

2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT

Published: June 2022

**COMIENZOS
BRILLANTES**
INICIATIVA PARA PROMOVER EL DESARROLLO INFANTIL

**BRIGHT
BEGINNINGS**
EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

An Initiative of the
Monterey County Children's Council

The Bright Beginnings Early Childhood Development Initiative: *Transforming Systems to Better Support All Children in Monterey County*

Transforming systems is an audacious goal. It takes a common agenda for the common good; collective action centered on race, equity, diversity, and inclusion; and an ever-deepening sense of community, connection, and compassion.

When it comes to the wellbeing of children and their families in Monterey County, we cannot fall short of audacious. The effects of the current COVID-19 pandemic and other natural disasters compound the longstanding disparities in health and wealth outcomes. Our youngest are most vulnerable to traumatic events like these, as they are in critical stages of development. They need a strong system of holistic supports to counter trauma and build resiliency that lasts a lifetime.

In 2020-2021, the collective spirit of the Bright Beginnings Early Childhood Development Initiative rose to the occasion, audaciously.

Systems Transformation in 2020-2021

A decade ago, we used the goalpost of “Kindergarten Readiness” as a measure of the wellbeing of young children. The further the Bright Beginnings Early Childhood Development Initiative moved into transforming the systems that support young children and their families, it became clear that instead of asking, “Are children ready for school?”, we needed to be asking, “Are our systems ready for children?”

In response, the First 5 Monterey County-led evaluation team that conducts the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment did something new: they developed the School Systems Readiness Assessment. Previously focused on primarily measuring the performance of children on standardized scales for cognitive, physical, and social-emotional development, it now also looks more broadly at how schools are ready to meet children where they are. (The assessment, scheduled for Fall 2021, was postponed due to COVID-19).

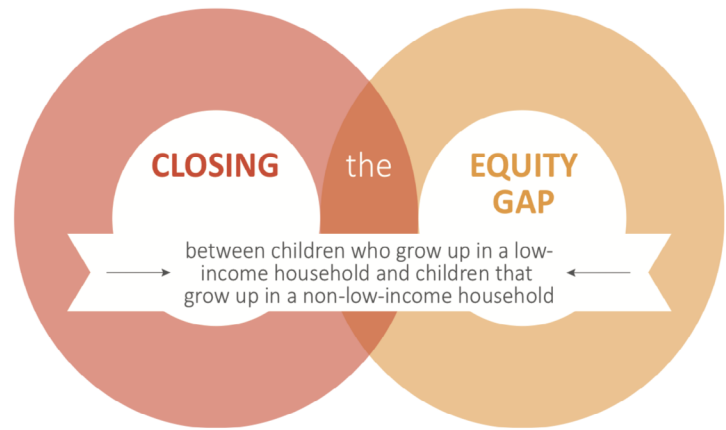
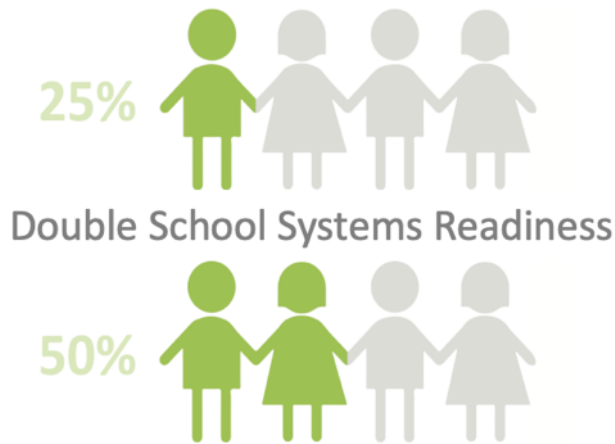
Within Bright Beginnings, we’ve adapted the [countywide strategic framework](#)¹ to reflect this shift, applying the equity-focused targeted universalism to defining the Initiative’s **overarching objective**:²

- *Universal Objective*: Change systems to double the number of children who are holistically supported so that they are healthy, their development is on track, and they are well prepared for kindergarten. Currently, it is assessed at 25% of children.
- *Targeted Objective*: Significantly reduce the gaps in school systems readiness between children in low-income households and children in non-low-income households.

1 Early Childhood Strategic Framework: www.brightbeginningsmc.org/strategic-framework

2 powell, john a., Stephen Menendian, Wendy Ake. [Targeted Universalism Policy & Practice](#). Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society. May 2019.

ITEM 1 – Targeted-Universalism for School Systems Readiness



Kindergarten Readiness

Looking at Readiness by the Numbers

School Readiness is measured by an assessment developed for the unique context of Monterey County. The Assessment was last completed in 2015 (then called the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment) and was completed every three years prior. It is based on the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP), providing a rating in four developmental domains, and included three tools: One, completed by teachers who have observed the child in the classroom setting. The second was a survey of parents to include their views on the readiness of the system and the experiences of their children prior to entering Kindergarten. The third was a survey for TK-K and early childhood educators on their views of the readiness of the early learning system they work in.

