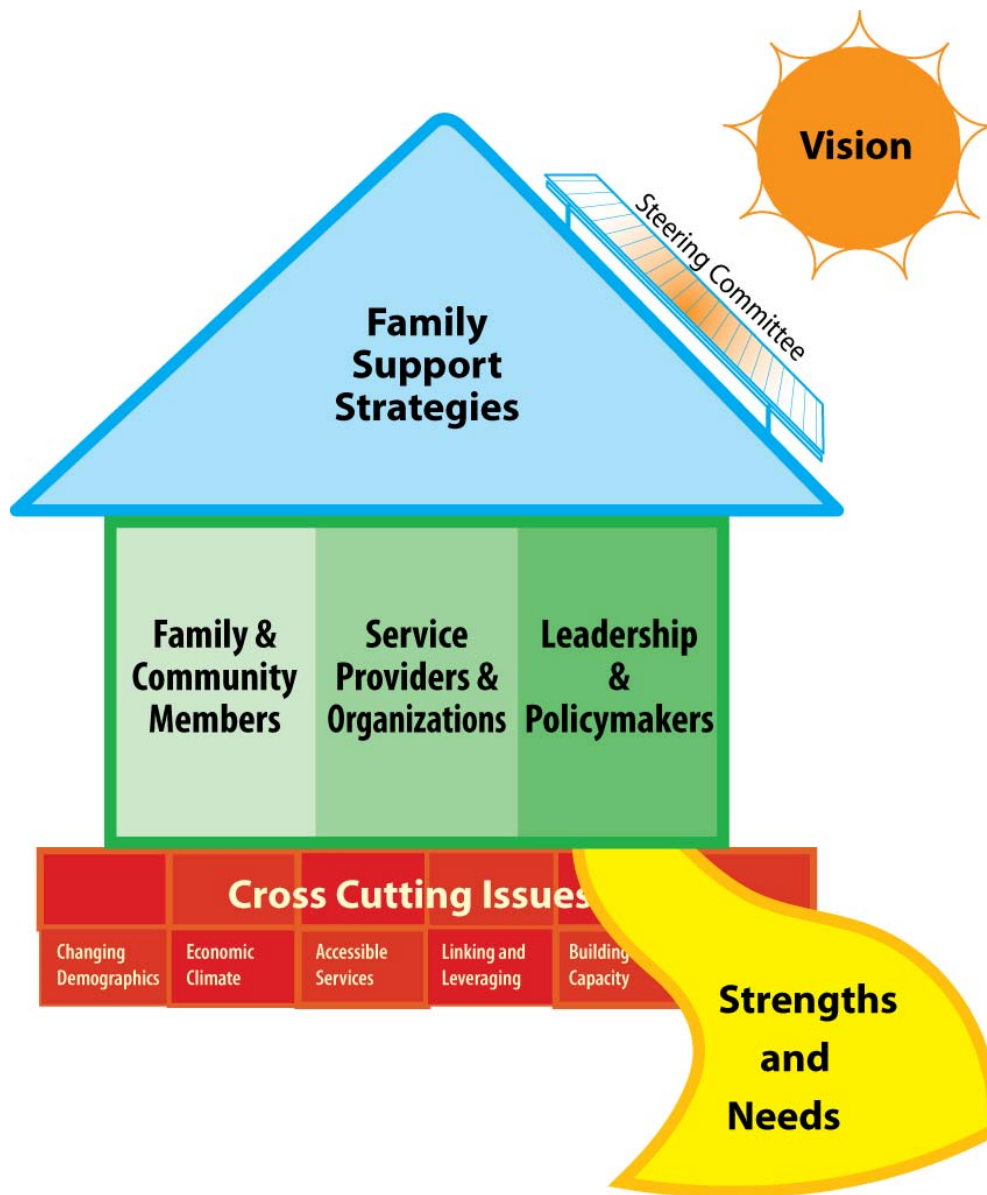


Marin County

Family Support Blueprint

Executive Summary



Family Support Principles

1. Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.
2. Staff enhance families' capacity to support the growth and development of all family members and emphasize the importance of hope and joy.
3. Practitioners work with families to mobilize both formal and informal resources.
4. Programs affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multicultural society.
5. Programs advocate with families for services and systems that are coordinated, fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.
6. Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.
7. Programs are flexible and responsive to emerging family and community issues.
8. Programs are embedded in communities, interdependent, and contribute to the community-building process.
9. Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning, governance, and administration.

I Why Marin Needs a Blueprint for Supporting Families

Marin is a County in which children are cherished and families are vital resources for communities that thrive.

Across the county, a growing number of families and communities are struggling to meet their basic needs, and to provide care and support for their children. At the same time that families find their needs increasing in all domains – economics, health and education – public and non-profits service agencies are faced with drastic cuts in resources. Meanwhile, Marin’s child population is growing faster than any Bay Area county. The Family Support System described in this Blueprint lays the foundation for a better way of supporting families, in these tough times and beyond.

