

Annual Agency Progress Report



FY 2025-2026





Letter from Supervisor Chuck Washington, Commission Chair



As Riverside County continues to grow, we must make sure it grows stronger for children and families. It has been a joy to serve again as the Commission Chair of the Riverside County Children and Families Commission. As a grandfather and Supervisor, First 5 Riverside County's mission is especially meaningful to me in one of the fastest-growing counties in California - a place more families choose to call home each year.

Riverside County families deserve more than good enough. They deserve our very best. That begins with helping every child get a strong start in life and arrive at kindergarten safe, healthy, and ready to learn.

As a pilot, I know that every successful flight begins with careful preparation and a strong foundation. The same is true for children. They cannot be ready to learn if they are not safe around water or if their parents cannot find dependable child care. When families need help, we must also make it easier for them to connect with the County and community partners best able to support them.

This year, First 5 Riverside County expanded its network of sponsored swim lesson providers to the largest in the Commission's history. This work is especially close to my heart. Swim lessons help children build skills and confidence in the water. Close adult supervision, secure barriers, and other layers of protection remain essential. When children can enjoy the water more safely—and parents and caregivers know how to protect them—we are helping build a safer county for families.

We also saw years of investment in child care begin to come to life. County, community, and child care partners brought several facility projects closer to welcoming children. Construction is an important milestone; licensing, staffing, and enrollment are the next steps toward making that care available to families. One example is the French Valley Learning Center and Discovery Hangar. Construction is complete, and the child care center is now moving through the licensing process. Supported with First 5 and American Rescue Plan Act funds, it will be operated by longtime child care leaders Angel and Sean Anton of ABC Child Care Village. Angel also serves on the First 5 Riverside County Advisory Committee and has been a tireless champion for children and families.

As Supervisor for the Third District, it brings me great pride and joy to see a project like this take shape in French Valley. It is also one example of work happening across our large and diverse county.



I am proud of Riverside County, proud of the families who call it home, and proud of the many people who work each day to help our children thrive. What we accomplished this year should not cause us to slow down. It should encourage us to keep going, reach farther, and continue bringing attention and resources to the earliest years of life.

Thank you to everyone joining us in this work.



Executive Director's Message Charna Widby, Executive Director



Every child deserves a strong start. Every family should know where to turn when they need help. That belief guided our work throughout the 2025–2026 fiscal year.

This year marked the final full fiscal year of our 2023–2026 Strategic Plan. Working alongside families, County departments, community organizations, health care providers, and educators, we strengthened connections to support young children across Riverside County.

Across FY 2023–24 through FY 2025–26, First 5 Riverside County invested \$48.1 million through funded contracts with County and community partners. Those investments supported child care, home visiting, healthy development, and family connections—helping sustain the people and places families turn to for support. Child care centers supported with American Rescue Plan Act funds finished construction, moved into licensing and are closer to opening their doors. Soon, more children will have safe, welcoming places to learn and grow.

First 5 Riverside County does not do this work alone. We are one County department within a much larger network of people and organizations that care for children and families. Our role is to listen, connect, invest, and help our partners move shared goals forward.

The numbers in this report show how programs performed and how public funds were used. But behind every number is a child, parent, caregiver, provider, or community partner. Their experiences help us understand what is working and where we must do better.

Our 2027–2030 Strategic Plan builds on this shared foundation. It reflects what we have learned and gives us a clear direction for the next four years.

Thank you to the families, partners, Commissioners, County colleagues, and staff who make this work possible. The progress reflected in this report belongs to all of us.

Every connection is a chance to **strengthen our families**. Together, we can turn those connections into **LASTING SUPPORT** — so more children grow up safe, healthy and ready to thrive.

Riverside County Children and Families Commission

Our Role & Legal Authority (Prop 10)

First 5 Riverside County was created under the California Children and Families Act of 1998, also known as Proposition 10. Proposition 10 provides tobacco-tax revenue to support pregnant people, young children through age 5, and their families. Riverside County Ordinance 784.11 carries out that law locally. It places First 5 within County government and creates an independent public commission to guide its work. The Commission adopts the Strategic Plan and annual budget, approves investments and contracts, and oversees the responsible use of public funds. Its work follows Commission Bylaws, the Brown Act, and County conflict-of-interest requirements.

What the Commission Does

The Riverside County Children and Families Commission serves as the governing board for First 5 Riverside County. Commissioners set direction, approve major investments, and hold the organization accountable for results.

State law and County ordinance define the seats on the Commission. Together, its members bring experience in health, education, social services, early childhood, County government, and community leadership. They ask hard questions, listen to families and providers, and keep the focus on access, fairness, and meaningful results for children and families.

Commission Membership

- Supervisor Chuck Washington — Chair; Board of Supervisors, Third District
- Jose Campos — Vice Chair; Public Member (District II appointee)
- Edwin Gomez, EdD — Riverside County Superintendent of Schools
- Zachary Ginder, PsyD, MSW — Public Member (District I appointee)
- Kimberly Saruwatari, MPH — Director, RUHS–Public Health
- Elizabeth Romero — Public Member (District IV appointee)
- Charity Douglas — Director, Department of Public Social Services
- Takashi Wada, MD, MPH — Public Member (District III appointee)
- Cheryl-Marie Hansberger, Ed.D. — Public Member (District V appointee)
- Board of Supervisors Alternate: Supervisor Jose Medina (District I)



First 5 Riverside County Advisory Committee

What the Advisory Committee Does

The Advisory Committee brings parent, provider, health, education, and community voices into the Commission's work. Members review information, identify gaps and barriers, and offer recommendations about strategy, access, fairness, and community needs.

Early experiences and safe, stable, nurturing relationships shape a child's development. Advisory Committee members help the Commission understand what families are experiencing so that its decisions reflect the needs of Riverside County's diverse communities.

Advisory Committee Membership

- Antonia Eli Mast — Chair (District II appointee)
- Agam Patel — Vice Chair (District IV appointee)
- Kari Middleton-Hendrix — Member (District IV appointee)
- Saovaros Diehl-Hope — Member (District V appointee)
- Angel Anton — Member (District III appointee)
- Helena Lopez — Member (District V appointee)
- Audrie Echnoz — Member (District II appointee)
- Jackie Steed — Member (District III appointee)



Riverside County’s Youngest Children

Understanding children and families who call Riverside County home helps guide where First 5 Riverside County and our partners focus resources.

Population Overview	About 161,400 Children ages 0–5 live in Riverside County.
Maternal & Infant Health	9.3% Of births were preterm in 2025
Prenatal Care Inequities	79.6% Of pregnant people began prenatal care during the first trimester in 2025.
Child Safety	3.9 PER 1,000 The infant mortality rate in 2025. Riverside County recorded 105 infant deaths, down from 141 the year before. 47 CALLS Emergency responders received 47 water-related 911 calls involving children ages 0–5 in 2025.

Why Early Investment Matters

Riverside County continues to grow while the number of children is falling across much of California. This means our county must prepare for more families while also responding to changing needs.

Strong prenatal care, safe and available child care, healthy development, and support for parents all help children get the best possible start. Investing early prevents more serious—and more costly—challenges later.

Our Shared Impact: FY 2025-26

First 5 Riverside County works with County departments, health care providers, educators, community organizations, and families. Together, these partnerships help children grow up healthy, safe, supported, and ready to learn.

16,053 Children and Caregivers

- Received services through First 5 Riverside County-funded programs

39 Contracted Partner Organizations

- Delivered direct services to families across Riverside County

14,626 Children

- Learned and grew in early learning programs participating in Quality Start Riverside County

11,302 Children

- Received added support through HealthySteps during pediatric visits

730 Families

- Received voluntary home visiting services, parenting support, and connections to community resources

4,806 Children

- Participated in sponsored swim lessons through partners across Riverside County

21,100 Books

- Distributed countywide to foster a love of reading in young children

409 Pregnant Participants

- Received monthly financial support through the county’s guaranteed income pilot

Building a Stronger System

This year, First 5 Riverside County and our partners also worked behind the scenes to make support easier to reach. Shared data helped identify gaps by race and geography. Process improvement projects reduced delays and made services easier to use. New funding partnerships helped extend the reach of local Proposition 10 dollars.