Since 2015, the assessment tools and processes have been re-evaluated to ensure appropriate focus on systems change, and on supporting early learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their early care and learning experiences before entering the school system, home language, or other contextual factors. This can lead to the design of better programs and systems to narrow the equity gap in levels of educational support and attainment. The new tool added a fourth survey for administrators on their views of the readiness of the early learning system and support for ECE, TK-K educators, and parents.

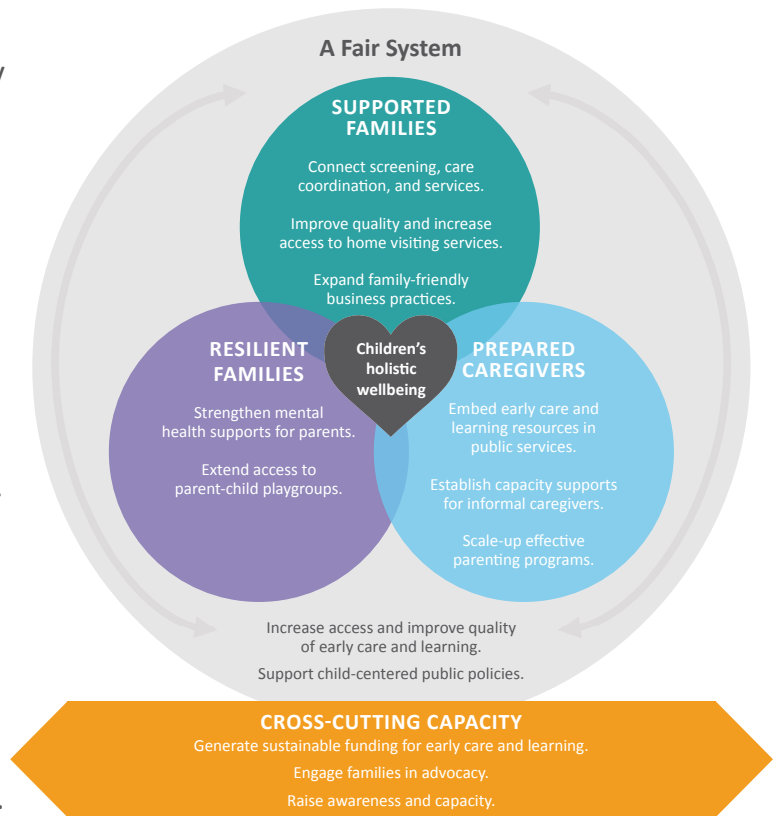
Due to the pandemic, implementation of the assessment was postponed. The next assessment with the new tool set is scheduled for Fall of 2022, and the report will be ready early in 2023.

The collective work of the Initiative is anchored in the Bright Beginnings **seven core principles, to ensure sustainability and co-powerment:**

1. Holistic view of children and families.
2. The power of interconnected community systems.
3. The rights of all children to access equitable opportunities.
4. Culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices.
5. Co-creating solutions.
6. A tenacious focus on results.
7. Informed by research.

The framework prioritizes strategies within four **drivers of influence in a young child’s life:**

1. A fair, equitable system of quality early care and learning.
2. Socially emotionally, and mentally resilient families.
3. Holistic and coordinated family supports.
4. Prepared caregivers that can appropriately respond to a child’s developmental needs.
5. Cross-cutting capacity building for sustainable funding, engagement, and awareness.



To transform systems, we must address all aspects that influence them: the structural aspects that lay above the surface, such as policies, practices, and resource flows, and the less tangible aspects that lay below the surface, such as relationships, connections, power dynamics, and mental models.³ We find that it is the latter that leads the way for the more visible and transformational change to happen. As such, within the Initiative, we seek to understand and communicate the needs of children, families, and the systems that support them, and uncover the root causes that keep disparities in place. We build networks, advocate for resources, and improve how we work together across disciplines and sectors to be more efficient and effective. Through that work, we ensure that our systems are ready to meet children where they are, so that the color of a child’s skin, their gender identity, the neighborhood they grew up in, or the jobs their parents have do not dictate the life-long outcomes of that child. We believe every child should and can have what they need to succeed.

What does systems transformation look like in our community? Below are highlights from the strategy-aligned change projects that are supported by the Bright Beginnings backbone team.

ITEM 3 – 2020-2021: Change Projects Supported by the Bright Beginnings Backbone

A FAIR SYSTEM

1.1 Access & Quality

- Salinas CAT: Preschool for All (also Mamas)
- Greenfield Early Learning Partnership & Kinder Festival
- Early Learning Network
- Child Care Accessibility Project
- COVID Response & Recovery

1.2 Public Policies & Practices

- Preschool for All (also Mamas)

RESILIENT FAMILIES

2.1 Parent Mental Health

- Monterey County Maternal Mental Health Task Force

SUPPORTED FAMILIES

3.2 Home Visiting

- Home Visiting Coordination Hub

3.3. Family Friendly Business

- Family Friendly Business Certification

PREPARED CAREGIVERS

4.2 Informal Caregiver Supports

- Family Friends & Neighbors Network

CROSS CUTTING

5.1 Sustainable Funding

- Assistance to state contractors (also A Fair System)

5.2 Advocacy

- Mamas de Salinas Abogan - Moms of Salinas Advocate (also Salinas CAT)

5.3. Capacity & Awareness

- REDI systems - centered in Race, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion

Fair System

Access and quality of child care.

