Introduction

Since its inception, First 5 LA has been committed to strengthening families, building community capacity and improving countywide systems impacting children from the prenatal stage to age 5. First 5 LA’s 2009–2015 Strategic Plan: Strengthening Families and Communities was informed in part by a growing body of evidence that a preventative approach emphasizing family and community protective factors yields positive long-term outcomes for children. At the forefront of this research was the Center for the Study of Social Policy’s work on the Strengthening Families Approach. As part of its 2015–2020 strategic planning process, First 5 LA commissioned an environmental scan of efforts underway locally, statewide and nationally to implement the Strengthening Families Approach as defined by the Center for the Study of Social Policy. With the adoption of the 2015–2020 Strategic Plan: Focusing on the Future in November 2014, First 5 LA committed to focus its work on supporting families and caregivers using the Strengthening Families Approach.

The purpose of this document is to share information with the early childhood development field and provide a point-in-time snapshot of some ways in which the Strengthening Families Approach is being advanced in Los Angeles County and throughout the nation.

The Center for the Study of Social Policy’s Strengthening Families Approach was developed over a decade ago with the goal to “help child welfare systems, early education, and other programs work with parents to build protective factors.” While grounded in research, practice and evaluation data, the Strengthening Families Approach respects the diversity and complexity of various state and local human service systems and resources. This scan, based on research gathered early in 2014, is not intended as a comprehensive analysis or review of all entities utilizing this approach. Rather, it is an effort to highlight examples of the Strengthening Families Approach and its related Protective Factors Framework in action, and includes similar efforts that may use different language to describe their work.

Background

In 2001, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) began studying the role that early care and education programs play in strengthening families and preventing child abuse and neglect. It conducted extensive field research on strategies most effective in keeping children safe, promoting healthy development and making families strong.

This evidence-based research led to the creation of the Strengthening Families Approach, which is organized around five protective factors, known collectively as the Protective Factors Framework. The key factors are: parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children.

Today, CSSP is working across the nation to lead statewide and local efforts to embed the Protective Factors Framework into programs, services and policies that serve children and families. In L.A. County, leaders and organizations representing early care and education, child welfare, family support and philanthropy have embraced the Protective Factors Framework and the Strengthening Families Approach.

The five Protective Factors described below form the foundation for the Strengthening Families Approach. Research studies support that when these Protective Factors are well established in a family, the likelihood of child abuse and neglect diminishes. Research also shows that these five Protective Factors not only prevent child abuse and neglect, but also promote optimal child and youth development by strengthening families and their environments.

Protective Factor Framework

Parental Resilience: No one can eliminate stress from parenting, but a parent’s capacity for resilience can affect how he or she deals with stress. Resilience is the ability to manage and bounce back from all types of challenges that emerge in every family’s life. It means finding ways to solve problems, building and sustaining trusting relationships including relationships with your own child, and knowing how to seek help when necessary.

Social Connections: Friends, family members, neighbors and community members provide emotional support, help solve problems, offer parenting advice and give concrete assistance to parents. Networks of support are essential to parents and also offer opportunities for people to “give back,” an important part of self-esteem as well as a benefit for the community. Isolated families may need extra help in reaching out to build positive relationships.

Concrete Support in Times of Need: Meeting basic economic needs like food, shelter, clothing and health care is essential for families to thrive. Likewise, when families encounter a crisis such as domestic violence, mental illness or substance abuse, adequate services and supports need to be in place to provide stability, treatment and help for family members to get through the crisis.

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development: Accurate information about child development and appropriate expectations for children’s behavior at every age help parents see their children and youth in a positive light and promote their healthy development. Information can come from many sources, including family members, parent education classes and research on the Internet. Studies show information is most effective when it comes at the precise time parents need it to understand their own children. Parents who experienced harsh discipline or other negative childhood experiences may need extra help to change the parenting patterns they learned as children.

Social and Emotional Competence of Children: A child’s ability to interact positively with others, self-regulate their behavior and effectively communicate their feelings has a positive impact on their relationships with their family, other adults and peers. Challenging behaviors or delayed development create extra stress for families, so early identification and assistance for both parents and children can head off negative results and keep development on track.

2 Ibid. www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families/the-basics/protective-factors
Los Angeles County Efforts

For decades, advocates, stakeholders and community representatives in L.A. County have known that the key to successfully strengthening families and promoting child, family and community well-being is through collaboration, coordination, and integration of services and resources.

As a result, over time numerous collaborative efforts have evolved that acknowledge the importance of protective factors and their role in child, family and community well-being. These collaborative efforts largely focus on service integration, systems change, neighborhood-based planning, family support and community capacity building.

