



Riverside County Constructing Connections, Chapter III

A Case Study for the ABCD Initiative



Riverside County Constructing Connections, Chapter III

A Case Study for the ABCD Initiative

PREPARED FOR:

LOW INCOME INVESTMENT FUND: ABCD INITIATIVE

100 Pine Street, Suite 1800, San Francisco, CA 94111

tel 415.772.9094
fax 415.772.9095
www.liifund.org

PREPARED BY:

BTW CONSULTANTS, INC.

Ellen Irie • Tina Cheplick
2550 Ninth Street, Suite 113, Berkeley, CA 94710
tel 510.665.6100
fax 510.665.6129
www.btw.informingchange.com



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
This Case Study	2
Filling Riverside County’s Child Care Capacity Gaps.....	3
A Systems Change Approach.....	4
Moving Forward.....	13
Challenges.....	13
Forecast for Sustainability	15
Appendix	17



Introduction

This case study examines the progress made in 2007-08 by the Constructing Connections project in Riverside County, one of ten sites chosen by the Low Income Investment Fund's (LIIF) Affordable Buildings for Children's Development (ABCD) Initiative for focused activities around capacity building for child care facilities development. It is an exploration of how one community is expanding support and resources for child care facilities development. This report could be considered Chapter Three of Constructing Connections story in Riverside County—two earlier case studies documented the collaborative group's formation and early efforts. These case studies are part of a larger third-party evaluation of the ABCD Initiative being conducted by BTW *informing change*, a consulting firm that specializes in planning, evaluation and organizational learning for nonprofits and philanthropic organizations.

The ABCD Initiative employs a combination of grants, loans, technical assistance, training and advocacy to facilitate and accelerate the development of quality child care spaces for California's children. Constructing Connections is one of the ABCD Initiative's primary program components. A full description of the Constructing Connections strategy, including expected accomplishments at each site, can be found in the earlier two case studies.

The Constructing Connections project in Riverside County, more commonly referred to as the ABCD Task Force, is an important component of First 5 Riverside's comprehensive approach to child care and preschool services and is housed within that organization. First 5 Riverside, also known as the Riverside County Children and Families Commission, is the public entity responsible for implementing the California Children and Families Act (Proposition 10) in Riverside County. First 5 Riverside funds early education, child care programs and health programs serving infants and children from the prenatal stage through age five.

THIS CASE STUDY

This case study is a snapshot of the fourth year of operations of Constructing Connections in Riverside County (2007-08). Riverside County, a member of the ABCD Initiative's first cohort of Constructing Connections sites, was selected as one of two sites for a case study review as part of the full evaluation of the ABCD statewide initiative. In this study we portray the Constructing Connections experience of one unique county, drawing on the materials, experiences and insights shared by those in Riverside County who participated in the evaluation process.

BTW *informing change* collected the data for this case study through interviews, surveys, on site observations and a review of written materials. In September 2008, BTW Senior Associate Tina Cheplick visited Riverside County Constructing Connections for two days to meet key stakeholders, collect materials and observe the collaborative's "Child Care Center Pipeline Symposium."¹

¹ See Appendix A for a list of the interview participants.

Filling Riverside County's Child Care Capacity Gaps

Riverside County is the fourth largest county in California with a population of 2 million residents as of January 1, 2008. Only Los Angeles, San Diego and Orange Counties have larger populations. Even though the pace of population growth has slowed from earlier years in this decade, Riverside still ranks as the second fastest growing county in the state, with a growth rate of 2.6 percent between 2007 and 2008, twice California's overall growth rate.²

In July 2008, Constructing Connections site lead Kristi Van Heule reported to the First 5 Riverside Commissioners that when it comes to meeting the public's demand for child care, Riverside County continues to rank at or near the bottom of the list of California's 58 counties.³ This low ranking is due to the county's rapid population growth in recent years: between 2000 and 2005 the county's population had increased by 25 percent.⁴

Acutely aware of the county's low ranking, the First 5 Riverside commission has historically devoted significant resources to child care and preschool services. For the 2008-09 fiscal year, the commission committed \$21.4 million to support child care and preschool services in the county. In addition to its annual budgets, in January 2007 the commissioners allocated \$2.5 million in First 5 funding over five years for a Child Care Capacity Building program. The Child Care Capacity Building program aims to expand child care availability by increasing operator and intermediary capacity and by supporting facility development; the program supports much of the technical assistance and training sponsored by the ABCD Task Force. First 5 Riverside

² Riverside County Progress Report 2008, Riverside County Center for Demographic Research/Transportation & Land Management Agency, page 3.

