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PART VIII.

## *Part VIII: Conclusion and Commentary*

First 5 Madera County and the Madera County Interagency Children and Youth Services Council believes in the importance of compiling information in a report that serves to inform key publics and constituencies about the status of the community. The Report Card, therefore, is a source of statistical information summarized into one document and presented in a “user-friendly”, graphical format. While the graphs were selected on the basis of their descriptive appeal in profiling the social conditions of the county, they do not encompass every aspect of quality of life conditions in Madera County. Instead, the Report Card is a starting point for informing, describing and educating key publics about conditions.

*“Our vantage point tells us that the need is not lessening but growing as our population grows. It also tells us that the human agency infrastructure is nimble and struggling to not be overwhelmed by the rapidly growing public need. Finally, our vantage point tells us that success of our county’s children is contingent upon how well we as service providers and child advocates work together.”*

*— Chinayera Black Hardaman,  
Executive Director  
First 5 Madera County*

To complement the graphical representations herein, statements from key department/agency heads are included to offer a local perspective on Madera County conditions and the efforts of their agencies to impact change.

First 5 and the Interagency Council intends with this report, and with future reports to follow, to make certain and press upon local governments, public schools, health care systems and all agencies that serve human needs to engage in efforts to build “systems change” and interagency collaboration. In this way, a combined effort will serve to improve quality of life for children, families and citizens of Madera County.

*Some Aspects about Madera County and Poverty Conditions*

*Hubert (Hub) Walsh, Director,  
Madera County Department of Social Services*

Poverty significantly impacts the daily choices of families in our community and their securing basic life needs, such as food, housing, and health care. The reality is that the current level of poverty in the community puts considerable pressure on local government and service providers for the greater levels of health and social services assistance needed by families and children.

As such, we need to continue efforts to expand economic development and work force development. These are critical to the work of improving the economic climate of the county. Associated with this are efforts to increase access to public and private health insurance coverage for members of the community, which helps in the long run to improve the health of our county.

Another indicated area of need is to continue improvement efforts in the assistance and services provided to children of the poor. It is anticipated this will require further development and refinement of the community's child welfare services systems. It is hoped these families and their children will have increased access to early voluntary assistance and services.

The challenge is, these issues and associated efforts are critical to the quality of life in our County. Without advances in these areas, the projected demand for public, social, and health services will lead to increased competition for shrinking resources. We thus need to enhance local efforts to improve. Without such, the quality of life in our community will be negatively impacted now and into the future.

The Report Card is a great start, and will hopefully serve as the basis for dialogue and discussion – at a public policy-leadership, as well as service provider level. These dialogues will hopefully assist us in developing an outline of common action-steps and the laying out of strategies to meet head-on the growing challenges. We must work together in reviewing and refining the local agenda to improve our community's quality of life.

In the narratives to follow, my colleagues-in-arms reflect their unique leadership perspectives about conditions and community life issues. Hopefully, you, the reader, the advocate, or the concerned citizen, will recognize themes that may be the basis for our common, concerted efforts to affect good public policy dialogue and possible change in Madera County.

*A Few Thoughts About Demographic Change and Community Health*

*Carol Barney, Director,  
Madera County Public Health*

The *Report Card* describes many features of social and demographic change in Madera County. The changes have been dramatic over twenty years, and will continue into the future. The change is inexorable: more people, more families, and more children, which translated means, more needs. As a rural county, predominantly agricultural, the County's communities are small, and with the exception of the city of Madera—the county seat—the infrastructure of small rural communities (incorporated and unincorporated) are not anywhere near the capacity to meet their own health needs.

The growth and changing demographics bring challenges. Population growth increases public demand for services and heightens the issue of access to care for all. Individuals without primary care services rely on the emergency rooms for their health care needs, which increases waiting time and health care costs. The increase in the number of births impacts the pediatric system as these children reach school age. A significant proportion of children and families and individuals are poor. In fact, the poorest people in the county are very young children. The median household income lags behind other Central Valley counties and unemployment is high. The diversity of the population also challenges the health care system to provide culturally competent and appropriate care. The public health system is constantly trying to find the cultural resources necessary to effectively communicate with the client base. These and other factors challenge the public health system to develop preventive health care strategies that improve the overall health of the community.

