



# Community Needs Assessment

San Francisco Department of  
Children, Youth & Their Families

MAY 2011

REPORT OVERVIEW



## Creating a city where children thrive

The San Francisco Department of Children, Youth & Their Families creates and facilitates innovative citywide policies and projects in support of children, youth, and families. As a result, children, youth, and families from throughout the City participate in a broad range of programs in the areas of early child care, family support, out of school time, health and wellness, youth workforce development, teen services, and violence prevention and intervention.



### DCYF

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# Introduction

## When Children Thrive, Cities Benefit.

San Francisco's prosperity depends on our ability to ensure that all children and youth have the opportunity to thrive. When children grow up healthy, obtain a quality education, and live in safe, supportive homes and communities, they have a solid foundation for a productive future. San Franciscans recognize that communities benefit when children thrive. In 1991, voters made our city the first in the country to guarantee funding for children by passing the Children's Amendment. This landmark legislation set aside a portion of annual property taxes for the Children's Fund, to be used exclusively for services that benefit children from birth to age 17.

The Children's Amendment also called for participatory planning that involves community members in identifying local needs and resources. To fulfill its own mission and the requirements of the Children's Amendment, the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth, and Their Families (DCYF) engages young people, parents, service providers, and policymakers in a Community Needs Assessment every three years. The results inform the development of a citywide action plan and strategic funding priorities.



## The San Francisco Department of Children, Youth & Their Families

DCYF's 2011 Community Needs Assessment was informed by a rich set of data and extensive public engagement. Sources of information included census and population survey data, City administrative databases, neighborhood meetings attended by 743 residents, a survey of 145 community-based organizations, conversations with 20 policy and advisory bodies, focus groups involving more than 80 parents and providers, and interviews with key City leaders. All told, DCYF's commitment to broad community engagement resulted in the participation of more than 1,000 individuals in this Needs Assessment.

This summary report provides an overview of findings from the 2011 Needs Assessment. It begins with a discussion of the needs of children and youth at different stages in their lives—from early childhood to the elementary and middle school years to high school and beyond. The section that follows provides insights into key trends shaping San Francisco families and the supports that parents need in order to be successful. The last section of this report summarizes Needs Assessment participant perspectives on the role of DCYF in ensuring an effective system of care for children, youth, and families over the next several years.



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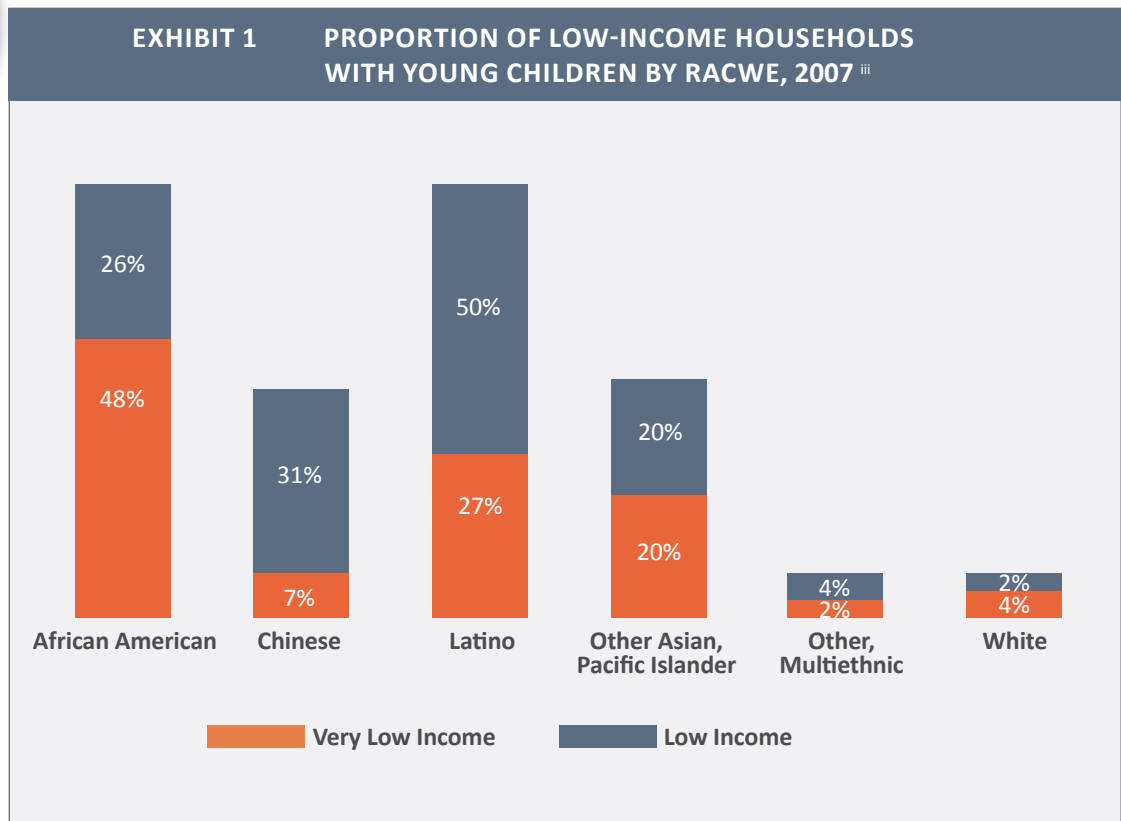
# Early Childhood