2026 Champion for Children Awards

A New Approach

Since 2019, First 5 Riverside County has honored people who make a lasting difference for young children and their families. Community members submit nominations, the First 5 Advisory Committee evaluates the nominations, and the Commission awards the honorees.

In 2026, the Commission expanded the award to recognize two kinds of leadership:

- **MAKING A DIFFERENCE** honors someone who works directly with children and families. Candidates may also nominate themselves.
- **LEADING THE WAY** honors someone who uses a leadership role to create lasting change for children and families.

Samudra Leitan, Child Care Provider

Making a Difference: Helping Every Child Learn and Thrive



Samudra Leitan has worked in child care for more than 25 years. For the past six years, she has operated a Montessori-inspired family child care home in the Coachella Valley.

Samudra creates a setting where children with different needs and abilities can learn together. She incorporates American Sign Language throughout her curriculum, helping children who are deaf or hard of hearing participate fully while giving all children another way to communicate.

Learning also extends beyond the classroom. Drawing on her experience as a soccer coach, Samudra uses outdoor activity and play to help children build confidence, skills, and friendships.

Her care does not end when children leave her program. Families often stay in touch and share stories about their children's progress in elementary school. Those lasting relationships reflect the trust she has built over many years.

Through her warmth, consistency, and inclusive approach, Samudra helps every child feel seen, supported, and ready to thrive.

First 5 Riverside County's Champion for Children Awards were created to honor and bring awareness to people and organizations whose leadership and advocacy **embody the vision of First 5 Riverside County**, where **ALL CHILDREN IN RIVERSIDE COUNTY** are healthy and thrive in supportive, nurturing, and loving environments and enter school ready to learn and embrace lifelong learning.

Sophia Williams, Regional Manager, DPSS

Leading the Way: Empowering Foster Youth and their Caregivers



Sophia Williams leads the Riverside County Healthy Crownz initiative, a culturally responsive program that supports the hair care, identity, and emotional well-being of Black children and youth in foster care.

Healthy Crownz began with a simple but powerful understanding: hair care is about more than appearance. It is connected to identity, dignity, belonging, and confidence.

Under Sophia's leadership, the Healthy Crownz committee meets weekly and hosts three major events each year. These events bring together young people, caregivers, social workers, and local hair care professionals for hands-on education, resources, and support.

Volunteer professionals care for children's hair while teaching caregivers and social workers how to maintain it at home and choose appropriate hair care products. Children leave with practical support and the experience of being understood and celebrated.

Participants have reported greater confidence after attending Healthy-Crownz events. That confidence can strengthen relationships, resilience, and a young person's sense of belonging at home and at school.



Sophia also helped turn the initiative into lasting change within the County. Healthy Crownz training is now required for DPSS social workers, helping more staff provide culturally responsive care to Black children and youth throughout Riverside County.

Through Healthy Crownz, Sophia has created more than a successful event. She has helped build a more informed, compassionate, and supportive foster care system.

Goal 1 - Quality Early Learning (QEL)

Supporting Providers, Expanding Choices for Families

Families need child care they can find, afford, and trust. Children need nurturing relationships and opportunities to learn through play. Meeting those needs takes early educators, families, the Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE), County departments, community organizations, and First 5 Riverside County working together.

21,100 books shared through early literacy partnerships -- bringing stories into children's lives and helping families read together.

During FY 2025–26, these partnerships supported child care providers, helped families access financial assistance, and advanced facility projects intended to expand infant and toddler care. First 5 Riverside County contributed funding, staff support, and coordination alongside the expertise and resources of our partners.

Through the Riverside Hybrid Alternative Payment (RHAP) partnership with RCOE, families receive help paying for care, and participating providers receive support to serve families using child care assistance. This work connects affordability for parents with the providers who make dependable care possible.

Access and quality must grow together. In FY 2025–26, 484 early learning sites participated in Quality Start Riverside County (QSRC). Through this shared effort, RCOE, First 5 Riverside County, and participating early educators supported professional learning, coaching, and improvements in everyday teaching and care.

Early literacy was one part of that work. In partnership with Raising a Reader National, First 5 Riverside County supported QSRC providers in bringing books and shared reading into their programs. Across the county, 43 participating providers reached more than 1,200 children, creating opportunities for families to enjoy reading together and build early language skills.

Providers' experiences helped guide what comes next. More than 150 QSRC providers shared feedback about the program's value for teaching, professional growth, classroom quality, and family engagement. They also identified needs for support with recruitment and retention, children's behavior, inclusion of children with disabilities, and educator well-being. Their input informed the QSRC strategic plan for FY 2026–27.



Partnership in Action

More Providers, More Child Care Choices

Nearly \$9 million invested with RCOE over three fiscal years -- helping families afford child care and support the providers they depend on.

Finding child care can be hard, especially when families need a provider who accepts child care assistance. First 5 Riverside County partners with RCOE to expand the number of providers available through the California Alternative Payment Program (CAPP).

The CAAP helps eligible families pay for child care with an approved provider of their choice. Each year, the partnership aims to add 125 providers to the program. Incentives help newly enrolled providers complete the process. They can also help Family, Friend and Neighbor caregivers become licensed providers.

In FY 2025–26, RCOE helped 181 providers enroll in the CAPP program—56 above the annual goal. All 181 entered the new fiscal year with agreements in place to serve families receiving child care assistance.

The partnership does not stop after a provider enrolls. New providers are also connected with QSRC for training, coaching, and other support.

Too many Riverside County families struggle to find child care that meets their needs. Expanding the provider network gives families more choice in where and how their children receive care. Investing in early care and education helps sustain dependable, high-quality care over time.

Infrastructure Expansion Across Riverside County

County leaders, facility partners, and child care operators are working together to expand infant and toddler care, with First 5 Riverside County contributing Proposition 10 funding alongside American Rescue Plan Act funds and other local resources. In FY 2025–26, nearly \$6 million in Proposition 10 and ARPA expenditures supported child care facility projects led by County and community partners. Licensing, staffing, and enrollment remain the next steps toward making that planned capacity available to families.

District	Project	Funding Blend	Capacity Impact	Completion
1/2	Lakeland Village (Lake Elsinore)	\$5.1M ARPA D1/D2/ECE + \$3.5M Prop 10 + \$607K DIF	+48 Infant/Toddler spaces	Spring 2026
3	French Valley	\$12M D3 ARPA + \$2M Prop 10 + \$2M Library + \$2M ARPA contingency	+48 Infant/Toddler spaces	Early 2026
4	Desert Rose (Ripley)	\$1M ARPA	+48 Infant/Toddler spaces	Fall 2026
5	Jan Peterson CDC (Moreno Valley)	\$1M ARPA + \$1.4M Prop 10	+36 Infant/Toddler spaces	Summer 2026

Partner Provider Highlights

Sarah Saucedo, CEO, Integrated Care Communities Fostering Social Emotional Development and Early Education through Community



For years, the Jan Peterson Child Development Center (JPCDC) has been a nurturing environment for Moreno Valley's youngest residents — a place where early education, community partnership, and dedicated care come together. The center is operated by Integrated Care Communities — which also operates assisted senior living facilities — under the leadership of CEO Sarah Saucedo.

The JPCDC operates with a clear developmental philosophy. Children learn through play, discovery, and relationship building. Under Sarah's leadership, the site is growing. This summer, construction was completed on two new additional classrooms, further expanding vitally needed child care capacity. Construction was made possible due to American Rescue Plan Act funds through Supervisor Yxstian Gutierrez' office as well as First 5 Riverside County Prop 10 funds.

