

Telling the Story

Using Data to Demonstrate Value in Family Support Programs

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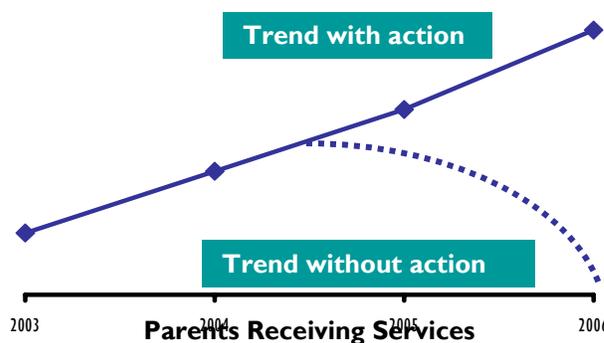
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Telling the Story – Using Data to Demonstrate Value in Family Support Programs

A. First Steps

Adopting Results Based Accountability (RBA) as the Framework

In the mid-1990s, Applied Survey Research (ASR) adopted RBA into our repertoire for performing assessments and evaluations to support community-wide change. Mark Friedman of the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute developed RBA. Put simply, RBA is a system to measure and improve outcomes at the community, system, and program level. RBA starts with the results that a community or program wants to achieve such as “children are safe” or “all children 0-18 have health insurance.” Once stakeholders agree upon goals, they work backwards to determine the appropriate means to achieve the goals. RBA is simple, straightforward, data driven, and promotes action. ASR uses the RBA model to assist community partners by defining and creating measurements for communities and programs. RBA helps facilitate turning the curve on bad outcomes:



A group of partners coming together to make community-wide or program change can develop a course of action based on RBA. The following seven steps are to be used for programs, agencies and service systems.¹ Similar steps can be used at the community level:

- **Step 1:** Who are our customers?
- **Step 2:** How can we measure if our customers are better off?
- **Step 3:** How can we measure if we are delivering services well?
- **Step 4:** How are we doing on the most important measures?
- **Step 5:** Who can help us make changes? Who are the partners who have a role to play in doing better?
- **Step 6:** What works to do better?
- **Step 7:** What will we do?

¹ Friedman, M. (2005). *Trying Hard is Not Good Enough: Using Results Accountability to Produce Measurable Improvements for Customers and Communities*. Trafford Publishing: Victoria, BC.

Using these steps, ASR applies RBA principles to all of our projects to help our clients and partners “turn the curve” in their community.

In this paper, we will mainly be discussing our work with Family Resource Centers (FRCs) with two projects: the Prevention Outcomes Project (POP) and the First 5 Santa Cruz County evaluation. FRCs have many funding sources and multiple partners and stakeholders. All of these parties are invested in outcomes and results. The purpose of discussing these projects is to introduce several tools and processes for FRCs to “tell the story” of their worth in creative ways – such as through the RBA framework, logic modeling, inclusion, reporting templates, thinking about cost and results, and dissemination. Both of these projects used the RBA framework to generate meaningful data, focus on results, and tell the story of the value of the programs. This paper will also show that Santa Cruz County FRCs are well down the path to achieving these goals thanks, in part, to the First 5 evaluation. The following pages highlight ASR’s work with these programs.

