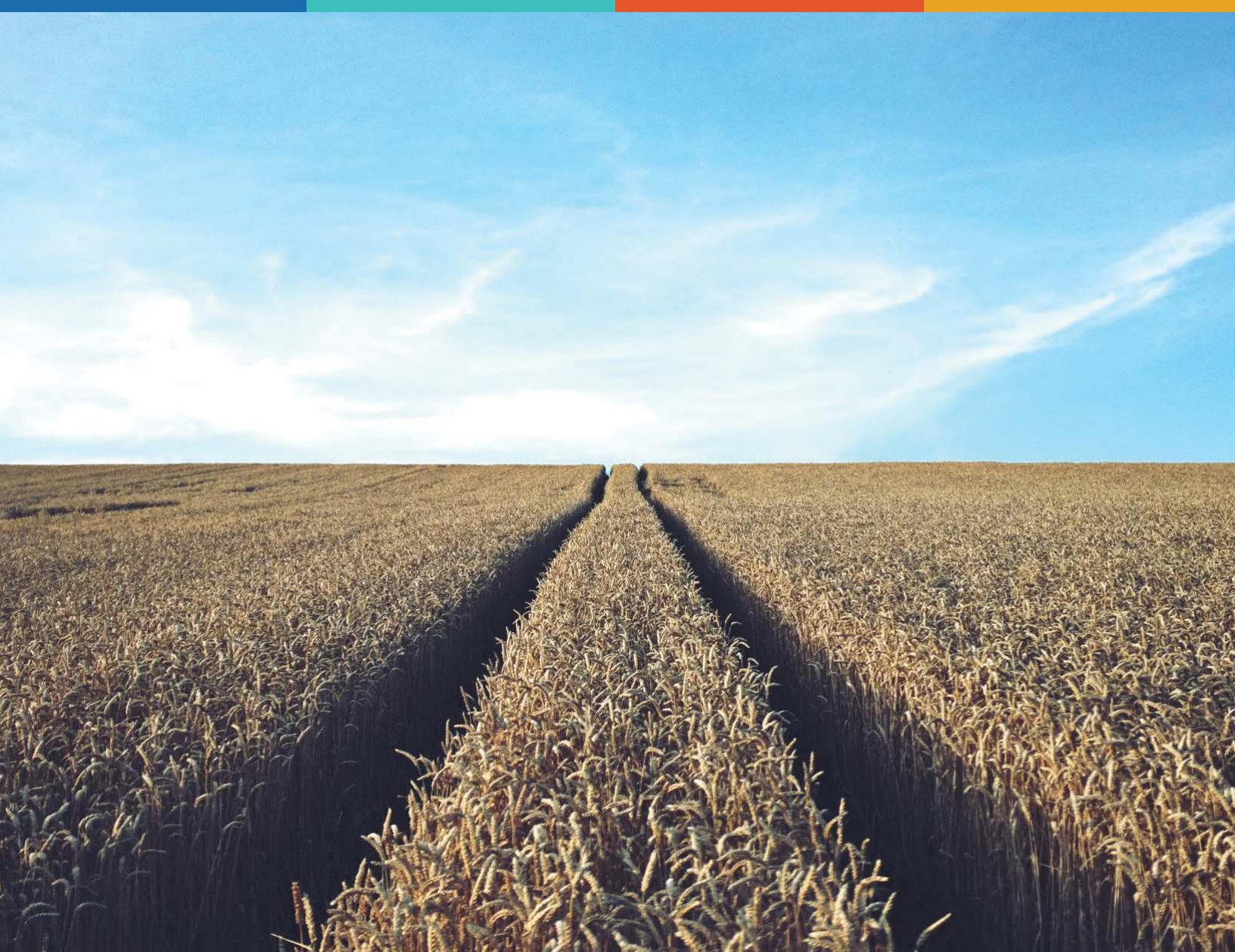


Fresno County Rural Community Needs Assessment

Conducted during Fiscal Year
2015-2016 on behalf of
First 5 Fresno County

Highlighting the communities
of **Mendota** and **Huron**



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La evaluación de las necesidades de las comunidades rurales no hubiera sido posible sin el tiempo y la dedicación de muchas personas y grupos a través del Condado de Fresno.

De parte de Los Primeros 5 del Condado de Fresno, el grupo consultivo para la evaluación, y el equipo de evaluación de Harder+Company, nos gustaría dar gracias a los miembros de las comunidades de Mendota y Huron. Gracias por su generosidad. Gracias por trabajar con nosotros, compartir sus experiencias, y darnos la bienvenida en sus comunidades. 🇺🇸

Executive Summary

Overview

In order to deepen its understanding of rural Fresno County families, First 5 Fresno County (F5FC) partnered with Harder+Company Community Research to conduct a needs assessment of two rural communities in Fresno County. While rural communities have always been a part of F5FC's research and evaluation efforts, this needs assessment marks a significant commitment to developing a deeper understanding of the conditions in rural communities.

After engaging with F5FC-funded service providers and considering the demographic characteristics of various rural communities, F5FC chose to conduct this assessment with a focus on two communities: Huron and Mendota. Harder+Company conducted the needs assessment and, using a mixed-method approach, collected information to inform the assessment using four different methodologies conducted from Fall 2015 to Spring 2016: (1) focus groups with service providers, (2) a service provider survey, (3) a parent intercept survey, and (4) family asset mapping sessions. An advisory group helped inform all the data collection activities, and provided valuable guidance in identifying local organizations and community leaders in both Huron and Mendota, ensuring that all activities imposed the least burden to families in these two communities. Overall, 355 individuals helped inform the rural needs assessment through one of the four methodologies.

Key Findings

The findings from this assessment are detailed across four key areas: understanding families, community infrastructure, service infrastructure and barriers, and the service system.

Understanding the families in Huron and Mendota and the day-to-day challenges they face is key to understanding how to best address their needs. Residents and service providers that serve both Huron and Mendota remarked on the resiliency and strength of families, and highlighted this as a key community strength. Additionally, both Huron and Mendota are home to a predominantly monolingual, Latino/a population that often faces additional challenges due to language and immigration status. Despite these challenges, parents hope to improve living conditions for their children.

Families in both communities noted that schools and parks are community hubs and are central to their **community infrastructure**. However, the built infrastructure lacks the capacity to meet the needs of both communities. Families frequently mentioned several community needs including the need for additional seating, maintenance, and surveillance of local parks; the need for more local offices and businesses; and, in the case of Huron, the need for a local high school.

The **service infrastructure** in Huron and Mendota also faces similar limitations. Both communities are home to a handful of organizations that provide family programs and services, such as the few youth organizations and the parental support programs provided by some organizations and the local schools. Parents suggested various services they would like to see provided in their community, such as increased childcare, parenting classes, and job training and job search support. Parents also explained the barriers that keep them from accessing the

services they need, including limited transportation and the cost of travel. Latino/a, Spanish-speaking families are even less likely to access services because of language and communication barriers, as well as cultural stigmas and a distrust of service providers. This is especially true for the undocumented immigrant community. High staff turnover also makes it difficult for service providers to establish long-term relationships with families.

The barriers families face accessing services mirror **the barriers service providers face in providing services to rural communities**. Service providers reported various service provision challenges, including limited funding, staff capacity, understanding of the community, and addressing each community's specific needs. Given these challenges, service providers recommended improving the service system by expanding their resources, promoting more communication and coordination between service providers, and encouraging the creation of sustainable partnerships between service providers.

Recommendations

In June 2016, Harder+Company shared preliminary findings from the Rural Needs Assessment with F5FC and a group of F5FC-funded service providers, and asked them to think of ways to better address the needs of families in Huron and Mendota, as well as rural communities in Fresno County as a whole.

Harder+Company used both the findings from the assessment and the recommendations that emerged from this discussion to inform its final recommendations, categorized into four areas. Overall, the recommendations outline what Fresno County service providers, community stakeholders, and F5FC can do to address the needs of Fresno's rural communities and strengthen the service system as a whole.

- **Raise awareness of the unique challenges and needs of rural communities in Fresno County.** Service providers noted the importance of their role in highlighting to funders the unique challenges rural communities face, challenges like the lack of essential programs and services. F5FC is also a respected advocate for children and families and can play a major role in raising awareness of the lack of essential family programs and services that align with their current efforts.
- **Create partnerships with Fresno's rural communities by engaging key stakeholders in order to build trust with local residents.** Findings from this report show that trust is a major service access barrier. To bridge this, service providers should leverage local organizations and trusted community members for their programs and initiatives by investing their time to cultivate and strengthen those collaborative relationships. F5FC as well should partner with local organizations to foster closer community ties.
- **Address the major service needs in rural communities by targeting both short-term and long-term investments.** Service providers should not only aim to meet gaps in specific service needs in rural communities, such as quality child care, youth programs, and parent support programs, but also partner with local and county government agencies to reduce systemic barriers faced by rural communities. F5FC and other funders can specifically target funding to address gaps, and change funding restrictions to expand the capacity of service providers.
- **Address coordination issues facing service providers by promoting greater communication and information-sharing.** This needs assessment found that service providers recommend greater communication and coordination between service providers and county agencies in order to improve the Fresno County service system. F5FC can play a key role by convening service providers to engage in meaningful discussions and promote information sharing between providers in order to improve the county's service system. 🇺🇸

Introduction

First 5 Fresno County (F5FC) invests in resources and supports efforts to improve the lives of children ages 0-5 and their families across Fresno County. As a particular area of focus, F5FC funds and supports diverse efforts to serve families living in rural communities. In order to deepen its understanding of families living in these communities, F5FC commissioned Harder+Company Community Research to conduct a Rural Community Needs Assessment. Based on feedback from F5FC-funded service providers in addition to a review of US Census data, F5FC selected two rural communities to be the focus of the assessment—Huron and Mendota.

Three key goals guided the Rural Community Needs Assessment:

- Learn about the strengths and assets in rural communities, the challenges facing families with young children, the availability of services, the capacity of service providers, and opportunities to improve the existing service system in these communities.
- Provide critical information and recommendations to F5FC and other stakeholders about the needs of families living in rural communities to make informed decisions regarding investments, services, and policies.
- Complete the assessment with a dedication to participatory research (e.g., creating opportunities for families to engage in authentic dialogue about their community, training community members to support data collection).

An advisory group provided strategic guidance throughout the assessment process, offering expertise from various sectors and issue areas, including early care and education, public health, domestic violence, housing, and immigration rights.

