

First 5 Amador

2022 - 2023

Program / Evaluation Report



Our mission is to promote, support, and enhance the optimal development of Amador County's children from zero to five years of age.

Our Commission believes that broad community involvement is critical to the success of this mission. With Proposition 10 funds, we support projects that make sense locally based on identified needs and opportunities for children and families in Amador County.

In 1998, California voters approved a \$.50 tax increase on tobacco products through the passage of Proposition 10, the Children and Families First Act. Each county created a local Commission and received revenue to be used for programs for children prenatal through age five.

First 5 Amador Focus Areas, Goals, and Objectives

Child Health and Wellbeing

Goal 1. Families with children zero to 5 have optimal health and well-being.

- Objective 1.1 Families with children prenatal through 5 have access to oral health, social and emotional health, and health education opportunities.

School Readiness

Goal 2. Children are ready for school/schools are prepared for all children.

- Objective 2.1 Children have access to quality early education opportunities.
- Objective 2.2 Children with social/emotional issues and special needs are identified early and receive support.
- Objective 2.3 Schools are prepared for children, and the community is linked with the schools.

Family / Parent Support

Goal 3. Families and caregivers have support and access to relevant information.

- Objective 3.1 Families/caregivers have access to information, quality early education opportunities, social connections, and support to protect and promote their children's social and emotional development.

Systems

Goal 4. Systems are integrated and sustainable.

- Objective 4.1 Reevaluate and restructure Amador's approach to reach families with children in outreaching/outlying areas of county.
- Objective 4.2 Explore alternative sites/options for connecting at the local levels (Boy Scouts, veterans halls, community centers, churches, and libraries) using Jackson's model as the hub/central site with satellites in outlying areas.

Results - Highlights

Imagination Library



Established by Dolly Parton in 1996, the program mails a new, age-appropriate book every month to children enrolled from birth until their fifth birthday. First 5 Amador began funding the Imagination Library countywide in 2009 to encourage early literacy and strengthen adult and child bonding. Recipients this year totaled **1,234 children – an increase of 30% over 2021-2022**. To date, 2,800 have graduated from the program with more than 110,000 books received by children in their homes. Nearly **70%** of age eligible children in Amador County are currently benefiting from this opportunity. First 5 staff have presented to current and potential Imagination Library programs statewide to share strategies for achieving high participation rates.



With several services now delivered in-house, staff have seen an increase in enrollment and will continue with the robust marketing campaign to reach all eligible children. WIC staff were trained in enrollment and have played a significant role in reaching more families.

Early childhood and school district personnel continue to share their appreciation of the program and the opportunities it provides children in Amador. Beyond literacy, the consistency of this program supports parent and child engagement by encouraging daily reading.



The goal of this universal program is to strengthen family functioning and improve children's readiness for school by ensuring all new parents have access to the tools needed to optimize their children's home environment, whatever the socioeconomic status. The Kit for New Parents, developed by First 5 California, is used as the basis for the delivery of parenting information and customized by the family engagement specialist with local resources based on the needs of the families.

The program provides paraprofessional face to face services offered in the home, in First 5's Indoor Learning Lab, or a location comfortable for the family (including phone and online visits). The first contact with the family will preferably be actualized in the prenatal period. This visit serves as the arena in which the family can express difficulties or family challenges are detected by the family engagement specialist and services arranged to limit the negative effects on the caregiver and infant relationship. Education regarding Ages and Stages (ASQ/ASQ-SE-2) developmental screenings is incorporated in all visits and the tool is made available for siblings (0 - 5) already in the home.

Welcome Baby is available to all families in the county regardless of income, zip code, number of children in the home, etc. The program builds on each family's individual strengths ultimately improving the health of their infant as well as overall family strength. Appropriate referrals to services such as WIC, Valley Mountain Regional Center, mental health clinicians specialized in maternal mental health, etc. are provided as well as tangible items such as diapers and wipes for those who are struggling with essential needs.

Building relationships with hospitals outside Amador has always been challenging for our local home visiting program(s). Approximately 50% of births occur in hospitals outside Amador. First 5's family engagement specialist has done an excellent job building rapport with these hospitals which has resulted in an increase in referrals from social workers assisting families with medically fragile infants. Often, these social workers are connecting with First 5 as many of these families have experienced higher-risk pregnancies and deliveries and now face economic challenges due to travel, time off work, etc.

