FY 2010-11 to 33 percent in FY 2012-13. Still, despite these positive signs that the financial situation for some F5FC families is improving, F5FC families continue to face higher levels of poverty than families in the county at large. For families with children under age five, the group with the highest poverty rates in the county, the percentage of families living below the poverty line was nearly half the rate (37 percent\textsuperscript{12} in 2012) of F5FC families (67 percent).

**Risk Factors.** Despite some improvements over the course of these interviews, the factors described above combined to create high socioeconomic risks for F5FC families. Seventy-five percent of F5FC families had at least one of the following socioeconomic risk factors: poverty, low levels of parent education, and one-parent families. In addition, nearly 50 percent had at least two. Among these, poverty and low parent

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{11} Ibíd.}\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{12} Ibíd.}
education were most prevalent among F5FC families: 25 percent lived below the poverty line and were headed by parents who had not obtained a high school diploma.

Disparities between the demographic and socioeconomic traits of F5FC families and other families in the county highlight the additional challenges F5FC families face in supporting and advocating for their child’s healthy development. F5FC’s ongoing commitment to these families ensures quality early childhood experiences are accessible to all Fresno County families and provides some much needed additional resources and support to families most in need so that all children in the county achieve optimal development.

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**Socioeconomic Risks and Childhood**

- Children living in poverty in early childhood have the greatest risk of high school dropout, are 1.3 times more likely to experience learning disabilities and developmental delays\(^\text{13}\), and experience more chronic health problems, more hospital stays, and higher rates of teen pregnancy\(^\text{14}\).

- Mothers with high education levels are more likely to enroll their child in early childhood programs\(^\text{15}\).

- Thirty-four percent of children in single-parent households are living in poverty compared to just 8 percent of children with married parents\(^\text{16}\).

\(^{13}\) [http://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/07_02_03.pdf](http://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/07_02_03.pdf)
Early Learning and Development

A plethora of studies have established that children who are reading at or above grade level by third grade have better long-term academic outcomes, including high school graduation and college attendance, than children reading below grade-level\(^{14}\). In Fresno County, 57 percent\(^{15}\) of third graders were not reading at grade level in 2013. For Fresno County children with demographic characteristics similar to those of F5FC clients, proficiency rates were even lower: 66 percent of children growing up in economically disadvantaged households and 76 percent of children whose parents had less than a high school diploma were reading below grade level\(^{16}\). Quality early learning experiences, both in the home and in child care and preschool programs, are crucial to success in school and reading proficiency by third grade. F5FC-funded programs emphasize the importance of early literacy and learning among parents and help improve the quality of care offered by providers.

### Key Home Educational Environment Trends 2012-13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>Percent reading to their child three or more times a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Average minutes reading to child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Average number of children’s books in the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>Average hours child watches TV per day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Home Educational Environment.** Since first participating in the parent interview in FY 2010-11, parents reported that they were engaging with their child in educational activities in the home more frequently this year. Parents reported:

- Reading longer to their child (21 minutes compared to 18 minutes in FY 2010-11);
- More children’s books in the home (61 books on average, compared to 37 in FY 2010-11);
- And that their child watched less television (1.9 hours a day compared to 2.5 in FY 2010-11).

All of these items contribute to an environment conducive to early learning and literacy. F5FC messaging about the importance of reading to your child seems to have resonated and parents receiving F5FC-funded services were reading to their children more frequently. The percentage of parents reporting that they read to their child less than three times a week decreased from 23 percent

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\(^{14}\) [http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Reading_on_Grade_Level_111710.pdf](http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Reading_on_Grade_Level_111710.pdf)  
\(^{15}\) [http://star.cde.ca.gov/star2013/Index.aspx](http://star.cde.ca.gov/star2013/Index.aspx)  
\(^{16}\) Ibid.
in FY 2010-11 to 16 percent in FY 2012-13. However, the percentage of families reading to their child daily dropped to 44 percent in FY 2012-13 after peaking at 51 percent in FY 2011-12 (for most families the year immediately following their F5FC service). This may reflect the increased age of children represented by the interview: older children may be reading by themselves more frequently or reading with other adults while in school. It may also suggest that there is a slight drop off in daily reading rates as families stop receiving services because they do not hear this messaging as frequently.

