



# CHANGING SYSTEMS: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF EVERY CHILD COUNTS

*Executive Summary*





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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1998, California voters passed the California Children and Families First Act, Proposition 10, that placed a tax on tobacco products to fund programs to support early childhood development. Alameda County received its first year allocation of \$20 million in 1999 after the First 5 Alameda County Commission completed its strategic plan for use of the funds. Alameda County's initiative, Every Child Counts First 5 Alameda County, created interlocking programs in the three environments where young children's lives are most directly and significantly impacted: at home, in child care, and in the community. To achieve lasting changes in these environments, Every Child Counts included among its goals, "Systems reform for sustainable impact." *Systems reform includes changes on many levels: the way services are delivered, the knowledge and skills of providers, the way community agencies work together, and the broader infrastructure that supports service delivery such as policy, accountability, and resources.*

Adopting systems change as a goal requires resisting short-term solutions to serve more children and families by funding agencies to do more of what they currently do. While this strategy may actually achieve rapid gains in outcomes for children, it is destined to be short-lived. From the beginning, it was clear that revenue from the Proposition 10 tobacco tax would slowly dwindle because one purpose of the tax was to reduce tobacco sales. Every Child Counts was committed to looking beyond short-term solutions that would create more services but have no sustainable impact. As one Every Child Counts staff member explained:

*In ten years, when all this is over, what is going to be left? Our goal is to take that money and play a systems change agent role in this County. The only way we know that these things are going to be sustained is that we are using the systems that *already* exist and infusing them with new practices and this kind of out-of-the-box thinking.*

Proposition 10 funds are small compared to the resources supporting the service system for children and families as a whole. However, unlike the vast majority of funds available for health and family support services, Proposition 10 funds can be used at the Commission's discretion provided they serve children 0-5 years and their families and are not used to replace funding from other public programs. Alameda County immediately saw this unprecedented opportunity to intervene creatively and strategically to influence the larger service system for children and families.

Every Child Counts has moved forward with an agenda for systems change in six focus areas:

- *Strengthening prevention to enhance a continuum of services*
- *Improving service quality*
- *Increasing provider capacity to deliver quality services*
- *Increasing coordination and communication*
- *Developing infrastructure to support high quality, coordinated services*
- *Leveraging resources for sustainability*

This report is based on an external evaluation of Every Child Counts' impact on service systems in Alameda County, on other counties, and on the state. It presents accomplishments, challenges, key strategies, and directions for the future.



### ON SYSTEMS CHANGE:

*"When you have an entity that has a limited lifespan because the resources will go away, some of its priorities should be to facilitate systems transformation within the sustainable institutions with which it partners."*

■ *First 5 Alameda County  
Commissioner*

## The Systems Change Evaluation

In September 2002, the Public Health Institute was competitively awarded a contract from the First 5 Alameda County Commission to conduct an external evaluation of the impact of Every Child Counts on the service system for children and families.

### In each of the six systems change focus areas, the evaluation sought to determine:

- What accomplishments were achieved in Alameda County and outside the county?
- What were the key strategies that led to these accomplishments?
- What were the challenges?
- What directions should be pursued for the future?

### Data Collection:

- Sixty-three open-ended interviews and 11 focus groups were conducted with a total of 101 respondents. These respondents included 28 direct service providers, 42 program/agency administrators, 6 technical assistance providers, 3 First Five Commissioners, 11 Every Child Counts staff, and 11 individuals who work at the state level or are policy experts.
- A web-based “systems change survey” was used to obtain quantitative data from stakeholders throughout the county. A total of 149 individuals responded including: 59 from community-based agencies, 40 from public agencies, 17 from public or private agencies that work primarily with other providers (e.g., training, technical assistance), 9 advocates, 4 early care and education providers, 5 parents, 3 elected officials or staff, and 12 others. Of these, 84 personally interacted with children under five and/or their families to provide direct services.
- Secondary data were synthesized from existing Every Child Counts evaluations and documents.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN ALAMEDA COUNTY

The evaluation documented accomplishments in each of the six focus areas for systems change.

### Strengthening prevention to enhance a continuum of services

*Every Child Counts recognized an important gap in the County's service system for children and families—prevention and early intervention services. Proposition 10 funding made it possible to address this gap. As one respondent explained, “There's never been money available for prevention before. It's always intervention. It's always mandated measures. This is the first time that we've been able to set some resources aside for prevention.”*

*To strengthen prevention, Every Child Counts:*

#### Created “universal” support for families of newborns

Every Child Counts provides one to three post-partum home visits regardless of income or medical-social risk factors at four hospitals in the County. The initiative also distributes “New Parent Kits,” educational materials and videos, books, and toys for children, as well as supporting parenting classes. One early childhood program director's comments reflected the broad support among providers for these universal preventive services: “The best thing about Every Child Counts is that it's there for every child, not just low income kids. If you have these services available to every child, then low income kids actually get served better because it may become norm.” Another remarked that Every Child Counts had “really been able to change attitudes among families themselves about how really important the early years are.”

