

June 2021

First 5 San Joaquin

## ***Raising Quality!* IMPACT 2020 Family, Friend, and Neighbor Initiative**

Many families use Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) childcare as it is often more affordable and offers more flexible hours compared to licensed childcare. In 2020-2021, First 5 San Joaquin (F5SJ) invested in *Raising Quality! IMPACT 2020: Family, Friend, and Neighbor Initiative*, an initiative aimed at enhancing the quality of care provided by grandparents.

This evaluation report documents implementation and early impacts of the *Raising Quality! IMPACT 2020 Initiative*, as well as how it can be improved in the future.



### **Executive Summary**

Many families rely on Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) childcare, or informal care, as it is often more affordable and offers flexible hours compared to formal childcare. Grandmothers are the most commonly used type of FFN provider.<sup>1</sup> Data show that since the COVID-19 pandemic, 40 percent of children who were previously in formal childcare are now cared for by FFN providers.<sup>2</sup>

In 2020-2021, First 5 San Joaquin (F5SJ) invested in an initiative – *Raising Quality! IMPACT 2020: Family, Friend, and Neighbor Initiative (Raising Quality!)* that is aimed to enhance the quality of care provided by grandparents. Three organizations received funding to provide resources to grandparent providers in the African American, Latinx, and Southeast Asian American communities. The goal of this funding is to support grandparent providers and enhance the quality of care they provide to their grandchildren.

This evaluation report documents implementation and early impacts of the *Raising Quality!* initiative for F5SJ contractors and grandparents during late 2020 and early 2021. Data were collected to document participant characteristics and experiences with the resources and support available through *Raising Quality!*, as well as how the initiative can be improved in the future. Recommendations from the evaluation include:

### **Recommendations**

- Expand *Raising Quality!* to reach more grandparents
- Continue to increase grandparents' access to age-appropriate play materials and resources
- Encourage greater engagement from parents as well as grandparents
- Prioritize in-person opportunities for grandparents to meet, socialize, and share learnings when the pandemic eases
- Work to ensure that *Raising Quality!* programmatic elements and implementation timelines align with contractors' needs

<sup>1</sup>Susman-Stillman, A., & Banghart, P. (2008). Demographics of family, friend, and neighbor care in the United States. New York: Child Care & Early Education Research Connections.

[www.researchconnections.org/location/14337](http://www.researchconnections.org/location/14337)

<sup>2</sup> Bell Policy Center (March 2021)

<https://www.bellpolicy.org/2021/03/16/informal-child-care-providers>

## Background

Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) childcare providers, who are commonly grandparents, play an important role in meeting family childcare needs. Many families rely on these informal care providers because they tend to be more affordable and convenient than formal childcare. Families also choose FFN providers because they have similar backgrounds and experiences such as shared language, culture, and values. Families who are low-income are most likely to use FFN care.<sup>3</sup> Data shows that since the COVID-19 pandemic, 40 percent of children who were previously in formal childcare are now cared for by FFN providers.<sup>4</sup>

The First 5 San Joaquin (F5SJ) *Raising Quality!* IMPACT 2020 Family, Friend, and Neighbor (*Raising Quality!*) Initiative is designed to enhance the quality of care provided by grandparents. Funding was allocated to three community-based organizations (contractors) to provide services to grandparent providers in several high need communities: African American, Latinx, and Southeast Asian Americans. The goal of this funding is to support grandparent providers and enhance the quality of care they provide to their grandchildren.

This evaluation report documents the implementation and early impacts of the *Raising Quality!* initiative on F5SJ contractors and grandparents during late 2020 and early 2021. Specifically, it highlights the characteristics of *Raising Quality!* participants and participant experiences with the resources and support available through *Raising Quality!*, as well as how the initiative can be improved in the future. Findings are informed by interviews with grandparents as well as F5SJ contractors and staff. Program data in the Hubbe data system was also included. For a full description of evaluation methods, please refer to the technical appendix.

## **F5SJ staff provided training and technical assistance to increase the capacity of contracted organizations to serve grandparent providers.**

Three organizations (APSARA, El Concilio, and Mary Magdalene Community Services) were funded to support grandparents to enhance the quality of their care. To orient these organizations to the newly established *Raising Quality!* initiative, F5SJ staff provided a range of training and technical assistance. One F5SJ staff member stated, "Although some contractors come in with early childhood education understanding, some don't have that, so we are trying to make sure they have as much current information as possible. That's how we're continuing to build capacity." Training topics included the following:

- Overview of *Raising Quality!*
- How to administer the ASQ and ASQ-SE screening system
- How to implement the Raising A Reader book bag program
- How to write Quality Growth Plans
- Fiscal reporting
- Data entry