Demographic change will affect demand for services. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the public need according to a set of some basic factors. The aging population will have needs different from the very young and newborns, the newly arriving populations from different cultures will have needs different from long-time residents, there will be differences by income group, and by race and ethnicity. These factors are all important policy drivers. Simply it means there are different populations to serve that may require different support approaches and activities. County leaders need to collaborate on understanding the relationship between these factors and health needs. We start perhaps by posing some very basic questions, such as: Who are the newcomers and how many? Are these new residents immigrants or are they in-migrants from other parts of this state or from out-of-state? What are their needs and issues? Who is leaving the county and how many? Who is staying and where do they live? Are those who stay the elderly and/or the poor? What are the cultural backgrounds and occupations of all these groups? Time and resources would be well spent to conduct countywide needs assessments and strategic planning to identify the gaps in services and the reasons for any gaps in services and how to close them. The health care community needs a “roadmap” that helps us get from here to there.

If issues are left unattended, the cost of health care for all consumers will increase as a result of the lack of preventive care. It means people will enter the health care system sicker, resulting in

hospitalizations and long-term health consequences. The quality of life of the individual and the community are decreased as well as the ability to be productive and to learn.

The *Report Card* reinforced the fact there are many social and economic challenges unique to us that impact our health and quality of life. The *Report Card* noted Madera County is a low income, low wage area. The county disproportionately has a higher housing cost compared to other counties. The county is not robust with high wage jobs. The county has a high number of under- or uninsured families. Educational attainment is also lacking. Moreover, the health care infrastructure varies from community to community. The result is a county with many clear inequities when it comes to the health status of people. Thus, what needs to grow alongside the population is a flexible health care system with the capacity to adjust to meeting the variation of need and serving people where they live.

The public health challenges today can be summarized as follows: it is necessary to provide a strategy for access to care for all residents; we need to increase the recruitment, retention and training of culturally competent staff; we need to outreach and assist families with children without health insurance by enrolling them into programs they are eligible to receive.

The fact is Madera County is in transition. However, we need to understand better the question, “in transition to what?” We need also to ask ourselves if we are ready. Madera County is rural and small and many of our communities do not have the infrastructure of health agencies, hospitals, private practice physicians, and clinics to serve health needs locally. We must pull together to continuously press for health care access for all. At the same time we must work with the community to develop a community focus on preventive health care strategies such as healthy eating habits and physical exercise. Finally, as leaders we must collaborate to improve health care and systemic barriers in addition to working with our legislators.

*A Few Thoughts about Madera County and Health Trends*

*M. N. Murphy, CEO,  
Darin M. Camarena Health Centers, Inc.*

Health status is dependent upon a number of factors, including particularly access to health care services and a growing recognition that cultural and individual lifestyle choices make a big difference in individual, family, and community health.

Access: The Madera County community, over the past several years, has supported broader access: increasing numbers of private clinicians, the growth of my own organization, Darin M. Camarena Health Centers, Inc., and continuing and growing public sector commitments to user-friendly procedures for services and access to public benefit programs, including support from the County Departments of Health and Social Services, and the rise of Madera's First Five Commission, all attest to increasing support for the access of Madera residents regardless of socio-economic or ethnic origin to quality health care services. Specific example: As a direct result of improved access to care and consequent improved birth outcomes, many Maderans may not be aware that Madera County used to have infant mortality stories that hit the state and national press.

Despite expanding access, access is under considerable fire. Access to health care is adversely affected for those with low incomes, or fluctuating employment, and changing social and economic circumstances. In order to control costs in a tenuous economy, for example, large employers are re-engineering and reducing health plan benefits or laying-off employees, often due to the significant rising cost of health insurance.

The current trend in our economy shows that most states, not just California, are being squeezed between "high-ticket" State budget items such as health care and education, and tightening Federal budgets because of runaway costs for health assistance programs such as Medi-Cal and Medicaid, and conflicting priorities between these programs and homeland security issues, for example. Medi-Cal and Medicaid are at jeopardy due to increased eligibility restrictions.

