Introduction

The Lake County Nurturing Parenting Program was developed by partner agencies to address the need for a consistent parenting philosophy and curriculum. After reviewing several parenting programs, Nurturing Parenting was chosen by the collaborative as the evidence-based curriculum to be implemented countywide. Lake County Office of Education has been funded through First 5 Lake since 2005 to coordinate the implementation of the countywide Nurturing Parenting Program.

The nationally developed Nurturing Parenting Program is a family-centered approach designed to build nurturing skills. These skills are an essential basis for parenting and child-rearing attitudes and practices. The program’s long-term goals are to teach positive parenting behaviors to stop the intergenerational cycle of needed child welfare interventions among families. The program was designed for all families with children ages 0 to 18, especially those at risk for child welfare intervention.

In Lake County, the goal of the Nurturing Parenting Program is to increase parents’ knowledge, skills and competency by participating in best practice parenting workshops that are promoted and utilized countywide. Agency partners include Lake County Department of Social Services; Mental Health; Public Health; Probation; AODS; and Office of Education, including ASPIRE, AmeriCorps, Healthy Start, Safe Schools/Healthy Students, and SARB; First 5 of Lake County; Lake Family Resource Center; Lake County Tribal Health Consortium; Big Valley Indian Education Center; Redwood Children’s Services; Lake County Children’s Council; Easter Seals; Migrant Head Start; and the County’s School Districts, among others.

Background

Lake County is a rural county located about 110 miles north of San Francisco and 50 miles east of the Pacific Ocean, with a total population of approximately 64,665 (US Census 2010). Children under age 18 make up 22% of the total population. The county is ringed by mountains and divided by Clear Lake. Residents live in small towns scattered around the lake, in the mountains, and in two incorporated cities at the northern and southern ends of the lake: Clearlake in the south with 15,250 residents and Lakeport in the north with 4,750 residents. Transportation is a major barrier for connecting with and receiving services, especially with the high cost of gasoline, dramatic downturn in the economy, and limited access to social services due to state budget cuts.

Ethnic diversity has been increasing in the county. In 1990, the population in the county was about 88% white, 7% Hispanic/Latino, 2% Native American and the balance (3%) a mix of other races/ethnicities. By 2010, according to the U.S. Census, this had changed to 74% white, 17% Hispanic/Latino, 2% Native American, and 7% made up of a mix of other races/ethnicities.

The local economy is based on agriculture, grape growing and wine making, tourism, and small and large retail business. Lake County’s poverty rate (including families with related children under age 18) is 28%, with 67% of children enrolled in the free and reduced lunch programs countywide. One in five residents in Lake County is receiving aid. Based on 2008 self-sufficiency standards, 4 in 10 Lake County households lacked enough income to cover “bare bones” living expenses. One-third of the population was reported to be “food insecure.” The State Employment Development Department's (EDD) monthly unemployment reports show that the county’s overall unemployment rate spiked from 13.4% in December 2008 to 19.8% in January 2010. Current unemployment countywide is at 14.7% (May 2012), compared to 10.4% statewide.

“I am learning new approaches to handling my children’s behaviors. I want to see this as an opportunity to teach them to make healthy choices.”

Native American Mother of two children
Behavioral Health Factors and Adverse Childhood Experiences

Children need healthy, safe and stable homes in order to thrive. Reducing child maltreatment requires a multi-faceted approach that promotes family protective factors and reduces the impact of adverse conditions that raise the risk of abuse and neglect. Lake County is ranked 52nd out of California’s 58 counties for poorest health due to death from all causes. Results from the 2010 Lake County Health Needs Assessment show that, compared to rates for the State of California, Lake County’s:

- Smoking rate is double for adults and triple for youth;
- Rates for alcohol-involved motor vehicle fatalities are three-times higher;
- Admission rate for alcohol and drug treatment is double;
- Rates for lung cancer, chronic liver disease and cirrhosis, as well as heart disease, obesity and deaths due to all cancers, are worse than the state’s.

Adult health issues such as the ones indicated above have been correlated through national studies with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE). The results of a local ACE survey (completed in 2010) of adults living in Lake County indicated that 82% of respondents had experienced one or more of ten ACE categories before the age of 18 years old, with 41% of the Lake County respondents indicating they had experienced 5 or more ACE categories. This compares to 66% indicating one or more categories of ACE among survey respondents in the original national study.

Experiencing family trauma can have a profound impact on children. When children lose loved ones, see others harmed by violence, suffer abuse, or witness other tragic events, it can increase their risk of experiencing social, emotional or behavioral health problems into adulthood. Early-life traumatic experiences can affect a parent’s ability to cope. Building stable, secure and nurturing relationships are a core component of healthy child development.

Strong parenting skills foster resilience among vulnerable children and promote healthy child development. Development of parenting capacity to aid in family strengthening and rebuild parent-child attachment is essential. Parenting education is one element of intervention that can make a difference for families.