The organizations, agencies and networks listed below highlight a sampling of the ways the Protective Factors Framework has been embraced and integrated into practice through collaborative efforts in L.A. County. Some groups are in the early phases of learning about the Strengthening Families Approach and applying the Protective Factors Framework, while others are deeply engaged in the Strengthening Families Approach and have more fully integrated the Protective Factors into their practice.
Casey Family Programs  
casey.org

Casey Family Programs (Casey) is the nation’s largest operating foundation focused entirely on foster care and improving the child welfare system. Casey works to provide and improve—and, ultimately prevent the need for—foster care in the United States. In California, Casey serves children in foster care, strengthens families and works to improve the child welfare system. In L.A. County (and throughout the nation), Casey provides strategic consulting services and nonpartisan research to help child welfare agencies and policymakers make informed decisions based on data and evidence that ultimately result in effective services to children and their families.

In 2012, Casey convened the Early Childhood Development and Well-Being Learning Community (Regional Learning Community). The Regional Learning Community invited county departments and community-based organizations to participate in a series of regional neighborhood-based meetings focused on the implementation of the Strengthening Families Approach to define/describe the work already going on. Casey also provided resources to support the organizing of the county’s Strengthening Families Learning Community (SFLC) convened by the Chief Executive Office. (See a later section for more on the SFLC.)

Child Care Resource Center  
crrcca.org

The Child Care Resource Center (CCRC) is one of the nation’s largest premier early care and education organizations dedicated to the promotion of higher standards in child care and early education for children, parents, child care providers and the community. With a staff of 600, CCRC serves over 35,000 children and families each month in the Antelope, Santa Clarita and San Fernando Valleys, as well as San Bernardino County. CCRC promotes optimal child development and family well-being through access to quality child care, family support, economic development and community education. Services include: child care resource and referral, financial assistance for child care, Head Start and Early Head Start, training and technical assistance on various areas of interests, Family Child Care Home Education Networks, First 5 LA’s School Readiness Initiative, Careers in Child Development, Discovery Van, and the Resource Library.

Children’s Data Network  
cdn.usc.edu

Established by First 5 LA in 2010, the Children’s Data Network (CDN) is a research collaborative housed at the University of Southern California’s School of Social Work designed to integrate data across state and local agencies and foster ongoing collaboration among public and private agencies in L.A. County to improve services for children and their families. This research repository will increase access to timely and accurate data about children 0-5.

The CDN builds off of existing data sets already collected by agencies (e.g., mental health services, public health, child care, child welfare, schools) to study populations of children and their families, cross-system involvement with public services, and child and family outcomes. The objective of the CDN is to inform policies and programs for children through the use of existing administrative data for research and evaluation.

Child Development Institute  
cdkids.org

The Child Development Institute (CDI) was founded in 1995 to address the lack of holistic early childhood development and intervention services available in the San Fernando Valley. CDI’s mission is to help all children reach their full potential by supporting the relationships and environments that shape early development. CDI provides relationship-based early intervention and therapeutic services to children and their families. In L.A. County, they are a leading resource on early childhood development and community building to support children’s healthy development.

CDI’s Early Learning Center in Canoga Park promotes early development and prevention through an inclusive environment open to young children of all abilities and their families. The Center is a developmentally appropriate play and learning space established to promote healthy development for young children while providing connection to community resources and opportunities to strengthen families. Integral to the Center’s Theory of Change is the belief that families are supported so that they engage in high-quality parent-child interactions, provide developmentally supportive early learning experiences, and ensure their child’s safety and well-being. Strategies and activities implemented by staff and volunteers address the Protective Factors to strengthen and support families.

CDI is also a leader in supporting professional development across various systems, providing participants with the tools necessary to meet the needs of young children and their families. CDI has worked with the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Los Angeles to develop an Early Childhood Training Program for volunteers, court staff and community stakeholders. Informed CASA volunteers and community stakeholders who participate in the Early Childhood Training Program are able to use their unique position to ensure that young children under their care receive the essential supports they need as early as possible.
Echo Parenting and Education
echoparenting.org

Echo Parenting and Education (Echo Parenting) was founded by Ruth Beaglehole in 1999, and is dedicated to teaching within a nonviolent framework and providing strategies that are based on empathy, connecting language and the understanding of a child's emotional, physical and brain development. Echo Parenting's mission is to support and facilitate child rearing rooted in connection and empathy.

Echo Parenting works with organizations throughout L.A. County, offering organizational trainings and professional development for parents and child-related professionals based on empathy and compassion across the various child-serving disciplines. “Teaching Nonviolent Parenting to Families Who Have Known Violence” addresses the science of brain development, trauma-informed care and the Protective Factors, including resilience, emotional competency and child development. “Family Mental Health Through the Lens of Nonviolence” trains professionals to provide effective and meaningful support with strategies that are based on research about attachment theory, interpersonal neurobiology, trauma-informed care and social and emotional intelligence. A special preschool training introduces parents and caregivers to a philosophy and practice of an empathy-led approach that is based on the latest research about brain and child development that promotes lifelong connections and learning.

