

A Path Forward

Find out how programs in San Benito County can help you and your family lead better, safer and healthier lives

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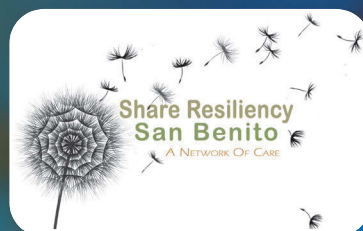
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Building Healthy Families & Communities

by Anne Stokes

Supporting children benefits everyone

As a rising tide lifts all boats, investing in healthy children and families is an investment in healthier communities. Studies have shown physically and emotionally healthy children do better in school, leading to greater success in adulthood. For communities, this means more skilled workers with greater incomes, a generational effect that creates long-term benefits for everyone.

"It provides a great base of people who are contributing to the community," says Lisa Faulkner, Executive Director for First 5 San Benito. "We have programs that lower the risks of truancy, of gang violence, of alcohol and drug use. All of those things are going to make a healthier and safer community."

As its name suggests, First 5 San Benito provides resources and programs that support basic needs, healthy development and parental support for families with children who are 0-5 years old. In order to meet the needs of the larger community, the Family Impact Center opened to expand access through partnerships with other community agencies and organizations.

While the center offers direct services such as parenting classes and early childhood educational programs, clients can also be referred to resources like financial assistance, health care and housing. The goal is to help stabilize families and prevent or mitigate issues and potential abuse—known as adverse childhood experiences or ACEs—before

they result in lifelong trauma.

"We found that there were siblings and family members who needed services. That's why we decided to gather together in a collaborative and open the Family Impact Center," says Faulkner, who is also the Coordinator for the Resiliency Network. "We understand we can't do it all so we have a network of partners who specialize in specific areas."

This Resiliency Network includes San Benito County agencies such as Health and Human Services, Probation and Sheriff's offices, Behavioral and Public Health, the Office of Education, the City of Hollister and its school district. Other member organizations include Head Start, United Way, San Benito Community Food Bank and more.

Whether it's providing direct services or ensuring clients get a warm handoff to one of their many

collaborative partners, First 5 and Family Impact Center staff are dedicated to helping families build healthy futures.

"When we make a referral, we send a case manager with that family. It's not just getting a number—we connect them through the database, we make the phone calls, and we also follow up with the client to make sure they received services," says Faulkner. "It takes an interagency effort to wrap around families to support them and get them on the right pathway to healing."

“It takes an interagency effort to wrap around families to support them and get them on the right pathway to healing.”

Lisa Faulkner
Executive Director,
First 5 San Benito



Share Resiliency
San Benito
A NETWORK OF CARE



Adverse Childhood Experiences

The physical, mental and emotional effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can be lifelong. Often, ACEs are passed down generationally.

What are ACEs?

ACEs are traumatic events that happen to and in the households of children during their formative years, including (but not limited to):

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Neglect
- A family member attempting or dying by suicide
- Domestic violence, substance abuse or mental health struggles
- Family separation, including by incarceration

Lifelong effects

Studies have found 61% of adults have experienced at least one type of ACE, with 1 in 6 adults enduring more than four types. Extended or prolonged periods of stress can affect brain development, resulting in:

- Depression and other mental health problems
- Learning difficulties
- Poor decision-making that increases the risks of injury, as well as risky sexual behavior
- Increased risk of substance abuse
- Difficulty with employment

Lifelong effects aren't limited to social-emotional struggles. ACEs have been linked with shorter life expectancies and health conditions such as:

- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- Cancer
- Obesity

For more information about ACEs, please visit www.acesaware.org.

Best Parent Practices

by Anne Stokes

The Family Impact Center helps a new father

While most parents face a steep learning curve when it comes to raising happy, healthy children, Matthew James Sepulveda faced a steeper learning curve than most. In 2019, he was notified by Child Protective Services that he had a 5-month-old daughter who was in their custody.

"It was a bit of a shock," he says. "As soon as it was confirmed that I was the father, it was full-throttle, do-everything-I-can to provide the best life for my daughter."

Luckily for Sepulveda, CPS connected him with the Family Impact Center, where he was able to take part in the center's Positive Parenting Program, which has not only helped him learn better parenting and communication skills, but provided the new father with emotional support as well.

"They have been incredible. ... If not for them, I would have been lost because I was not ready for a child," he says. "Everyone was friendly, it was just like an extension of my own family. If you're doing something incorrectly, ... (they) show by example how another way would work better and be more effective. It's very positive, it's loving, ... I feel very comfortable with their direction."