Overall, contractors reported these trainings were helpful to get a deeper understanding of the initiative and expectations as a grantee. One contractor shared, "The trainings have been amazing. I've learned a lot. Cathy has done a really, really good job." Another staff person stated, "I think Cathy is very

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<sup>3</sup>Packard Foundation (November 2020)

<https://www.packard.org/insights/perspectives/centering-family-friend-and-neighbor-care-in-the-early-learning-system/>

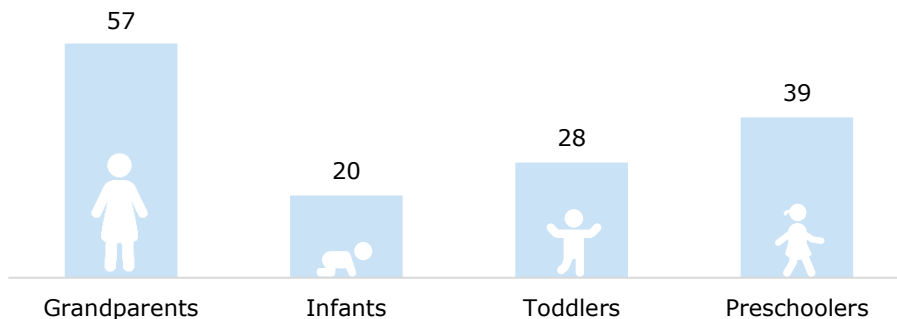
<sup>4</sup> Bell Policy Center (March 2021) <https://www.bellpolicy.org/2021/03/16/informal-child-care-providers/>

thorough, and she always says, 'If you don't understand something, call me.'"

## Nearly 60 grandparents have enrolled in *Raising Quality!*.

From its conception, *Raising Quality!* was designed to reach diverse racial and ethnic communities to support families with unique challenges. According to the Hubbe data system, as of June 2021, 57 grandparents were enrolled, including 27 Cambodian, 17 African American or Black, and 13 Latinx grandparents. In total, these grandparents cared for 87 children including 20 infants, 28 toddlers, and 39 preschool age children (Exhibit 1).

### Exhibit 1. *Raising Quality!* Enrollment



Contractors used creative ways to reach and enroll grandparents. This included outreach through locations where grandparents frequently visited such as faith-based communities, parks, grocery stores, and libraries; through schools and community-based organizations, as well as "in reach" to families who were already participating in an existing program or service. Contractors shared some of the most successful outreach strategies included:

- Targeting grandparents who were already familiar with agency,
- Encouraging "word of mouth," and
- Promoting the program supports.

Despite contractor persistence and creativity in outreach strategies, there were some challenges. First, due to COVID-19, most efforts were confined to telephone rather than in-person outreach, making connections with potential participants difficult. Second, while F5SJ had shared program details in advance of outreach, one contractor had difficulty describing the purpose of the program to potential participants and expressed that it would have been helpful to have all trainings conducted in advance of outreach.

## Grandparents expressed childcare needs as well as ways in which contractors provided concrete solutions to enhance the quality of care.

Different racial and ethnic communities bring unique assets and insights to childcare, but they also may face substantively different barriers. For example, one contractor staff person explained, "We work with many migrant families who may be monolingual ... We have grandparents who didn't go to school and don't know how to read. We encourage them to just look at books and talk about what's in the book. That is already encouraging." For grandparents with limited traditional education, contractors emphasized the importance of engaging with children, frequent verbal interaction, and non-educational screen time. Many grandparents engage in story telling with children and can pass on family songs that non-familial providers would not know.

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**"I'm calling parents that are working, and I'm asking them, 'Hey, do you have kids? Who's watching them? Any chance grandpa is watching them? Because we have a program that can help.'"**

**–Contractor**

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However, speaking English provides easier access to educational institutions and helps to navigate the system of early childhood services. Another grandparent educator emphasized, “Many of our families do not speak English at home. They don’t understand the school, the school regulations, how to work with the school, or the relationship with the parent and the school.” One important role contractors play in this initiative is to support grandparents to better prepare their grandchildren for school and be able to access additional supports (e.g., Help Me Grow) as needed.

The challenges grandparents described in providing quality care for their grandchildren conveyed some common themes. Grandparents across contractor agencies spoke about: the difficulty of increased screen time, the varying numbers of children at different ages under their care, social and developmental challenges, behavioral and disciplinary concerns, and a lack of age-appropriate play materials.

Common barriers to quality care grandparents identified included:



Increased Screen Time



Social/Developmental Challenges



Behavioral/Disciplinary Concerns



Age-appropriate play materials

Importantly, contractors also provided strategies to grandparents for overcoming these challenges including how to limit screen time or incorporating more educational games and content, providing information about key developmental benchmarks, referring grandparents to appropriate service connections, and connecting them with options for age-appropriate play materials.