El Monte City School District/Mulhall Family Center
(Website not available at the time of publication of this document)

Scheduled to open in 2015, the Mulhall Family Center is designed to be a “one stop” family center in El Monte, modeled after the Magnolia Place Community Initiative. The Design Team overseeing the project is comprised of representatives from the El Monte City School District, including parents, board members and administrative leadership as well as community-based organizations, professionals and organizers.

City of Santa Monica Cradle to Career Initiative
santamonicyouth.net

Coordinated by Santa Monica’s Community & Cultural Services Department, the Cradle to Career Initiative is a collaboration between over 30 educators, parents, public entities and community-based organizations working together to support the healthy development of children and youth in Santa Monica. Established in 2011, Cradle to Career’s first major project, the Youth Wellbeing Report Card, measures the well-being of Santa Monica’s children across the developmental spectrum—academically, physically, socially and emotionally. The report, released annually, provides baseline data that is being used to improve programs, empower parents and better coordinate services to help children and their families. Cradle to Career’s goals for 2015 include: increasing kindergarten readiness, strengthening youth connectedness and emotional health, engaging vulnerable youth and their families in supportive services, and improving college and career readiness.

First 5 LA
first5la.org

First 5 LA recognizes the role strong families and communities play in supporting the well-being of young children. In 2006, First 5 LA Commissioners invited Judy Langford, Associate Director and Senior Fellow at the Center for the Study of Social Policy, to present findings from her research and publication titled “Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education.” The Strengthening Families Approach is embedded in First 5 LA’s 2009–2015 Strategic Plan and is exemplified through its investments such as: Partnership for Families (PFF), Healthy Births, Peer Support Groups for Parents, Family Literacy, Los Angeles Universal Preschool, Welcome Baby, Intensive Home Visiting and Best Start.

The Commission’s adoption of the “Building Stronger Families Framework” for the Best Start place-based initiative further demonstrated First 5 LA’s commitment to supporting approaches that strengthen families, build community capacity and improve countywide systems serving children 0–5 and their families. This framework includes a focus on family and community protective factors including: building stronger families' capacities; social connections and concrete supports; and promoting family-supporting communities through coordinated services and supports, common vision and social networks.

The Strengthening Families Approach plays a central role in First 5 LA’s 2015–2020 Strategic Plan “Focusing for the Future” adopted by the Commission in November 2014. The new plan aims to strengthen families, communities and systems,
so that children are ready to succeed in school and life. Over the next five years, First 5 LA will focus its efforts and limited resources on supporting parents/caregivers by strengthening their skills, fostering community capacity, and working to change policies and systems that give families support.

**Friends of the Family**
fofca.org

For over 40 years, Friends of the Family (FOF) has provided programs and services that strengthen and empower families. FOS serves as a catalyst for community organization and enrichment, positively enhancing the capacity of residents to advocate for themselves and their children. FOF, a local champion of child, family and community well-being, is a comprehensive family resource center known for pioneering innovative, practical programs where families are recognized as central to a child’s well-being and are supported to build on their skills and strengths.

FOF’s programs are organized into four programmatic areas: Child and Youth Development, Parent Support and Education, Family Development, and Mental Health. Programs are designed to foster an improved sense of community and interpersonal connectedness, increased resilience, improved parental knowledge and competence, improved social and emotional competence, increased awareness of the beneficial help that is available and the ability to access and use the assistance, increased economic well-being, and strengthened and expanded community-based networks.

In 2012, FOF collaborated with the Child Development Institute and Echo Parenting and Education, with support from CSSP and Casey Family Programs, to develop and pilot a curriculum focused on integrating information on brain science/early brain development, trauma-informed care, and the interconnectedness of all protective factors. In 2013, with support from Casey Family Programs, FOF developed an implementation curriculum titled “From Knowledge to Impact: Enhancing Child Welfare & Family Support Practitioner Capacity to Promote & Increase Protective Factors in Families and Children” specifically focused on increasing the spread and uptake of skills human service practitioners need in order to implement the kinds of interventions that will result in increases in protective factors in their service populations.

The Strengthening Families Approach provides the Institute with a consistent framework for projects and has been adapted to support its Strengthening Communities activities, in particular, the Canoga Park Neighborhood Partners in Action Initiative.

For over a year, the Institute engaged in an ongoing listening campaign in Canoga Park to understand community needs and develop and build partnerships based on mutual trust. Projects launched as a result of these ongoing conversations include a family financial literacy project offered through Mommy and Me and Grandparents and Me programs.

The Canoga Park Neighborhood Partnership in Action Initiative (NPA) intends to measure its impact with the Protective Factors Framework. Working with the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families & Communities, the NPA is applying the Protective Factors to community systems with a focus on: neighborhood resilience; promoting social connections; concrete support systems; community and neighborhood development; and promoting social, emotional and cultural competence.