In addition to parenting classes and moral support, Sepulveda says the Family Impact Center was also able to help him with other tangible forms of support, including essential supplies and even a referral to legal assistance.

"They're an incredible resource in San Benito

County, I've come to find out. If there's something you can't get at the moment, they're more than happy to help. They're there for you," he says. "If you ever need anything parenting-wise, they can get you educational materials, they can get you legal referrals, household supplies, they pretty much have everything you could think of that you would need (while) parenting. I was surprised."

Today, Sepulveda shares legal custody of his 2-year-old daughter with his ex-partner. He says the skills he's learned at the center have not only helped him build a loving father-daughter relationship, but also how to communicate effectively with his daughter's mother, with whom he has a strained relationship.

"We've established a very good foundation now. She knows I'm Daddy and she loves me and I love her too," he says of his daughter. "It not only

helped me wrap my mind around being a dad, it was also focused on co-parenting ... (and) helping me cope with that type of relationship."

For more information on the Family Impact Center, visit www.familyimpactcentersanbenito.org or call 831-634-2046.

"If not for them, I would have been lost."

Matthew James Sepulveda
Father, Positive Parenting
Program participant

PHOTO COURTESY OF MATTHEW JAMES SEPULVEDA



Empowering Families

Families in crisis can get the support they need at the Family Impact Center. Whether facing domestic violence or seeking to be a better parent, the right support is crucial.

"They're able to be more independent. We empower them as parents, we make sure they have everything that they need to go forward and know how to use their voice to let people know what they need," says Maria Diaz Ruiz, home visitor with First 5 San Benito. "They're more empowered to make decisions for themselves... and how to help their children in the future."

The Family Impact Center can connect clients with:

- Positive Parenting Program classes
- Community Solutions
- Domestic violence and sexual assault crisis hotlines and services
- Emmaus House shelter
- La Isla Pacifica women's shelter
- Adult and Child Protective Services
- Low-income financial assistance for housing and utilities
- Women, Infants & Children program (WIC)

Keeping Food on the Table

by Anne Stokes

The Family Impact Center can connect families with community resources

Across the country, the COVID-19 pandemic hit families hard. Even those lucky enough to avoid getting sick were still vulnerable to the economic downturn and business closures. Such was the case for the Herrera family.

"Because of COVID-19, my husband wasn't working ... and neither (was I) because I had my baby girl, she was a preemie," says Ana Patricia Herrera.

Herrera, a homemaker with the new baby and two school-age children at home as well, reached out to the Family Impact Center for help. Staff there were able to connect her with the Community Food Bank of San Benito to help keep her family of five fed.

"They had a lot of different stuff all the time, like fruit, vegetables, sometimes rice, beans and tortillas, tomatoes, strawberries. ... They had a lot

of fruits and vegetables that were really fresh and I loved that," she says. "It was a lot of help for us ... (and) I appreciated all that because they gave us (diapers) and wipes for the baby."

"If they have a problem or are in a situation like mine, for sure they can help."

Ana Patricia Herrera
Client, Family Impact Center and the Community Food Bank of San Benito

For county residents struggling with food insecurity, the Community Food Bank of San Benito offers emergency food distribution for short-term needs as well as recurring weekly services for those who qualify based on income. Food and supplies are dispersed a few times a week and once registered, clients can also shop at the on-site store, which carries cleaning supplies, detergent and other home goods at a lower cost than typical grocery stores.

Not only did the pandemic increase need throughout the community, it also created new obstacles: Social distancing complicated disbursement days and distance learning meant parents couldn't leave home in the middle of the day to make pickups. The solution was delivery. Herrera says she's grateful for that option because it allowed her and her newborn to stay safe at home during the pandemic.

Today, Herrera's family is getting back on their feet: The kids returned to the classroom, her baby is now a healthy toddler, and her husband is once again working in construction. Herrera says getting help wasn't as hard as many people think it is, especially with support from the Family Impact Center.

"They need to go to the (Family Impact Center) and get information about programs or the food bank. Sometimes they don't go because they think (they'll need) information like social security," she says. "It's super easy. They can help everybody and all different situations."

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANA PATRICIA HERRERA



Where to find help

In San Benito County, there are resources available to individuals and families struggling with hunger. If you need assistance navigating the application process, staff at the Family Impact Center can help.