Still, the quality of reading remained high in FY 2012-13 with the vast majority of parents reporting that while reading they asked their child about the pictures in the book, pointed out letters, asked their child to read together, and talked about the story after it was finished (Exhibit 2). These interactive reading strategies engage children in reading long before the child is able to read on his or her own and help lay the foundation for reading success and proficiency in future years.

Parents were engaging in other household learning activities more frequently in FY 2012-13, as well:

- 57 percent of parents reported that they told their child a story in the last week (compared to 44 percent in FY 2010-11);
- 83 percent helped their child learn letters, words or numbers (compared to 71 percent);
- 68 percent played counting games, sung songs or read books with numbers (compared to 60 percent);
- And 61 percent talked to their child about what had happened in preschool or their early education program (compared to 40 percent).

All of these increases suggest parents continue to grow and improve as their child’s first teacher.
Kindergarten Readiness.

Children build on previous learning to understand more complex concepts. A child’s early learning experiences, therefore, including their readiness for kindergarten, are linked to later academic outcomes\(^\text{17}\). When asked about the importance of a number of activities in preparing their child for kindergarten—including “soft” skills like sharing as well as “hard” skills like learning the alphabet and reading—many more parents saw these activities as “essential” to their child’s success in FY 2012-13 than in past years (Exhibit 3). When it comes to preschool attendance (an important step toward kindergarten readiness), however, F5FC families continued to have low rates of preschool enrollment. During the year in which the children represented in the interview were most likely to be of preschool age (FY 2011-12) only 43 percent of parents reported that their child was attending a preschool program, although this is consistent with a countywide rate of 42 percent\(^\text{18}\). This shows that access to preschool is not just a First 5 issue, but a countywide issue as well. Parent or relative care continued to be the primary child care arrangement for the majority of F5FC families.

Closing the Gap in Early Learning and Development. Further analysis\(^\text{19}\) revealed some of the most important findings relating to early learning and development outcomes. In FY 2010-11, parents with less than a high school education, families in poverty, and non-white parents were reading to their child less frequently (Exhibit 4), using quality reading

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\(^{19}\) We used multivariate regression analysis to isolate the effects of highly correlated independent variables like child and family demographics on outcomes variables like frequency and quality of reading.
strategies less often, engaging in home educational activities less frequently (Exhibit 5), and were less likely to believe in the importance of kindergarten preparation.

By FY 2012-13, however, these gaps had shrunk or were closed. There were no significant differences in the frequency or quality of reading for any of these subgroups and families living at or below the poverty line were actually engaging in household learning activities more frequently than families above the poverty line. That is to say, on all of these measures, parents with less than a high school education, families in poverty, and non-white parents were performing as well, and in one case better than, white parents, parents with more education, and families living above the poverty line by the last year of this study. This suggests that F5FC participation may be helping the county’s highest risk families catch up in terms of how they are preparing their child for success in school.
Children who are healthy and developing on track in their early years are more likely to be ready for kindergarten, less likely to be chronically absent in elementary school, less likely to have untreated health conditions or avoidable developmental delays, and are more likely to be reading proficiently by third grade. F5FC programs help families obtain preventive care and treatment for their child by encouraging and providing early screenings and assessments and connecting children who have health or developmental concerns to early intervention services.

Health Care. Having health insurance is the first step toward receiving routine medical care and 97 percent of parents in all three years told us their child was covered by some form of health insurance. These high and consistent coverage rates contribute to nearly 100 percent of children in FY 2012-13 seeing a doctor or other health professional in the last year, near universal immunization of children, and decreases in the percent of children visiting an emergency room from 34 percent in FY 2010-11 to 26 percent in FY 2012-13.

More than twice the number of children in FY 12-13 had hearing and vision screenings than in FY 10-11.

Exhibit 6: Dental Insurance and Check-Ups

Dental Care. More and more families are also receiving the oral health care they need. While dental coverage increased slightly—from 85 percent in FY 2010-11 to 93 percent in FY 2012-13—dental visits have increased greatly (Exhibit 6). In FY 2010-11 despite high rates of coverage,

only 45 percent of parents reported their child had been to the dentist in the last year. In FY 2012-13 this increased to 81 percent. This current rate is also substantially higher than the CHIS rate of 68 percent in 2011-12 (the most recent year for which data were available). This may be a reflection of parents being more likely to take their older children to the dentist but it is still a positive trend and indicator that Fresno’s young children are having their oral health needs met.

