



First 5 Sonoma County Children and Families Commission
Summary of Grantee Accomplishments

Program Details

Contractor	Sonoma County Office of Education – Child Care Planning Council of Sonoma County (CCPC)
Program Name	CARES (Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Educational Standards)
Strategic Planning Goal Area (2006-2010)	Early Care and Education
Priority Outcome	Early childhood education will be of the highest quality
Pathways to Results Indicators (First 5 Sonoma County 2006-2010 Pathways to Results)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase in providers participating in professional growth ▪ Increase in ECE providers with California Child Development Permits ▪ Advancement on California Child Development Permit matrix
Amount of First 5 Sonoma County Funding	\$2,144,248
Additional Funding Received During First 5 Grant Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ \$419,000 – California Department of Education’s Staff Retention Program (AB 212) ▪ \$550,905 – CRET funds, supporting CCPC activities in addition to the CARES program ▪ \$325,562 – First 5 California matching funds
Terms of Grant	July 1, 2004 – February 15, 2011

About this Summary

This summary captures the set of accomplishments and lessons learned while implementing the CARES program from July 2004 to February 2011. These findings are derived from the multiple data sources, including:

- Progress reports submitted by CARES staff to the First 5 Commission of Sonoma County;
- Demographic data on the population served submitted to First 5 California for the State Annual Report in 2007-08, 2008-09, and 2009-10;
- The 2009 Sonoma County Early Childhood Education Workforce Survey;
- A Five Year Snapshot produced in 2010 by the Child Care Planning Council summarizing key program accomplishments; and
- Key informant interview conducted by LFA Group evaluators with program staff in January 2011.

This summary serves as a guide that can help inform both the CCPC’s future programming as well as the First 5 Sonoma County Commission’s future funding decisions.

Program Overview

Program Description

CARES (Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Education Standards) is a professional development program offering incentives, in the form of paid stipends and other supports, to early childhood educators pursuing higher education coursework, degree attainment, and new, renewed or upgraded Child Development Permits. The program supplies participants with a CARES advisor who meets with them individually to develop personal educational plans and to support them in finding relevant courses and workshops that meet their goals. In addition, the program provides a book loan program, hosts workshops on topics pertinent to early childhood educators, and convenes community round tables for information sharing and networking. The program has also offered support and incentives for Family, Friend and Neighbor caregivers to attend a variety of professional growth trainings and activities. Furthermore, the program has offered additional incentives to participants completing a Language and Literacy course, and to participants in the Pathways for Diverse Educators (DEE) project.

Administered by the Child Care Planning Council of Sonoma County (CCPC), the CARES program received First 5 funding from both the state and the county, and from the California Department of Education's Staff Retention Program (AB 212).

Program Theory

The 2009 Child Care Needs Assessment completed by CCPC found that a conservative estimate of 25,000 children were in need of child care in the county, including approximately 7,500 with special needs.¹ As of 2009, there were 800 child care programs serving families and their children in Sonoma County, however this number has since declined due to the economic recession. As of May, 2011, there are a total of 672 child care programs. The CARES program model is based on research which demonstrates that quality in child care is enhanced by provider education and access to resources and support networks. High quality teacher education, especially a degree program with specialized coursework in Early Childhood Education, has been shown to improve the quality of child care delivery.² However, child care providers face numerous challenges in pursuing further education, including low wages, full work weeks, and their own family commitments. Given these challenges, child care providers are in particular need of incentives and support to remain in the field and to pursue additional educational opportunities in order to increase the quality of care they provide.

Accomplishments During First 5 Grant Period

During its six years as a grantee of First 5 Sonoma County, the CARES program achieved its intended outcomes, benefitting both the specific participants of the program as well as the child care field as a whole. The following is a summary of the populations served during five years of the CARES program, as well as the program's major accomplishments and key challenges to implementation, from the grantee's perspective and according to the data sources available for this summary.

