September 3, 2007
To submit comments or items (3 weeks in advance) for this e-newsletter, please contact Katie Kurutz, public affairs officer, First 5 LA at kkurutz@first5la.org or (213) 482-5902.

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CALENDAR
September 7-8, all day: Universal Preschool Conference and Education Expo at the Los Angeles Convention Center. This FREE event will feature guest speakers, parent workshops and an education expo. Childcare will also be available for children ages 3 and up, on Saturday, from 9 am to 12 noon. For information or to register, call (866) 581-LAUP (5287) or visit www.laup.net.

September 8, 11:00am-4:00pm: “1st Annual Burbank Block Party,” presented by Assemblymember Paul Krekorian along part of San Fernando Blvd., (between Olive and Angeleno). The event will feature refreshments, “Adopt-a-Pet,” and informational booths. For information contact Chief of Staff Adrin Nazarian at (818) 240-6330.

September 12-October 10, 8:00am-4:30pm: “HEALTH CARE INTERPRETING: A Free course for Bilingual Health Care Workers who Interpret for Patients,” presented by L.A. Care Health Plan located at 555 W. 5th Street, Los Angeles, Ca 90013. For information call Beverly Treumann at (213) 694-1250, ext. 4223.

September 13-16, 11:00am-dusk: “Los Angeles Korean Festival” at the Seoul International Park, Koreatown, located at 3250 San Marino Street, Los Angeles, CA 90006. First 5 California’s HANDS-ON HEALTH VAN will provide children 0-5 with free games, great prizes, and fun ways to stay healthy. For information visit www.lakoreanfestival.com.

POLICY PICK
Health Coverage for Children: One Step Closer
On the heels of signing the state budget, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez, and Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata joined First 5 California at a press conference in Sacramento last week as the state organization announced its intention to invest $20 million in health care benefits for California’s children.

The event, an important step toward providing health coverage for young children, drew a crowd of advocates, parents, pediatricians, community and faith leaders to the steps of the State Capitol. The governor commended First 5 California for establishing an “important foundation to build on.” The $20 million commitment is contingent upon the establishment of a state health coverage program for all children beginning January 1, 2008 – an effort strongly supported by First 5’s throughout the state, and healthcare and children’s advocacy groups.

According to studies conducted by the California Endowment, uninsured children are 70 percent less likely than insured children to receive medical care for common conditions like ear infections, and 30 percent are less likely to receive medical attention when they are injured. In addition, uninsured children are often ill, which affects their ability to pay attention in school and hinders them from keeping up with class activities. California has 174,000 uninsured children under the age of six.

First 5 LA recognizes and commends the efforts of our state leadership as they work to provide a health care plan for all Californians. And we also encourage all providers to continue to enroll eligible children in our Healthy Kids health insurance program. To learn more about Healthy Kids call (888) FIRST5LA.

Play! It’s a Child’s Work
In this new era of teaching to academic standards and standardized testing, policy makers and caregivers can easily forget that standard classroom-style learning does not work for very young children. Last May, the Bay Area Early Childhood Funders (BAECF), a group of early childhood advocates, published the brief, “Play in the Early Years: Key to School Success”, to remind us to make play time a staple of young children’s education and development.
For preschoolers, playing is learning, and a well-trained teacher will know to work with a child’s inherent interests to help develop essential school readiness skills. Self-directed play can lead to representational competence, language development, positive attitudes toward learning, and logic development for a preschool-aged child. Group play is also important for self-regulation and social negotiation.

“We are very excited about this brief. So often educators think of playing as separate from learning, but we are hoping to change this notion. As we move toward universal preschool in California, we want to be sure that play is at its heart,” said Lyda Beardsley, executive director of the Trio Foundation, a member of the BAECF and a primary funder of the brief.

The brief has been distributed widely to policy makers and early educators throughout California, and BAECF encourages its continued distribution. To download the full brief, click here. Simpler versions are also available in English, Spanish, and Chinese. Click on the language name to download.

CHAMPION PROFILE

Deborah Meyers Travels the World to Bring Best Practices

Deborah Myers is the manager of the hospital-based Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Support Project at South LA Health Projects, LA BioMed at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center.

Born and raised in Queens, New York, Deborah was influenced by social activist camp counselors with whom she spent most of her childhood summers. After graduating from Queens College with a degree in psychology, she traveled through the heart of Central America, seeking an understanding of cultures other than her own.

Her experiences there – seeing poor campesinos, or farmers, trekking down narrow mountain paths leading donkeys laden with empty coke bottles – led her to study nutrition. At Columbia University she had the great fortune to work with physician professors in exile from the military dictatorship in Chile. From them she learned how nutrition and breastfeeding were political as well as clinical, because of the aggressive and unregulated marketing practices of formula manufacturers resulting in the death of infants in developing countries.

After receiving her masters degree from Columbia, she began work as a WIC nutritionist, and then worked with a Population Council project that demonstrated how breastfeeding rates could be increased by altering hospital practices. Later she worked on a USDA funded project that looked at model breastfeeding practices in the WIC Program.

She moved to Los Angeles in 1989 with her husband and then 1-year-old son, and began her work at South LA Health Projects, LA BioMed at Harbor-UCLA. She has been there ever since.

Which book has most influenced your life?

Moment in Peking, by Lin Yutang. As a teen, it sparked a fascination for cultures that are different from my own.
Evie’s Desk
The Children of Hurricane Katrina

Last week commemorated the second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. Many who watched the president give a televised speech from the first open school in New Orleans were no doubt reminded of what this natural disaster meant for the children in its wake.

Post-Katrina New Orleans has posed unique challenges for families trying to rebuild their lives in the devastated areas. Some children have moved in with extended family members in other parts of the country while their parents work to rebuild a safe home. If not addressed, this kind of unexpected displacement can create potential attachment, psychological and emotional problems for these children.

Families whose children are with them in the disaster zone must take extra precautions in play spaces, as many may be contaminated or littered with other unsafe debris. Most playgrounds have been taken over by FEMA trailers and, with the exception of a few rebuilt play spaces, children don’t have designated places to play and learn.

Disaster can strike at any time, and children, our most precious resource, can be the most vulnerable. The special needs of children in the aftermath of a disaster are not always at the forefront of a busy parent’s mind. But to the extent that we can, we should prepare for these in advance. Click here for tips of disaster preparedness for children.

Evelyn V. Martinez
Executive Director
First 5 LA

What is your idea of a perfect world?
One in which people are kind to one another and respectful of our environment.

What is the greatest challenge the children and families of LA County face today?
Poverty. The gap between the “haves” and the “have nots” is widening.

Which living person do you most admire and why?
Hard to say – up there are my yoga teacher for living what he teaches, and my son for his intellectual curiosity.

Who was your favorite teacher and why?
My high school chemistry teacher. Way back then, he knew that girls could be just as good in science as boys.