One hundred nineteen (119) families received the service with most referrals initiated at the Sutter Amador Women's Center. **Two-hundred thirty-five (235) siblings** in the homes benefitted from the information shared during the visit. This is a significant increase from the prior year where 47 families participated in the visits and 146 siblings benefitted from the families' engagement. Siblings are provided with books, toothbrush kits, etc. and can engage in activities in First 5 Amador's Indoor Learning Lab if they attend an on-site visit.

Welcome Baby visits provided an opportunity to enroll families in the Imagination Library making it possible for a newborn to acquire 60 books in their home library by the time they graduate from the program. Introducing families to the importance of early literacy immediately after the birth of their child reinforces the impact talking, reading, and singing has on the development of their child and strengthens the bond with the adults in their life.

Supporting the adults' well-being is another important component of Welcome Baby. During the visits, the family engagement specialist offered the Edinburgh Screening to determine if services for perinatal mood and anxiety disorders would be appropriate. During this reporting period 58 screenings were completed with 10% referred to clinical services. These clinical services are provided through a partnership with Amador County Behavioral Health's Mental Health Services Act. In collaboration with the Amador / Calaveras Perinatal Wellness Coalition, First 5 continued to provide education regarding perinatal mood and anxiety disorders to community-based organizations serving families as well as the community-at-large.



Perinatal Wellness


Improved mental health and well-being for families before and after delivery.

Research tells us that as many as 1 in 7 moms (1 in 10 dads) experience symptoms of depression and anxiety during the postpartum period. People in every age, income level and culture can develop Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders (PMADs) during pregnancy and within the first year after delivery. To address these concerns, First 5 and Amador County's Public Health Department brought together local agencies and organizations to establish the Amador - Calaveras Perinatal Wellness Coalition. Due to the high number of Calaveras babies born at the Sutter Amador Hospital, it made sense to include Calaveras agencies and organizations in the Coalition. First 5 Amador continues to coordinate Coalition meetings and participate in ongoing activities. The Coalition continued to have a robust level of participation from the hospital, Amador Public and Behavioral Health, community-based organizations, private clinicians, and local nurses. The Coalition's ongoing work and accomplishments include training for professionals and paraprofessionals, reviewing and refining the system, resource and referral services and clinical treatment. The Coalition continued to distribute educational/outreach material that clinicians credit to positive outcomes for families experiencing PMADs. Coalition members and community service providers report that by normalizing the subject matter, pregnant and postpartum families are reassured that their personal experiences are not unusual.

The Coalition continued to identify areas for improvement in the comprehensive system and worked closely with Amador County's Behavioral Health Department in providing referrals to a program (MOM Chat) that provided clinical and peer support services for pregnant women. First 5 Amador provides free space in the Indoor Learning Lab for participants after delivery for gatherings for the mothers and children. This provides an opportunity for families to learn more about programs and services offered through First 5 and connects the Welcome Baby coordinator with new families.

Clinical services: Six (6) women followed through with services provided by marriage and family therapists and licensed clinical social workers coordinated through First 5 utilizing MHSA funding.

**This is not
how I thought
I would feel...**




Perinatal Wellness

- Support for expectant and new moms / families to recover from pregnancy and birth
- Discuss anxiety, stress, depression, and difficulty adjusting
- Learn coping skills, relaxation techniques, and communication skills

If you would like to learn about what services are available, please call First 5 Amador at 209-257-1092.

A project of the Amador/Calaveras Perinatal Wellness Coalition, funded by the Mental Health Services Act.



Playgroups (Jackson, Ione, Plymouth)

Playgroups offer safe and supportive environments that provide early learning opportunities and social connections for young children and those who love and care for them.



These weekly events are offered in three locations throughout the county (Jackson, Ione, and Plymouth). Playgroups are open to all children in Amador from birth through age 5. These events are designed as drop-in and provide quality time for the children and their parents/caregivers.

Playgroups also offer support to adults by providing information regarding community events, support services in the community and access to early childhood development screenings (Ages and Stages Developmental Screenings – ASQ-3 / ASQ-SE-2). These parent-led screenings help families understand typical development and milestones and what they can do to encourage and support their child. Staff provides families with suggestions regarding appropriate activities and resources for referrals to early intervention services based on the results of the screenings. Playgroups provide parents and caregivers a comfortable space for social interaction, community networking, and an opportunity to play/interact with their children while learning fun and educational activities that can be replicated at home.

