First 5 LA Allocates $2.1 Million To Identify Five "Baby Zones"

First 5 LA Commissioners last Thursday approved a revised implementation plan to identify five “Baby Zones” to demonstrate how LA County communities can build safe and friendly places for families and caregivers to support children’s development.

Approval of the $2.1 million allocation is part of a $125 million, five-year effort to work with community and business partners to optimize early development of children from the prenatal stage through age 3. Known as the Prenatal through 3 Focus Area, the project represents an innovative approach by First 5 LA to partner with outside organizations and individuals, such as health and child care providers, educators, parents, philanthropies, hospitals, municipalities, and private employers.

"We are looking to integrate all of our other initiatives that address health care, early learning, child abuse prevention, and prenatal care in a community-wide effort that will make neighborhoods in LA County particularly positive environments for having and raising children," said First 5 LA Executive Director Evelyn V. Martinez.

"By networking existing programs and filling in gaps, First 5 LA will serve as a catalyst for building and strengthening communities as well as services to families," she added.

To identify the communities that will become “Baby Zones,” First 5 LA will conduct a series of focus groups early next year to introduce the concept to families and opinion leaders and get their feedback.

Other efforts include developing training programs for child care providers and teachers, fostering parent and agency leadership, implementing a comprehensive policy agenda, and recruiting a Prenatal through 3 partnership team of community, philanthropic, and business leaders to join First 5 LA in promoting healthy and safe environments for LA County’s youngest children.

For information, contact Barbara Andrade DuBransky, First 5 LA program officer, at bdubransky@first5la.org or (213) 482-9428.
TELEMUNDO SERIES
Second Spanish Segment on Pregnancy Focuses on Healthy Eating, Cooking

First 5 LA and Telemundo Los Angeles' series on pregnancy, "Primeros Pasos," focused last week on healthy eating and cooking for pregnant and parenting women.

The segment aired last Wednesday on the 6 p.m. news in place of the planned segment on high-risk pregnancy (highlighted in last week's Monday Morning Report) due to a last-minute schedule change. The high-risk pregnancy story will air this Wednesday instead.

Featuring traditional Mexican breakfast, lunch, dinner and dessert entrees adapted with healthier ingredients and cooking methods, last week's segment was taped at the West LA NutriFit Kitchens of Jackie Keller, a nutrition expert and health coach whose recent book, Body After Baby, provides advice to women on how to lose "baby fat."

"Our goal is to teach pregnant and parenting women how they can stay healthy and fit, while enjoying food that is both familiar and tasty," said Keller.

"By substituting high-fat cheeses for low- or non-fat varieties, using cooking spray instead of oil for stir-frying, and baking instead of deep-frying, we can cut out lots of calories without sacrificing taste," she added.

For information in Spanish about nutritional guidelines during pregnancy, women are advised to consult their doctor and to click here.

Children's Health Initiative Pledges to Continue Efforts Following Prop. 86 Defeat

Although California voters failed to approve Prop. 86 during last Tuesday's elections, the Children's Health Initiative of Greater Los Angeles is pledging to continue its efforts to provide health coverage for all children in LA County by working with the Governor and California legislators.

If the proposition had been approved, it would have provided for $2.1 billion annually to fund children's health insurance and other health-related programs through an additional $2.60 tax on each pack of cigarettes sold in California.

In LA County, the Children's Health Initiative, a coalition of 50 diverse organizations (including First 5 LA), launched Health Kids insurance in 2004 to provide health coverage for all children who are not otherwise eligible for state-sponsored programs.
Since its launch, the initiative has enrolled nearly 45,000 children from low-income families, and has worked with elected officials in Sacramento to find a long-term, sustainable solution to quality health care for all children.

“This was a missed opportunity to invest in expanding health coverage for all children,” said Howard Kahn, CEO of L.A. Care Health Plan, a co-convener of the initiative. “Although the proposition failed, we know that most Californians support universal health coverage for children, and we will act on that mandate.”

For information about Healthy Kids insurance, visit www.first5la.org or call (888) FIRST5LA.

CHAMPION PROFILE
Garrison Smith Works With Foster Children to Promote Mental Health

Champion Profile features individuals who exemplify First 5 LA’s tagline, “Champions for Our Children.”

Garrison Smith, director of the Foster Youth Mental Health Initiative for Children’s Law Center of Los Angeles, works closely with leaders, providers, and caregivers in the foster care system to affect positive mental health outcomes for children and youth.

The three-year project, funded through the California Endowment, aims to bring attention to the mental health needs of this at-risk population, recommend systems changes, and implement new approaches to meeting the mental health needs of children in foster care.

As co-founder of LifeWorks Mentoring, the nation’s only mentoring program for gay and lesbian young people, Smith previously served as director of Youth Services for the LA Gay & Lesbian Center, working to address homelessness among street youth.

Smith started his career in Boston as a dancer, theater director, and writer, before becoming an early AIDS activist. He earned a BA in English with a minor in Theater from Suffolk University in Boston.

Which book has most influenced your life?
The Third Life of Grange Copeland by Alice Walker.

What makes you happy?
Watching a dancer interpret an emotion through movement.

Angry?
LA drivers.

Which historical figure do you most admire?
James Baldwin, who wrote with a style that truly transforms readers, making them feel deeply the hurt caused by racial bias.
Which living person do you most admire?
My father, Lawrence Smith, who is a true American success story, working his way up from bank messenger to bank president, and always giving generously to both his family and others in need.

What is my motto?
"Life is an opportunity; benefit from it."