

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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Contact: Muffy Berryhill
(530) 229-8300

\$1.5 MILLION QUALITY CARE INVESTMENT EXTENDED TO 2010

REDDING-----Over 40 percent of Shasta County children under age five are in some form of child care, many up to 30 or 40 hours each week.* While parents are working or going to school, offering their child a quality early child care experience benefits the child, the family, and the community in which they live. First 5 Shasta has just confirmed a \$167,000 contract with Shasta County Office of Education's Early Childhood Services to manage its Early Care Initiative through 2010. Through a partnership between First 5 Shasta and First 5 California, over \$1.5 million has been invested since 2003 in this Initiative dedicated to increasing the quality of care available in Shasta County.

Quality early care can contribute to the positive, healthy development of young children. In the child care field, "quality" is associated with a safe, engaging learning environment, and the child's relationship with a consistent child care provider who is educated and experienced. The local Early Care Initiative has helped raise the bar on quality services that better meet the expectations of parents and the community. Initiative efforts aim for higher education of child care professionals, national accreditation of early care centers and family child care homes, and support for license exempt providers (often extended family members or neighbors). All are considered benchmarks for quality care.

To date through the Initiative, 530 early care providers have earned stipends or incentives for completing academic classes or professional development. Support provided to 24 child care centers and 9 family child care homes helped them attain national accreditation, an intensive two-year process. The new extension of the Early Care Initiative allows for greater focus in the area of family child care accreditation, with up to ten more family

**First 5 Shasta's Parent Survey 2002/2004*

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child care homes entering the accreditation process. Support of higher education will continue, allowing up to 200 providers to receive educational stipends or incentives. Continuing support for license exempt providers will support 350 providers in enhancing their services with young children.

The investment potential for refining Shasta County’s child care system is significant. Says Jolene Thomas from Shasta County Office of Education, Early Childhood Services, “The startling insights neuroscientists have shown into how a young child’s brain works and what is needed to optimize development underscores our need to deliver quality early care and learning experiences to young children. Research suggests economic savings as much as \$7 in benefits for the child and society for every \$1 invested in high quality early learning.” Thomas further emphasizes the positive financial impact on the community when traditional intervention costs decrease due to wise, early investment. “The greatest savings,” says Thomas, “are estimated to come from the reduction of crime and increases in earnings for the child as an adult.”

To date, First 5 Shasta has invested over \$12 million in projects and programs that benefit young children and families in Shasta County. First 5 Shasta, the Shasta Children and Families First Commission, was established after voters passed Proposition 10 in November 1998, adding a 50 cent-per-pack tax on cigarettes to fund education, health, child care and other programs promoting early childhood development for expectant parents and children up to age five.

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