The first five years of life are critical to healthy development. Science has shown that early experiences have long-term neurobiological consequences. Given the importance of these first years, what are the characteristics and needs of San Francisco's youngest children? The 2011 Needs Assessment portrays a growing and diverse population of children, some of whom are experiencing poverty, poor health, and low school readiness.



## Early Childhood by the Numbers

- **The city's population of young children is growing.** As of 2009, children from birth to age five accounted for six percent of San Francisco's total population. The number of children in this age group has grown in recent years, from an estimated 36,302 in 2000 to 47,988 in 2009.<sup>i</sup>
- **One in three young children lives in a low-income household.** Although young children's economic security increased steadily between 2000 and 2007, one in every three children 0-5 years old lives in a low-income household.<sup>ii</sup>
- **Latino and African American children are disproportionately affected by poverty.** As illustrated below, an estimated 77 percent of Latino and 74 percent of African American children 0-5 live in a low-income or very low-income household.





- **San Franciscans make use of a variety of child care options.** Most families in San Francisco (63 percent) rely on more than one type of arrangement for child care for their young children. Among those that rely on a single source of care, primary sources include care provided by a non-family member in a home (20 percent), care provided by a grandparent or family member (7 percent), and preschool or center-based care (5 percent).
- **While many public school children participate in child care or preschool, not all children enter school ready to learn.** In 2009, 83 percent of San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) kindergarten students entered with some pre-kindergarten experience.<sup>iv</sup> Despite this promising statistic, only 57 percent of public school kindergarteners have all of the school readiness skills they need to succeed in school.<sup>v</sup>

## The Community Perspective

**When asked to identify key needs of young children and their families, parents, community members, and service providers consistently identified affordable, quality early care and education as a priority.**

**Affordable child care.** Affordable child care was highlighted as a concern for many working parents that cut across all of the city’s neighborhoods. Families living in homeless shelters, immigrant families, and families with special health care needs expressed a particularly strong need for affordable child care. Child care allows parents to work and to gain education and training necessary to provide for their families, according to Needs Assessment participants. Data on the availability of subsidized care affirms the needs expressed by parents. Since 2005, the need for subsidized child care in San Francisco has more than doubled. In 2005, a total of 1,340 children were on the waiting list for subsidized care, compared to 3,558 in 2011. Service providers, in particular, expressed concern about the effect of state budget cuts on the future availability of subsidized care.