Participation: 75 (unduplicated) children benefitted from playgroups throughout the year. Due to the pandemic, some families have been slower to re-engage which could explain a slight decline in participation. First 5 continues to offer take-home activity kits as an option for families. Each kit included a book and activities that followed the storyline. Information regarding programs such as the Imagination Library and community events were included each month. Family engagement kits were shared with the library's story time, community partners serving families as well as those visiting First 5's location.

The structure of the in-person playgroup consisted of a welcome and greeting; exploratory play; lesson - activity; story/circle time; and a healthy snack.

Children anticipate the weekly playgroup, and it takes only a few visits for the routine to be set and children to feel comfortable.

Activities such as painting, drawing, puppet play, circle time and dress-up are provided each week. Parents, grandparents, nannies and other family, friends and neighbor providers attend these events. Time for parent-to-parent interaction occurs during free play. The conversations are rich with parents sharing information such as local medical care options, favorite outdoor areas that are safe for small children, and support for each other regarding family stressors.

T-shirts with a Talk, Read, Sing and Play message are distributed to children to reinforce the message with families and promote the program.



Messy Mornings

'Learning Through Play'

“DRESS FOR MESS!”



First 5 Amador provides an opportunity for children and their caregivers to participate in weekly events focused on unstructured child-led play. Activities include gardening, painting, building, science, taste-testing, and large motor play (tricycles, wagons, obstacle courses, etc.). This program launched in the spring of 2021 and has become one of First 5 Amador’s most popular activities. Weekly attendance continues to be **25 – 40 children with a minimum of one caregiver**. Shady sitting areas for families with infants are provided and have created opportunities for peer sharing and new friendships. Community partners such as Head Start and Valley Mountain Regional Center are invited to share information regarding their programs. T-shirts for the children and parents have been distributed to promote the program and provide appropriate attire for “messy play.” Information regarding Ages and Stages Developmental screenings and local and state resources is made available and referrals for children who would benefit from additional services are offered.

With families and staff building rapport, sometimes challenging conversations occur, and children benefit by receiving early intervention activities and/or referrals that would most likely not occur without these sensitive conversations.

Messy Morning coordinators focus on STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math) by creating activities that allow children to explore the topics. Based on a partnership with Amador Arts, music and movement was also incorporated into the program allowing children to move indoors to experience Native American drumming, multiple instruments and dance led by Laurie Story, a local music and art instructor.



First 5 continues to host nursing students as a component of their community health requirements. The nursing students participate in playgroups as well as assist with Messy Mornings. Each cohort focuses on family health-related topics such as dental and healthy bodies.



Transition to Kindergarten

Kindergarten Bridge Program

Background

The Bridge Program in Amador County began in 2003 and initially served 16 children. This program was designed for children who would be entering kindergarten in the fall and had spent little or no time in a preschool setting. The program was designed to introduce the children to the structure and rhythm of the classroom. It was called a Bridge Program because it was aimed to help children cross from the pre-kindergarten environment to kindergarten.

This year's attendance increased slightly from 56 to 63 students which is down approximately 50% due to transitional kindergarten (TK) and the pandemic. First 5 was fortunate to have enough teaching staff to host a classroom at each elementary school in the county. Each class included a teacher and a minimum of one aide. Children's social and emotional skills were significantly different from that observed in prior years, small motor skills were not as developed, and children who would benefit from early intervention had not been identified and referred to school district services. First 5's early learning specialist assisted teachers and parents in addressing separation anxiety which is not unusual at this age but seemed to be exacerbated for a few this year.

First 5 provided a snack for each of the sites as well as "Tuesday envelopes" that mimic the school district's communication strategy with families. This not only demonstrates to parents how information will be sent home but provides an opportunity for First 5 and teaching staff to share educational materials, events, and school readiness resources.

Based on the Kindergarten Readiness Profiles that were completed during the Bridge program, most children showed school readiness for kindergarten with the majority of students scoring 3 or 4 in most areas. The categories that consistently scored the highest at all sites were – engaging in cooperative play activities with peers, separating appropriately from caregivers and is enthusiastic and curious. We continue to see the effects of the pandemic through more need for social and emotional support and more exposure to hands-on activities that will build fine-motor skills.



