

## Stimulus to aid children

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An increased number of local children under 5 years old will have access to early health screenings and educational enrichment opportunities as a result of over \$2 million in federal stimulus funds, officials recently announced.

New opportunities to work with families in San Mateo, East Palo Alto, Menlo Park and at Redwood High School will be created as a result of various grants given to local agencies. Head Start programs, which support families and young children with help in health and academics, will be expanded locally with the Early Head Start stimulus grants through the Federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The funding is one-time, but local education officials are happy to have the opportunity for training and to help families while the money lasts.

Family Service Agency of San Mateo County received \$1.9 million, which will serve up to 72 children between the ages of 6 weeks to 3 years old. Those early years are critical in a young child's life, said Family Service President Laurie Wishard.

"If we only had 18 months, that is a whole lot of time in a child's life. It's worth it for that time," she said.

This funding means the creation of an Early Head start program for the nonprofit, which will be headed up by Program Director Anne Senores. Seventeen full- and part-time employees — including teachers, a disability and mental health services manager, a health and nutrition services manager, a clerical worker and driver — will be hired. About 52 children will be served at one of the nonprofit's development centers while 20 will be reached via home-based visit programs. Grant funding will also be applied toward training, equipment, supplies, contractual fees and construction costs.

Tessa Solomon, director of new programs and grant management, noted the risk factors for children who come from low-income and homeless families are higher. Children and families are assessed to see what needs they have, like access to health services or development delays, to allow early intervention.

"Whatever resources they need in the community, they can get right away. Any special needs they have, we can intervene," Solomon said.

Some of the spots will go to pregnant women, allowing help before the baby is born, she added.

Contracts for the program were written for the 18 months available under funding. Of course the hope is it can continue, said Solomon, who added the agency offers many programs so children will have access to support after this one ends.

Another perk of the grant is an opportunity to evaluate how the agency works with children and their families.

"It's a wonderful opportunity to reflect on every aspect of what we do for children and families," said Wishard.

A number of other communities now have access to early services as a result of the federal money

as well.

Angel Barrios, executive/program director for the Institute for Human and Social Development, Inc., which offers Head Start and Early Head Start development programs, noted two federal grants were received in recent months.

In November, a \$150,000 grant allowed for the expansion of a program in East Palo Alto adding space for 20 3- to 4-year-olds. This unique program was designed to help children with challenging behaviors, Barrios explained. To help in these areas, the class has four teachers instead of three and offers access to an occupational therapist.

A second grant in December allowed for the expansion of Early Head Start programs, helping younger children, around the county. Under this grant, children in Pescadero, Redwood City and East Palo Alto are able to participate through home visits, full-time child care or help at a center. A majority of the 49 new infants assisted will have access through home visits. Others, throughout the county, will get access to child care.

Barrios was particularly excited about the 11 families to be served in Pescadero, an isolated area of the county that does not traditionally have as many spots for home visits.