One of the most unique strengths Sarah champions is the JPCDC's intergenerational model with senior residents. Through weekly shared experiences — art, gardening, music, conversation — staff provide space for children to interact with older adults in ways that enrich both groups. Sarah notes how instinctively children lean into these interactions, joyfully playing, hearing stories, and connecting. Seniors, in turn, feel the purpose and emotional lift from these cross-generational relationships. It is a model that reinforces that healthy, happy kids are in everyone's best interest.

In every space she occupies — from program development to community partnerships — Sarah brings a grounded, compassionate perspective. She sees early educators as essential partners, values community, and advances models of care rooted in dignity and belonging. Her leadership ensures that JPCDC remains not only a special place for child care and learning, but also a vibrant hub where children and community members, young and old, thrive together.

Trudy Oliver, Director, Temple Beth El Child Development Center Parent Partnership Through Every Child



NAEYC-accredited Temple Beth El Child Development Center (TBE CDC) has served families in Riverside since 1965, providing low teacher-to-child ratios for children aged 6 weeks through sixth grade. TBE CDC is also a long-standing partner of First 5 Riverside County, having received funding for multiple projects since 2000 to increase capacity for the growing number of families in our county.

Center director Trudy Oliver says the site is a one-stop support for families who need child care for a range of ages. While most children enrolled are aged five and younger, caring for older children after school is a significant support for working parents with demanding schedules.

Whatever the age range, communication is everything to Trudy and to the providers at TBE CDC.

Infants especially require individualized approaches and consistent dialogue with parents.

"Infants are the most challenging and rewarding of all classes. Parents are picky and they should be, as you entrust a newborn who cannot speak and cannot talk to you — we need to work together with parents and replicate what they are doing at home and share information so that child has a more seamless process under our care," Trudy said.

Parents of infants receive a daily report detailing naps, feedings, diaper changes, and mood. As children get older, TBE CDC employs a continuum of care model so that caregivers continue to work with children as they get older, ensuring a familiar face and voice educating them as well as caring for them as they keep growing.

An Engaged Parent, Now a Provider for Children

Wendy and Kamila's Story

Wendy first brought her daughter, Kamila, to parent engagement classes at the Mead Valley Family Resource Center. Led by First 5 Riverside County's Quality Early Learning team, the classes give families simple and playful ways to support their children's development.

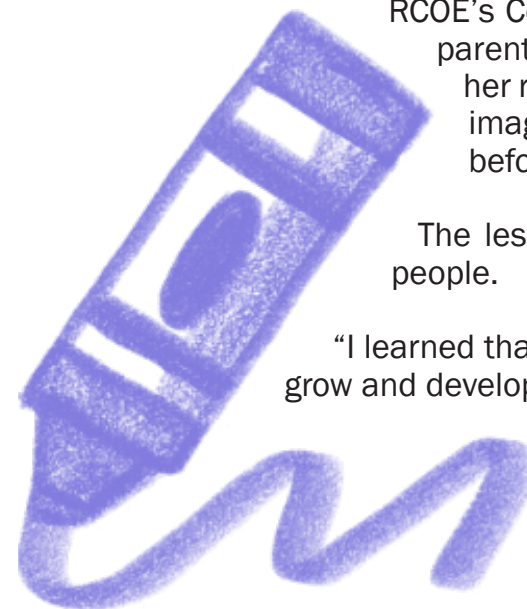
Parents learn how everyday activities—such as crafts, sensory play, stories, and movement—can help children build fine and gross motor skills, language, and early literacy. Many activities use items families already have at home, making learning easy to continue after class.

Kamila loved the hands-on, screen-free activities and the chance to make new friends. Wendy valued having a welcoming place to spend time with her daughter, connect with other parents, and exchange ideas about raising young children.

The experience also opened a new path for Wendy. Today, she is a newly credentialed substitute teacher in RCOE's Court School program. She credits the parent engagement classes with helping her recognize an interest in education and imagine a career she had not considered before.

The lessons still guide her work with young people.

"I learned that every child is different," Wendy said. "As a parent, I want to help my child grow and develop in every way, and First 5 gives me that space."



Goal 2 - Comprehensive Health & Development (CHD)

Helping Children Grow Healthy and Strong

A child's first three years are filled with extraordinary growth. When families have caring support early, children have a stronger foundation for learning, health, and well-being.

This year, First 5 Riverside County worked with Riverside University Health System–Public Health's Epidemiology team to build shared data dashboards. These dashboards help us see where families are thriving, where more support is needed, and how children's health is changing across Riverside County. A clearer picture helps First 5 Riverside County and its partners focus time and resources where they can make the greatest difference.

730 families connected with home visiting--a trusted partner through pregnancy, parenting, and a child's earliest years. FY 2025-26

Home visiting is another trusted source of support. Home visitors build relationships with families, answer questions, celebrate progress, and help parents connect with health care, food, housing, financial assistance, and other resources.

This year, First 5 Riverside County and JFK Memorial Foundation also tested an AI-assisted tool designed to make those connections easier. The tool helped staff find benefit programs and complete forms with families from different locations—not only in an office. Staff said they spent less time on paperwork, worked more efficiently, and had greater flexibility to support families. Some staff described opportunities to spend more time engaged with families; their feedback also identified improvements needed for reliable everyday use.

Pediatric teams at partnering hospitals and clinics provide HealthySteps support during young children's health visits. First 5 Riverside County helped establish the local partnerships and funding, and now thousands of children and families have received HealthySteps services through Riverside University Health System – Community Health Centers and Rady Children's Hospital. This year, the partnership grew again. With support from Inland Empire Health Plan and coordination from First 5 Riverside County, HealthySteps expanded to four additional sites across Riverside County.

\$2.08 million supporting child development and family care within pediatric settings. FY 2025-26

HealthySteps

Support Families Can Feel

HealthySteps specialists work alongside pediatric care teams to answer parents' questions, support children's development, and connect families with help.

"Thank you for helping our family try to reach our goals! [Our child] always enjoyed our time in sessions and it was helpful for all of us to have guidance and support. It was good for us to have some structure while we navigate military family life and developmental leaps."

"She quickly helped my child. We felt right at home."

"My HealthySteps Specialist listens to what my concerns are and always gets back to me with suggestions or answers."

Partnership in Action

Camila's Story: Growing Safer and Stronger in the Water

Five-year-old Camila loved the water long before she took her first formal swim lesson. She had gone swimming with her family at their apartment's community pool, but her confidence was growing faster than her swimming skills.

Camila is naturally fearless and adventurous. Her mother, Rebeca, wanted her to enjoy the water while also learning to recognize her abilities and boundaries.

The family learned about sponsored swim lessons when the City of Temecula Aquatics Division visited Camila's older brother's elementary school. Through a partnership between First 5 Riverside County and the City of Temecula, Camila received a scholarship that made lessons available to her family.

Camila has now completed Levels 1 and 2. Along with new swimming skills, she is building awareness and respect for the water. Rebeca has been amazed by how much her daughter has learned in a short time and looks forward to helping her continue.

Camila's story shows what partnership can make possible. A school shared the information. The City provided the instruction. First 5 Riverside County helped cover the cost. Her family encouraged her every step of the way.

Why Early Swim Skills Matter

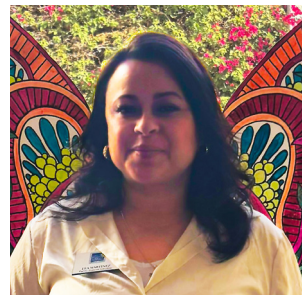
Many childhood drownings happen when no one is planning to swim. A child may get through a door unnoticed, reach a pool during a brief distraction, or encounter water during an unexpected moment.

Swim lessons help children build water skills, but children still need layers of protection—even when a child has taken lessons.



Partner Provider Highlights

Lea Martinez, Home Visiting Parent Partner, JFK Memorial Foundation
Trusted Support, Easier Access to Benefits



When families are managing concerns about income, housing, employment, or health, finding and applying for assistance can feel overwhelming. At the JFK Memorial Foundation, Home Visiting Parent Partner Lea Martinez helps parents understand their options and take the next steps toward support.