#### Provided intensive support for high risk families

Every Child Counts combines universal services with intensive support for families of young children at higher risk for developmental problems or involvement with child welfare. To address the needs of medically-fragile infants, Every Child Counts created the Special Start program by expanding services provided by Children's Hospital Oakland and funding an additional 12 nurses in the Public Health Department. Providing training and fostering a partnership between Public Health and one of the County's strong private institutions created new capacity within Public Health. To address risk factors associated with teen parenting, Every Child Counts enhanced existing services for teen mothers to emphasize the developmental needs of the children. To further support high risk families, Every Child Counts collaborated with Social Services and two collaboratives of community-based agencies to create Another Road to Safety (ARS). ARS is pioneering a new service delivery approach using community-based agencies to support families referred to child welfare but whose cases do not warrant an investigation. As a staff person explained, “We have moved it up one step further because we knew we would hear from some of these families again, and we want to prevent the revolving door.” Staff from Social Services talked about how working with Every Child Counts had shifted their focus from looking at how many children were brought into the system to how many children were left safely at home.

## OVERVIEW OF EVERY CHILD COUNTS SERVICES

### For Children at Home

- **“Universal” 1-3 home visits** are provided to families of babies born at Summit, St. Rose Highland, and Alta Bates Hospitals. An additional 10 visits are available if needed. Hospital Outreach Coordinators are new staff stationed in these hospitals to offer home visits and enroll families in Every Child Counts.
- **Intensive Family Support Services** are provided to families of young children at higher risk for developmental problems or involvement with child welfare. *Special Start* provides home-based case management for medically fragile babies who are discharged from Alameda County’s neonatal intensive care nurseries. *Case Management for pregnant and parenting teens* is provided by The Perinatal Council and Tiburcio Vasquez Health Center. *Another Road to Safety* uses two community-based agencies, La Familia and Family Support Services of the Bay Area, to support families at risk for child abuse and neglect.

### For Children in Child Care

- **The Child Development Corps** rewards staff who continue their professional training and remain in the child care field with monetary stipends. The goal of the Corps is to improve the quality of early care and education by building support for early childhood educators, creating incentives for providers to continue their education and work in the field, and establishing a strong network of early childhood professionals.
- **The Child Care Fund** provides loans and grants for improvement to child care environments, a Family Child Care Fair, Spruce Up for Kids beautification projects, and professional business classes. The Fund also provides technical assistance to child care grant recipients to improve the quality of their programs.
- **Mental health consultation** at child care centers involves work with specific children and also with staff and directors to help staff interact with children and families to promote positive development and address social, emotional, and behavioral issues.
- **The Enhanced Mentor Program** builds on an existing statewide system to provide one-on-one training and technical assistance for child care providers and teachers.

### For Children in the Community

- **The Community Grants Initiative** funds community and public agencies to provide innovative programs including parent education, services for special needs children, health and mental health services, tobacco education, school readiness, and arts and music programs.
- **The Parent Advisory Committee** advises Every Child Counts on parenting issues.
- **Neighborhood-based School Readiness** projects reach children without formal preschool or child care experience to prepare them for kindergarten through summer camps and other activities.

### For Providers

- **The Specialty Provider Team** is a multidisciplinary team with expertise in mental health, child development, substance use, and lactation concerns that provides consultation to program staff working with Every Child Counts.
- **Training Connections** offers seminars for professionals working with young children and their families.
- **The Infant Mental Health Seminar** is an intensive training effort in which community-based providers working with children commit to attending one seminar per week for a nine-month period.
- **Professional Development Coordinators** housed in four Alameda County community colleges work with early child care and education students, faculty, and administrators to improve the quality and accessibility of courses in child development.
- **Career Advocates** are new staff housed at child care resource and referral agencies to help childcare providers enter and navigate the early childhood education field. They address questions on how to get a license, how to join the Child Development Corps, and how to progress on the Child Development Permit Matrix.
- **The Child Development Training Consortium** runs professional development seminars on applying for a Child Development Permit and offers reimbursement for the cost of applying for the Permit.
- **The Pediatric Advisory Committee** brings pediatricians together to identify ways that they can support child development. A pilot project places developmental specialists in two pediatric practices.

