The Power of Connection: Tackling Challenges Together

2021 Annual Update
Our Programs

• **Thriving Families: Parent participation preschool**, where parents get “on the job” training to be their child’s first and most influential teacher and children arrive at kindergarten academically, socially, and emotionally ready

• **Young Scholars: K-5th grade coaching and tutoring** designed to help families navigate evolving challenges as kids move through the school system

• **Parent Education** on topics such as positive discipline, nutrition, media usage and safety, bullying, healthy routines, and school transitions as well as opportunities to lead classroom activities and organize community-building events

• **Support groups for parents** to help those experiencing similar challenges, e.g. overcoming social isolation

• **Learning and developmental assessments** for children as early as 1 month through 5 years old

• **Mental and behavioral health assessments** for both children AND parents from Day 1

• **Direct and timely access to resources and care** through referrals to Family Connections’ extensive network of community partners

We dedicate this Annual Update to:

- The hundreds of brave families in our learning community that inspire us every day. They are our North Star, and the courage, commitment, and care they show for each other is remarkable.

- The unsung heroes of Family Connections—our team of wonderful Family Educators. In the midst of unprecedented times, our team leaned in while the world sheltered away. Everyone went above and beyond to support our families, and without their dedication, we would not have been able to have such an incredible impact.
A Letter from Leadership

Dear Friends,

What a year it has been! In all of our decades of experience, we could not have imagined what we would be facing moving into last year, or how things would look at year’s end. When the pandemic hit, of all the resources our families could have reached out to in the midst of the unknown, they turned to us. It was humbling to be trusted in such a significant way. Our families told us that what they needed most was the community they had built with us over the years and to stay connected during a time of incredible isolation. We heard that request and worked with speed and agility to ensure that those connections remained intact.

We couldn’t have responded in this way without the strong community we have built over the years of families, staff, and supporters. Our families led the way, showing incredible strength and communicating with our staff and each other. Our staff rose to the challenge and found creative ways to keep the lines of communication with our families open and strong—from phone calls, text messages, and Zoom meetings to socially-distanced walks and outdoor activities. Staff also responded quickly by adding new partnerships and connections that would get our families the resources they urgently needed. And finally, our amazing supporters leaned in to provide the funding we needed to keep going even when the economy was uncertain.

We are incredibly grateful for each and every one of you in this very special community, who buoyed us during stormy times. As we move into our new program year, we are excited by new opportunities to strengthen and grow our community. Family Connections will be embarking on a new adventure this fall as we bid a fond farewell to our Belle Haven site and return to our roots in East Palo Alto through a new and exciting partnership with the Ravenswood City School District. We will continue to serve our beloved Belle Haven families while reconnecting to our agency’s birthplace. As we enter the new school year, we look forward to reconnecting with old friends and forging new partnerships in support of the families we serve.

With great appreciation,

Sarah Poulain MA, LMFT
Executive Director

Yukari Schneider PhD, MPH
Board Chair 2021-2022

Susan Loveall MA
Board Chair 2020-2021
Without our amazing team, none of this work would have been possible. To ensure staff wellness, we increased our support and flexibility, providing paid time-off for health and mental health/wellness and our multidisciplinary team met monthly to ensure we continued to meet the needs of our families and each other.

Our partnership with families and learning engagements drove our success last year

• Until it was safe to meet in person, Family Connections programs were online, provided 2-3x per week, 2-3 hours per day, for a total of 414.5 hours of instruction for families with children from birth to 5th grade. When COVID-19 restrictions loosened and vaccinations became more widespread, we safely connected with families at local parks to return to in-person programming outdoors.

• 98% of children participating in our programs received an initial home visit and developmental screening. Of these, 7.8% met criteria for further assessment to support early identification of any developmental delays.

• To ensure ongoing connection, Family Connections prioritized monthly one-on-one engagements with every child and monthly one-on-one engagements with every parent/family between September and May. One on one engagements were virtual and in-person, depending on COVID-19 safety guidelines.

• Monthly virtual engagements with pediatricians provided a space for families to learn and engage in dialog regarding child and family health, including COVID-19 vaccine education.

• Responding to participant feedback and need, we offered food distributions 2x weekly beginning in April. Over a 13-week period, 1,170 boxes of nutritious foods were distributed to families, amounting to approximately 5,850 meals.

• In a year like no other, 90% of families remained engaged throughout the entire year, from beginning to end.

In a time when virtual learning presented challenges for those with young children, we remained nimble and intentional in our approach to supporting families, especially our parents.

Parent education and family engagements, including Parent CAFEs, held an even more important role than ever. Supportive services and home visits provided families with scaffolding and connection, building their capacity to help manage and cope with the stress of the pandemic.

Investing in Families Today, Thriving Community Tomorrow
In a time when toxic stress was at its highest and family wellness at great risk, Family Connections’ learning community came together in invaluable ways more than ever.

“We continue to create a culture where mental health is becoming less and less of a stigma. Families talk to each other about the services they receive, how they are feeling, and even uncover childhood traumas they have never spoken about before. It is bringing families closer together and I hope we can continue doing this work to serve the whole family from children to parents to grandparents”.
- Stephanie Loera
Family Connections Mental Health Clinician

Family Connections continues to build upon what we have learned throughout the pandemic—we are stronger together. Our mental health services have never been more critical, and the care and support of our learning community has never been stronger. We sought to provide validation, empathy, and resources for families facing challenging times.