About this Report

This report begins with a summary of guiding questions and methods for the assessment, followed by a brief contextual overview of Fresno County and the two focus communities. Next, the report provides a summary of key findings, organized according to four key areas — **understanding families, community infrastructure, service infrastructure and barriers, and the service system**. Finally, the report summarizes key findings and presents recommendations for F5FC and other stakeholders. The report is followed by two appendices that focus on each community, separately. Each appendix follows a structure similar to the body of the main report. 🏠

First 5 Fresno County (F5FC) is a public organization, created in 1998 when California voters passed Proposition 10, also known as “The Children and Families Act.” F5FC invests in resources and supports efforts to improve the lives of children ages 0-5 and their families. Through its efforts, F5FC serves as a catalyst for creating an accessible and effective network of quality services promoting children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Methods

Through the Rural Community Needs Assessment, F5FC sought to answer the following questions:

- What are the communities' strengths and challenges?
- What is the landscape of available services?
- What is the capacity of organizations to serve families in these communities?
- What are the service needs of families?
- Where are families accessing needed supports?
- What are the service delivery gaps?
- What are the opportunities to leverage partnerships, resources, knowledge, or other information to help strengthen the system of care in these communities?
- What role does or can F5FC play to support rural families?

In order to answer these questions, Harder+Company used a mixed-methods approach that integrated both qualitative and quantitative data from families living in both communities and the service providers who serve them. This report draws on data from four assessment methods: a service provider survey, a focus group with service providers that serve both communities, an intercept survey with local parents, and asset mapping sessions. The following section details each of the four methods, including when and where each was conducted. All methods were conducted in consultation with the advisory group, which played an important role in identifying local events and locations to conduct data collection and host focus groups. The group was also instrumental in recommending local organizations and community leaders to help recruit participants.



(n=70)

Service Provider Survey (Fall 2015)

Both the advisory group and F5FC helped to identify service providers to participate in the service provider survey, conducted online via SurveyGizmo. Respondents included both F5FC-funded organizations as well as organizations not funded by F5FC, school districts, city and school administrators, and health care providers. They also represented organizations that are physically located in the communities as well as countywide organizations. Additionally, survey participants were also asked to share the survey with other relevant service providers. The final list of 70 survey participants spanned several service sectors and included many countywide organizations (a 69 percent response rate). For a complete list of the organizations that participated, please refer to the table found in Appendix C. Harder+Company staff analyzed the survey results using SPSS, a software package used for statistical analysis.



(n=16)

Service Provider Focus Groups (Winter 2015)

Harder+Company staff held two focus groups with service providers who serve families with young children in the communities, with representation from community-based organizations, county agencies, city and school district administrators, childcare providers, and faith-based leaders (n=16). The advisory group helped select a targeted group of service providers to participate in the discussion, and provided a local location to host each group. Harder+Company staff facilitated the focus group, took notes, and used content analysis to analyze the qualitative data in ATLAS.ti, a computer program used in qualitative research and qualitative data analysis.



(n=237)

Parent Intercept Surveys (Winter-Spring 2016)

Harder+Company consulted with the advisory group to identify various local events or venues to administer a short parent intercept survey, as well as any local organizations and community leaders who could assist in recruitment. These short surveys lasted between 5-10 minutes, and families who participated received a \$5 incentive. Surveys were administered at local community establishments and events, such as grocery stores, clinics, swap meets, and family events. Both the locations and the duration of the survey were chosen to minimize the burden on participants. Harder+Company partnered with community member surveyors to administer 237 surveys (140 in Mendota and 97 in Huron), totaling about 10 percent of the family population in each community. Community member surveyors were paid for their time. Harder+Company staff inputted and analyzed the survey results using SPSS.



(n=32)

Family Asset Mapping (Spring 2016)

Harder+Company conducted two asset mapping sessions with parents and caregivers of young children in Huron and Mendota (n=32). The advisory group and community surveyors helped recruit participants for the sessions while Harder+Company posted flyers in each community. During the asset mapping sessions, participants identified community assets on a physical map using stickers. A community member or service provider facilitated each group, and Harder+Company staff took notes. The sessions lasted for an hour and a half, and participants received a \$25 incentive; childcare was also provided. Harder+Company staff analyzed the asset mapping data by inventorying the identified assets and using content analysis to analyze the qualitative data using ATLAS.ti.

Limitations

Harder+Company designed this community needs assessment to balance methodological rigor, community appropriateness, and available resources. Strengths of this assessment include its mixed-methods approach, collecting data from both service provider and family perspectives, the large sample size of the parent intercept survey, and the use of community members to support data collection and build trust in the community. Limitations for consideration when reviewing the results are described below.

- **Possible selection bias.** The perspectives of service providers and families who responded to surveys and participated in focus groups or asset mapping sessions may differ from those who declined participation in significant ways. This may cause some selection bias in both the quantitative and qualitative data collection activities.
- **Parent intercept survey administration locations may have influenced responses.** Harder+Company collected intercept surveys during local community events and at community hubs like parks, grocery stores, and clinics. While Harder+Company partnered with F5FC and its advisors to identify a diversity of data collection sites, it is important to consider how the location of survey data collection may have influenced the responses received.
- **Findings have limited generalizability.** Harder+Company used a convenience sampling approach to recruit participants for the intercept survey and the asset mapping sessions. While not random or representative, this sampling approach was selected for its ease of collection and to ensure the least burden on participants. Due to this convenience sampling approach, the assessment findings cannot be generalized to each community as a whole. Analysis of socioeconomic data indicate that parent intercept survey respondents were generally reflective of the community.

While these limitations are inherent in most needs assessments, Harder+Company is confident that the data collected and the results presented in this report are an accurate reflection of the needs in the two communities. 🏠



Context

The Central Valley and Fresno County

Bounded by the Sierra Nevada Mountains and the Coast Ranges, California's Central Valley ("the Valley") dominates the geographic center of the state. The Valley is one of the most fertile valleys in the world, and agriculture is the primary industry in most parts of the region. The Valley faces many of the state's most pressing challenges, including immigration, land issues, and drought.

Fresno County is located in the heart of the Valley, about three hours from both San Francisco and Los Angeles. Fresno County is one of the most productive agricultural counties in the nation; almonds, milk, grapes, and tomatoes are the county's leading commodities.¹ Recent estimates show that about 12 percent of Fresno's labor force is employed in farm work.²

Two out of five Fresno County residents live in rural areas (i.e., outside of the cities of Fresno and Clovis).³ Rural residents in Fresno County as a whole are predominantly Latino/a (71 percent), speak a language other than English at home (58 percent), have completed less than 12 years of formal schooling (40 percent), and have children who are being raised in poverty (39 percent).⁴ 🇺🇸



12% of the Fresno labor force works in farm work.



40% of Fresno County residents live in rural areas.



71% of Fresno County residents are Latino, and 58% speak a language other than English at home.



40% of Fresno County residents have less than 12 years of formal schooling.



The median income in Fresno County is \$45,201. 39% of residents have children who live in poverty.

¹ California Department of Food and Agriculture. (2015). *California Agricultural Statistics Review*.

² California Employment Development Department. (2016). *Fresno County Profile, Labor Market Information*. <http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/>

³ Department of Public Health. (2012-2013). *Fresno County Chronic Disease Community Health Needs Assessment*.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. (2014). *American Community Survey, 2010-2014 5-year Average*.

A Focus on Mendota and Huron

First 5 Fresno County (F5FC) selected two communities of focus for the Rural Community Needs Assessment – Mendota and Huron. To select these two communities, F5FC began by compiling input from F5FC-funded service providers, asking them to identify which rural communities are hardest to reach and which communities they would like to learn more about. Based on this feedback, F5FC staff considered a number of different factors, including demographics, current service availability, geography, community need, and community partners, and selected Huron and Mendota as the focus of the assessment. Both of these communities embody many of the characteristics of rural Fresno County towns, including a large immigrant population, a predominantly Latino/a community, many monolingual Spanish-speaking residents, and a limited community infrastructure. These characteristics allow the recommendations emerging from this assessment have a broader resonance for all of rural Fresno County.⁵ 🇺🇸



Mendota and Huron are small communities. Mendota has 11,360 residents; Huron has 6,777.



11% of the population in Mendota (1,244) and Huron (763) are under 5.



Almost all residents in Mendota and Huron are Latino, and more than 8 in 10 speak Spanish.



About 7 in 10 adults in Mendota and Huron do not have a high school diploma.



The median income in Mendota is \$25,229, and \$28,896 in Huron. 67% of children in Mendota and 43% in Huron live in poverty.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. (2014). *American Community Survey, 2010-2014 5-year Average*.

Overall Findings

The findings from the Rural Community Needs Assessment are organized into four key areas. First, the **understanding families** section describes the families in Huron and Mendota, the challenges they face, and what they hope for their children. Next, the report outlines the **community infrastructure** in each community (e.g., schools, parks, transportation) followed by the **service infrastructure and barriers** to accessing services. The report concludes with a discussion of the **service system** as a whole, mostly from the perspective of service providers.



Understanding Families

Understanding the families of Huron and Mendota is an essential part of understanding their needs and challenges, and the greater needs and challenges of their respective communities. The following section highlights major findings about families in both communities, including general characteristics and some of the challenges families face when raising young children. The findings and quotes in this section are primarily from the service provider survey and the parent intercept survey.

Community and Family

Community members and service providers in both Huron and Mendota resoundingly affirmed that both towns are home to **strong community members who exemplify resilience and humility even in the face of challenging conditions**. About 50 percent of providers surveyed in both communities ranked “strong and resilient families” among the top three community strengths. As one provider explained, “These families are advocating for each other. Especially in a small, rural area, there’s not a lot of services, so I think that the families are getting stronger and they’re making other families stronger.” Part of that community strength draws from close community ties where residents share close relationships with family members and neighbors. Among providers surveyed in Mendota and Huron, 53 percent also ranked “close and caring community” as a top-three community strength. Overall, these close-knit social networks support families and contribute to the social vibrancy of both of these communities.

Additionally, social life in both communities centers around the home. Not only do families and friends gather at each other’s houses, but large social events and activities also happen at the home. One local parent shared, “We talk when we get together... We BBQ or do a carne asada... We feel good when we’re with our family.”

Social, Economic, and Political

Many community members in Huron and Mendota shared their experiences facing daily challenges. Residents in these two communities shared that **language and immigration status challenges are part of the day-to-day reality**. Language barriers sometimes make it difficult for residents to access services, while immigration status leaves some unsure about which services they might be eligible to receive. Nearly half of residents in both communities reported facing language barriers when accessing support for their families (46 percent in Mendota and 45 percent in Huron). An immigrant’s undocumented status often compounds these challenges. For example, recent changes in California state law have expanded the Medi-Cal eligibility to undocumented children.⁶ Although the opportunities for children have expanded, many undocumented adults continue to face limited access to services. These newly emerging changes and the fact that eligibility is not open to all undocumented immigrants leave many wary of accessing services and service providers. This topic will be covered in greater detail when discussing service access barriers.



