



## **It Takes a Village...**

*The Story of the San Mateo County  
COVID-19 Child Care Response Team*



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# SMC COVID-19 CHILD CARE RESPONSE TEAM

## Introduction

In March 2020, early care and education leaders in San Mateo County came together to form the San Mateo County COVID-19 Child Care Response Team (“Response Team”) to ensure a coordinated child care relief and recovery effort during the COVID-19 pandemic. The team has met at least once a week since then to understand and respond to the impact of COVID-19 on the child care and early learning field. The group’s efforts include:

- Consistent communication,
- Technical assistance and informational workshops for families and providers,
- Coordinated fundraising, and
- Organized advocacy.

The Response Team identified three pressing needs for the child care field during the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. Establishment of emergency child care for essential workers,
2. Economic relief for child care providers, particularly home-based and other private child care providers, and
3. Emergency child care supplies.

## Partner Organization Roles

### *Build Up for San Mateo County’s Children*

Focuses on preservation of facilities/spaces, while continuing to shepherd new projects into the development pipeline to meet future needs. Provided technical assistance to child care providers and led policy education and advocacy efforts and community outreach.

### *Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County (4Cs)*

Maintains a database of all licensed programs in San Mateo County and a website clearinghouse of COVID-19 information for the field, regularly posts updates on providers’ open/closed status, communicates to the public, organizes PPE distribution, and administers subsidies for essential workers. Liaison with Public Health.

### *Child Care Partnership Council*

Provides data collection and analysis on community needs. Convenes regular meetings of key stakeholders, including parents and child care providers. Tracks federal and state



legislation and budgets. Shares timely information on events/trainings, funding, and advocacy opportunities.

### ***Community Equity Collaborative***

Incubates pilot programs to meet community needs in the education equity space including workforce development for early care and learning providers; develops active social media highlighting importance of child care, and impacts of COVID on child care and working families, especially working mothers.

### ***County of San Mateo***

Across many County departments (Board of Supervisors, County Health, County Manager's Office, Office for Sustainability), provides resources and funding to support the child care sector. Included child care in the County's Recovery Initiative.

### ***First 5 San Mateo County***

Takes a broad view, as a funder, in promoting child and family well-being in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. First 5 staff serves as a liaison with the County Manager and with the statewide First 5 Association and First 5 California.

### ***San Mateo County Office of Education***

Developed the Pandemic Recovery Framework and the Framework's Licensed Early Learning and Care Companion Document. SMCOE's Early Learning Support Services (ELSS) provides technical assistance, communication tools, training, and coaching support for the child care field. ELSS convened meetings for child care and preschool directors, organized town hall meetings with Community Care Licensing to better understand the State regulations, and shared newsletters and other tools created by SMCOE's School Nurse on Special Assignment.

### ***Silicon Valley Community Foundation***

Provided initial facilitation for the Response Team. The Community Foundation has encouraged philanthropic and strategic support for the child care sector.

## **Our Accomplishments**

### ***Essential Worker Survey and Child Care Provider Surveys***

To determine the demand for child care among essential workers, the response team administered a survey in April 2020. Survey data provided valuable information for the

Response Team's emergency child care approach. 264 surveys were completed identifying 451 children needing care.

The Response Team also surveyed all of the county's child care programs in June 2020 and April 2021 to understand the extent of program closures and programs' financial status. We learned that 85% of survey respondents have lost income during the pandemic, and 45% have one month or less of cash on hand.

### ***PPE Distribution and Emergency Child Care Supplies***

In response to child care providers' difficulty securing basic health and safety supplies such as toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and baby wipes, 4Cs and First 5 worked with the County's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to identify potential sources of local supplies and request supplies from the State EOC and First 5 CA.

### ***COVID-19 Child Care Project***

Spearheaded by the Silicon Valley Community Foundation and funded by Heising-Simons Foundation, this fund provided \$100,000 in emergency grants of up to \$10,000 to family child care providers, paired with technical assistance to access federal and state funding. Build Up for San Mateo County's Children served as SVCF's community partner to assist grant administrator (LIIF) with outreach, technical assistance, and the grant review process.

### ***Coordinated Communications and Resources***

The Response Team collaborated to create and distribute many communications including:

- *Need child care?* flyer for essential workers seeking child care in [English](#) and [Spanish](#), distributed via core service agencies.
- [Child care provider program guidelines](#) and [Guidance for Parents/Guardians Using Emergency Child Care in San Mateo County](#) for operators providing care and families utilizing care during the early days of the pandemic.
- A family information sheet in [English](#), [Spanish](#) and [Chinese](#) with COVID-19 general health guidelines and information about core service agencies, food distribution sites, and mental health/legal resources.
- [Financial Assistance Available for San Mateo County Child Care Providers](#) to assist operators with identifying funding resources to keep their programs afloat.
- [Will Child Care Be There?](#) advocating for individuals, companies and cities to invest in the child care infrastructure to ensure a post-pandemic recovery.
- A [Learning Hubs Case Study](#) to document successful models in San Mateo County.



- [Vaccine Information for Child Care Professionals and Early Educators](#) to educate providers on how to access a vaccination appointment.