**L.A. County Child Care Planning Committee**
caoa.lacounty.gov/ccp/ccpc.htm

The mission of the Child Care Planning Committee (Planning Committee) is to engage parents, child care providers, allied organizations, community, and public agencies in collaborative planning efforts to improve the overall child care infrastructure of L.A. County, including the quality, continuity, affordability, and accessibility of child care and development services for all families.

The Planning Committee serves as the local child care and development planning council for L.A. County as mandated by state legislation (AB 2141; Chapter 1187, Statutes of 1991). The Planning Committee is composed of 50 members representing: parent consumers, child care providers, community representatives, public agency representatives, and discretionary members, including Board of Supervisor appointees.

**Institute for Community Health and Wellbeing: California State University, Northridge**
csun.edu/wellbeing/

The Institute for Community Health and Wellbeing was established by California State University, Northridge in 2009 and is a collaborative of campus and community affiliations focused on strengthening individuals and communities through creative partnerships and education. The Institute works to cultivate public and private resources, promote interdisciplinary and intercommunity partnerships, and bring campus expertise and resources to communities in response to regional health and well-being needs. Over 17 University Centers and Programs (e.g., Center for Educational Psychology and Counseling, Center for Health Promotion, Research and Ethics, Center for Food Science, Nutrition and Dietetics) offer services to over 15,000 clients each year.

Los Angeles County Efforts
In its Strategic Plan for Child Care and Development in L.A. County for 2013–2018, the Planning Committee looks to align its work in the coming years with the Child Care Policy Framework with these key desired impacts:

- High-quality early care and education available throughout L.A. County
- Sufficient distribution and effective use of resources to meet the early care and education needs of children, families and communities
- A unified voice on early care and education
- High-quality early care and education experience that prepare children as life-long learners and productive citizens of the world

L.A. County Department of Children and Family Services
dcfs.co.la.ca.us/

The L.A. County Department of Children and Family Services’ (DCFS) vision is for children to thrive in safe and supportive communities. This vision is supported through a delivery model that focuses on child safety, permanency and access to effective and caring services.

Previously, DCFS received individualized training and technical assistance from CSSP to help integrate the Strengthening Families Approach into the Department’s strategic plan, core practice model and contracting processes, including its Prevention Initiative Demonstration Project.

In 2013, the L.A. County Board of Supervisors called for the creation of a Blue Ribbon Commission to focus on systemic change and comprehensive countywide approaches that extend beyond DCFS to include Public Health, Health Services, Mental Health, the Sheriff, the Medical Examiner, First 5 LA and other agencies. The Blue Ribbon Commission’s final report and recommendations, issued in April 2014, and approved by the Board of Supervisors in June 2014, will serve as a roadmap for countywide systems and practitioners to systematically implement a preventative approach consistent with the Strengthening Families approach.

L.A. County Department of Mental Health
dmh.lacounty.gov/wps/portal/dmh

Over the past 20 years, The L.A. County Department of Mental Health (DMH) has been a leader in recognizing the critical need for collaborative work in support of children, youth and families in L.A. County. Through the DMH Children’s System of Care, Wraparound programs, Community Outreach and Engagement, and other initiatives and partnerships, DMH pursues its vision for the future: to strengthen families and enhance the community’s social and emotional well-being through collaborative partnerships that promote the Protective Factors Framework.

The Children’s System of Care is dedicated to enriching the lives of children and their families, from infancy to 15 years old, who are experiencing mental health challenges by providing a wide range of client-centered, family-focused services. Its goals are to:

- Provide quality, strength-based mental health services to children
- Help children achieve success at school and in the community
- Strengthen and empower family relationships by fostering hope, wellness and resiliency

DMH’s Family and Community Partnership (FCP) administrative unit aims to strengthen local agency and community capacity to address the mental health needs of children and their families; contribute to related workforce, program and policy development; and promote strategic investments in infant, early childhood and school-based mental health.

The FCP unit supports the following community programs and partnerships:

**Birth to Five** focuses on strengthening the social-emotional well-being of young children and their families through mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention. Using the “It Takes a Community” (ITC) model, Birth to Five program staff work to develop place-based social change and leadership development initiatives that build upon existing or create new partnerships with parents, caregivers and early education providers who have assumed key leadership roles in Partnership for Families Programs, Parent Cafés, Promotora networks and other community-based collaboratives in selected Service Planning Areas.

**Parent Child Interaction Therapy** is an evidence-based program for young children with emotional and behavioral disorders that places emphasis on improving the quality of the parent-child relationship and changing parent-child interaction patterns. The program has also been documented to serve as an effective way to reduce incidences of physical abuse involving young children. Its approach is to strengthen parent-child relationships and focus on promoting healthy outcomes for children and parent.

