



# Families First: Stories of Love and Learning

An evaluation of the Parenting Partnership produced by  
**Center for Digital Storytelling • First 5 Alameda County**

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# Acknowledgments

This evaluation report was developed collaboratively by The Center for Digital Storytelling and First 5 Alameda County.

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# Executive Summary

## Executive Summary

This document is a multi-media report that describes the Parenting Partnership—a program of the First 5 Alameda County Community Grants Initiative (CGI). The Parenting Partnership is a cohort of six community based agencies who have received awards in the 2007 -2009 cycle of the CGI. The partners include Alameda Family Literacy Program, Asian Community Mental Health Services, Berkeley Albany YMCA, Brighter Beginnings, Community Childcare Coordinating Council, and Family Support Services of the Bay Area.

First 5 Alameda County (F5AC) and the facilitators modeled working with grantees in ways that they hoped partners would work with parents participating in their programs: maintaining a respectful and trusting group environment, creating regular opportunities for reflection, and using strength based inquiry and clear expectations as tools to support change. The goal was to increase organizational and individual practitioner use of promising practices to improve outcomes for children and families.

Grantees provided services to children and families using various service models. In addition, each grantee participated in an intensive capacity building process. Partners worked together to identify promising practices, conduct a self-assessment of their current approach and skills. They attended regular cohort meetings and received intensive training and opportunities for facilitated reflection, individual technical assistance and consultation. This report provides you with an overview of the initiative's activities, the aspects of the initiative that partners found useful, and changes in practices that resulted from participation in the partnership. The results come from a range of evaluation activities conducted during the two years of the initiative.

A unique feature of this report is that it includes digital stories created by members of the partnership. These personal narratives provide an in-depth look into the experiences of the partners and the impact the Partnership had on them and the parents they serve.

Over the two years of the Partnership, grantees served 633 children ages 0-5 and 798 parents, guardians and caregivers. Services included parent-child playgroups, parent-child activities, parent education, and support groups, and developmental screening for children.

## Successful Elements of the First 5 Alameda County Parenting Partnership

Partners described several elements of the Partnership that were particularly useful to creating changes in their practice. The Partnership:

- Was responsive to the needs of the partners
- Set high expectations
- Maintained a clear vision
- Offered guidance and support
- Emphasized promising practices
- Modeled effective practices in adult learning

# Executive Summary

## Changes in Practice

The most common shifts in practice identified by the Partners included:

1. Incorporation of reflective practice and increasing collaboration (both intra-agency and inter-agency)
2. Deeper understanding of child development
3. Intentional choices in parenting education and support
4. Consistent use of a strength-based approach
5. Focus on cultural responsiveness

## Impact on the Families

Parents reported:

- Some reduction in stress
- Playing more with their children (95%)
- More confidence in their parenting (91%)

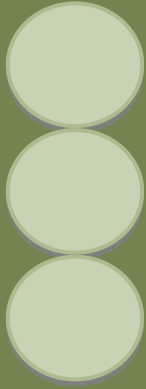
In addition to these data, partners shared anecdotal reports of many family successes, including:

- Parents taking a more active parenting role
- Parents able to complete their GED
- Consistent attendance at parent programs
- Improved behavior of children
- Improved spousal relationships
- Improved parent-child relationships
- Increased networking among families

We hope that you enjoy listening to and reading the stories that capture the success of this Partnership!

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“I don’t speak English, how do I help my child?”  
by Katharine Chun, Asian Community Mental Health



## The Parenting Partnership

**The Parenting Partnership** is a program of the **First 5 Alameda County Community Grants Initiative (CGI)**. “Partnership” Grants have been a funding category of the Community Grants Initiative (CGI) since 2003. The Partnership reflects First 5 Alameda County’s (F5AC) approach to improving practice by not only providing information, but also by providing the opportunity to integrate and reflect in the context of supportive relationships. The CGI partnership model is where improving the quality of grantee practice is explicitly and intensively addressed through the development of learning communities.

Past Partnerships have focused on school readiness, mental health consultation to childcare, and developmental playgroups. The Parenting Partnership was a cohort of six community based agencies who received awards in the 2007 -2009 cycle of the CGI.





## Partnerships are Unique

Agencies receiving Parenting Partnership grants were required to provide:

1. Parenting education
2. Childcare and incentives to remove barriers to participation in parent education
3. Opportunities for parent-child activities where parents could put parenting education concepts into practice with the support of facilitators to model and guide new skills and behavior

Grantees committed to:

1. Participate in a learning community who met regularly for intensive training, peer support, and reflection about parenting education and family support
2. Co-create a shared understanding of the best or promising practices in parenting education and family support
3. Participate in on-site consultation and training specific to their agencies' unique needs and service model
4. Demonstrate leadership in their field of practice and share lessons learned





## The Capacity Building Process

While each grantee provided the required service components, their service models and the populations they served varied. In addition to providing services, each organization participated in an intensive capacity building process that included the following:

### Identification of Promising Practices and Self-Assessment

F5AC conducted a thorough literature search to identify evidence based and theory driven parent education practices (Appendix A). Specific practices that emerged consistently as successful were identified as “promising practices.” These practices became the basis of a self-assessment matrix (Appendix B) that each organization used to guide their professional development.