Community Food Bank of San Benito County

www.communityfoodbankofsbcb.org
1133 San Felipe Road, Hollister, CA 95023
831-637-0340

HOURS:

Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Saturdays, 8 a.m. – noon

Women, Infants & Children Program (WIC)

www.wicworks.ca.gov
Access through the San Benito Health Foundation's WIC department
www.sanbenitohealth.org/wicdepartment.php
351 Felice Drive, Hollister, CA 95023
For appointments, call 831-637-6871

HOURS:

Every 2nd and 4th Saturday of the month are resource disbursement days

CalFresh (SNAP)

www.calfresh.dss.ca.gov/food
Access through
San Benito County Human Services
hhsa.cosb.us
1111 San Felipe Road, Ste. 206
Hollister, CA 95023
831-636-4180
HOURS:
Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

'I Wanted to be a Better Father'

by Anne Stokes

FIC's parenting classes help families thrive

At some point, every parent has wished kids came with an instruction manual. Even under the best of circumstances, parenting is hard. As a father of six, Adam Mendoza wanted to make sure he had the right tools to guide his children. He found them through the Family Impact Center's Positive Parenting Program.

"I grew up without a dad. My mom was a single mother trying to work and doing the best she could. It was really hard for her to parent so I kind of grew up on my own... I never had anyone to really guide me," he says. "I was doing the best I could with what I knew. I've got really good kids—I cannot complain about that—but I know that I was lacking in understanding. I wanted to understand things better, I wanted to be a better father."

With six kids ranging in age from 2 to 21, Mendoza says the Positive Parenting Program helped him communicate more effectively with his family.

"It's not only for them, but also for me. It's been a great learning experience," he says. "It's changed my way of living: It has given me more confidence, it's helped me engage more with my family, it's been a lifesaver."

It wasn't just his relationship with his children that improved. Through the center's co-parenting class, Mendoza was able to build better relationships with his wife as well as with his older children's mother.

"We were able to see different perspectives and

find tools that worked without damaging our kids any more than we'd already done," he says. "It's so much easier when you can respect one another and talk to one another with respect."

Since going through the parenting classes—which are free for families—Mendoza has shared his experience with other parents, referring at least three others to the program.

"Any chance I get to bless somebody and guide them in the right direction, I take the opportunity because I'm so grateful for it and hopefully they can feel the same way," he says. "With everything going on in the world, it's easy to get lost, it's easy to get misguided, it's easy just to misunderstand things. Groups like this I believe are the key to a better future not only for the kids, but also for parents just to reassure them, give them strength and tell them they're doing the right thing."

For more information on the Family Impact Center and available parenting classes, visit www.familyimpactcentersanbenito.org or call 831-634-2046.

"It has given me more confidence, it's helped me engage more with my family, it's been a lifesaver."

Adam Mendoza
Father and Positive Parenting
Program student



PHOTO COURTESY OF ADAM MENDOZA

A Family Affair

Healthy communities are made up of healthy families. Through the Family Impact Center, parents can get the support they need to provide their children with a solid foundation for their future.

"The impact of our services through the Family Impact Center promotes wellness for the whole family," says Cristina Gomez-Hernandez, Intervention Services Director with First 5 San Benito. "It's about helping them find their strengths and their resilience, and making sure they're connected to a system of care that is empathetic and takes their needs and differences into consideration as they navigate a system that can be sometimes overwhelming."

Available supports include:

- Positive Parenting Program classes to provide the tools needed to create healthy parent-child relationships.
- Case management to assist with issues such as employment and education.
- Service referrals for behavioral and health care, financial and social services. (To streamline the referral process, San Benito County Behavioral Health is on-site for drop in services twice a week.)
- Resources and supplies, such as food bank and nutrition support, diapers, formula, clothing and more.

A Hand Up

by Anne Stokes



The Family Impact Center helps people get back on their feet

When Monica Hernandez works with clients, she knows what it's like being on the other side of the table needing help. Because of this, Hernandez brings a unique empathy to her job.

"My first experience was with parenting classes that I had to attend. It was fascinating and I asked the facilitator how I can do that type of work," she says. "That's how I got into social services."

Today, the Community Navigator works out of the Family Impact Center, where she's able to facilitate warm hand-offs between clients and the programs and resources they need to thrive. She directly connects families with parenting classes, and helps them navigate social service systems to obtain benefits, including nutrition resources, education, behavioral health and financial aid. Hernandez also works with clients experiencing homelessness.