Family strength and resiliency are seen as points of community pride.



79% of adults in Mendota and 82% in Huron have less than a high school diploma.

⁶ Health Access, California’s Health Consumer Advocacy Coalition. “Profiles of Progress: California Counties Taking Steps to a More Inclusive and Smarter Safety-Net,” May 2016.

Distrust of services is exacerbated by the trauma many immigrants face upon migrating to the United States from their countries of origin.


Estimates show that about one in four of Fresno County’s population is foreign-born, and that about 8 percent of the population is unauthorized.⁷ Often immigrants migrate alone, leaving family members, such as spouses and children, behind. During the service provider focus groups, providers estimated that a large portion of parents in Huron and Mendota have experienced some form of abuse. They also felt that immigrants are among the most vulnerable community members and frequently face domestic abuse or sexual assault before, during, or after coming to the U.S. Recent national trends align with the sentiments felt by local service providers, showing that immigrants, especially children and women, are vulnerable to abuse and trauma. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that the number of Latino child maltreatment cases has increased over the last decade.⁸ Human Rights Watch also estimates that immigrant women working in agricultural workplaces are at high risk for sexual violence and harassment in the workplace.⁹

Additionally, education and employment are central determinants of the economic opportunities available to a family. This is true in Mendota and Huron where 79 and 82 percent of parents surveyed reported having less than a high school diploma, respectively. The Central Valley is also a predominantly agriculture economy and even though the agriculture industry supplies job opportunities, the work is physically demanding, requires long work and traveling long distances, and is seasonal. Also, the annual mean wage for farmworkers in California in 2015 was \$21,550, making it one of the lowest paid jobs in the nation.¹⁰ Both limited job opportunities and limited education leave many families financially unstable. One parent shared her husband’s experience, explaining, “My husband doesn’t like that work. He gets home really tired. If he could work doing something different, he would.” When asked about the top three challenges in the each community, **both providers and parents reported economic and job challenges.**

Despite numerous challenges, **parents make major economic and personal sacrifices to provide opportunities for their children.** One provider affirmed,

[Parents] don’t want to continue the cycle. Nothing wrong with working [in the fields, but]...parents are stopping that cycle. They want their kids to get an education, they want them to get a college [education].

Parents reported that they try to stay involved in their children’s schooling and commonly suggested their communities provide more youth development programs, such as age-appropriate sports and afterschool programs. By investing in the development of their children, parents hope they will pursue higher education and broaden their economic opportunities.



From the findings of the service provider survey, one in three providers in Mendota and Huron identified job training and support as one of the top three service needs in the community.

This was also true for 30% of parents in Mendota and 17% in Huron, as found in the parent survey.

⁷ Marcelli, Enrico A., and Manuel Pastor. "Unauthorized and Uninsured: Building Healthy Communities in California." USC Dornsife, February 11, 2015. <https://dornsife.usc.edu/csii/unauthorized-and-uninsured>.

⁸ Dettlaff, A.J. & Johnson, M.A. (2011). Child maltreatment dynamic among immigrant and U.S. born Latino children: Findings from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-being (NSCAW). *Children and Youth Services Review*.

⁹ Human Rights Watch. (2012). Cultivating fear: the vulnerability of immigrant farmworkers in the U.S. to Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment.

¹⁰ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2015). Occupational Employment and Wages.

Community Infrastructure

Both Mendota and Huron are home to a collection of local assets that contribute to each community's infrastructure and provide some basic community resources, such as schools, public spaces, and health care services. The community infrastructure described below presents the perspectives from parents and service providers. Reflections from parents provide a nuanced, firsthand picture of the resources available locally and what it is like to interact with them on a daily basis. As with many rural communities, parents shared that there are gaps in even the most basic community resources. Many of the findings for this section draw from the asset mapping sessions in both communities, as well as findings from the parent intercept survey. The Summary Asset Maps for both Huron and Mendota provide an overview of each community's asset landscape, and can be found in Appendix D and E of this report.

Schools

Schools and preschools play a central role in both Huron and Mendota, providing services and a location for activities. Fifty-four percent of surveyed parents in Mendota and 52 percent in Huron identified the K-12 system as one of the top three resources in the community, making it the most mentioned asset in both communities. Parents reported meeting other parents at schools and using school grounds for exercise. One parent shared, "Moms in our community walk around [the school] after they drop the kids off at school." Parents in Huron acknowledged Migrant Head Start and West Hills Community College Child Development Center as providing important services, such as parenting classes, and both programs are seen as high-quality community assets. For all of these reasons, families in both communities listed schools as a point of community pride.

As important as schools are to family life, many families find it difficult to transport their children to and from school. This is especially difficult for Huron families with high school students who have to travel to attend school in Coalinga, approximately 20 miles away, due to the lack of a local high school. Limited public transportation in Huron mean parents often have to rely on private forms of transportation, which imposes burdens on parents, such as the cost of owning a car or the time cost of dropping off and picking up their children every day. As one parent noted, "My daughter attends middle school all the way over here. When my car breaks down, I can't bring her. Or when there are too many kids and the buses are delayed, [it is difficult for her to get to school]." Challenges of transportation and geographic isolation explain why one in five parents in Huron identified opening a high school in the community as something they would change or create in their community.

Transportation

The challenges parents face transporting their children to school relate to the challenges all community members face in accessing transportation. Twenty-nine percent of parents surveyed in Mendota and 35 percent in Huron identified transportation as one of the top three community challenges. Families in both communities rely on the Fresno County Rural Transit Agency Bus System, but noted that the bus runs infrequently. Instead, families reported relying on one another for transportation between their communities and other cities, such as Kerman, Fresno, and Hanford. Parents with young children are at risk when using these modes of transportation, traveling long distances in cars that do not come equipped with child seats. In one community, a provider shared, "These families get in transportation to the services that they're going to with whoever is going in that direction...They are getting in the car without proper restraints for their children, and they're taking a chance."

Exhibit 1. Community Assets

Parents were asked to identify the three biggest community strengths or resources in their community. The most frequently mentioned resources include:

	Mendota	Huron
Schools	54%	52%
Childcare	19%	25%
Healthcare	29%	23%
Green spaces	28%	19%
Grocery stores	27%	3%



More than half of parents surveyed noted the K-12 system as one of the top three resources in the community.

One in five parents in Huron said that opening a local high school is a community need.

When traveling within their communities, parents in Huron and Mendota largely rely on walking to carry out daily errands even though neither community is pedestrian-friendly. Providers and residents noted that the lack of built infrastructure, such as poor quality sidewalks and a lack of road signs create challenges for pedestrians. High temperatures in the summer and reckless drivers also make walking unsafe. Parents remarked that even areas with high pedestrian traffic are at times unsafe, like one parent who noted, “The cars drive through very fast... It’s hard to cross the street there. And that’s the street that separates the school and the park.”

Public Spaces

During the asset mapping session in both communities, participants in Huron and Mendota noted that libraries and parks are also important community assets. The libraries in Huron and Mendota allow students and adults to access resources like books and computers, and provide a recreation space for children and young adults. Both communities identified libraries as points of pride, as one parent explained, “The library has kept a lot of young people off the streets. There they find something to do or spend time on the computers.”

Parents in both communities also reported taking their children to parks to play and exercise. Twenty-eight percent of parents surveyed in Mendota and 19 percent of parents in Huron identified parks as one of the top three resources available in their respective communities. However, parents and service providers noted that inadequate parks are also a major community challenge. About 21 percent of parents in Mendota and 29 percent of parents in Huron indicated that parks are among one of the top three community challenges in their respective communities.

Many parks in Mendota and Huron lack amenities, such as playgrounds, exercise equipment, and free picnic areas. In addition, although each community has one to two major parks, each park does not have the capacity to meet the needs of its community. One parent described one park’s limited capacity, explaining, “During Easter there aren’t enough tables [at the park], so we have to go out to other places.”

Like many rural communities, Huron and Mendota are home to a limited community infrastructure, made even more limited by the safety concerns that restrict families to their homes out of fear. Several parents across both communities reported seeing drug use and gang activity in public parks, posing major safety concerns. These activities are a major community challenge, as agreed by 33 percent of parents surveyed in Mendota and 25 percent of parents surveyed in Huron. Insecurity at parks and other public spaces discourages families from using these spaces, and largely restricts the ways families in both communities conduct their lives. Many parents reported preferring that their children play at home.

Housing

Community members in both Huron and Mendota noted other community infrastructure challenges they face, including the lack of affordable housing, health care centers, and businesses in both communities.

Although there are various apartment complexes and houses in both communities, many families face limited income sources and struggle to find housing within their financial means. The majority of families in Mendota and Huron rent their home, 61 percent and 69 percent, respectively. Also, according to the U.S. Census Bureau,



Common challenges with transportation and the built environment include:

- Limited public transport
- Poor quality sidewalks
- Few road signs
- High summer temperatures



21% of parents in Mendota and 29% in Huron who were surveyed indicated parks, playgrounds, and green spaces as a top three community challenge.

63 percent of renters in Mendota and 63 percent of renters in Huron spend more than 30 percent of their gross income on rent.¹¹

Health Care

A handful of health care centers in both communities offer various services. These health care centers include United Health Care in both communities and Adventist Health Clinic in Huron, all of which offer routine primary care and prenatal care. One in three parents in Huron and Mendota identified health care centers as one of the top three community resources. Parents and children that require specialized care, however, **lack easy access to a nearby hospital or specialized medicine**. Filling prescriptions is also challenging for families in Huron which lacks a local pharmacy.

Businesses

Both communities are home to some small businesses (e.g., restaurants, stores, grocery stores, banks), but the limited number of businesses makes it difficult for families to make all of their necessary purchases locally, especially in Huron. While Mendota is home to a number of grocery stores, including Mendota Food Center and Garcia's Market, some families in Huron travel to Walmart in Hanford for a greater selection and lower prices. For example, one parent elaborated, "There are some places here in town. They have meats, produce, and everything that a market carries, but it's much more expensive." Only three percent of Huron residents interviewed listed food access as a community resource.



About two-thirds of families in Mendota and Huron rent their homes.

¹¹ US Census Bureau, 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.

Service Infrastructure and Barriers

In addition to the community infrastructure, Mendota and Huron are home to a small number of local and mobile community-based organizations that provide services for children zero to five and their families. Due to the limited number of local organizations, the service infrastructure in both of these communities relies heavily on countywide organizations that lack local offices, and often do not meet the range of needs in these communities. Parents also face barriers in accessing services, such as transportation and language barriers. The findings in this section mainly draw from the parent intercept survey and the asset mapping sessions in order to provide an overview of the available services that support families, and highlight gaps in the existing service infrastructure.

