



July 10, 2021

Dear Ms. Hayes,

Please accept the attached proposal regarding the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for Fiscal Year 2021-2022. First 5 Humboldt's voter-approved mandate is to work for better coordinated systems of support for families with children 0-5. I believe that the attached proposal is modest, minimizes additional work for county staff, and prioritizes investments of first round ARPA funds in a way that responds to concerns that I have heard expressed by County department heads working in the fields of child welfare, social services, public health, and behavioral health regarding family engagement with pre-clinical level community supports, as well as working within the County's existing plan for small business grants to shore up critical child care services. The plan is designed to reduce utilization of more intensive intervention services.

The proposal includes a discussion of how to leverage this pilot program to access state and federal funds by 2025 to ensure continuance of the proposed prevention services to families. I believe that the combination of child care investment and targeted prevention services will yield maximum long term positive outcomes for Humboldt families.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

*Mary Ann Hansen*

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# First 5 Humboldt Proposal: 5 for 5

## American Rescue Plan Proposal to the County of Humboldt



### Current Need

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During the last year, when families were impacted by COVID restrictions, job loss, and increasing job insecurity, families experienced isolation, elevated levels of stress and a lack of access to traditional family support services, such as child care, parent education resources, home visiting and the K-12 traditional support system. Reports of abuse to Humboldt County CWS specifically from the educational sector dropped from 414 in 2019 down to 154 in 2020. Overall, reports of child abuse and neglect to Humboldt County CWS dropped 19.7% ([California Child Welfare Indicators Project](#)). When working with local families, First 5 Humboldt's early childhood mental health specialists saw unprecedented levels of stress and risk.

Even now, with the community seeming to emerge from the worst of the isolation, the mental health needs of our families remain high. Recent data from Humboldt County Behavioral Health indicates a steady increase over the last 6 months in youth mental health needs<sup>1</sup>. Local law enforcement has seen a significant increase in mental health calls over the last several months.<sup>2</sup> Families were holding on during lockdown, but as we emerge, the longer-term consequences are becoming clearer. In a county where Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are already among the [highest in the state](#), where we have the highest percentage of [children enrolled in special education](#), and a child abuse report rate that is [66% higher](#) than the state rate, it's easy to understand that Humboldt has vulnerable young families. Pile on top of that the emotional, social and economic impacts of COVID, and it's clear that we as a county need to consider what supports we can put in place to prevent more negative outcomes.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Humboldt's families are experiencing increased risk and reduced access to supports. There has never been a clearer need for prevention and early intervention services.

### 5 for 5

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**Filling the Gap** Early childhood services and programs are often the services neglected in planning. The experiences of families with young children are often hidden and disconnected from traditional service systems. Yet we know that the [greatest financial return on investment](#) is realized when we invest in early childhood supports. Families with young children need services, so they can get back to work, but also because we know that early childhood services matter for children's well-being now—and our community's well-being in the long term. First 5 Humboldt proposes that 5% of American Rescue Funds are prioritized for children under 5 and their families.

#### Child Care

The County Administrative Office has proposed a small business grant program to which child care business could apply. The economic impact of COVID and increased requirements of these small business seems to have contributed to a number of child care programs closing in Humboldt. Before the pandemic, [in 2019, 80% of Humboldt](#) families looking for licensed child care so that they could work were unable to find a child care spot in the time frame they needed, according to Kidsdata.org. With the pandemic, child care has become even more scarce. We propose that the county prioritize expansion or start-up funds for child care programs, so that we can make it possible for

Humboldt residents find the child care they need to get back to work. The first installment of American Rescue Plan funds, 60% has been proposed for these grants. Within that program, we request that up to \$500,000 of the more than \$7 million in grants be prioritized for child care expansion and start-up grants.

