



2023

Building Resilience in Napa County's Children and Families - a System of Care Approach



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Science-Based Developments in the Prevention Field

Significant research over the last 30 years provides concrete ways for individuals, organizations, and the larger community to support the healthy development of the next generation by preventing child maltreatment. Adverse child and community experiences (ACEs) can occur in the household, community and in the environment, causing toxic stress.



Whether physical/sexual abuse in the home, chronic generational poverty or natural disasters like fires and floods, left unaddressed, toxic stress harms an entire community by reducing the ability of individuals in that community to respond resiliently. Fortunately, research also shows that there are many ways to reduce the impact of toxic stress from ACEs and build healthy, resilient communities. [i]

Leading this research is The Center for the Developing Mind at Harvard, whose mission is to drive science-based innovation that achieves breakthrough outcomes for children facing adversity. They accomplish this mission in partnership with organizations committed to using science to inform policy and practice and to drive innovation in the field.

Their theory of change, [Building Adult Capacities to Improve Child Outcomes](#),^[ii] provides an overview of why and how the Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC) of Napa County members work together to prevent child maltreatment.

Theory of Change Overview

When adults have opportunities to build the core skills that are needed to be productive participants in the workforce and to provide stable, responsive environments for the children in their care, our economy will be stronger, and the next generation of citizens, workers, and parents will thrive. To have a bigger impact, we must switch from information/advice giving, to active skill building, coaching, training, practice.^[iii]

How can we create a more welcoming and less stress-inducing atmosphere for parents/caregivers using these programs, moving from information giving to skill building?

A proven strategy is to provide training to caseworkers that will support relationship building with their clients and longevity in the work. Caseworkers need:

- 1) training on how to offer trauma informed services to avoid re-traumatizing families in the system;
- 2) training on managing the secondary trauma they may experience, so they are ready to work with families with multiple challenges; and
- 3) training on adult learning strategies, ensuring that they switch from information and advice giving to active skills building through coaching and practical skills development.

Additionally, it is important to set up services and systems that relieve key stressors in families' lives, like filling basic needs (food, shelter and safety). As a community, ensuring that family resource centers are available to help families navigate resources, offering guaranteed income programs and housing support programs are a few examples of strategies that are effective.

Locally, the members of the Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC) of Napa County work together day in, day out to provide a structure of support to Napa's families, working upstream to ensure that adversities are mitigated, and healing can occur. The shift to upstream prevention work has been embraced at the national and state levels as well. The Families First Preservation Service Act, signed into law in February 2018, brought renewed focus to preventing children from entering the foster care system. At the state level, the Office of Child Abuse Prevention and the Child Welfare Directors Association embraced the opportunity this new legislation provided, hosting the first statewide Prevention Summit in 2019. Napa County is one of the 49 counties engaged in comprehensive prevention planning efforts to better leverage resources to develop our own system of care for child and family well-being.



Prevention efforts are continuously furthered year-round by CAPC with a focused effort annually in April for Child Abuse Prevention Month. Members pictured here together for the last in-person campaign kick-off in 2019.

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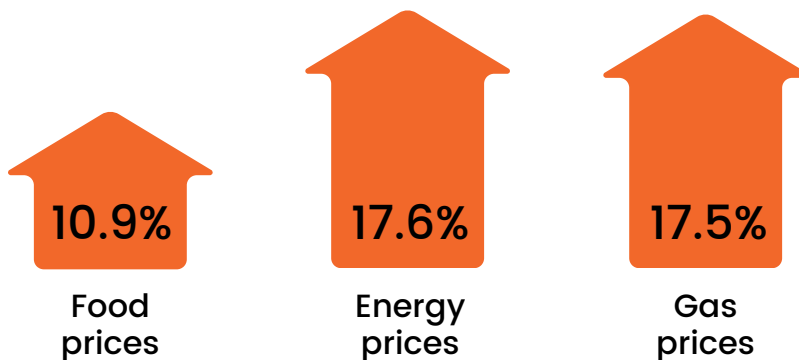
The State of Children and Families in Napa County

The residual impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to take a serious toll on families, many of which are struggling with financial pressures to make ends meet. Families are making hard decisions like choosing between rent, prescriptions, and food. They struggle to find safe and reliable childcare. They often face language, technology, or educational barriers to helping their children. The extreme stress that parents are facing puts their children at greater risk of maltreatment, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and exposure to family violence.