The second factor affecting individual and human health care is this matter of cultural, community, and individual choice. (Choice is affected, of course, by present patterns, by habits, by education, and by available resources to effect desired changes.) This factor directly contributes to trends adding substantially to rising costs: and these rising costs are for health service expenditures, as well as lost productivity and ability to focus on the job or at other tasks, including education. People, including Californians, are beginning to realize that the costs of smoking, of eating high refined carbohydrate and high-fat diets, and lack of balanced exercise contribute substantially to health care costs and deteriorating quality of life, including behavioral (mental or emotional) health. Even though Californians recently voted for increased funding for mental health services, Maderans may not realize how pervasive this issue is. Depression and a strong sense of alienation from school or work are also on the rise. For example, at Darin M. Camarena Health Centers, depression is one of the top ten

diagnoses among adults, and is a growing issue among children as the result of family and network stresses and anxieties, as well as diet and lack of exercise. Balanced physical exercise is something that you do if you happen to have athletic talents or can afford a gym membership. Unfortunately, our American lifestyle and culture are no longer organized to encourage or foster healthy eating or healthy, balanced exercise.

For those with limited incomes or with adverse changing circumstances, such as the loss of job or health insurance, health and quality of life will continue to deteriorate. Rising health costs restrict access for most people. It stands to reason that as health care costs rise, so too will the number of health illness cases rise, including depression and anxiety, which increase loss of productivity and focus in the workplace and community. These notable and serious challenges must be confronted as we seek to improve health conditions in Madera County.

Solutions?: California has seen significant improvements in health with decreasing numbers of smokers as the result of its strong and prolonged anti-smoking campaign, which has occurred on a number of levels: media, in the schools, and legislative policies that restrict smoking from restaurants and other public places. The same commitment in dealing with the air, water, chemical, and lifestyle pollution needs to occur as has happened with the anti-smoking campaign. Otherwise, society will continue to see increasing costs to employers and services, and increasing debates about the proper allocation of tax dollars.

It is important to begin to put more education and service development into helping people stay well. It would be good policy strategy to begin with children and schools. The removal of soda and carbohydrate machines from all school campuses and governmental facilities would be a good public health policy focus. Such a focus with good results has already begun in Fresno County. In addition, the structuring of exercise programs beyond gyms, and making community walking spaces broadly and publicly available, beginning with non-athletic children, will help to control obesity and depression, which are two known looming health problems only now coming to the forefront of public health policy. Improved public health policies and strategies must be developed and implemented to meet the challenges of rising health care costs and decreasing health status across the socio-economic spectrum.

*A Note About Madera County and Mental Health Services*

*Janice Melton, Director,  
Madera County Behavioral Health Services*

Madera County Behavioral Health Services is dedicated to improving the quality of community life by providing countywide behavioral health services in a caring, ethical and respectful manner, and by promoting accessible, cost-effective and culturally appropriate mental health services. Behavioral Health Services serves a higher percentage of children compared to the statewide average suggesting Madera County may be intervening earlier in the mental illness process, resulting in a reduced need for hospitalization.

The *Report Card* describes many challenges to our community. One challenge to services is the extreme poverty in Madera County. Poverty creates stress. Stress often leads to symptoms of mental illness and emotional disorders. In another challenge, due to an inadequate public transportation system, it is extremely difficult for large segments of the population to gain access to treatment services they are eligible to receive. The lack of public transportation services for all publics, plus the prevalent poverty, combine to exacerbate the problem of access to services for many of our residents. The need to provide treatment in the Spanish language is another challenge. Statewide there is a shortage of bilingual professional and paraprofessional staff. Madera County, therefore, is challenged to recruit and retain bilingual staff.

As for the immediate future, the legislative process may bear hopeful outcomes such as current efforts to pass a Mental Health initiative that would result in more funding to the County. More resources are necessary to infuse new life into a badly needed system of mental health services to the public. Also encouraging is the formation of a Central Valley coalition to address children's mental health issues on a regional basis, including working toward the development of a regional inpatient facility for children.

Our hope is that a collaborative delivery of services will continue to evolve in the County and that it will extend to the whole region. If our advocacy for better transportation systems results in better access to services for families, we will have accomplished much. Finally, as Madera County agencies improve the recruitment of culturally competent staff, the County will realize significant progress toward improving the lives of those we serve.

*A Note About Future Challenges for Madera County and Affordable Housing*

*Christine Richard, Director,  
Madera County Housing Authority*

There is a critical need to create more opportunities for homeownership in the City and County of Madera. In particular, there is need for greater public policy dialogue to address the mounting shortage low-income housing in the City and County of Madera.

Not only is there a scarcity of low-income housing located in each community, there is even less barrier free low-income housing. Families with female head-of-households, in particular, are in need of emergency or transitional housing assistance. For most people with disabilities or special needs, housing is also a problem. The Housing Authority will need to determine over the next five years how its programs can be expanded to meet the needs of more Madera County families.