L.A. County Office of Child Care
cao.lacounty.gov/ccp/

The L.A. County Office of Child Care shapes policy recommendations, facilitates planning and provides a range of services aimed at improving the availability and quality of, and access to, early care and education programs. Its vision is to ensure families have access to high-quality early care and education services that nurture children’s healthy growth and early learning, fosters protective factors in families and strengthens communities. The Office of Child Care works across disciplines to promote access to concrete supports families need by planning, convening and facilitating several groups,
all of which have made an explicit commitment to align with the Strengthening Families Approach and Protective Factors Framework. These groups include: the Policy Roundtable for Child Care and Development, L.A. County Strengthening Families Learning Community and the Child Care Planning Committee.

L.A. County Policy Roundtable for Child Care and Development
cao.lacounty.gov/ccp/prcc.htm

The Policy Roundtable for Child Care and Development (Roundtable) builds and strengthens early care and education by providing recommendations to the Board of Supervisors on policy, systems and infrastructure improvement. In March 2011, the Board of Supervisors adopted the L.A. County Child Care Policy Framework 2011-2013: Promoting Healthy Children, Strong Families and Vibrant Communities. The Policy Framework reaffirmed the County’s commitment to the healthy development of young children, their families and communities, and explicitly called for integrating the Strengthening Families Approach and Protective Factors Framework throughout L.A. County Departments.

In July 2014, the Board of Supervisors adopted the Child Care and Development Policy Framework for 2014-2016, which is intended to focus county departments and community stakeholders on areas where a unified voice from L.A. County can best support the optimum development of our children, families and communities. As such, the Child Care Policy Framework for 2014-2016 will focus on the following goals: restore and expand funding, strengthen policies on eligibility and access, maximize access to available services, and expand family and community engagement. Embedded in the Policy Framework is the importance of contributing to child, family and community well-being by ensuring access to high-quality early care and education, particularly to families most in need.

L.A. County Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant
ceo.lacounty.gov/ccp/rtelcg.html

The Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) is a federally funded pilot program that aims to improve the quality of early learning programs and close the achievement gap for vulnerable children. As one of nine states funded through RTT-ELC Phase I, California was awarded a $52 million grant to implement comprehensive plans to transform early learning systems for children 0–5. The RTT-ELC focuses on improving early learning and development programs for young children by designing and implementing an integrated system of high-quality early learning programs and conducting quality assessments that support the National Research Council’s reports on early childhood.3

The Office of Child Care and Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) were each selected to participate on California’s RTT-ELC Regional Leadership Consortia. LAUP and the Office of Child Care are using lessons learned from the implementation of their current quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) to improve the quality of licensed family child care homes and center-based programs. The Office of Child Care is working with UCLA’s Center for Improving Child Care Quality and the local Child Care Resource and Referral agencies to provide up to 175 child care programs with assessments, quality improvement training, coaching and financial incentives through RTT-ELC funds. Likewise, LAUP is using RTT-ELC funds to engage an additional 275 early education providers.

Representatives of the Office of Child Care and LAUP served on the California’s RTT-ELC Regional Leadership Consortia’s statewide Family Engagement Workgroup. The Workgroup developed recommendations addressing family engagement for early care and education programs, which include the Strengthening Families Protective Factors.

L.A. County Strengthening Families Learning Community
cao.lacounty.gov/ccp/sflc_about.htm

Convened by the L.A. County Chief Executive Office (CEO) and facilitated by the Office of Child Care, with technical assistance and support from Casey Family Programs and the Center for the Study of Social Policy, the Strengthening Families Learning Community (SFLC) began exploring mechanisms for coordinating the integration of the Protective Factors within the county service delivery system to improve child, family and community outcomes, and maximize resources. The SFLC is comprised of senior-level staff members representing county departments and offices that serve children and their families. These include the Children and Family Services, Health, Mental Health, Parks and Recreation, Probation, Public Health, and Public Social Services departments, as well as the Public Library, Office of Education and the Office of Child Care.

An initial promising practice of the SFLC was demonstrated in 2012, through a partnership between the L.A. County Public Library and the Department of Mental Health, to expand the support services provided to parents and caregivers through the Family Place Libraries. With financial support from DMH, 16 library staff members were trained in the Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) and implemented the program in Family Place Libraries and Parent Cafés. DMH provided funding support to open up five Parent Cafés and 10 Family Place programs. The formal partnership ended in June 2013; however, the L.A. County Public Library continues to provide Triple P training on a smaller scale.

In 2013, the SFLC expanded membership beyond the county system to include leaders from community-based organizations and the funding community (including First 5 LA, Friends of the Family, ECHO Parenting, Magnolia Community Initiative, Child Care Resource Center and the LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment), who have long been engaged in addressing child, family and community well-being. The evolution of the SFLC to include public and private agencies was an intentional step towards building a community of practice to address child and family well-being in the county.

3 U.S. Department of Education Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant.
LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment
investinkidsla.org

Founded in 2003, The LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment is a philanthropic funding collaborative comprised of private foundations, family foundations, and public funders of early childhood development. The Partnership’s mission is to invest in and promote innovations that advance the lifelong health and well-being of L.A. County children from the prenatal stage to age 5 (P-5). It recognizes that investments in early childhood are a prevention action, and the earlier the investment, the greater the return.

