Calaveras County

OUR CHILDREN, OUR COMMUNITY

Our Children, Our Community

Executive Summary

The State of Children and Youth in Calaveras County

An Assessment of Strengths and Challenges
Affecting the Well-being of Our Children

January 2003

The Executive Summary reflects many hours of independent research and contributions by community groups, residents, and child-serving organizations and individuals. A listing of those individuals and groups is contained in the full report. Without their continued commitment and effort, this report would not have been possible

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To obtain an electronic copy of the entire report, ***The State of Children and Youth in Calaveras County,*** please visit the First 5 Calaveras website at http://ccfc.ca.gov/calaveras/ or contact: Linda Perry, Executive Director, First 5 Calaveras, 314 E. St. Charles Street, San Andreas, CA 95249-0209, Phone: (209) 754-1470, Fax: (209) 754-1425, Email: lperry@sonnet.com

Our Children, Our Community project is supported by experienced consultants from Social Entrepreneurs, Inc. The consulting team of Sarah Boxx, Margot Chappel, and Mike Smith authored this report and has assisted with all other aspects of the community engagement and planning process. Social Entrepreneurs, Inc. can be reached at 6121 Lakeside Drive, Suite 160, Reno, Nevada, (775) 324-4567 voice, (775) 324-4941 fax, or via the Internet at http://www.socialent.com.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE STATE OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CALAVERAS COUNTY

Background

In 1998 California voters passed Proposition 10, which imposed a fifty cent per pack state sales tax on cigarettes, to be utilized for promoting, supporting and improving the development of young children. Each county was required to establish a Children and Families Commission (known locally as First 5 Calaveras) to develop, implement and administer a strategic plan for local expenditure of this money. Through the extensive planning process that was undertaken, a need was recognized for a more comprehensive "10 year Master Plan for Children" that would guide our county in addressing the needs and priorities of **all** children, not just those in the 0-5 age range covered by Prop.10 funding. To enable the creation of such a plan, First 5 Calaveras sought and obtained a grant from The California Endowment to cover inclusion of children from 5-18 years of age. **Our Children, Our Community** is a result of this funding partnership.

Our Children, Our Community is a countywide commitment to ensuring that Calaveras County remains a great place to raise a family. It will include a plan to partner with families and communities throughout the county in raising children that are safe, healthy, and successful in school. The plan will address the health, development and support needs of children and youth all the way from the prenatal stage to age 18. Earlier plans have focused on specific age ranges such as children age 0-5 or specific issues like child care and health care. This is the first time that a plan has addressed <u>all</u> children and youth and <u>all</u> families with children in a comprehensive way.

In order to plan for the future, it is important to get as complete a picture as possible of the strengths, resources, needs, desires, and interests that affect children, youth and families in Calaveras County. An intensive process to create such a picture was conducted from August to December 2002. There were three main aspects of this process:

- Nineteen youth and adults were trained as Community Advocates. The advocates then met with local organizations, groups and residents throughout the county to ask important questions: What would the community need to be like to do the best possible job of growing healthy children and families? What resources and strengths are already in place? What are the biggest problems or challenges facing children and youth? What are some potential solutions to those challenges? These discussions formed a solid picture of interests, strengths, and needs from the perspective of area residents. In all, outreach and contacts were made with sixty-three community groups and businesses. This outreach resulted in feedback and opinions collected from 179 residents via surveys and presentations.

- An extensive amount of relevant information was already available within the county, contained in plans and studies sponsored by various organizations in the past five years. In order to leverage this existing information, avoiding unnecessarily duplication of work already done elsewhere, numerous organizations – County agencies, nonprofit service providers, business groups, school districts, and others – were contacted to request available data and reports. Thirty-one documents were received, analyzed, and incorporated into this report. Additional research was then conducted to obtain the most current publicly available data on issues such as county demographics, health status, crime, and education.