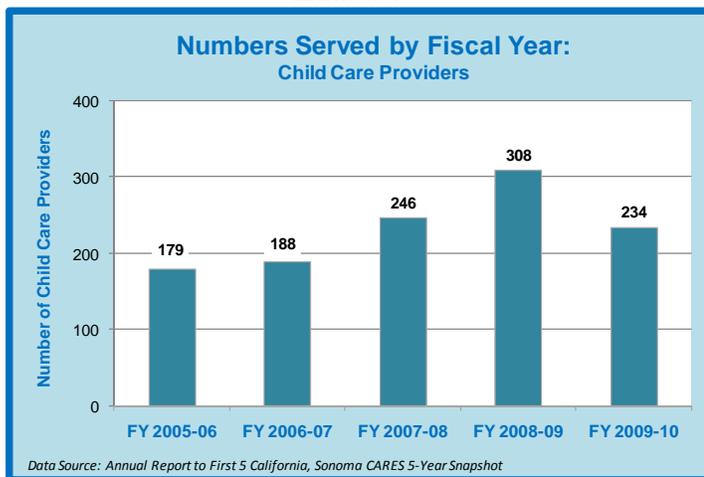
¹ 2009 Child Care Needs Assessment, Sonoma County Child Care Planning Council.

² Kreader, J et al. *Impact of Training and Education for Caregivers of Infants and Toddlers*. Research-to-Policy Connections No. 3. August 2005. Downloaded 3/17/2011.

Reaching the Target Population

CARES enrolled hundreds of child care providers while funded by First 5 Sonoma County. These numbers increased from the first two years to the subsequent three years, with a spike in year four, FY 2008-09 (Exhibit 1). Staff explains that the program has had steady growth and expansion from 2005-06 through 2008-09 due to program ramp-up and outreach, leading to increased community awareness and participation. Staff attributes the sudden drop in 2009-10 to the economic recession in Sonoma County, explaining that many child care programs had to close or lay off staff during this time. Furthermore, during the same time period, Santa Rosa Junior College – one of the primary sources in the County for higher education in the child care field – experienced significant reductions in funding, leading to fewer offerings in early childhood education courses.

Exhibit 1



While most providers served came from child care centers, nearly 20% were from family child care programs. In addition to those who successfully completed coursework, between 55 and 157 additional providers enrolled in the program each year, receiving support and guidance, and participating in professional development workshops even though they did not meet the requirements to receive a stipend.

Exhibit 2
Demographic Characteristics of Child Care Providers Served by Fiscal Year

	FY 2005-06		FY 2006-07		FY 2007-08		FY 2008-09		FY 2009-10	
	Count	Percent								
RACE/ETHNICITY*										
White	109	60%	118	63%	138	56%	191	61%	133	56%
Hispanic/Latino	54	30%	59	31%	90	37%	96	31%	84	35%
Asian	4	2%	4	2%	7	3%	7	2%	6	3%
Black/African American	6	3%	2	1%	4	2%	7	2%	3	1%
Alaska Native/American Indian	2	1%	3	2%	3	1%	6	2%	4	2%
Pacific Islander	1	1%	2	1%	0	0%	2	1%	2	1%
Other	8	4%	5	3%	7	3%	11	4%	9	4%
PRIMARY LANGUAGE										
English Only	119	66%	126	67%	153	62%	204	66%	147	62%
Spanish Only	33	18%	41	22%	63	26%	70	23%	67	28%
Spanish and English	15	8%	12	6%	17	7%	20	6%	13	5%
English and Other	5	3%	4	2%	7	3%	10	3%	5	2%
Other	7	4%	5	3%	6	2%	4	2%	2	2%
TOTAL NUMBER SERVED	179	—	188	—	246	—	308	—	234	—

Data Source: Child Care Planning Council CARES Program Data Tracking

* Note: Totals for ethnicity do not match total enrolled due to multiple entries possible per participant.