### Contractors provided a range of virtual services to grandparents.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, contractors provided services virtually to grandparents who participated in *Raising Quality!*. This included dropping off materials such as personal protective equipment, oral health kits, and the Raising A Reader book bags. They also hosted virtual meetings and workshops with grandparents via Zoom, FaceTime, and conference calls. One contractor said, “We did a workshop on oral health and it was really exciting to have the grandparents join in and learn about what oral health is. The next day, one of the grandparents texted [us] a confirmation that she set up an appointment for her grandkid.”

Contractors also referred grandparents, both within and outside their agencies, for a range of issues, including<sup>5</sup>:

Immigration services



Developmental concerns



Accessing low-cost food



COVID-19 vaccinations




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**“My granddaughter likes to play on the phone, but now I spend more time reading with her instead.”**

**–Grandparent**

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<sup>5</sup> Children ages 0-5 were not eligible for a vaccine at the time of this report. Vaccination access here refers to the needs of grandparents or other adult family members.

One contractor shared, “We help them make doctor and dental appointments for their grandchildren... And we also refer them to the COVID-19 outreach and education program. Because we were able to help make the appointments, I believe 12 of the grandparents got the vaccine.” Finally, contractors provided grandparents with important emotional support during stressful experiences of the pandemic.

COVID-19 made implementing *Raising Quality!* challenging, particularly with regards to grandparent’s comfort and familiarity with virtual service platforms. One contractor shared, “Right now, everything is done on the phone. But the challenge that we face is that the population we work with is a low literacy, low tech-savvy type of community. They’re not familiar with FaceTime or Zoom or Google Hangout or any of the technology.”

### **Grandparents understood program goals and developed trusting relationships with staff who support those goals.**

To help ensure their motivations for participating could be addressed by the initiative, grandparents were asked if they knew what the initiative was trying to accomplish. Grandparents described the program in different ways that conveyed they understood the initiative’s purpose and wanted their grandchild to benefit from its key aims. Some of the things they mentioned wanting to gain from the program included:

- Learning how to better support children,
- Obtaining learning materials, and
- Preparing children for preschool.

After enrolling in the program, grandparents quickly formed important partnerships with their educators. One grandparent explained, “It’s about knowing that there is support. That there’s somebody out there that has more experience. When it’s just me [with] so many kids – I need backup!” Similarly, grandparent educators explained how they approach instructing grandparents and the importance of recognizing grandparent’s own expertise. “I don’t go in saying ‘Okay, I think your child needs this’, because *I don’t know your child*. You know your child, so you tell me what it is that you’ve observed... that I can help you with.”

Grandparents developed trusting relationships with staff and reported they are helpful, responsive, and easy to talk to. These are key foundations for successful instruction. One grandparent shared, “I understand [the grandparent educator] and she understands me. We are working together, and then I work with my son and his wife. We are all working together to improve [my granddaughter’s] education.” In addition to sharing advice and tips for the family, contractors provide learning and play materials to address the needs grandparents have identified.

### **Grandparents learned new strategies to engage with their grandchildren.**

Once contractor staff build relationships with grandparents, they are trusted to share their knowledge about childcare. Contractors shared tips on how to promote reading, increase child verbal skills, and recognize important developmental benchmarks. When asked about the types of activities they had been learning about from grandparent educators, one grandparent described, “We talked about being able to read to them, trying to set up the ABCs, to get coloring down. I

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**“It’s about knowing that there is support. That there’s somebody out there that has more experience. When it’s just me feeling [with] so many kids – I need backup!”**

**–Grandparent**

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learned there are [educational] television programs besides the cartoons with kicking and fighting.”

One of the most successful components of the program was Raising A Reader. Many grandparents did not previously have age-appropriate books in their homes, but the initiative provided high-quality, culturally-appropriate reading materials for children. Similarly, grandparents noted the increased reading time they are incorporating into their daily routines with children. One grandparent shared, “My grandkid now reads three to four times per day. They are interested in touching the book and playing with the book. I also enjoy it too.”

This trusting relationship with grandparent educators provides F5SJ-tested tips for quality care and changes the way families support children over time. As one contractor shared, “Encouraging somebody to read to their grandkids or to even spend quality time with their grandkids, that creates a lifetime impact on the family... it doesn’t just change the way that the grandparents interact with the child, but the way that the actual parents interact with the child, too.”