### ***Reopening Forum***

In July 2020, the Response Team hosted a webinar to provide essential information and support to early learning and care programs as they made plans to reopen to serve children and families. The forum featured a panel of center-based and family child care providers who had already reopened sharing their best practices and lessons learned. [[Slides](#); [Recording](#)]

### ***San Mateo County Recovery Initiative***

Several members of the Response Team participated in the County's Recovery Initiative meetings, specifically providing leadership on the Education and Child Care Committee.

### ***Child Care Relief Fund***

Advocated for the County of San Mateo to allocate \$2M of CARES Act funds in August 2020 to create the Child Care Relief Fund. Members of the Response Team served as the Fund's advisory body and administrators alongside the San Mateo Credit Union and County Board of Supervisors. Grants from the Fund provided one month of operating expenses (up to \$55,000 for child care centers and \$10,000 for family child care homes). In addition, a broad spectrum of donors contributed over \$829,000 to the fund, including local companies, community foundations, cities, faith-based organizations and individuals. To meet additional outstanding needs, the County contributed an additional \$2.5M to the Fund in November and December. The total of \$5.3M in grants to 287 child care programs (79 centers and 208 family child care homes) benefited over 8,000 of the county's children with the greatest needs.

### ***Parent Town Hall Meeting***

Members of the Response Team partnered with County Health to hold an online Parent Town Hall in November 2020 addressing "Child Care During COVID-19." The Town Hall was moderated by a parent leader and featured a panel of health care and child care experts sharing information on how to safely provide/attend child care during the pandemic.

### ***Learning Hubs Expansion Grant Fund***

As part of San Mateo County's Recovery Initiative, members of the Response Team played a key role on the "Providing Out of School and Young Child Care" task force created in June 2020. In December 2020, the Response Team launched the San Mateo County Learning Hubs Initiative in partnership with Thrive, the Alliance of Nonprofits, in order to raise awareness about, advocate for, and support "learning hubs" (programs that provide supportive places

for K-12 students engaged in distance learning). Based upon the Response Team’s recommendation and proposal, the Board of Supervisors approved \$1.5M in January 2021 to create the Learning Hubs Expansion Fund, which increased by 29% the number of learning hub slots available for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged households for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year. The Learning Hubs Expansion Fund was administered by the Community Equity Collaborative and the San Mateo Credit Union in coordination with the Response Team and Board of Supervisors.

### ***Vaccine Distribution***

The Response Team advocated for prioritization of early childhood educators during Phase 1B of vaccine distribution and made recommendations to County Health to support equitable distribution. Distribution efforts prioritized providers who remained open during the pandemic serving the communities with the highest needs, including East Palo Alto, North Fair Oaks, Redwood City, Belle Haven and Daly City. In February 2021, 4Cs and SMCOE partnered with County Health to survey all individuals working in the child care and ECE field to understand how many of these essential workers would require and want the vaccine, their insurance status, and any hesitations they might have to getting the vaccine. Within a period of three weeks, SMCOE and 4Cs conducted one-on-one outreach to assist hundreds of ECE workers with making vaccination appointments by promoting child care sector-specific mass vaccination clinics arranged by County Health.

### **What is Still Needed**

While the Response Team has taken decisive action over the past year to address the pressing needs of the child care field during the COVID-19 pandemic, much is still needed to sustain this essential industry.

### ***Continued Fundraising and Advocacy for Public Investments***

The Response Team is interested in securing funding for another round of Child Care Relief Grants, recognizing that providers continue to face challenges to their sustainability. Providers have incurred debt as they kept their businesses going with reduced tuition from families. Providers also need ongoing technical assistance to access grant and loan programs.

### ***Building Back Better***

The pandemic highlighted long-standing structural problems that impact the child care field. The lack of qualified workers and low wages for child care educators have continued to limit the expansion of child care services. The gap between what parents can afford to pay and the



cost of providing high quality care has grown wider. The Response Team partners have been advocating that state and local governments use federal relief funds to address these long-term structural challenges to make child care more affordable for families and to ensure higher wages for ECE workers.

As the need for crisis response winds down, the Response Team is creating final recommendations to the County for needed funding and other supports for the child care field to recover, and recommendations for structural improvements to make our child care infrastructure more resilient for the future. Coordinated advocacy and mobilization for future disasters can be conducted through existing organizations such as the **Child Care Partnership Council** (CCPC). As the county’s commission for child care, the CCPC holds regular, public meetings of stakeholders to understand the needs of families and providers. Interested members of the public are encouraged to attend CCPC’s meetings to learn more about COVID-19 recovery efforts and to voice their needs and concerns.

<https://www.smcoe.org/about/child-care-partnership-council>

## Reflections

While the global pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for the child care field, the strength of the relationships among organizations serving this sector in San Mateo County allowed for a quick ramp-up in the local response. Because two of the partners, Build Up SMC and the CCPC, regularly convene stakeholder meetings, the Response Team came together quickly to identify the emergence of pressing issues. Collectively, the Response Team has invested more than 1,000 hours in weekly meetings and follow-up. Through this significant investment of “people power,” the Response Team has harnessed significant public and private investment in the child care sector, helped connect essential workers to child care, and used every means possible to sustain child care businesses for the future.

### Developed by members of the San Mateo County COVID-19 Child Care Response Team:

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