



# **Grail Family Services**

## **Strategic Plan**

2014 – 2018

*GFS strengthens family capacity to support young children's positive educational outcomes and to build a thriving community.*

## **GRAIL FAMILY SERVICES** 2014-2018 Strategic Plan

### **Executive Summary**

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Grail Family Services (GFS) began in 1995 as an organization tasked with building affordable housing units and two community centers in the Mayfair neighborhood of San Jose, California. By 1999, all of the construction was complete and the housing units sold. Subsequently, GFS shifted focus to provide education and support programs to serve families with young children.

The GFS mission is *“to strengthen family capacity to support young children’s positive educational outcomes and to build a thriving community.”* After fourteen years as a service provider, serving more than twelve thousand children and their families, the organization has become a successful and recognized leader in the areas of early literacy, oral language development, and family engagement.

At the end of 2013, we launched a new strategic planning process. This effort incorporated our learnings from the past several years, an in-depth literature review and research and, most importantly, extensive input from all stakeholder groups: clients, funders, other agencies, our Board and our Staff. Staff conducted several brainstorm sessions on improving services and client outcomes. Our Board participated in all of the stakeholder interviews and also held two retreats – one Board-only and the other in conjunction with GFS staff. These retreats enabled valuable communications and ensured that all perspectives were heard. This four-year strategic plan identifies objectives, strategies, and activities to guide the direction of GFS between 2014 and 2018.

### **From Surviving to Thriving**

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When considering a theme for our Board and Staff retreat, we realized that for the last several years, while we were “incubating” our approach and programs, the agency had been in survival mode. The agency’s vision of becoming an incubator of quality, results-oriented programs that respond to identified community needs and that can be replicated at a broader scale was gradually becoming a reality. As new ventures and opportunities continued to head our way, we realized that we needed to think beyond surviving. It was time to focus on how GFS can thrive, and how we can help our clients, our staff, and our communities thrive as well.

Two examples that illustrate the beginning of our shift to a thriving state include:

- GFS had the unique opportunity to be invited to participate in a ground-breaking research-service project with the Language Learning Lab at Stanford University. This resulted in our *Habla Conmigo* Academy – the only program of its kind serving families with children 0-18 months old with a specific focus on oral language and cognitive development. This effort is currently receiving national attention, and we intend to expand it to other communities.
- As a recognized community leader, with expertise in family engagement, GFS was chosen by the Heising-Simons Foundation to work with a number of organizations within Alum Rock for the development of a community-wide Family Engagement Impact Project. This opportunity enabled us to develop a community partnership and implementation plan that coordinates evidence-based family engagement services for families of young children in the Alum Rock neighborhood of San Jose.

## **Values Section**

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During the development of the 2014-2018 Strategic Plan, the GFS Board and Staff decided to review our values. This process ensured that we acknowledged that our agency has been profoundly influenced by the values of our founding organization: The Grail. The following are the five core values that guide our work:

### **Respect**

At GFS we respect each other, our clients, and the larger community. We express this respect through active listening, understanding the unique conditions of culture and family faced by our clients, and by supporting each other as we define and deliver impactful services.

### **Collaboration**

Unique insights and contribution to the development of thriving communities are developed when we embrace the diversity of our individual perspectives and our community. We seek to increase our impact and scope through partnership and collaboration with each other, our clients and the larger ecosystem. Through collaboration we incorporate the wisdom of experience and excitement of innovation to accelerate collective community impact.

### **Integrity**

We conduct our business with honesty and transparency.

### **Family**

At GFS we know that family is the cornerstone of our society. We acknowledge families' strengths, respect their unique assets, and partner with them so they can strengthen and build social connections, and benefit from concrete support in times of need. We value families from all diverse backgrounds and structure, and we focus on the parent/child relationship which is at the core of the development of all GFS programs.