Public Benefits and Childcare

Public benefits provide an important support network for families in Mendota and Huron. The public benefits or programs parents listed using the most in both communities include WIC, Medi-Cal, and CalFresh. While most families access benefits and enroll for programs in their communities, a proportion of families reported having to travel to other towns to do so. Forty-one percent of families in Mendota report traveling outside their community to enroll in Medi-Cal, and 27 percent had to travel to enroll in CalFresh.

Parents also noted that childcare is both an existing community asset and a service need. In both communities, a portion of the parents surveyed reported childcare as a top-three community resource, but an even greater proportion of parents identified childcare as a community challenge, with about 42 percent of parents in Mendota and 37 percent of parents in Huron identifying childcare as a top three community challenge.

Often, parents' work hours make it difficult for them to find childcare, including all-day childcare or evening childcare. Although there might be some childcare centers available in Huron and Mendota, families struggle to find affordable options, and often rely on family and friends for childcare. Forty-two percent of parents in Mendota noted that finding childcare is among the top three community challenges, while in Huron, 37 percent of parents agreed. About one in five providers who serve Mendota identified childcare as a top three service need. One provider shared their experience with families, noting that it is difficult for parents to attend community events due to the lack of childcare:

...we look at these families, and they're so tired. We do the childcare now, we feed them, we bring the families in and we say 'bring the kids,' ... We'll do whatever it takes to get them there, but to get them [to be] present, it's hard.

Youth Development

While parents shared that their children most often played at home, they also reported afterschool programs, library reading programs, and youth-specific services as important assets in the community. These include afterschool programs at McCade Elementary and Westside Youth Inc. in Mendota, and the recreation center in Huron. Parents in both communities reported using the library and the services offered at their local Boys & Girls Club, noting both to be points of community pride.

When asked what program they would like to create or change in their community, many parents asked for youth development programs. About one in four parents in Mendota and one in five in Huron would like to see more youth development programs in their communities. This was the most requested service in Mendota,



42% of parents in Mendota and 37% of parents in

Huron who were surveyed identified childcare as one of the top three challenges in their communities.



The survey found that one in four parents

in Mendota and one in five in Huron would like to see more youth development programs in their communities.

and the fourth most requested service in Huron. Parents also emphasized that programs should be age-appropriate, as existing programs in both communities don't provide services for all age groups.

Along with youth development programs, parents remarked on the need for more family-oriented entertainment. Parents suggested that movie theaters and family-friendly restaurants like Chuck E. Cheese would give families more options when looking for activities to do together outside the home.

Parent Support

Parents and service providers in both communities identified a need for parenting classes. Twenty-three percent of providers in Mendota and 21 percent in Huron identified parenting groups and classes as one of the top three community needs. Parents agreed, as one parent explained, "We need parenting classes and counseling on raising children and positive discipline. The library would be a great place to host these classes."

Local schools are able to fill this need in both communities, offering some supportive services, such as counseling and advice for students and their parents. However, parents admitted that social stigma is a major issue. Families with children with special needs are particularly vulnerable due to the lack of quality, specialized services in either community, and the cultural stigma surrounding mental health and therapy among the Latino community. One parent discussed this issue, noting that one way to address this issue would be to provide more information to parents. The parent explained, "The problem too is denial, acceptance, that our culture doesn't like therapy. We need more workshops and more information."

Jobs and Education

Service providers and parents identified employment and educational support to be among other parent-focused services needed.

Parents with low-educational attainment are often frustrated by their limited employment opportunities and the lack of diverse jobs in their agriculture-dominant region. Most families in Huron and Mendota are left highly dependent on the few job opportunities available. The few community members who are able to gain an advanced education or some training are often forced to look outside the community for employment opportunities.

To address this, **parents would like to see more adult educational services and opportunities provided in their respective communities.** In Mendota, adult education was the second most mentioned service parents would like to see offered, and listed among the top 10 most mentioned services needed in Huron. Providers also identified the need for job training and job search support, with 37 percent in Mendota and 40 percent in Huron identifying these services among the top three greatest service needs. Parents and providers proposed their communities provide more adult education opportunities, such as technical skill and ESL classes, as well as job training courses.

Currently, the K-12 school system provides most of the existing adult education opportunities in these communities. In Huron, these opportunities include English language, computer, and GRE classes offered by Huron Middle School; Mendota High School offers English language classes as well. Ultimately, parents would like educational opportunities to expand their employment opportunities, but would like to see a greater amount and a greater variety of employment opportunities not only for themselves, but, eventually, for their children.



Families with children with special needs reported cultural stigma surrounding mental health therapy, especially in the Latino community.

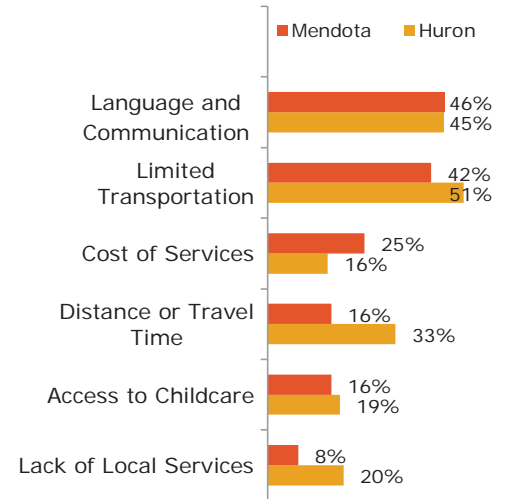
Service Barriers

When asked what the greatest barriers parents face in accessing services are, parents and providers detailed several barriers, including a lack of local community services, limited transportation, the burden of traveling long distances, and language and communication barriers, as detailed in Exhibit 2. Many of these service access barriers are interconnected and reflect overall community challenges. Residents of Huron and Mendota heavily rely on countywide organizations and agencies to access services, such as healthcare and youth programs, due to the lack of local community services. Traveling to other cities to access services is difficult for many families due to the lack of public transportation, cost of travel, and having to take time off work. The lack of childcare makes it even harder for families with young children to access services.

Of all these service barriers, language and communication barriers were most commonly reported by parents. Although both Huron and Mendota are home to large Latino, Spanish-speaking communities, and Fresno County is predominantly Latino, families reported a lack of services available in Spanish. Nearly half of parents surveyed reported this as a barrier, and 43 percent of providers in Mendota and 52 percent in Huron agreed. Also, undocumented immigrants are among the least likely to access services due to a series of factors, including language barriers, lack of knowledge about the services available in their community, and a fear of deportation. The Immigrant Access to Health and Human Services Project, conducted by U.S. Department of Labor, reports that fears of deportation deter immigrants from seeking public assistance, fearing that even enrollment on behalf of their U.S.-citizen children may result in deportation.¹² These barriers show how service barriers disproportionately affect migrant Latino populations.

Exhibit 2. Service Barriers

Parents were asked to identify barriers and obstacles they've faced when accessing services. The most frequently mentioned barriers in each community included:



¹² Barriers to Immigrants Access to Health and Human Services Programs, May 2012. Krista M. Pereira, Robert Crosnoe, Karina Fortuny, Juan Manuel Pedroza, Kjersti Ulvestad, Christina Weiland, Hirokazu Yoshikawa, and Ajay Chaudry.

Service System

The experiences of service providers echo many of the same challenges shared by parents, such as building a local presence, retaining an appropriate workforce, and securing adequate resources to engage families effectively. This section focuses on the service system in Huron and Mendota from the perspective of the service providers themselves, detailing the challenges they face providing services in both communities, and what they feel should be done to improve the system. These findings are drawn from both the service provider survey and the two focus groups held with service providers.

The following table, Exhibit 3, summarizes the service providers that participated in the service provider survey, broken into organizations that service Huron, Mendota, and which organizations provide services to both communities. This shows how a number of countywide organizations provide services in both communities.

Exhibit 3. Service Provider Survey Participants by Community Served

	N	%
Mendota Only		
California School Based Health Alliance (1)		
Central Valley Children's Services Network, Parent Voices (1)		
City of Mendota (2)		
EOC Headstart Mendota (1)		
Exceptional Parents Unlimited, Inc., Gentle Start Services (1)		
Fresno County Department of Public Health (1)		
McCabe Elementary (1)	18	25.7%
Mendota Unified School District (3)		
Promesa Behavioral Health (1)		
Save the Children (1)		
Superior Court of California, County of Fresno (1)		
United Health Center Mendota (1)		
Washington Elementary (1)		
West Fresno Health Care Coalition (1)		
West Side Youth Inc. (1)		
Huron Only		
City of Huron (2)		
Coalinga-Huron Unified School District (4)		
Eminence Health Care (1)		
Huron Middle School (1)	13	18.6%
Huron Public Library (1)		
Keenan Community Center (1)		
Valley LEAP (1)		
West Hills Community College District Huron Family Learning Center (1)		
Both Communities		
Boys and Girls Club of Fresno County		
California Health Collaborative		
Catholic Charities		
Central California Asthma Collaborative		
Central Valley Children's Services Network		
Central Valley Regional Center		
Centro La Familia Advocacy Services		
Community Food Bank		
CSU - Community & Economic Development		
Department of Social Services		
Esperanza Therapy Services	39	55.7%
Exceptional Parents Unlimited, Inc.		
Fresno Council on Child Abuse Prevention		
Fresno County Department of Behavioral Health		
Fresno County DPH		
Fresno County Office of Education		
Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission		
Housing Authority		
Madera CAP		
Marjaree Mason Center, Inc.		
Migrant Headstart		
Reading and Beyond		
Superior Court of California, County of Fresno, Family Dependency Treatment Court		
United Health Centers		

Service Provider Challenges

Providers shared the many challenges they face providing services in Huron and Mendota. Much like the challenges families reported, distance and travel time was the most commonly mentioned challenge. Nearly half of the providers who reported serving families in Mendota said that they face difficulties traveling to and from Mendota, and 42 percent of providers who served Huron faced the same challenge. The problem is not just the cost of travel, but finding staff willing to make the trip, as one provider explained, “One of our personnel problems out here sometimes in rural communities is just the staffing. We have some trouble finding staffing to travel out.”