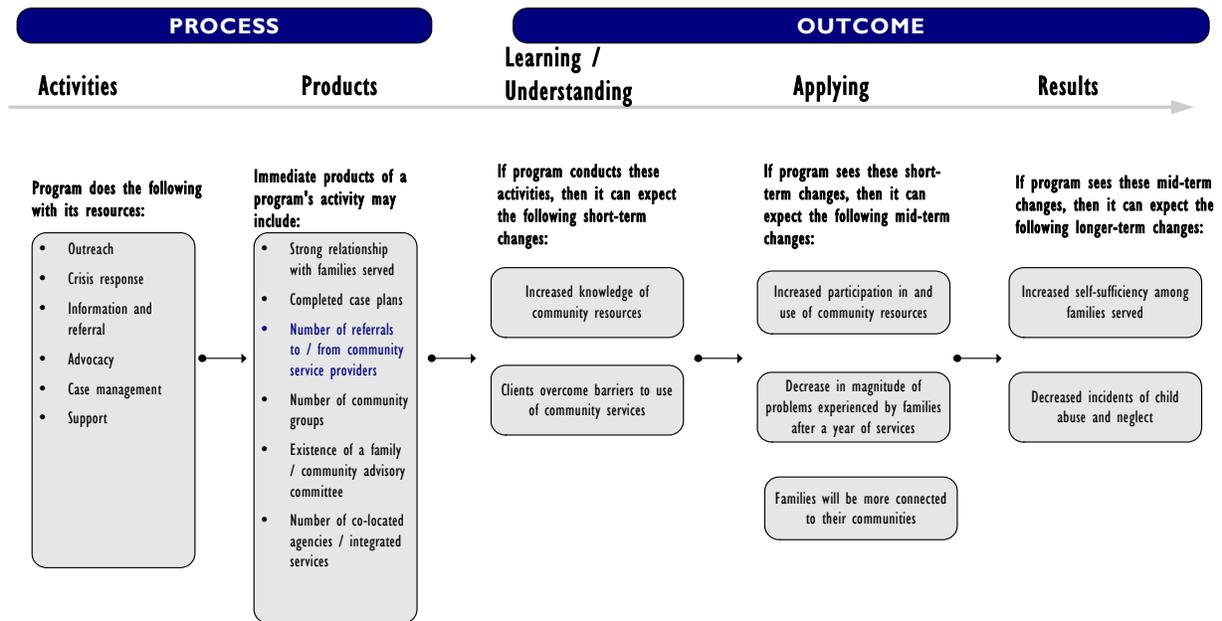
B. Public / Private Support for Results

Using RBA with the Prevention Outcomes Project²

The Prevention Outcomes Project (POP) was a two-year study in Santa Cruz County to identify and measure shared outcomes for prevention programs. Five Family Resource Centers (FRCs) in Santa Cruz County were part of the prevention effort. The POP FRC cluster used RBA methodology to identify a logic model linking services with client outcomes, develop a data collection tool, and assess family outcomes through a pre-post comparison. The POP project highlights the success of working together. Many different FRCs in the County had been providing a variety of services based on multiple ways of understanding prevention, but all programs had similar goals in mind. Logic modeling allowed the partners to understand their common goals and develop ways to join forces to effectively collect data about outcomes.

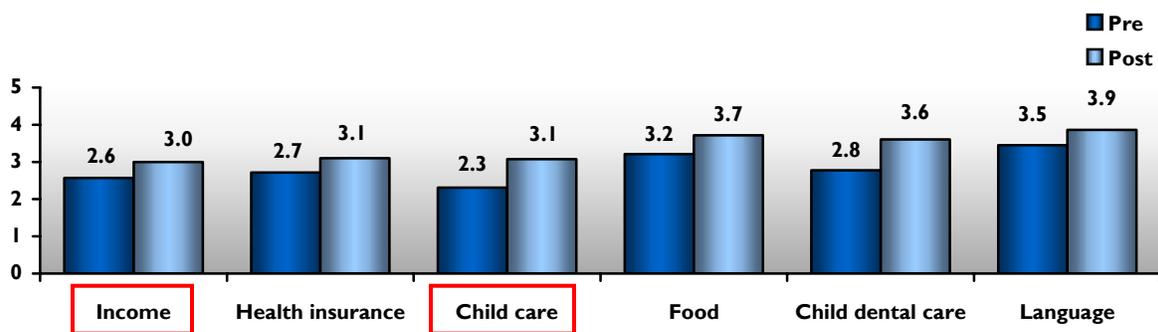
² The Prevention Outcomes Project, 2002.

Family Resource Center Logic Model



Outcomes were measured in two areas: an increase in community connectedness and a decrease in the magnitude of family problems. Data were gathered on a total of 31 families who began receiving services from the Family Resource Centers in fall of 2001. Post-test data collected on the same families four to six months later showed significant improvements in both outcomes (community connectedness and a decrease in the magnitude of problems) on eight of the twelve specific measures that were analyzed.

Results: Overcoming Problems



Note: All pre to post differences are statistically significant.

The ratings were based on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 represented “in crisis,” 2 represented “at risk,” 3 represented “stable,” 4 represented “self-sufficient,” and 5 represented “thriving.” Specifically, for income, families went from a 2.6, meaning that they rarely, but sometimes, went without basic needs, to a 3.0, meaning they had adequate income to meet basic needs and emergencies. Similarly,

in terms of child care, families went from 2.3, meaning the family had inconsistent child care or after-school activities, to 3.1, meaning the family had dependable child care or after-school programming for at least six months.

For this project, the process was based on the involvement of FRCs in planning and evaluation. The outcomes emphasize the success of bringing partners together to achieve common goals. Building on this success, ASR applied RBA principles to the First 5 Santa Cruz County evaluation.