Bridge to Kindergarten Calendar Book

First 5 continued to distribute Kindergarten Bridge Calendars to families with children 3 years and older to encourage activities at home to prepare them for school. The objective is to support learning through everyday actions such as sorting laundry, reading signs and labels at grocery stores and while traveling so that education and discovery is occurring daily.



Quality Counts California is a collaborative approach that forges partnerships between First 5 California, the California Department of Education and counties to achieve the goal of helping children ages 0 through 5 and their families thrive by increasing the number of high-quality early learning settings, including supporting and engaging families in the early learning process. Multiple funding sources are utilized to meet the needs of the childcare providers, preschool teachers and parents in each county.

Participation rate in Q4K declined from the previous year with a few sites closing. **A total of 30 participating sites included family childcare homes, centers, family, friend, and neighbors and alternate sites (playgroups, etc.). Three hundred fifty-two (352) children benefited from provider participation. Three were foster children and 11 were homeless.** Families and caregivers were invited to attend most educational opportunities offered through Quality for Kids. Cross-county sharing occurs to maximize our rural resources. Participants receive incentives for completing the goals they identified through their Quality Improvement Plans.

Participants were engaged in the Q4K Messy Play Campaign which included incentives for the completion of monthly tracking logs. Families were also encouraged to participate in the campaign and submit their Messy Play logs to be entered in a drawing. The objective was to remind families and providers of the importance of unstructured child-led play.

Family, friends, and neighbors (FFN) participants (and potential participants) took part in an early learning activity kit program distributed monthly at First 5 Amador. Kits included books, developmentally appropriate activities that built on the theme of the children's book as well as information regarding early childhood development, events, and local resources.

This year, Quality for Kids focused on social and emotional well-being and self-care for the children, parents, and early care providers. First 5's early learning specialist created and distributed social/emotional kits throughout the county including school district personnel struggling to meet the needs of transitional kindergarten students with minimal pre-k experience.

Amador's Quality for Kids consortia led by First 5 Amador includes members from the Childcare Council, State Preschool, Nexus Youth and Family Services, Amador County Adult Education, ATCAA - Head Start, private preschools, The Resource Connection, and Amador College Connect.

Dad and Me (Grandpas, Uncles, Brothers, etc.)

First 5 Amador understands the importance of father-involvement and over the years has sponsored Dad & Me monthly events. For the last couple of years, due to restrictions with the pandemic, attendance declined significantly and First 5 moved to a take-home kit model. During this reporting period, 40 kits that included bird houses for building, seeds for planting, etc. were distributed. Research shows that children who grow up with warm, nurturing, and actively involved fathers reap tremendous benefits, including better school performance, increased self-esteem, healthier relationships with peers and caregivers, and future access to greater financial resources, according to a recent review of the research. When fathers read to their young children on a regular basis, they tend to raise children who are superior readers, who perform better in school, and who have better relationship skills (Green, S. 2002)

First 5 Amador is experiencing an increase in participation by fathers and grandfathers at Messy Morning events. We attribute this to the design of the program – outside, less structure, and more hands-on activities.



Mental Health / Social-Emotional Well-Being

First 5 Amador offered consultation services through our partnership with Behavioral Health's Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funding. Services were delivered by experienced behavioral specialists who assisted preschool and childcare providers and stay-at-home families experiencing challenging behavior. These consultants are available to assist family childcare providers and early education teachers with a wide range of resources and services. The consultants offer phone and on-site assistance to programs and families as well as linkages to ongoing services that would benefit children ages 0-5.



Some of the referrals recommended by the behavioral specialist included Nexus Youth and Family Services for ongoing counseling, perinatal wellness services for a pregnant mom experiencing anxiety and postpartum depression, and Valley Mountain Regional Center for early intervention services.

The objective is to provide early intervention to keep children from being removed from their current setting due to challenging behavior. During the last quarter of the year Calming Kits, mental health coloring placemats, crayons, children's books on stress, and essential goods for struggling families were distributed to address the challenges of the pandemic. First 5 continued to provide support for families and early care providers by offering training opportunities and resources regarding challenging behavior, stress reduction and self-care.