Through a partnership with Nava Labs and First 5 Riverside County, Lea tested an AI-assisted tool designed to help case-workers identify benefit programs and complete applications alongside families. The tool supports the practical work of applying, while Lea brings the relationship, guidance, and understanding of each family’s priorities.

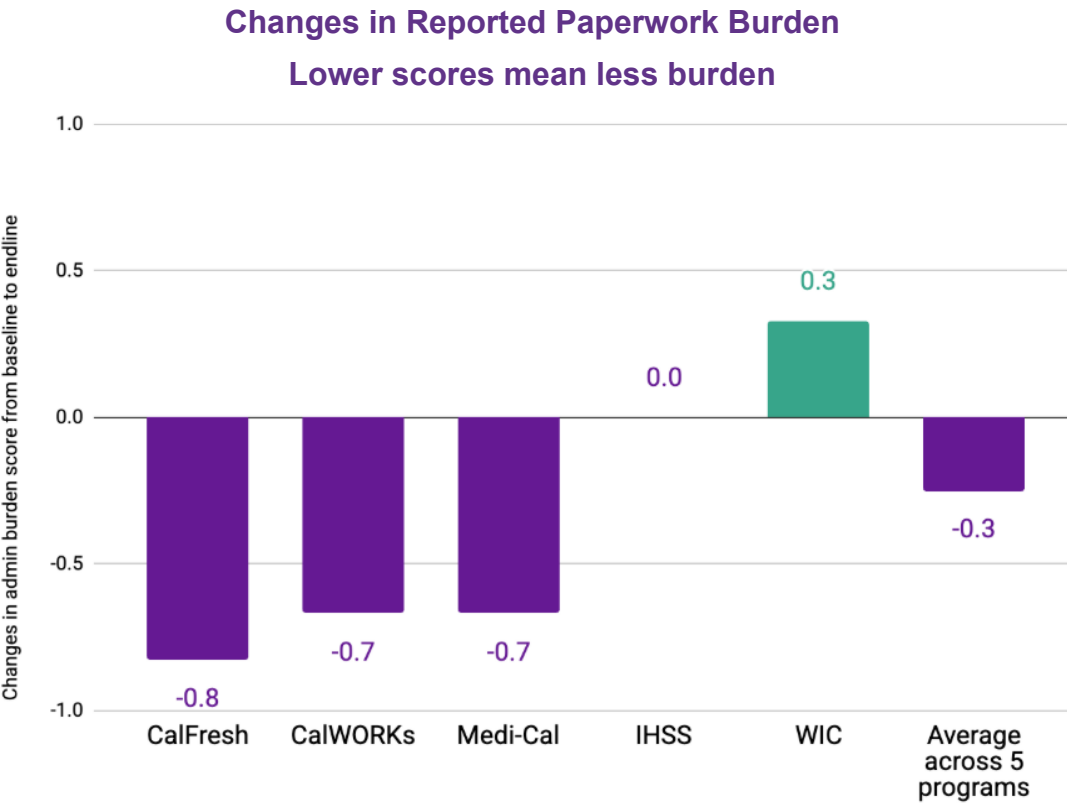
Family Resource Center staff spend 50% of their time filling out application forms with families.

For one family expecting a baby, that combination helped address an urgent need. The father was unemployed, and the family was using limited savings to buy food. They had struggled to access CalFresh despite being eligible. Lea used the tool to help them complete an application, and within a week of submitting it, the family was approved for benefits. That assistance helped them

afford groceries and eased pressure on their budget as they prepared for their baby.

In the months that followed, the father found work close to home, the family welcomed a baby girl, and they began saving for an apartment of their own.

Their progress reflects the family’s efforts and the value of having a trusted person to turn to. Lea’s experience shows how thoughtfully used technology can support that relationship and make an important step—accessing help with food—easier for families.



Step-by-Step to Success

Elizabeth’s Story

It was September 2025 and Elizabeth was feeling alone, afraid, and unsure how she would be able to best take care of her children today, let alone tomorrow. She spoke with her Parent Partner for the first time over the phone, in tears, detailing how she had to leave her partner and take her children to live with her father in a small RV. Her income was tight and she worried about having enough food for her children.

Slowing the conversation down, and focusing on the next small steps that needed taking, Elizabeth’s Parent Partner addressed a budgeting goal first. This helped Elizabeth feel more in control of her situation. With a little time, she became more confident as she better managed her finances. Then she opened up to her Parent partner about a longtime goal she had yet to achieve: finishing school.

With her Parent Partner always exploring options with her and working out different scenarios, Elizabeth had her next goal in sight. She enrolled in RCOE School of Career Education to become a phlebotomist.

In FY 25–26, 4,654 home visits were delivered, giving parents like Elizabeth a partner when they need it most.

Soon after enrolling in school, Elizabeth enrolled her youngest son in daycare. She was building momentum. She went to class four days a week, and at home was engaging with more routine activities with her children - story time at night, accessible activities like going to the library. These small steps led to big outcomes: she passed the phlebotomy exam after completing her 21-week course.

Today Elizabeth is employed and has moved her family into their own apartment. She continues to meet with her Parent Partner, who is inspired by listening to the confident mom today who not long ago did not even know how she would put food on the table. Elizabeth’s success today is the result of creating and sticking to a clear plan, every step of the way.



**BIG CHANGES BEGIN
WITH SMALL STEPS**

Goal 3 - Resilient Families

Connecting Families Across County and Community Services

Families should be able to find support wherever they first ask for help. Through RivCoONE, County departments and community partners are working together to make those connections easier, so families can spend less time navigating programs and more time caring for their children.

\$2.2 million invested in Family Resource Center Network Specialist partnerships over three fiscal years—strengthening local connections to support families.

At Family Resource Centers, staff listen to families' priorities, identify available resources, and—with permission—connect them directly with people who can help. First 5 Riverside County

contributes its staff, provider relationships, and experience working alongside families to this shared effort.

As one of the first departments to participate in RivCoONE, First 5 Riverside County began putting the approach into practice through the Jurupa Valley Family Resource Center's partnership with Riverside University Health System — Community Health Centers. Teams incorporated the Whole Person Health Score—a tool for understanding a family's needs and priorities—into everyday conversations and service connections. Work in Temecula extended this approach, with First 5 Riverside staff working alongside other County teams to help families access support in one place.

These partnerships provide opportunities to learn together: what makes a connection helpful, where families encounter barriers, and how County and community providers can improve follow-through. The measure of progress is whether families receive the support they need.

Our 2027–2030 Strategic Plan builds on this foundation. Together with our partners, we will focus on three priorities:

- **Make connections part of everyday practice:** Help staff and providers connect families directly with services and follow up to understand whether they received help.
- **Strengthen County and community partnerships:** Connect County services with the trusted organizations and places families already turn to, making support easier to reach close to home.
- **Learn from families' experiences:** Use family feedback and shared information to identify delays, reduce repeated steps, and address barriers together.

84,922 diapers distributed through Family Resource Centers -- meeting families' immediate needs and connecting families with more support



Partnership in Action

Helping Families Connect—and Following Through

Finding the right support can be difficult when the resources a family needs are spread across different departments and programs. Through RivCoONE, County and community partners are working together to connect families with support that matches their priorities. Staff at Family Resource Centers contribute by listening to families, helping them identify available support, and connecting them directly with resources.

