

Rural Community Needs Assessment Project

Mendota as a Community for Children and Families

Overview and Purpose

To deepen its understanding of rural Fresno County families, First 5 Fresno County (F5FC) partnered with Harder+Company Community Research to conduct a needs assessment of two rural communities in Fresno County, Huron and Mendota. The purpose was to learn about community strengths and challenges, provide critical information and develop recommendations to support community, and complete the assessment with a dedication to participatory research.

The full report on both communities can be found at first5fresno.org.

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach using qualitative and quantitative data from parents and service providers was used to inform the assessment. In Mendota, this included:



(n=140)
Parent surveys



(n=24)
Asset mapping



(n=8)
Service provider
focus group



(n=70)
Service provider
surveys

Key Findings

The findings from this assessment are detailed across three key areas:



Understanding Families

- The majority of parents (68%) identified their home as the center of their social life.
- Most households in Mendota (88%) report family incomes of \$30,000 or less.
- The majority of Mendota households speak Spanish (97%).



Community Infrastructure

- Parents identified schools as the most important community asset.
- Parents noted that the library is an important community resource.
- The top three community challenges identified by parents include the lack of childcare (42%), safety concerns (33%) and challenges around employment and jobs (30%).



Service System

- One in three of the organizations that provide services to Mendota are located in the community.
- Parents identified language and communication barriers as a major challenge when accessing services.
- Service providers noted that traveling long distances is a major service provision challenge.

Recommendations

The findings from the assessment informed the final recommendations detailed in the report. The recommendations are categorized into four categories:

1. Raise **awareness** of the unique challenges and needs of rural communities.
2. Create **partnerships** with rural communities by engaging key stakeholders in order to build trust with local residents.
3. Address major service needs through short-term and long-term **investments**.
4. Improve service provider **coordination** by promoting greater **communication** and **information-sharing**.

Mendota Asset Map

During the asset mapping session a group of Mendota parents worked together to identify a broad range of assets. This summary map represents Mendota's assets and challenges from the perspectives of families in Mendota.

Key Findings:

- Homes and schools are centers for learning, exercise, and social gatherings, and are safe spaces in the community. Schools in Mendota offer resources and services to families, such as services for children with special needs, counseling, and parent workshops.
- Safety is an overarching concern for families. Parents identified loitering, substance use, and a lack of police patrolling in public spaces. Parents also mentioned that homelessness, substance abuse, and mental health issues were also safety issues. Many parents also shared that fast traffic and a lack of pedestrian infrastructure makes walking unsafe. These safety concerns often restrict families to their homes.
- United Health Care is the primary provider of healthcare in Mendota. While parents appreciate the clinic's evening and weekend hours, they shared that it is often difficult to get an appointment, wait times are long, and staff is not always friendly. Families seek routine care in Firebaugh or Kerman because of negative experiences in Mendota, and travel to other communities for emergency or specialty care.