This Family Support Blueprint offers a vision of Marin County that will guide our policies and practice in support of families for years to come. At this moment of unprecedented economic crisis, it is even more critical to have a plan for supporting families in difficult times. The Family Support approach that underlies this Blueprint is built upon the understanding that family is the most fundamental influence in the lives and outcomes of children, and families are strong when they are supported by safe and thriving neighborhoods.

Family Support Blueprint Vision:

Marin is a County in which children are cherished and families are vital resources for communities that thrive. We are united in our efforts to support all families to be healthy, secure, interconnected, and filled with hope and joy. The County's Family Support System is made up of formal and informal resources that are coordinated, accessible and reflective of our growing diversity. Everyone in the community shares the responsibility of contributing to the wellbeing of families.

II Purpose of the Blueprint

We are united in our efforts to support all families to be healthy, secure, interconnected, and filled with hope and joy.

The Family Support Blueprint presents a guiding vision and framework, along with concrete steps for supporting families in Marin County. It is grounded in both evidence based practices and family support principles and the needs and strengths that are unique to Marin. It also provides a framework for organizing new and existing systems and resources in the County. In the current climate of reduced public, private and philanthropic resources, reorganizing and leveraging what we have is especially critical. Therefore, in addition to identifying effective family support strategies for providers, family members, and policymakers, the Blueprint focuses on the pressing issue of improving the coordination and overall effectiveness of the Family Support System.

The Blueprint was developed with input from a countywide cross-section of service providers, public agencies, advocates, policymakers and community members. It has been endorsed by all of the stakeholder organizations represented on the Steering Committee, and, as such, carries significant political capital. The Blueprint provides a common language, vision and framework for everyone working with families in Marin. It can be used to inform individual services, to advocate for new and existing resources, and to integrate the many efforts happening across the county.

III Why Invest in Family Support

Even prior to the recent economic downturn, a wide range of social and demographic factors changed the landscape for many Marin families. Demographic shifts such as an increase in the number of single-parent households, growing poverty, and Marin’s extraordinary cost of living have increased the number of families that struggle to meet their basic needs. A growing immigrant population has required a shift in service delivery systems to meet the challenges of greater diversity. Furthermore, the burgeoning cost of healthcare and housing, long commute and work hours, and the breakdown of extended family and neighborhood support have increased burdens on families.

As the nation faces an unprecedented healthcare crisis, research tells us that the social conditions of our lives (e.g. employment, housing and education) impact health more than genetics, behavior, or even medical care. Chronic stress, experienced by those who have high demands but little control in their lives, taxes physiological systems and often triggers an array of chronic diseases.¹ Research consistently shows that investing in children yields substantial benefits and savings to society.²

Now, more than ever, we need to invest in families. According to First Focus, a bi-partisan child advocacy group, an additional 2.6-3.3 million children throughout the nation are likely to fall into poverty during this recession. Of these children, 60% could fall into persistent or intermittent poverty - often leading to lost earnings, increased crime, and poor health outcomes. Ultimately the cost of this increase in child poverty could total \$1.7 trillion over this generation’s lifetime.³

Local communities and the federal government can do something to divert our children from this path. From the 1960’s to the early 70’s, the federal government instituted a number of anti-poverty programs that reduced the child poverty rate to an all-time low in 1973. The health and educational status of children during this period demonstrated a corresponding improvement. Family Support has the potential to improve the lives of families across all of these domains. Engaging families in problem solving and bringing together services and resources that promote new opportunities will increase the capacity of families to be healthy, involved members of dynamic communities. Now, more than ever, is the time for Marin to give top priority to the wellbeing of children and families.

IV Components of the Family Support Blueprint



The Family Support Blueprint for Marin County contains all of the elements necessary to build a comprehensive Family Support System. It starts with a foundation of *Strengths* and *Needs* and *Cross Cutting Issues* for families. It then presents an organizational *Framework* drawn from the Spectrum of Prevention⁴, which is used nationally to develop comprehensive prevention strategies. Finally, it lays out in detail *Strategies* at all levels of the spectrum, highlighting “high leverage opportunities” and effective strategies for coordination.

Strengths and Needs. An effective Family Support System is rooted in an understanding of the unique strengths and needs of

¹ Ten Things to Know About Health, California Newsreel (2008)

² Investing in Infants and Toddlers: The Economics of Early Childhood, Zero to Three Policy Center

³ <http://www.firstfocus.net/Download/CostNothing.pdf>

⁴ <http://cchealth.org/topics/prevention/spectrum.php>

the community. The first step in creating a countywide Blueprint for family support was to examine the status of families. We gathered data from many sources across the domains of family life: Family Economics, Health Access and Physical Health, Emotional and Behavioral Health, Education, and Family/Community Resilience. The Blueprint presents the key findings, and the complete Community Assessment can be found at: <http://www.co.marin.ca.us/familysupport>.