Not only is there a scarcity of low-income housing across the county, in each community there is even less access to low-income housing. For individuals receiving a total gross income of \$700.00 per month, paying market rate for any type of apartment or house is a virtual impossibility. Due to lower incomes, single-headed households often have more difficulties finding adequate, affordable housing than families with two adults. Also, single-headed households with small children may need to pay for childcare, which further reduces disposable income. This group of families and their children would benefit greatly from expanded affordable housing opportunities.

As the median home price climbs in Madera County the problem of access to affordable housing becomes greater. According to a recent report by the California Association of Realtors, home prices jumped by 22.4 percent to \$202,000 today, from \$157,000 in August 2003 in Madera County. Without the assistance of first-time homebuyer down payment programs, or other related family assistance programs of this type, low-income families will continuously be priced out of realizing any dream of homeownership.

The Housing Authority will continue its activities in support of housing in the community based on prior levels of commitment. However, the amount of additional funding available is dependent upon State and Federal sources, and the success of the Housing Authority in competing for these funds. The Housing Authority's commitment remains strong in its mission to serve both the city and county housing needs of low-income families.

*A Few Remarks Regarding the Challenges and Successes for Madera County and Education*

*Dr. Sally Frazier, Superintendent,  
Madera County Office of Education*

Successful education outcomes are critical to the long-term health of our county. Success in school means children learn to see a pathway for success when they leave. The education community is not alone in this process. Both the schools and parents are responsible to prepare children to be successful. But the education experience is not without serious challenges.

As educational programs are developed to enhance the learning opportunities for children, it is important to take into consideration the changing demographics in Madera County. Many children live in poverty. The social problem is exacerbated further by the high rate of births to teenage, single moms. Moreover, families of low socio-economic means are often families whose children are English-language learners. In addition, a significant proportion of adults from such families do not have a formal education. Often the high school diploma or experience with post-secondary education institutions has been outside of their reach. The overarching challenge is how to ready children for school while at the same time providing opportunities for adults to pursue education. On the one hand, the education community must also challenge itself to seek ways to connect our children and families to understanding and believing the benefits of education. On the other hand, the education community must challenge itself to connect our schools to understanding the benefits of implementing nontraditional approaches to serving the public.

An example of nontraditional approaches to meeting community needs in a demographically changing community, is the strategic emphasis on school readiness. In partnership with the First 5 Madera County Children and Families Commission, the Madera County Office of Education is delivering education developmental readiness to very young children and their families in the First 5 School Readiness Initiative, and delivering education through the CARES program to improve childcare providers' skills and knowledge about child development which directly impacts our children at childcare centers and family day care settings. The Madera County Office of Education is also experiencing the involvement of parents and children as they participate in the Even Start program in Chowchilla. To be successful these programs typically involve a collaborative approach from many agencies that work together to create a system that is more effective in bringing education and other health services to families. Across the spectrum of collaboration on new approaches we see results: We see parents who are experiencing learning and beginning to grow in their leadership ability. We see parents gaining access and participating in new education opportunities that are brought to where they are. We see schools becoming better at outreach and in meeting their community's education needs. We see young children coming to school ready to learn.

For older students, alternative education programs are designed and redesigned as necessary to enhance their learning opportunities. The Madera Unified School District created career pathways to encourage students to use their high school education as an exploratory step in career decisions.

Students often learn it is reasonable to establish higher goals than they might have originally believed possible. Madera County Office of Education established a charter school with a vocational education foundation which has opened students' eyes to a world of opportunities broader than what they may have envisioned before. Students who are often first generation high school graduates are discovering that post-secondary work is within their reach. Such personal outcomes will benefit their own children when they become parents as well as impact our community in a positive way.

Madera County is experiencing rapid enrollment growth, although not equally distributed throughout the county. Here, the education system faces two distinct challenges: the capacity to serve students with highly qualified teachers, while at the same time keeping pace in providing adequate facilities to house the growing numbers of new students. The community demonstrated its support for our children and their schools in the passage of a general obligation bond for school construction. The Chowchilla area schools are now beginning to work with the community to define and address the need to build schools in response to its own enrollment growth needs.

Continuous improvement is a dynamic model practiced by the private sector. It is also a model applicable to our public agencies. We must continue our collaboration to develop innovative approaches to meeting the needs of our children and families. This includes defining unique needs of our Central Valley and to involve post-secondary institutions such as the State Center Community College District and others.