Screenings and Assessments. F5FC programs focus substantial energy and resources on encouraging and providing developmental screenings and assessments to children in Fresno. The percentage of parents reporting that their child received such screenings increased over the course of the three years. Children receiving both a hearing and vision test more than doubled from 23 percent in FY 2010-11 to 56 percent in FY 2012-13—a positive sign that children are being evaluated early for problems or delays that can potentially affect development and learning. Children receiving a development or behavior screening peaked at 40 percent in FY 2011-12, a significant increase from the 23 percent who received these screenings in FY 2010-11. This increase in the year after most families received their F5FC service may suggest that F5FC plays an important role in encouraging families to get their children assessed.

Special Needs. F5FC is also helping to ensure that children who are diagnosed with special needs or developmental delays are getting the services they need. This is evidenced by increases in the average number of services and service hours children with diagnosed delays or special needs received over the course of this three year interview. While the percent of children with a diagnosed delay remained steady at about 15 percent, the average number of service types and monthly service hours received by these children increased from 2.3 service types and 8 service hours in FY 2010-11 to 3.5 service types and 11 service hours in FY 2012-13. These increases are important because they suggest that not only are more children getting screened and diagnosed within the first five years, but that F5FC-funded providers are responding to their needs by providing more services both in scope and hours.
In FY 2012-13, the most common diagnoses for F5FC children remained:

- Speech impairments or difficulty communicating (42 percent);
- And developmental delays (33 percent).

The most common services for special needs children were:

- Speech therapy (59 percent);
- Home visits (47 percent);
- And enrolling in classes with other special needs children (44 percent).

Improving the general health of all children through health and dental insurance coverage and regular check-ups as well as detecting and treating developmental delays through early screenings and services help promote healthy development of children 0-5. F5FC-funded programs ensure that these tools for optimal health are available to all of Fresno County’s young children and that the neediest families are able to provide their children with the care and services they need to be and remain healthy.

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Health Insurance and Low-Income Families

A 2011 study of low-income adults found that having medical insurance was associated with increases in hospital utilization and preventive care, decreases in out-of-pocket medical expenses, improved mental and physical health, and overall wellbeing. For children, health insurance has been linked to increases in receipt of needed services, improvements in quality-of-life, better relationships with peers, and doing better in school. Fresno’s high coverage rate for its youngest population is critical to reducing health disparities within the county and to promoting healthy development among all children.

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21 http://www.nber.org/papers/w17190.pdf?new_window=1
22 http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9210/index1.html
First 5 Fresno County knows strong families are essential to healthy development in the early years. F5FC programs provide parents with tools to support their child’s development through home visitation, parent education, mentoring programs, and other services. These programs also aim to connect families to additional supports and resources they may need and to empower them to be their child’s most effective advocates.

**Social Support.** F5FC families report high levels of social support: more than two-thirds feel they have someone who listens, they can confide in, provides advice, and provides information most of the time. These feelings of support remained constant in the three years of the study. Parents did, however, report changes in the number of close friends and family members they had. Interestingly, parents reported the highest number of close friends and family members in FY 2011-12, the year after most families received F5FC services. Parents averaged 16 close friends and family members in this year compared to 12 and 10 close friends and family members in year one and year three of this study. This may suggest that participating in F5FC-funded services helps connect parents to other parents or service provider staff who act as important resources and supports.

**Use of Community Resources.** Parents’ knowledge of county services grew significantly over the course of this study. In all three years, food nutrition assistance and income assistance were both the most well-known and most utilized services in the county (Exhibit 7). Overall service use, however, decreased for most county services. This could be the result of the gradually improving economy and economic picture for many F5FC families, including higher employment rates for fathers. Further analysis supports this explanation: families living in poverty were significantly more likely to be using county services in all three years regardless of other demographic factors.
Special Report: Teen Parents

According to a 2012 report by the Public Health Institute, Fresno County has the fifth highest birth rate among teenagers in the state, costing taxpayers $43 million dollars annually in lost tax revenue and increased use of public services. Teen parenthood is associated with lower rates of high school graduation, higher rates of single-parenthood, more employment instability, and increased health risks for children. As a result of these risks, teen parents are a population of particular concern for F5FC and a number of programs target or provide special services to teen parents.