For further information see Every Child Counts’ Annual Reports available on the website, [www.ackids.org](http://www.ackids.org)

### Enriched child care and community environments to make them more supportive of child development

The Child Care Fund is an Every Child Counts program which makes resources available to child care providers to assess their sites and programs and to make long range plans for quality improvements. The Fund then offers specialized training, individual technical assistance, and capital grants to help implement these improvements. The Fund holds a fair every year for family child care providers that gives them vouchers to purchase new toys and books that increase children's access to engaging and developmentally stimulating activities. Every Child Counts' Community Grants Initiative expands and enhances innovative community programs such as parent education, services for special needs children, health and mental health services, tobacco education, and arts and music programs. School Readiness activities conducted by Every Child Counts reach out to children approaching kindergarten age who have not participated in any preschool or child care programs.



#### ON ENVIRONMENTAL

#### ASSESSMENT OF CHILD CARE:

"I sat down with my staff, and we read through [the environmental rating scale]. We were just very honest about it, and we went, 'Oh well, we don't do that anymore, do we?' We're going to have to start doing that again. So it caused me to really look closer at my daycare and say, 'Oh, I used to have a bunch of books. I think the kids ate them all.' So I went out and I got some more books, that sort of thing. And I got the faucets fixed in the bathroom because the children were having trouble washing their hands. So I actually made physical changes in my child care to make it work better, so that when I went back to the [rating scale] next time I could say, 'Yeah, we do that.'"

■ Family Child Care Provider

### Infused a focus on social-emotional development into existing services

By providing training and integrating mental health consultants into child care centers and community-based agencies, Every Child Counts infuses new practices into existing services to support children's social-emotional development. Providers reported that having a mental health consultant improved their interactions with children, increased their comfort level talking with parents about behavioral issues, and provided a new, more accessible avenue for parents to seek advice about developmental and emotional issues. Sixty-two percent of respondents to the systems change survey felt that Every Child Counts had increased the focus on mental-health within their agency.

### Improving service quality

*Every Child Counts chose to focus on improving the quality of services not only because better services improve outcomes for children, but also because changes in service provider attitudes and practices can potentially endure even when specific funding streams, such as Proposition 10, decline. To improve service quality, Every Child Counts:*

#### Improved access to services

Access barriers were reduced by funding agencies to provide services in new locations and at hours more convenient to working parents, and by increasing community awareness of the availability of services through outreach, trainings, and collaboration. Ninety percent of respondents to the systems change survey indicated that Every Child Counts had increased access to services for children and families. Sixty-seven percent reported that their own agency had added services at a new time or new location.

#### Improved cultural competence and greater attention to diversity

Every Child Counts used a variety of strategies to improve services for diverse populations including training, educational materials, translation, and interpretation services. Provider contracts now contain language that addresses issues of diversity. Child development classes (in Spanish and other languages) through the community colleges were developed to reach providers who do not speak English. Every Child Counts funded the translation and evaluation of college transcripts for providers who were educated in other countries, thereby increasing the diversity of qualified child care providers. Respondents felt that Every Child Counts' trainings increased providers' awareness of cultural factors, special needs, and other community agencies serving non-English speaking communities. They praised Every Child Counts' efforts to translate educational materials and resource lists into Spanish and several Asian languages, and to expand interpreter services. Through Every Child Counts' funding, many agencies were able to hire staff with similar language and cultural backgrounds to the clients they served. Roughly half of the respondents to the systems change survey reported that Every Child Counts had increased their agencies' ability to serve diverse populations.

### **Increased the use of research-based best practices for serving children and families.**

Training and technical assistance resulted in increased use of best practices such as family-centered, comprehensive, relationship-based services. The Specialty Provider Team (see p. 3) gave providers backup in working with challenging cases and improved their ability to handle issues such as breast feeding problems, domestic violence, substance abuse, and developmental delay. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents to the systems change survey felt that Every Child Counts had strengthened a multidisciplinary approach within their agency. Many of the providers interviewed felt that Every Child Counts had enabled them to make their services more family-centered.

### **Increased use of protocols and standardized assessments**

Home visiting protocols enhanced post-partum and newborn assessment and achieved greater uniformity across visits. They also helped agencies train new staff and identify problems that might have gone unnoticed such as maternal depression. Standardized assessment tools were not new to Children's Hospital, but a staff person explained, "Having the assessment requirement has really made us look at this in a much, much better way. We've developed things that will be in place that have led to better services." Working with Social Services and community-based organizations, Every Child Counts helped facilitate use of a new assessment tool called 'structured decision making' to triage cases of suspected child abuse/neglect. In the child care field, many providers had an "eye opening" experience when they conducted assessments on their own facilities using standardized tools to assess the adequacy of the environment for children.