We must continue to work together as stakeholders in the community to offer services and programs that strengthen educational opportunities. Working together to meet the health needs, the basic life needs, and parent leadership training needs are necessary components in the educational process that builds an informed citizenry. By working together to meet common challenges our community will be strengthened and our quality of life enhanced.

*A Few Remarks about Juvenile Crime and Child Abuse*

*Harry Nabors, Court Administrator  
Madera County Courts*

The *Report Card* provides a snapshot of juvenile delinquency and child abuse issues in Madera County. The fact is, to have gained a comprehensive picture and overview of these conditions including how the courts system and law enforcement work to deal with prevention, arrests, and crime reduction, would necessitate a single volume by this topic alone. However, the *Report Card* was not intended to deal exclusively with one single issue or topic but to present an overview of conditions regarding the quality of life across the County. With that understood, the *Report Card* is a start and appreciated.

My comments are brief as well. According to the United States Department of Agriculture and U.S. Census, Madera County as a small county with an urban influence and non-specialized economy, it is housing stressed, with low education and low employment indicators. This means the county is challenged by a variety of socio-economic and environmental factors. Factors often cited to explain juvenile delinquency are factors, such as poverty, family factors like divorce, the environment such as no jobs, or high under- and unemployment. Family factors play a role in juvenile crime problems. For instance one of the most statistically reliable indicators of juvenile crime is the proportion of fatherless children. And as noted by the *Report Card*, the poorest persons in the county are very young children in female-headed single-parent households.

In light of these factors, the *Report Card* observes that juvenile felony arrests have shown a steady decline over the years, while juvenile misdemeanor arrests have been significantly higher. Recently, however, misdemeanors have also been on the decline in Madera County. Interestingly, there are differences by gender when looking at misdemeanor arrests in the County: female rates have been on the rise while the rates for males have been decreasing. Male felony arrest rates have also been declining while female rates have been much lower, and stable. Overall the rates by type of offense for all juveniles are also decreasing. These are trends going in the right direction. In spite of the fact of being a small county with a small tax base of resources, Madera County is holding its own in law enforcement services and the administration of justice

These social problems are what public safety and social service agencies deal with on a daily basis. A few remarks about small counties and social problem management are in order, however. The image of small rural counties today suggests that small towns and agricultural communities are "crime free." This perception is not accurate even though compared to the problems of urban centers, rural areas appear peaceful and safe. It is fact that juvenile crime in rural areas is almost always well below the crime rates of urban areas. However, while rural areas today have less crime than large urban centers, rural small towns also have more crime than they did in the past, and their crime problems are serious.

Perhaps there is one difference yet for Madera County from the large urban counties that has to do with the informal social relationships that remain relatively important in influencing the behavior of

individuals who live in small communities. The influence of social relationships sometimes serves as a mitigating factor that reduces the impact of social problems such as juvenile delinquency and child abuse. But it also can mask the small community from recognizing that social problems do exist, and that such problems could be on the rise. Another difference is that the economic, social, and cultural forces associated with rising levels of social problems such as juvenile crime appear first in urban areas and then migrate out to neighboring areas.

Madera County needs to be ready to deal with the natural increases in social problems due to the natural increases in population. In addition to population growth, the fact Madera city is a close neighbor to Fresno city means we tend to be on the receiving end of “big city” problems as the population migrates north from Fresno to Madera. The same phenomenon occurs in Bakersfield that receives gang problems and crime influence from the Los Angeles area. Thus, small areas often lag behind the bigger cities on crime and other social problems. But the issues should not be ignored or taken lightly. It is also a fact that because of these perceptions there is a tendency for state and federal policymakers to leave small rural areas out of some resource allocation decisions because the problems are often viewed as big city urban problems.

The solution for Madera County is to continue the path of interagency cooperation, collaboration, and leadership that views the county as one community “system” to care for and nurture into a better quality of life for all citizens. It is also incumbent upon leadership to engage with state and federal policymakers for additional allocations of resources to improve the human and physical infrastructure of the county so that it may keep up with the growing needs of the county and the Central Valley.

*A Few Thoughts About Systems Coordination and Integration*

*Chinayera Black Hardaman, Executive Director,  
First 5 Madera County Children and Families Commission*

How children function during school age, adolescence and even on through adulthood hinges in large part on their experiences with parents and caregivers before age five. As such, proactive strategies that promote self sufficiency among families through prevention and early intervention will have lasting impacts on many of the conditions highlighted in this report. With this in mind, First 5 Madera County makes every effort to maximize the use of Proposition 10 funds with the ultimate goal of getting our young children learning, growing and ready to start school.

