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## **TOBACCO TAX PROGRAM SEES SUCCESS**

### **First 5 Sacramento Invests in the Power of People**

Sacramento, CA. Since 2004, First 5 Sacramento Commission has been implementing a community grants program called the Community Building Initiative (CBI). Designed to build *social capital*, (the connection between individuals, also called the “glue” that holds a community together), this unique program aims to recover the social safety net that once supported families in neighborhoods throughout the country. This safety net, which many of us took for granted while growing up, is essential to healthy communities, which in turn are vital to raising healthy young children.

To measure the success of this evidence-based program, one might look at the associated metrics: so far the CBI program has allocated more than 150 small grants totaling approximately \$508,000 to more than 45 neighborhoods throughout Sacramento County. Each of these grants is facilitated by groups of no less than three people, thereby activating 450 adults working to build social capital in diverse communities serving hundreds of families with children ages five and under. In addition to the families directly served by this program, there are siblings, extended family members, friends and neighbors participating, totaling more than 4,800 people and helping to make up the social fabric of a healthy society.

However, social capital and its subsequent benefits cannot be measured in metrics alone. The investment of CBI resources into our communities to encourage and inspire collaboration between families requires a match of input from community members to complete the equation. Countless hours have been donated to the building of social capital, including time and materials beyond the scope and funding of what any grant could supply. These community members are not measuring their success or relationships with metrics. They are experiencing the value of how important it is to have someone to call to watch the kids at the last minute, by how much better they feel knowing their neighbors and feeling safer in their community, and by trusting and relying on each other, instead of government programs. Even Child Protective Services acknowledges that isolated parents are at greater risk for abuse, neglect and violence.

These are not “professionals” working toward these successes, but everyday people who work to apply the small grants like seed money to invest in ideas that can bring

about positive change. Grantees are given small advances and are held accountable by First 5 to provide receipts and progress reports that outline their activities, challenges and successes. In fact, of the 150 grants issued over the past five years, only three groups have not cleared their advances. Three. That's a 98 percent fiscal responsibility rate for this tobacco tax funded program in Sacramento County. Through qualitative evaluation, staff at First 5 Sacramento have learned from grantee groups and have witnessed the progress and positive impact this program is having throughout the county. In addition, the impact of the CBI program has been evaluated by an independent consulting firm, Walter R. McDonald and Associates, Inc., and based on a random sample of families, community building activities have resulted in strengthening community bonds, promoting trust among neighbors, and parents having a greater sense of control over their lives, which may lead to less reliance on social services over time.

A dance-along in McKinley Park for young children may provide fodder for those who want First 5 Sacramento funds for other uses. Vanessa D., however, says the connections built within her community as a result of the dance-alongs are proving invaluable in these difficult economic times and certainly cannot be easily measured. With the help of a CBI grant, the Friends of Grant Park community literally took its neighborhood park back from vagrants and drug dealers. Now families with young children frequent the park. CBI staff have been following the success of this grantee group for 5 years and it continues to build. Positive results are reported monthly by new grantee groups such as Galt at Play and the Vietnamese Young Mothers group.

Some argue that there are other ways to provide similar types of activities to those funded through the CBI program. The difference is that these other activities are not created or implemented by members of the community themselves but by for-profit businesses. Are there other places you can take your child to dance and sing? Of course there are. But getting together with other parents in your own neighborhood to build an activity through good old grass-roots enthusiasm creates benefits that outlast and outshine the activities themselves. The activity is merely the vehicle or the conduit for bringing people together and gives them the capacity and capability to build social capital.

In these trying economic times, there is now more than ever a need for social capital.

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## **SIDEBAR**

### **About First 5 Sacramento**

In 1998, Californians voted to impose a tax on tobacco products (Proposition 10) and directed those funds to prevention, thus the inception of First 5 Commissions in every county. Careful research and local planning by First 5 Sacramento identified that a

multi-pronged approach incorporating direct services and preventative care would facilitate long-term results in supporting the healthy development of young children. Preventative care includes the support of the parents and family, but goes beyond the family unit and household to include extended family, friends and neighbors.

### **About Community Grants and CBI**

CBI provides funding to groups of three or more people. This group – oftentimes simply an informal group of moms, dads or grandparents – needs to develop a plan for activities that can create ongoing connections that develop networks for parents and children that last beyond the scope of the project.

### **CBI Quick Facts:**

- The Community Building Initiative is provided by the First 5 Sacramento Commission, which uses Proposition 10 (tobacco tax) funds to support the healthy development of children ages zero to five.
- To date, First 5 Sacramento has awarded over 150 community grants in Sacramento County totaling over \$508,000.
- CBI funding represents 3% of the First 5 Sacramento Commission's annual expenditures.
- Grants up to \$5,000 are available and projects can last up to one year.
- Activities should be structured around parents and children ages zero to five interacting with one another. Successful grant projects include activities that get families to get to know each other, such as play groups, reading, art, singing, dancing or other interactive activities.
- Projects are based on regular meetings instead of one-time events.
- Projects are structured for participation by all attendees, rather than a meeting with a speaker and an audience.

### **Important Dates to Remember**

The next round of CBI grant applications is due on November 6, at 5:00 p.m. Anyone interested in applying needs to live in Sacramento County, form a group with two other individuals, and have an idea for activities that will strengthen connections with others in their community and benefit children five and under. First 5 Sacramento staff will help you through every step of the grant application process. Contact Julie Beyers at (916) 876-6529 for more information. Download a copy of the application and read about other CBI grantee experiences by visiting [www.First5Sacramento.net](http://www.First5Sacramento.net).

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