

Proposal for Sonoma Valley Fund to Support CFSC's Early Childhood Education Initiative

Why Invest in Early Childhood Education

Education is the bedrock for addressing disparities in our community. It is a human right and essential to ensuring that all children meet their greatest potential. Research shows that the opportunity gap appears long before children reach kindergarten and at-risk children who do not receive a high-quality early childhood education are:

- 25% more likely to drop out of school
- 40% more likely to become a teen parent
- 50% more likely to be placed in special education
- 60% more likely to never attend college
- 70% more likely to be arrested for a violent crime

A focus on early childhood is the most cost-effective way to ensure the healthy development of children in poverty and offer the greatest returns to society.

Creating Opportunity

Building an effective early childhood education system that prepares every child for a successful start in kindergarten cannot be accomplished by any single organization or sector alone. Community Foundation Sonoma County is fortunate to be launching our Early Childhood Education Initiative as part of a cross-sector partnership working on four critical systems that affect children's success in school: the Family System, Community System, Early Childhood Education System, and the K-3 System.

Community Foundation Sonoma County has taken the lead in supporting the Family System, with a focus on building early literacy skills through increasing parents and family members' time spent reading to children. Significant research shows that reading aloud to children provides essential emergent literacy skills such as building vocabulary, book handling behaviors, story comprehension and awareness between letters and sound. Studies also show that reading aloud is the single most important thing a parent or family member can do to help a child prepare for reading and learning in school.

CFSC's initiative has three core strategies:

- Expand parent engagement with early literacy
- Increase access to books
- Launch comprehensive community literacy campaign

How Sonoma Valley Fund Can Support CFSC's Program

Expand Parent Engagement with Early Literacy: Pasitos

Community Action Partnership's *Pasitos* (Spanish for "little steps") program prepares low-income, monolingual Spanish-speaking Latino parents to be effective teachers and advocates of their 3-4 year-old children so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed. Parents and children enrolled in the year-long *Pasitos* program share activities that build language, early literacy, and fine motor and social skills on a weekly basis in a playgroup at their local school or community center. There is special focus on parents reading daily with their child, and each week families go home with a bag full of books to read. Each *Pasitos* group costs \$16,000 and serves approximately 15 families, making this a low-cost, high-impact investment in a child's future. There is currently one *Pasitos* playgroup in Sonoma Valley.

➔ **Proposal: Sonoma Valley Fund's Board contribute \$5-8K toward the launch of a new *Pasitos* playgroup in Sonoma Valley and commit to raise the additional dollars necessary.**

Increase Access to Books: Kindergarten Readiness Backpacks

United Way of the Wine Country has created a Kindergarten Readiness Backpack to provide parents with tools they need to prepare their children for kindergarten. The backpacks include several bilingual books, a parent binder (in either English or Spanish) with more than 80 developmentally appropriate activities for parents to use to engage their child through reading and other activities; a pencil pouch including crayons, scissors, a music CD, and several bilingual books. United Way partners with programs such as *Pasitos* and Migrant Education to ensure that the backpacks reach low-income Latino families. Through these partnerships, families are trained on how to use the backpack, and follow-up is done to track the effectiveness of the backpack in increasing family literacy. \$1,000 provides 25 families with backpacks, training in how to use the activities and read to their children, and follow-up.

➔ **Proposal: Sonoma Valley Fund's Board contribute \$5-8K toward the distribution of backpacks in Sonoma Valley over the summer and commit to raise an equivalent matching amount.**

Comprehensive Community Literacy Campaign: iRead

Community Foundation is implementing a community literacy campaign aimed at low-income Latino families to increase the percentage of parents and family members reading to children. The messages of this campaign will highlight the importance of reading to children and how to read to children, among others. Design and administrative support for the campaign come from Studio B, the firm that produced the highly acclaimed *iWalk* and *iGrow* campaigns. Donations to the campaign could purchase bilingual posters, radio advertisements, or billboard space.

➔ **Proposal: Sonoma Valley Fund's Board helps distribute posters in the Valley**