C. Partnering with First 5 Santa Cruz County

Similar to the POP project, First 5 brought together many programs in order to achieve a common goal: to improve the well-being of Santa Cruz County children aged 0-5. Each program's services were looked at through the RBA lens and logic modeling to see how the programs could partner to achieve the First 5 goals. Our work with First 5 Santa Cruz County was to provide technical assistance, develop easy to use data collection tools, and provide meaningful analysis to not only share each programs' outcomes with stakeholders and partners, but also to create usable data that could help build program capacity.

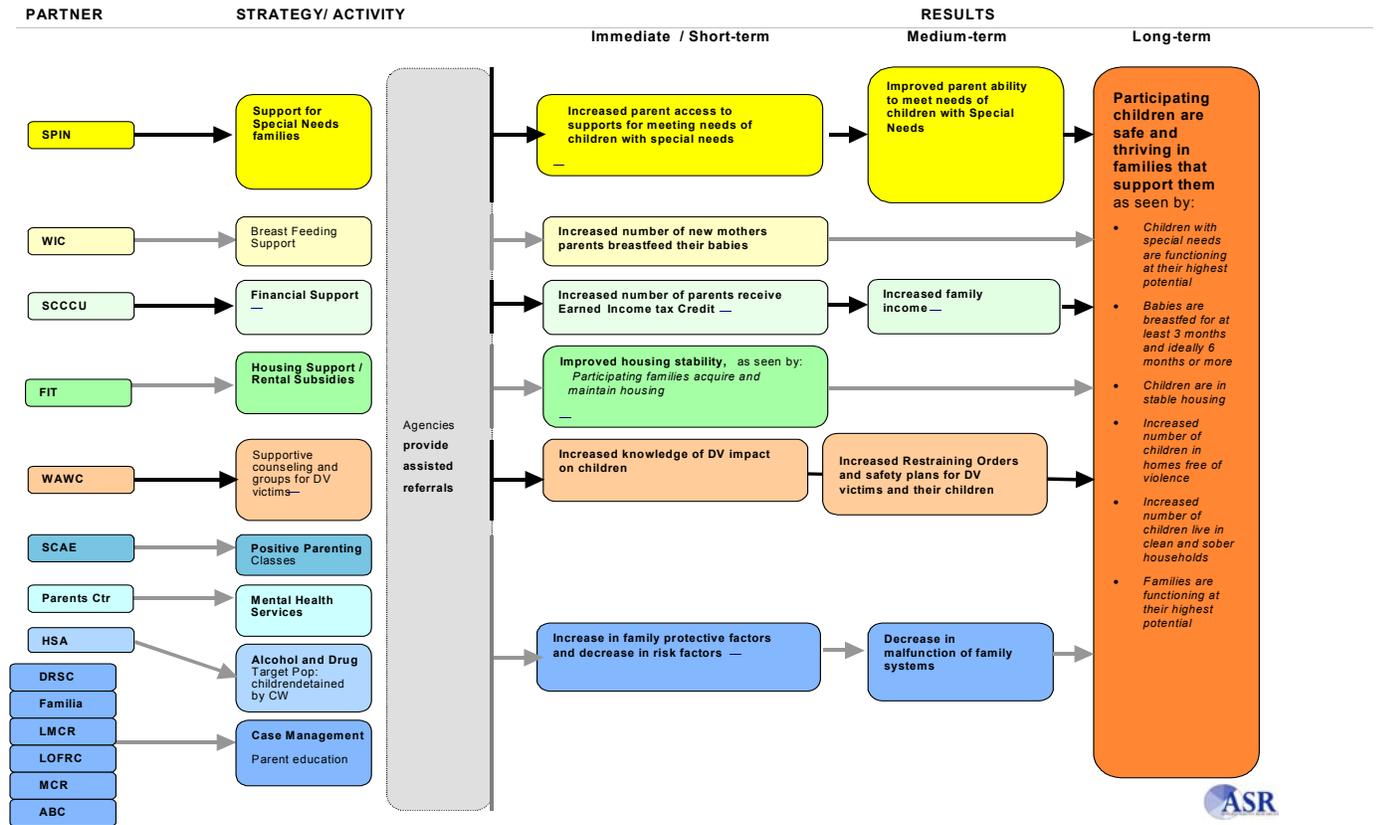
The purpose of the First 5 Santa Cruz County evaluation is to answer four central questions:

- Who are the children and families served and what are their characteristics?
- Are partners achieving the outcomes that are stated in their accountability plans?
- Are partners disseminating and using their outcome information?
- Are partners integrating their service delivery with others, as seen by indicators of increased referrals, and staff and client follow up with referrals?