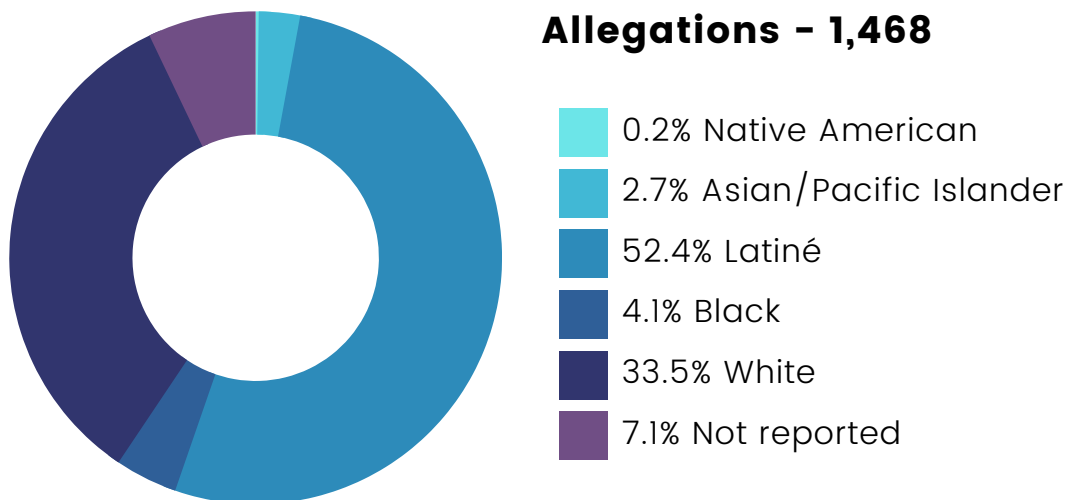
**The extreme
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The following statistics provide an indication of the financial pressures experienced by families in our community: in Napa County 8% of children live in poverty, and 48% qualify for free or reduced-price lunches; 3% of children and 10% of adults are uninsured; 22% of residents report severe housing problems [i], and of Napa's housing insecure families, 60% are Latiné [ii]. The additional stress of 2022's steep inflation rates have made it even harder to meet basic needs. Nationwide, consumer prices increased at a staggering rate of 7.7% (Oct. 2021-Oct. 2022).



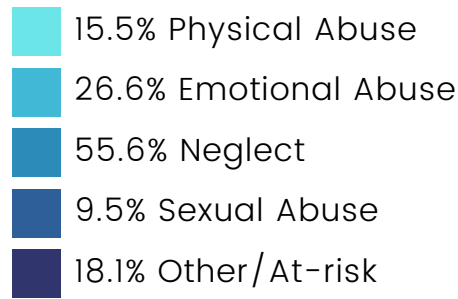
Statewide, close to half a million children annually are reported for maltreatment and only a small percentage of those are confirmed, with over 50% of allegations classified as neglect.

Napa County's statistics align with state trends in terms of allegations, entries to care and in care services.





Allegation Types



In 2022, HHSA’s Child Welfare Services received 1,468 reports of suspected maltreatment[iv]

- This is a 10% increase from the 1,327 reports of suspected maltreatment in 2021.
- Of those reports received and investigated, 74 met the legal definition of child maltreatment, a 14% decrease from 2021.
- 56% of the allegations were neglect, in alignment with the state’s reporting.
- While the rate of allegations is consistently higher than the state rate, some positive trends include: [v]
 - the rate of substantiations have been steadily decreasing over the past five years.
 - the rate of children/youth in care has been lower than the state’s rate since at least 2013 and,
 - the rate of entries to care has been decreasing since 2019.