- One-on-one interviews and small group discussions were conducted with professionals who work most closely with children, youth and families in order to get their perspectives about strengths and challenges affecting children and youth, and to validate (or invalidate) what was learned from analyzing the available data. Surveys were collected from the 139 health, social service, early care and education, primary/secondary school education, law enforcement, and other professionals that participated in this effort.

This report contains the combined results of all of these community outreach and data collection activities. First and foremost, it is intended to provide a picture of "what is really going on" with children and youth in Calaveras County that is as complete as possible so that informed choices can be made regarding how to better support children, youth and families in the future, while taking into account the unique strengths and challenges in each community. It is also hoped that organizations and groups working with children and youth will find this to be a useful study, as will anyone interested in learning more about forces affecting the current and future well being of children and youth.

A summary of the most significant findings from the outreach activities is presented in this executive summary. The rest of the report contains more detailed information, organized into several main sections. Section 2 explores the demographics and economic status of Calaveras County, since changes in the county's population and economy can profoundly affect all residents. Section 3 describes the existing strengths and resources found in communities all over the county that form a solid foundation for supporting children and youth. In section 4, opinions of residents about problems or challenges facing children and youth are presented, followed by analysis of many dimensions of community well being such as health, food security, housing, education, crime, family safety, child care, and other issues. Section 5 presents what people said about their vision for the future of their community – their hopes and dreams for what the community will be like five or ten years from now. Section 6 concludes with a summary of gaps in information that still exist, which may be addressed through additional data collection activities.

Summary of Findings

It is helpful to have a snapshot of the county's economic and demographic situation in mind, as the picture helps put responses from the community outreach process into context. A few items to note, which are described in greater detail in the full report, are presented here.

The county is growing rapidly, especially on the west side where many residents commute to work in the San Joaquin Valley and the Bay Area. This results in families spending long periods of time away from each other, causing children to be raised by adults other than their parents.

The local economy's emphasis is now more focused on tourism, local services, and farming; most areas of the county are experiencing difficulty in creating and maintaining a strong economic base.

The county's unemployment rate has been dropping steadily for over five years, declining from 9.0% in 1997 to 5.7% in August 2002. Highest unemployment rates for the county in 2001 were in the Murphys and San Andreas areas (7.7% and 7.0%, respectively), and lower rates were in Angels Camp area (5.5%).

California's median family income in 1999 was $47,379. Within Calaveras County the median family incomes varies widely, as follows:

- Angels Camp, Murphys, Rancho Calaveras, Valley Springs, Arnold, and Dorrington all showed median family incomes of $49,805 - $51,882 in 1999.
- Rail Road Flat, Glencoe and Wilseyville had a significantly lower median family income of $35,491 in 1999.
- San Andreas, Mountain Ranch and Sheep Ranch was not much higher with a median family income of $39,649 in 1999.

In 2000, the county had a total of 4,928 households with a total of 9,248 children under 18 years; representing almost 23% of the total population. Almost 16% of people living in households with a child under 18 years old were below the poverty level. West Point / Rail Road Flat area representing 33.7% of that population, and Copperopolis and surrounding areas, representing 20.1%, had the highest rates of people living below the poverty level.

Job growth in the county is expected to occur in higher-paying positions that also carry higher education and skill requirements, such as accountants, engineers, computer science positions, teachers, librarians, and health care professionals.

Although small businesses are predominant in the county, the largest employers are the Calaveras County Office of Education with 946 employees, Calaveras County Government with 380 employees, and Mark Twain St. Joseph's Hospital with 248 employees.

The main positives that are used to attract businesses to the county are the excellent quality of life, relatively affordable housing, 30-60 minute access to the Highway 99 corridor, and similar access to various college and university locations. These are some of the same factors that attract people to the county to raise families.

Residents also appear to want economic growth only to the extent it fits with the way of life in Calaveras County; ensuring economic development is compatible with their rural environment, and that economic growth is not more important than the environment.

What do community members consider Calaveras' strengths and assets?