Strategic focus areas for the Partnership include:

- Family strengthening in high-need communities
- Leveraging state and federal investments for P-5 in L.A. County
- Building support for P-5 investment in the business sector

In 2011, The Partnership established the Baby Futures Fund, designed to advance policy reforms within public systems serving young children and families through investments in: innovative projects that improve child and family outcomes, effective strategies for information dissemination, and advocacy for public/private programmatic and fiscal collaborations. This pooled fund was created to maximize impact in support of lifelong health and well-being for children from the prenatal stage to age 5. The Fund’s initial investments include grants to KPCC (Early Education Reporter), Pew (L.A. Home Visiting Campaign), the Advancement Project, and Children Now (Local Control Funding Formula). Funding criteria includes supporting innovative projects that are grounded in the Strengthening Families Approach and policy changes leading to more effective practices or allocation of resources in L.A. County.

Los Angeles Universal Preschool
laup.net

Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) is an independent, nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide quality preschool experiences to children throughout L.A. County. Approximately 11,000 children annually receive quality preschool experiences through LAUP’s universal preschool network. In 2013, LAUP’s Parent Engagement and Resource Specialists (PERS) and coaches have integrated the Protective Factors Framework into their Professional Development training and support services for the Network’s 280 preschool providers.

LAUP’s efforts in the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant will offer coaching and PERS support using the Protective Factors Framework to promote family resilience and optimal child development. LAUP plans to expand individualized coaching and training, technical assistance, incentives, and assessments to additional L.A. County programs outside of the existing LAUP network. Emphasis will be placed on providing support to programs that serve English language learners, at-risk children and children with special needs.

Magnolia Place Community Initiative
magnoliaplacela.org

In 2001, the Children’s Bureau of Southern California conducted a strategic planning process that identified key research areas necessary to create safe and supportive environments, where children are encouraged to achieve the best results and live free of abuse and neglect. This effort led to the Magnolia Place Community Initiative (MPCI).

Today, representatives from the county, city and community come together under the MPCI to create sustainable change for families by promoting and strengthening individual, family and neighborhood protective factors through increasing social connectedness, community mobilization and access to necessary supports and services.

Four goal areas anchor the initiative: educational success, good health, economic stability, and safe and nurturing parenting. MPCI is nationally recognized as a groundbreaking model for large-scale community mobilization and transformation. It acknowledges that the most effective way to affect positive, long-lasting change at the family and community or neighborhood level is to strengthen the Protective Factors and support families as the vehicle for transformation of the community.

MPCI adopted the Protective Factors Framework and the “It Takes a Community” model as core working philosophies to guide how public institutional partners, community-based organizations and individuals can operate within communities. Both models reinforce the notion that services are not enough to support community health and well-being. Over 90 MPCI Network Partners, including individuals, public entities, funders and community-based organizations, are working together to strengthen what they already do and reflect on how they do it, reinforcing the premise that social and organizational networking is necessary to achieve child, family and community well-being.

Project ABC
projectabc-la.org

Project ABC is a collaborative partnership between the L.A. County Departments of Mental Health (DMH), Children and Family Services (DCFS), and community service providers. It is designed to establish a system of care addressing infant/early childhood mental health for young children in L.A. County. Project ABC is focused on the South Bay areas of L.A. County, including Long Beach and Inglewood and includes partner agencies (For the Child, Pacific Asian Counseling Services and Ties for Families) The goal is to incorporate a broad array of services and supports into a coordinated network, building meaningful partnerships with community service providers as well as with families and young children.

Project ABC offers an example of how the Protective Factors are being used “on the ground” in work with families, parents, and caregivers. Approximately 70% of families...
served by Project ABC are referred either directly from DCFS or by the DMH staff co-located at the DCFS offices. ABC’s Strength and Needs approach brings together parents/caregivers and guests of their choosing, along with a clinical team (consisting of a therapist, care coordinator and parent partner). The goal is to develop an agreed-upon plan for therapy and other intervention resources and supports. Family, parent/caregiver and child strengths are identified using the Protective Factors, including a sixth factor: nurturing and attachment.

SBCC Thrive LA
sbcc-la.org

For 40 years, SBCC Thrive LA has helped communities throughout L.A. County discover and develop tools for individual and collective well-being. SBCC has focused its efforts on building communities where children and families thrive. SBCC’s long-term commitment in L.A. County focusing its resources on child, family and community well-being demonstrates its role as a leader in striving to embed the Protective Factors in all aspects of its work.

Respect for individual, family and neighborhood partners is reflected in their strength-based community-building and organizing efforts focused on four Impact Strategies: Community Well-Being, Family Well-Being, Child Development and Early Learning, and Pathways to Self-Sufficiency.