“You are teaching me more and more each time I come. These classes are opening my eyes so I don’t just focus on the bad stuff, but reward my children’s successes, too.”

Hispanic/Latino Dad of two young children

Program Description

Effective parenting education programs, such as Nurturing Parenting, have features including:

- **Evidence-based curricula** that include an emphasis on parenting consistency; take into account the developmental stages of children; enhance positive parent-child interactions and emotional communication skills; and encourage real-time parent-child interaction and use of positive discipline techniques.

- **Experiential, peer-to-peer learning formats of sufficient duration** with small group sizes and flexible curriculum that can be targeted to specific group and individual family needs.

- **Well-trained facilitators** for families to build relationships and gain knowledge and skills.

- **Use of pre/post-testing of parenting knowledge** that includes observations of parent-child interactions.
Evidence-based Curricula

The Nurturing Parenting Program was originally developed through research conducted in 1983 with the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). Since then, 30 additional research studies have been conducted in communities implementing the program nationally and internationally. As a result, Nurturing Parenting is recognized by the SAMSHA National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices. As part of the program, parents and children typically attend separate sessions that meet concurrently and are designed to: build self-awareness and self-esteem; increase levels of empathy; teach alternatives to hitting and yelling; enhance family communication and awareness of needs; replace ineffective parenting strategies with nurturing behaviors; promote healthy physical and emotional development; and teach appropriate roles and developmental expectations.

The Lake County Nurturing Parenting Programs utilizes the evidence-based curricula individualized for a wide range of age groups, including parents and their infant, toddler, preschool, school-age, and/or adolescent children. Classes are offered in English and Spanish, with bi-lingual and/or bi-cultural facilitators appropriate to the group. Curriculum, activities and practice exercises are designed to be linguistically- and culturally-appropriate.

Experiential, Peer-to-Peer Learning Formats of Sufficient Duration

The Lake County Nurturing Parenting program features experiential learning through: activities to foster positive parenting skills and self-nurturing; home practice exercises; and activities to promote positive development in children. Lessons are delivered in a group setting to encourage peer-to-peer learning.

Four types of offerings are provided in Lake County:

- **Extended classes** ranging from 7 to 18 weeks, including infant, toddler and preschool, school-age, and adolescent programs;
- **Ongoing weekly classes**, for example at ASPIRE (for pregnant and parenting high school students) and Lake County Tribal Health Consortium for Native American parents;
- **Short-term community-based classes** on individual topics, including a series of eight topical workshops based on the Nurturing Parenting curriculum offered by Lake County Family Resource Center that qualify for court-ordered parenting; and
- **Home visits**, including through the Differential Response Program and Lake County Tribal Health’s Home Visiting Program.

Well-Trained Facilitators

Over the course of the Lake County project, 91 facilitators from 17 agencies countywide have received 3-days of training on the Nurturing Parenting curriculum to be able to utilize the program in their service delivery with families through groups, home visits, or individual counseling. An additional 22 people from other counties also attended the 3-day Nurturing Parenting Facilitator trainings in Lake County. A Facilitator’s Group and an Advisory Group meet monthly for continuous quality improvement of the countywide program, with discussion on coordinating program elements among the numerous agencies involved; meeting the diverse needs of families in the county; and encouraging data reporting.

Lake County Office of Education has been funded through First 5 Lake to coordinate the project, staff the Facilitator’s and Advisory Groups, organize trainings with child care, provide Facilitators, inform the community, work with schools, and be the contact with the national curriculum developer, Dr. Bavolek. Trained facilitators have been fully or partially funded through the project to provide classes at the Lake County Jail, Migrant Education, and AODS. Classes at Lake Family Resource Center have been funded through CAPIT, as part of child abuse prevention efforts. Additional internal funding sources have supported offering the curriculum at DSS/CWS in classes for their parents and Differential Response in home visits.
Use of Pre/Post-Testing of Parenting Knowledge