Child-centered public policies.

KEY DRIVER ONE: A FAIR SYSTEM

A fair, equitable system of quality early care and learning.

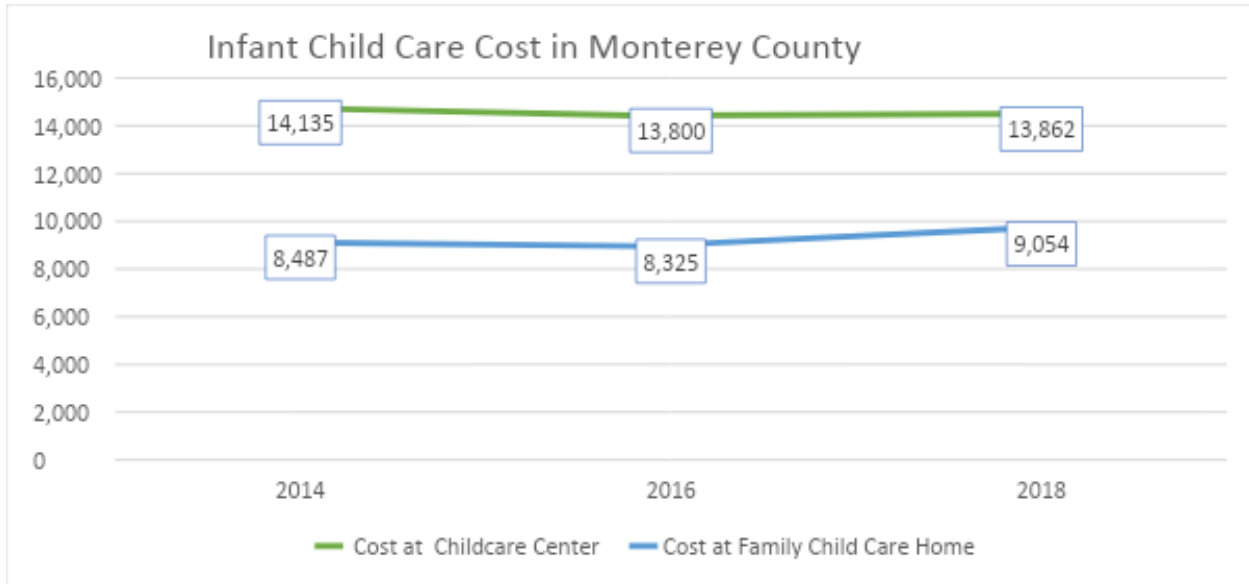
In 2020-2021, the Bright Beginnings backbone supported four change projects within the key driver, A Fair System:

- Child Care & Wellbeing COVID-19 Response & Recovery Coalition
- Early Learning Network
- Child Care Accessibility Project
- Greenfield Early Learning Partnership.

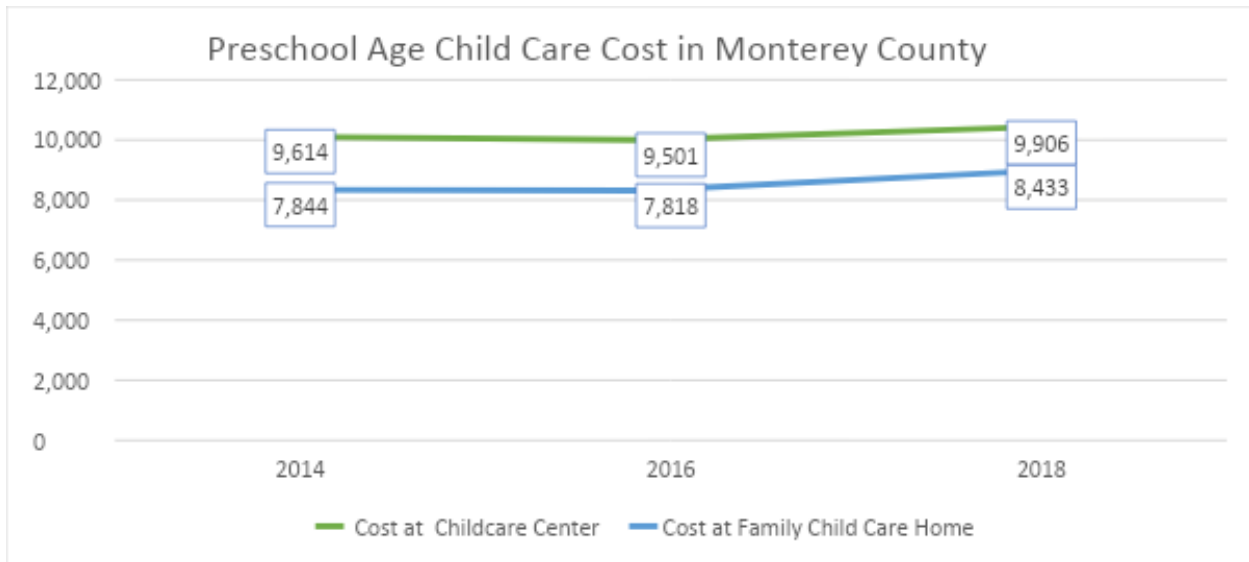
Access to Child Care

The cost of child care in Monterey County can be more than tuition to California State University, Monterey County. Infant and toddler care can close to \$14,000 a year. That is because child care is not funded in the same way as public TK-12 grade education. The cost burden is placed on the consumer instead of the general public. There is little room to cut costs of doing business, and public subsidies for families are limited.