³ California Child Care Resource and Referral Network. "2007 CA Child Care Portfolio."

⁴ "Growth Trends and Methodology." Riverside County Center for Demographic Research/Transportation & Land Management Agency 2006.

further augments the ABCD Task Force resources with dedicated consultant help, in-kind support and funding for facilities development.

Developing facilities for child care has been plagued by the high demand for land in Riverside County, for both housing and commercial developments. In 2008, with housing and related consumer businesses at a near standstill, child care advocates were looking for signs that land and space might again become available and affordable for child care facilities development. With fewer people migrating into the county, the demand for new housing has also slowed from the feverish pace of previous years. Between 2000 and 2007 169,000 new housing units were added in the county, but Riverside County saw less development in 2007 with the decline in the number of new households, the declining economy and the statewide mortgage crisis.⁵

Thus far, however, there are no signs of easier access to land or space for child care facilities development. “Will the economic downturn be helpful? Despite the housing crisis and economic downturn it does not appear that land and space are opening up for child care facilities development,” says an ABCD Task Force member.

A SYSTEMS CHANGE APPROACH

Like all Constructing Connections sites in Fiscal Year 07-08, the ABCD Task Force worked towards systems change in four areas:

- Building the capacity of operators and intermediaries;
- Increasing financial resources for child care facilities;
- Improving the regulatory environment; and
- Developing new or expanded partnerships.

The ABCD Task Force’s chosen activities and accomplishments of the past year reveal the stated and unstated principles used by ABCD Task Force leaders in determining where to put their resources given that child care needs are so great and the options for action are so numerous. An observer can see that the Task Force applies four principles to its choice of actions:

1. Identify opportunities that are both leverage points for systemic change and ready for involvement by child care facilities advocates.
2. Choose priorities that match the needs and interests of many Task Force partner organizations. This is the responsibility of the Task Force’s Capacity Building team, which includes the Constructing Connections site lead, the host agency executive director, a representative of the Local Planning Committee (which is the

⁵ Op. cit, Riverside County Center for Demographic Research/Transportation & Land Management Agency p.12.

Riverside County Child Care Consortium) and a few First 5 Riverside staff who are the key providers of technical assistance to child care intermediaries and operators.

3. Keep working simultaneously on all four systems change areas. Even if one area is receiving priority attention, keep an eye on the others and don't completely stop working in any one area.
4. Relationships, relationships, relationships—build them and maintain them.

Building Operator & Intermediary Capacity

Riverside County's civic leaders say that the community has a useful, organized network of child care operators and intermediaries. They note that members⁶ of the ABCD Task Force are now calling upon one another for support and resources. In the early years of the ABCD Task Force, these members had responded enthusiastically to Task Force invitations to attend meetings, happy to meet one another and learn from experts assembled by the statewide ABCD Initiative. As the Task Force has matured, experienced members have taken on roles as mentors and facilitators for the growing number of child care operators who continue to join the Task Force and attend its events.

“As a [child care center] director for 20 years, the toughest thing was to pull together all these resources. Networking and knowing who to call are a vital part of what we need.”

—Speaker at the Child Care Symposium

The mentor function was evident at the Child Care Center Pipeline Symposium sponsored by the ABCD Task Force in September 2008. Approximately 40 individuals—including a diverse mix of experience, focus, age, race and gender—met for an afternoon to learn about expanding child care in faith-based, school-based, co-op, private for-profit and nonprofit child care settings. The audience listened intently as several experienced child care operators took turns at the podium to present information and insights into the business of starting or expanding a child care center. A year before, in the same room, the same individuals who stood as experts at the front of the room had been seated around the table listening to information presented by the ABCD Task Force site lead and other First 5 Riverside staff. At this Symposium, in contrast, the most visible ABCD Task Force staff role was that of a moderator.