Calaveras residents consider the county's geographic diversity, its caring and committed communities, the individuality of its people, and the relative isolation from the problems that plague larger, more centralized areas of California as strengths. Qualities such as the communities' concern for and interest in children; citizens' willingness to get involved and volunteer time and energy; and, the small-town, rural nature of the communities are important to residents.

Specific to other community resources and/or strengths, both residents and service providers identified a number of government and nonprofit services, after school programs, community programs (e.g., Kids Place, Teen Challenge, 4-H, etc.), and support groups.

Also identified as strengths were a variety of assets scattered throughout the different communities in the areas of:

Arts & Entertainment	Health Related	Senior
Business Organizations	Mutual Support	Service Clubs
Charitable	Parent Groups	Special Interest
Civic	Recreation/Outdoor	Sports Related
Education	Religious	Youth Group

Volunteers are also considered an important resource and asset to the well-being of chidren and youth, although limited data exists about the number of individuals and extent to which they volunteer throughout the county. However, results for a 1999 survey done for the Calaveras Community Renewal Project, and the community outreach conducted for the Our Children, Our Community (OCOC) assessment indicate that there are untapped volunteer resources.

For example, almost 9% of the OCOC outreach contacts indicated they would be willing to volunteer their time to:

- Help develop the 10-year master plan, or
- Volunteer expertise and services to benefit children and youth, ranging from contributions in teaching, tutoring and supervising academic subjects, sports, music, performance and visual arts, to supporting families through parent support and education, financial management training, and donating food, clothing and holiday items.
- A few people also indicted they would be willing to lend their expertise toward fund raising, marketing and general office support.

There are a wide variety of programs and services in place to help children, youth and their families. In order to determine how community members viewed these programs and services,

residents and service providers were asked to indicate what additional services, resources or actions are needed to address their concerns about the well being of children and youth. Answers to this question revealed that providers and residents had a fairly good understanding of what was available. Each group had recommendations for how to improve on existing services, as noted below.

Providers' top three recommendations for improving services for all ages of children, noted in order of importance were to:

1. Provide health and human services that address needs of children and youth (33.7%)
2. Provide recreational facilities, activities and programs for youth that are open after school, evening hours, and during the summer (15.1%)
3. Address issues related to the cost of living and working in the county – specifically lack of jobs and cost of housing (15.1%)

Residents' top three recommendations for improving services for all ages of children, noted in order of importance were to:

1. Add new and/or improve existing recreation facilities and activities for youth (23.1%)
2. Ensure necessary programs, services and resources were provided to children and youth (17.6%)
3. Make improvements in the area of education for all ages of children 12.6%

Specific suggestions for improvements in the area of recreational opportunities ranged from new and/or improved facilities such as skate parks, theaters, and arcades to programs and events such as arts, group meetings, sports and other youth programs. Suggestions for additional programs or services included providing prevention, early identification and treatment for all age groups of children and youth related to physical, mental and dental health as well as shelters, drug prevention, intervention and treatment programs, etc. In addition, access and affordability need to be addressed. Education improvements ranged from increasing the availability of quality, affordable early education and care options for all income levels, expanding before and after school programs and activities, offering tutoring programs, establishing higher education standards, and improving relationships between the schools and the communities.

Before a community can determine what action steps it should take to improve the overall well-being of children and youth, it is necessary to have an understanding of the problems and challenges. Community members were specifically asked to identify the conditions and/or challenges facing Calaveras' children and youth. When responses by residents and services providers for **all children** in the county were compiled and averaged, the descending order of concern were:

1. Lack of facilities and supervised activities, recreation, and social interactions for children, youth, and their families (23.5%).
2. Use and abuse of alcohol, tobacco and drugs (15%).
3. Current number and location of education facilities, opportunities (early education, vocational, adult learning), and relationships between schools and the community (13.5%).