### Cohort Meetings

Direct service practitioners and supervisors from partner agencies attended regular meetings. Cohort meetings alternated between interactive training and facilitated reflection on practice. Training curriculum (Appendix C) and peer feedback focused on the use of promising practices in work with families.

### Individual Consultation and Technical Assistance

Each organization maintained a consistent relationship with a professional development consultant throughout the partnership. Professional development activities were driven by the promising practices assessment tool and by agency requests. Consultants observed services and offered feedback to direct service teams, facilitated reflective practice, consulted on curriculum and environment, and offered site-based training. In some cases, consultants served as a sounding board for program managers and supervisors. Organizations received an average of 12 consultation site visits as well as additional technical assistance provided by phone or e-mail.

Consultants who provided site-based assistance also led the cohort meetings, which allowed for each capacity building strategy to inform the other. Observations made on site visits led to an understanding of common learning needs that drove the selection of training topics. Site based consultation took the didactic material from cohort meetings and supported its translation into the field in the specific settings where practitioners were building bridges between new knowledge and practice skills.



# This Report

## **This report**

This report represents the lessons learned from the Parenting Partnership. It provides a summary of the ways that grantee organizations and individual practitioners changed as a result of participation in the Parenting Partnership, and an exploration of what made those changes possible.

The primary sources of data for this report were interviews conducted with agency representatives at three points in time; regular grantee reports to F5AC, agency self assessments against specific promising practices; and digital storytelling—a new tool to gather narrative and visual data about participants' understandings of an event or phenomena.

Interviews were conducted with managers from each program and explored their expectations, the benefits and challenges of participation, and any changes they perceived in their staff or their agency culture. Reports solicited service data as well as a description of successes, challenges, and lessons learned. Quantitative data collected included common client self-report items and the Parental Stress Survey (Berry & Jones, 1995). Interview and report data were read and coded using the project logic model as a guide. Codes were grouped into categories and finally themes were developed where particular ideas recurred.

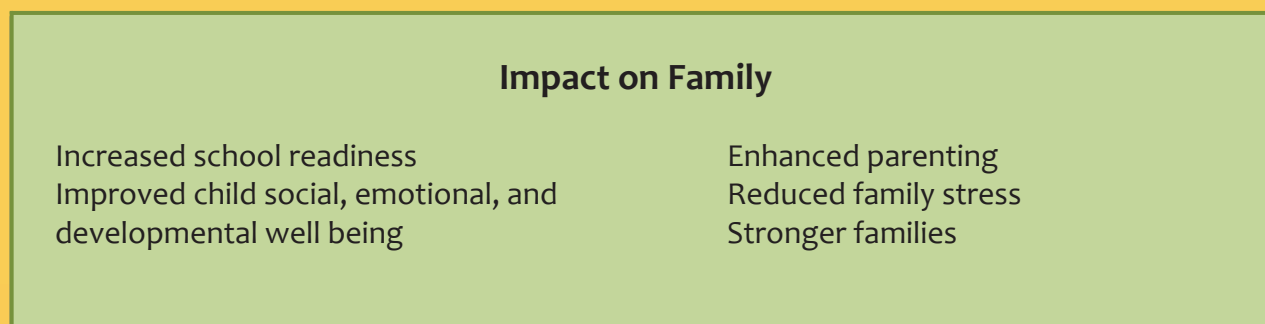
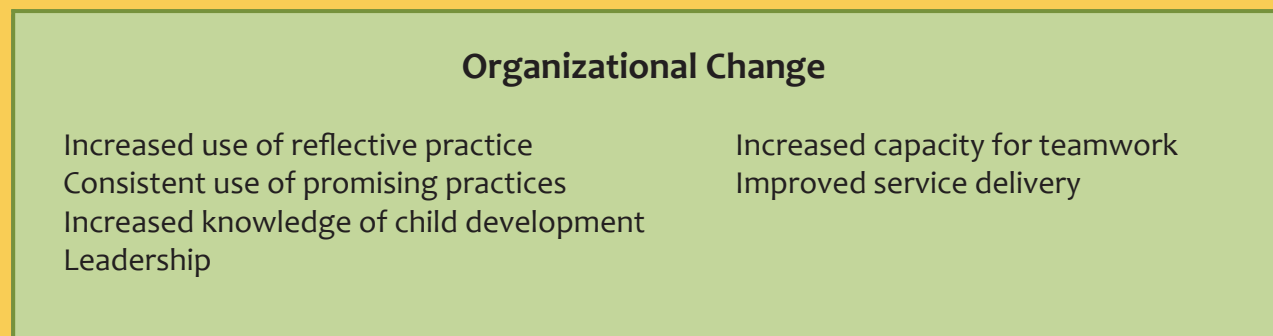
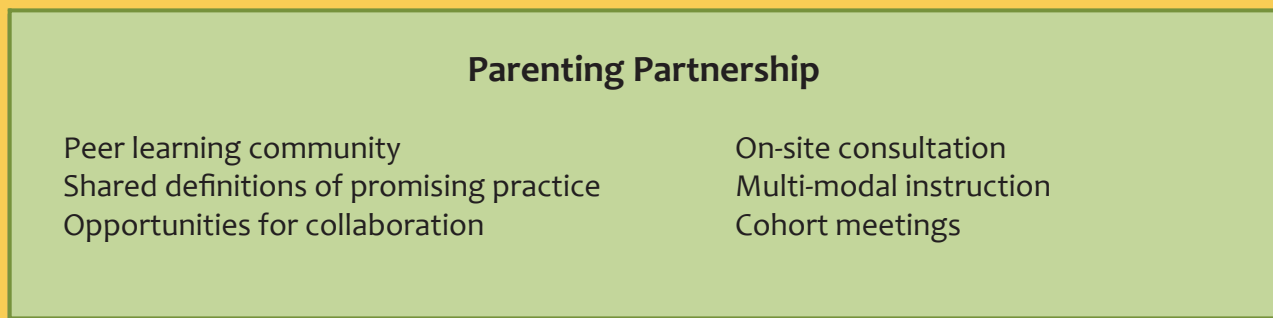
A total of 21 participants representing the six organizations and co-facilitators in the process attended the digital storytelling workshop. The process began by asking participants to come prepared to share a story about their work with the partnership or with the families they serve.