First 5's monthly e-newsletter and Facebook posts provide information and resources that support children's mental health. First 5 staff continue to be active participants and member of ongoing Behavioral Health/Mental Health Services Act Steering/Cultural Competency meetings and the Student Assistance Program to reinforce the importance of early identification and services for children and families.

Bus ads continue to promote the importance of supporting children's mental health and developmental screenings as well as newspaper and radio ads.

Communications and Community Engagement

First 5 Amador's outreach and education efforts ensure the community has access to the latest information on issues impacting the healthy development of young children. Utilizing the Kit for New Parents, monthly e-newsletters, Facebook, flyer dissemination, radio, newspaper ads/articles, family activity kits and staff sharing at local meetings. A display window at the county fair provided an opportunity to display our message regarding the importance of the first five years as well as share information regarding activities and programs available to all parents with young children living in Amador.



First 5 continues to work closely with the Amador Calaveras Breastfeeding Coalition by providing two nursing nooks at the county fair and education to families and service providers throughout the year.



To address the stigma associated with mental health, First 5 Amador continued to create and distribute information regarding early childhood mental health as well as perinatal mood and anxiety disorders. Staff collaborated with Amador County Behavioral Health on an Hispanic Health Fair, Heart of Hope art event, and resource fair. First 5 continued to educate parents, caregivers, early care providers and the community at-large regarding the importance of early identification and treatment through developmental screening for children and perinatal wellness screening for parents. Throughout the year, First 5 purchased and distributed books regarding social and emotional well-being to community partners serving children 0 – 5 including the Pregnancy Help Center, Behavioral Health, and Nexus Youth and Family Services.

Communications and Community Engagement (Continued)

First 5 continued to supply community partners and parents with copies of the **Plays Well with Others – A Guide to Social and Emotional Development**. The guide includes an overview of social and emotional development, local resources, and parenting tips. The guide provides age-by age breakdowns of typical child development, behaviors that warrant concern, and ideas of steps families can take to help foster healthy social and emotional development in their infants and young children.

First 5 staff continued to provide support for Child Welfare Services by providing developmental screening assistance for foster parents caring for children in Amador. The online version of the Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ / ASQ-SE) allows foster parents an option to meet the requirements for all children under the age of 3. First 5 staff provide results to the child welfare social worker and foster parents so that appropriate resources can be provided to the child/ren.

Throughout the year, **117 online and hardcopy ASQ / ASQ-SE screenings** were completed by families in Amador. We will continue to promote this valuable resource to the community.

First 5's website, monthly e-newsletter, and Facebook page provided up-to-date information for parents and providers. First 5 monitors participation rates through data management. Staff has noticed an increase in the number of fathers, policy makers, and community members accessing information provided through our social media efforts.



First 5 assisted with the annual Celebrate Our Children event in April and hosted a table at the second Winter Wonderland held at the Amador County Fairgrounds. Staff provided activities for children as well as take-home kits for families. Participation at both events was up significantly from prior years.



First 5 provides administrative oversight of the **Amador Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC) / Resilient Amador**. Activities and outreach topics included Mandated Reporter Trainings, a monthly e-newsletter, mini-grants to support the Council’s mission, newspaper articles / marketing and participation in community events.



Resilient Amador was established to address Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Trauma Informed Care. The initiative’s objective is to educate community members about the effects of adverse childhood experiences, trauma-informed care, and how to build resiliency in our community. A year long Trauma Informed Organization training was provided to 20 individuals in the community representing more than a dozen organizations.