ITEM 4 – 2014-2018: Infant Child Care Cost in Monterey County



ITEM 5 – 2014-2018: Preschool Age Child Care Cost in Monterey County

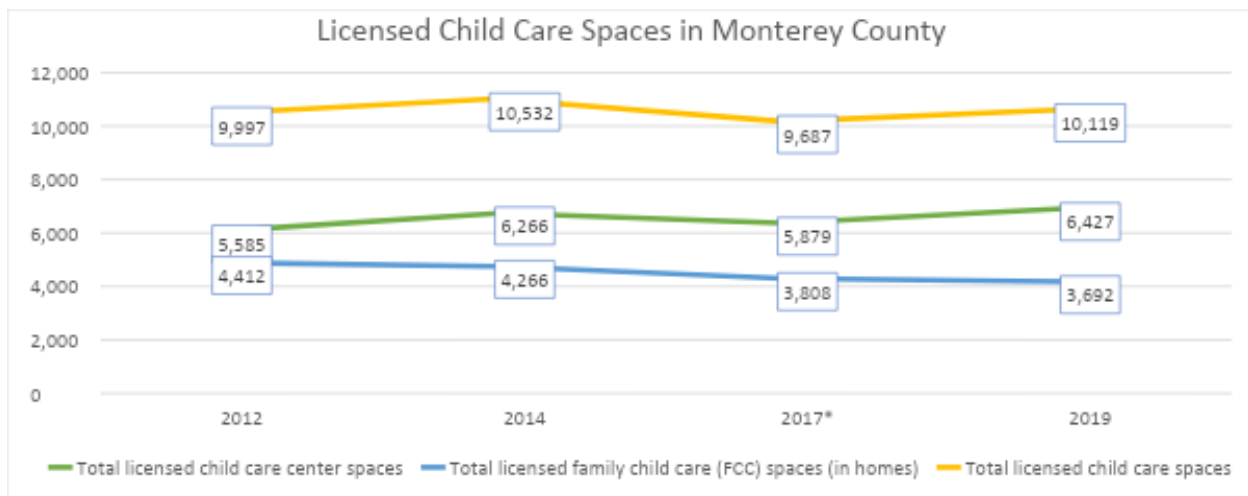


[Note: All data above is not yet available 2019 and 2020 as of January 21, 2022.]

Source: <https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/1849/child-care-cost/>

In addition to cost, availability limits access to child care for families. As we can see in the chart below, the number of licensed child care spaces, in both center- and home-based programs, has hovered around 10,000 for years, which does not meet the demand.

ITEM 6 – 2012-2019: Licensed Child Care Spaces in Monterey County



[Note: All data above is not yet available for 2020 or 2021 as of January 21, 2022.]

Source: www.rrnetwork.org

Child Care & Wellbeing COVID-19 Response & Recovery

Why: In a time of crisis, coming together to connect, share experiences and needs, and to mobilize resources is crucial.

What: A countywide coalition of those that serve young children coalesced at the onset of the pandemic. They continued to connect and mobilize, coming together virtually every other week.

Who: Coalition of dozens of child care, education, and service providers and advocates. Core planning team: Child Care Planning Council, Quality Matters, United Way, and MAOF Resource & Referral.

How: During the biweekly meetings, updated COVID statistics were presented (usually by representatives from the Health Department), updates on state and local mandates for child care and other settings were shared, and other announcements and reports from the field were made.

In between meetings, the Initiative's backbone and various partners:

- Provided support to private and subsidized child care centers as they navigated changing COVID guidance, opening and closures.
- Coordinated distribution of supplies from First 5 California, MAOF, United Way, and the County for child care and education providers.
- Organized and staffed vaccine clinics for child care providers and families in Salinas and Greenfield, administering 1,176 doses of the vaccine in partnership with Visiting Nurses Association. Of note was helping to break down barriers to access, including working with Centro Binacional el Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño to provide multi-lingual translation. See [KSBW](#) news coverage.
- Reported on needs for the early child care and learning field and families to policy-makers, in part based on data analysis support for the Community Alliance for Racial Equity's direct outreach and assistance to community members in highly impacted communities.