The program consistently served primarily White and Hispanic/Latino providers, reflective of the characteristics of the County overall (Exhibit 2).

One-third of those served were Hispanic/Latino and approximately one-quarter of all participants each year were Spanish-speakers. The percentage of participants whose primary language was Spanish grew from 18% to 28% over the course of the five years, as CARES hired a bilingual CARES Advisor, increased outreach activities to the Spanish-speaking population, and invested in its Diverse Early Educators project for Spanish-speaking providers. The DEE participants were provided with a designated SRJC faculty support person, tutoring, assistance with obtaining text books, and cohort meetings for peer support.

Major Accomplishments: Progress Toward Strategic Plan Indicators

In implementing the CARES program over the six years of their grant, the CCPC has worked towards meeting the three First 5 Sonoma County Strategic Plan priority outcomes that the program was intended to address:

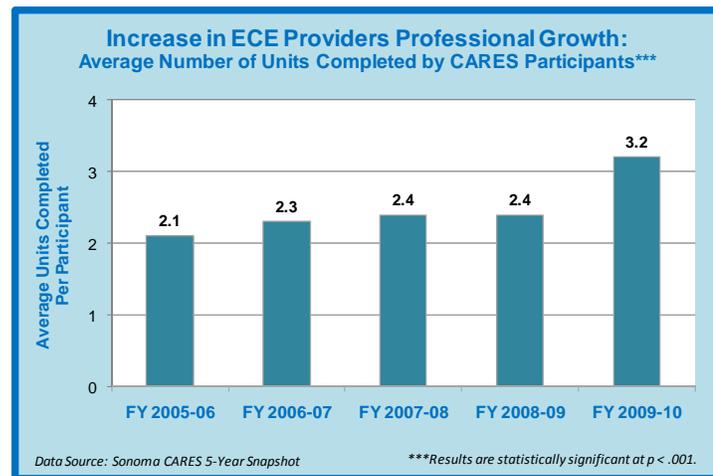
1. Increase in early child care providers participating in professional growth
2. Increase in early child care providers with care development permits
3. Advancement on state-issued development permit matrix

Results are highlighted below.

Increase in Provider Participation in Professional Growth

The program reduced barriers and provided incentives, and thus opened up opportunities for providers to participate in professional growth. CARES has helped to increase provider participation in professional growth. This is evident by the increase over time in the average number of units completed by participants (with the exception of the 09-10). Over the course of the First 5 grant period, the average number of units completed by participants rose from 2.1 in 2005-06 to 3.2 in 2009-10 (Exhibit 3). These results are statistically significant ($p < .001$) and suggest that the program has, over time, become more effective in their efforts to encourage early childhood education providers to complete a greater number of units.

Exhibit 3



As noted in progress reports submitted by CCPC staff, participants have shared comments further demonstrating the support that CARES has provided them in their efforts to develop their professional skills. For some, the stipends gave them the necessary funds to pursue education when they could not otherwise afford it. For others, the stipends allowed them to justify time off from work to enroll in courses. Several participants achieved degrees during these five years, including 19 providers who received an Associate degree, four who received a Bachelor's and two who received a Graduate degree. Research has shown that receiving a Bachelor's degree and specialized training

I am able to do school full time during the summer. If I did not receive the CARES stipend...I would need to work a second job in the summer and likely save money to pay back debt from summer over the school year.