First 5 Santa Cruz County evaluates several different kinds of programs, but here again we will specifically focus on our work with FRCs. Four out of five FRCs evaluate their home visiting services with the Santa Cruz County Family Development Matrix (Matrix). The Matrix consists of 13 outcome categories, and general indicators that describe the important elements of that category define each outcome category. FRCs measure five outcome categories: Family Relations; Social/Emotional; Parent/Child; Community Relations; and Child Care and Safety.

ASR worked with several FRCs to develop the Strong Families logic model based on First 5 goals:

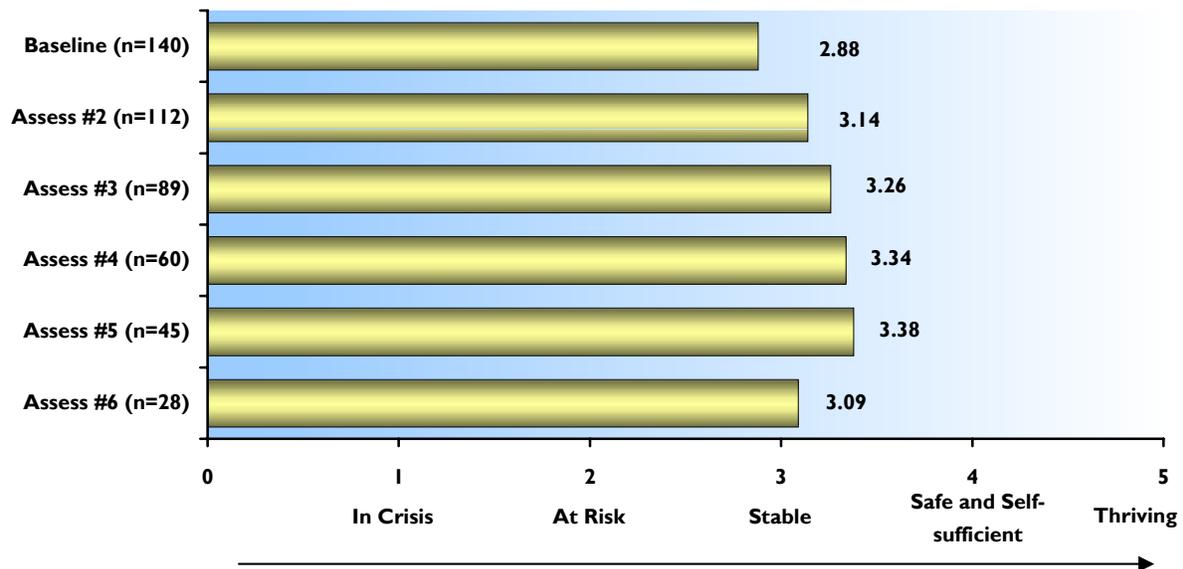
First 5 Santa Cruz County – Strong Families Logic Model



Looking at Matrix scores, we can see if the partnering helped improve the situation of County families served by First 5 FRCs.

Outcomes:

Family Matrix Scores, Combined FRC Scores, Assessed Every 3 Months

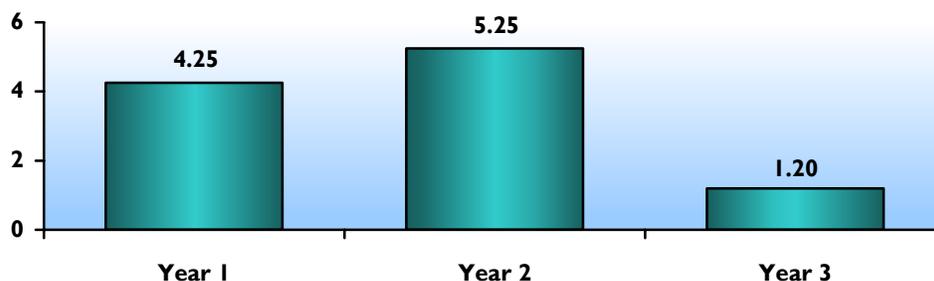


As with the POP project, First 5 FRCs are successfully working together to achieve the overarching First 5 goal. From the baseline assessment to assessment five, families serviced by First 5 FRCs improved from a score of 2.88 (at risk) to 3.38 (stable). Though there was a decrease in the score at assessment 6, the score was still higher than baseline. This demonstrates how using the Matrix with the involvement of families tells the stories of families served and shows the value of the programs. For example, reporting about outcomes not only met the needs of the funder, but also helped FRC partners better understand the families they work with, such as detecting a resurgence of needs in families at assessment 6.