Other challenges are detailed in Exhibit 4, but mainly focused on:

- Funding
- Staff capacity
- Ensuring access for families
- Lack of understanding about the community

Additionally, establishing trust between service providers and families is a prominent service barrier. Twenty-six percent of providers in Mendota and 23 percent in Huron identified parents’ distrust of service providers among the top 10 service barriers faced by families with young children. This is especially true for the many service providers coming from outside these communities that lack the social relationships and local knowledge that in-community service providers hold. One service provider talked about how important local knowledge is in connecting service providers to community members, saying, “We have people from the County office come, and they come out and they come in their suits and they come with their badges. I tell them, ‘Please do not come dressed like that because [residents] will not open the door.’”

High staff turnover also exacerbates these feelings of mistrust. Service providers work hard to establish relationships with families in their communities, but as they struggle to retain staff, many find it hard to reestablish those close connections and sustain their trust.

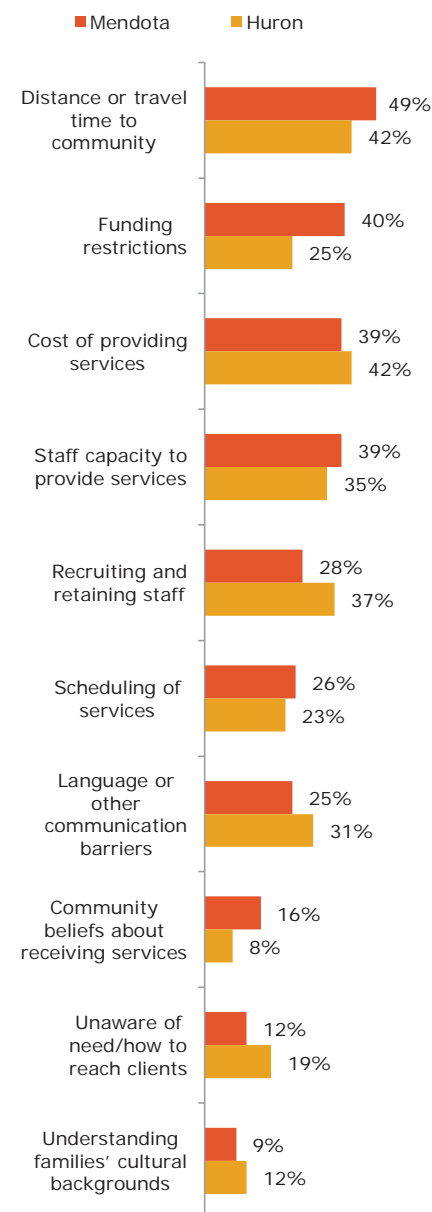
Improving the Service System

Given these challenges, service providers provided various recommendations they feel could improve the current service system, including increased resources, greater coordination and communication, and promoting cross-organization partnerships.

Increase resources. Across both communities, the most common recommendations from service providers focused on expanding resources, including additional funding, increasing the provision of services, and establishing local offices with additional staff. Thirty-nine percent of service providers in Mendota and 44 percent in Huron shared that greater funding could help them overcome many of their provision challenges and be used towards paying for travel costs. They also suggested that funding be provided with fewer restrictions and be granted for longer periods.

Promote communication and coordination. When addressing the challenges of the service system as a whole, providers identified several opportunities to help improve the system of care for children and families in Huron and Mendota.

Exhibit 4. Service Provider Challenges



Suggestions included conducting more networking opportunities to allow service providers to connect and coordinate efforts, creating a unified strategy for service and funding, and increasing data sharing between service providers to help improve coordination. Forty-nine percent of providers in Mendota and 26 percent in Huron proposed having meetings and coordinating their efforts, while 19 percent of providers in Mendota and Huron suggested information-sharing across agencies.

Create sustainable partnerships. Service providers also recognized that in order to promote greater coordination and communication throughout the service system, providers need to partner with other county organizations. Countywide service providers reported that they primarily collaborate with organizations outside of Huron and Mendota, and that a smaller proportion of their partnerships are with providers located in either community. Exhibit 5 displays the different partnerships service providers have with program partners in Huron and Mendota. However, service providers face difficulties forming these partnerships, including a lack of information of other programs and services, unclear roles and responsibilities within an organization, and a lack of staff capacity to engage with other organizations.

Overall, these recommendations focus on intentionally resourcing coordination and collaboration, and show that providers would like to work collaboratively with other providers to create a more unified service system.

The Role of F5FC and Other Stakeholders

Providers shared specific ideas about the strategic role of F5FC in each community, and noted that F5FC can play a key role as a convener and coordinator for efforts throughout Fresno County. Specifically, 60 percent of providers in Huron and Mendota want to see F5FC play a larger role in both of these communities. As one provider explained that F5FC could impact these communities by providing their services in-community, explaining, “[F5FC has] the resources, just bringing their services here to the people of the community [could make a difference].” In addition to expanding the resources they provide to rural communities, providers would like greater transparency on which organizations and programs receive funding, fearing the lack of transparency can cause competition among service providers. This was explained by a service provider:

It shouldn't be a program focus...it creates competition among service providers...[F5FC] could help us with the database, they could help us convene one another, and then where there are gaps...they could selectively come in and fund the gaps ...let's use the dollars judiciously as we come together.

Providers feel that F5FC is strategically positioned to promote greater communication across organizations in Fresno County and should organize more gatherings. Providers also expressed a strong desire to learn more about F5FC's initiatives and interest areas. When asked the role F5FC can play in rural communities, one provider explained: “If F5FC has now expressed an interest in understanding what the needs are, F5FC now needs to follow through.”

Besides F5FC, providers identified a number of stakeholders they would like to see play a larger and more intentional role in meeting the needs of families with young children in Huron and Mendota. The following table shows the findings from the service provider survey, summarizing the community stakeholders most identified by service providers. Services providers listed these stakeholders and felt that they could play a larger role in Huron and Mendota by being more physically present in both communities. 📍

Exhibit 5. Service Provider Partnerships

	Mendota	Huron
My program partners mostly with providers that are located within the community	23%	21%
My program partners mostly with providers that are located outside of the community.	49%	44%
My program partners equally with providers within and outside of the community.	28%	35%

Exhibit 6. Community Stakeholders Identified by Service Providers to Play a Larger Role

	Mendota		Huron	
	N	%	N	%
Philanthropic, charity, or nonprofit organizations	35	61.4%	26	50.0%
County elected officials (e.g., Board of Supervisors, Sheriff, District Attorney, etc.)	34	59.6%	32	61.5%
First 5 Fresno County	34	59.6%	31	59.6%
Local school board or district	33	57.9%	36	69.2%
Community/faith-based leaders	32	56.1%	26	50.0%
City elected officials (e.g., Mayor, City Council, etc.)	32	56.1%	36	69.2%
Community residents	31	54.4%	24	46.2%
The Children's Movement of Fresno	16	28.1%	7	13.5%
Other [†]	11	19.3%	2	3.8%

* Participants could select multiple stakeholders, so percentages total to greater than 100 percent.

† Other responses included: health care providers, private sector businesses, employers countywide public agencies (e.g., Social Services, Public Health, Behavioral Health, Office of Education, etc.), and the Rural Transportation System.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Huron and Mendota exemplify many of the challenges facing rural communities in Fresno County. Both of these communities benefit from the existing community infrastructure that supports day-to-day activities. Local organizations are also pillars in these communities, ensuring some basic needs are met.

However, the gaps identified in this assessment highlight the challenges parents face accessing services and the challenges providers have reaching families with young children. Specific subpopulations within these communities such as Spanish-speaking families and undocumented residents face additional barriers when accessing services.

With these needs in mind, service providers suggested greater communication and coordination among service providers coupled with an increase of targeted resources might improve the county's service system. These improvements could be viable actions towards improving the conditions in strong, resilient rural communities in Fresno County, such as Huron and Mendota.

Recommendations

In June 2016, Harder+Company shared the findings of the Rural Needs Assessment with F5FC and F5FC-funded service providers, and facilitated a discussion where we asked participants to think of ways to better meet the needs of these two communities and Fresno's rural communities in general. Harder+Company used both the findings of the assessment and the recommendations that emerged from this discussion to inform the following recommendations, which are categorized into four key areas. The recommendations detail the steps F5FC, other funders, and local community benefit organizations can take to strengthen the service system to better support the needs of rural communities.

- **Raise awareness of the unique challenges and needs of rural communities in Fresno County.** This needs assessment identified several of the challenges facing parents with young children in rural communities, including the lack of programs and services available to rural families, such as the need for quality childcare, more youth programs, more parents support programs, and greater adult educational services. Overall, service providers working in rural communities cited the importance of their role in raising awareness of the unique challenges faced by rural communities, bringing to light some of the concrete actions funders could take to address the needs of rural communities.
 - **What F5FC can do:** Service providers cited F5FC as a respected advocate for children and families in Fresno County and noted that F5FC has the capacity to raise awareness of the needs of rural communities and advocate on behalf of rural families. F5FC has a role to play in promoting awareness among the greater early childhood community about the challenges facing rural families. F5FC can help raise awareness of the importance of providing culturally-appropriate services, especially to undocumented

families who face additional barriers in accessing 0-5 services. In addition, F5FC should ensure that its early learning, healthy development, and family support efforts address key service gaps in rural communities, such as the lack of quality childcare which parents in both Huron and Mendota indicated is an important need.

- **Create partnerships with Fresno’s rural communities by engaging key stakeholders in order to build trust with local residents.**
Findings from the needs assessment showed that local organizations and institutions, such as schools, are trusted community assets that provide established locations to connect with parents and children in rural communities. These organizations also avoid many of the major service barriers faced by countywide organizations because they have trusted, recognizable staff that are often live in these communities. Given this, service providers should leverage both the formal network of community organizations and the informal network of trusted families, friends, and neighbors for any of their program or initiatives in rural communities. Countywide organizations could greatly benefit by seeking out and partnering with local organizations to develop trust and understanding with rural communities.
 - **What F5FC can do:** F5FC and other funders should develop relationships with local organizations, institutions, and networks in order to develop closer ties with community residents. This will promote trust between residents and service providers and help to overcome some of the service barriers outlined in this report.

- **Address the major service needs in rural communities by targeting both short-term and long-term investments.** Service providers in Fresno County need to consider ways they can align and target their services to address specific service needs, such as childcare, youth programs, and parent support programs in rural communities. This could entail establishing new local service branches in rural communities, including specialty services which rural communities like Huron and Mendota tend to lack.
 - Additionally, funders can target investments to reduce the unique service barriers faced by rural families. Given that families and providers most frequently cited transportation as a service barrier, **improving transportation options** for families must be considered more intentionally for all services and programs.
 - Lastly, funders should consider funding strategies that **invest in the rural workforce** in order to ensure that service providers have the resources and training necessary to **provide culturally-competent services**. This training could ensure that staff knows the specific needs of undocumented community members, or also hire and retain Spanish-speaking staff members.
 - **What F5FC can do:** As both a short-term and long-term investment, F5FC and other funders should seek to target funding for service providers to ensure they can meet the needs of the rural communities they serve. Service providers could also benefit from changes to funding restrictions that limit the capacity of their work in rural communities. F5FC and its partners can play a key role in accessing and leveraging county, state, federal, and philanthropic funding to align and increase the resources available

to local service providers. These resources can then go towards ensuring organizations are providing culturally appropriate services either through hiring bilingual staff, reducing staff turnover, and/or addressing the specific needs of undocumented community members.