At the breaks, small groups of people clustered quickly at the edges of the room. Some clusters were colleagues with close connections, happy to see one another and catch up on news. Many, however, were new acquaintances, introducing themselves by sharing experiences, asking

⁶ By Constructing Connections members, we mean the individuals who are active, ongoing participants in Constructing Connections committees and projects, with assigned functions and roles; they attend meetings and assume responsibilities for projects, often as part of their employed positions within a partner organization.

questions about one another's programs and locations, requesting help with problems and giving out phone numbers and referrals.

“There’s support for people who want to open facilities, from their first idea to when they open the doors. Because of the Pipeline and the Task Force, there are people ready to give help and expertise every step of the way.”

—ABCD Task Force
Member

ABCD staff circulated forms, asking everyone to update their information for the Riverside Child Care Pipeline. The Riverside Child Care Pipeline, a list of the child care facilities projects in various stages of development within the county, has been a useful tool for tracking and guiding the technical assistance needs of operators who are considering or in the midst of facilities development. By collecting and monitoring this information, the ABCD Task Force has helped local child care intermediaries and advocates to better understand the scope and the challenges of child care facilities development, and provide support when and where operators need it. The Pipeline is cited by many in the collaborative as one of the Task Force's major accomplishments.

An ABCD Task Force member appreciates how, through the Pipeline, the ABCD Task Force “shows people the path” to building a successful child care business. “We often see business owners do things in the wrong order, including child care operators. I often hear ‘If I had only known about you six months earlier...’ Getting to those people early in their planning and educating them is so valuable. ABCD is now getting to those child care business owners.”

“It helps planners to have the ABCD Task Force. The Task Force is a mechanism for various organizations to communicate their expertise [around child care] to us—it’s a great way to help them help us.”

—ABCD Task Force
Member

The partner organizations⁷ involved in the Task Force are finding their own organizational capacity enhanced through their Task Force connections. The Riverside County Child Care Consortium (RCCCC) reports that the Task Force is helping publicize its resources and services. For example, the initial printing of a new RCCCC brochure about opening a child care center was widely distributed by Task Force members and partners. “ABCD Task Force members made connections to builders and operators, people we don’t usually connect with,” reports an RCCCC staff member. “This is an example of how the task force has enhanced our ability to promote our services.”

RCCCC staff feel that the nature of the shared work of the Task Force also creates a close bond among participants, different from the relationships in other coalitions or cross-organization committees. “We [Task Force members] may meet in other realms, but the ABCD Task Force solidifies the relationships differently. I think it may be the format of the meetings...They reinforce the contacts you have made elsewhere with one another.”

⁷ Constructing Connections partners are organizations or groups that have stepped forward with a shared interest in improving the local childcare facilities situation. The partner organizations comprise the collaborative. Their levels of involvement vary widely due to their level of interest overall or to the nature of the specific Constructing Connections activities underway at any given time (e.g., compiling a resource directory, developing training, advocating for a change in policy).

County planners also say that the ABCD Task Force expands their department's capacity. "Child care advocacy groups can help providers throughout the county with compatibility with community plans and zoning and giving them good examples of quality facilities," remarks one planner. Even when the county or a city has clear guidelines or plan templates, planners frequently need someone to whom they can refer child care operators who encounter a problem—someone familiar with local regulations as well as state child care requirements. "We hope the ABCD Task Force can facilitate some of the negotiating these operators need, identify opportunities, help them find additional help."

New Advocates for Constructing Connections

The ABCD Task Force has created many new advocates for child care facilities throughout the county, most noticeably within County government, specifically the Planning Department, Economic Development Agency and in the offices of the Board of Supervisors. Through their work with the ABCD Task Force, many individuals have gained a greater appreciation for the impact of child care facilities development on their own work. As Task Force staff and members make and maintain relationships for the collaborative, they first build awareness of the need for and the impact of facilities and second, they educate individuals about what can be done to address the problems. After that second step, some individuals are transformed into new advocates.

Current site lead Kristi Van Heule and her predecessor Nancy Maich experience a huge sense of accomplishment when they hear others take the lead in advocating for change on behalf of child care facilities in public meetings. For example, the County of Riverside is planning a child care center for county employees, and a fairly large planning committee meets in formal public sessions to move the project forward. As much as the ABCD Task Force may have encouraged or been consulted about the launching of the project, says Van Heule, the county staff are clearly the advocates for the project and they lead the discussion. "Our [ABCD Task Force] comments are part of the public input section of the agenda. It's very clear that it's not our project, it's theirs," says Van Heule.

