

GROWING HEALTHY MINDS

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 **FIRST 5**
RIVERSIDE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 13, 2011

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First 5 Riverside Provides Parents of Children 0 to 5 Free, Confidential Support as Part of *Growing Healthy Minds* Campaign

In time to beat holiday stress, First 5 Riverside provides parents with resources to cope with the season

(Riverside, CA – Dec. 13, 2011) First 5 Riverside has launched a public education and outreach campaign to support its multimillion-dollar investment in addressing the mental health needs of the county's youngest children. Hundreds of informational and promotional materials were distributed to families and caregivers at events in Cabazon and Lake Elsinore. The new *Growing Healthy Minds* campaign materials provide parents of 0 to 5 year olds with information and resources to help develop their children's social well-being.

"Prevention is possible," said Susan Loew, chairman of the First 5 Riverside Commission and director of the Department of Public Social Services. "Just as we've learned how improving a child's diet can improve her overall health, we can teach parents simple steps they can take to improve their child's social and emotional development."

First 5 Riverside chose to launch the campaign and provide access to resources in time to help parents during what can be a stressful time of year. Even very young children can feel the strains of the season.

The *Growing Healthy Minds* initiative is a dynamic partnership between Family Service Association, Riverside Department of Mental Health and First 5 Riverside and now includes a public education component. Relying on the positive message that early intervention can be a life changing experience for parents and children, the campaign connects parents with resources through a website, www.growinghealthyminds.org, a 24/7 confidential, free hotline, 2-1-1, and access to free screenings and direct services through Family Service Association and the Department of Mental Health.

"We know the value of early intervention at FSA," offered Veronica Dover, chief operating officer of the Family Service Association. "We've seen it first hand. And, what I love about this Growing Health Minds campaign is that it builds on family strength. All of the interventions are based on evidence-based research and positive skills. Every part of this campaign is positive and it's helping families grow. Parents love having this type of information at their fingertips and we are so happy to be a part of it."

As part of this initiative, more than 3,500 children have received services since March 2010 and the impact on local families is palpable. Kyle Sugimura, a recent graduate of parenting classes held by the Department of Mental Health at Lake Elsinore Unified District's Heald Academy, sought help when his sons were having significant trouble in preschool.

(more)

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Sugimura said, "Using these tools, I learned how to be a better parent. It's made a huge difference." His now 8-year-old son is excelling in a Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program and his kindergartner is thriving.

In Riverside County alone, there are more than 165,000 children between the ages 0 to 5. Without preventive measures some 20 percent, or 33,000, will go on to develop mental health issues based on national statistics. While the public education campaign is funded through June 2012, the Mental Health Initiative is funded through June 2013.

"Through the public education component," said Harry Freedman, First 5 Riverside executive director, "we want to help parents understand the importance of social emotional development, prevent issues before they ever appear and get them help as early as possible to keep small disruptions from becoming larger problems."

First 5 Riverside, the Riverside County Children & Families Commission, is a division of the Department of Public Social Services funded by Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues and established by the County Board of Supervisors in 1999. First 5 Riverside provides funding for early education, health and child care services that help children through age 5 develop a strong foundation for success in school and throughout their lives. For more information about First 5 Riverside programs and other funded services, call 951-248-0014 or Toll Free 800-266-3880 or visit www.rccfc.org.