Many parents and service providers also commented on an acute need for child care services for infants and toddlers. As one parent stated, “Child care [is the greatest challenge faced by children and families], especially for children zero to three.” Some parents feel that access to infant and toddler care is particularly challenging because it tends to be more expensive than care for older children.

### **High-quality early care and education that promote school readiness.**

A number of parents and service providers voiced that early education programs are essential for preparing children to transition into formal schooling. One service provider commented, “I’ve talked to kindergarten and first grade teachers and they say that they notice a huge difference when children are in preschool.” Similarly, a Bayview parent shared, “When I got my daughter into Head Start, she started learning so much and her vocabulary started to expand.” Parents highlighted the role that high-quality early care and education can play in developing school readiness. They noted that such programs help children develop familiarity with the basics such as colors and letters, learn how to interact with other children, become accustomed to being apart from their parents, and learn to follow a school schedule.

**Positive mental health.** The need for early childhood mental health supports was raised by parents as well as service providers. Particular concern was

“[At Head Start,] my granddaughter [has been]... much healthier and happier. They send books home every week. They ask parents to volunteer in class, so I can come in and hang out with her. I hung out with her and read to her for four hours.”

 Grandparent in Bayview

“We are losing providers and licensed care. [It’s] important to keep the pool of providers that we have and focus on quality.”

 City service provider





expressed for young children in households experiencing domestic violence, as participants believe these children may be at risk for abuse, neglect, or harm by their families. A representative from one parent-run advocacy organization commented, “Children are often exposed to violent environments and this has a detrimental impact on the mental health of children.” Some service providers recommended expanding outreach to parents as a way to increase awareness of existing services and therapeutic play groups. They also asserted a need for parent education on how best to meet children’s mental health needs.



## Elementary and Middle School Youth

Elementary and middle school children between the ages of six and 13 face unique challenges as they transition from pre-kindergarten to elementary school and from elementary to middle school. Findings from the 2011 Needs Assessment portray a culturally and linguistically diverse group of young people who are in need of additional in and out of school supports designed to improve their health, school success, and general wellbeing.

### Elementary and Middle School Youth by the Numbers

- **San Francisco’s population of elementary and middle school youth are largely API and White.** In 2009, Asian and Pacific Islander (API) youth made up more than one third (34 percent) of children ages six to 13 in San Francisco. White youth accounted for 30 percent, Latino youth accounted for 20 percent, and African-American youth made up eight percent of the population.<sup>vi</sup>
- **Nearly one-half of first and second graders in public schools are English language learners.** Among English Learners in SFUSD kindergarten, children’s primary language are Spanish (39%) and Cantonese (37%) followed by Vietnamese (3%), Tagalog (3%) and Mandarin (2%).<sup>vii</sup>
- **Safety at school is a concern for many young people.** In 2006 and 2008, 57 percent of fifth graders reported that they have been bullied (hit or pushed). Just over half (52 percent) of fifth graders reported that they feel safe at school all of the time.<sup>viii</sup>
- **Since 2005, an average of 459 youth ages 6 to 13 were victims in substantiated child abuse incidents each year.** In 2009, youth ages 6 to 13 represented about 41% of all substantiated cases in San Francisco.<sup>ix</sup> Among substantiated cases involving youth ages 6 to 15, about a third were African American, about a third were Latino, and about 10% were White.

### The Community Perspective

Parents, community members, and service providers who participated in the 2011 Needs Assessment identified free and low cost Out of School Time (OST) programs as the primary need for elementary and middle school age youth. OST programs include afterschool programs, summer programs, and extracurricular activities that take place after school hours and when school is not in session.



**Afterschool programs.** Participants in neighborhood meetings consistently expressed that afterschool programs were “most helpful” and a priority need because they support their children’s academic success and overall development. Stakeholders indicated a need for the programs to: (1) include academic support activities (especially for English Learners) as well as arts activities; (2) extend hours of operation to meet the needs of working parents; and (3) be accessible to youth. With regard to this last need, stakeholders suggested that the school assignment system creates some barriers with transportation to programs.