Cross Cutting Issues. The key findings from the Assessment led to the identification of five cross cutting issues most heavily affecting families in all aspects of their lives. These issues help us understand, develop and communicate about the work of supporting families.

1. Changing Demographics: Marin's child population is growing faster than any Bay Area county, and becoming increasingly ethnically diverse. The family support system must expand to serve a growing population, and do so in a manner that is culturally and linguistically appropriate.
2. Economic Climate: Even before the economic downturn, one-third of Marin households were unable to pay basic living expenses and were not considered self-sufficient. It takes more than four full-time minimum wage jobs to cover the basic expenses for a family of three in Marin. Meanwhile, the cost of housing is extraordinary, unemployment is rising, and demand for public assistance and services is growing at the same time those resources are diminishing.
3. Accessible Services: In addition to barriers such as lack of transportation and language, another challenge to access is the federally-defined requirements for many services. For example, the Federal Poverty Level is so low that, while many families have incomes above what qualifies for subsidized services, they struggle to meet basic needs because the cost of living is so high.
4. Linking and Leveraging Services: Marin supports families through a wide range of services. However, navigating the many CBOs, school districts and public agencies in this geographically diverse county is a challenge for providers and families alike. It is crucial to develop an effective resource and referral system, and to move beyond that to a coordinated system of care, especially in difficult financial times.
5. Building Capacity for Family Support Practice: While providers agree that the family support principles describe their philosophy, integrating the principles into their work is challenging. The system must integrate promising and evidence-based practices while at the same time engaging our diverse informal resources, families, and unique communities that make up this County.

V The Framework and Strategies

The County's family support system is made up of formal and informal resources that are coordinated, accessible and reflective of our growing diversity.

This section of the Blueprint details what is needed to achieve our vision of a countywide Family Support System. The Blueprint consolidates the Spectrum of Prevention into three **stakeholder levels** that are most directly affected by the strategies, that is, family and community members, service providers and organizations, and leadership and policymakers. The system should facilitate the flow of information, feedback and learning among all three stakeholder levels.

The strategies in the Blueprint are a combination of existing strategies currently underway in the County *and* promising new ideas that have shown success in other communities. While the majority of these strategies are currently in place, many successful ones must be expanded, adapted to other communities, and/or better coordinated to meet the expressed need of families and providers. In addition, many strategies were in danger of being cut as the Blueprint went to print.

Within each stakeholder level, there are 2-3 *high leverage opportunities*. These involve strategies that are connected to a specific opportunity in the coming year, e.g. stimulus funding, organizational priority. The following are six high leverage opportunities that directly address our changing demographics, economic climate, access to services, linking and leveraging opportunities, and capacity building.

- ◆ **Supportive Services for Pregnant and Postpartum Families.** Leveraging and expanding resources targeting postpartum depression could substantially increase home-visiting and group prenatal care, both of which increase access to evidence-based services. Possible new resources include Early Head Start stimulus funds, Bella Vista Foundation funding, and the County Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).
- ◆ **Resource and Referral.** At the same time that the current economic crisis has created a demand for services which is unprecedented, both direct services and the outreach necessary to provide access to those services are being cut. The County HHS will dedicate staff time to work with 211, Network of Care for Kids, www.HealthyMarin.org, and other coordination points for family support services to improve access to and use of HHS and community resources.
- ◆ **School-Based Services.** There is significant federal, regional and foundation support for school-based services under the umbrella of Community Schools, an approach with which Marin has had considerable experience through School-Linked Services (SLS). Although current fiscal challenges will result in the end of SLS as we know it, the infrastructure and relationships that have been built position Marin to access funding for Community Schools, an effective way to support children, families and community, and to address the crosscutting issues.
- ◆ **Division of Public Health / HHS Restructuring.** The Marin County Division of Public Health (DPH) is currently undergoing a reorganization process. The DPH will utilize the Family Support Blueprint to help inform decisions related how existing public health resources will support families in Marin and to leverage resources for a range of family support strategies. This will help address families' increased needs and improve linkages, even during difficult times.
- ◆ **Coordination at the Level of Service Providers and Organizations.** The release of this Blueprint could generate increased involvement and philanthropic support for coordination of family support efforts. We recommend exploring how to build on existing coordination points for service providers, such as the Coordinating Council, to most effectively link a wide range of family support providers, and leverage our efforts, knowledge and resources.
- ◆ **Coordination at the Level of Leadership and Policymakers.** The Family Support Steering Committee is an existing group of leaders in the field that has the potential to build and sustain a coordinated approach and the political will for family support across Marin County.

VI Moving Forward

Everyone in the community shares the responsibility of contributing to the wellbeing of families.

This Family Support Blueprint offers a vision of Marin County that will guide our policies and practice in support of families for years to come. At this moment of unprecedented economic crisis, it is critical that we have a plan for supporting families in difficult times. The Family Support Steering Committee will continue to focus our collective efforts to achieve the vision and strategies defined in the Blueprint and build political will to improve the wellbeing of all families.