### **Opportunities to improve *Raising Quality!***

F5SJ staff, contractors, and grandparents identified many strengths and benefits of the services and support provided through the *Raising Quality!* initiative. The following recommendations can support F5SJ and participating contractors to enhance the quality of care provided by grandparents and in turn, meet the needs of families with young children throughout the county:



#### **Expand *Raising Quality!* to reach more grandparents**

F5SJ’s budget for the upcoming fiscal year includes increased funding for *Raising Quality!*. To expand the program’s reach, F5SJ could consider growing new partnerships to serve families who could benefit from the program. As demonstrated in this first year of implementation, partnerships with community organizations have been a crucial component of program success. Community organizations that work with families living in rural areas, families who have recently immigrated to the United States, and families who are monolingual in languages other than Spanish and Khmer could serve as key partners in program expansion. Given that many infants and toddlers are cared for by family members due to the high cost of center-based care, working with grandparents offers a unique opportunity to ensure the care environment for these young children is as well-resourced as possible.



#### **Continue to increase grandparents’ access to age-appropriate play materials and resources**

Ensuring that grandparents have access to and knowledge about the evolution of children’s needs throughout the stages of development is vital to providing quality care. To complement the rich knowledge that grandparents bring to their child’s learning environment, contractors could continue to provide individualized, culturally appropriate information about fostering healthy development in children under their grandparent’s care. This might include providing resources about the stages of development; working with grandparents to determine how to utilize toys and games already in the home based on a child’s age; and continuing to support the purchase of age-appropriate materials with program funds. Additionally, contractors can continue to work with grandparents to develop strategies to replace screen time with activities that promote healthy social-emotional development.

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**“There’s nothing like reading to your kids [with characters] that look like them and understanding the concept in your culture.”**

**–Grandparent**

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### **Encourage greater engagement from parents as well as grandparents**

Contractors highlighted the intergenerational benefits of the IMPACT program, noting that “[these learnings] don’t just change the way that the grandparents interact with the child, but the way that the actual parents interact with the child, too.” While building relationships and rapport with grandparents is of primary importance for the success of the program, parents play a crucial role in a child’s continued learning and the consent of a legal guardian is often required for service referrals. F5SJ and contractors could consider expanding program strategies to engage parents. For instance, contractors might consider hosting monthly social gatherings for the entire family to attend; setting goals with both grandparents and parents present; and having occasional one-on-one meetings with parents to ensure their priorities for their child’s development are included in quality growth plans.



### **Prioritize in-person opportunities for grandparents to meet, socialize, and share learnings when the pandemic eases**

Grandparents and providers described the significant impact of COVID-19 on the program’s implementation. When possible, *Raising Quality!* contractors can consider how to host in-person meetings with grandparents, as well as opportunities for peer connections between grandparents. Until it is safe to meet in-person, F5SJ and contractors could continue to support grandparents accessing virtual meeting technology. This might include supporting grandparents to purchase phones or tablets with video capabilities, providing technology trainings, or working with parents and other family members to coordinate video calls.



### **Work to ensure that *Raising Quality!* programmatic elements and implementation timelines align with contractors’ needs**

The first year of implementation of *Raising Quality!* provided opportunities to adapt the program structure based on contractors’ needs and preferences. Coordinating the timing of trainings so that all contractor staff are fully trained before recruitment of participants begins will make sure contracting organizations feel fully prepared to support participants’ needs. Similarly, ensuring that all program elements are ready for implementation before recruiting participants will prevent any gaps between the time of participants’ enrollment and the beginning of services. Additionally, contractors noted an opportunity to streamline data collection by updating the intake assessment to align with HUBBE and ASQ data fields.

## Technical appendix

- **Contractor staff group interviews (n=3 with 6 staff).**

Harder + Company conducted three group interviews, each with 2 staff members from participating CBOs. These interviews inquired about how CBOs were progressing through the components of their contracts (e.g. Raising a Reader; Talk, Read, Sing, Draw, Play; and Grandparent Education Workshops), successes and challenges of implementation, experiences making referrals to other services with F5SJ partners, and experiences with technical assistance from F5SJ coaches.

- **Interviews with grandparents (n=7).** Evaluators conducted seven interviews with grandparents from each participating CBO (3 from Mary Magdalene Community Services, 3 from ASPARA, 1 from El Concilio). Interviews were conducted in English, Spanish, and Khmer. Khmer interviews were translated by a staff person from ASPARA. Interviews inquired about grandparents' motivations for participating in the program, received supports and frequency, connections to other social support and educational services, and challenges to providing high quality care.
- **Group Interview with F5SJ staff (n=1 with 2 staff).** Evaluators conducted a single group interview with F5SJ staff to learn how this work had evolved since the beginning of the shelter-in-place order, how staff have helped CBOs navigate challenges as the work unfolds, what early successes they were seeing, and how they anticipated the work would look going forward.
- **Hubbe.** *Raising Quality!* IMPACT stores program data in the Hubbe online data system. The evaluation team analyzed data entered into Hubbe as of May 2021 to understand the number of grandparent providers participating in *Raising Quality!* and the ages of children in their care.