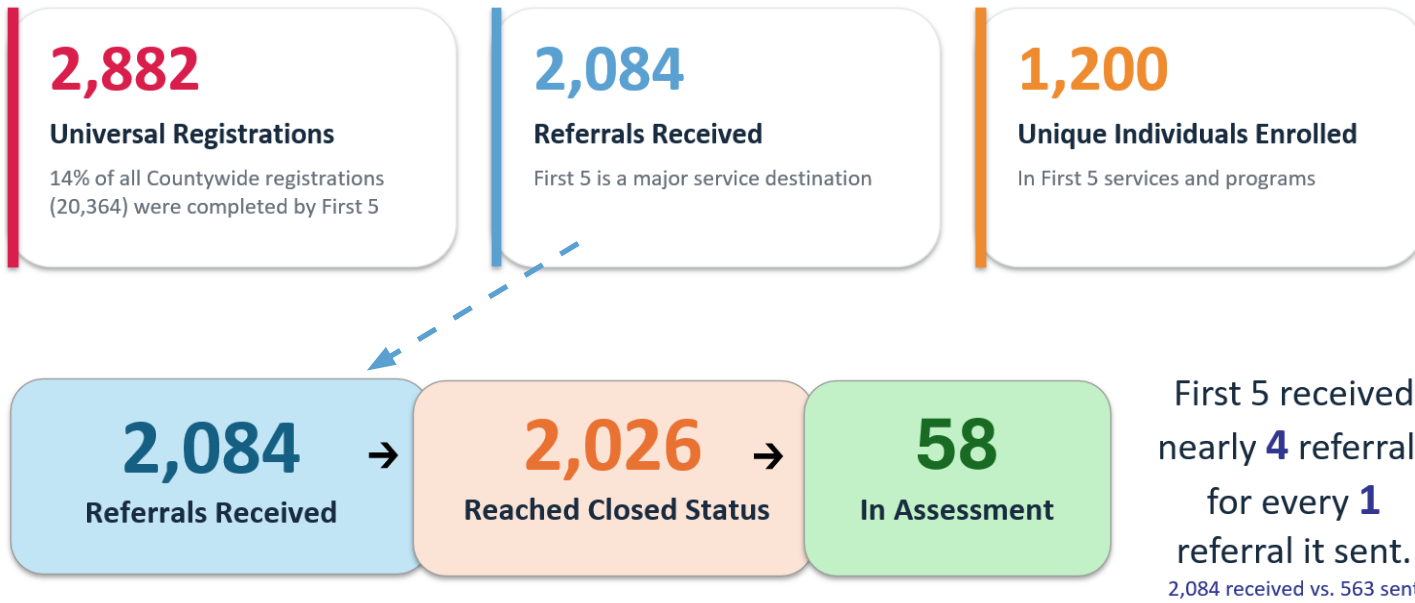
In FY 2025–26, First 5 Riverside County staff completed 2,882 universal registrations—14% of the countywide total. This shared process helps staff understand families' needs and, with their permission, coordinate support across departments. First 5 Riverside County also received more than 2,000 referrals and enrolled 1,200 individuals in its programs during the fiscal year.

Family Resource Centers served 10,191 individuals in FY 2025-26, including 415 children aged 0-5 years

Nine out of ten First 5 Riverside County registrations included permission to coordinate with at least one County department. That permission allows teams to work together on the priorities families identify, whether they need food assistance, health care, housing support, or other services.

Countywide RivCoONE data show why a personal connection matters: 89% of residents referred through a warm handoff enrolled in a service or program, compared with 49% of those referred without one. A warm handoff connects a family directly with someone who can help, giving them a person to contact and a clearer next step.

RivCoONE is a countywide shared commitment: helping families take the next step, following up on what happened, and working with partners to address barriers along the way.





Family Resource Centers

Family Resource Centers: Connections That Make a Difference

Families come to Family Resource Centers with different priorities and circumstances. These stories show how staff and partners listen, respond to immediate needs, and stay connected.

Desert Hot Springs Family Resource Center Connecting a Parent with Ongoing Support

Maria Machuca
Regional Manager

Late one afternoon, a pregnant mother came to the Desert Hot Springs Family Resource Center looking for food and a safe place to stay. She had spent the previous night in her car and was managing several urgent needs.



Staff listened to her priorities and explained how home visiting could provide ongoing support during pregnancy and after her baby’s birth. When she chose to participate, the team contacted the JFK Memorial Foundation, whose home visiting staff connected with her that evening. Together, they explored available resources, and JFK submitted a request for housing assistance to the Department of Public Social Services.

Within days, she enrolled in home visiting. The connection gave her an ongoing source of support as she prepared for her baby and worked toward greater stability for her family.

Jurupa Valley Family Resource Center A Place to Return for Support

Alicia Corona
Regional Manager

A resident came to the Jurupa Valley Family Resource Center without stable housing or the identification documents needed to access benefits and health care. He had limited transportation and phone access, making each step more difficult.

Family Resource Center staff and their clinic partner helped him work through document replacement, food assistance, health coverage, and medical appointments. When he returned after a gap in visits, the team helped address interrupted benefits and an identity verification issue delaying unemployment assistance.

At his request, staff also helped organize paperwork and develop a manageable plan for next steps. Support continues with employment, training, health care, and basic needs. His experience shows the value of having a consistent place to return when circumstances change or a process becomes difficult to navigate.



Mead Valley Family Resource Center Supporting a Grandparent’s New Caregiving Role

Charity Webb
Regional Manager



When a grandmother unexpectedly became the primary caregiver for her nine-month-old grandchild, she sought help finding formula, diapers, clothing, and other baby essentials.

At the Mead Valley Family Resource Center, First 5 Riverside County staff Eduardo Herrera and Jennifer Gomez listened to her priorities and arranged an in-person meeting with California Family Life’s KinCare staff. Because she lived in Temecula, they also connected her with nearby organizations and the Temecula Family Resource Center for help accessing supplies closer to home.

The team introduced her to Grandparents Raising Grandchildren through the Office on Aging, adding opportunities to connect with other caregivers and receive ongoing guidance. As she settles into her caregiving role, these partnerships give her people and places to turn to for her grandchild’s immediate needs and her own support.

Mecca Family and Farmworkers’ Service Center Keeping Paperwork Ready for the Next Step

Maria Machuca
Regional Manager

Applying for assistance often means keeping track of forms, identification, and other important documents across several appointments. At the Mecca Family and Farmworkers’ Service Center, staff introduced document organizers to help families keep those materials together and ready to use.

Staff work with families to organize paperwork around their upcoming appointments and applications. The organizers offer a practical way to keep documents secure and easier to find.

This small change addresses an everyday barrier: helping families arrive with the information they need so appointments can focus on getting support.

Temecula Family Resource Center Staying Connected as Families Move Forward

Charity Webb
Regional Manager

After separating from her husband, a mother of two young children came to the Temecula Family Resource Center for support. First 5 Riverside County Community Health Worker Carolina Sanchez listened to her priorities and connected her with local resources.

She continued attending parent engagement sessions, where she explored ways to support her children’s development and connected with other families. Over time, she took additional steps herself, including completing a needs assessment with the Department of Child Support Services and beginning an In-Home Supportive Services application for her child. Family Resource Center staff remained available when she wanted help with paperwork or questions.

Today, she and her children are living in their own home. Her experience reflects the value of practical help, ongoing relationships, and room for parents to set their own direction.



Goal 4 - Cross Program Impact

Strong Programs, Stronger Connections

The 2023–2026 Strategic Plan guided First 5 Riverside County’s work through four priority areas: Quality Early Learning, Comprehensive Health and Development, Resilient Families, and Cross-Program Impact.

The first three areas focused on services for children and families. Cross-Program Impact focused on what helped those services work together: strong partnerships, shared information, easier processes, community connections, and the thoughtful use of public resources.

During FY 2025–26, First 5 and Riverside University Health System–Public Health continued developing shared data dashboards. These tools helped partners better understand where needs were greatest, where gaps remained, and how the experiences of children and families differed across Riverside County.

Staff also used continuous improvement projects to examine delays, repeated steps, and confusing processes. New tools helped home visitors and caseworkers find benefits and complete forms with families from different locations. RivCoONE Connect began bringing intake, consent, screening, and referrals into a more connected process.

Family Resource Center Network Specialists strengthened relationships among local organizations and helped connect families with support closer to home. Partnerships with County departments, health plans, health care providers, schools, and community organizations also brought together different funding sources and areas of expertise.