## **Increasing provider capacity**

*Many of the improvements in service delivery that resulted from Every Child Counts were achieved by changing providers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills. To build provider capacity Every Child Counts:*

### **Increased providers' knowledge and skills**

Providers from many agencies identified concrete knowledge and skills they acquired through Every Child Counts and described how this changed the way they delivered services. For example, child care providers learned new strategies for handling difficult behavior such as redirecting or changing a child's environment. Staff at ACCESS, Alameda County's mental health referral line, learned more about infant mental health services so they could make appropriate referrals. Other skills mentioned included: conducting developmental and mental health assessments, providing education to families on a broader range of issues, collecting data, and serving children and parents with developmental disabilities.

### **Improved providers' morale and sense of professionalism**

Respondents felt that Every Child Counts had improved staff morale in a variety of agencies, but most profoundly in the child care field. Factors contributing to this improvement included: training and stipends offered through the Child Development Corps (see p.3); decreased isolation from greater interaction with other service providers at trainings; greater collaboration with other agencies; opportunities to provide new and more comprehensive services; and greater access to resources such as the Specialty Provider Team and educational materials. One policy expert in the child care field described a "renaissance in the community" in terms of keeping qualified staff. In addition, providers remarked on a growing sense of professionalism. They described feeling differently about their work, feeling that they were treated as professionals, and seeing these positive feelings translated into improved work with children and families.



### **ON JOB SATISFACTION:**

"It's very nice to get the respect as a professional. I find that it's a little more rewarding, it's a little more exciting just to know that people aren't looking at you as a babysitter kind of thing, but as an educated individual who knows what she's doing. That kind of good feeling goes on to the children, the families, to everyone."

■ *Family Child Care Provider*

### Increased the educational level of child care providers

By matching stipends for the Corps to California's Child Development Permit levels, Every Child Counts aims to encourage providers to complete more educational units and apply for the Permit. These efforts proved to be successful. Community college enrollments increased, and the number of Permit holders grew by 235% in the first two years. Community college staff reported that not only were child care providers enrolling in classes in greater numbers, they were more interested in getting a degree. The City of Oakland's Head Start program praised Every Child Counts for moving them toward their goal of having all their teachers hold at least an Associate degree. Every Child Counts hopes that increasing the number of providers holding a Permit will change community norms such that the Permit becomes a standard in the field and providers continue to apply for it even if stipends are discontinued.



#### ON FOSTERING NEW

#### ATTITUDES TOWARD POLICY:

“Every Child Counts has brought a whole different way of approaching things that we never saw before. They were very aggressive, they sat down, they put things in motion... We're used to working with children and families; we're not used to making policy changes. You kind of sit around and watch that happen. And Every Child Counts presented a new way of looking at that—that we can become part of it. We can become active agents of change.”

■ Child Care Provider

### Increasing coordination and communication

*The goal of Every Child Counts is to enhance systems that were already in place, not to create new programs. Accomplishments in increasing service coordination have been numerous (see p. 7). To increase coordination and communication, Every Child Counts:*

#### Improved communication and partnerships

Many comments were made about the way in which Every Child Counts created new connections and partnerships among agencies. Respondents commented that “programs are working together,” “people are talking to each other more,” “people know who is seeing whom,” and there is “less territoriality.” They noted these connections at the county level and among community providers. A county administrator explained, “I think it's become a real pivotal focus within the County of all programs that serve children and families in some way. We just never had that before.” Community providers described sharing resources such as using space at other agencies or pooling resources to conduct trainings. ECChange, Every Child Counts' web-based information system facilitated information sharing across providers.

#### Brought stakeholders together for planning and advocacy

Every Child Counts was widely praised for convening or strengthening a number of planning groups that are now better positioned to keep pressure on service systems to respond to current and changing needs. These groups include: the Child Care Planning Council, the Early Childhood Mental Health Systems Work Group, the Interagency Fiscal Leveraging Workgroup, the Pediatric Advisory Committee, and the Parent Advisory Committee.