- **Address coordination issues facing service providers by promoting greater communication and information-sharing.** Service providers resoundingly recommended the need to promote communication and coordination among themselves. Service providers in Fresno should seek out opportunities to convene and share information with other service providers in order to best serve the needs of rural communities.
 - **What F5FC can do:** As a trusted entity in Fresno County, F5FC is strategically positioned to bring service providers together, provide them opportunities to convene, and promote information sharing and coordination between organizations. By providing more opportunities for organizations to interact and engage with one another in a meaningful way, F5FC could lay the foundation for sustainable partnerships between organizations.

Appendix A. Mendota Findings and Recommendations

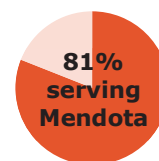
Overview

The First 5 Fresno County (F5FC) Rural Community Needs Assessment used a mixed-methods approach that integrates both qualitative and quantitative data from service providers and parents and caregivers. The following information summarizes the four methodologies used to inform this assessment – a focus group with local service providers, a service provider survey, a parent intercept survey, and a mapping asset session with Mendota families.

In Mendota, one focus group was held at the Rios Terrace Community Center with representation from community based organizations, county agencies, city and school district administrators, childcare providers, and faith-based leaders. An online survey was also conducted with service providers (n=70), which included F5FC-funded organizations, organizations not funded by F5FC, city officials, school administrators, and health care providers. Respondents represented organizations that are physically located in the community as well as those that are located outside of Mendota. Eighty-one percent of service providers surveyed reported serving the community of Mendota. A complete list of the organizations that participated in both of these data collection efforts is listed in Appendix C. Harder+Company staff and community member surveyors administered parent intercept surveys (n=140) at local community establishments and events in Mendota, such as the Farmworker Appreciation Day event at Gonzales Hall, the EOC Food Distribution in front of the Mendota Community Center, and several times at the night market next to Rojas Pierce Park. Almost all respondents identified as Latino/a (99 percent) and responded to the survey in Spanish (91 percent). Last, one asset mapping session with parents and caregivers was held at Westside Youth Inc. Community members and service providers helped facilitate this session in Spanish.



70 Service Providers



140 Families



Understanding Families

The following section highlights major findings about families in Mendota, including community characteristics and the challenges families with young children face.

Community and Family

In Mendota, families are resilient and humble, friends and neighbors look out for one another. Service providers identified the biggest strengths in Mendota as strong and resilient families who desire to improve their lives (56 percent) and a close and caring community committed to supporting children (53 percent). As one parent explained:

[In Mendota] the ladies are lined up in the morning to send their kids off to school. They are there to pick up their kids. That's what I love so much about Mendota, just how tight knit it is. You can just feel the love the family has for their kids.

Sixty-eight percent of Mendota families have lived in the community for 10 years or longer, and 86 percent are parents or caregivers of at least one child five years and

younger. When asked where families gather, 68 percent of families identified their home as the center of social life.

Social, Economic, and Political

Parents also shared that they often struggle because of their limited educational attainment and the lack of economic opportunities offered in Mendota. Seventy-nine percent of parents in Mendota have not received a high school diploma or its equivalent, and 88 percent reported annual family incomes of \$30,000 or less. When asked about the biggest challenges in Mendota for families with young children, 29 percent of service providers called out economic and workforce challenges related to the agriculture-based economy. Despite these challenges, families in Mendota are invested in the education and development of their children. Service providers described families are eager to learn about child development, supportive of all forms of education, and willing to advocate for their families and one another. As one provider explained, “[parents] want things, they want to learn about their kids, they want to understand how to be their developmental disabilities, how to explain developmental disabilities to their families...”

Language barriers, immigration status, and experiences with trauma create and often exacerbate challenges for families in Mendota. When asked what languages are spoken in their home, the majority speak Spanish and English at home (97 percent and 43 percent, respectively). Forty-six percent of parents also noted language and other communication barriers as the most frequent barrier or obstacle they face when trying to access services or programs they need for themselves and their families. Parents with limited literacy or who speak Mexican indigenous languages face additional challenges.

Moreover, both families and service providers in Mendota discussed issues of eligibility and limited access to needed services due to their immigration status. Service providers shared that the people they serve have expressed being afraid to access health services for their children or themselves because the adults lack health insurance or immigration documents. Some parents in Mendota may even hesitate to express their dissatisfaction with services because of this.

In addition, many immigrants in Mendota have experienced stress and trauma that creates additional challenges. A service provider shared the story of a mom they worked with who experienced domestic violence and returned to her living situation right away, adding that “you can refer them to places but then they won’t stay, they are scared.”

Community Infrastructure

Mendota is home to community assets and organizations that contribute to the community infrastructure, such as schools and health care centers. These assets provide important basic services, but often lack the capacity to meet the needs of Mendota families. The following section details Mendota’s community infrastructure and highlights any existing gaps.

Schools

More than half of parents (54 percent) in Mendota identified the K-12 school system as one of the top three resources in the community, making the school system the most frequently mentioned community asset in Mendota.



Language and communication are the most frequently mentioned access barriers families with young children face in Mendota.



The K-12 system is the biggest community resource for families with young children.

Public Spaces

Existing parks and libraries are important public spaces in the Mendota; 28 percent of parents identified parks as one of the top three resources in the community. One parent shared, “The library has kept a lot of young people off the streets. There they find something to do or spend time on the computers.” However, both providers and parents in Mendota noted the parks are also a challenge and a need. Insecurity at the parks and other public spaces discourages families in Mendota from using these spaces. A third of parents (33 percent) identified safety concerns, violence, crime, and substance abuse as one of the top three challenges in the community.

Transportation

Service providers and families in Mendota both shared challenges for pedestrians, including: a lack of crosswalks, lack of stop signs, reckless drivers, poor quality sidewalks (especially for strollers and wheelchairs), and hot summer temperatures. One parent shared their experience:

[Safety] is a problem along [Avenue] 33. They can't put speed bumps there and the cars drive through very fast. It's hard to cross the street there. And that's the street that separates the school and the park.

Although families in Mendota reported using the Fresno County Rural Transit Agency bus system, 29 percent of parents identified transportation as one of the top three community challenges, while 44 percent of providers identified transportation as one of the top three greatest service needs in the community.

Housing, Healthcare, and Businesses

U.S. Census data shows that 56 percent of households rent in Mendota.¹⁴ However, affordable housing is a challenge for families. One parent noted, “It is hard to find housing here, and it is hard to qualify for housing assistance. I was on a waitlist for six years. Rents keep going up.” Additionally, over a quarter of parents (29 percent) identified health and healthcare services as one of the top three resources that support families with young children in Mendota. Almost a third of parents (30 percent) identified healthcare services as the most important service or program they had used for themselves and their families. However, although clinics in Mendota offer routine care for families, the community lacks many other health services, including easy access to a hospital and specialist medical care. Twenty-two percent of the parents surveyed have used a hospital in towns or cities outside of Mendota, and 26 percent have used healthcare services and doctors, such as specialists, outside of town. Lastly, businesses in the community of Mendota are limited. Families in Mendota expressed the desire to have more local grocery stores and department stores.

Service Infrastructure

The service infrastructure in Mendota relies heavily on organizations providing services countywide. However, Mendota is home to a small number of local and mobile community-based organizations that provide services for children zero to five and their families. Thirty-one percent of organizations that participated in the service provider survey were located in Mendota, while 52 percent were located outside of the community but provided mobile or home-based services in the

¹⁴ US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010-2014 5-year Average.

community. The following section details some of the services available to families in Mendota, and also notes gaps in the existing service infrastructure.

Public Benefits and Childcare

Public benefits provide an important support network for families in Mendota. While most families are able to utilize these benefits locally, they often have to travel to other cities for enrollment. For instance, 41 percent of parents indicated that they traveled outside of Mendota to enroll in Medi-Cal while 27 percent had to travel to access CalFresh benefits.

Parents in Mendota also noted that childcare is both an existing asset and a service need. Nineteen percent of parents in Mendota identified childcare as one of the top three resources in their community. However, many parents (42 percent) also identified childcare as one of the top three community challenges. Similarly, 26 percent of providers identified childcare as one of the top three service needs.

Youth Development

While parents in Mendota shared that their children most often played at home, parents identified afterschool programs, library reading programs, and youth-specific services as assets in the community that they felt proud of. A parent said, “The library has kept a lot of young people off the streets. There they find something to do.” However, 26 percent of parents would like to see more age-appropriate youth development programs offered in Mendota.

Parent Support

Service providers identified parenting classes as one of the top three greatest service needs in Mendota (23 percent). Currently, parents receive this support from the K-12 school system, such as counselling.

Jobs and Education


Fifteen percent of parents in Mendota identified adult education (e.g., technical skills, arts, ESL classes) as something they would like to see offered in their community, while 37 percent of service providers identified job training and job search support as one of the three greatest service needs in the community.

Service Barriers

Because Mendota’s service infrastructure relies on countywide organizations and agencies, families in Mendota often have to travel to Fresno, Kerman, or Firebaugh to access services. Language barriers, specifically not being able to access services in Spanish, was the most common barrier noted by parents. When asked about the greatest barriers to accessing services, parents and service providers identified language barriers, limited transportation, and long distances among the top three greatest service barriers, as summarized in Exhibit 1.

Service System

This section focuses on the service system needs in Mendota from the perspective of service providers themselves, who identified the challenges they face providing services to families with young children, as well as recommendations to improve the service system as a whole.



About 1 in 4 parents want more youth-specific programs offered in Mendota.

Exhibit 1. Service Barriers

	Parents	Providers
Language or other communication barriers	46%	42%
Transportation is limited	42%	72%
Distance to services is too great or inconvenient	16%	58%

Service Provider Challenges

Service providers also face challenges in providing services and meeting the needs of families in Mendota. The following section details challenges service providers who serve Mendota face, and suggestions they provided to improve service provision in Mendota.

Among all the challenges service providers face, the most commonly mentioned challenges include traveling long distances to and from the community (49 percent), funding restrictions (40 percent), the cost of providing services (39 percent), and limited staff capacity (39 percent) among the top four challenges.

