



2021 COVID-19 Impact Report

First 5 Lake County



Table of Contents

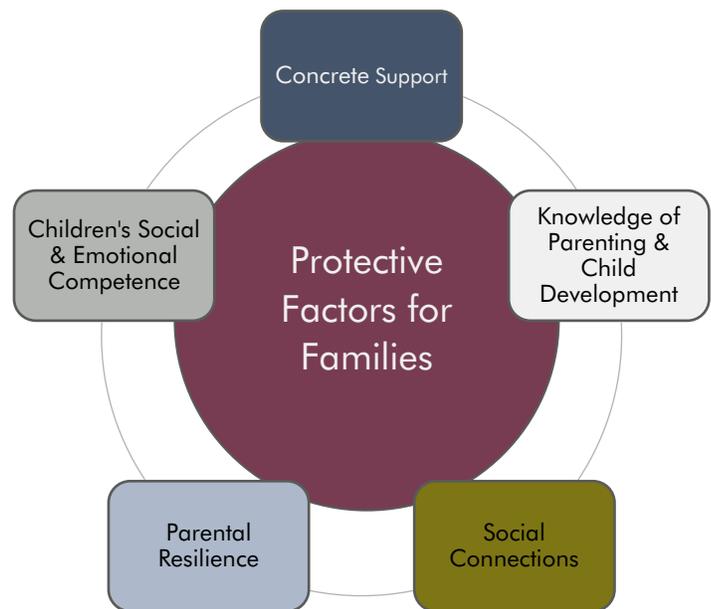
About First 5 Lake County 3
Rationale for the 2021 COVID-19 Survey..... 3
Results..... 6
Conclusions 10
Appendix..... 11



About First 5 Lake County

First 5 Lake County’s mission is to build the early childhood systems and supports needed to ensure Lake County’s youngest children are safe, healthy, and ready to succeed in school and life. It achieves this by leveraging the California Proposition 10 (Prop 10) tax on tobacco products to support community agencies and community-based partners. Each year, the First 5 Lake County Commission stewards approximately \$625,000 from Prop 10 to support early access to care, developmental screenings, parenting education, and collaborative work with child and family-serving agencies across the County and northwestern California.

First 5 Lake County is guided by a Strategic Plan and strives to align its approach to meet the needs of families with young children. The First 5 Lake County Commission has adopted the research-based Strengthening Families Framework™ and the five Protective Factors to guide decision making related to funding and collaborative work to ensure the community has a shared way to view family strengths and needs. This framework was instrumental in the design of this study of family needs to understand the “attributes that help families successfully navigate difficult situations.”¹



Rationale for the 2021 COVID-19 Survey

In addition to the Strengthening Families Framework™, First 5 Lake County’s Strategic Plan includes a “desire to focus special attention on those in crisis or in potentially isolating situations for greater equity.” In 2020, and continuing in 2021, families across the County experienced isolation as the COVID-19 pandemic closed schools and early care and education settings and put many families in crisis situations with the loss of a job and resulting financial stress. In response, First 5 Lake County developed a survey to assess the impact of the pandemic on families in order to better understand how to meet their needs moving forward.

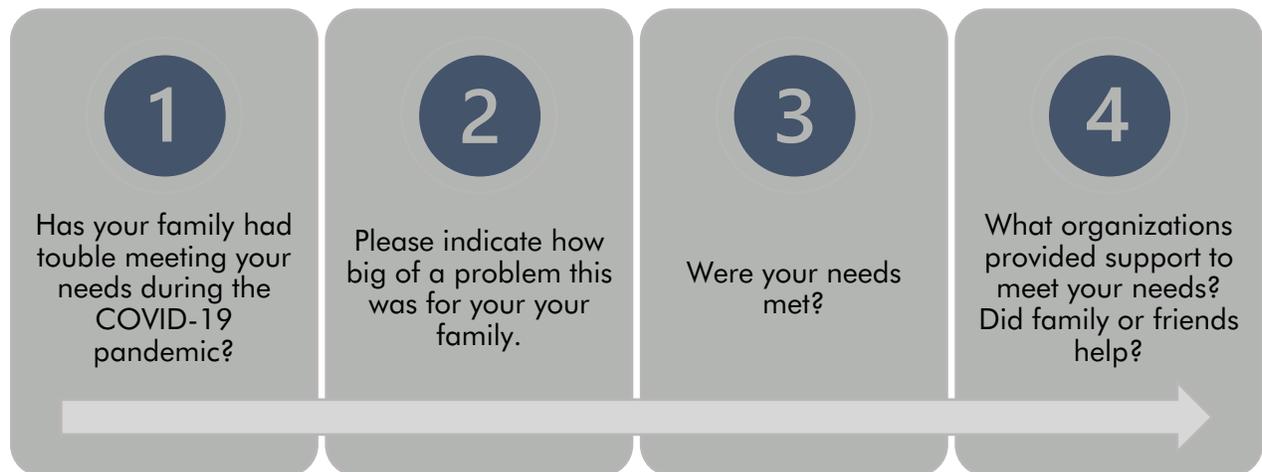
¹ More information on the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework is available at: <https://cssp.org/our-work/projects/protective-factors-framework/>.