While these statistics tell a story about the children and families involved in the child welfare system, these numbers do not represent the full story of children and families impacted by adversities across all three realms of ACEs.

Frequently, neglect cases are tied to poverty (lack of childcare, housing, basic utilities, food, medical services). Furthermore, some neglect cases involve families because of lack of services – lack of mental health services for a mother dealing with postpartum depressions, domestic violence, substance abuse issues or recovering from a natural disaster that has displaced a family from their home. These are challenges that require supports offered outside the child welfare system, from a broader base of community supporters.



How might we work smarter, more collaboratively to keep families strong and together?

The issue brief – Creating a Child & Family Well Being System: A Paradigm Shift from Mandated Reporting to Community Supporting – from Safe and Sound, a children’s advocacy organization, highlights ways to reform our current child welfare system of mandated reporters to one of community supporters, aimed at keeping families strong and together.

With opportunities presented by new legislation (Families First Prevention Service Act) and awareness of the impact that toxic stress has on the developing brain, we must make this shift from punitive (mandated) to supportive by engaging multiple stakeholders to ‘embrace a new frame’ [vi] of our societal response.

"We must prioritize the best outcomes for a child, by asking whether there is truly a substantial risk of harm to the child, and if not, we turn to questions about supporting the child within their caregiving system to address the mandated reporters concerns about the Child’s environment or living conditions. It is a strength-based model, as opposed to a fear based model, leaving in place the possibility of referral to CWS in the case of an imminent threat to the child’s health and well-being."

The issue brief shines a light on the correlation between neglect reports and poverty/disproportionality and highlights the trauma of removing a child from their home. Additionally, it recognizes that this is a complex situation given the mandated reporting laws and current systems. The mandate to report is intended to protect children, but at the same time can restrict attempts to help. Once mandated reporters are focused on carrying out their legal obligations and avoiding the penalties they may face if they do not, they may find it more difficult to center the family's needs and strengths and to fully consider supports that led to the suspicion of abuse or neglect.

This structural problem thereby obscures one of the very things that may be most protective for children: the existing strengths of the caregiving systems within which they live. Moreover, factors such as using social services, receiving economic benefits, and living in public housing subject families to an extra layer of contact with mandated reporters, leading to over surveillance of these families.[vii]



Implications for Napa County's Children and Families



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Safe and Sound's Issue Brief provides several recommendations for consideration, some of which are in practice in Napa County.

Advance Legislative and Legal Reforms

Moving from mandated reporting to community supporting requires revisions to laws and regulations that address a system of care that penalizes families, but rather keeps open the possibility of a system centered on keeping families together through support and building on their current strengths. Suggested revisions include changing the threshold, timeline and evidentiary standards of reporting laws and improving data collection standards around the 'neglect' category.

Napa County Spotlight

- With the passage of AB2085 (Holden) earlier this year, changes have been made to the definition of neglect to exclude a family's 'economic disadvantage' and to heighten the standard to a 'substantial risk of suffering serious physical harm or illness.' In partnership with Health and Human Services Child Welfare Services Division, CAPC is updating the Mandated Reporter Training to include this shift in language with guidance from the Office of Child Abuse Prevention.

Advance Policy and Practice Reforms

To make this shift, there needs to be policies and practices in place that provide the community with resources to offer the services and supports that are needed, with a sufficient level of assurances that concerns about the child's health and well-being will be addressed. Examples of reforms include centering and fully funding family resource centers, health centers and school-based wellness centers to create community access to supports that address poverty, use of group decision making models and use of Peer Partners and Advocates.