What We Learned		What Cross-Program Impact Means	
• See the whole child	• Make every handoff count	• Share information responsibly	and organizations
• Listen to the family		• Learn what works and	improve what does not
• Meet families where they are	• Build health and strength together	• Makes services easier to reach	• Use public resources where they can make the greatest difference
• Connect support sooner		• Strengthen partnerships across programs	

The final year of the 2023–2026 Strategic Plan showed the value of this work. It also showed that stronger connections could not remain behind the scenes or sit alongside our other priorities. They needed to become part of how every program works.

The 2027–2030 Strategic Plan builds on this foundation. Cross-Program Impact becomes County-wide Impact, reflecting a broader commitment to shared data, connected services, community access, strong partnerships, and learning across Riverside County. Wherever a family begins, they should be welcomed, heard, and connected to support that helps their family thrive.



Partnership in Action

Shared Data, Earlier Support

Children do best when families can get help before a difficult moment becomes a crisis.

The Riverside County Department of Public Social Services created the Office of Child Abuse Prevention to help partners prevent child abuse and support families earlier. This year, the office released its first State of the Child Report, bringing together countywide information about children’s health, safety, education, and family well-being.

The report helps partners see where families are under the greatest strain and where added support could make a difference. It also identifies Family Resource Centers and RivCoONE as important parts of Riverside County’s family support system.

What the data tell us

Family Stress Begins Early

Parents of young children may be balancing financial pressure, housing needs, child care, health concerns, and the daily work of raising a family.

family is facing challenges with health, housing, transportation, child care, or other basic needs.

A Healthy Start Matters

Prenatal care, health coverage, developmental screening, and support during a child’s earliest years build a strong foundation.

Safety Trends Show Where Help is Needed

Looking at patterns across communities helps partners direct support earlier and strengthen the conditions that help families thrive.

Attendance can Reveal Barriers

Frequent school absences may be a sign that a

Turning Information into Support

Data should do more than describe a problem. It should help partners act.

Family Resource Centers, Community Health Workers, benefits assistance, warm handoffs, and RivCoONE Connect can make food, housing, child care, health care, and other resources easier to reach.

Prenatal care, home visiting, perinatal mental health services, developmental screening, early learning, and family navigation add other layers of support. Together, these services help families build stability, connection, and confidence.

This is Cross-Program Impact in action: County and community partners looking at the same information, understanding the connections among family needs, and working together to make help easier to find.

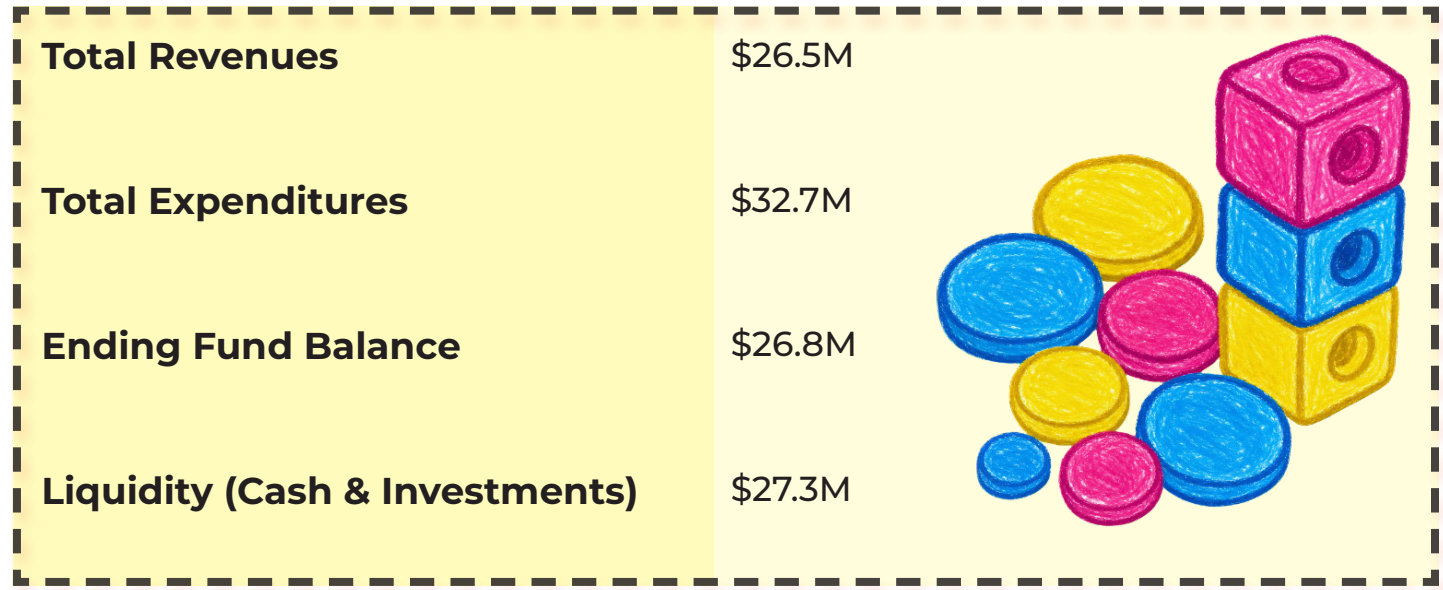
Budget Overview

Investing Today, Planning for Tomorrow

County and community partners bring different funding sources and expertise to Riverside County’s early childhood services. First 5 Riverside County invests Proposition 10 funding alongside state, federal, health plan, and other resources to support early learning, home visiting, healthy development, and family connections.

In FY 2025–26, expenditures exceeded annual revenue, and fund balance helped support services and planned investments. This makes careful planning essential: sustaining effective services, pursuing eligible funding, and matching future commitments to available resources.

Our responsibility is to report what these investments supported and work with our partners to sustain effective services, keeping children and families at the center of those decisions.



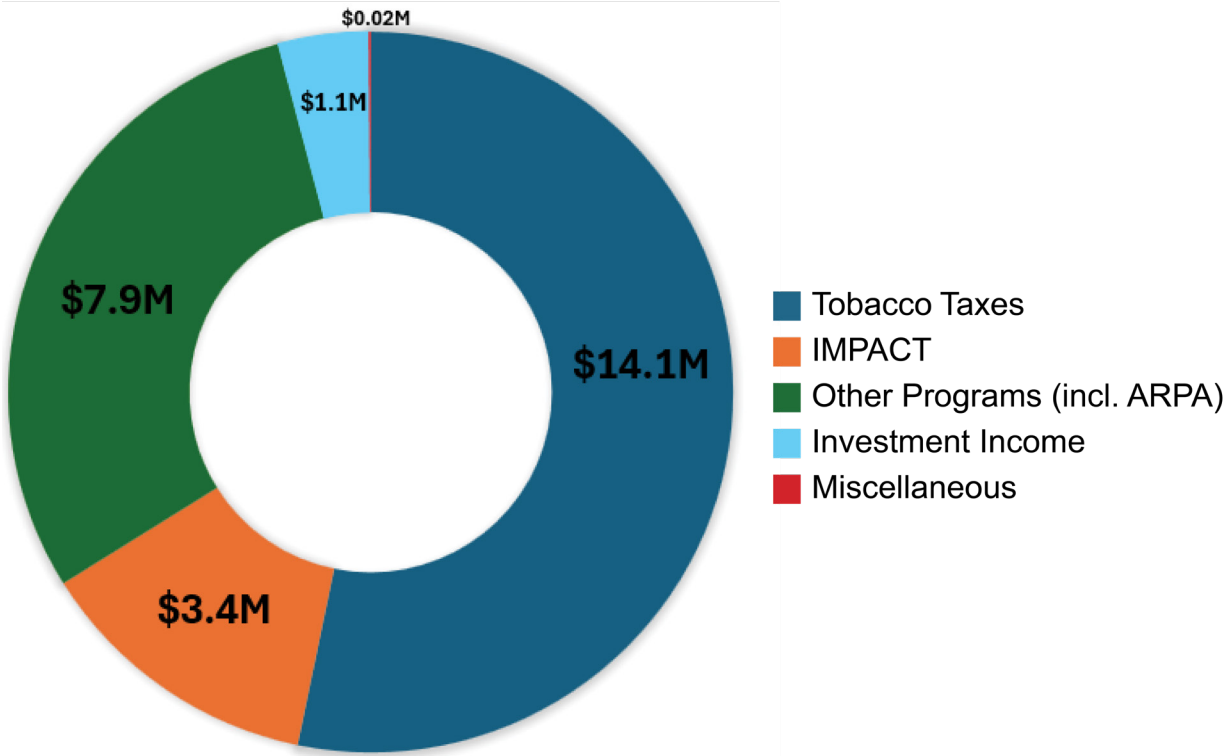
Proposition 10 remains our funding foundation. Nearly half of this year’s revenue came from other sources, extending the resources available to support children and families.