At the first meeting, participants shared their stories as part of a story circle—one of two small groups where participants were encouraged to share their stories and receive feedback from other group members. This process allows participants to shape the story they want to tell about their work. Ethnographic field notes of the digital storytelling process were recorded. The story circles were also tape recorded. When all stories were completed, a final screening was held. At the end of the screening, two focus groups were conducted to discuss the stories and emergent themes. These focus groups were also recorded. The ethnographic notes, tapes from the story circles, the recorded voiceovers, the stories, and the discussion from the final screening were reviewed as part of the data analysis process. Stories were analyzed as a way to better understand the individual and collective meaning made from the experience of the Parenting Partnership. The voices of the participants are the heart of this report.

The digital stories are included throughout this document.

# The Theory of Change: How the Parenting Partnership helps to strengthen families

The premise of the Parenting Partnership is inspired by Jeree Pawl's platinum rule (cited in Gowen & Nebrig, 2002); "Do unto others as you would have others do unto others." First 5 and the facilitators would do with participants what we hoped they would do with their parents: maintain a respectful and trusting group environment, create regular opportunities for reflection, and use strength based inquiry and clear expectations as tools to support change. Organizational and individual practitioners' increase in the use of promising practices would lead to improved outcomes for children and families.



# The Partners

## Alameda Family Literacy Program

The Alameda Family Literacy Program strives to break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy through education for parents and children. The program serves immigrant families with young children (ages 0 to 5). The program follows best practices developed by the National Center for Family Literacy and the National Center for Literacy. The model includes four educational components: instruction in adult education, parent education, and early childhood education and parent-child interactive literacy activities.

Alameda Family Literacy requested funding to provide home visits to support and address individual parenting issues and to provide play groups for parents and children. All families served were English Language Learners (low literacy) and high poverty. Classes and home visits were offered in Chinese, Spanish and English.



## Asian Community Mental Health Services

Asian Community Mental Health Services (ACMHS), has pioneered a community mental health approach with the diverse Asian/Pacific Islander (A/PI) population that is consumer need driven and community based. ACMHS' mission is "to provide and advocate for multilingual and multicultural mental health services that empower individuals and their families to lead healthy, productive and harmonious lives in the community."

ACMHS requested funding to establish a parenting program for Asian parents and their children with two components. The first component was parent group meetings designed to enhance parenting and build strong families by increasing parental knowledge of developmentally appropriate expectations for children age two to four in a culturally relevant context. The second component was a parent and child developmental play group designed to work with the parents to improve their child's social, developmental and emotional well being.

## The Partners

### **Berkeley Albany YMCA**

The Berkeley-Albany YMCA is a leader in the development of innovative, high-impact programs for children and families. The Downtown Berkeley YMCA serves as a major community hub and service center for over 2,500 families with children ages 0-5, providing them with an exciting array of activities tailored to their unique needs. Over the past several years, the YMCA has expanded its successful work with children and families with special needs.

The Berkeley-Albany YMCA requested funding to significantly expand and enhance the parent education and support component of special needs programming for 2-5 year old children and their families. The program is a tightly integrated program that includes supervised swimming and tumbling activities for children, followed by a parent support group offered in tandem with a Childwatch program. Enhancements to the core program include an online parent forum, a sensory equipment lending library, field trips, and respite care.



### **Brighter Beginnings**

Brighter Beginnings' mission is to support healthy births and children's successful development by strengthening families and helping to build strong communities. The organization promotes the health and well-being of the mother, baby and entire family before, during and after birth for several years. Their core service approach is the home-visiting, whole-family case management model.

Brighter Beginnings requested funding to target several sub-groups of teen-parent families with children ages 0-3. Each group received parenting education and support sessions while children received developmentally appropriate childcare, and guided parent-child playgroups. All required components are based on Bavolek's "The Nurturing Curriculum."