Methodology and Survey Design

Throughout the month of June 2021, participants in First 5 Lake County funded programs were asked to share how COVID-19 impacted their families through an electronic survey. First 5 Lake County and Social Entrepreneurs, Inc. designed questions related to concrete needs as well as social supports, per the Strengthening Families Framework™. The survey was promoted on the Bloom and First 5 Lake County Facebook pages and distributed to parents and caregivers who had children enrolled in the Imagination Library program via email.² To encourage participation, respondents had the chance to win a prize from First 5 Lake County. Data from the survey was analyzed by SEI and First 5 Lake County.

Respondents were asked a series of questions regarding the impact COVID-19 had on their family, beginning with whether or not their family had trouble meeting a specific need. Families were then asked to indicate whether the need or barrier was a big problem or small problem and whether their need was met. Respondents who indicated their needs were met were then asked to provide information on what organizations provided support to meet their needs and/or if family or friends helped them meet a need. The graphic below illustrates the flow of questions that were used to explore 11 possible areas of need, which are listed on the following page.

Order of Questions



² This survey served a dual purpose of collecting information on the impact of COVID as well as information on family experiences with the Bloom and Imagination Library programs. Data from those questions is reported in the First 5 Lake County Commission Evaluation Report, available at <https://firstfivelake.org/first-5-lake-commission/>.

Areas of Exploration

The survey used the flow of questions described on the prior page to explore the impact of COVID on families within the following 11 areas of concrete need:



Childcare/Daycare



Housing



Rent or Mortgage



Children's Medical Care (including medicine)



Internet Access



Transportation (including gas, bus passes, shared rides)



Employment



Medical Care (including medicine)



Utility payments



Groceries/Food (including baby formula)



Personal Hygiene (including diapers)

Open-ended responses on how needs were met (question 4 in the graphic on the prior page) were coded by First 5 Lake using the Protective Factors framework. In some areas, where it was unclear how the family's needs were met, First 5 Lake staff called agencies to better understand their service provision and how families may have reached out during the pandemic. This coding was reviewed by the First 5 Executive Director and the Program Support Specialist to ensure consistency.

Limitations

The survey was administered through SurveyMonkey and designed with logic to take respondents from one question to the next appropriate question depending on their answer. In the process of transferring the survey, this logic was disabled and participants were asked to answer questions that did not correspond to their answers to the first question. For example, if a respondent indicated that they did not have trouble meeting a specific need, they should not have been able to answer the follow-up question asking how big of a problem it was for their family. However, in some instances respondents did provide answers to follow-up questions they should not have been prompted to answer. Occurrences in which respondents provided conflicting answers (i.e., answered the first question indicating they did not have trouble meeting a need and then responded to the question about how big of a problem it was for their family) were minimal and were recoded for analysis. Responses were not deduplicated, however, any duplicate responses are likely minimal.

Results

269 people responded to the survey. Not all families that indicated they were experiencing a certain need or barrier went on to answer the follow-up questions and the number of total respondents to questions and sub-questions varies. Individuals that indicated “Does not apply to us” and “Not Applicable” to questions were removed from the denominators for each question.

Areas of Need

The area where the greatest number of families expressed difficulty during the COVID-19 pandemic was in paying for utilities (n=106). This was followed by families reporting they had trouble with employment (n=105), families reporting trouble meeting childcare or daycare needs (n=98), and families reporting trouble with rent or mortgage (n=95).