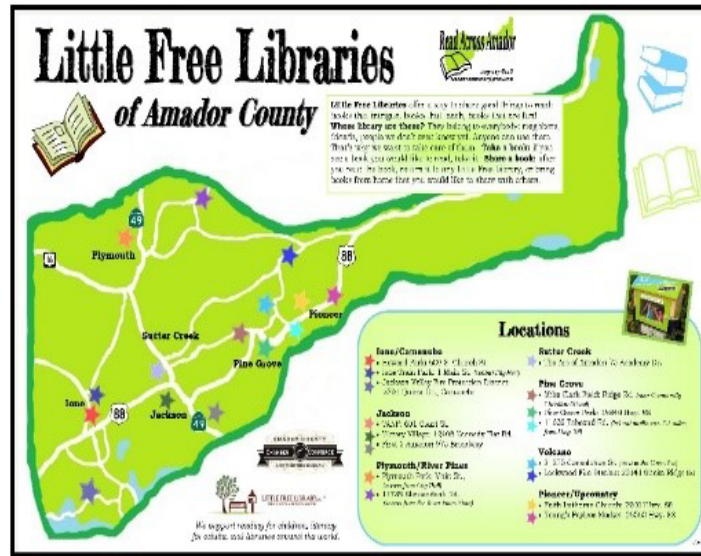
First 5’s facility (Margaret Dalton Children's Center) has become a community hub and family resource center. This year we coordinated with Child Welfare to offer the Indoor Learning Lab for supervised visitation. This family-friendly setting provides an opportunity for the parent(s), grandparent(s) and children to meet and engage in a more relaxed setting. Fitness classes, board meetings, parenting classes, and NAMI support groups utilize the facility making it possible to familiarize more community members about First 5’s mission. Community partners including Head Start, State Preschool, Tribal TANF Native American Roundtables), Amador County Unified School District, Nexus Youth and Family Services, Amador-Tuolumne Community Action Agency, and the Amador Childcare Council utilized First 5’s location to host events and educational forums.

First 5 staff continued to take an active role on the Domestic Violence Council, Behavioral Health Advisory Board, Mental Health Services Act Cultural Competency / Steering Committee, Local Childcare Planning Council, the school district’s Student Mental Health Workgroup, Children and Families Program Committee, Tobacco Reduction of Amador County and Amador Dental Partnership (Public Health).

COVID-19 Pandemic Support Services

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated challenges many families and service providers in Amador County were already facing, including economic and mental health issues. In response, First 5, on behalf of multiple community based organizations in Amador, applied for a California Family Resource Center grant which provided funding for resources / supplies including gas, tutoring, school supplies, groceries, diapers, and wipes. Families were referred by the Pregnancy Help and Family Resource Center, Nexus Youth and Family Services, the Amador Tuolumne Community Action Agency, the Resource Connection, Amador County Public Health and Tribal TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families). Families continued to receive support during the first part of this fiscal year.

“Calming Kits” for early care providers and families were made available. These provide supplies and tips for teaching children self-regulation and stress reduction and encourages providers and families to stop and think before responding to challenging behaviors.



Amador County’s Little Free Libraries continue to provide options for families living in every corner of the county. This year, three LFLs were installed bringing the **countywide total to 36**. The mission of the official Little Free Library program is *to promote literacy and the love of reading by building free book exchanges worldwide and to build a sense of community as we share skills, creativity, and wisdom across generations*. Most Amador LFLs are registered with the international organization and can be located on their website. The Amador County Friends of the Library has established a system for delivering books monthly to each of the LFLs and connects with First 5 to determine the availability of children’s books to include in the distribution.

Oral Health Education and Services



By collaborating with the Amador Dental Partnership through Public Health as well as the Samuel Merritt nursing partnership, First 5 was able to provide oral health education and services for families at Celebrate Our Children, Kindergarten Bridge, playgroups, and Messy Mornings increasing the reach to young children and their families. This early education, including that provided through Welcome Baby and family engagement take-home kits helps set the stage for bright smiles and overall health and wellbeing.

Strengthening Families Framework

First 5 Amador aligns strategies with the Strengthening Families – Five Protective Factors – and works closely with community partners and grantees to incorporate the objectives of the framework.

Research has shown that the Five Protective Factors are linked with lower incidence of child abuse and neglect.

- 1) Parental Resilience – the ability to manage and bounce back from all types of challenges that emerge in every family’s life.
- 2) Social Connections – friends, family members, neighbors, and community members provide emotional support, help solve problems, offer parenting advice, and give concrete assistance to parents.
- 3) Concrete Support in Times of Need – meeting basic economic needs like food, shelter, clothing, and health care is essential for families to thrive.
- 4) Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development – accurate information about child development and appropriate expectations for children’s behavior at every age help parents see their children and youth in a positive light and promote their healthy development.
- 5) Social and Emotional Competence of Children – a child’s ability to interact positively with others, self-regulate their behavior, and effectively communicate their feelings has a positive impact on their relationships with their family, other adults, and peers. Challenging behaviors or delayed development can create extra stress for families, so early identification and assistance for both parents and children can head off negative results and keep development on track.



First 5 Amador’s 2022-2023 Team