**Summer programs.** Summer programs were also identified as a need because they provide a safe, structured learning environment for youth during the summer months when they are out of school, and because they support elementary and middle school students’ transition into their next level of school. Stakeholders emphasized the need for free or low-cost summer programs with hours that reflect parents’ schedules. They also suggested that these programs should provide academic support along with enrichment activities including the arts as well as physical activity/sports.

**Extracurricular activities.** Parents, service providers, and community members at DCYF community input sessions articulated a need for extracurricular activities, including tutoring, academic supports, recreation/physical activity, and the arts. Service providers indicated that one-on-one tutoring was the most commonly requested service for families with children of this age. Similarly, about 57 percent of public middle school principals responded that a top need of families was “support in helping their child with school work.”



## Older Youth

Older youth face numerous challenges as they enter high school and move on to adulthood. This is a stage in which they gain greater independence both at school and in their lives generally. The older youth population is comprised of high school youth ages 14-18 as well as disconnected transitional-age youth (TAY) populations ages 16-24. In the 2011 Needs Assessment, older youth identified the need for support in their efforts to mold their future careers and lives as adults.



### Older Youth by the Numbers

- **Teens comprise three percent of San Francisco’s population.** There are approximately 25,000 youth ages 14 to 17.<sup>x</sup>
- **Some older youth are at high risk for negative outcomes.** In San Francisco, officials estimate there are between 5,000 to 8,000 disconnected transitional-age youth—youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who will not make a successful transition into adulthood. These youth are at risk for a number of negative outcomes including substantial periods of unemployment, homelessness, involvement with the criminal justice system and poverty.<sup>xi</sup>
- **The majority of older youth is in school or has earned a high school diploma or GED.** The vast majority of youth (97 percent) ages 14-17 are





enrolled in school. Most youth ages 18-24 have a high school diploma or GED (89 percent), with nearly one-half that have some college experience and about one-quarter that have attained a Bachelor’s degree or more. <sup>xii</sup> Among the disconnected TAY population, as many as 5,000 lack a high school degree.

## The Community Perspective

At community meetings across San Francisco, youth, parents, community members, and service providers identified out of school time programs, youth employment programs, mental health programs, violence prevention, and disconnected TAY services as priorities for older youth.

### Community Perspective Value of Out of School Time Activities

Programs **help prepare students** for college and financial aid applications. *(Immigrant youth)*



Afterschool programs **provide needed academic support.** *(Community member in Ocean View/Merced Heights/Ingleside)*



Youth can **express themselves through art**, which is a universal language. *(Recent immigrant youth)*

### Out of school time (OST) programs for arts, sports, leadership, community service, academic support, and college preparation.

According to participants at community meetings, OST activities serve as an important supplement to classroom learning for older youth, as well as an escape from stresses in their lives and violence in their communities. Respondents noted that the quality of some OST programs could be enhanced to more closely align with the needs of older youth. They identified a need for (1) programs that are accessible, engaging, and provide access to consistent adult figures, and (2) enhanced capacity to serve the needs of immigrant, LGBTQ, and system-involved youth.

**Youth employment opportunities and training programs.** Youth, parents, community members, and service providers emphasized the importance of youth employment for this population. According to participants, young people need job-readiness training and connections to potential job opportunities. As one parent explained, “Job training for youth is important because once they graduate from high school, they have experience and they can find a job.”

Some community participants expressed concern that certain populations will need specialized youth employment programs to meet their needs: immigrant, disconnected, transitional-age youth, youth with disabilities, young mothers, and reentry youth. According to Needs Assessment participants, these youth populations need employers who understand

their life situations and programs that have the capacity to support them. A focus group with transitional-age youth suggested that young mothers in particular face challenges finding stable employment that also accommodates their parenting responsibilities. As one youth explained, “They don’t care when I say my baby is sick.”