"The ABCD Task Force has done an excellent job educating localities and developers and school districts about the need for facilities and what they can do."

—ABCD Task Force
Member

Jay Hoffman, Superintendent of the NuView Union School District based in Nuevo and a First 5 Riverside Commissioner, is another good example of how the Task Force's work has created knowledgeable advocates with links into specific groups who are able to influence how child care facilities develop across the county. Hoffman became involved with the ABCD Task Force and with First 5 Riverside through the development of new preschool facilities in his district. "The ABCD Task Force had the experts and problem solvers. They were a central resource and knew where to get the money," says one official involved in developing the preschool facilities. Hoffman now shares the story of his district's successful project with other school superintendents

and civic leaders, encouraging them to look at adding child care facilities on their sites. Recently a member of the Board of Supervisors asked Hoffman to talk with a city mayor in hopes that it would open up some new avenues to additional child care facilities.

Several collaborative members note that one-to-one relationship building is an important strategy in the Task Force's awareness and education campaigns, especially with government officials. Says one, "Many government leaders may be less sensitive to the issue since they are usually older than the typical parent looking for affordable child care, more established, and with more financial resources." The complexity of the issue also calls for one-on-one interactions. "This child care stuff is alphabet soup, the complexity is too much for me," says one government representative. "I don't understand it and I don't have the time to figure it out." "I want a "Press Here" start button and that's what the Task Force is!" says another planner.

Despite the complexity, or perhaps because of it, the ABCD Task Force has brought a wide range of civic leaders into the discussion of the need for child care and the actions that can help address this need. This is apparent with one look at the organizations and County departments involved in the Technical Advisory Committee that studied proposed child care language for the County's General Plan:

- Coachella Valley Association of Governments
- First 5 Riverside
- County of Riverside (County) Board of Supervisors
- County Counsel
- County Department of Public Social Services
- County Economic Development Agency - Redevelopment Agency
- County Executive Office
- County Facilities Department
- County Fire Department
- County Human Resources Department
- County Planning Department
- Riverside County Child Care Consortium
- Riverside County Office of Education

"All the players are here at the table," says Van Heule. "We are addressing child care facilities now at a completely different level." Nancy Maich, her predecessor as site lead, draws upon her years of experience working in county government to explain why she believes the Task Force has been

able to get and keep the attention of elected officials. “Public officials in public meetings often hear their constituents asking for action on transportation and child care, which are big and complex issues. They don’t know where to start. Until Constructing Connections, they didn’t know how to address the child care problem.” Now, in contrast, public officials can turn to the steps Constructing Connections has specified about what government can do. “The situation has flipped,” Maich continues. “The Task Force can get the attention of government and get someone to listen to us where we need it.”

Changing the Regulatory Environment

Maich admits that when she started as ABCD Task Force coordinator she thought that the Task Force could bring about the greatest changes by influencing developers. Now she sees that it has been the local policy work that is likely to have the greatest and longest lasting change. Task Force members are enthusiastic about their work to add child care language to the County’s General Plan and agree that this work has far-reaching potential to support and streamline the process of child care facilities development.

“With the General Plan and the zoning, folks can say, ‘These are the requirements for a child care facility.’ A property buyer can have a sense of the probability of the approvals [for a facility] with predictable and minimal costs. People can self-sort before they get deep into the process.”

—ABCD Task Force
Member

In 2007 at the recommendation of the ABCD Task Force, the First 5 Riverside Commission sent a letter to the Board of Supervisors proposing child care language for the next revision of the county General Plan. The Board of Supervisors agreed it was worth pursuing, and the county planning department formed a General Plan Amendment Technical Advisory Committee to explore whether and how to do this. The Committee has worked for months and has submitted proposed policy language to the Board of Supervisors for adoption in 2009.