### Developing infrastructure to support high quality, coordinated services

*To sustain improvements in service quality and integration, Every Child Counts sought to change the infrastructure that supports service providers and agencies. For example, to sustain the use of best practices, the initiative worked to build a system for delivering high-quality training. To generate data needed for continuous quality improvement, Every Child Counts designed systems for tracking outcomes. And to enable innovative approaches to service delivery, changes to policy and regulations were sought. To build systems infrastructure, Every Child Counts:*



## HOW EVERY CHILD COUNTS IMPROVED SERVICE COORDINATION

- Hospital and home-based care became more coordinated.** Hospital Outreach Coordinators (HOCs) at Summit, St. Rose, Highland, and Alta Bates Hospitals fill an important gap in service coordination. The HOCs interface with the hospital system – doctors, nurses, social work staff – to offer home visits, enroll babies in Medi-Cal, ensure that moms and babies have a primary care provider, and ensure that physicians’ orders for home/social services are implemented.
- Pediatricians and home-based service providers** began to communicate more effectively. Public health nurses are required to fax their home visiting reports directly to pediatric offices. Many pediatricians rely on the nurses to assess newborns within 72 hours of discharge.
- The County’s local managed-care initiative**, the Alameda Alliance, improved its services to members. The Hospital Outreach Coordinators identify Alliance members and help the health plan to reach them with services including home visiting, breastfeeding supplies, and lactation counseling and support.
- Perinatal home visiting services** offered through several different programs became more coordinated after Every Child Counts expanded visits to new mothers and set up new mechanisms for communication. Providers work together to determine who will be the primary provider. They then seek consultation from each other as needed. Better coordination reduces duplication and enables families to keep the same provider over time.
- Neo-natal intensive care nursery patients** are reviewed more systematically. Weekly meetings are now held to review every infant and assign them to appropriate follow-up services.
- Referrals** were increased through the trainings for community grantees that increased providers’ familiarity with each other’s services.
- School staff** – principals, kindergarten teachers, and preschool teachers – have built relationships with the School Readiness program to better serve children and families living in areas of low academic performance.
- Resource sharing** increased, such as using space at another agency or pooling resources to conduct trainings. For example, a home visitor who works with Latina mothers, described her new relationship with an agency that serves the African American community where she held some group classes:
 

*They're opening their doors to a bunch of Spanish-speaking, Latina immigrant mothers, and they're very welcoming. You know if you have these mothers walking into an agency where the providers and the client base are primarily African-American, I think it starts to kind of break down some fear factors and some tensions...when you start forging collaborations, you start getting secondary gains like that.*
- Early Care and Education (ECE) training** became more coordinated as four community colleges and resource and referral agencies collaborated for the first time to coordinate information, courses, and counseling information.
- Early Care and Education Credentialing** was facilitated through a systematic approach to accessing the State Child Development Permit (ECE equivalent of a credential) including a coordinated process for Permit fee reimbursement.

### Systems Change Survey: How much has Every Child Counts...



## Expanded training and technical assistance

Respondents viewed Every Child Counts' investments in existing and new training programs as critical to achieving gains in provider capacity and service quality. Participants gave overwhelmingly positive feedback on trainings and technical assistance. They described trainings as high-quality, helpful in improving practice, and popular with staff. They mentioned benefits including: allowing providers an opportunity to learn together and "feed off each other," generating a more supportive environment for child care providers thereby encouraging retention, increasing



understanding across disciplines through cross-trainings, and increasing cultural competency through the cross-cultural response panels. In addition to conducting training, Every Child Counts enhanced the way that many agencies train and support their staff. Providers reported that case conferencing and clinical supervision shifted away from "focusing on the numbers" to building capacity and supporting staff in handling difficult situations.

Every Child Counts is making a focused effort to improve the community college system's responsiveness to the needs of child care providers and students of early child development. Significant and potentially long-lasting changes in the community colleges included: offering evening child development classes and practicums, updating curricula to include the most current research/practices in child development, and the addition of a credit-bearing class on business development training for family child care providers.

### ON EXPANDING TRAINING:

"I've just been very struck by [Every Child Counts'] comprehensive approach of putting training where it needed to be, alongside with some pretty carefully thought-out goals and objectives. And I don't always agree with everything they're doing, but I think there's a real effort to try to make it work together in a pretty coherent system. And it's the first time I've seen that in any of my experiences with the service delivery system in Alameda County."

■ *Community Provider*

### Promoted results-based accountability

Every Child Counts requires its funded programs and grantees to identify outcomes and track progress in meeting them. Many community grantees reported that Every Child Counts greatly improved their ability to track outcomes. Although there were some complaints about excessive paperwork, confusing forms, and mandatory trainings, the overwhelming majority of respondents gave high praise to the technical assistance and support they received to implement the accountability requirements.

An important tool for promoting results-based accountability is ECChange – a mobile, web-based system designed to confidentially track families, services received, and outcome indicators. ECChange is integrated into providers' work flow with the goal of making data collection serve the purposes of accountability, quality assurance, and case management. According to respondents, ECChange: improved accuracy and speed of data collection; promoted the use of best practices by automating standardized assessment tools; enhanced the ability of nursing supervisors to manage case assignments and monitor appropriateness of care; facilitated claims submission for reimbursement from state and federal programs; and enhanced infrastructure so that additional ECChange modules for county data systems could be built.

