



MONTEREY COUNTY CHILDREN'S COUNCIL

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Mission

The Children's Council provides leadership and policy direction to encourage the development of a comprehensive and collaborative delivery system of services to children and youth in Monterey County.

City of Gonzales recognized for innovative children and youth policies

(Salinas, CA): Leading the pack on policy making for children and youth, the City of Gonzales is the first city in Monterey County to adopt a Health and Wellness Element in the City's General Plan for the well-being of children and youth. This action inspired the Monterey County Children's Council (MCCC) to develop an annual Champion for Children award. Gonzales was honored with the inaugural award on Monday. The Champion for Children Award recognizes leadership and commitment to improving the lives of children and youth through policy and systems change.

"Innovation and leadership for the well-being of children and youth define the Monterey County Children's Council Champion for Children award," said Dr. Nancy Kotowski, Monterey County Superintendent of Schools and MCCC Chair, in her remarks. "The City of Gonzales took pioneering steps to support children, youth, and their families. The plan addresses both short- and long-term community needs that will help children and youth thrive now, in school, and later in life."

The first five years of life are critical for children's development - nearly 85% of the brain develops during this time - and continues through adolescence and early adulthood. Cities do not often dedicate resources to children and youth, which makes Gonzales' commitment to children and youth impressive.

"The community voice is loud and clear – Monterey County residents value early learning and preschool programs, however many areas in our region have little to no child care providers leaving working families with few options," said Supervisor Jane Parker, Monterey County Supervisor, District 4 and MCCC member. "We are so proud of the City of Gonzales for showcasing healthy community planning principles by prioritizing quality, affordable child care and accessible services for families with young children."

(More)

“The Health Department is proud to have worked alongside Gonzales policy makers and residents towards the adoption of a Health and Wellness Element for the City of Gonzales’ General Plan,” said Elsa Mendoza Jimenez, MPH, Director of Health Services for the Monterey County Health Department. “This will create a healthier, safer, and thriving community so that its children and youth can achieve their fullest potential. Gonzales Youth Commissioners were part of the Gonzales’ Resident Committee; a group of engaged Gonzales residents who met and learned about policy development and helped inform and formulate policies for the Health and Wellness Element. Committee members who are parents, often times brought their children into the conversation as well and their voices were also heard and incorporated into the process.”

This marks a significant shift in the city’s view of the General Plan—one that sees children and youth as an investment that has benefits for residents, employees, and employers. Approved in July 2018, the plan provides a blueprint for the city’s approach to improving children and youth development. Specifically, the city looks to encourage the inclusion of child care spaces in new residential and non-residential areas and also supports the development of affordable, accessible, and quality early child care, preschools and Head Start programs. The plan gives a significant nod to building cross-sector collaboration to help determine community needs and find solutions to early learning and care.

“We could no longer ignore our hearts—and the research,” said René Mendez, City Manager for the City of Gonzales. “Investments in children and youth have so many positive impacts for communities that we can’t overlook ways to increase graduation rates, lower crime, and have a return on investment. This begins with early childhood.”

Advocates applaud the inclusion of early childhood and youth in general plans and hope this move is a catalyst for others to consider plans inclusive of quality, affordable child care options, opportunities for youth, and services that support parents like parenting classes, playgroups, and mental health consultations. Currently, the City of Seaside is moving in a similar direction with their draft General Plan slated to be discussed in several months. The City of Salinas also plans to open up their General Plan process, providing another opportunity for children and youth policies to be adopted. The Alisal Vibrancy Plan conversations have also included discussions about supports for children and youth.

About the Monterey County Children’s Council

The purpose of the Monterey County Children’s Council is to facilitate the development of a comprehensive and collaborative delivery system of services for children and their families. The Children’s Council was established by the County Board of Supervisors in 1992 to enhance services and decrease duplicative efforts in child and youth service provisions and more efficiently and effectively meet the needs of children and their families. Learn more at <http://www.mcchildren.org>

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