**Mental health.** Mental health services were also identified as a need to help older youth address violence, interpersonal relationship, and substance use issues.

**Violence prevention.** Parents, community members, and service providers who participated in the Needs Assessment cited violence in the street and at home as a major concern for children, youth, and their families. While respondents recognized the value of intervention services that help young people cope with the violence, they emphasized a need for more preventive measures—in particular, the availability of safe spaces such as parks, gyms, pools, and

“Services that are working for transitional-age youth are services where you can just stop in and get services you need in a safe way and be supported in that. We also need wrap-around services, counseling, case management, and more social activities.”

 Formerly homeless youth



community centers. Parents and community members emphasized also the importance of positive, supportive relationships in preventing older youth from falling into dangerous activities. SFUSD high school principals identified conflict mediation as one of the top needs of youth this age.

**Disconnected TAY-specific programs and services.** Many disconnected, transitional-age youth are no longer in the school system, or have aged out of most programs and services targeted to children and youth. As they transition into adulthood, youth in this category face unique challenges and service needs. Disconnected TAY youth who are no longer in the school system do not have access to many of the programs that are either school-based or where outreach for the program happens through schools. According to older youth who participated in the Needs Assessment, safe and supportive drop-in services may be the easiest way for transitional-age youth to access the services they need.



## Families

The wellbeing of families is critical for promoting the social and economic vitality of San Francisco. The family is the basic unit of our communities and the City. It is where adults nurture children and where they lay the foundation for healthy physical and emotional development so that youth are prepared to become the next generation to lead San Francisco. Consequently, providing support for families not only benefits individual family members, it also supports the growth of an entire city. The 2011 Needs Assessment portrays a culturally and linguistically diverse set of families, some of whom are struggling with the impacts of the recession.

### Families by the Numbers

- **Children in San Francisco’s families are culturally diverse.** In San Francisco, youth under the age of 18 are more likely to be non-White than adults. This difference is especially pronounced for the Latino population (representing 14 percent of adults but 23 percent of youth) and the population of two or more races (representing 3 percent of adults but 8 percent of youth).
- **Over a quarter of families with children are headed by single parents.** There are nearly 64,500 families with children in San Francisco. Twenty-one percent of these families are headed by single mothers and six percent are headed by single fathers.
- **Families have shouldered the impacts of a deep and prolonged recession.** The economic climate has dramatically shifted since DCYF’s 2008 Community Needs Assessment. In San Francisco, the unemployment rate more than doubled from 4.2 percent in January 2007 to 9 percent in 2009.<sup>xiv</sup> A parent’s job loss can have adverse effects on children’s school success, their emotional wellbeing, and their economic security.

“When I had my daughter, I didn’t know anybody. I didn’t know any other moms. The whole preschool process was kind of a secret... I had a lot of problems [as a new parent].”

🌿 Parent from Telegraph Hill

- **Many children and youth live in low-income families.** In 2008 before the recession, about 40 percent of San Francisco's four-person families fell below the self-sufficiency standard (meaning below a "bare bones" budget appropriate for their family composition) and about 14 percent were extremely low income (meaning they fell below the federal poverty level). Racial disparities appear in the percentages of children living below the federal poverty level. Based on 2006-2008 estimates, 17.6% of Latino children, 9.5% of Asian children, and 8% of multiracial children lived in poverty compared to 4.5% of White children.
- **San Francisco's child population has declined significantly over the past several decades, while the overall city population has increased.** In 1960, there were 181,500 children in San Francisco, and by 2010 there were 107,500. The number of children living in the City remained relatively constant between 1980 and 1990, with a slight decrease in 2000. The U.S. Census Bureau estimated that the child population increased by about 10,000 youth between 2000 and 2009, but the latest Census data suggests a decline of about 5,278 since 2000.