### Changed public policies

Public policy provides an important foundation for the development of services that effectively promote early child development. To improve public policy, Every Child Counts:

- Played a critical role in advocating for passage of AB 212 which created the CARES program that makes stipends available statewide to child care providers working in subsidized child care centers.
- Collaborated with the Social Services Agency to obtain a waiver from the California Department of Social Services to use Title IV-E funds to provide services through community-based organizations to families not yet involved with the child welfare system. Normally these funds are available only for services provided by Social Services staff to families already in the system.

- Created a policy on confidentiality and data sharing that was used to craft state legislation (AB 973). The legislation protects individually identifiable information collected by any Proposition 10 Commission from being disclosed without consent of a client or guardian.
- Actively promoted three anti-tobacco policies through its contracts and grants: smoke-free workplace, institutional divestment from tobacco, and refusal of tobacco contributions. In fiscal year 2001-2002, 36 out of 57 community grant recipients passed all three policies; the rest were working towards compliance.

## Leveraging resources for sustainability

Resource leveraging is an important component of Every Child Counts' approach to systems change. Proposition 10 funds are a major new source of local funds that can be used to draw down federal funding and to attract new public and private grant funds. The goal of the fiscal leveraging efforts is to help agencies access stable funding streams, reduce reliance on Proposition 10 funds, and promote sustainability of services as Proposition 10 funds decrease over time.

In September 2000, Every Child Counts completed its fiscal leveraging plan, a blueprint for using Proposition 10 funds and other state and local funds to draw down additional federal funding for county programs. Although still in progress, the work of the fiscal leveraging group has already paid off. In fiscal year 2000-2001, Alameda's Proposition 10 funds were not leveraging any federal funds. In 2001-2002, \$632,000 was leveraged, and the following year, that amount grew to \$1,587,800. The successful leveraging of funding allowed Every Child Counts to sustain its programs despite reductions in Proposition 10 funding.

To leverage resources, Every Child Counts:

- Facilitated non-county agencies' access to federal funding streams. Prior to Every Child Counts, community agencies were not accessing federal funds for Targeted Case Management (TCM) because it required a relationship with the County. Every Child Counts opened the TCM door for a number of agencies and provided them with assistance in creating structures and procedures for accessing federal reimbursement. Every Child Counts has made program review for fiscal leveraging opportunities a mandatory part of its Community Grants Initiative.
- Pursued maximum reimbursement by using multiple funding streams. Through leadership from the Public Health Department, Alameda County negotiated with the state to enable the County to bill a portion of the universal home visits to the Child Health and Disability Prevention program. This funding stream is combined with TCM to maximize reimbursement for home visits.
- Supported expanded funding for early childhood mental health. Every Child Counts collaborated with Behavioral Health Care Services and other agencies to create a structure for expanding Medi-Cal billing for mental health services to five target populations including young children 0-5 years.
- Leveraged grant funds. Every Child Counts supported the Child Care Fund, a public-private partnership that raised over \$1 million from its partners including Providian, the Alameda County Social Services Agency, and United Way of the Bay Area. In addition, Every Child Counts leveraged almost three million dollars for the Child Development Corps from California Department of Education and from California First 5.



### ON LEVERAGING RESOURCES:

“The [City of Fremont’s Human Services] Department provides counseling and case management for the families of youth involved with status offenses. When we received funding through Every Child Counts, their staff worked with us to determine which of our services were eligible for reimbursement under the Medi-Cal Targeted Case Management program. We are now billing for these services and leveraged an additional \$56,000 over the past two years.”

■ *Public Agency Administrator*

## INFLUENCE BEYOND ALAMEDA COUNTY

*There was wide recognition that Every Child Counts has made a significant impact on systems change that extended beyond Alameda County. According to First 5 California staff, Alameda County was “innovative” from the beginning and continues to be a “cutting edge county.” In extending its influence beyond Alameda, Every Child Counts:*

### **Served as a role model for the development of county strategic plans**

Alameda was the first county to complete its strategic plan, which was offered as a model for other commissions to critique or emulate. First 5 California staff acknowledged the contribution Every Child Counts made by responding to questions from other counties and providing a great deal of technical assistance. Another respondent noted that because Every Child Counts invested in communications by developing a website, a “branding campaign,” and high-quality print materials, Alameda County was able to effectively communicate the concepts of Proposition 10 before many other counties.