- Identified response and recovery needs of children and their families, co-developing the Pathway for Recovery for Children and Families 2021, a set of solutions to address the holistic needs of children and those that serve them. (See section on Sustainable Funding for more details.)
- Issued a [weekly resource eDigest](#)⁴ to Coalition members, and maintained the Coalition web portal for resources.
- Launched a joint “Memo to Early Educators,” with key information directed at teachers and administrators of child care centers and family child care homes, issued from the Child Care Planning Council, MAOF Resource & Referral, and Bright Beginnings.
- Collaborated with the Community Alliance for Racial Equity and Bright Futures to analyze thousands of conversations with community members, connecting families with resources based on their specific needs.
- Provided resources to the VIDA Community Health Workers: with First 5 Monterey County, offered reflective practice circles to support mental health and distributed children’s books; with First 5 Monterey County, TAMC and MyMuseum, distributed Shelter-in-Play boxes for children; provided diapers for families with children that were isolating with COVID, and provided initial support on data collection.

Child Care Accessibility Project

Why: Increase access to resources for finding child care, and for providers of child care and early education.

What: Centralized web-hub for all things child care: www.MontereyCountyChildCare.org

Who: Quality Matters, Child Care Planning Council, First 5 Monterey County, MAOF Resource & Referral, and United Way

How: Working as a team to identify content, primarily in response to COVID-related needs, the following happened:

- Upgraded and maintained up-to-date information on the website and troubleshoot barriers to referrals.
- Posted information on accessing emergency child care, PPE, vaccinations, and other COVID-related resources for families and early educators alike, tying content to the Coalition’s web portal, weekly eDigest, educator memos, and partner websites.
- In order to better support timely updates that meet the local needs, site management was moved locally from LA-based MAOF headquarters. Bright Beginnings backbone manages the site with team oversight. MAOF, United Way, and Bright Beginnings contributed financially to website maintenance.
- The website saw a steady increase in new users, ranging from about 250 new users to 1600, depending on the month.

Early Learning Network

Why: Provide a forum for school-based early learning teachers to connect across schools, share experiences and resources, and establish a common language and capabilities, including preschool, kindergarten and transitional kindergarten professionals.

Who: Monterey County Office of Education – Education Services

What: Meet quarterly with time to connect and presentations and hands-on workshops on best practices in the classroom, and emerging policies and practices.

How: Held three network meetings:

- Broadened from transitional kindergarten teachers to include preschool and kindergarten teachers.
- In response to feedback from participants, covered family engagement during distance learning, phonics and language toolkit, and Pre-K Glad.
- Had 21 distinct attendees, with an average of 15 attendees per meeting. Five school districts and other early childhood agencies were represented.

Greenfield Early Learning Partnership

Why: Ensure families know the importance of early childhood education and how to access it locally.

Who: Co-leads: Greenfield Unified School District (GUSD) and City of Greenfield.

What: Convene local early childhood champions to connect and share resources. Hold community events to support families with young children access resources and enroll in school-based early education.

How: Five core partners meet almost monthly to connect and share resources and understanding of needs, and to plan community events.

- Re-designed and renamed team to Greenfield Early Learning Partnership.
- Launched social media campaign for enrollment and immunizations. Navigating the application and access to immunizations is a major barrier for timely enrollment of children.
- Provided input to the City on Prop 68 grant for park innovation for early childhood needs.
- Presented to the school Board of Trustees on the work of the Partnership.
- Planned and held annual Kinder Festival at GUSD on April 28, 2021. This year the event was a drive through, with enrollment information and goodie-bags full of resources, books and shelter-in-play kits. A mobile immunization clinic was available. At least 250 cars rolled through, compared to an estimated 150 families attending the in-person event in previous year.

Resilient Families

Mental health supports for parents.

Access to parent-child play groups.

KEY DRIVER TWO: RESILIENT FAMILIES

Socially emotionally, and mentally resilient families.

In 2020-2021, the Bright Beginnings backbone supported the Maternal Mental Health Task Force within the key driver, Resilient Families.

Maternal Mental Health Task Force

Why: Support resilience and wellness of pregnant and parenting mothers and primary caregivers. Promote better access to services.

What: Strengthen a network of service providers and catalyze new partnerships. Raise awareness about maternal mental health amongst service providers and the general public. Build shared understanding of practices to support mothers with perinatal or postpartum mood and anxiety disorder (PMAD).

Who: Co-chaired by Monterey County Behavioral Health Staff.

How: 60 unique individuals representing at least 22 agencies attended 9 meetings, with an average of 21 participants per meeting and 10 agencies represented at each meeting.

At the meetings, they covered presentations from partners, Beacon Health Options, MomsWell, Door to Hope, MCHD Nurse Family Partnership home visiting program, planned actions, and shared resources.