## The Community Perspective

Parents, community members, and service providers identified the importance of bringing stability to families, as the recession has placed immense pressure on families and disconnected parents from critical resources used to maintain the health and welfare of their children and families. Participants identified a need to support families and parents through support groups and parent education, and to help families learn about existing programs and services, obtain health-related services, and improve family safety.

### Learning about existing programs and services.

Many parents who participated in the Needs Assessment expressed that they find it difficult to obtain information about available programs and services, and therefore have primarily relied on word of mouth. One parent found that "unless you use [the programs] or someone tells you it's there, you just don't know." Participants noted that not all parents have access to computers or have knowledge on how to use computers, and therefore a written guidebook available in multiple languages would be more broadly accessible. They also acknowledged the need for specialized outreach to isolated populations such as teen parents, new LGBTQ parents, immigrant families, families involved with public systems, and those living in public housing or who are under-housed. With regard to this last population, Needs Assessment participants emphasized that outreach should ideally come from familiar faces and people they trust. As one participant explained, many residents may be wary of outsiders: "[Residents] don't want to be affiliated with you because they think you are the police, or they think you are going to turn them in for something instead of trying to get [them] into the programs."

**Mental and physical health of families.** Participants emphasized the need to ensure that families have access to affordable mental health services. Parents and service providers expressed concern that families are experiencing significant stresses in their homes and

communities. Poverty, street violence, domestic violence, substance abuse, and grief and loss were identified as stressors currently affecting many families.

The impact of food security and the lack of healthy foods on the health of low-income families were also concerns voiced by parents and service providers at community meetings. Food pantries and school lunch programs were identified as mainstays to some families, and some participants expressed that more needs to be done to ensure that families have access to healthy food in their neighborhoods.

**Parent support.** Parents and service providers identified support groups as an important community need, particularly for new parents. Support groups play an important role in reducing the sense of isolation many new parents feel and providing families with information about available services, according to many who participated in the Needs Assessment. Some parents expressed that support groups helped them establish connections with other parents and build a system of support. One parent from the Excelsior explained, “Parents [in my group] support each other when there are challenges.”

**A sense of safety for families.** Participants across the City consistently identified the need to increase family-friendly spaces, improve safety on public transit and in communities, and attend to violence in the home. Violence prevention and intervention programs were also identified as crucial to addressing violence in communities. In addition, several service providers commented that support services for families experiencing violence in the home are important for protecting all members of the family, particularly vulnerable children.



“For families that live in neighborhoods where it is not safe to leave home, [safety] presents barriers to access.”

 Service provider





# Looking Ahead

The 2011 Community Needs Assessment marks a critical time for San Francisco's children, youth, and families. Since the last Needs Assessment was released three years ago, San Francisco's economy has been impacted by the recession, the unemployment rate has increased, and families have struggled even more to make ends meet. Availability of publicly-funded services has also declined due to cuts at the local, state, and federal level. This situation raises new concerns about the ability of children to grow up healthy, obtain a quality education, and live in safe, supportive homes and communities.

Given this context, participants in the 2011 Needs Assessment were asked to reflect on the role that DCYF and the Children's Fund can play during these challenging times. During interviews and meetings, participants highlighted the following strengths of the Department's approach, which they believe are essential to an effective system of care for children, youth, and families.