## Parent Supports

In our April survey of Humboldt families with young children, more than 38% of families reported that they wanted to talk with one of our early childhood mental health specialists. First 5 and our partners currently have playgroups back up and operating throughout the county, including two “walking groups” for parents and their babies, giving parents a chance to talk with other parents and ask questions of our trained specialists. This kind of model is **free, accessible, and prevention-oriented**.

We are concerned, however, that our county’s most at-risk families struggle to use these existing supports. We propose that \$75,000 be allocated for a pilot early childhood “Community Connections Program,” to help at-risk families access the existing parent and early childhood mental health supports available through First 5 Humboldt and our partners: parenting classes, playgroups, parent-child programs at the Humboldt County Library, stress-management workshops, and programs through local Family Resource Centers. The program would take referrals from Humboldt County CWS, Social Services and Behavioral Health, as well as local pediatricians, Family Resource Centers and transitional housing programs such as Arcata House and Betty Kwan Chinn Day Center, Raven Project and others. We know that it is often daunting for at-risk parents to break into existing social settings to make the connections they need. Community Connection Coaches would function like modified home visitors, connecting with referred families and going with them to playgroups and existing supports, and staying connected between visits via text and phone calls. Through a series of 3 to 10 “visits,” Coaches would offer more than a “warm handoff.” They would provide an accessible bridge, helping make the social connections to these free services. Coaches would provide parent education, positive child-interaction modeling, transportation as needed, and incentives to keep families engaged in the beginning.

**Flipping the Script** In response to ACEs, Tufts Medical Center convened medical experts to look at what makes the difference in childhood outcomes in the face of adversity. The solution is more than “resilience,” the concept of bouncing back after adversity. It is about **promoting positive childhood experiences** that build the framework for resiliency and better lifelong health outcomes. The model is called HOPE ([Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences](#)) and is referred to in the California Surgeon General’s Report, [Roadmap for Resilience](#) (2021). As the Roadmap describes, some of the strategies to address ACEs must be helping families **build their parenting skills, promoting healthy relationship norms, providing parent support groups and parent mentorship opportunities**. In addition to a focus on clinical supports and intensive interventions during COVID recovery, Humboldt County also needs to focus on **building the strengths of our families** with young children.

Research further tells us that there are several **factors related to the prevention of child abuse and neglect**: parent knowledge about child development, parents’ feelings of connection to others, concrete support in times of needs, social and emotional competence of children, and parental resilience. These protective factors provide a roadmap to providing effective prevention activities for the families of young children. It’s time for Humboldt to start filling the gap and flip the script, by building our system of supportive child care and providing a simple connective tool so that existing resources are better used.

## Leveraging Opportunities for Sustainable Family Supports

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The American Rescue Plan (ARP) provides a unique opportunity for short-term, one-time funding. But one-time funding is inadequate to meet long term health changes. However, ARPA does **provide funding that can bridge to**

**more sustainable solutions on the horizon.** The most obvious sustainable solution is California's planned expansion of Medi-Cal reimbursement to community health workers (CHW). This expansion is in the "regulation writing" phase, so details aren't yet final. So far, the plan is that community-based organizations could bill Medi-Cal for the type of community health worker that the Parent Partners Program would pilot. Our expectation is that the program could be eligible for Medi-Cal reimbursement once California's CHW program is fully operational by 2025. In the meantime, Humboldt County families would get the support they need to recover from the devastating impacts of COVID-19.

A second potential sustainability option involves California's Medi-Cal re-procurement process. The California Department of Health Care Services this year aims to once again procure Medi-Cal managed care contracts. In California's re-procurement negotiation, it is clear that managed care will be held accountable for underperforming on HEDIS measures (Health Plan Employer Data and Information Set, a widely used measurement set used to track quality health care) to a much greater extent, including significant financial consequences for not meeting targets. Rural child health related HEDIS measures include well child visits, childhood immunizations, and birth outcomes. Humboldt's measures are generally well below the state average. While the re-procurement process doesn't directly affect Partnership Health Plan for now, the domino effects will most certainly result in Partnership Health being held to these new guidelines. This creates a **strong future incentive** for managed health care plans to incentivize programs that promote healthy family behaviors. Much like Home Visitors, Community Connection Coaches could be a tool for putting families on a track to wellness.