In between meetings, they:

- Were awarded a collaborative grant from Central California Alliance for Health, with CSUMB as lead. With the funds, released asynchronous [online training series](#)⁵ with continuing education credits on effective assessment and treatment of woman with PMAD. At least 175 attended the workshops, and 80% reported increased knowledge and skills. (Grant spans fiscal years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 – more activities will be reported in the next annual report.)
- Developed a system to track referrals with Beacon Health Options.
- Held a training with Department of Social Services Women-Infant-Children program on maternal mental health, with 26 people attending (December 2020).
- Hosted 116 people virtually at the national 20/20 Mom Forum, building a shared understanding of maternal mental health across agencies and disciplines (March 2021).
- Supported activities to raise awareness of maternal mental health during Mental Health Awareness month in May:
 - Supported the adoption by the Board of Supervisors of a county resolution declaring Maternal Mental Health Awareness Week in May, sponsored by Monterey County Behavioral Health. Read more [here](#).⁶

5 Maternal Mental Health Online Training Series: mailchi.mp/brightbeginningsmc/maternal-mental-health-webinar-series

6 County Resolution on Maternal Mental Health: <drive.google.com/file/d/1XIHJN25MzmoJ-j9ymg6Lf4HzTI9OZ5t9/view>

- Launched Blue Dot Project social media campaign, “Making Over Motherhood.”
- Published local stories by Mamas in illustrated eZine: [“Out of the Shadows: Personal Stories of Pregnancy and Postpartum.”](#)⁷
- Circulated a monthly newsletter full of resources (available online since October 2021 [here](#)⁸).
- Helped promote the Parenting Connection postpartum supports. In 2020, the warmline maintained a steady stream of calls from parents at an average of 20 a quarter, and more than doubled the number of texts, maxing at 41 a quarter. They increased their referrals to providers from an average of about one a month to almost six a month. Their virtual support circles stayed steady with an average of 21 participants.



KEY DRIVER THREE: SUPPORTED FAMILIES

Holistic and coordinated family supports.

In 2020-2021, the Bright Beginnings backbone supported two projects within the key driver, Supported Families: 1) Home Visiting Coordination Hub; and 2) Family Friendly Business.

Home Visiting Coordination

Why: Coordinate early childhood related home visiting programs across agencies to better connect families with the services they need.

What: Convene home visitors to connect the local network of providers. Build a common understanding of best practices and capacities, including trauma-informed practices. Support care coordination and data sharing.

Who: Co-led with Monterey County Health Department.

How: Despite ongoing setbacks in staffing this project, revolving individuals representing four programs convened to refresh their interest in coordinating outreach, referrals, and capacity building across programs. In between meetings, they:

- Finalized 12-month action plan. Realized that a re-orientation needs to occur, due to turnover of staff at partner agencies and pandemic hiatus.
- The Health Department’s Nurse Family Partnership program partnered with Behavioral Health to integrate trauma-informed practices into their program, winning an innovation grant from California Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health over 2.5 years.
- Participated in F5CA Home Visiting grant technical assistance on data collection and sharing.

7 Out of the Shadows eZine: www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-a-h/health/behavioral-health/bh-home/information-resources/maternal-mental-health/stories-of-struggle-and-strength#item-1

8 Monthly Maternal Mental Health Newsletter: www.brightbeginningsmc.org/maternal-mental-health/

Family Friendly Business

Why: Foster relationships and relevance of all things early childhood in the business and economic development arena. Increase practices and policies that support working parents and all young children as the future workforce.

What: Grow the Family Friendly Business Certification program. Support favorable local and state policymaking. Network through business and economic development associations.

Who: Co-led with First 5 Monterey County.

How: Developed three-pronged approach to expanding the Bright Beginnings Family Friendly Business strategy (see Why and What). Action included:

- Joined the Salinas Valley and Monterey Peninsula Chambers, active in various committees.
- Participated actively in development of the County Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) development and Community Resilience Emergency Plan.
- Participated in the Monterey Bay Economic Partnership Regional Economic Summit. Attended US Chamber of Commerce's National Summit on Equality of Opportunity: Moving from Conversations to Real Action. Met with County's Housing Development Manager Anastacia Wyatt.
- Placed article in the Salinas Valley Business Journal [October 2020](#) issue,⁹ and ran ads in various issues for Family Friendly Business.
- Worked with Mamas de Salinas Abogan and the Central Coast Early Childhood Advocacy Network to advocate for state-level policies that support family friendly business practices.
- Certified the Monterey County Health Department as a Gold Standard Family Friendly Employer. A total of 32 agencies are certified.

Prepared Caregivers

Capacity supports for informal caregivers.

Embedded early care & resources in public services.

Scaled parenting programs.

STRATEGIC DRIVER FOUR: PREPARED CAREGIVERS

Prepared caregivers that can appropriately respond to the child's developmental needs.

In 2020-2021, the Bright Beginnings backbone supported the Family, Friends and Neighbors Network within the key driver, Prepared Caregivers.

Family, Friends & Neighbor Capacity Building

Why: As one of the primary sources for child care for many families, increase the ability of informal Family, Friend and Neighbor caregivers (FFN) to provide age and stage appropriate care and education to the children they serve.

What: Support FFN through playgroups, peer network, workshops, and other resources. Connect those who provide support to informal caregivers to improve services, share resources, and coordinate efforts towards a common goal.

