

March 23, 2021

Chris Woods  
San Joaquin County Human Services Agency  
102 S. San Joaquin  
Stockton, CA 95202

Dear Chris,

*Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence and making sure that impact lasts in your absence. Sheryl Sandberg*

After almost 21 years, I'm hoping I've made an impact that will last in my absence. The last day of my most incredible journey of my life – working at First 5 San Joaquin, will be December 3, 2021.

It's impossible to recount the stories, memories, and results of these years, but some stand out:

- The grocery store manager who wouldn't press charges against a mom who stole some diapers if she called 211
- The little boy who wanted carrots instead of a cake after learning about fruits and vegetables at a home visit
- The post-partum mom with depression who was comforted by books from a literacy program in Stockton
- The many planning meetings for a new insurance program for children that didn't qualify for other coverage
- The dental hygienist who commuted five hours a day, several days a week, because she loved her job
- The agency staff who got excited at our *Evening of Thanks* event because she got another colleague's business card (even though the true highlight of the evening was playing "Partridge Family Greatest Hits")
- The High 5 Awards posted proudly at agency offices that staff made sure I saw when visiting
- The countless home visits, preschool and summer bridge visits, and agency site visits filled with family engagement, child learning, and excitement from parents about our programs
- The continuum of services offered for CalWORKs families, the myriad of 'WORKs' programs
- The COVID vaccine clinics – seeing 700 people receive the vaccine over a three-day period

Each job I've held at the County has been an incredible experience, from my first job at Public Health working as a case manager with teen parents, to being a therapist at the outpatient clinic at Mental Health



**Talk. Read. Sing. Draw. Play...Everyday!**

**COMMISSIONERS**

Tony Anderson  
Zienna Blackwell-Rodriguez, DNP, RN, PHN  
Susan de Polo

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Lisa Vela  
Miguel Villapudua  
Chris Woods



Services, and returning to Public Health as the Program Coordinator of Adolescent Programs. At first I couldn't understand why I spent so much time on childcare committees when so few of our teen moms used licensed childcare providers. As with much of life, it made sense later.

My time at Public Health helped me realize that my dream job was working as a program officer at a private foundation and seeing programs start up and grow. But one needed to come to San Joaquin because I didn't like to commute. And soon after, a colleague handed me THE job announcement and told me, "This is you!"

While at First 5, I've had the privilege of being mentored by many amazing and wise leaders. I was hired by David Baker and Trish Huarte-Pechan (County Administrator and Assistant County Administrator). My friends were concerned because they didn't think I could stay serious through an entire interview. But I did, and then experienced cognitive dissonance when David cracked a joke. David and Trish taught me a lot about critical thinking and exposed me to the system of the County. A year later came Manuel Lopez and Rosa Lee (new County Administrator and Assistant County Administrator). Manuel taught me about expecting high standards and Board Letters. Rosa taught me a lesson that I carry with me and have been able to share with many as they ask, "Who did you pick as your successor?" She taught me that succession planning isn't about a person, but putting the systems in place so the next person can walk in and lead seamlessly.

In 2010, First 5 moved to HSA, which benefitted children and families throughout the county. Under the leadership of Joe Chelli, I learned about "setting the table" before jumping into an issue (I jump a lot). With Mike Miller, I received many crash courses on the legislative process. With Tony Rocha, I learned that even if someone isn't an expert in an area, they can bring new insight to program staff. And finally, from you Chris, I learned to think in new ways, with your questions that always bring a fresh perspective. You are wise, astute, and you balance leading an agency with heart, mind, and soul. All my mentors and bosses have taught me so much, and I'm grateful.

I have worked with 27 Commissioners in my almost 21 years. Each brought a different perspective on the mission of First 5. Each asked questions that helped me, and the community, do better. Each meeting, whether tense over funding decisions or full of joy because we heard about the impact of a program, helped me grow. Again, grateful.

Thank you, Board of Supervisors, for your support. Thank you for saying yes to our contracts that allowed over \$215 million to be invested in the community, and thank you for caring about children and families.

I'm incredibly grateful to work alongside smart and passionate staff. I love making magic with them. The next Executive Director is incredibly fortunate.

I will also miss my fellow First 5 Executive Directors, especially colleagues in the Sacramento Region. They are my family. The First 5 Network in California is filled with change agents, and services for children and families are more effective because of this powerful network.

For the days when I was tired, I had colleagues that provided encouragement to keep me going. They have been more than colleagues, they have become friends. I'm also incredibly appreciative of the community – from parents on resident councils, to seniors advocating for housing. This is my home, and I continue to fall in love with it. And finally, our funded programs, our partners. They are first class all the way – fierce advocates for children and families. The positive outcomes that have occurred in children and families over the years – it's because of all of them.

I have been in awe of this community during COVID. We have seen great damage: deaths, illness, unemployment, and emotional impact on children and families. And we have seen creativity, new passion, persistence, and an amazing resolve in our community to support each other in new ways. Gratefulness continues.

And what's next for me? Sleeping in, taking walks, reading, binging on tv and movies, and fixing up the house. Volunteer work that doesn't involve a board. Family time. Of course, more cruises. And living each day with profound gratitude.

Sincerely,

*Lani Schiff-Ross*

Lani Schiff-Ross, LCSW  
Executive Director

C: San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors  
Manuel Lopez, Interim County Administrator  
Jay Wilverding, County Administrator  
First 5 San Joaquin Children and Families Commissioners