"I work with them one-on-one as a case manager to help them get to their goals," she says. "Some of

them just want a place to live. ... A lot of them are fighting their own behaviors like addiction."

One such client, an unhoused woman living near Dunne Park in Hollister, reached out for help for herself and her family.

"She was in the CPS system, so she came for classes. She had an addiction so we helped her to find a place to recover," Hernandez says. "She is doing very well now."

While Hernandez recognizes that in San Benito County, as in many places, there is more need than help available, she still considers her career a rewarding one because she's able to help others

change their lives for the better, particularly her clients who are homeless.

"A lot of people think, 'That could never be me,' but...they are like everyone (else)," she says. "They need to have the same rights, maybe they need a little more support and help."

"I work with them one-on-one as a case manager to help them get to their goals."

Monica Hernandez
Community Navigator,
Family Impact Center



Finding the right help

Homelessness is a complex problem with many varied causes and solutions. At the Family Impact Center, staff work one-on-one with clients to connect them with the right resources and support, whether it's finding housing, health care or navigating the complex social service system to ensure clients are able to achieve their goals. Through the center, clients can be connected with resources such as:

- Behavioral Health, including substance abuse services and rehabilitation
- Health care
- Youth and runaway crisis services
- Employment assistance, such as CalWORKS and America's Job Center of California
- Adult education
- Unemployment and disability insurance
- Social Security Administration
- Housing and rental assistance
- Low-income resource programs
- Salvation Army
- Food bank and nutrition benefits, such as SNAP

For more information, please contact our bilingual staff member, Monica Hernandez, at Monica@first5sb.org or 831-768-4262.

Supporting Healthy Families

by Anne Stokes

A Q&A with Cristina Gomez-Hernandez, FIC's Intervention Services Director

What types of resources are available through the Family Impact Center?

The Family Impact Center services include:

Case Management, where families meet with a staff member every other week and work on personalized goals, such as managing stress in healthy ways by focusing on sleep and self-care.

Resource and Referral Support, which connects families with community resources and helps them as they apply for and access what they need.

Parent Education, where parents can join age-specific groups that provide social connections and parenting strategies. A co-parenting group for families in transitions, such as separation or divorce, is also available.

Food Distribution, a partnership with the Community Food Bank of San Benito, provides on-site healthy food pick-up every Wednesday.

So the Family Impact Center can provide direct services like early childhood education and parenting classes, but also refer families out to partner organizations for other resources like housing, food and more?

Yes, all sorts of resources, not just those that belong to our partners, but any in the community as well. It's more than just providing a number and a list of resources, we're really checking in with them during the process to see what barriers they may encounter (and) if there is anything we can help with.

What are some of the most common needs you see and can help families with?

A really common one is connection to other parents (and) help managing their children's behavior.

Another common thing is support enrolling in Medi-Cal. Understanding local food resources was something that became big during COVID. Right now we're starting to see parents ask for academic support, especially when there is a language barrier. Children are now returning to school in person and they need to support their kids.

Who can get help at the Family Impact Center?

Services at the Family Impact Center are open to families of all shapes and backgrounds within San Benito County. Services are free of cost.

Our partners, First 5 San Benito, will be the strongest point of connection for any families with 0-5-year-olds. It is our hope to ensure that any family that comes

through the FIC doors finds a network of connection and support.

How does helping families and children—especially early in their development—make for healthier and more successful adults?

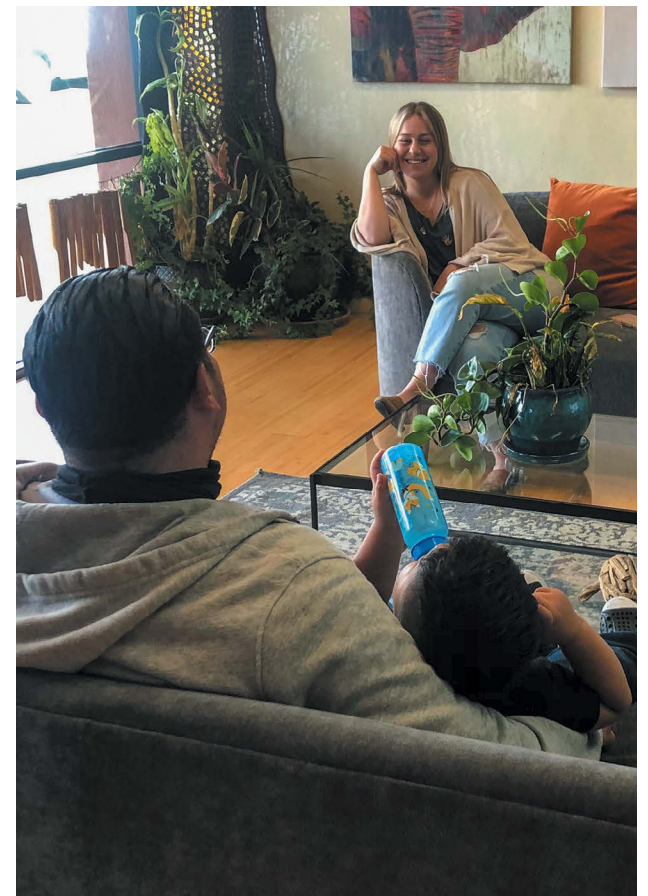
When families are connected to programs here, they report an increase in their overall protective factors, such as relationships with their children and the improvement of their children's resilience—being able to adapt to change, manage their emotions—and all of that leads to really strong protective factors...such as emotional resilience and healthier relationships. There's also the school-readiness part, which is directly related with better outcomes later on.