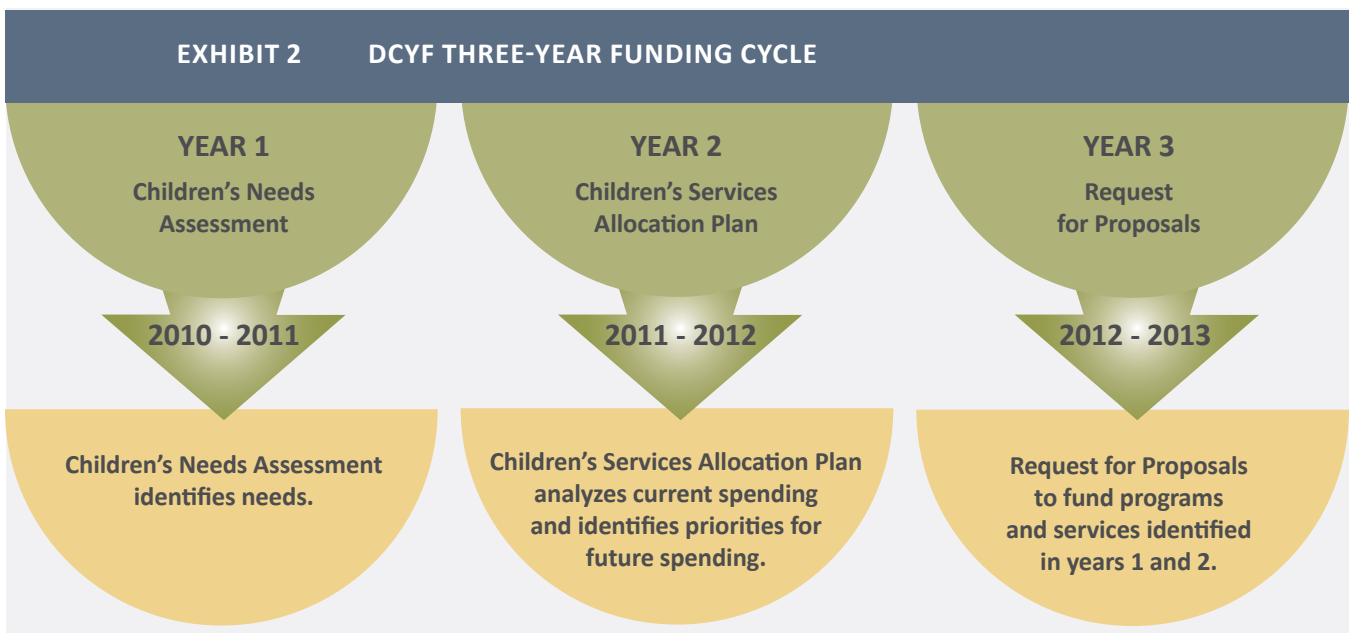
- **Strategic significance of DCYF resources.** Participants in the Needs Assessment emphasized the importance of the Children's Fund to the local system of care for children, youth, and families. As one City leader noted, "There is a high level of local resources investment in children's services, largely because of the Children's Fund property tax set aside and the children's baseline requirements." Another agreed, and noted that DCYF has used the Children's Fund to attract additional resources to San Francisco. S/he commented, "DCYF has done a good job of leveraging local funds with state and federal funds."
- **Collaboration with and across public agencies.** DCYF has developed a reputation for being both collaborative and transparent in its decision-making processes. Several of those interviewed expressed appreciation for the role the Department has played in bringing City departments and other public agencies such as the School District together to plan services collaboratively. One City leader commented, "One good thing in these difficult times is the collaborative work we have done... We have worked together to fill gaps."
- **Understanding of children, youth, and families.** DCYF has relationships with a broad spectrum of community members and nonprofits which makes the Department deeply knowledgeable about the needs of San Francisco's diverse children, youth, and families. The Department draws on its broad network to convene young people, parents, and service providers around developing action plans to address community needs. DCYF is also successful in using its knowledge to contribute to the overall development of City programming and the policy process. One person characterized the department as the City's "thought leader" for children, youth, and families.

As San Francisco approaches the reauthorization of the Children's Amendment in 2015, the City and its service providers face the challenge of meeting increased community need with fewer public resources. How can the City move forward to ensure that children, youth, and families have access to services that will help them thrive? City leaders and advocates for children and parents voiced that the following will be key success factors in the years ahead.

