

HISTORY

The Solano Children's Alliance, formerly known as The Children's Network Council, was first established in April of 1982 by the Solano County Board of Supervisors. In one of the oldest historical documents available to us, a 1983 NACO Achievement Awards entry form by the Chair of the Board of Supervisors and the CAO's office, the original vision and purpose is described. According to this document, from its inception the Network has been comprised of:

- An 18-member operations council appointed by the Board of Supervisors. The Council is comprised of approximately 50% county line staff who provide children's services in the Probation/Health/Welfare Departments. The remaining 50% of the members are comprised of providers of children's services in the private community. The Operations Council meets each month and is staffed by 5 consultants who are paid by the County. This is now called the Children's Network Council, or, most recently, the Children's Alliance.
- A five-member Advisory Board comprised of the County Administrator, the Probation Officer, the Mental Health Director, the Welfare Director, and the Health Officer. This Board meets quarterly and is advisory to the Operations Council. This is now called the Children's Policy and Planning Council.
- A Children's Trust Fund. This is a private non-profit organization and is recognized by the Board of Supervisors as the county fund raising entity for children's programs in Solano County. This organization helps finance those programs recommended by the Operations Council for which no county funds exist. This is now called 'The Children's Network.

In forming The Children's Network, the Board of Supervisors authorized County financing for staff for the "Operations Council," and charged the council with the responsibility of being the planning body for both the Children's Trust Fund and CAPIT funds. It further charged the Council with "analyz(ing) the impact of new or pending State and Federal Legislation on children's services, and act(ing) as a lobby for children's services with state and national legislators."

The nonprofit group, which was initially incorporated as The Children's Fund, and then changed it's name to The Children's Network, began to meet it's fundraising goal by holding an "Onion Dance." The first dance cleared \$5,000 which was donated to a community based parent-teen conflict resolution program.

The Council and it's staff achieved their first major legislative victory when they acted as lead advocates on a first of it's kind state law, in collaboration with a local Assemblyman. This law allowed the county to establish a Family Preservation program, to help those families who could benefit get the additional services they needed to keep their families whole, and avert the need for long term foster care placements, while simultaneously keeping the children safe.

In 1990, the Board of Supervisor's designated the Children's Network Council as the County's SB997 Children's Services Interagency Coordinating Council. The Network Council had already been fulfilling much of the role outlined in this legislation. In granting this formal designation, the Council took on additional membership requirements, and additional coordinating responsibilities. For instance, the state required the endorsement of the Council for all Healthy Start Applications prior to considering them.

In recent years, the Council has continued to rack up significant achievements:

- Provided the leadership to augment the Solano County Children's Trust Fund, via fee increases approved by the BOS and via the tax insert. This raises more than \$100,000 annually for child abuse prevention services in Solano County
- Participation and support in the development of the Youth Summit.
- Identified the need for a countywide approach to Family Support/Child Abuse Prevention leading to the development of the FRC Network, which serves over 4000 families per year countywide. The Council created the FRC Network in 1995 with Family Preservation and Family Support funding secured through Children's Network efforts, and continues to monitor and support their development.
- A countywide, coordinated system of family support, including home visiting, has been developed through the Family Resource Centers that are sustained by The Network without any County funds.
- Coordinated needs assessment, successful state approved integrated plan development and implementation of contractor selection process for Children's Trust Fund, CAPIT, CBFRS, and PSSF funds.
- Created and adopted annual Legislative Platforms affecting families and children in the areas of education, safety, health, economic security, foster care and governance, and engaged in extensive advocacy efforts for proposed legislation based on these priorities.
- Developed and secured BOS and seven city councils' adoption of Public Policy Principles for the Future of Solano Children's Services to provide a framework for positive public policy approaches for local governments, and subsequently developed the Public Policy Principles for Budgetary Decisions.
- Provides informative monthly forums involving parents, professionals and community members on a variety of pertinent issues facing children and families in Solano County.
- A countywide system of identifying parenting education services and linking families to appropriate courses is nearing completion

Many vital and yet less tangible successes which have arisen from the networking opportunities provided by The Council. For example, an advocate for parents in need of jail based services and a child development educator recognized they could create a parenting program in the jails by joining forces, and did exactly that.

The capacity of the non-profit has also expanded over the years, while remaining true to the original vision. What began as a \$5,000 fundraising event is now a much more formalized approach to raising money for those services prioritized by the Council. This past year, the total amount raised, planned or guided through this work exceeded \$3 million....over \$300,000 of which was used to pay the salaries of county staff.

Quoting again from the NACo Achievement Awards document, "The concept of the network itself has resulted in more effective coordinationIdeas generated become group ideas shared by all departments involved and result in better delivery of services for children thus placing more emphasis on meeting the needs of affected children and less on the bureaucracy and it's internal needs..... "In a time of diminishing resources and a troubled society, networking is key not only to increased efficiency but also to improving services to children and their families (effectiveness.)"