Need	Percentage of families that indicated this need/barrier was a <i>big problem</i>	Percentage of families that indicated that their need was <i>not</i> met
 106 families had trouble with utility payments	44% (46/104)	32% (32/100)
 105 families had trouble with employment	52% (53/102)	61% (59/96)
 98 families had trouble with childcare or daycare	48% (46/96)	51% (48/94)
 95 families had trouble with rent or mortgage	38% (35/93)	23% (21/93)

Survey respondents provided the following details about their areas of need and the challenges they experienced.

“We're scraping by. We had to pay rent and can't pay our utilities.”

“We were able to get enough to feed our family but still having a hard time affording food.”



“Daycare closed. Had to find more expensive private childcare.”

“We drove two hours away to find diapers.”



Challenges to Meeting Needs

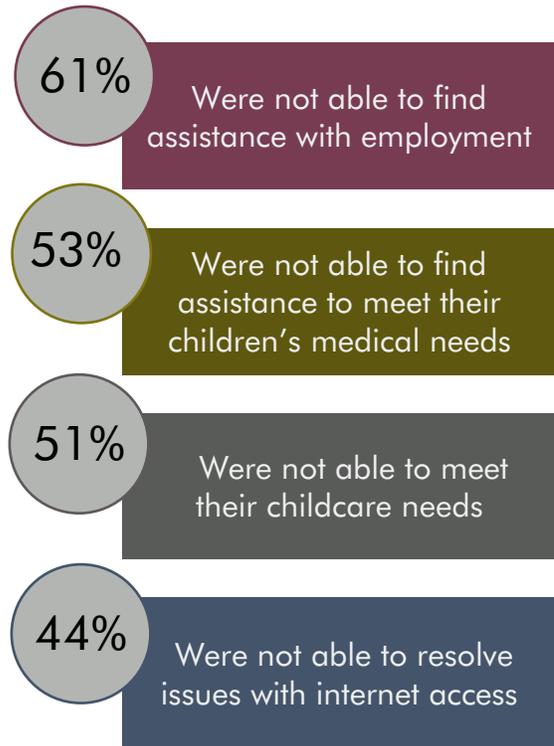
Respondents indicated that resolving trouble with employment was the most challenging area of need, with 59, or 61% of respondents to the question, noting that this need was not met by the time of survey completion. The other areas in which families were unlikely to find assistance in meeting their needs were those related to children’s medical care (10 out of 19, 53%); childcare (48 out of 94, 51%); a parent’s medical care (15 out of 32, 47%); and internet access (13 out of 34, 44%). Additional needs and the number of respondents noting them as a problem for their family are described in the Appendix of this report.

Families who were unable to get their needs met described earning too much to qualify for assistance but not being able to pay for necessities such as utilities. Other struggles included having dental, physical, and mental health appointments for children and parents canceled or postponed to the point parents felt they or their children were falling behind. Two respondents described being in debt, with one respondent commenting that a spouse’s immigration status compounded issues for their family. One respondent described being at risk of homelessness.

How Needs Were Met

Families were asked what organizations provided support to meet their needs, and were given the opportunity to indicate if family or friends helped meet needs. For those families that were able to get assistance, responses to open-ended questions described the agencies or programs that were able to help them. Answers to the open-ended questions were categorized by First 5 staff to identify how families navigated difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The top three Protective Factors leveraged by families are described on the following page, with the highest number of needs being met in the area of concrete support in times of need.





168 connections to concrete supports were made

Examples of assistance provided to support families in accessing concrete support and the agencies or programs that provided necessities to children and families included the following. “N”s represent the number of respondents who indicated they were supported by that agency or organization.

General Assistance | Women Infants and Children (WIC) program operated by Lake County Social Services, CalWORKS, or other “social services,” (n=28); North Coast Opportunities (n=11); CARES Program or Federal Stimulus checks (n=8); Non-Healthcare Tribal Services including the Dry Creek Band of Pomo Indians, Scott’s Valley Band of Pomo Indians, and a Susanville Tribe (n=7).

Food-Related Assistance | Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—SNAP (n=14); Redwood Empire Food Bank or other food banks (n=13); school meals (n=4).

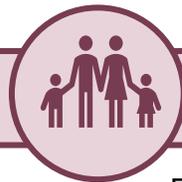
Utility Assistance | Home Energy Assistance Program—HEAP (n=15); Low Income Assistance Program from Pacific Gas & Electric (n=5); school-facilitated internet access (n=2).