- Maintain a focus on quality.** Increasing organizational capacity and building cultural competency are important to delivering high-quality services that are responsive to local needs. Creating standards and measuring outcomes also promotes quality service delivery, but more importantly, it ensures accountability to the public. Several Needs Assessment participants emphasized the importance of DCYF continuing its work toward ensuring only the most effective programs receive funding, and working to build nonprofit capacity to deliver effective programs where necessary to meet unique community needs.
- Coordinate and align services.** San Francisco has an extensive network of nonprofit, private, and public service providers. Enhancing coordination and aligning strategy for specific target populations can expand the reach of services to communities in need, decrease duplicative services, and maximize scarce resources. Several Needs Assessment participants remarked on the importance of DCYF continuing to play a convening role. As one school leader explained, “DCYF works with multiple departments and agencies that are part of City government. They have many connections to both clients and direct service providers. DCYF is at the crossroads of a lot of different needs and services, and can facilitate coordination.”
- Continue to be a leader for children, youth, and families.** Needs Assessment participants highlighted the importance of DCYF’s role in ensuring that policy makers and the general public are aware of and responsive to the needs of children, youth, and families. They also noted the importance of maintaining investments in services to San Francisco’s children, youth, and families given perceived increases in community needs.



Overall, the 2011 Needs Assessment provides rich information about the current needs of San Francisco’s children, youth, and families. It also highlights the essential role that DCYF and the Children’s Fund play in supporting their overall health and wellbeing. The information presented here and in the full Needs Assessment report will inform the development of a strategic plan, called the Children’s Services Allocation Plan (CSAP) to guide DCYF over the next several years, a critical time in the lives of San Francisco’s children, youth, and families.



# Endnotes

- <sup>i</sup> San Francisco Mayor's Office of Housing, Office of Economic and Workforce Development, Redevelopment Agency. 2010-2014 Five-Year Consolidated Plan. May 2010.
- <sup>ii</sup> *First Steps: A Data Report on the Status of San Francisco's Young Children*. First 5 San Francisco, February 2010.
- <sup>iii</sup> *First Steps: A Data Report on the Status of San Francisco's Young Children*. First 5 San Francisco, February 2010.
- <sup>iv</sup> *First Steps: A Data Report on the Status of San Francisco's Young Children*. First 5 San Francisco, February 2010.
- <sup>v</sup> Applied Survey Research, Portrait of School Readiness 2009-10: San Francisco Unified School District, p. 54;
- <sup>vi</sup> Human Services Agency analysis of American Community Survey 2009 data.
- <sup>vii</sup> California Department of Education, "Student Demographics-English Learners," accessed June 9, 2009 via DataQuest, <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/Dataquest/> as cited in First 5 San Francisco, "First Steps: A Data Report on the Status of San Francisco's Young Children," San Francisco, 2010.
- <sup>viii</sup> California Safe and Healthy Kids Survey Program Office, Duerr Evaluation Resources, WestEd, "California Healthy Kids Survey: Key Findings: 5th Grade, Fall 2006, San Francisco Unified," <http://healthiersf.org/Resources/chks-yrbs.cfm> (accessed 2/11/2011). California Safe and Healthy Kids Survey Program Office, Duerr Evaluation Resources, WestEd, "California Healthy Kids Survey: San Francisco Unified, Elementary, 2008-2009, Key Findings," <http://healthiersf.org/Resources/chks-yrbs.cfm> (accessed 2/11/2011).
- <sup>ix</sup> Note: Child welfare statistics were only available for youth up to age 17. On substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect are cited here, not total reported cases. Needell, B., et. al., "Child Welfare Services Reports for California," 2009, accessed January 18, 2011, University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research, [http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb\\_childwelfare](http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare).
- <sup>x</sup> San Francisco Human Services Agency analysis of American Community Survey 2009 data.
- <sup>xi</sup> Mayor's Transitional Youth Task Force. 2007.
- <sup>xii</sup> American Communities Survey 2009.
- <sup>xiii</sup> 2009 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics.



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