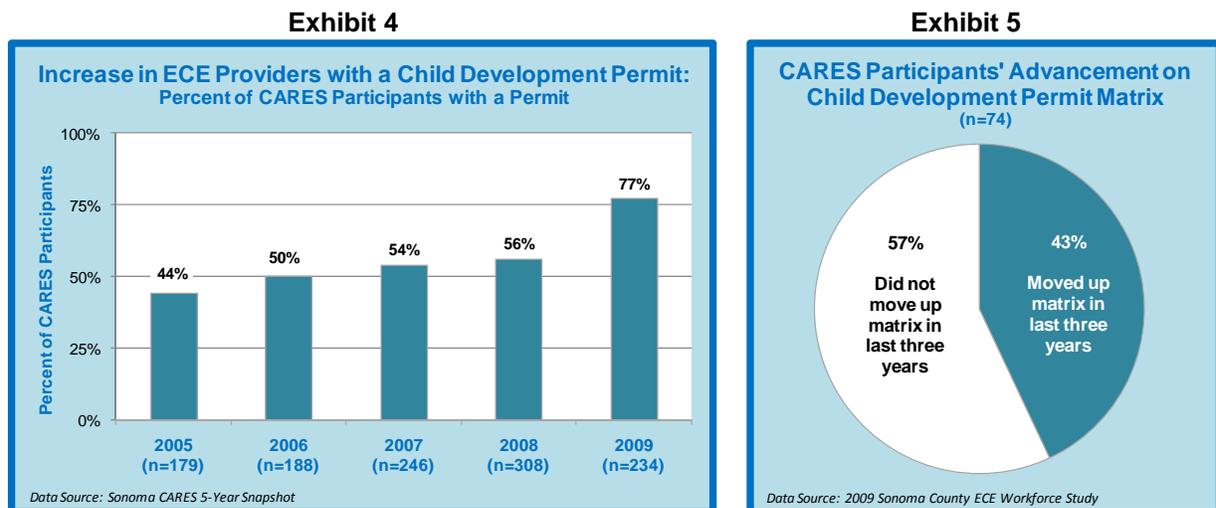
CARES Participant

in the child development field is especially important for teachers to effectively prepare young children for success in kindergarten.³

Increase in Number of Providers' with California Child Development Permits and Advancement on Child Development Permit Matrix

The program assisted participants in advancing on the Child Development Permit Matrix.

The California Child Development Permit is issued through the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. The permit enables a student to move along a career ladder that supports a hierarchy of professional goals and competencies relative to child care employment and leadership. As shown in Exhibit 4, even as the total number of CARES participants rose, the proportion of participants with a permit increased dramatically from 44% to 77% of those enrolled. In the final year alone, the program supported 96 participants in successfully applying for a permit.



Furthermore, results from the 2009 Sonoma County ECE Workforce Survey showed that, for those CARES participants who had already achieved a permit, nearly half (43%) were able to move up the permit matrix in the last three years, receiving the next level of permit (Exhibit 5).

Additional Accomplishments

In addition to making progress on the three specific priority outcomes for which they were funded in the First 5 Sonoma County 2006-2010 Strategic Plan, the CARES program has had success in other areas – from both a process and outcomes perspective – as described below.

The program provided tailored professional development for providers. Through one-on-one counseling sessions and individual professional development plans, the CARES Advisor supported each enrolled provider in determining and implementing their own unique plan. Using a mixture of coursework at local community colleges and the workshops provided by the CARES program, the Advisor could create a plan that took into account the individual aspirations of each participant. While many caregivers pursued Child Development and Early Childhood Education coursework, the educational plans also included general education coursework towards attainment of degrees. Of participants attaining degrees, half were in fields outside of Early Childhood Education, but were directly related (e.g. Human Development, Education, etc.). Staff explains that these tailored plans led to a unique sense of accountability as caregivers were being held to their self-defined standard.

³ Whitebook, M. 2003. *Early education quality: Higher teacher qualifications for better learning environments – a review of the literature.*

Spanish-speaking caregivers received valuable and targeted support through the Diverse Early Educators (DEE) project. The DEE program worked to ensure the availability of coursework in Spanish and provided 43 students with resources and support as they completed the requirements for their Child Development Permits and an AA degree in Child Development. Through the Santa Rosa Junior College, the DEE cohort of students received designated tutoring services and academic guidance from staff and Child Development faculty. The project covered the cost of books, enhanced tutoring, and connected students from the project with one another for peer support. Over the five years, 12 of these 43 participants (28%) achieved their AA degree.