The first year of this study included 21 families with at least one teen parent (10 percent of interview participants). These families faced an even greater combination of hurdles than other parents served by F5FC-funded programs. Teen parents served by F5FC are at greater risk than non-teen parents of poverty, low educational attainment, and single-parenthood. Exhibit 8 illustrates the following discrepancies between families with teen parents and those without:

- **80%** of families with teen parents live below the federal poverty level, compared to 66 percent of families without teen parents.
- **64%** of families with teen parents obtain less than a high school diploma compared to 39 percent of families without teen parents.
- **36%** of teen parent families are single parent households compared to 21 percent of families without teen parents.

In combination, these factors translate to 64 percent of families with teen parents experiencing two or three socioeconomic risk factors. This is a significantly higher percentage than the 45 percent of families without teen parents who have two or three risk factors. These risks put families with teen parents at much greater risk of not being able to provide their child with the conditions necessary for healthy development in the early years which in turn puts them at greater risk for not being ready for school or reading proficiently by third grade and is all the more reason teen parents need the added support and resources provided by F5FC-funded programs.

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23 [http://www.phi.org/uploads/application/files/7vrp7yk2x4tf3ok5xh9vij8qur81x6xhn3x4b5blx9i099d4rm.pdf](http://www.phi.org/uploads/application/files/7vrp7yk2x4tf3ok5xh9vij8qur81x6xhn3x4b5blx9i099d4rm.pdf)

Findings and Recommendations

The final year of the parent interview provides important insight into how F5FC services might be making a difference for Fresno County families. As F5FC begins implementing its 2013-2018 strategic plan, these data help shed light on how to improve services and access, which investments are the most effective, and where there are opportunities for improved advocacy or cross-agency collaboration.

Findings

- **First 5 Fresno County’s service providers are serving families most in need of support.** Still, these families continue to live in circumstances and face hurdles that make ensuring their child’s healthy development in the early years more difficult. F5FC families face higher poverty and teen parenthood rates and lower educational attainment than the Fresno County at large. Yet, among F5FC clients, families with the most risk factors actually saw some of the biggest gains, particularly around literacy and home educational activities.

- **Parents and families receiving F5FC services are engaging in more literacy and home educational activities and taking more steps toward preparing their child for the kindergarten transition than in years past.** These gains are greatest for the county’s highest risk families and the gap between families with low- and high-socioeconomic status is closing.

- **Children in Fresno County, including children receiving services from F5FC-funded programs, continue to attend preschool at rates lower than the California state average.** With nearly 60 percent of Fresno County four-year-olds not enrolled in preschool, supporting parents, relatives, and community members who provide care for young children is an essential component to ensuring universal school readiness.

- **F5FC children have access to and are utilizing preventive care services, are going to the ER less frequently, and are getting screened to ensure healthy development more frequently than years past.** Ensuring all children receive regular well-child visits promotes improved health among the county’s youngest residents.

- **Children with confirmed developmental delays are receiving a greater variety of interventions over more service hours to support their needs compared to prior years.** Developmental screenings are the critical first step in diagnosis of delays and in connecting children with delays and their families to early intervention supports and other services.
Recommendations
The following recommendations are based on the findings discussed above.

- **Target F5FC services and funding to families most in need for the largest impact.**
  Findings suggest that high risk clients benefit most from F5FC services. Targeting these families for services may have the largest effect on outcomes.

- **Engage the Fresno County community as advocates for early learning and bolster the network of support for children as they age and enter elementary school.**
  A community-wide effort to emphasize the importance of 0-3 may further boost gains especially among families most in need.

- **Promote the importance of preschool and quality preschool alternatives by remaining a key advocate of high-quality early learning opportunities.**
  Low preschool attendance is a countywide problem. Promoting preschool and strengthening the quality of alternative forms of care will ensure more children are prepared to enter kindergarten.

- **Promote and encourage universal routine well-child visits across Fresno County.**
  Improve the health of all of Fresno County’s youngest residents by ensuring children have access to and receive well-child visits.