Strong partnerships and careful fiscal planning **help public dollars go further** — supporting effective services today and **PROTECTING OUR ABILITY** to invest in children and families for years to come.

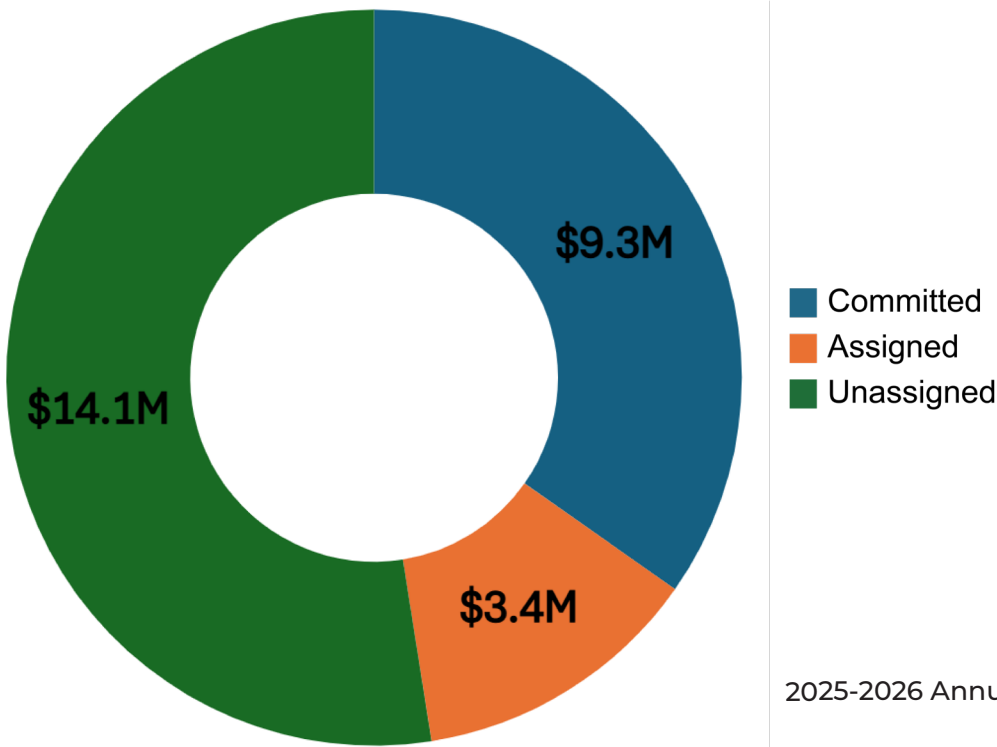
Cash & Investments in County Treasury: \$27.3M

Budget Stabilization: **\$6.0M committed** | Minimum Fund Balance: **\$4.0M on target**

FY25-26 Revenue Mix



FY25-26 Ending Fund Balance Composition



FY 23/24 through FY 26/27 Investments

Goal Area	FY 23/24 Contract Actuals	FY 24/25 Contract Actuals	FY 25/26 Contract Actuals	FY 26/27 Contract Budget	FY 23-27 Estimated Total
Countywide Programs - Total	\$675,000.00	\$1,265,700.00	\$373,171.12	\$250,000.00	\$2,563,871.12
Quality Early Learning - Total	\$6,249,524.75	\$5,656,766.49	\$8,708,067.11	\$5,889,610.24	\$26,503,968.59
Comprehensive Health and Development (CHD) - Total	\$6,653,243.01	\$7,764,062.86	\$8,121,318.95	\$9,427,273.34	\$31,965,898.16
Resilient Families - Total	\$707,388.48	\$746,275.69	\$769,448.53	\$1,100,000.00	\$3,323,112.70
Contracts Expired - Total	\$373,745.45	\$84,578.28	\$ -	\$ -	\$458,323.73
ESTIMATED GRAND TOTAL FY 23/24 THROUGH FY 26/27 INVESTMENTS	\$14,658,901.69	\$15,517,383.32	\$17,972,005.71	\$16,666,883.58	\$64,815,174.30

Includes select funded contracts; FY 2026–27 amounts are budgeted.

FY 25/26 Funded Partner Results

Service Targets and Reported Results for Funded Contracts

Agency Name	Contract	Primary Target Description	Target #	Result #
Desert Recreation District	CF23118	Swim scholarships	902	157
SoCal Water Babies	CF24101	Swim scholarships	242	242
Corona-Norco YMCA	CF24104	Swim scholarships	2,240	2,240
City of Temecula	CF24146	Swim scholarships	250	296
YMCA of the Desert	CF25108	Swim scholarships	400	684
Lifesaver Aquatics	CF25132	Swim scholarships	150	500
City of Banning	CF25117	Swim scholarships	58	21
City of Beaumont	CF25124	Swim scholarships	112	19
City of Desert Hot Springs	CF25136	Swim scholarships	184	40
City of Palm Springs	CF25138	Swim scholarships	38	21
Jurupa Area Recreation & Park District	CF25140	Swim scholarships	65	37
Premier Aquatic Services LLC	CF26118	Swim scholarships	92	92
City of Lake Elsinore	CF26128	Swim scholarships	53	87
British Swim School (PJEA SC Inc.)	CF26130	Swim scholarships	40	66
Rady Children's Hospital (HealthySteps)	CF25130	Children ages 0-3 receiving Tier 3 Visits	2,400	2,119
Riverside University Health System – Community Health Centers (HealthySteps)	CF25144	Children Ages 0-3 receiving Tier 3 Visits	800	1,541
Loma Linda University Children’s Hospital (Help Me Grow Inland Empire)	CF25146	Children registered for developmental navigation	5,411	4,813
Blindness Support (Home Visiting)	CF24111 CF24112	Families served	38	50
Yoo, Jeung Choo MD Inc. (Home Visiting)	CF24113 CF24114	Families served	122	133
Jurupa Unified School District (Home Visiting)	CF24115	Families served	130	234
John F. Kennedy Memorial Foundation (Home Visiting)	CF24117	Families served	100	185
Riverside University Health System - Public Health (Home Visiting)	CF24119 CF24120	Families served	31	40
Family Service Association (Home Visiting)	CF24123	Families served	60	69
Inland Southern California United Way, Inc. (Basic Income Pilot)	CF24136	Pregnant participants	409	409
Early Literacy/Reach Out and Read Continuity -All About Books	V271662	Books distributed	26,000	20,947
Early Literacy/Reach Out and Read Continuity -Hexagramm Books	V261865			
Early Literacy/Reach Out and Read Continuity -Interstate Books4School	V272145			
Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE)	CF25121	RHAP - scholarships for children and provider incentives		432
		Child care providers and sites receiving Quality Incentives		1,632



Larissa Wills
Regional Manager
Alicia Corona
Regional Manager

More Time for What Families Need

When a parent comes to us for help, an application is often one piece of a much longer day: another appointment across town, documents to gather, work, and children who need care. Staff may be moving between websites, repeating information, and tracking requirements across programs. Our teams bring tremendous care to this work. But the steps required to get help can leave less time for the person asking. This partnership offered a possibility worth exploring: a little more breathing room for families and staff.