4. Access and availability of medical, dental, and mental health providers and facilities (7.5%).
5. Low levels of parent involvement and participation with their children, schools and the larger community (7.5%).
6. Need for increased community involvement, leadership, support and funding to create, provide, and maintain the services and other help resources needed by children and youth (7.5%).
7. Cost of living, availability of good paying jobs, and the cost of housing and rentals (7.5%).
8. Insufficient public/other transportation options and isolation of the communities (5.5%).
9. Child abuse, neglect and domestic violence (5%).
10. Increasing involvement/contact with law enforcement (3.5%).

Other concerns noted to a lesser degree were: lack of diversity and exposure to different cultures; non-acceptance of youth presence; harm, injury and/or death due to unsafe environments; lack of awareness of existing resources; unplanned growth; and lack of follow through and confidence in public agencies and leadership.

When the countywide concerns of residents and providers are segregated into specific age ranges, and concerns from both groups averaged, a different ranking of issues emerges. Using the same categories of concern as above, the **combined** concerns of residents and service providers in descending order of concern is shown in the table below:

Children Ages 0-5	**Children Ages 6-13**	**Children Ages 14-18**
Lack of facilities and supervised activities. (17.1%).	Lack of facilities and supervised activities. (26.5%).	Lack of facilities and supervised activities. (25.4%).
Education facilities, opportunities, and relationships (16.2%).	Use and abuse of alcohol, tobacco and drugs (15.4%).	Use and abuse of alcohol, tobacco and drugs (17.8%).
Access and availability of medical, dental, and mental health providers and facilities (10.7%).	Education facilities, opportunities, and relationships (13.9%).	Education facilities, opportunities, and relationships (11.5%).
Low levels of parent involvement (10.2%).	Access and availability of medical, dental, and mental health providers and facilities (7.5%).	Cost of living (7.7%).
Cost of living (9.5%).	Low levels of parent involvement (7.2%).	Need for increased community involvement and contribution (7.1%).

Children Ages 0-5	Children Ages 6-13	Children Ages 14-18
Use and abuse of alcohol, tobacco and drugs (9.4%).	Need for increased community involvement and contribution (7.1%).	Low levels of parent involvement (6.7%).
Need for increased community involvement and contribution (7.6%).	Cost of living (5.8%).	Access and availability of medical, dental, and mental health providers and facilities (6.5%).
Child Abuse, neglect and domestic violence (6.9%).	Transportation options and community isolation (5.5%).	Transportation options and community isolation (5.9%).
Transportation options and community isolation (5.2%).	Child Abuse, neglect and domestic violence (4.7%).	Child Abuse, neglect and domestic violence (4.2%).
Involvement/contact with law enforcement (2.6%).	Involvement/contact with law enforcement (3.4%).	Involvement/contact with law enforcement (4.2%).

However, within the overall areas of concerns for children by age group, residents and service providers weight their concerns differently when looking at a particular age group. For instance, when considering only residents' responses for children ages 0-5, access to medical, dental and mental health services is replaced by parent involvement as the third largest concern. A breakout the top three of concerns expressed by residents and providers is presented here.

Residents' Concerns	Providers' Concerns
Children ages 0-5 1. Availability and access to facilities and activities for children in this age group the most pressing concern (20.2%). 2. Education and learning opportunities (17.7%) 3. Parent involvement, Cost of living, and Child abuse and domestic violence (8.1% each)	**Children ages 0-5** 1. Education and learning opportunities (14.7%) 2. Availability and access to facilities and activities for children in this age group the most pressing concern (14.0%) 3. Parent involvement (12.3%)
Children ages 6-13 1. Availability and access to facilities and activities for children in this age group the most pressing concern (30.8%) 2. Alcohol, tobacco and drug use (16.2%) 3. Education and learning opportunities (10.9%)	**Children ages 6-13** 1. Availability and access to facilities and activities for children in this age group the most pressing concern (22.2%), 2. Education and learning opportunities (16.8%) 3. Alcohol, tobacco and drug use (13.9%)