Building Capacity

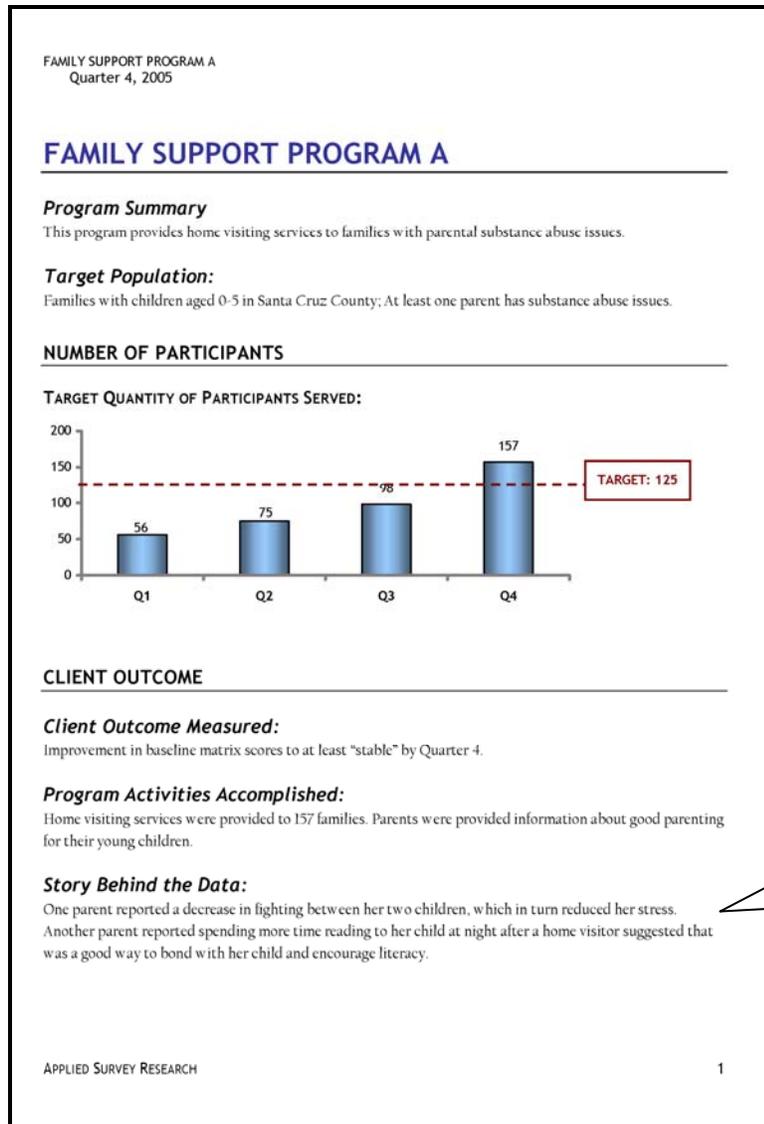
One challenge in the beginning phases of work with First 5 partners was late reporting. Partners indicated that often they were overwhelmed with the evaluation components of their grant and were unable to get their reports in on time. As part of ASR's ongoing work to build partners' capacity, ASR tracked on-time reporting for each quarter.

Average number of late reports per year:



As the chart shows, by year three only about one program submitted late data, on average, each quarter, compared with about four during year one and about five in year two. On-time reporting improved, in part, because ASR partnered with FRCs to facilitate outcome reporting and build partner capacity. Building partner capacity helps ensure that program strategies will work and that precious family support resources are put where they will have the greatest value. ASR also designed a template to clearly tell each programs story in the RBA framework. An important component of the template is that it has space for narratives that allow partners to highlight family experiences.