During FY 2025–26, Nava Labs partnered with First 5 Riverside County and the JFK Memorial Foundation to test an AI-assisted Form-Filling Assistant, supported by Google.org’s GenAI Accelerator. Eighteen frontline staff contributed their experience and feedback.

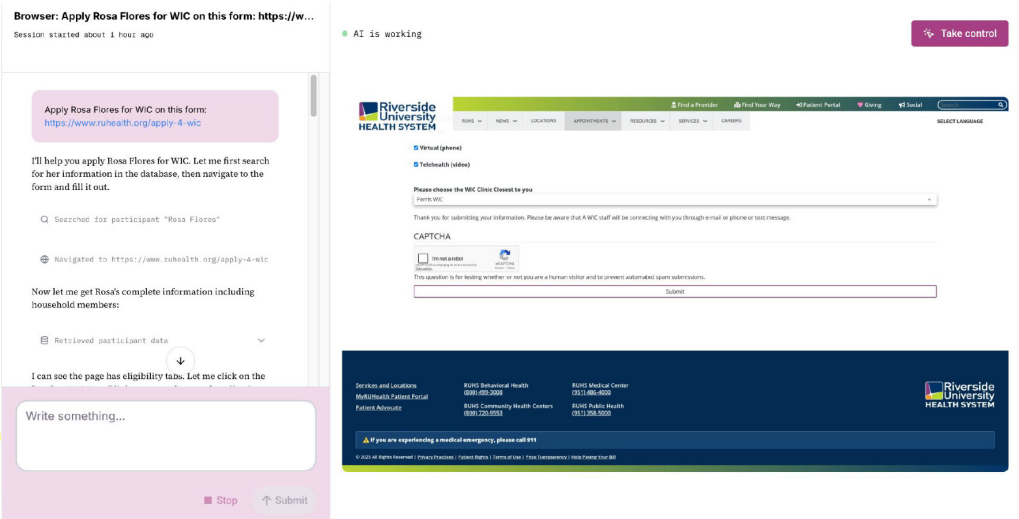
The assistant uses information in a family’s case record to fill out online benefit applications. Staff can monitor progress, add missing information, and take over at any time. The caseworker reviews each application before submitting it, keeping professional judgment and family priorities at the center.

During the evaluation, a JFK Family Resource Center Network Specialist described completing a parent support session while the assistant worked on an application. The family received both kinds of help in one visit—an example of how technology could give staff more time to connect and families fewer appointments to manage.

A little less paperwork can create more room to listen—and one less appointment can give a family part of their day back.

The pilot also identified challenges. Incomplete records, connectivity problems, and technical interruptions sometimes added work. Use remained limited, and staff feedback is guiding improvements in reliability and everyday usefulness.

The next opportunity is helping families renew and keep their benefits while managing notices, paperwork, and deadlines. Partners will explore whether the assistant can help address missing information and required steps, reducing preventable interruptions or denials tied to incomplete paperwork.



What’s Next: Stronger Connections for Children and Families

Ben Slagter, Assistant Director



As we enter the 2027–2030 strategic cycle, First 5 Riverside County is poised to lead with renewed clarity and purpose. The Plan guides how we work with partners to help families find timely support, with fewer repeated steps and stronger connections across services.

Using this plan as our compass, we will *LEAD* by advancing quality early learning and expanding integrated referral pathways especially in maternal and child health systems, so that parents, caregivers, and children receive right-sized, high-quality support in times of need. This leadership reflects our commitment to building a system around the needs of children and parents. A system that improves access, quality, coordination, and capacity while ultimately creating stronger outcomes and better experiences for families.

Over the next three years, we will *PARTNER* across county departments, education, managed care, and community-based organizations so that families experience connection as a coordinated community of support. Shared infrastructure such as RivCoONE Connect, home visiting networks, warm handoffs, and closed-loop pathways help make those connections stick. As those connections take hold, parents feel seen, heard, and understood. And when they receive timely follow-up and authentic connection to help, trust builds. As trust builds and engagement deepens, growth and resilience can begin anew.

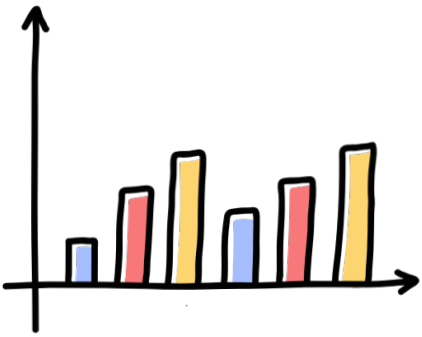
Finally, we will *SUPPORT* the people and organizations that families turn to when they need help. Behind every service, contract, and braided funding stream is a parent or caregiver trying to make sure their child is safe, healthy, and growing, or a child who needs a caring adult to show up and stay. To that end, we will invest in strong services, strengthen the connections between them, and help communities build solutions that reflect what families are actually experiencing. We remain steadfast in our vision: all children in Riverside County are healthy and thrive in supportive, nurturing, and loving environments.

Stronger connections among County and community partners can make support easier for families to reach. Our next strategic chapter builds on those relationships so children and caregivers can find **TIMELY HELP, CLOSER TO HOME, WITH FEWER STEPS ALONG THE WAY.**

Methodology & Sources

How We Understand Progress

This report brings together program records, partner reports, family and provider feedback, financial information, and research. Program results generally cover FY 2025–26. Countywide indicators, research findings, and updates outside that period are identified by their reporting year or date.



Sources include:

- First 5 Riverside County’s Apricot 360 case-management records, contracted-provider reports, and FY 2025–26 program results.
- RivCoONE registration, consent, referral, and enrollment records, including the Whole Person Health Score and RivCoONE Connect.
- Riverside County Office of Education and First 5 records for Riverside Hybrid Alternative Payment, including child care assistance and provider incentives.
- Quality Start Riverside County participation and improvement records, accomplishment reports, and provider feedback, including analyses by Kenyon Education Consulting and Poder Collective Research.
- HealthySteps partner reports and family feedback from Riverside University Health System and Rady Children’s Hospital, with information on expansion supported by Inland Empire Health Plan.
- Child care facility project reports and funding records from County departments, facility partners, and child care operators.
- First 5 financial statements, expenditure records, and funding agreements.

Countywide Conditions and Research:

- Riverside University Health System–Public Health’s Epidemiology & Program Evaluation Branch: county dashboards and maternal, infant, and injury surveillance data.
- California Integrated Vital Records System, California Department of Education, and First Watch drowning surveillance data.
- Riverside County Department of Public Social Services, Office of Child Abuse Prevention: State of the Child Report.
- Nava Labs: Form-Filling Assistant project brief and September 2026 Pilot Evaluation Report, drawing on caseworker surveys, interviews, usability testing, time studies, and product data.
- Kristin Gist, MS: Early Identification and Intervention Landscape Report and stakeholder discussions.
- UC Berkeley Center for the Study of Child Care Employment: early educator workforce and compensation research.
- Dowell Myers, PhD, University of Southern California Population Dynamics Research Group: Children as Infrastructure: Securing Riverside County’s Future through Early Investment (2025).

Reading the Findings

Service counts describe participation and activities; they do not, by themselves, establish changes in children’s health or family well-being. Counts across programs may include the same children or caregivers and should not be added unless identified as unduplicated. Countywide trends reflect many influences and cannot be attributed to First 5 investments alone.

Family stories and participant feedback help illustrate experiences that numbers may miss. They are individual perspectives rather than evidence that every family experienced the same result. Findings from the AI pilot are preliminary; its limited use and small evaluation samples inform how broadly the results can be interpreted.

Recognizing Shared Contributions

The progress described here reflects the work of families, providers, County departments, educators, health plans, and community organizations. First 5 contributes funding, staff expertise, coordination, and learning alongside these partners. Reporting those contributions accurately helps us understand what is working and where stronger connections and additional support are needed.



IT’S ABOUT THE KIDS
STRONG STARTS, STRONG COUNTY