# The Partners

## Community Child Care Coordinating Council (4C's)

4C's provides child care resource and referral services in southern Alameda County. All parents, regardless of income, receive free child care referrals, information about choosing child care and parenting support services. Child care providers receive technical assistance, resources and training. 4C's also provides child care payment services for CalWORKS participants and families needing respite care and operates two child development centers serving children from birth to 5 years of age. For parents and providers, 4C's offers a quarterly newsletter, written publications on a variety of child development topics in four languages and a lending library of books, videos and educational materials.

4C's requested funding to continue their parent education and support program for Spanish-speaking families in southern Alameda County. The program included parenting classes, child enrichment activities, fieldtrips, and Family Reads Nights. Incentives were provided to eliminate barriers to attendance and included dinner, child care, transportation, fieldtrips and take-home materials.



## Family Support Services of the Bay Area (FSSBA)

FSSBA's mission is to support children, youth, families and communities by providing services that make them stronger. The agency fulfills its mission by providing voluntary, hands-on, individually tailored services to families in their homes and in their communities. This family-driven model is the cornerstone of the four core services, all of which are targeted to families with low incomes who face unusual challenges in nurturing their children successfully. Core services are: Family Preservation for families at risk of foster placement; Respite for parents and other caregivers of children with special needs; Kinship (supportive services for grandparents/relative caregivers); and Mentoring (for children of an incarcerated parent).

FSSBA requested funding to create a new "Empowered Parenting for Empowered Families" (EPEF) program. EPEF provided kinship caregivers and parents with parenting skills training, supportive interaction with parenting educators and child care providers, and safe and nurturing child care (both in order to attend the trainings and as incentives).

## The Families and the Services

The grantee agencies served a diverse family population. Services were provided to families from many cultural and ethnic backgrounds and families who speak a range of languages. Over the two years, the partners served 633 children ages 0-5 and 798 parents, guardians, and caregivers.

Children	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Ages			
<3	151	265	416
3-5	112	105	217
Total	263	370	633
Parents, Guardians, Caregivers			
Total	308	490	798

### Services Provided

(Year 1 and Year 2 of the grant period)

Parent-child activities = 436

Parent-child playgroups = 105

Parent education or support groups = 610

Children receiving developmental screening using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) = 164

Children screened with ASQ who score “of concern” in at least one developmental domain = 50





**“Change”**  
by Janis Keyser,  
Parenting Partnership  
Co-Facilitator

## What Worked

Participants identified seven elements of the Partnership that were particularly helpful in improving their practice. One strength of the process was the **responsiveness** of the facilitators **to the needs of the grantees**. The facilitators taught to different adult learning styles and trainings were developed based on the grantees requests. Co-facilitators were flexible, good at reading the level of a group, and wanted to meet the group’s needs

*I found the group leaders and the staff very responsive to the needs and... suggestions of the group.*

Facilitators of the Partnership **set high expectations** for the grantees and **had a clear vision** for the project. Grantees noted that there was a clear expectation that the agencies would make programmatic improvements.

*The other thing that helped changes to happen is just that we were pressed to make changes. First 5 asked, ‘What are you doing to improve?’... I realized, I need to articulate this and get on the stick here... I couldn’t do the status quo... This was really the push, “how are you making it better? How are you changing things and be specific when you tell us.’*

*The facilitator played an important role. Through her observation she identified areas of potential growth for the program. She came to our site on three occasions and conducted three-hour workshops for all staff. Her use of video to tape staff interactions with children resulted in changes in staff thinking, especially with regards to special needs children. She shared many different ideas on open-ended play for children. Her gentle modeling was what staff needed to become more confident in their leadership with children. Above all, she understood the exhaustion the staff felt after working with six children with special needs in a class of 19.*





### Successful Elements of the First 5 Parenting Partnership

- ✓ Were responsive to the needs of the partners
- ✓ Set high expectations
- ✓ Maintained a clear vision
- ✓ Offered guidance and support
- ✓ Provided agency specific consultation and training
- ✓ Emphasized promising practices
- ✓ Utilized a parallel process



*One of the things I liked best about the partnership was having a closer connections to F5AC...I felt like I could use you [the staff] as more of a resource as opposed to just people that we report our findings to.*

Grantees described the **guidance and support** they received from both First 5 staff and their peers as helpful to their process. Partners felt supported in their work, both personally and in their relationships with their own staff. This feeling of support helped them to make changes in their programs.

*It was really helpful—the relationships and camaraderie that was built up within the people in the partnership. It took a little while to build but... eventually we became a really tight group.*