American Rescue Plan funding provides Humboldt County with an **opportunity to build a program and an evidence base to strategically position us for reimbursement for preventative family support services, as the County recovers from COVID.** ARPA has the potential to be a bridge to a long-term, sustainable funding opportunity for prevention services for families. It would be naïve to believe that Medi-Cal reimbursement for CHWs and Medi-Cal re-procurement are a silver bullet to the uncertainty of early childhood prevention funding. However, they present concrete options that may produce funding solutions. Even if they didn't, in the short three-year window of ARP, **local outcomes for some families could be improved by expanding child care options and implementing concrete, relatively low-cost, easy access supports that promote healthy outcomes.**

<sup>1</sup> per data provided via email by Jeremy Nilsen, Humboldt County Behavioral Health, May 7, 2021. Data available on request.

<sup>2</sup> per data provided via email by Sgt. LaFrance, Eureka Police Department, April 28, 2021. Data available on request.

## Proposal Specifics

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- **5 for 5:** Prioritize 5% of total ARPA funding for children under 5 and their families.
- Fund "**Community Connection Coaches**" to link at-risk families with existing community services
- **Child care expansion and start-up funds** prioritized in local ARPA small business grant program

## Budget September 2021-June 2022

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### Budget Description

- Concrete parent **incentives** such as monthly "diaper kits" (a box of one month's worth of diapers and wipes) and children's books. Diaper kits have been shown to prevent negative health outcomes related to "diaper need" when families can't afford diapers. Diaper costs are approximately 14% of the average family's CalWORKs support. Because diaper kits are purchased in bulk, they provide a cost-efficient way to maximize family resources. Promotion of reading with children has a strong correlation with not only later literacy, but also the development of positive parent-child relationships. Other incentives include activities designed to promote access and engagement in positive family norms and community connections.
- **Strollers** for Lend: to facilitate parent participation in playgroup walking groups, we would have strollers available for parents to borrow during the groups.
- Early childhood "**Community Connection Coaches:**" early childhood mental health specialists providing transportation, coaching, and parent education to at-risk families
- **Interpretation** service: If we are unable to hire bilingual coaches, interpretation services will be provided for families as needed.
- **Community parent events** offered quarterly to promote parent connections, positive parenting norms and a focus on creating positive childhood experiences for all children in the community; Pastels in the Park, Outdoor Children's "Music Together," Zoo Days, or similar events.
- Data collection and outside evaluation: Parent surveys, participation counts, evaluation of outcomes, plus an Outcomes Report on protective factor correlates to leverage potential future funding.

## Budget

Community Connection Coaches		
	Description	Annual Cost
Monthly Diaper Kits	50 kits per month	\$10,000
Children's books	50 durable children's books per month	\$500
Community Connection Coaches	Two Coaches trained in parent-child relationship support and early childhood mental health; Health Education Specialist positions, part-time, extra help September, 2021-June, 2022	\$27,900
Interpretation Services		\$3,000
Parent Incentives: Zoo passes, Discovery Museum tickets, gas cards, etc.		\$7,500
Strollers for Lend (10)		\$3,900
Community Parent Events		\$10,000
Technology support: 2 cell phones, 2 tablets and app access		\$3,800
Program Evaluation		\$3,000
	Subtotal direct services	\$69,600
Administration	7.5% of services cost	\$5,220
	<b>Annual Cost of Community Connection Program</b>	<b>\$74,820</b>
<b>Child Care Stabilization and Expansion Grants</b>		
Prioritize child care expansion and start-up grants in ARPA small business grants		Up to \$550,000
<b>FIVE for FIVE</b> 5% of ARPA for children under 5 and their families		Up to \$624,820 for Early Childhood Prevention