- **Connect all children to developmental screenings and children with delays to early intervention support and special needs services.**
  Children with special needs achieve better outcomes when their delays are diagnosed early and when they are connected to early intervention supports and other services.
Appendix A: Methodology

The purpose of the longitudinal parent interview study, implemented from 2010 to 2013, is to identify the benefits of funded programs that provide direct services to children age 0 – 5 and their families over time. The parent interview design has several advantages including its focus on identifying the most likely impact of services among all participants, and its ability to detect “big-picture” impacts across programs, which places a premium on the measurement of cross-cutting findings. Although the study is correlational in nature and cannot definitively link observed changes over time to the efforts of service providers, the use of high-quality measures, a representative sample, repeated measurement, and the linkage of outcomes with the type and intensity of service provision, enables the evaluation to make circumstantial inferences as to the likely benefits of F5FC services. The parent interview is designed to answer the following questions across three primary domains: target population served, services used and selection factors, and client starting points and outcomes.

Parent Interview Sample. The longitudinal parent interview survey drew a stratified random sample of newly enrolled, consented clients that received direct services from F5FC funded programs from July 2010 to January 2011. To ensure that the overall sample within each focus area was representative of all newly enrolled clients, the number of clients sampled from each service provider (using the Persimmony database) was proportional to the overall numbers of clients (families) served by funded programs within each focus area. A total of 205 families participated in the interview at Baseline, 175 families participated at Time 2, and 161 families participated at Time 3. This translates to a an 85 percent response rate from Time 1 to Time 2, a 92 percent response rate from Time 2 to Time 3, and an overall response rate of 78 percent over the duration of the study which is notable for this type of longitudinal study.

Parent Interview Survey Instrument. The parent interview questionnaire was developed in collaboration with F5FC staff with feedback from F5FC service providers. The instrument includes many items from existing national and state-wide surveys, such as items from the Head Start FACES study, the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey Birth and Kindergarten cohorts (ECLS-B and ECLS-K), the National Longitudinal Surveys of Children and Youth (NLSCY), and the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS). By using items and scales that have known psychometric properties and that have already been well tested with similar populations, we can be assured that the items are accurately assessing the construct of interest. The survey primarily consisted of close-ended questions including basic child, parent and family demographic information; home education activities family members participate in with the child; parenting practices and beliefs; parent resilience and community resources known and used; children’s health and special needs; and early childhood education program participation. All data gathered was self-reported by study participants. The instrument was designed to encourage parent participation and focused on the most important outcomes for parents participating in F5FC-funded programs. This parent interview survey data was matched with data collected in the Persimmony database which describes program participation and level of involvement with funded programs.
Parent Interview Administration. Prior to survey administration, the parent interview survey questionnaire was piloted with a sample of clients drawn from Persimmony to ensure that the interview fit within the one hour time frame and to identify any survey questions that may have posed problems for participants. After initial pilot testing, the instrument was translated into Spanish and a second round of piloting took place for the Spanish-language interviews.

The baseline parent interview was administered over the phone by trained interviewers from November 2010 to January 2011. The Time 2 interviews were administered one year later between November 2011 and January 2012. Time 3 interviews were conducted the following year from November 2012 to January 2013. All interviewers were required to participate in a comprehensive half day training course. The purpose of the training was to ensure that high quality data was collected from all interview participants. The key components of the training included the role of the interviewer in gathering confidential data from participants, primary skills needed to gather data, techniques for addressing participant’s questions and/or comments, and a review and practice of the survey. All interviewers received a question by question (QxQ) packet that provided detailed instruction and additional information for the majority of the items on the Parent Interview protocol. Interviewers also received a document that identified the procedures for contacting potential survey participants to schedule interviews. Bilingual interviewers were paired with the primary language of the client identified through the Persimmony database. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. In the future, F5FC and the evaluation team will work on including other populations in Fresno County. The English interviews averaged 45 minutes while the Spanish interviews averaged one hour. All survey respondents who completed the interview received a $40 grocery voucher.

Data Integrity and Analysis. A primary goal of the survey development was to ensure that all survey items were accurate and reliable. To ensure the validity and reliability of the interview questions, the instrument was piloted with a sample of clients, asking whether the questions were understood and determining whether the data produced were reliable. Second, an extensive training was conducted with all interviewers (see above for details). Lastly, completed surveys were reviewed for duplication and data quality by a trained Harder+Company staff member prior to data entry and analysis.