Medical Assistance | Lake County Tribal Health (n=7); Sutter Lakeside Hospital (n=4); Adventist Health Clear Lake (n=2).

Employment Assistance | Employment Development Department (n=6).

Housing Assistance | New Digs at North Coast Opportunities (n=1); The NEST (n=1); Housing and Urban Development (n=1).

Child Development Services | Head Start, including Early Head Start and Pinoleville Native American Head Start (n=4); First 5 (n=2); Easterseals (n=2); Mother-Wise (2); Training Wheels (n=1).



85 families relied on family or friends for support

Families also relied on **social connections** (friends or family members) to overcome challenges. This included financial assistance to pay for things like rent, diapers, housing, and assistance finding employment.



54 families relied on their own resilience to persevere

Families most frequently described overcoming financial stressors. Disruptions in childcare were noted multiple times and parents made accommodations by alternating who would stay home with their child/children or changing their employment status from full to part time, onsite to remote, when possible, or leaving the workforce altogether. Examples as to how respondents indicated they overcome challenges are provided below.

We used our own savings and depended on credit cards much more than we normally would have.

No organizational support. We were able to set up reasonable payment plans with our utility companies and make supplemental payments as finances allowed.

I just had to go back to work sooner than I wanted after having a baby (10 weeks).

My partner was able to work a ton of side jobs in a neighborhood.

My husband had to work a lot of overtime to make sure we could pay our mortgage.

I had to sell our belongings and work double shifts.

My husband stopped working to stay home with our child.



Conclusions

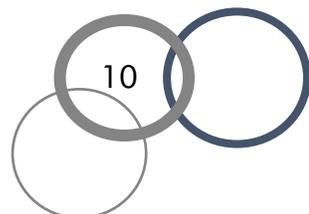
Families' ability to get their needs met during the COVID-19 pandemic varied by the type of need and family circumstances. Over the course of 2020-2021, families accessed a multitude of government programs and nonprofit agencies in Lake County, as well as relied on support from family and friends and their own resiliency, to meet these needs.

Resources for some things like utility assistance were in high demand and were available to many people in the county. However, some families noted that their income was too high to qualify for assistance with utility bills or other services. This is a theme that First 5 funded programs have noticed as well. While 18.3 percent of families in Lake County are designated as living in poverty, with a median household income of \$47,000, many other families may be working but still struggling.³

It is not surprising that the challenge that was most difficult for families in Lake County to overcome was employment as unemployment tends to be relatively intractable. Families were forced to make trade-offs in order to balance work and other commitments, choosing in some cases to leave the workforce to care for children or assist with online learning, or to attempt to get by with temporary work such as "odd jobs." There will likely be longer term challenges associated with the compromises Lake County families made to get by in the last year.

Surveying families participating in First 5 programming proved to be a successful strategy to better understand the experiences of Lake County families with young children. It may be beneficial to do such a survey periodically to assist with designing programs or engaging in collaborative community-wide systems-strengthening work.

³ U.S. Census Bureau. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/lakecountycalifornia>.



Appendix

Need	Percentage of families that indicated this need/barrier was a <u>big problem</u>	Percentage of families that indicated that their need/barrier was <u>not met</u>
 106 families reported trouble with utility bill payments	44% (46/104)	32% (32/100)
 105 families reported trouble with employment	52% (53/102)	61% (59/96)
 98 families reported trouble meeting childcare/daycare	48% (46/96)	51% (48/94)
 95 families reported trouble with rent or mortgage	38% (35/93)	23% (21/93)
 79 families reported trouble with groceries/food needs (including baby formula)	31% (24/77)	13% (10/76)
 60 families reported trouble with housing	39% (22/56)	34% (17/50)
 53 families reported trouble with internet access	48% (25/52)	44% (21/48)
 50 families reported trouble attaining basic household or personal hygiene items (including diapers)	37% (18/49)	26% (12/47)
 36 families reported trouble meeting medical care needs (including medicine)	51% (18/35)	47% (15/32)
 36 families reported trouble meeting transportation needs (including gas, bus passes, shared rides)	44% (16/36)	41% (13/34)
 21 families reported trouble meeting their child's/children's medical care needs (including medicine)	43% (9/21)	53% (10/19)