Improving the Service System

When asked how to improve the provision of services to Mendota, service providers provided various recommendations. The top three recommendations to help service providers overcome the challenges they face serving families in Mendota included additional funding (39 percent), more local agencies/services (25 percent), and additional staff (11 percent).

Service providers also shared ideas about the strategic role that F5FC can play in Mendota, including hosting service system meetings and greater coordination, sharing information across agencies, and providing additional funding, as detailed in Exhibit 2.

Finally, providers identified a number of stakeholders they would like to see play a larger and more intentional role in meeting the needs of families with young children in Mendota, with over half of service providers identifying philanthropic, charity or nonprofit organizations (61 percent); county elected officials (60 percent); and First 5 Fresno County (60 percent) as stakeholders they would like to see more involved in these efforts. Other suggested stakeholders included:


- Local school board or district
- Community/faith-based leaders
- City elected officials 

Exhibit 2. F5FC’s Role

	Ideas
Service system meetings and coordination	49%
Information-sharing across agencies	19%
Additional funding	16%

Appendix B. Huron Findings and Recommendations

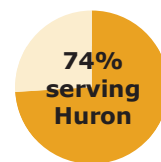
Overview

The First 5 Fresno County (F5FC) Rural Community Needs Assessment used a mixed-methods approach that integrates both qualitative and quantitative data from service providers and parents and caregivers. The following information summarizes the four methodologies used to inform this assessment – a focus group with local service providers, a service provider survey, a parent intercept survey, and a mapping asset session with Huron families.

In Huron, one focus group was held at the Huron Family Learning Center with representation from community based organizations, county agencies, city and school district administrators, childcare providers, and faith-based leaders. An online survey was also conducted with service providers (n=70), which included F5FC-funded organizations, organizations not funded by F5FC, city officials, school administrators, and health care providers. Respondents represented organizations that are physically located in the community as well as those that are located outside of Huron. Seventy-four percent of service providers surveyed reported serving the community of Huron. A complete list of the organizations that participated in both of these data collection efforts is listed in Appendix C. Harder+Company staff and community member surveyors administered parent intercept surveys (n=97) at local community establishments and events in Huron, such as the Week of the Child Celebration at John Palacios Community Center, the Westside Food Distribution, and Los Amigos Grocery. Most respondents identified as Latino/a (94 percent) and responded to the survey in Spanish (87 percent). Lastly, one asset mapping session with parents and caregivers was held at the John Palacios Community Center. Community members and service providers helped facilitate this session in Spanish.



70 Service Providers



97 Families



Understanding Families

The following section highlights major findings about families in Huron, including community characteristics and the challenges families with young children face.

Community and Family

Huron families are resilient and humble with friends and neighbors looking out for one another. As one parent detailed, “One of the things I really appreciate about this town is the humility of the people. It’s really just a ‘good morning.’ You can converse with anyone walking down the street.” Over half of service providers (54 percent) agreed that Huron is home to resilient families. Sixty percent of families have lived in Huron for 10 years or longer, and many community members (83 percent) are parents or caregivers of least one child five years and younger.

Social, Economic, and Political

Parents also shared that they often struggle because of their limited educational attainment and the lack of economic opportunities offered in Huron. Eighty-two percent of parents in Huron have not received a high school diploma or its

equivalent, and 86 percent reported annual family incomes of \$30,000 or less. When asked about the biggest challenges in Huron for families with young children, 39 percent of service providers mentioned economic and workforce challenges related to the agriculture-based economy. Despite this, families are invested in the education and development of their children.

When asked what languages are spoken in their home, parents in Huron indicated that they frequently speak Spanish (95 percent) and English (37 percent). Almost half of parents in Huron (45 percent) also identified language and other communication barriers as the second most frequent barrier they face when they try to access services or programs they need for themselves and their families. Similarly, both families and service providers discussed issues of eligibility and access to needed services due to lack of immigration status. A service provider serving Mendota shared that “parents are nervous... because they are undocumented and they don't want anybody to [know].”

In addition, many immigrants have experienced stress and trauma that creates or worsens the challenges they face. For instance, a service provider indicated, “a lot of these parents, most of them, have been sexually abused.” One mother discussed experiencing domestic violence and finding immigration support through Westside Family Services, a local service provider.



Immigrants often face trauma before, during, or after migration.

Community Infrastructure

Huron is home to community assets and organizations that contribute to the community infrastructure, such as schools and health care centers. These assets provide important basic services, but often lack the capacity to meet the needs of Huron families. The following section details Mendota’s community infrastructure and highlights any existing gaps.

Schools

More than half of parents (52 percent) in Huron identified the K-12 school system as one of the top three resources in the community. Schools are also places where families in Huron feel safe engaging in other activities, such as doing physical activity. However, transportation to and from school is a challenge for many families, especially in Huron where youth must travel to Coalinga to attend high school. When asked what one thing they would create or change in their community, one in five parents in Huron identified opening a high school in town.

Public Spaces

Existing parks and libraries are important public spaces in the Huron. Nineteen percent of parents identified parks as one of the top three resources in the community. However, both providers and parents also identified parks as a challenge and a need. Insecurity at the parks and other public spaces discourages families from using these spaces. A quarter of parents in Huron (25 percent) identified safety concerns, violence, crime, and substance abuse as one of the top three challenges in the community.

Transportation

Service providers and families in Huron both shared challenges for pedestrians, including: lack of crosswalks, lack of stop signs, reckless drivers, poor quality sidewalks (especially for strollers and wheelchairs), and hot summer temperatures. Thirty-five percent of parents identified transportation as one of the top three community challenges, while 52 percent of providers identified transportation as one of the top three greatest service needs in the community. Families in Huron

also rely on the Fresno County Rural Transit Agency bus system, although parents noted the bus runs too infrequently.

Housing, Healthcare, and Businesses

U.S. Census data shows that 69 percent of households rent in Huron.¹⁵ However, affordable housing is a challenge for families. Additionally, nearly a quarter of parents (23 percent) identified healthcare services, like United Healthcare and Adventist Health Clinic, as one of the top three resources that support families with young children in their community. In fact, almost half of parents (46 percent) identified healthcare services as the most important service or program they had used in Huron for themselves and their families. However, although clinics in Huron offer routine care for families, the communities lack many other health services, including easy access to a hospital and specialty medical care. Sixty-seven percent of parents have used a hospital in towns or cities outside of Huron, and 20 percent have used healthcare services and doctors, such as specialists, outside of town. As one parent explained:

Many of us go to Hanford for dentist services, specialty care, or emergency services. That's true too when you're about to deliver a baby. You see the nurse practitioner here and the doctor all the way to Coalinga.

Importantly, Huron also lacks a pharmacy. Parents shared that given the opportunity to create one service in their community, many would build a pharmacy. Parents who participated in the asset mapping session were also vocal about this need. Lastly, businesses in the community of Huron are limited and families often travel to other cities for groceries and banking.

Service Infrastructure

The service infrastructure in Huron relies heavily on organizations providing services countywide. However, Huron is home to a small number of local and mobile community-based organizations that provide services for children zero to five and their families. Thirty-five percent of organizations that participated in the service provider survey were located in Huron, while 54 percent were located outside of the community but provided mobile or home-based services in the community. The following section details some of the services available to families in Huron, and also notes gaps in the existing service infrastructure.

Public Benefits and Childcare

Public benefits provide an important support network for families in Huron. In fact, most Huron residents are able to access these benefits locally and only a few indicated traveling outside of town to access Medi-Cal (8 percent) and WIC (3 percent).

Parents also noted that childcare is both an existing asset and a service need. Twenty-five percent of parents in Huron identified childcare as one of the top three resources in their community. However, over a third of parents (37 percent) identified childcare as one of the top three community challenges. Similarly, 10 percent of providers identified childcare as one of the top three service needs in Huron.

¹⁵ US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010-2014 5-year Average.

Youth Development

While parents in Huron shared that their children most often played at home, parents identified afterschool programs, library reading programs, and youth-specific services as assets in the community that they felt proud of. A parent said, “The library is renovated and it looks really nice. It’s a place to learn.” In addition to the library, parents in Huron identified the Boys & Girls Club and the recreation center as assets in the community. Parents also highlighted a need for more youth programs for children of all ages. Nineteen percent of parents in Huron identified youth development programs as something they want in their community.

Parent Support

Parenting classes were identified as a need in Huron. Providers also identified parenting groups and classes as one of the three greatest service needs in the community (21 percent). Some parents in Huron reported receiving supportive services and attending programs through the K-12 school system, such as English as a Second Language (ESL), high school equivalency, and computer instruction courses. However, some families with special needs children shared facing a lack of local services as well as social and cultural stigma. One parent shared their experience raising a child with developmental needs:

It’s hard to raise a child with special needs. Thank God we scramble to find information. Even if there’s some help, sometimes it’s not good help. I would like to see more agencies doing work here.

Jobs and Education

Seven percent of parents in Huron identified adult education (e.g., technical skills, arts, ESL classes), while 40 percent of providers identified job training and support finding a job as one of the three greatest service needs in the community.

Service Barriers

Because the service infrastructure relies on countywide organizations and agencies, families in Huron have to travel to Fresno, Hanford, or Kerman to access services. Language barriers, specifically not being able to access services in Spanish, was the most common barrier noted by parents. Many barriers reflect overall community challenges—such as transportation, childcare, and limited service capacity—especially for healthcare services. When asked about the greatest barriers to accessing services, parents and service providers identified transportation, language and communication, and distance as major barriers, as detailed in Exhibit 1.

When asked how their organizations usually connect with families with young children in Huron, providers shared they conduct outreach at community events (69 percent), receive referrals from other organizations (63 percent), and use word of mouth in the local community (61 percent).

Service System

This section focuses on the service system needs in Huron from the perspective of service providers themselves, who identified the challenges they face providing services to families with young children, as well as recommendations to improve the service system as a whole.



Families with children with special needs reported cultural stigma surrounding mental health therapy, especially in the Latino community.

Exhibit 1. Service Barriers

	Parents	Providers
Transportation is limited	51%	75%
Language or other communication barriers	45%	52%
Distance to services is too great or inconvenient	33%	75%

Service Provider Challenges

Providers reported numerous challenges meeting the needs of families in Huron. The most prominent was the distance and travel time between Huron and Fresno, highlighting the service system’s reliance on countywide organizations. Service providers identified other challenges, including:

- Distance or travel time
- Cost of providing services
- Recruiting and retaining staff

Improving the Service System

When asked how to improve the provision of services to Huron, service providers provided various recommendations. The top three recommendations to help providers overcome challenges they face serving families in Huron included additional funding (44 percent), more agencies/services (16 percent), and additional staff (12 percent).