The impact these strategies have on the Protective Factors is exemplified in SBCC’s Thrive Wilmington. Thrive Wilmington initiatives include:

• **Preschool Without Walls** (PWW), which provides participatory, parent-child early learning programs in accessible community locations (e.g., parks, libraries, community centers). PWW has been demonstrated to support key parent and child protective factors contributing to health, safety, and overall well-being, including motor, cognitive and social-emotional development.

• **Community Doula**, which provides emotional and social support to women, assisting them through pregnancy, delivery and early infancy. This initiative promotes attachment and bonding by providing basic needs support including: medical systems advocacy, labor and delivery coaching, breastfeeding education and mother-child activities.

• **Connected Parents, Strong Families**, which is a network of engaged parents supporting the flourishing of each other’s children and families and building neighborhood-based relationships with parents of young children.

Long-term commitment to the four Impact Strategies, along with resident engagement and intentional collaboration with other neighborhood institutions, demonstrates the powerful changes robust community involvement can yield.

Westside Infant-Family Network (WIN)
winla.org

The Westside Infant-Family Network (WIN) provides culturally sensitive mental health care and resources for families with children from the prenatal stage to age 3. WIN’s bilingual therapists and partner agency case managers work together in families’ homes, focusing on child-parent relationships and creating an integrated nest of basic services to undergird the resiliency of all household members. WIN also offers in-home individual therapy to parents, Family Night networking to build community, and consultation/training to Early Head Start programs and professionals throughout L.A. County. WIN and its partners, Venice Family Clinic, Westside Children’s Center and St. Joseph Center, provide seamless, integrated health, mental health and social services to families.
Statewide Efforts
The Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP) administers federal grants, contracts and state programs designed to promote best practices and innovative approaches to child abuse prevention, intervention and treatment. As such, the OCAP has incorporated the Protective Factors Framework into its statewide funding applications and program requirements. The OCAP also serves as a statewide source of information, developing and disseminating educational material regarding prevention/early intervention programs, activities and research. In 2010, the OCAP established the California Strengthening Families Roundtable following a statewide convening on the Strengthening Families Approach.

The California Network of Family Strengthening Networks (CNFSN) is a membership organization comprised of county, regional and statewide networks that are focused on strengthening and supporting families. Membership includes the L.A. County Partnership for Families Collaborative members: Bienvenidos Children's Center, Children's Bureau of Southern California, Para Los Niños, St. John’s Child and Family Development Center, SHIELDS for Families, Inc., SBCC, SPRITT Family Services, The Help Group Child and Family Center, and the Southern California Indian Center.

In 2012, the CNFSN approved the “Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening and Support,” which integrates the Principles of Family Support Practice and the Protective Factors Framework. The CNFSN Standards were designed for use by all family strengthening and family support stakeholders (i.e., public departments, foundations, community-based organizations, and parents) to plan, provide and assess quality of services. Its intent is to provide a common language that promotes quality practice across different service systems that work with families, such as Family Resource Centers, home-visiting programs and child development programs.

5 Ibid.
California Strengthening Families Roundtable
familyresourcecenters.net/projects-2/strengthening-families-california/california-strengthening-families-roundtable/

The goal of the California Strengthening Families Roundtable is to work towards a “new normal” in California in which government, health care, education, business, law enforcement, early childhood and social service organizations join with communities and families to build Protective Factors for children. The Roundtable, funded by the Office of Child Abuse Prevention and facilitated by Strategies, a statewide capacity-building organization, is working to provide state-level leadership, resources, expertise and coordination to move California towards this goal. Local leaders from across the state convene three times a year to learn about promising practices related to the implementation of the Protective Factors Framework and discuss emerging opportunities to improve systems coordination. Representatives from L.A. County have included the L.A. County Office of Child Care, First 5 LA and the Magnolia Place Community Initiative.

First 5 Commissions
first5california.com

A 2014 survey of the Association of California First 5 Commissions shows that more than 28 First 5 County Commissions have integrated the Protective Factors Framework into their program planning and design, funding, outcome reporting or professional development. An example of this leadership is seen in Shasta County, where First 5 Shasta led the effort to establish the Strengthening Families Collaborative, which consists of 70 members from almost 30 organizations. The Strengthening Families Collaborative’s mission is to strengthen families and reduce adverse childhood experiences by increasing the protective factors in families, coordinating service systems and engaging the community.

Alameda County and Orange County commissions have led statewide efforts to implement Help Me Grow (HMG). HMG is a national model for cross-sector collaboration, including health care, early care and education, and family support, which establishes an efficient system of early identification, referral and connection to community-based programs and services to support young children and their families.

Likewise, First 5 Ventura County contracted with Strategies (see below) to support local organizations in completing a Strengthening Families self-assessment in which organizations identify their strengths, challenges and opportunities for cross-sector collaboration. First 5 Ventura also provided participating organizations with professional development and technical assistance based on the needs identified in the assessments.