If and when the child care language is adopted, it will be a shining moment for the ABCD Task Force and for child care facilities development in the county. But the process of getting to that point should not be underestimated in its value to the Task Force’s goal. The Technical Advisory Committee process heightened awareness and knowledge for a broad field of important allies for child care facilities. “We realized we needed a Technical Advisory Committee because of the level of work we needed to do,” says one planner who has become a child care facilities advocate.” Our committee started with seven members and now we have about 20. We needed all those people to cover all the issues appropriately.” Another planner, who regularly attends the ABCD Task Force quarterly meetings, did extensive research on General Plans and child care issues, looking at both state and county level plans, but there was nothing off-the-shelf that matched what Riverside County wanted. She compliments LIIF materials: “The LIIF Planners Guide was very useful, but it is designed for operators and intermediaries, so we still had to adapt a lot.”

As 2008 comes to a close, it appears that the County will adopt the recommended child care language for the General Plan in early 2009. To get to this point, the child care advocates had to work their way past a number of obstacles. The building industry raised formal opposition to the language, worried that the county would establish developer fees to support child care facilities and concerned that the language adds components to what they perceive as a burdensome planning review process for large residential and commercial developments. ABCD Task Force members rallied to help address these concerns. “And just as the Committee thought they were approaching the final language, County Counsel identified points that needed further research and changes,” says a member of the Technical Advisory Committee. “We’re now making changes based on County Counsel’s advice, as well our conversations with the building industry,” he adds.

“The ABCD Task Force is trying to bring all the planners to the table to work on streamlining the process, establish model ordinances and adopt similar amounts in their cities’ fees. This is still a critical need. The discrepancies in the costs and the processes make it difficult for operators to make their way through the maze; it really hinders facilities development.”

—ABCD Task Force
Member

“The General Plan amendment [at the county level] will set the standard for the rest of the county,” says a Task Force member. “Once it’s adopted with the child care language in there, it will affect all the other jurisdictions, city by city. The Task Force has a plan in place to go after each city as this happens.” A Task Force partner agency, the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG), is prepared to work with its members (10 cities and 3 tribal communities) on child care language for their general plans, but only after the County General Plan is adopted. Child care is a long-standing need in the cities and towns of the county’s Coachella Valley region, and every year child care appears on CVAG’s list of priority issues;

Aurora Wilson, Director of CVAG’s Community and Human Relations Committee, believes that the Task Force was wise to work on including child care language in the County General Plan. Wilson says cities will explore how to include child care within their own General Plans once they see the leadership of the County. “If I said to a city ‘What about child care [in your General Plan]?’ they’d ask, ‘What has the county done?’ The County is a major player and its actions are carefully watched,” says a Task Force member.

The General Plan work has also prompted county planners to think about the kind of zoning changes that are needed to support child care facilities. A Task Force member says, “Along with general plan revisions, we are doing draft revisions of zoning ordinances, writing in allowances for large family and center based child care in residential, commercial, light industry and also rural zoning.” County planners have become aware that child care facilities are not all similar. “Our approach [in the policy language] is to try to be very open, to allow people to propose what they think they need.”

County planners are paying new attention to the child care facilities in town, observing their design and their suitability to different neighborhoods. As one planner describes a particular revision to a zoning ordinance, he muses,

“With the zoning we can give child care center operators some help.... maybe they can do joint use with parks. After all, the neighbors would be prepared for the public use of the space, for the noise of children, the traffic.” It is clear that the ABCD Task Force has gained a strong ally in the County planning office.

The Task Force’s approach is making a difference, says one long-time member. His job gives him opportunity to compare Riverside County’s capacity around developing child care facilities with neighboring San Bernardino County, where there is no Constructing Connections project. “I attended a meeting that LIIF did on child care in San Bernardino County. They are where Riverside was five years ago. You could see the difference Constructing Connections makes in a community.”

“With child care language included in the Land Use element of the General Plan, wherever you go in the county, developers will have to be able to answer the question “Are the needs of child care being met?”

—ABCD Task Force Member

A Change in Site Leads

Along with the progress made this year, the ABCD Task Force also handled a major internal transition when Nancy Maich, the site lead since the project started in 2004, announced she would retire. Maich had led the ABCD Task Force to many accomplishments and is well known throughout the county as the spokesperson for the project.