Who: GoKids, First 5 Monterey County, CAPSLO and United Way

How: Both GoKids and CAPSLO continued virtual playgroups and other support to FFN:

- With funding and technical assistance from F5MC, GoKids supports about 120 FFN in Salinas.
- With funding from United Way and evaluation assistance from Bright Beginnings, CAPSLO supported 27 unique FFN in Greenfield and Gonzales. Greenfield added this year.
- As a part of the Response & Recovery efforts, United Way received grants from the Packard Foundation, Monterey County Community Foundation, and Financial Independence Initiative to provide resources to FFN in Monterey County. Collectively designed with F5MC, GoKids, and CAPSLO, they were able to provide cash assistance, iPads, and reflective practice to support these informal heroes of child care during the pandemic.
- As part of Women's Policy Institute, produced [a video](#)¹⁰ featuring local FFN and recognizing their role in supporting children in the Alisal Unified School District during pandemic-related distance learning.

Cross-Cutting Strategies

Sustainable Funding
Engagement & Advocacy
Awareness & Capacity

CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGIC DRIVER: CAPACITY BUILDING

Sustainability, co-empowerment and broad shared understanding.

In 2020-2021, the Bright Beginnings backbone supported strategies that cut across all drivers:

1. Sustainable funding for early childhood
2. Engaging parents in shaping policies, budgets and service design
3. Awareness raising and capacity building

Sustainable Funding for Early Childhood

Why: Consistent funding is key to stabilize programs that stabilize families with young children, whether through city, county, state, or federal funding.

What: Coordination and alignment of current public, private, and philanthropic funding for improved efficiency. Generation of new public, private, and philanthropic funding dedicated to early childhood.

How: The backbone team supports collaborative grant writing as described in the various projects (such as Home Visiting, Maternal Mental Health, and Family Friends and Neighbors), and advocates for local funding. This year, the highlight was the [Pathway to Recovery for Children & Families 2021](#),¹¹ a broad vision for what families with young children and the systems that support them need to recover from the pandemic.

Led by the backbone team, a set of comprehensive priorities for public investment in recovery for children and families was co-developed through ongoing feedback with the Child Wellbeing COVID-19 Response & Recovery Coalition, Child Care Planning Council, Children's Council, and Community Alliance for Racial Equity. Initiative partners and parents mobilized to County Budget Committee meetings and in the Board Chambers to express community need and public support of the recommendations.

The Pathway recommendations to the Board were ultimately narrowed to investments that align with the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) guidelines, to focus on child care capacity and affordability, unanimously voting to fund \$1.54 million in fiscal year 2021-2022, across three agencies – Monterey County Office of Education, First 5 Monterey County, and Bright Beginnings. Business leaders also called for funding for child care so that workers could return to the workplace.

This effort helped to transform our systems primarily by changing mental models so that more local public funding and resources flow into child care and education infrastructure. It was also an opportunity where needs voiced by the community influenced decision makers during a public budgeting process, thus helping to shift power dynamics. While this is one-time funding, we hope that this elevates the need to sustainably invest local resources in early childhood.

Engagement & Advocacy – Las Mamas de Salinas Abogan

Why: Connect parents for mutual support and to build capacity for engagement and advocacy. Support community ownership of policies, practices, and the flow of resources so that they reflect the needs of all families and young children. Grow community-based spheres of influence.

What: A consistent total of 13 mothers and community members in Salinas that care deeply about the wellbeing of young children, gathered as Las Mamas de Salinas Abogan 22 times to connect, learn about early childhood development, and plan their community outreach and advocacy work. The Mamas have quite a following on their social feeds (over 3000), where they offer light-spirited parenting support and resources and a place to connect more broadly.

In between meetings, they are very active, often collaborating with other community groups such as Padres Unidos, Mujeres en Accion, and others. Here are some examples of how various Mamas engaged in the community:

- Mobilized for the Census 2020 and participated in VIDA as a community health workers.
- Participated in Central Coast Early Childhood Advocacy Network, including the storytelling workshop, “Centering Children & Families at the Heart of Recovery” in September; Parent Power Summit in January; and 3 legislative visits.
- Provided public comment at County and City of Salinas budgeting processes.
- Helped form and participated in the AUSD Buckhorn Early Learning Center Parent Committee, spoke at school Board of Trustee meetings, and participated in the DLAC and LCAP processes.
- Supported AUSD early learning enrollment fair.
- Interviewed on Facebook radio segments to share how the Mamas share the importance of preschool for all, with “Mujer al Dia with Lupita G.” from La Preciosa, and with Valenzuela.
- Participated in Quality Matters Consortium and MCOE All In for Equity conference; Centro Binacional el Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño Language Summit; ACEs Resilience for the Community Santa Cruz County webinar; and BHC Healing Circles.

Awareness and Capacity

Why: Key to systems change is changing mental models, such as centering on race, equity, diversity, and inclusion, to ensure that child care and wellbeing is everyone’s business – not simply an individual family’s responsibility.

What: Continuous communications and learning.

How: In addition to project-based work, the backbone team issued [10 newsletters](#)¹² and ongoing social media (admittedly not nearly as popular as the Mamas). It conducts quarterly internal Continuous Quality Improvement cycles, understanding and learning from levers of and barriers to success, and looking for how projects can mutually reinforce each other (e.g., Mamas participate in activities of the Maternal Mental Health Task Force).