Residents' Concerns	Providers' Concerns
Children ages 14-18 1. Availability and access to facilities and activities for children in this age group the most pressing concern (28.4%) 2. Alcohol, tobacco and drug use (20.3%) 3. Education (9.8%)	**Children ages 14-18** 1. Availability and access to facilities and activities for children in this age group the most pressing concern (22.5%), 2. Alcohol, tobacco and drug use (15.3%) 3. Education and learning opportunities (13.1%)

Yet a different picture emerges when concerns for children are further segregated into specific community groups. For instance, when viewed at the community level, facilities and activities is no longer the number one issue for three of the seven communities. Murphys and the Rail Road Flat group of communities (West Point, Mountain. Ranch, Sheep Ranch and Wilseyville) are more concerned with alcohol, tobacco and drugs than facilities and activities. And San Andreas and Mokelumne Hill are more concerned about education.

A detailed view of the various communities' perspectives is presented in the full report.

Once the communities identified the qualities and characteristics that make Calaveras a great place to raise children, and also identified the concerns and issues needing to be addressed, they were asked to describe their vision for the future. Six broad theme areas emerged, which will need to be further refined as the community moves forward to develop its 10-year master plan for children. Those themes are contained in the full report, and repeated here:

1. **Improved/expanded schools and education opportunities.** The education system would address the needs of the county's youngest children and provide ongoing learning opportunities for youth and adults. There would be schools in each community, and they would address the different learning styles and needs of residents. School facilities would be used more broadly by the communities for meetings and as places where youth could congregate and participate in non-school related activities. Educational standards would be high and students would have links with the community via mentoring, internships and volunteer activities.

2. **Facilities and activities for children, youth, and families.** Each community would have recreation and/or cultural facilities where families and their children could participate in a wide variety of activities. These community centers would meet the needs of children of all ages and be open throughout the year. Parks and other recreation options (skateboard parks, movie theaters, etc.) would be in place throughout the county. And children and youth would be able to access these facilities by using safe and reliable public transportation options.

3. **Available, affordable, accessible human service programs and resources to support children/families.** Individuals and families would have easy access to needed resources and supports, either through locally based services or home visiting programs. Eligibility

for assistance would be expanded so that the any family needing assistance in providing for and raising a family could participate. Programs and services would be well staffed and funded, and be offered based on the real needs of the county's residents.

4. **Available, affordable, accessible medical, dental, and mental health services, including prevention/treatment services.** There would be a variety of medical, dental and mental health providers available throughout the county that accept Medi-Cal and other insurance. Preventative care would be the norm, and the early identification of health related issues would result in care being provided in a timely manner. Families would have the ability to pay for services, either through insurance programs, or because services were affordable. A variety of prevention, intervention and treatment options would be available and no children or youth would go without needed services.

5. **Planned growth resulting in increased job opportunities and higher compensation while retaining the small town atmosphere, traditions and safety enjoyed currently.** The quality of life in Calaveras County would be preserved at the same time as residents are benefiting from increased job opportunities and higher wages resulting from planned growth. The infrastructure to support growth, including affordable housing, transportation, and additional public service resources would be built and maintained as the county grows at a slow, measured pace. And, all the while the friendly, caring nature of the communities would be maintained and the natural beauty and resources protected.

6. **Countywide collaborations to pool existing/available resources.** The existing resources and talents of Calaveras County would be used together to achieve results. Turf issues would not exist and communities would work together to leverage all available resources, rather than categorically funding and operating programs and services (e.g., children's services, senior services, disability services, etc.). Communities would focus on their collective assets rather than deficits and look for unique partnership opportunities to meet existing and emerging community needs.

While more work remains to be done, it is clear from the level of community input and concern throughout the assessment process that a very positive and bright future is possible for the children and youth of Calaveras County. And that the vision can be accomplished by building on one of the mainstays of the county – people working together for the greater good of their community.