First 5 Riverside, as the Constructing Connections lead agency, carefully planned for the leadership transition and managed the process for hiring the new site lead. First 5 was cognizant of how important it was to find the right fit for this position, and it took a while to find someone with the desired background and experience. Approximately seven months after Maich’s announcement, Van Heule stepped into the position. She was the second person hired to fill the position. Comments from collaborative members show that this extended time period gave people the chance to understand and accept that the new site lead would not be a replacement lead but the “next” site lead, a new leader who would take the ABCD Task Force to its next stage of development.

First 5 Riverside ensured a smooth leadership transition by retaining Maich for three months as a consultant to work with Van Heule. Maich worked alongside the new site lead and provided a wide range of support, from giving strategic advice to cleaning out old files.

Community leaders who worked with Maich for many years are conscious that the trust they developed with her over time did play a role in how quickly they made decisions on her requests and recommendations. They expect similar relationships to develop with Van Heule as her priorities and her leadership style become more apparent to them. Wisely, ABCD Task Force leaders are saying that Van Heule needs to continue to take the time to

“understand the dynamics of what’s in place…” and to observe and listen as she does her work around the county.

Van Heule is now firmly in charge of the Constructing Connections workload, and the momentum of the ABCD Task Force continues to roll forward. With a little more time and the continuing support of First 5 Riverside and other partners in the ABCD Task Force, she will also find her own authentic voice as the Task Force leader.

Moving Forward

CHALLENGES

“Just increasing slots is not enough...”

“One obstacle is the number of people waiting for child care subsidies. We talk about having a choice of spaces and providers as if the availability of slots is the alternative to the current crisis, but really it’s the availability of subsidies.”

—ABCD Task Force
Member

A new challenge facing the ABCD Task Force is the question of what will it take to meet the public’s need for child care. Since the start of the ABCD task Force, child care facilities have been opened but the need seems to remain level. Even more troubling, many child care centers report significant vacancy rates despite the high demand for care. “To advance child care you have to have quantity, quality, access and affordability. We have been focused on the first two,” says First 5 Riverside Executive Director Harry Freedman. “The ABCD Task Force has been successful, but it’s getting pretty complicated... We’re seeing that it’s not just a lack of facilities, it’s also quality and the interrelationships of affordability and access.” “There are [child care] slots open in some areas saturated with child care spaces, while other areas are severely lacking,” reports a Task Force member.

Months ago, prior to the housing mortgage crisis and the economic downturn, First 5 Riverside staff contacted the national offices of KinderCare and other commercial child care center operators to find out whether they had considered opening new centers in Riverside County. Given the high need, it seemed logical that these businesses would be trying to open centers in the county. “What we learned,” says Freedman, “was that the companies did their market research and they are not assured that the customer base they need, the demographics and economics, is here to support their private-pay business model.” Some of these companies’ centers already in operation in Riverside County had 50 percent vacancy rates.

This prompted Freedman and Laurie Schoenberg, First 5 Riverside’s Early Care and Education Administrator, to look further at the available child care spaces. They contacted the completed child care facilities reported in the Constructing Connections Pipeline list and found at the time that 40 percent of their slots were still available. “There’s a big gap between what’s available

and who can pay,” says Freedman. “It could be that the number of working poor increased; it could be that more people need child care subsidies but are not eligible or there are no more subsidies available in their location.” In any case, the issue of affordability has become a new issue for First 5 Riverside.

Freedman’s message to child care facilities advocates is that “just increasing the number of slots is not enough.” It is necessary to also consider the ability of parents to pay full fare and the availability of state subsidized slots, which has remained relatively static. In a recent round of grant proposals for one-time-only funding for child care facilities and training, First 5 Riverside required applicants to explain how they could be certain that the new slots created with this funding would be filled. “They had to have a plan. Either they had available subsidies or they had a wait list and knew what those families were able to pay, said Freedman. Some applicants could answer that question, and funds were released to create 372 new child care slots.

Examining this issue of vacancy rates and the complex economics of child care is sure to be part of the ABCD Task Force’s future work. Elected officials, now very aware of the bottom-rung position of the county in providing child care, are starting to ask, “Why aren’t we moving up in rank? If our investments are not making a difference, what should we do differently?” a Task Force member sighs as she reflects on her role as a liaison to the ABCD Task Force for a member of the Board of Supervisors. “We’re tired of being 58th out of California’s 58 counties,” she says. “And you have to wonder if more could be done, if talented people with new ideas could break through, if there should be more exploration.”