Service providers also shared ideas about the strategic role that F5FC can play in Huron, including hosting service system meetings and promoting coordination, helping to share information across agencies, providing additional funding, and creating coalitions around key themes and specific, shared goals, as detailed in Exhibit 2.

Finally, providers identified a number of stakeholders they would like to see play a larger and more intentional role in meeting the needs of families with young children in Huron, with almost three quarters (70 percent) of service providers identifying the local school board/district as a stakeholder they would like to see more involved in these efforts. Other stakeholders included:

- City-elected officials
- County-elected officials
- First 5 Fresno County
- Community/faith-based leaders
- Philanthropic, charity, or nonprofit organizations 🏠

Exhibit 2. F5FC’s Role

Ideas	
Service system meetings and coordination	26%
Information-sharing across agencies	19%
Additional funding	19%
Create a coalition or task force around shared goals	19%

Appendix C. Data Collection Respondents and Organization

Service Provider Survey Participation

The following exhibit lists number of participants for the service provider survey by the organization they represent. A total of 70 service providers participated in the survey.

Exhibit 1. Participants and Organizations, Service Provider Survey

	Total	
	Frequency (n=70)	Percent
Boys and Girls Club	1	1.4%
California Health Collaborative	1	1.4%
California School Based Health Alliance	1	1.4%
Catholic Charities	1	1.4%
Central California Asthma Collaborative	1	1.4%
Central Valley Children's Services Network <i>(Staff representing the following programs: Fresno Family Connections, Parent Voices, Research-Based Family Literacy Program, Special Needs Inclusion Team)</i>	5	7.1%
Central Valley Regional Center	2	2.9%
Centro La Familia Advocacy Services <i>(Staff representing the following programs: Criando Niños Saludables, Fortaleciendo Familias, Voces en Acción)</i>	4	5.7%
City of Huron	2	2.9%
City of Mendota	2	2.9%
Coalinga-Huron Unified School District <i>(Staff representing the following functions: special education, homeless and foster youth, curriculum, administration)</i>	4	5.7%
Community Food Bank	1	1.4%
Fresno State University, Office of Community & Economic Development	1	1.4%
Department of Social Services	1	1.4%
Eminence Health Care	1	1.4%
Esperanza Therapy Services	1	1.4%
Exceptional Parents Unlimited, Inc. <i>(Staff representing the following programs: Family Resource Center Mentoring, Gentle Start Services, Learning</i>	4	5.7%

	Total	
	Frequency (n=70)	Percent
<i>About Parenting)</i>		
Fresno Council on Child Abuse Prevention	1	1.4%
Fresno County Department of Behavioral Health	1	1.4%
Fresno County Department of Public Health <i>(Staff representing the following programs: Nurse Liaison, Nurse-Family Partnership)</i>	3	4.3%
Fresno County Office of Education	1	1.4%
Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission	2	2.9%
Headstart Mendota	1	1.4%
Housing Authority	1	1.4%
Huron Middle School	1	1.4%
Huron Public Library	1	1.4%
Keenan Community Center	1	1.4%
Madera CAP	1	1.4%
Marjaree Mason Center, Inc.	1	1.4%
McCabe Elementary	1	1.4%
Mendota Unified School District <i>(Staff representing the following functions: special education, migrant services, administration)</i>	3	4.3%
Migrant Headstart Mendota	1	1.4%
Promesa Behavioral Health	1	1.4%
Reading and Beyond	1	1.4%
Save the Children	1	1.4%
Superior Court of California, County of Fresno <i>(Staff representing the following programs: Family Dependency Treatment Court, Juvenile Court)</i>	3	4.3%
United Health Centers <i>(Staff representing the following functions across the Huron and Mendota clinics: WIC programs, breastfeeding, nutrition education, community development, clinic management)</i>	5	7.1%
Valley LEAP	1	1.4%
Washington Elementary	1	1.4%
West Fresno Health Care Coalition	1	1.4%
West Hills Community College District Huron Family Learning Center	2	2.9%
West Side Youth Inc.	1	1.4%

Appendix D. Mendota Asset Map

During the asset mapping session a group of Mendota parents worked together to identify a broad range of assets. This summary map represents Mendota's assets and challenges from the perspectives of families in Mendota.

Key Findings:

- Homes and schools are centers for learning, exercise, and social gatherings, and are safe spaces in the community. Schools in Mendota offer resources and services to families, such as services for children with special needs, counseling, and parent workshops.
- Safety is an overarching concern for families. Parents identified loitering, substance use, and a lack of police patrolling in public spaces. Parents also mentioned that homelessness, substance abuse, and mental health issues were also safety issues. Many parents also shared that fast traffic and a lack of pedestrian infrastructure makes walking unsafe. These safety concerns often restrict families to their homes.
- United Health Care is the primary provider of healthcare in Mendota. While parents appreciate the clinic's evening and weekend hours, they shared that it is often difficult to get an appointment, wait times are long, and staff is not always friendly. Families seek routine care in Firebaugh or Kerman because of negative experiences in Mendota, and travel to other communities for emergency or specialty care.

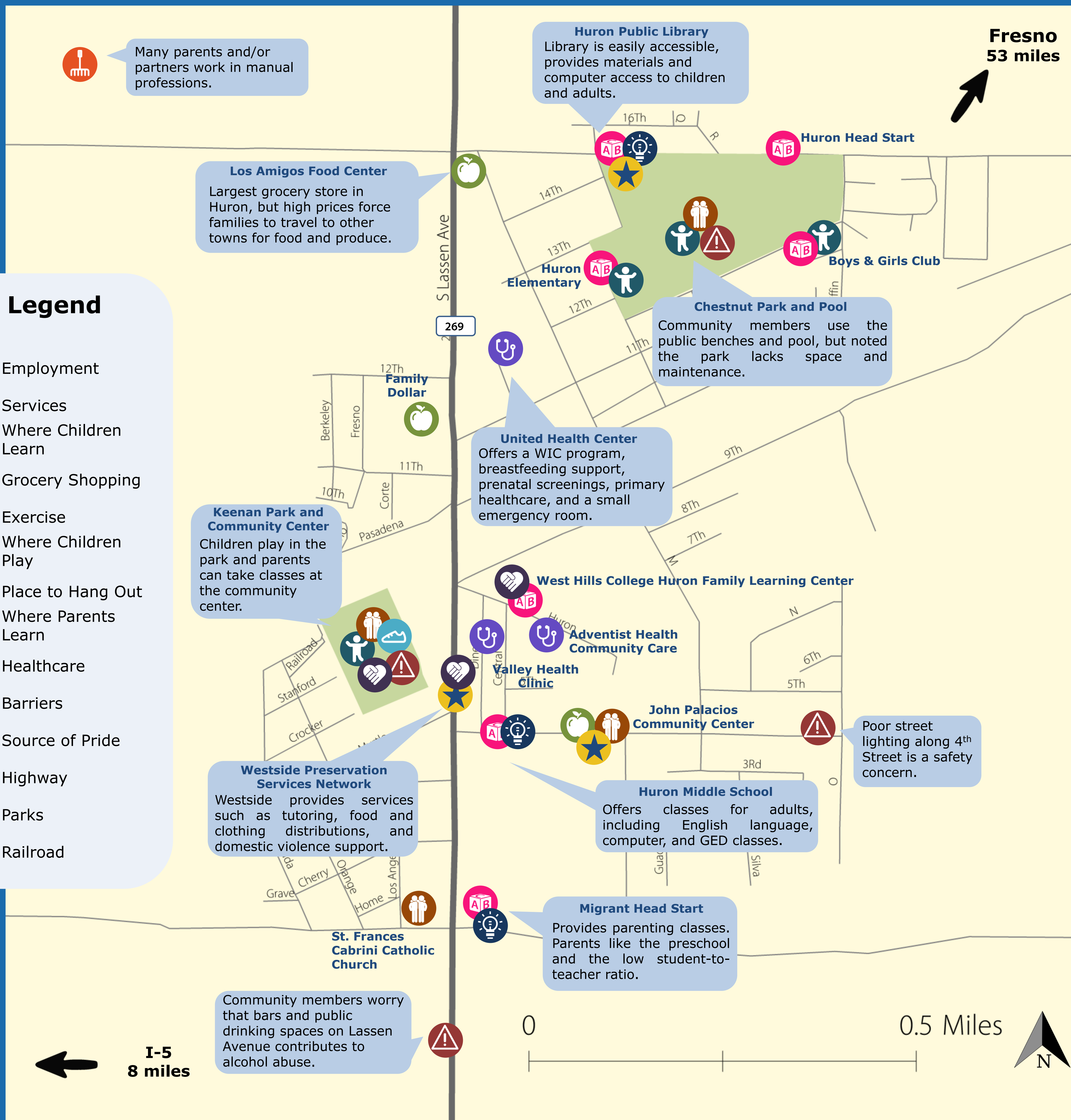


Appendix E. Huron Asset Map

During the asset mapping session a group of Huron parents worked together to identify a range of assets. This summary map represents Huron's assets and challenges from the perspectives of families in Huron.

Key Findings:

- Local health care providers provide several services to residents, including perinatal care and primary health care. However, families reported long-waiting times and limited waiting room space. Parents with young children shared that the waiting rooms are not kid-friendly. Often families travel to Hanford, Coalinga, or Fresno for routine and specialized care due to their negative experiences in Huron.
- Families identified Chestnut and Keenan Park as important community assets. However, many acknowledged park maintenance and surveillance could be improved. The cost of Zumba classes offered at the Keenan Community Center and the lack of sufficient benches at Chestnut, makes it so many parents prefer to exercise and gather at home.
- Safety is an overarching concern. In addition to the drug and gang activity in community parks, the lack of public infrastructure, such as sufficient sidewalks, street signs, and street lighting, make walking around the community difficult and unsafe. Children often play at home and in the streets, but fast drivers can pose a serious safety risk.



Service Provider Focus Group Attendance

The following lists the names of the organizations that sent representatives to attend the Mendota and Huron focus groups with service providers:

Mendota

- City of Mendota
- Economic Opportunities Commission (EOC) Head Start
- Exceptional Parents Unlimited, Inc. (EPU)
- Fresno County Department of Public Health
- Mendota Unified School District
- Migrant Head Start
- Westside Youth, Inc.

Huron

- Central Valley Children's Services Network (CVCSN)
- Centro la Familia
- Coalinga and Mendota Parks and Recreation
- City of Huron
- Fresno County Department of Public Health
- Westside Family Preservation Network
- Other (private childcare provider) 🇺🇸

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