Reporting Template

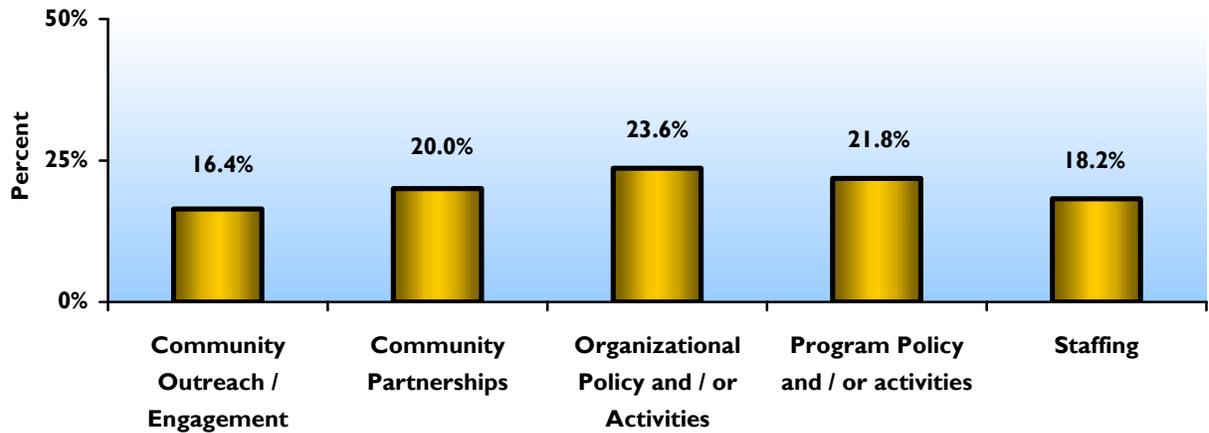


This is where partners have the space to qualitatively tell the stories of families and programs.

Partner outcome data were tracked primarily to report to stakeholders, but ASR's goal was to also get First 5 partners to use the data to make program change. Across all First 5 programs, 67% reported making changes based directly on client characteristic and/or outcome findings. Many FRCs made program changes as well, and as the evaluation continued, higher percentages of FRCs

reported making changes based directly on client characteristic and/or outcome findings. In Quarter 1 (January-March, 2004), 67% of FRCs reported making changes while in Quarter 6 (April-June, 2005), 83% reported the same. Changes were made in the following areas:

Change Areas:



The area of change most often cited was Organizational Policy and/or Activities (24%). One example of this was changes in discharge policies. Clients were remaining in the same level of services for extended periods of time at stable levels. Matrix data has begun to be used as criteria for discharge from intensive case management services to less intensive services such as parent education classes or support groups.

Cost Data

Cost per program data is another method for monitoring outcomes and capacity and can also tell parts of the FRCs’ story. Cost data is a way to glean whether or not money and effort are being used to achieve the best results. The following table shows five programs providing services to families. Due to the different services that each of these programs provide, comparisons of the average individual cost per program cannot be made. Further, as budgeting and funding are reported differently for each program, the following data is for illustrative purposes only.

Cost per Individual and Per Parent for First 5 Programs Offering Home Visiting Services and Home Visiting, Parent Education, and Information and Referral Services

Home Visiting Program		
Program	Cost Per Individual	Cost Per Parent
Program 1	\$1,139.45	\$2,658.72
Program 2	\$1,217.49	\$3,135.46
Home Visiting, Parent Education, and Information and Referral Services		
Program	Cost Per Individual	Cost Per Parent
Program 3	\$1,170.53	\$2,591.90
Program 4	\$1,574.18	\$3,673.09
Program 5	\$275.98	\$758.40

The cost per individual or parent varies widely between programs. Though cost data must be utilized carefully, it helps show return on investment for funders and can help partners to self-evaluate.

Conclusions

RBA brings together multiple partners with a variety of backgrounds to work toward common goals. Developing logic models can help key stakeholders and partners see how many programs fit together to make community-wide change. The Prevention Outcomes Project is an example of how working together can achieve positive results.

As highlighted in the First 5 Santa Cruz County evaluation, many grants require partners to report their findings to stakeholders and partners. Program evaluators must work with partners to develop meaningful data collection tools to facilitate timely and relevant data collection. Findings must be germane to grantors, stakeholders, and partners. ASR’s core values of working with First 5 partners are to involve the partners throughout the process, include qualitative as well as quantitative data to better tell the stories of the programs and of the families served, use case studies to help focus on results, and include cost data to assist partners in self-evaluation. ASR also believes that if developed with these values in mind, findings can be useful to partners that may in turn be more likely to use these results to make program-level change. In this way, the tools and processes highlighted in this paper can help bring programs together to achieve common goals, develop meaningful data to report to stakeholders and partners, as well as build program capacity.