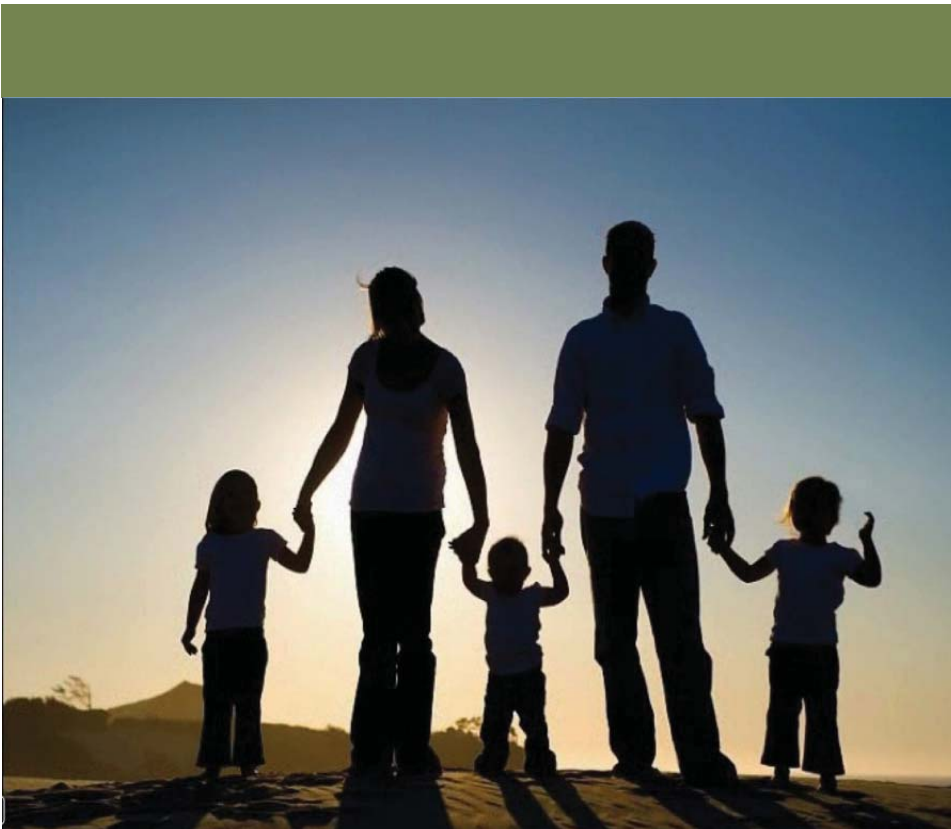
*I feel more confident in doing the work. And I feel like when I meet challenges, I'm not the only one. I feel very supported. If you don't have ongoing support and allies...then it can feel very isolated, you can burn out. But we are very energized.*

The **emphasis on promising practices** helped the grantees to adopt new skills and modify the way in which they were delivering current programs.

*We believe that the changes we have made were possible because our program faithfully follows and embodies what has been identified in our Parenting Partnership as promising practices.*

*The promising practices have helped us to put our work and our program into a larger context. We have quietly gone about our work of supporting families. Now we are seeing that we can support others who want to do similar work. Our circle of effort has expanded.*

Grantees also identified the use of **parallel process**—using relationship based practices in technical assistance and cohort meetings that could then be incorporated into how staff worked with families—as effective in helping grantees become more intentional about their own parenting education programs. The Partnership has given grantees concrete tools to use when working with parents. As one participant stated, “We are teaching providers how to be models for their families, which is new for us...”



## “Un Nuevo Camino” by Lili Martinez, 4C’s of Alameda County

### The Outcomes

The six agencies described various ways in which their service delivery had changed as a result of their involvement with the Parenting Partnership.

*Our work with the Parenting Partnership has resulted in a radical shift in the self-image of the program. We have grown from seeing ourselves as helpers for the West End of Alameda into seeing ourselves as part of a larger movement to help children reach their potential. We are learning about how to advocate for our work in a larger political arena. We believe more strongly than ever that we have the potential to make a significant impact.*

The primary purpose of the Partnership was to encourage agencies to identify and implement promising practices in their parent education and family support work. The characteristics of promising practices are described below. Partners utilized a matrix describing specific practices to guide quality improvement activities. The matrix was also used as a reference tool for providing peer feedback. After listening to case presentations, colleagues helped their peers reflect on when and how they were putting promising practices into action. At the conclusion of the Partnership, each agency used the matrix to assess if they were using the promising practices more consistently than they were when they began. These self-assessments, in addition to interview, reporting, and digital story data reveal where shifts in practice occurred.

## Promising Practices

Are those that...

- ✓ Were responsive to the needs of the partners
- ✓ Have a strong theoretical base and framework.
- ✓ Are developmentally specific.
- ✓ Are strength-based, family empowering and family-centered.
- ✓ Strengthen parent-child relationships
- ✓ Are collaborative and built on trust, respect, and mutual understanding
- ✓ Utilize comprehensive interventions
- ✓ Adapt to multiple learning styles with multi-modal, hands on instruction
- ✓ Include opportunities for parent-child interactions
- ✓ Link families to early childhood networks, support networks and other community services
- ✓ Are culturally and linguistically responsive and based on an ecological model
- ✓ Integrate cultural and community factors

The most common shifts toward the consistent use of promising practices identified by the Partners included:

1. Incorporating reflective practice and increasing collaboration (both intra-agency and inter-agency)
2. Deeper understanding of child development
3. Intentional choices in parenting education and support
4. Consistent use of a strength-based approach
5. Focus on cultural responsiveness

*Through our involvement in the Parenting Partnership we implemented many of the promising practices that were covered in the trainings. We have become more aware of the impact of the physical environment, we actively create more culturally sensitive programming through choice of songs in Tumbling and the staff has become more educated in special needs topics such as sensory integration, autism, and speech delays. The staff feels more confident in working with both the children and the parents and we have a more family centered philosophy when serving the participants. The parenting partnership cohort trainings and the Incentive Grant funded staff trainings facilitated these improvements.*

Additionally, the partners describe ways in which these changes in practice have had an impact on the families with which they work.