In executing the mission of First 5 over the past four years, we have grown to understand better the character and culture of the populations we serve. We have grown to appreciate just how much more we need to learn. More pointedly we have learned that we cannot “go it alone”. For this reason, our strategic plan is designed with the clear objective to build partnerships, alliances, collaborations and inter-agency relationships to promote systems integration and better serve young children and their families. Leading the process to birth this first countywide report card, as presented here, is an example of our commitment towards supporting the entire system that serves Madera County’s children.

Playing not the role of a direct service provider, but the role of a convener and facilitator affords us a unique vantage point. From our vantage point we see tremendous need among children and families ranging from basic life needs – food, clothing, housing – to health examinations, education, child care and on to parent education, access to health insurance and job preparation assistance. The list is long. Our vantage point tells us that the need is not lessening but growing as our population grows. It also tells us that the human agency infrastructure is nimble and struggling to not be overwhelmed by the rapidly growing public need. Finally, our vantage point tells us that success of our county’s children is contingent upon how well we as service providers and child advocates work together.

*Summary Remarks about the Report Card and Conditions in Madera County*

*Dr. Angel A. Sanchez, Ph.D., CEO,  
Pathways & Insights Associates*

The data presented in the *Report Card* overviewed several important themes:

- The incidence of poverty is greatest in the county among families with young children.
- The poorest people in the county are children under the age of 5 living with a single mom.
- Adequate and affordable housing will continue to be an issue.
- Childcare supply that is affordable and of high quality will increasingly become a pressing public demand to many established residents as well as to many newcomers to the county.
- Madera County shows many disparities and challenges to overcome in health, education, and economic status, as compared to the State and other Central Valley Counties.
- African Americans and Hispanic/Latinos continue to show wide gaps with white non-Hispanics in dropping out of high school, as well as gaps in educational attainment and the completion of college degrees.
- The Hispanic population has grown rapidly, increasing in size by more than 70 percent between 1990 (30,982) and 2000 (54,515). The Hispanic/Latino group has been and shall continue to be the most prolific group in the county.
- Immigration flow, though a trickle in the past, is gaining momentum and presence in the county with Eastern Asian and Southeast Asian groups joining the stream in slight but steady numbers.

These are only a few key message points that may be gleaned from the *Report Card*. Still more message points are illustrated by the comments of county agency heads. However, what is clear from all sections introduced in the *Report Card*, that many forces are coming together to place critical constraints on the quality of life in the community. Many forces of change are pressing: Demographic change, poverty, health care, and changing family conditions are revealing new social problems to which solutions are not easy to come by. In fact one of the most pressing concerns highlighted is that in every instance, the younger the child, the greater the incidence of poverty.

Children and families are on an apparent increase in vulnerability. The implications mean a shift of responsibility to the broader community of institutions and agencies to work together to provide structure and leadership in helping to shape a community that is better than its past experience. Public agencies have traditionally operated as the mold into which the public must fit. This can no longer be

the acceptable practice. Social agencies, like schools and other public service agencies, must change to fit the needs of society and publics.

The previous remarks by the select group of county leaders attests to their agency and personal commitment to improve community life and well-being in Madera County. As intimated by these leaders, the pressing need is for leadership to act together on public policy formation that will mold interagency collaborations to bring about supportive environments that improve the quality of life for children, families, and citizens of Madera County.

Indeed, social agencies, and schools, are bearing an onslaught of socio-demographic change. Because of this it is important for policymakers and leaders to begin assessing and analyzing needs and issues strategically, and discern today what these socio-demographic changes portend for human service agencies, the local economy, and community life into the future, near and far.

Public policy solutions are not straightforward. There are many obstacles to overcome. The forces of change mean constraints between social service delivery systems and the public welfare, between child population growth and State and local dollars to pay for services to support them. Without some fundamental rethinking about how best to accommodate and serve the needs of the public—and children—in the face of limited resources, it will be almost impossible to overcome the growing constraints between the public need and human agency. The challenges facing Madera County call for an intensification of public policy thinking and policymaking about children, families and citizens. It means an intensification of policymaking regarding how best to care for and serve a growing public that will rise soon in chorus to place many more demands upon the infrastructure of human agency in the county. Now, it seems, is the appointed time to act.

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