The survey data were extensively cleaned and checked for coding and data entry errors and a set of derived variables were constructed that would be used in the subsequent analysis25. All interview items were then analyzed descriptively, producing frequencies and means. Following the descriptive analyses, a series of bivariate statistical tests were conducted to test the relationships between the three main data components: demographics, services and outcomes. Depending on the level of measurement, these analyses employed either contingency table analyses using the chi-square statistic, or a comparison of group means using either t-tests or Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Additional bivariate analyses were conducted within each group of data (e.g. family demographic backgrounds) to identify correlations between key factors. For each set of bivariate analyses, significant relationships were identified, and, when appropriate (e.g. to identify demographic factors most predictive of service type received by parents and children) for those variables where there were statistically significant bivariate associations, additional multivariate analyses were conducted. Finally,

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25 All data coding and analyses used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).
regression analysis was used to isolate the effects of highly correlated independent variables (e.g. family demographic backgrounds).

**Limitations.** Most evaluation designs have inherent tradeoffs between methodological rigor and costs or resources, and thus have some limitations in the extent to which the results can be interpreted to indicate program effectiveness. The current evaluation design has many advantages: it has been developed as both a program monitoring/program improvement effort as well as an outcome evaluation and thus it is geared toward measuring the nature of services provided, their types, duration and the clients who make use of these services, and it will also identify the impacts of services where they are most likely to occur. The longitudinal survey design has several key strengths, including the random selection of participants, the use of well-known measures from prior studies, the repeated measures nature of the design and the tracking of a group of parents and children across time, and the use of trained bilingual and bicultural interviewers. However, there are also a number of limitations of the current study design, described below. These limitations should be taken into account when considering the data and their implications.

- Findings rely on self-reported data from respondents. Although clients were told during the interview that there were no wrong or right answers and that their responses were confidential, there may have been an element of “social desirability” or “response” bias. This occurs when respondents are concerned about what the research or others present will think about their responses. Respondents may report what they think they should say rather than being completely candid about their opinions.

- Items asking respondents to remember events that occurred in the past may be subject to poor memory or selective recall bias, i.e., recalling more favorable events.

- Despite the various efforts undertaken to locate and contact randomly selected clients, there was a large proportion of clients the evaluation team was not able to reach primarily due to disconnected numbers. Measures taken to locate clients included searching the Persimmony data system for updated contact information, enlisting the help of service providers to obtain updated contact information, and the use of reverse telephone directories to obtain updated phone numbers connected with a given address. However, to the extent that only 52 percent of clients sampled were successfully interviewed, it is possible that the baseline sample of parents may not adequately represent all newly enrolled families into F5FC funded services.

- The evaluation is designed to detect big-picture impacts across programs, which places a premium on the measurement of outcome indicators primarily at the focus area and cross-cutting levels only. Because of this focus on broader impacts, the measurement of outcomes at the individual contractor level is limited and targets the measurement of key indicators of individual program outcomes across groups of funded programs.

- A key limitation of this study is that it is correlational in nature and cannot definitively link observed changes over time to the efforts of F5FC Commission funded contractors. There are no comparison or control groups to provide counter-factual evidence showing that any changes in clients was a result of the services they received rather than other factors, such as the backgrounds of families who enroll in specific services (what is known as the selection effect).
However, by relying on sound evaluation practice, including understanding each program’s theory of change, and by using good research methods such as representative sampling, quality data, repeated measurement, and the linkage of outcomes with service provision, the results can make a circumstantial but not definitive case as to the impact of funded services on children and parents. The ultimate goal of the evaluation is to establish the extent to which the funded services are helping program participants throughout the county.

- With the core of the new evaluation plan focused on determining the impact of F5FC-funded services on participating children and families, the evaluation approach for providers who do not provide core client services or who provide services to professionals will be less intensive. These would include providers funded to train or educate other service providers (e.g., early childhood education providers, child welfare workers, medical providers, etc.). Those who provide services that do not directly engage children and families will be included in Persimmony, so that service type and duration can be measured, and will also be included in the individual program outcome indicators. In later years of the evaluation we may expand their participation by conducting focus groups or surveys with these “provider clients” in order to determine the benefits of the training provided to them by funded services.