First 5 Riverside is watching a controversial experiment in Minnesota, a market-based system, in which dollars for child care are allocated directly to parents who then choose among certified operators to use the dollars to pay for child care. The issue of building or expanding child care facilities is not part of this project, which takes the position that the market will resolve this. Freedman’s expression as he describes the project seems to say, “Who knows? It’s a different approach, but we have to check it out.”

Expanding Financial Investments

Site lead Kristi Van Heule acknowledges that financial investment in child care facilities has been the most difficult systems change areas for the collaborative. “Banks would be great for the ABCD Task Force!” says a task Force member. Based on his experience, he thinks the ABCD Task Force needs an ambassador to the banking community. He admits it will take effort to build up interest among lenders. “Bankers don’t understand child care; they don’t like the product,” he says. “There’s high liability, which means risk, and

the margins are small.” His advice is to find an interested Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) because they are more flexible.

The Task Force has been trying to open some new public funding doors by helping child care operators to understand CDBG funding eligibility. Suzanne Holland, Deputy Director of Community Services Division of the County Economic Development Agency, has become more interested in child care operators as applicants for the funds. Holland made a detailed presentation at the Child Care Center Pipeline Symposium, clearing away some questions about the application process and explaining which jurisdictions were eligible for which funds. Her translation of the terms and requirements was clearly a necessary bridging of two worlds – child care operators and government economic development. The ABCD Task Force hopes that with such translation, more child care operators will apply for funding.

FORECAST FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The ABCD Task Force has drawn on the input of many community members in the development of the site’s Sustainability Plan, which the ABCD Initiative has required of every Constructing Connections site in the state. In addition to Task Force member and partner input, all participants at a one-day Child Care Crisis Summit in April 2008 shared thoughts about the county’s priority child care needs and what their organization could contribute going forward. Kristi Van Heule says that some of the input received at the Summit went directly into the Sustainability Plan. Other input, actually questions and requests for assistance, were fed back into the Task Force’s action plan.

“ABCD tries not to do everything themselves. They leverage other organizations’ expertise—it’s a loose network. They have all those strings, those connections [to other organizations]. They throw them into the water and then pull them in as they need something specific.”

The ABCD Task Force has been fortunate to have strong support from the primary child care advocacy organizations in the county, and it is highly likely going forward that these organizations will provide a lasting structure for implementing some of the Task Force’s work. First 5 Riverside, through the Capacity Building Project and other funded projects, has committed funding to support the work through 2011. RCCCC values the Pipeline and is committed to seeing it continue. The SBDC takes responsibility for cultivating the business skills of operators and preparing them to seek financing, and at least one of the two Councils of Government in the county sees a role for itself in pushing cities to look favorably on child care facilities development. Task Force members also feel that the passage of a revised County General Plan containing the new child care language will bring county agencies into long-lasting supportive roles as well.

—ABCD Task Force
Member

Just as important in the quest for sustainability are the planners, elected officials and business leaders—new advocates from outside the realm of early childhood education—who have come to see the availability of quality child care as a useful corollary to their own agendas. They are presently speaking up on behalf of facilities development, guided by the expertise and

clear messages from the ABCD Task Force. As the ABCD Task Force plans for its future, it will be important to determine ways to maintain the momentum of high interest and support generated among these new advocates through the Constructing Connections project.

Given the quality and strength of the individual leaders and partner organizations in the ABCD Task Force, there is great promise that the work begun through the Constructing Connections project will expand and endure, with lasting impact on Riverside County.

Appendix A: List of Interview Participants

- Deborah Clark-Crews
Executive Director
Riverside County Child Care Consortium
- Harry Freedman
Executive Director
First 5 Riverside
- Jerry Jolliffe
Deputy Planning Director
County of Riverside
- Nancy Maich
Consultant
First 5 Riverside
- Vincent McCoy
Executive Director
Inland Empire Small Business Development Center
- Robin Reid
Legislative Assistant to Riverside County Supervisor Jeff Stone
- Adrienne Rossi
Urban Regional Planner
County of Riverside
- Kristi Van Heule
ABCD Task Force Coordinator/Constructing Connections Site Lead
First 5 Riverside
- Aurora Wilson
Director, Human & Community Relations Committee
Coachella Valley Association of Governments