

# The San Francisco Starting Points Initiative

Note: The following profile describes one of the 11 sites that were funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York as part of the Starting Points initiative. It was developed in conjunction with the Learning from Starting Points project, an assessment of the four and one-half year initiative, and approved by the Starting Points site as of July 1999. For more information see *Learning from Starting Points: Findings from the Starting Points Assessment Project*, prepared by Dr. Jane Knitzer with the assistance of Fida Adely and published by the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), Mailman School of Public Health of Columbia University, 2001. This publication is free on the NCCP Web site: <<http://www.nccp.org>> or copies are obtainable at \$5.00 each prepaid at NCCP Attn. Publications, 154 Haven Avenue, New York, NY 10032. For further information, e-mail: [nccp@columbia.edu](mailto:nccp@columbia.edu), fax: 212-544-4200, or phone: 212-304-7195.

The primary vehicle of the San Francisco Starting Points Initiative (SPI) is an early childhood leadership network, the Early Childhood Interagency Council (ECIC). The interagency council, which is comprised of representatives from city agencies, community-based organizations, local foundations, advocacy groups, and parents, has provided a forum for citywide leadership for planning, coordinating, and monitoring services for young children and their families. The vision of the ECIC is that all children should enter school ready to learn. To date, the ECIC and SPI have focused primarily on quality child care and mental health services to implement this vision.

SPI, with the ECIC as its primary vehicle of action, has utilized strong partnerships, innovative fiscal analysis, and the use of data to expand and improve services for young children and their families, particularly in the area of child care and mental health services. SPI has also been a catalyst for bridging the gaps between the advocacy, political, and provider communities on behalf of young children while helping to create a common and strengthened policy and advocacy agenda for children from ages birth to five. Using welfare reform as an opportunity to assist in the area of child care, the ECIC has worked closely with the Mayor's Task Force on Welfare Reform—staffing the Child Care Committee of this task force—and has taken the lead in developing a series of initiatives to increase the affordability, availability, and quality of child care in San Francisco. With respect to mental health services, SPI has brokered partnerships between the county mental health agency and the child care community, helping to leverage increased resources for mental health services for young children. In 1999, SPI reported that 80 percent of center-based child care programs serving low-income children had access to mental health consulting services.

## THE GENERAL POLICY CONTEXT

Mayor Willie Brown has been very supportive of early childhood efforts in San Francisco. Furthermore, a strong local and state economy has made it easier to advocate for resources for young children. In addition to a politically favorable climate, there is a supportive and active local bay area foundation community. San Francisco bay area funders formed an Early Childhood Funders Group that developed a privately funded Quality Child Care initiative addressing welfare reform and impacts on children.

San Francisco's residents are diverse. Only 58 percent of the population speak English at home and more than 20 languages are spoken in the community. This helps to explain the importance of neighborhood and interest-group politics in San Francisco. Remaining attuned to different neighborhood needs and concerns is a challenge. Broad representation on the ECIC has helped to meet this challenge.

## THE SAN FRANCISCO STARTING POINTS INITIATIVE

### Initiative Leadership and Auspices

The ECIC, a public/private partnership, is the major vehicle for SPI. The ECIC, which has consisted of anywhere from 25 to 30 representatives from a range of public and private organizations, is supported by SPI staff. During the first three years of the initiative, ECIC worked with a professional facilitator to develop its decisionmaking processes. All ECIC meetings were professionally facilitated during this time, which helped to develop a workable and inclusive process. The primary goal identified by the ECIC is that all children be ready to learn. At the beginning of the second year of the SPI, the ECIC identified three priorities for working toward this goal:

1. Increase the availability of child care.
2. Improve the quality of child care.
3. Increase young children's access to mental health services.

In the fifth year, seven new priorities were established. They are:

1. Help establish a San Francisco plan for universal newborn home visiting.
2. Work with the High-Risk Interagency Council to improve early identification of children with special needs and strengthen and support an inter-agency/multidisciplinary approach to training, intervention, resource development, and policy to ensure an appropriate continuum of care.
3. Maintain and expand mental health services for young children and their families, including mental health consultation in child care settings.
4. Take steps toward standardized services at family resource centers.
5. Assess availability of a broad range of services, including neighborhood support strategies for kith and kin caregivers.
6. Expand quality infant care options in all types of child care programs.
7. Participate in the implementation of the federal Department of Justice Safe Start grant in San Francisco to address violence prevention in the lives of children from birth to five years of age.