Specifically at the Family Impact Center, we see parents being able to manage their stress levels better, feeling more parental confidence, feeling like

they have a discipline strategy, one that's coming from a place of calm and a positive perspective rather than reactive. That's all going to help with the normative development of their children. You hear parents saying relationships are better, boundaries are better and rules are more clear. They are able to spend more time sharing joy with their kids, that's a big thing.

To find out how the Family Impact Center can help your family, visit online at www.familyimpactcentersanbenito.org or call 831-634-2046.

Case Manager Charlee Tomasini with FIC clients
PHOTO COURTESY OF FAMILY IMPACT CENTER



“Services...
are open
to families of
all shapes and
backgrounds.”

Cristina Gomez-Hernandez
Intervention services director,
Family Impact Center



Reach Out Today

We would like to thank the Resiliency Network partners for their support of the Family Impact Center. For more information about the Network please visit:

<https://www.shareresiliencysb.com>

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California Family Resource Association

The David and Lucille Packard Foundation

First 5 California

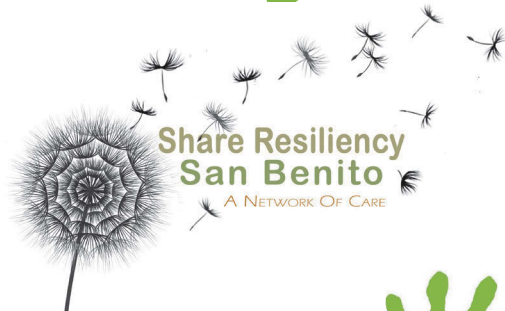
First 5 San Benito

The Health Trust

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State of California,
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Sunlight Giving



Services are available to meet San Benito families' needs

- **RAISING A READER** is a book-lending program that helps families with children ages 0-5 develop, practice and maintain the home-based literacy routines necessary for school success.
- **POWER TO PLAY** "POP" is designed for children ages 0-2 and teaches parents how to boost achievement in a fun environment.
- **WONDERS OF THE WORLD** "WOW" is a playgroup for 3-5-year-olds and will inspire their sense of wonder, exploration and creativity.
- **GETTING READY FOR KINDERGARTEN** offers parents education and resources that are specifically designed to get children ready for school and transition to kindergarten.
- **MY STORIES** helps parents learn sufficient English to help their children with homework.
- **TALK, READ, AND SING** is a program for children and their parents where they listen to stories and do activities together.
- **HOME VISITING** is a once-a-week, in-home educational program for families with children ages 0-3.
- **HELP ME GROW** promotes and supports effective identification and early intervention systems for children with special needs.
- **TRIPLE P POSITIVE PARENTING PROGRAMS** offers a selection of classes for parents of 2-12-year-olds and teens built on evidence-based practices that promote stronger family bonds, calm communication and positive behaviors. Co-parenting classes are also available for separated, divorced or blended families.
- **FOOD DISTRIBUTION** partners with the local Community Food Pantry to make a food pickup available to families every Wednesday, 3:30-5:30 p.m. (People can register on-site—materials are provided through a drive-up service.)
- **RESOURCE AND REFERRAL SUPPORT** links parents with a staff member who can connect them with services and programs that can best meet the needs of their family. Families can self-refer online at: Home | Share Resiliency ([shareresiliencysb.com](https://www.shareresiliencysb.com))

For more information,
call or text 831-634-2046