In Lake County, pre- and post-testing of parent knowledge and use of effective parenting strategies is done with the Adult Adolescent Parenting Index (AAPI) and/or Nurturing Skills Competency Scale (NSCS). The AAPI has been used with the extended groups (we have recently moved to using the short-version of the NSCS). Parents completing the AAPI (or the NSCS) are assessed in their parenting and child-rearing attitudes through their responses across five parenting constructs to provide an index of their level of risk for practicing behaviors that have been known to contribute to child maltreatment.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parenting Constructs</th>
<th>High Risk</th>
<th>Medium Risk</th>
<th>Low Risk</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expectations of Children</td>
<td>Lacks understanding of normal child growth and development</td>
<td>Understands growth and development of children</td>
<td>Tends to be supportive of children</td>
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<td>Tends to be demanding and controlling</td>
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<td>Parental Empathy toward Children’s</td>
<td>Fears spoiling children</td>
<td>Allows children to display normal developmental behaviors</td>
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<td>Needs</td>
<td>Lacks nurturing skills</td>
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<td>Recognizes feelings of children</td>
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<td>Use of Corporal Punishment</td>
<td>Thinks hitting, spanking, and/or slapping children appropriate and</td>
<td>Understands and uses alternatives to physical force</td>
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<td>required</td>
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<td>Lacks knowledge of alternatives and/or inability to use</td>
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<td>Parent-Child Family Roles</td>
<td>Perceives children as objects for adult gratification</td>
<td>Tends to have own needs met appropriately</td>
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<td>Tends to treat children as confidant and peer</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Finds comfort, support and companionship from own social peers</td>
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<td>Children’s Power and Independence</td>
<td>Tends to view children with power as threatening</td>
<td>Places high value on children’s ability to problem-solve</td>
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<td>Tends of view independent thinking as disrespectful</td>
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<td>Empowers children to make good choices</td>
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Lake County Program Outcomes

Levels of Participation

The Lake County Office of Education has worked closely with its community partners over the last seven years to implement the best practice principles of the Nurturing Parenting Program; grow the countywide program in participation and effectiveness; and achieve positive outcomes for parents and their families.

Countywide, since 2005, a total of over 1,290 parents have participated, and almost 580 children age 0-5 and 780 children age 6 and older, have participated in or been affected by the Nurturing Parenting program.
An ongoing challenge for the program has been retaining parents’ participation in the extended classes from start to finish. Strategies that have helped with retention have included offering food and child care. To maintain overall participation, more short-term community-based classes have been offered around the county in the last couple years.

The number of extended classes (lasting between 7 and 18 weeks each) remained about consistent from 2009-2012, while the number of short-term community-based classes increased from 14 classes offered in 2009-2010 to a total of 26-27 classes offered each year from 2010-2012. As a result, the number of parents participating in the extended classes has remained about the same from 2009-2012, while the number of parents participating in the short-term community-based classes increased significantly between 2009-2010 and 2010-2012.
Levels of Parenting Knowledge

After taking one of the extended classes of 7-18 weeks in the Lake County Nurturing Parenting program, 97% of participating parents increased their positive parenting knowledge in one or more of the five construct areas. In addition, 83-97% of parents were assessed as being at medium or low risk for behaviors leading to child maltreatment across the five parenting constructs (scoring 4 or more on a scale of 1 to 10) based on pre-/post-results of the AAPI, a measurement tool designed for use with the curriculum with good validity and reliability.

Other Parent Outcomes

The Parenting Ladder is being used with the short-term community-based classes. The Parenting Ladder was developed by the Oregon State University, Department of Human Development and Family Sciences, Family Policy Program. Parents completing the retrospective Parenting Ladder are asked to assess their level of knowledge on 12 areas of parenting and their child(ren)’s skills on three areas of behavior before they took the class and now that they have participated. The Nurturing Parenting short-term community classes are using this approach to assess increases in knowledge, understanding, and skills gained by participating parents.

Parents completing the retrospective Parenting Ladder from 2010-2012 had an average increased score of 0.62, increasing from a pre-score of 2.94 to a post-score of 3.56 on a scale of 1=low skill to 4=high skill.

The highest increases in self-reported competency (with an average of +0.74 in post-scores) were seen in parents’ assessment of their increased knowledge, understanding, and skills in:
- Finding positive ways to guide and discipline children;
- Dealing with the day-to-day stresses of parenting;
- Talking with other parents to share experiences;
- Setting and sticking to reasonable limits and rules; and
- Knowing normal behavior for my child(ren)’s age level.

“I love these classes because I am learning new ideas about how to be a good parent. And, I can pass this useful information on to my son to use with his children and also apply it to my grandchildren.”

Grandmother
Conclusions

Major elements of the countywide Nurturing Parenting Program’s success have included:

- Stability of the funding from First 5 Lake over seven years of implementation.
- Stability of the coordination function, including with lead agency and staffing.
- Strong support and involvement by a range of diverse family service agencies in the county, making classes available on frequent basis; geographically spread throughout the county; and at places where parents gather, like schools.
- Original collaborative approach and community focus by First 5 Lake, Lake County Office of Education, Healthy Start, Lake County Child Welfare Services, and Lake Family Resource Center.
- Formation of an Advisory Group to ensure continuous quality improvement in the countywide implementation.
- Formation of a Facilitator’s Group to encourage professional development and ensure fidelity to the program curriculum and approach.
- Early implementation and sustained approach to evaluation, documenting a range of program accomplishments.

References

Lake County Nurturing Parenting Program 2005-2012

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Thank you to Kathy Windrem for her hard work in developing and coordinating the program from 2005-2012.

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