The initiative is housed in the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth, and their Families and thus has access to government officials on a day-to-day basis. The city also supports Starting Points through a contract and the provision of in-kind services. However, SPI staff members are not city employees. The San Francisco Foundation Community Initiatives Fund acts as the SPI fiscal agent, and SPI is supported by local private funders in addition to Carnegie and city funds.

## Site-Specific Starting Points Goals

As a way to achieve the overall Starting Points goals, the ECIC, in the context of the larger goal of ensuring that all children are ready to learn, voted on three major site-specific priorities:

GOAL 1: Increase the availability of high quality child care.

GOAL 2: Increase young children's access to mental health services.

GOAL 3: Mobilize support for investing in young children and their families.

## Site-Specific Activities and Accomplishments

**GOAL 1: Increase the quantity and availability of quality child care.**

*Create partnerships to leverage resources for increased availability and quality of child care*

- Developed the Child Care Facilities Fund (CCFF), a public/private partnership that provides grants and loans for family child care providers and child care centers. CCFF initially received \$200,000 in city funding in FY 1997–1998 (this was annualized in FY 1998–1999). In FY 1998–1999, CCFF also received \$400,000 in additional city funds. SPI has also helped to leverage \$2.65 million in additional funds from banks, foundations, and other private sources, as well as an on-going source of funds for CCFF by rewriting legislation on use of exactions and fees collected by the city.
- Developed and ensured continuity of the High-Quality Child Care Initiative (HQCCI), which funds a purchasing pool, mental health consultation to child care programs, training for providers, and supports for family care providers and license-exempt providers. The city initially allocated \$2 million for HQCCI, the first time city funds have been used for quality improvement efforts.
- Developed the Provider Health Benefits initiative, which subsidizes the healthcare benefits of eligible family child care providers and center personnel. This initiative was initially funded by the city with \$250,000 in FY 1999-2000.
- Initiated the Adopt-a-Child Care Center Program, in which local construction companies donate labor to develop and improve child care facilities.

- Staffed the Child Care Committee for the Mayor's Welfare Reform Task Force.

**GOAL 2: Increase young children's access to mental health services.**

*Create partnerships to increase the availability of mental health services for young children*

- Seeded the Early Childhood Mental Health initiative as part of the High Quality Child Care Fund. As a result of this initiative, \$700,000 from city funds were blended with \$1.3 million of CalWorks/TANF funds to provide mental health consultation to 100 child care centers and 75 family child care homes. The Mental Health Work Group of the Early Childhood Interagency Council is helping to develop standards and guidelines to ensure the quality of the mental health consultation provided.

**GOAL 3: Mobilize support for investing in young children and their families.**

*Improve government and private attention to young children and families*

- Initiated significant changes in the city's commitment to the needs of young children and their families including:
  - Development of the CCFF and start-up funds from the city;
  - Creation of a child care coordinator position in the San Francisco Department of Human Services; and
  - Increased funds from the city's Children's Fund for young children (advocate for an increase in allotment commensurate with the proportion of children in this age group).
- Increased funds for young children including in FY 1997–1998, \$2 million for child care programs, subsidies and initial contribution to CCFF and in FY 1998–1999 \$5.7 million total for subsidies, CCFF, and HQCCF.
- Provided policy and fiscal reports and data about young children to policymakers, service providers, community-based organizations, advocates, foundations, and parents including:
  - *First Steps, Children 0-5 in San Francisco: A Data Report on the Status of San Francisco's Young Children;*

- A briefing paper for the San Francisco Children and Youth Summit;
- *Landscapes of Family Support Programs in San Francisco; Home Visiting Programs in San Francisco; Early Childhood Planning and Legislation; and Mental Health Consultation Services in Child Care Programs in San Francisco;*
- *The Impact of Federal Welfare Reform on Children in San Francisco;*
- *Mental Health System of Care for Children from Zero to Five Years of Age;* and
- *Investing in Our Future: Opportunities and Challenges, the Family and Children's Budget.*
- Supported and enhanced the work of the local Prop 10 Commission on Civil engagement.
  - In January 2000, SPI received funding for the Civic Engagement Project (CEP). The goal of the CEP is to ensure that traditionally underrepresented parents, other caregivers, and a broad array of San Franciscans are actively engaging in Prop 10 planning and implementation. SPI is co-directing this project with the San Francisco Children and Families Commission. (There are CEP initiatives in seven additional counties in California. Private and local foundations fund CEP.)
  - Provided Prop 10 Commission with extensive data, policy analysis, and strategic planning information.
- Successfully engaged private foundations as partners and garnered financial support from them.