### **Provided a model for county CARES programs**

Alameda was one of the first counties to develop a CARES program (called the Child Development Corps in Alameda County). The Corps has served as a model for many other counties that subsequently developed CARES programs, and Every Child Counts staff provided a great deal of technical assistance. One of the concepts developed by Every Child Counts that many other county programs emulated was the linking of stipend levels to the Child Development Permit matrix levels with the goal of promoting long-term professional growth. In addition, with funding from the Packard Foundation, Every Child Counts developed a database to track participants in the Corps that has now been made available at no cost to other counties.



### **Demonstrated leadership statewide**

Respondents at the state level credited Every Child Counts with influencing a number of First 5 California programs and policy decisions. To support First 5 California, Every Child Counts:

- Played a crucial role politically, legislatively, and strategically in strengthening First 5 statewide. Alameda County leadership helped position the counties to “speak with one voice” and protect Proposition 10 funds from cuts.
- Encouraged First 5 California to adopt unifying messages and themes, but allow flexibility at the county level to prioritize and implement programs. This concept drove the school readiness matching grant program.
- Provided significant input into crafting First 5 California’s television advertising campaign on the importance of child development and articulated the vision of First 5 to the media.
- Developed a fiscal leveraging plan that became a model for the manual developed for all counties.
- Played a key role in crafting the outcome measures for the Infant Preschool Family Mental Health Initiative funded by First 5 California. The outcome measures set the focus for the programs of all grantees in the initiative.
- Influenced the way the statewide evaluation approached the development of indicators.
- Developed a model for assessment, improvement, and financing of child care programs through the Child Care Fund that is now being used by several counties and is being reviewed by a major foundation for possible replication.

### **ON STATEWIDE LEADERSHIP:**

“[Alameda County] is widely thought to [have] some of the most politically astute leaders in the county organizations. They have played a really important role in shepherding us through really difficult times legislatively, politically, and strategically.”

■ *First 5 California Staff*

## CHALLENGES

*Respondents described a number of obstacles to Every Child Counts' systems change efforts. Some of these obstacles were successfully overcome, whereas others remain a challenge.*

### Meeting the needs of a diverse population

According to providers, there continues to be a need for more materials in different languages and more culturally appropriate strategies for reaching different populations, particularly immigrants. In addition to facing the challenge of serving a diverse population of children and families, Every Child Counts confronted the challenge of addressing the needs of a wide variety of service providers. In particular, it proved more difficult to reach family child care and license-exempt providers through the Child Development Corps and other Every Child Counts programs than to meet the needs of center-based child care providers.

### Collaborating successfully

Many respondents, from both Every Child Counts and partner agencies, commented on the difficulty of building new collaborative relationships. Some of the difficulties described included: differences in service models and organizational structures; imbalanced relationships due to the dominance of one institution in a service sector or different levels of resources controlled by partnering agencies; and the shortage of time to engage in the fundamentally time-consuming process of collaborative planning. Some partner agencies expressed concerns that Every Child Counts did not understand their agency or respect their professional knowledge.

### Overcoming differences in institutional culture and mission

Building relationships between agencies was complicated by the fact that agencies have very different institutional cultures. These differences emerged between Every Child Counts and other county agencies, between public and private institutions, and between service providers and schools. Some agencies had greater tolerance for change and "crisis mode" operation; others were accustomed to greater structure and stability. As agencies began to work together, they discovered that different concepts of prevention, different target populations, and differences in culture complicated the partnership.

### Dealing with the difficulties of change

A sense that "this isn't my idea" or a perception of infringement on one's professional territory at times contributed to a resistance to change that many saw as a natural human tendency. Some institutions resisted engaging in self-reflection or allowing outsiders in; others raised concerns about partnerships causing them to lose control and potentially compromising the quality of services. There was acknowledgement that even with a high level of effort, change comes slowly. In the child care field, respondents noted a gap between what is learned in training and actual changes in the classroom environment. On the other hand, when change did come, it sometimes brought new types of stress. Some agencies were overwhelmed by the volume of the new services they were providing as a result of their work with Every Child Counts.

#### ON CONCERNS ABOUT EVERY CHILD COUNTS:

"One of the ways to be disowned by the public system is to take a highbrow attitude which is demeaning to the people who have committed their lives to doing this work for a long period of time."

■ *Public Agency Administrator*

## Weighing broad ambitions against feasible steps

Every Child Counts often faced a choice between starting projects on a small and feasible scale or maximizing systems change by integrating more fully with existing services. Smaller, self-contained pilot projects provide greater control over quality but risk never going to scale. On the other hand, larger, more ambitious projects seek real change in existing systems but are more difficult to manage and have a greater possibility of failure.

