

## The El Sol Children and Family Learning Center

The El Sol Family & Children Learning Center (“FCLC”) is an innovative new nationally important pilot program that offers a range of integrated health, educational and social services for the families whose children attend the El Sol Academy in Santa Ana. Most of these families are low-income, Latino immigrants who speak little English and work in entry-level jobs.

The FCLC believes that if it can help improve the overall health of the family (broadly defined to include physical, emotional, educational, employment, and environmental health), the family life will improve and parents will be better equipped to help their children succeed in school. The FCLC also believes that the best way to improve a family’s health to the extent possible is through integrated services. El Sol families lack the resources and time to access the services they need. Eligibility criteria vary; application packets are intimidating; and providers are scattered throughout the county. By bringing integrated and case-managed services to their children’s school (a safe and convenient location that reinforces the educational mission of the FCLC), the FCLC will effectively reduce barriers to access and improve the family’s overall health.



**Center Overview:** The El Sol Science and Arts Academy (“El Sol”) is a relatively young charter elementary school that is located in downtown Santa Ana (zip code 92701) and has approximately 500 students enrolled. In 2007, almost 80% of the students received free or reduced lunch, and 96% were Latino. El Sol has school-wide Title 1 designation and the curriculum is dual immersion in Spanish and English.

From the inception of the El Sol Family and Children Learning Center in April of 2009, families have enjoyed services offered by numerous local providers, including El Sol, Orange County Social Services Agency, Santa Ana College, Latino Health Access, Volunteer Nurses and Drs, Orange County United Way, Latino Educational Attainment, Healthy Smiles Orange County, Public Law Center, Wells Fargo, University of California at Irvine, Legal Aid Society of Orange County, Children’s Health Initiative of Orange County, and the Center to Promote Healthcare Access (One-E-App).

What distinguishes the FCLC is its combination of six important elements: (1) Place (located on the El Sol Charter School campus at night and on weekends), (2) Mission (focus on the family’s health to help parents support their children’s education), (3) Outstanding El Sol School leadership and Community Support (a broad community partnership), (4) Integrated Services (to minimize barriers to access), (5) Case Management & Referrals (linking families with a *promotore*), and (6) Community Empowerment (to enable family members to become leaders);

**On-Site Services:** Upon arriving at the FCLC, a family is assigned to a *promotore* who conducts intake and inputs the family’s demographic and financial data into a web-based program called One-E-App. This program transmits information electronically to other providers (subject to confidentiality waivers) and performs a preliminary determination of the family’s eligibility for various benefits.

*Promotores* will then help the family create a plan of action (Family Opportunity Plan), refer families for a health assessment and other benefits, support parents as they



coordinate a range of appointments for on site services and class schedules, and follow-up to ensure family attendance re. multiple services.

All families utilizing the FCLC must undergo a health assessment, to determine health risks and if necessary link EI Sol families to the Orange County Health Care system. Other initial services provided on-site include job training and referrals, English literacy, civic participation and citizenship classes, financial and credit planning, legal assistance, as discussed below.



**Health Assessment.** Many EI Sol families lack comprehensive healthcare. Accordingly, the FCLC collaborates with volunteer physicians and nurse practitioners to provide on-site health assessments, make referrals to medical homes for specialty care, and offer health education. In addition, the Children’s Health Initiative of Orange County and Orange County Social Services Agency helps families enroll in diverse insurance opportunities, while Healthy Smiles offers dental care for children and dental referrals for adults.



**Employment/Income Evaluation.** Orange County Social Services Agency evaluates families for eligibility for cash and employment services, including CalWorks (temporary financial assistance and employment-related services for families with minor children), Food Stamps, General Relief, and Immigrant Assistance. Santa Ana College provides job training, including basic employment skills (i.e., how to create a resume, do a job search, interview, dress for the workplace, and use the computer), off-site vocational training, and job referral/placement. The Merage Foundation has placed a volunteer counselor on site to help breadwinners find jobs.



**English Literacy.** A large number of EI Sol parents do not speak English proficiently, and this impedes their ability to help with homework, communicate with teachers, and participate in school governance. It also negatively impacts their job mobility. Accordingly, Santa Ana College offers a variety of free on-site English as a Second Language (“ESL”) classes, starting with Spanish Literacy and ESL/Family Literacy (which incorporates the 10 Educational Commandments for Parents curriculum developed by Santa Ana College and Latino Educational Attainment).



**Civic Participation & Citizenship.** An important goal for the FCLC is to train family members to become leaders in the community. Accordingly, Santa Ana College will teach a course on community building and participation in cultural life, including information about American government, understanding law enforcement, voting, coalition-forming and lobbying beginning soon. There will also be workshops presented by local community organizations, as well as a citizenship class to prepare clients applying for naturalization.



**Legal Services.** Finally, the Legal Aid Society of Orange County and the Public Law Center offer regular clinics to provide legal assistance for a variety of matters, including landlord/tenant issues, wage and hour disputes, divorce and custody matters, domestic violence, public benefits claims and denials, and tax assistance.

**The Future:** The EI Sol Family and Children Learning Center is on its way to becoming a model for the nation. The Center has secured the interest of the White House and leaders around the nation. FCLC will enroll 200 families this fall and is examining ways to secure resources to offer FCLC services to the wider community. The opportunity is visible to make a big difference in peoples’ lives.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Santa Ana College will teach many evening classes in the FCLC for low-income families in Santa Ana beginning in the fall. FCLC will have nearly 400 people on site beginning in fall.