

2020 CSAC Challenge Award Entry
Emergency Child Care for Essential Workers During COVID-19
Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services Department (EHSD)

Overview – The Contra Costa County Emergency Child Care Program provided vital childcare services to hundreds of essential workers between March 17 and June 5, 2020.

Challenge – Create and preserve childcare options in the COVID-19 crisis environment. Unique or critical factors which led to this project include state-wide shelter in place; need to support essential workforce called into duty; school closures leaving school-aged kids in need of care who normally would not be a part of the demand; disrupted supply chain and nationwide depletion of essential sanitation, PPE, and operational child care supplies; and social distancing guidelines which challenged centers' financial viability by allowing only ten children to be in a classroom. Contra Costa County (CCC) used a two-part process to address the challenge. First, immediate action was taken to identify key stakeholders and mobilize them to support a collective effort. Second, the group, led by the Employment & Human Services Department (EHSD), collaborating with CocoKids, CCC Office of Education (COE), First 5 Contra Costa, Local Planning and Advisory Council for Early Care and Education (LPC), and Contra Costa Health Services, would self-identify key strengths and competencies, which each member could contribute towards implementation of the Emergency Child Care Program.

Solution – Innovative steps to overcome the challenges included a call to action even prior to the state taking action. This call began a multi-faceted approach to addressing the need for emergency child care on seven fronts: LPC surveyed essential workers and child care providers to assess needs and challenges. CocoKids ran centralized enrollment, streamlining the efforts of community-based organizations, home care providers, and child care centers across the County. CocoKids led efforts to access supplies through government resources and private donations, and identified available storage for supplies. First 5 tracked and inventoried supplies and supported rapid distribution. EHSD coordinated the efforts and opened County-owned child care sites. Head Start centers leveraged Federal funds to support volunteer teachers and facility space to provide quality care. COE identified storage and bulk supply delivery solutions for distribution hubs run by First 5 and CocoKids. Supplies were provided to 110 centers and 369 Family Child Care Providers. Contra Costa Health Services coordinated immediate PPE and

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other supply needs to allow county-owned child care facilities to open and continued to provide support to private and state-funded child development programs that remained open.

Innovation – Contra Costa County's Emergency Child Care Program was innovative among California Counties because not a single eligible applicant for emergency childcare was turned away. The Program demonstrated creativity, uniqueness and an innovative spirit in two ways. First, by unifying resources from across the County with amazing speed; and second, by getting out ahead of the game, beginning its programming even before the California Alternative Payment Program (APP) funding for emergency child care was implemented.

Results – The program received 872 requests from essential workers for emergency childcare (before and after vouchers became available), and 565 children of essential workers participated. 405 essential worker families were issued state-funded emergency childcare subsidies. The positive impacts of the Program were felt by childcare providers who were able to continue working, essential worker parents who no longer had to worry about quality care for their children, and children who received nourishing education. The Program also improved delivery of services to the public by freeing up front line health care workers who were able to place their children in safe, high quality centers with qualified staff.

The stakeholder group also formed an Emergency Child Care Task Force, which helped to advocate for childcare as a critical service for economic recovery at the State level. The task force went on to document and improve administration of the Program by identifying areas to strengthen child care infrastructure beyond the COVID pandemic. This work resulted in clarified roles and strengths of department and organizations across the County.

Replicability – Thanks to extensive documentation, including a school-age care handbook and an Emergency Childcare Operations Plan for services to children ages birth to 5 developed by EHSD and Head Start, other counties looking to implement best practices can replicate the Program.

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Optional Submission – [Emergency Child Care Program Press Release](#) and [Emergency Child Care Response Report](#)