Napa County Spotlight

- Napa County has a vibrant family resource center network with ten sites across the county, Ole Health, a federally qualified health center and multiple school-based wellness centers at the middle and high school campuses. These resources provide a solid foundation for the formation of strong community pathways to better wrap around families in need.



- HHS Child Welfare Services Division implemented Child Family Team Meetings (CFTM) in 2019. CFTMs are an opportunity to engage with families and their identified network of support to help children remain in their homes when it is safe to do so, return home or find an alternative permanent living arrangement.
- CWS has added two community members who are Parent Partners with “lived experience” to be advocates for families and advisors to the agency and staff.

Increase Access to Supports and Services

How might we ensure that families are connected to the variety of services offered in Napa County, using a trauma informed approach, without burdening families with multiple waitlists? Options include investing in basic supports like guaranteed income programs, providing trauma informed connections between families and service providers and investing in shared technology to improve coordination between agencies with an accurate inventory of services.

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Napa County Spotlight

- Since 2022, the Interagency Leadership Team (ILT), which includes Health and Human Services, other Napa County departments and community agencies,, is developing Napa County's Comprehensive Prevention Plan (CPP) to guide the implementation of the Families First Prevention Service Act. Through data collection, evaluation and development of strategies to address local unmet needs, the CPP will serve as a guide for our collective work together.

Engage Communities, Tribes and other Stakeholders to Guide Reform

A broad representation of stakeholders that includes parents with experience in the child welfare system, public health workers, community-based organization staff, business leaders, and educators need to be involved in co-creating the solutions/changes to the system. A partnership among a wide variety of stakeholders is best suited to advise policy makers and program leaders about the challenges faced by families as well as help create strong community connections

Napa County Spotlight

- The Mi Familia, Mi Comunidad community education campaign engaged key stakeholders (Latine, LGBTQ and families with children with special needs) in the development of the content, look and feel of the materials for the campaign. The bi-lingual, multi-cultural content is shared monthly through a variety of mediums (print, social media, radio) identified by the stakeholders as effective and accessible.

Conclusion

The 2023 CAPC Report provides an introductory look at the research and reasoning for embracing the new frame of “Reforming Mandated Reporting to allow for Community Supporting.” As shared by Dr. Malcolm Gaines, Senior Clinical Projects Director of Safe & Sound, “We want educators, clinicians, and case managers to have more room to offer support and collaborate with families to build strengths rather than send them into a fear-based system of surveillance that may not result in greater safety for the child. When the risk of imminent danger to a child is low, we must be able to engage in offering sincere support with integrity, and without the shadow of fear that accompanies the obligation to report.”

To support this shift in Napa County, the following recommendations are submitted for the Board of Supervisors consideration:

1. Advocate for the legislative, legal, policy and practice reforms outlined in the issue brief.
2. Encourage the development of a system of care by investing in family resource centers and school-based wellness centers.
3. Encourage collaboration between colleagues at cities, school districts and the businesses to leverage resources (funding, technical expertise, improved access to services) to create a “community supporting” approach.
4. Attend a CAPC of Napa County meeting, visit a CAPC member agency and attend a Mandated Reporter Training to learn more about the work locally.

Acknowledgements & Sources

This Report Prepared By The Child Abuse Prevention Council of Napa County (CAPC)



crosswalk



NAPA COUNTY Health & Human Services Agency



NAPA COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION



Public Health Prevent. Promote. Protect.



NVUSD NAPA VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



On The Move



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Acknowledgements & Sources

We thank you for your continued support in protecting children and strengthening families.



Sources

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[ii] <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/building-adult-capabilities-to-improve-child-outcomes-a-theory-of-change/>

[iii] <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/deep-dives/adult-capabilities/>

[iv] HHSA Annual Report 2022

[v] CWS/Probation System Improvement Plan Stakeholder meeting – Power point presentation, slide 31.

[vi] https://economics.safeandsound.org/static_reports/Shifting.from.Mandated.Reporting.to.Community.Supporting_brief.pdf

[vii] [ibid](#)