## Change in Practice

### 1. Incorporating reflective practice and increasing collaboration.



## “imagine”

by Cynthia Wasko, Alameda by Family Literacy Project

The Parenting Partnership placed an emphasis on reflective practice as a key component to improving services. Reflective practice is building in structured processes to think about, review, analyze, and assess one’s own work with the support of another person or group of people. It is an opportunity to think about relationships with families: what is working well, what needs attention, and where one’s strengths and growing edges are. In this process facilitative questions are used to support and encourage the reflection process (Copa, Lucinski, Olsen, & Wallenberg, 1999). The partners report that prior to their involvement with this initiative, they used reflective practices inconsistently if at all. They now report that they are using the principles of reflective practice in their everyday work environments.

As multi-disciplinary teams incorporated reflective practice by holding team meetings and inviting case discussion, increased integration and collaboration began to occur. Parent educators, child care providers, and home visitors began to think together about children and families. Opportunities to share information and reinforce and support one another increased.

*I’m looking at my program much more critically for areas of improvement. I’m piecing out little concrete steps of where improvement can happen. Standards are higher than they used to be, but I’m figuring out what’s realistic in terms of expectations of the staff.*

*The partnership has caused us to think more about how we do things with both the parents and children. We seem to be analyzing a bit more each thing that we do with the parents.*

## Reflective Practice In Action

We believe that we have begun to become more reflective with our work with our Spanish parenting class. We find that we always check-in about how things went the day after each class meeting to discuss any issues that may have arisen or to talk about what went well. When an issue comes up with a parent we try to reflect on how we have worked with the family or what has been said to the parent first before trying to come up with solutions. We try to reflect on the procedures we have and see if there is something we can do or change to help the situation in the future. We also think about how we can involve our parenting instructor for support.



More than once over the year, a parent has been concerned about their child crying during the child enrichment activities. Reflecting on this piece of our program, we realized that we could make some minor changes to our procedures. First, we realized a need for parents and their children to become more familiar with our childcare teachers. We asked our teachers to roam the room during dinnertime to either introduce themselves or to just sit and chat with the families. We talked with our parenting instructor and asked if she could facilitate an evening with the topic of separation and transition. Although reflecting on our program each week takes more time, staff believe that it is very useful and in the end, they believe that it really does save them more time and stress as the program runs more smoothly and parents have less concerns.



## “Practicing Inclusion”

by Eden O’Brien Brenner, Berkeley YMCA Swim & Gym



## “Reflection”

by Heather Cunningham, Berkeley YMCA Swim & Gym



### Deeper Understanding of Child Development

The training and technical assistance enhanced partners' knowledge about child development, positive parent-child interactions, and developmentally appropriate environments, materials, and activities. This increase in knowledge allowed the partners to create better experiences for children and model developmentally appropriate interactions for parents. Learning child development is a key element of parent education as it allows parents to understand the meaning of children's behavior and respond more effectively.

*Our activities address the whole child in all domains of development (physical, social, cultural and emotional). We believe strongly that if our activities can get at those three aspects, we would have achieved our hope for our families. Our program has become more inclusive, especially of special needs children and the activities offered take that into consideration. These activities give the children opportunities to show their strengths in the different domains and not just in the ability to use language. For example, we acknowledge a child who is good with his hands, good at listening, good at building or drawing, or good at dancing, good at playing with other children. We have parents pay close attention and observe and report back each week on their children's strengths and we discussed on how we can build on that strength and provide support and acknowledgment.*

### Change in Practice

#### 2. Deeper understanding of child development



## “Learning in Action”

by Jessica Delaney, Family Support Services of the Bay Area



## ***Saying Goodbye for the First Time: Teaching Trust By Supporting Separation***

“We know that a lot of children who come to our program only know their parents and haven’t been in the care of other people. They don’t know what its like to be away from their parents. This year we talked about how we have issues or challenges with separation. We’ve spoken to our instructors and had them speak about separation to parents and how to make it easier. We now purposely create separation between children and their parents because they need it. Intentionally we have it built in that there will be separations.

Through modeling, families get a chance to practice separation. The first step—that’s the first night of each group. They talk about it. We notice that parents have their own struggles, fears about the same thing “I’m leaving my child, they cry, what’s happening, I’m gone from them for 1-2 hours, are they OK?” We prepare parents for separation. We want them to know about how a nine month old separates and how that is different from how a three year old separates. By the time the whole year goes by the parents have learned that and it is incredible how much the children can grow.”

## **“Transforming Separations”**

**by Nancy Spangler, Parenting Partnership Co-Facilitator**





### Change in Practice 3. Intentional choices in parenting education and support

*One of our program goals was to provide students with as much information and guidance as possible, so they could formulate their own parenting approach that was right for their family and culture. We are particularly proud of the ways in which our students were able to articulate their own approach to parenting.*

*We found that when teen parents were exposed to new ways of parenting, they would be less likely to pass on their parent's uninformed, negative parenting behaviors.*

### Intentional Choices in Parenting Education and Support

Promising practices specific to parent education include choosing curriculum topics based on parent interests and needs, using parents as resources and mentor for each other, using observation, and incorporating interactive, hands on learning.