Child care providers stayed longer in the field, and experienced pride and personal satisfaction, as well as an increased sense of professionalism, from participating in the program. As reported by staff, CARES enabled child care centers to retain staff by offering them opportunities to grow and progress toward personal goals, thereby keeping them engaged in their work. Especially during the recession, when many centers had difficulty granting raises, the CARES program provided alternative incentives for child care workers to stay in the field. With newer providers staying in the field longer, CARES staff has observed that both the level of education and years of on-the-job experience have increased in the overall child care provider population.

It encouraged me to learn more about the children I work with and helped me with ideas on how to guide them in all disciplines. I had worked in the field for over 20 years when I began taking classes. The money was definitely an incentive, but the education I received far outweighed the money that came with it. I took classes with my co-workers which gave us great ideas and ways to improve our program to the benefit of the children we serve.

CARES Participant

Key Challenges

Over the course of their First 5 Sonoma County grant, the CCPC reports having experienced a few key challenges in implementing the CARES program:

- **Many participants experienced challenges completing general education requirements in English and mathematics.** Often, participants were returning to school after significant time out of the educational setting, some without a positive previous experience. For these participants, explain staff, the general education requirements sometimes proved daunting. Through ongoing advising, the program sought to support these participants in completing this general coursework. Additionally, advising focused on addressing each individual participant's concerns and goals, tailoring a professional development plan to their capacity and interests.
- **Participants faced numerous financial challenges because of the economic recession.** The economic downturn impacted child care providers in Sonoma County directly and significantly. Centers lost families who could no longer afford child care, and some centers were forced to close, reduce staff, or postpone raises. While the CARES program saw countywide child care wages increase on average over the course of the program, individual participants did not necessarily see their own wages increase. Already in a low-wage field, providers did not always have the motivation to continue their education for potentially little or no subsequent increase in earnings. Some participants noted that the stipend did not cover all of their school expenses, let alone their living expenses. However, for the many people who did participate, the stipend often helped them overcome immediate financial concerns and provided a sense of satisfaction as well as personal and professional growth. Additionally, the program addressed economic concerns by developing a book lending library so participants did not incur the costs of course textbooks. Center Directors also saw the program as a way to support their staff in lieu of raises made impossible by the recession.

- **Providing coursework in Spanish proved a consistent challenge.** English Language Learners simply had fewer options in the county when seeking out appropriate coursework, workshops and materials. The program addressed this challenge by advocating for coursework and workshops in Spanish, developing its own materials in Spanish, and ensuring that the Advisor was bilingual. In addition, the program developed the Diverse Early Educators project, which connected bilingual staff and faculty at local colleges to students at their institutions. Through this project, the program also created a Spanish-speaking peer cohort where members could share their experiences and support each other through their unique challenges.

Lessons for Future First 5 Commission Investment

In their experience with the CARES program, CCPC and its community partners feel it has made a significant impact in increasing professional development in the local ECE community, and has learned what may help to ensure even more successful programming in the future. These lessons can inform future investments for the First 5 Sonoma County Children and Families Commission.

While the stipends are the core component of the CARES program, staff members have learned that the services surrounding the stipend – academic counseling, peer support, access to textbooks and tutoring – are also critical to participants’ success. As the CARES program prepares to move forward, staff plans to implement the following strategies to improve and expand the program:

- **Peer support:** The CARES program plans to expand their peer support components. Based on the success of the Spanish-speaking peer cohort, the program will begin to offer three facilitated additional cohorts for people at different stages in their educational and permit attainment. Also, the program will continue to expand other opportunities for peer support and networking through events and workshops.
- **Academic support:** The program will provide enhanced Academic Counseling, create study groups, connect participants with tutoring and expand their book-lending program. To increase the links between the program and the educational institutions where participants enroll, the program will combine the role of CARES Advisor with community college academic counseling.