Backbone staff stay present in the community, actively engaging in: the Children’s Council, Child Care Planning Council, Quality Matter Consortium, Community Alliance for Peace, Bright Futures Steering Committee and Equity Task Force, and the Monterey County Immigrant Services Network of Empowerment (CISNE). They participate in state level meetings about state-funded programs and policy. They continue to develop their skills in collective impact and in centering race, equity, diversity, and inclusion, by participating in the Governing for Racial Equity learning series, the Office of Education’s All in for Equity conference, in the national StriveTogether Cradle to Career convening, Results-Based Facilitation training, and the First 5 Monterey County Infant Family Early Childhood Mental Health training series.

To support the Initiative’s growing scope, the Initiative added a needed 0.5FTE Program & Administrative Support position.

Looking Ahead: 2022 and Beyond

In 2020-2021, through some of the toughest times our world has collectively faced, the Bright Beginnings Early Childhood Development Initiative stretched and grew in ways previously unimagined. It moved forward with audacity against the odds, to bring attention and resources to young children and their families, to support the deep systems transformation we need for a just, equitable Monterey County.

Our community will likely be in some form of “response & recovery” mode due to the pandemic for years to come. Disruptions will normalize and our work, child care, and school schedules will adopt a new level of flexibility. In the wake of ongoing heightened stress and loss, supporting mental health is paramount through all aspects of our daily lives. The retention and attraction of teachers and health professionals is in a critical state from the early years onward. Child care has suddenly become everyone’s business, no longer only an individual family’s struggle to find and afford, but a matter of short- and long-term economic resiliency that must be addressed from a standpoint of the collective and as a common good for all.

We have established powerful, committed partnerships within the Bright Beginnings Early Childhood Development Initiative, full of champions ready to mobilize their resources, including their voices, for transformation. There are still large gaps between parts of our community and the systems that support it. Inspired by the work of the Mamas de Salinas Abogan, VIDA Community Health Workers, and the various networks we support, when we look ahead, we seek to answer: “How can we be a better bridge between community and systems?”

As scholar and organizer Angela Y. Davis shared, “It is in collectivities that we find reservoirs of hope and optimism.” Together, even in the hardest of times, we *can* transform the systems so that *all* children thrive. In fact, we already are on the way.

About the Initiative

In 2012, the Monterey County Children’s Council launched the Early Childhood Development Initiative. The name “Bright Beginnings” was added later, and it also became the steward of the early childhood related goals within the new Bright Futures Education Partnership cradle to career initiative.

In 2018, a countywide strategic framework was launched, “Together, preparing every child for life and school.” The framework defines a common goal and prioritizes the collaborative efforts of partners within the Bright Beginnings Early Childhood Development Initiative. The Bright Beginnings backbone, hosted by First 5 Monterey County, supports the Initiative by shepherding the strategic framework, supporting collaborative projects, and by providing continuous communications and accountability through a shared measurement system. It is guided by the Early Childhood Development Advisory Group and governed by the Children’s Council.

Ancestor, Community and Partner Acknowledgment

We respect the lives and wisdom of those that came before us and will come after us. We honor the indigenous people of Monterey County that have stewarded these lands for thousands of years, from the Ohlone, Costanoan, Rumsen, Mutsun, and Esselen tribes. We acknowledge those amongst us that have been forcibly removed from their native lands and traditions. We uplift the voices that have been and continue to be oppressed and excluded. We uphold the equal rights and equitable opportunities for people of color, women, and LGBTQ+ people. We care and advocate for *all* children of Monterey County.

The Bright Beginnings Early Childhood Development Initiative is an ever growing and evolving initiative. It would not exist without the many partners, leaders and followers that guide, fund and do the work in our community. While only a partial list has been captured here, we are grateful for the commitment of all.

MONTEREY COUNTY CHILDREN'S COUNCIL LEADERSHIP

Elsa Jimenez - Monterey County Health Department (Council Chair)

Edward Moreno - Monterey County Health Department (Initiative Co-Chair)

Francine Rodd - First 5 Monterey County (Initiative Co-Chair)

BRIGHT BEGINNINGS BACKBONE

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Cristina De Orta - Program Support

Iris Gamez - Communications & Community Engagement Coordinator

Laura Keeley-Saldana - Early Learning Systems Program Manager

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY GROUP

(* indicates Bright Futures Steering Partner)

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Alma Cervantes – Building Healthy Communities

Laura Dunn - Carmel Unified School District

Dana Edgull - Behavioral Health

Claudia Gomez - Door to Hope

Eliza Gomez - MCOE - Quality Matters

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Ella Harris - Monterey County Health Department

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Sarait Martinez - Centro Binacional

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DeeDee Perez-Granados - CSUMB
Ginger Pierce - Child Abuse Prevention Council
Angie Ramirez - CAPSLO
Laurie Ramirez - Monterey County Office of Education - Child Care Planning Council & Quality Matters
Maria Ramirez - Go Kids, Inc.
Beth Reeves-Fortney - First 5 Monterey County
Francine Rodd* - First 5 Monterey County
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Josh Warburg - Bright Futures
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