The challenge of achieving an appropriate balance arose as decisions were made about how to staff the universal home visiting services. Every Child Counts' original intention was to have a limited number of public health nurses dedicated solely to conducting these home visits in order to pilot and cost out the model. However, Public Health Nursing felt strongly that the strength of their discipline was in having generalists capable of responding to a variety of needs in the community. As a result, all nurses were trained and deployed to integrate the post-partum home visits into their other duties. However, the value of starting with a model that provides more control and accountability is still under debate.

## Working with Every Child Counts' unique structure and history

Every Child Counts differs from most other county Proposition 10 initiatives in that it runs many of its own programs. This structure raised some concerns that Every Child Counts would result in the creation of another bureaucracy. In addition, Every Child Counts' approach of partnering extensively with county agencies differs from that of most other counties who primarily make grants to community-based organizations. According to several state-level respondents, this difference, in combination with the fact that Every Child Counts was more advanced in terms of implementation and expertise, at times made it difficult for Every Child Counts to give input on statewide issues that was relevant to other county commissions.

## KEY STRATEGIES AND DIRECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

*There was a great deal of praise for Every Child Counts' impact on the service system. However, respondents were also clear that the work was far from complete. Comments about the success and struggles of Every Child Counts highlighted a number of factors that are critical to the continued success of the initiative:*

### Strong vision and leadership

Vision and leadership among those in high level policy positions were seen as key to successful implementation of an initiative that avoided infighting and resource grabbing. There was a commitment from the leaders of key county agencies to use the money for something innovative and not allow it to become "a bank account for existing organizations and initiatives." *Maintaining a clear direction at the highest level should be a priority for keeping Every Child Counts on track.*

### High quality staff

Many people felt that Every Child Counts was particularly strong because of its highly qualified staff and the fact that the program directors are experts in their fields. The interpersonal strengths of Every Child Counts staff also were widely praised; respondents referred to staff as "very committed," "movers and shakers," "energetic," "wonderful," and "respectful." *If staff leave, it will be important to replace them with others who are also experts in their fields and who have the inclination and disposition to work collaboratively with other agencies.*

### Investment in relationship development

In discussions about what made Every Child Counts programs work, the importance of relationships surfaced repeatedly. The systems change agenda, by its nature, puts the initiative in the position of working with agencies, whether community-based or governmental, with the explicit intent of changing some of their practices. Commissioners and staff recognized that their agenda required them to build good working relationships with other agencies. *Every Child Counts should continue to place a high priority on relationship development to sustain and expand the system changes it has achieved.*

## Broad input and inclusiveness

There were many positive comments made about the inclusiveness of the planning process for Every Child Counts. Those involved in the planning process felt that a broad range of opinions were solicited, including those of community members and staff at various levels. At the same time, as the initiative was developed and rolled out, some felt that their concerns were not being heard.

*The combination of praise and criticism leveled at Every Child Counts indicates that efforts to maintain an inclusive process should be continued and strengthened.*

## A mix of universal and targeted strategies

Throughout discussions of the overall approach of Every Child Counts, there were many opinions expressed about the value of taking a “universal” services approach or targeting specific high-risk populations. In developing its programs, Every Child Counts took both universal and targeted approaches. A large number of respondents supported the concept of universal services; however, there was also a great deal of ambivalence. In an environment with limited resources, some questioned whether targeting high-risk families might be the best use of resources. Others felt that Every Child Counts had achieved a good balance between universal and targeted services. *Given the disparate opinions on the question of universal versus targeted services, continuing a mixed approach appears to be the most promising strategy.*

## Commitment to systems change and out-of-the-box thinking

As circumstances change, new modifications in the service system will be needed to respond to new needs. Staff and commissioners are aware of the need for on-going systems change. As a First 5 Alameda County Commissioner explained:

Do you continually reinvent yourself and reinvent the strategies, to force people to constantly look at issues and problems?... You had your big bang, you got started, you moved systems in a certain direction, but can you continue to act and do that again?

Community providers hoped that Every Child Counts would keep its “ear to the ground” to identify new opportunities for change. *Every Child Counts should strive to continue to be an innovator and catalyst for continued systems change.*



### ON HAVING A CLEAR VISION:

“The mission has always been so clear. The commitment is so clear. I think that therein lies the brilliance of the original legislation. The population was identified. The money couldn’t be supplanted, it was protected. It was given its own separate governance structure. It had to do certain kinds of things. It had the right kind of structure around it that allowed us to do this kind of thing that we are all extraordinarily committed to.”

■ *Public Agency Administrator*



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child  
counts

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