



San Mateo County Families Getting through COVID-19: How Community Leaders & Policymakers Can Drive the Change We Need



Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, families have weathered unforeseen impacts with strength. Forty families from 10 communities in San Mateo County shared their perspectives on the challenges they faced during the pandemic, the strengths that helped them overcome obstacles, and their hopes and dreams for their children. Even as families have learned to navigate this pandemic, they have been working within systems that leave gaps in support. Leaders in our community can help create alignment and transform how our county’s services, supports, and systems work for young children and families in San Mateo County.

Different Families Faced Different Challenges

As families told their stories of navigating the pandemic, four key themes emerged.

“Managing four children at home (a child just entering middle school, a child just entering Kindergarten, a preschooler in Head Start and a baby). I have lost myself for a little bit because I am so stressed out. They have not done well with remote learning. It has been very intense and difficult on me.”

1 Parenting Challenges

2 Financial Insecurity

3 Language Barriers

4 Fear and Isolation

“The pandemic didn’t get us all the same, we are more exposed, we must be on the streets every day and others can just work from home and life continues as usual. We have to leave our children; we can’t work and take care of them at the same time like it is for other families.”

Our San Mateo County Families

The families who shared their stories were racially diverse and included families raising children with special needs, single mothers, monolingual Spanish families, undocumented and mixed status families (parents are undocumented, children were born in the USA), and at least three families who have recently experienced homelessness. These interviews were conducted by the Silicon Valley Community Foundation.

Families lived in East Palo Alto, North Fair Oaks, Redwood City, Foster City, San Mateo, Daly City, Belmont, South San Francisco, Pacifica, San Bruno, and Half Moon Bay.

“ The children around us don’t necessarily have to be as affected by our grownup problems if we get the proper support that we need as adults. ”



Investing in Equitable Safety Nets

These families welcomed every opportunity they got to do better, to work harder, to learn and grow for themselves and their children. Their stories reflected their sense of perseverance, a desire to lift their families and their communities up. They contribute so much despite all the hurdles they must navigate.



“ At the end of the day, I just want [my children] to feel healthy, to feel happy, to feel loved, but most importantly, I want them to love and respect themselves... ”

Recommendations: Because Those Closest to the Problems Are Closest to the Solutions

Increase level of investment to align available support systems locally

- Invest in community navigator staff housed in community-based organizations in priority zip codes.
- Make multi-year, full-cost grants to support the operation of small nonprofit organizations who are providing family-centered solutions in low-income zip codes.
- Capture family voices on an ongoing basis to inform policy decisions and community investments.
- Fund after school & summer programs with enrichment activities for young children.

Advocate for families that need support at all levels

- Support organizations working with undocumented families and increase access to services and resources.
- Increase partnerships to bridge the support gap of undocumented families.
- Advocate for affordable and high-quality early care and learning experiences for all children.
- Build bridges between schools and community organizations supporting the needs of the adults.
- Improve public transportation and subsidize use for working families.
- Offer responsive, flexible, and non-traditional hours to meet the needs of working families.