These are just some examples of how California First 5 County Commissions are integrating the Protective Factors Framework into their work throughout the state. There is a growing interest among the Commissions to share lessons learned and best practices for measuring the application of the Strengthening Families approach in their work.

Strategies: Strengthening Organizations to Support Families and Communities
familyresourcecenters.net

Strategies is a statewide organization, which provides training, coaching, facilitation and technical assistance for community-based organizations, county agencies and networks. Strategies’ focus is child abuse and neglect prevention and early intervention. Strategies has worked across California to provide training and consultation on the application of the Strengthening Families Approach and Protective Factors within systems, organizations and programs. Technical assistance activities range from planning and facilitating the California Strengthening Families Roundtable, to leading asset mapping and gaps analysis of the Protective Factors, to hosting local Parent Cafés. Strategies has provided technical assistance related to the Strengthening Families Approach to multiple First 5 Commissions.

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7 www.shastastrongfamilies.org
National Efforts
In September 2013, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Violence Prevention (CDC) awarded California a five-year grant to implement the “Essentials for Childhood: Safe, Stable, Nurturing Relationships and Environments” initiative. This initiative offers an overall approach to the primary prevention of child maltreatment and is intended to support sustainable, multi-sectored collective impact efforts that promote safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments through the coordination of existing and new partnerships in child maltreatment prevention. The Department of Public Health and the Office of Child Abuse Prevention are California’s co-conveners for the Essentials for Childhood’s Planning Committee. This Committee will explore the opportunities to link and build upon California’s current Strengthening Families efforts with the implementation of Essentials for Childhood Initiative.

The National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds is comprised of state and children’s trust and prevention funds that have come together to strengthen child abuse prevention efforts. In 2012, the Alliance launched “Bringing the Protective Factors Framework to Life in Your Work.” This initiative provides 14 hours of online training to various professionals and individuals on the Strengthening Families Approach and Protective Factors Framework. Almost 4,300 individuals have participated in the training and received Completion Certificates. Trainings include a “wrap-up” course that emphasizes how the Protective Factors are used in work with children and their families, moving the user from knowledge to action. A three-day training of trainers has been initiated to build a national network of certified trainers.

Established in 2008 by the Center for the Study of Social Policy, the Strengthening Families National Network brings together states working on policies and practices across the disciplines of early childhood, child abuse prevention and child protective services. The Strengthening Families National Network currently includes more than 40 states (including California), which have implemented the Protective Factors Framework at some level. Since its establishment, there has been significant movement in the adoption of policies, which explicitly support the integration of the Protective Factors Framework (e.g., Race to the Top Quality Rating and Improvement Systems, Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Planning, Integration into Child Welfare Practice Model, Implementation in Home Visiting, etc.). The network provides a forum for sharing new ideas and lessons learned. Many states have established interdisciplinary leadership teams and/or identified individuals to coordinate statewide planning, policy and data analysis, program implementation and professional development related to the Strengthening Families Approach and its Protective Factors Framework.

The federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant (RTT-ELC) is intended to improve the quality of early learning and development programs and close the achievement gap for young children with high needs. A total of 20 states, including California, have been awarded RTT-ELC grants since 2011. The California Department of Education and local collaborative efforts in 16 counties are leading California’s RTT-ELC Initiative, which includes the Strengthening Families Approach and Protective Factors Framework in its draft “Continuous Quality Improvement Pathways Matrix.” The L.A. County Office of Child Care and Los Angeles Universal Preschool represent L.A. County on the RTT-ELC Regional Leadership Consortia.

The Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) is focused on improving the well-being of children and families in the child welfare system and has incorporated the Protective Factors Framework into its grant opportunities and programs. An example of this funding priority is reflected in ACYF’s Child Welfare and Early Education Partnerships to Expand Protective Factors for Children with Child Welfare Involvement. These funds are used to improve the well-being of children who are involved in or at risk of entering the child welfare system. The initiative looks to build collaboration between state and local child welfare agencies and early childhood education systems and reflects ACYF’s focus on the Protective Factors Framework to address and improve child and family well-being.
Conclusion

In a relatively short period of time, the Center for the Study of Social Policy’s Strengthen Families Approach has been embraced by the early child development community across the country and incorporated into public policy at the federal, state and local level. Here in L.A. County there are numerous examples of communities, nonprofits, social service agencies and funders working together and putting theory into practice. First 5 LA will continue to support these efforts going into the future.

First 5 LA’s Strategic Plan 2015–2015 is grounded in the Center for the Study of Social Policy’s Protective Factor Framework and places parents and caregivers of children 0–5 at the center of their work. First 5 LA’s dedication to promoting the Protective Factors builds upon the organization’s 15 years of experience and learning about what works for families and children. First 5 LA will support parents and caregivers by strengthening their skills, fostering community capacity building, and working to change the policy and systems that give families the support they need to help their children succeed in school and in life.

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