As a result of the work with the Partnership, organizations report that they have changed their practice by becoming more intentional about the type of parenting education and support that they offer. For example, one organization stated that they had begun to have parents develop ground rules within the parent meetings. Another partner stated that they have been using and encouraging acknowledgement instead of praise for children within parenting meetings.

*I feel like we're more mindful of why we do the stuff that we do... Like [when we are working with children on the autism spectrum] do we need to do this circle time? Why are we doing this circle time? Is it just to corral them to be in one place so that we can tell them what to do next? Or are we actually teaching them something and creating something while we're doing the circle time.*

Collaborating and networking with other agencies was also an important aspect of the Partnership. By learning from each other, some partners described ways in which they had become more intentional about their practice.



**“Because He Made Me Laugh”**  
by Rachel Longan,  
Berkeley YMCA Swim and Gym

### Strength-Based Approach

Historically, health and human service organizations have utilized strategies and services that focus on the needs, deficits, or problems facing individuals, families, and communities. More recently, research has supported the use of a strength-based approach (Egeland, Carlson, and Stroufe, 1993; Saleeby, 1994; Keogh and Weisner, 1993). A strength-based approach holds the belief that, “people possess inherent strengths or assets that hold the key to their ability to cope with stress and trauma.” Those working within a strengths-based approach help individuals or families build upon their own inner resources. Interestingly, people learn better when they feel a sense of competence, and curriculum is more relevant when it builds on existing knowledge. Strength based strategies used by partner agencies included parents sharing observations of their children, inviting discussions of successes, peer mentoring, and welcoming cultural stories and parenting practices.

The grantees involved in this Partnership describe the ways in which their own practice has shifted to a strength-based approach.

*We have learned that we should draw on the parents’ expertise and strengths more. We are trying to better understand the parents and work together to find common ground, getting into a true collaboration, partnership.*

*The shift is not so much in what we do, but how we do it. Our focus has always been strength-based. Now we approach situations with families by asking about the resources they have to use in whatever situations they are seeking to change. We quietly focus on the child and “talk out loud” about what we observe, sharing only positive comments.*

### Change in Practice 4. Consistent use of a strength-based approach



**“Or So I Thought”**  
by Julie Cosenza, Brighter Beginnings



**“Untitled”**  
by Cindy Nguyen, Asian Community Mental Health



## Change in Practice

### 5. Focus on cultural responsiveness



## Focus on Cultural Responsiveness

The Partnership's emphasis on family culture and language diversity has been an important learning process. As a result of their work with the Partnership, grantees describe being more comfortable integrating home culture in a more inclusive and celebratory way. Stories illustrate the cultural and linguistic competency in curricula and everyday interactions. Partners have incorporated an intentional focus on and adaptation to the diverse needs of their families. Together agencies and parents discovered ways to honor home culture and language while at the same time offering tools for understanding and thriving in the mainstream culture. Participants have created an environment of respect that builds a community inside and outside of the organization.

*Through the participation in the parenting partnership, we are thinking more about best practices in terms of group work, creating a more inclusive, culturally competent and strength based environment and what that means in terms of our programming and how can we expand what we know to support other emerging communities such as the Burmese. We realized that many of the immigrant parents and children are not familiar with being in a group. Working in a group format gave us the great opportunity to create an inclusive structure, to work with the strengths of diversity and different perspectives, to use each other as resources to learn about different stages of development as well as developmental delays and special needs.*

**“Crossing Generations”**  
by Colleen Lee,  
Asian Community Mental Health



Roxann's and Tamara's stories are examples of how reflective practice helps staff members understand what personal strengths they bring to their role. Reflective practice supports exploration of personal experience in order to enable connection with families. Thinking deeply about one's own culture and how it influences the work was a theme reflected in many stories.

Roxann talks about how she began her work with some fear about what she could offer women in an English language learning program. She soon realized that her unique background allowed her to understand the women's journeys in new ways and that she was learning as much as she was teaching. Tamara reflects upon the ways in which her involvement with Alameda Literacy Project helped her overcome post-partum depression and transition to the United States. That experience helps her understand and work effectively with families.