Our team was resourceful and creative: we offered outdoor summer walks, mindful meditation and yoga sessions outside windows, and informal conversations at weekly food distributions for those who just needed someone to listen.

The Inherent Strengths of our Learning Community are Profound:

- **93%** of families have others to talk to when in crisis
- **94%** of families reported their family pulls together when things are stressful
- **88%** of families have several people to talk to when lonely
- Family Connections mental health counseling increased by **41%** last year
The Pandemic Hit Our Families Differently

While the pandemic has been difficult for all of us, our families experienced its effects most intensely. In California, Latino families, which make up the majority of the community served by Family Connections, are 8.1 times more likely to live in high-exposure homes than their white counterparts, often sharing smaller living quarters and working essential, in-person jobs. Similarly, nearly 1/3 of all COVID cases in San Mateo County were reported in the communities we serve: North Fair Oaks, Redwood City, Menlo Park, and East Palo Alto.

Many families were affected or had loved ones affected by COVID-19. Our families spoke about the stigma and fear around contracting COVID and how it negatively impacted their health, their employment status, and their ability to take care of their families. When a family was exposed, in addition to our mental health services, Family Connections dropped off meals and supplies to minimize stress during quarantine and recovery. We also partnered with the county to provide accurate information and updates on COVID-19.

When the vaccine became available, Family Connections engaged in outreach to disseminate accurate information about the vaccine when many were hesitant. Family readiness to receive the vaccine increased from 50% to 90% after our vaccine education initiative through one-on-one educational sessions with our staff and pediatricians from our partners at Stanford Health.

“When my husband could not work and it was hard to get food, Family Connections signed us up for a program that sent us boxes with fresh fruits, vegetables, rice and beans. And in December when we had no way to get the kids a nice gift, they partnered with volunteers to get our children gifts based on their interests. We also got support with mental health, for both of us, after my husband contracted COVID and began to struggle with mental health.” - Victoria, Mother of 7
Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Financials

A special thank you 2020-2021 Board Chair Susan Loveall for all your dedication to helping Family Connections fulfill our mission in a challenging year!

Total Income $1,194,125.60

Total Expenses $1,103,980.88

**Assets**
- Cash and Equivalents $594,887.81
- Accounts Receivable 133,319.08
- Grants Receivable 53,692.31
- Prepaid Expenses 13,221.59
- Rent Deposit 4,000.00
- **Total Current Assets** $799,120.79

**Fixed Assets**
- Computers $11,498.30
- Accumulated Depreciation Computers (11,498.30)
- Equipment & Furniture 30,164.36
- Accumulated Depreciation Equipment (28,357.03)
- **Total Fixed Assets** $1,807.33

**Total Assets** $800,928.12

**Liabilities & Equity**

**Fixed Assets**
- Accounts Payable $6,510.00
- Credit Cards Payable 1,308.97
- Accrued Vacation 1,585.84
- PPP Loan Advance –
- **Total Liabilities** $9,404.82

**Equity**
- Beginning Net Assets $724,298.55
- Change in Net Assets 67,224.75
- **Total Equity** $791,523.30

**Total Liabilities & Equity** $800,928.12
Why the Franklin and Catherine Johnson Foundation invests in Family Connections

The Franklin and Catherine Johnson Foundation’s core mission is to support children and families in Redwood City and East Palo Alto. Family Connections was first selected for a grant in 2005 and we are grateful that the foundation has stood by us ever since. The Franklin and Catherine Johnson Foundation was a lifeline for Family Connections in a year when many grantors made the difficult decision to divert resources to the COVID front lines, leaving a significant gap in their wake. In an uncertain time, The Franklin and Catherine Johnson Foundation gave us the flexibility to respond to our families’ needs with crucial support for our programs.

Foundation Executive Director Tarah Evans reflected on her first impressions of Family Connections:

“We had been looking for a strong program that supported young children and their families, particularly in the often overlooked but critical age group of 0-5. We found alignment between our values and what Family Connections was already doing in our community, for our community. Family Connections has so much faith and trust in their families.”

Tarah noted that Family Connections stood out last year when every organization was forced to pivot and get creative. “The challenge was monumental for Family Connections. So much of what they do relies on that connection between the parents, the children, and the staff. They were able to bring a deep level of care and concern to an online format. Family Connections made a promise to those families and the pandemic did not stop them from keeping that promise.”

Family Connections is incredibly grateful for the support of the Franklin and Catherine Johnson Foundation and the work they do building a strong community.

*Please note: the Franklin and Catherine Johnson Foundation does not accept unsolicited proposals.
## Recognizing Our Supporters

*A special thank you to our 2020 volunteers: Each Green Corner, Ravenswood Family Health Network, Sonrisas Dental Health, KidPower, Good Roots Events & Farmers Markets, VeganOutreach, Young Men's Service League, National Charity League, Bank of America, Palo Alto Kiwanis, One Love, My Digital TAT2, Sanjana Ryali, Oshman Family JCC, Help me Grow San Mateo, West Hillsborough Elementary, Hands on Bay Area, and our tutors from Crystal Springs Highschool and JTS!*

*Indicates that the donor is part of Family Connections’ Leadership Circle - we are most grateful for your continuous support!*

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Administrative Office
3460 W. Bayshore Road
Suite 202
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Belle Haven School Site
1391 Chilco Street
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