**“Women of Strength”**  
by Roxann Childe,  
Alameda Family Literacy Project



**“Opening Windows”**  
by Tamara Centeno,  
Alameda Family Literacy Project

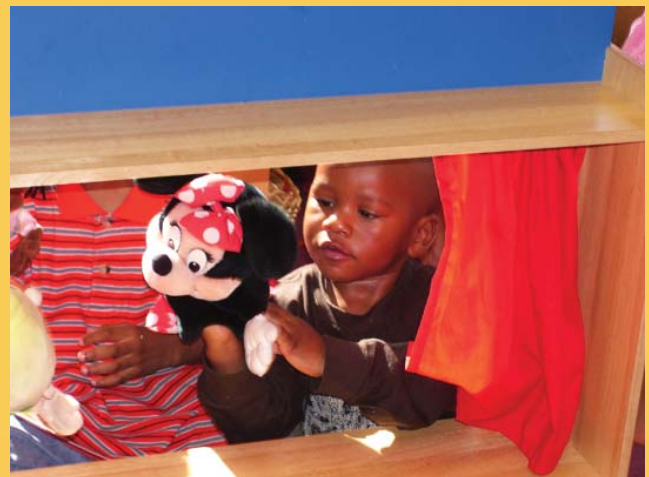
### ***An example of transformation through promising practices***

The Latino Family Literacy Program is a curriculum aimed at providing Latino parents with English language skills and support for parenting their children living in the United States while preserving the culture and traditions of their heritage. Through the use of children’s books, reflection, writing, and sharing with the class and at home, parents connect to their personal and cultural past. After reading the first book, *Nueva Sol*, a story about coming to the United States from Mexico, parents wrote and illustrated their story of coming to the United States. Creating compelling stories, many parents carefully sketched maps of their journey, pictures of their birthplaces, and wrote poems about their fears. One parent told of how she woke her mother in the middle of the night to say goodbye because she was leaving Mexico to go “Al norte”—the coyote had come for her. Another mother wrote of the pain she felt as she fled El Salvador leaving her youngest son behind with her parents.

Throughout the program, the parents were using language to transform their personal experiences and move into a new understanding of the responsibilities of their new life. The parent education classroom became a place of healing and renewal. A public reading was held with more than 80 people gathering as women read their stories aloud while husbands and children listened. Parents spoke of the strengthening of their relationships with their spouses as they engaged in intimate conversations about the choices they had made. They clarified what they wanted to pass on to their children from their culture and what they were willing to release. Many parents renewed their commitment to their dreams of education, economic stability, and citizenship.

Transformation through language is a powerful agent of change. We did not expect such a response; nor did we anticipate the need that our families had for healing. We believe that these changes were possible because our program faithfully follows and embodies what has been identified in our Parenting Partnership as a promising practice.

***--Alameda Family Literacy Program***



## Impact on Families

The evaluation of the partnership was primarily focused on understanding the effect of the Parenting Partnership on service delivery. Could focused technical assistance and training to the partners change the ways in which partners worked with families? The expectation was that improved service delivery would lead to improved outcomes for families. The partners provided different services to families and served families with various needs. This makes evaluation across the sites challenging. However, partners did agree at the outset of the initiative to utilize the Parental Stress Survey (PSS) (Berry & Jones, 1995) as a cross-site assessment tool. There were also two common questions asked of families at each site. The results are presented here. In addition to these measures, partners and families described successes in their own words. These stories are also presented in this section.

First, the PSS instrument is designed to measure stress in a parent-child system. The use of the PSS was described as challenging by the partners. However, partners did administer the survey to parents. Partners submitted a total of 307 client records. Of this total, 143 (46.6%) had matched pre-post surveys. One-hundred and four (72.7%) contained no missing items in either survey. A paired-sample test of means was used to test for significant changes in family stress from pre to post survey. In year 1 significant reductions in stress was noted for participants. In Year 2, reductions in stress trended downward, but did not reach statistical significance.

The two common questions in client surveys were:

Did parents report playing more with their children?

Did parents report more confidence in their parenting?

95% of parents (n=243) reported playing more with their children

91% of parents (n=257) reported more confidence in their parenting

In addition to these data, partners described many family successes. These included:

- Parents taking a more active parenting role
- Parents were able to complete their GED
- Consistent attendance at parent programs
- Improved behavior of children
- Improved spousal relationships
- Improved parent-child relationships
- Increased networking among families



### **A Mother's Thank You**

First, I want to thank everyone because I love the classes. Now I feel happy. When I started to attend the classes, I commented to Lili that this is the first time I could say I am a full time mother. I used to work and my mother would take care of my children. I was so frustrated and I did not understand why my children did not listen to me. With the help of the topics and discussion with parents in class, it made me see things differently. I can enjoy my time at home and most of all being a mother. My family has learned together. I have learned to be a better mother when I discipline them and they listen to me now.

--A parent



**“A Good Father”**  
by Vincent Cheng,  
4C’s of Alameda County



## Addendices

### **Appendix A Parenting Partnership Literature Review**

A summary of the literature review that informed the selection of promising practices for the Parenting Partnership conducted by First 5 Alameda County: [www.first5ecc.org/community/community-reports.htm](http://www.first5ecc.org/community/community-reports.htm)

### **Appendix B Parenting Partnership Promising Practices**

The Promising Practices Self-Assessment Matrix. Partnership organizations used this matrix to assess their implementation of promising practices, guide the development of training and technical assistance plans, and provide feedback to one another as part of case-based peer consultation. First 5 Alameda County: [www.first5ecc.org/community/community-reports.htm](http://www.first5ecc.org/community/community-reports.htm)

### **Appendix C Parenting Partnership Cohort Curriculum**

A description of the training topics covered in Parenting Partnership Cohort meetings. First 5 Alameda County: [www.first5ecc.org/community/community-reports.htm](http://www.first5ecc.org/community/community-reports.htm)

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