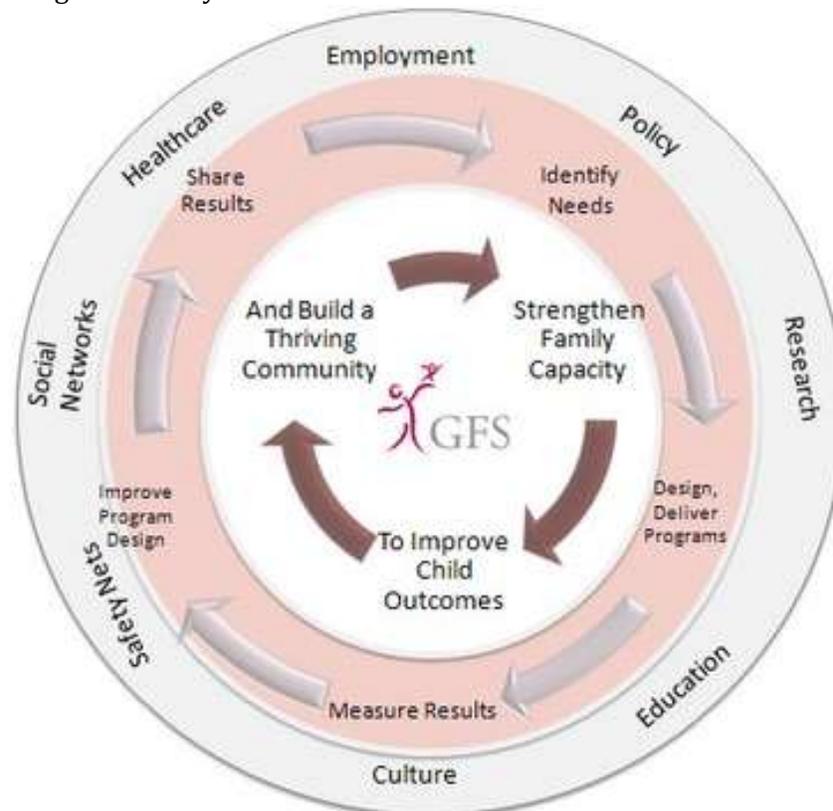
### **Quality**

Toward ensuring personal and programmatic integrity, we design and deliver programs based on well-understood client needs. We leverage internal as well as external research. Each program and service includes documented expected outcomes, which we measure and review in the spirit of continuous improvement.

## GFS Theory of Change and Strategic Objectives

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The GFS 2014-2018 Strategic Plan outlines GFS theory of change as its overarching goal: “to strengthen family capacity to support young children’s positive educational outcomes and to build a thriving community.”



We *strengthen family capacity* by engaging parents/caregivers in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs that directly respond to their needs. We developed and soon will implement the “Community Portals” concept, a framework that focuses on building a thriving community by engaging other providers in a shared vision. GFS uses the model of the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework. We work to improve resilience, social connection, and concrete support in times of need; knowledge of child development; and strong social/emotional health in all our program design and implementation. We implement Evidence-Based Practices and promising best practices to meet the families’ needs and provide opportunities for families to learn together in different settings.

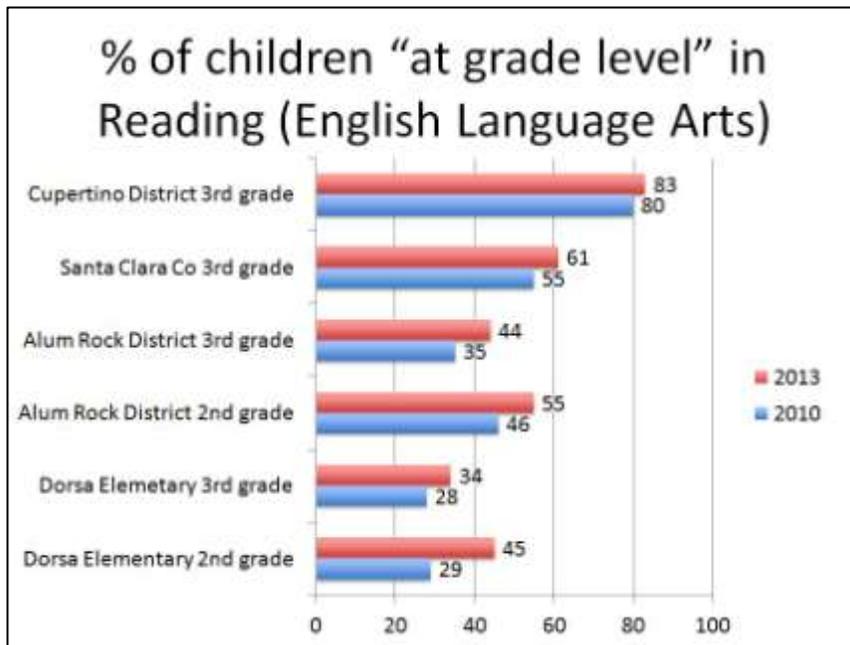
Our long term goal in this area is that Alum Rock families actively support their children’s learning through meaningful activities at home, at school and in the community.

Our assumption is that families will be stronger when parents are confident in their skills and their knowledge of child development; when they are heard, and their feedback is a critical part of local initiatives; and when they have strong connections to others in the community.

The focus in this area for the next four years is to build parents' skills so they can support their child's learning. We will have a special emphasis on ESL (English as a Second Language), understanding how children develop oral language and cognitive skills, supporting early literacy, and how parents can become more engaged in their child's learning. Our work will focus on the infant/toddler years since we have identified a great need and a lack of services for families with children in this age group. We will also focus on the transition grades of K-3.

We aim at *improving children's outcomes* by strengthening parents/caregivers' skills and by providing families with opportunities to learn together. The long term goals in this area are that: by age three, children in the Alum Rock community will have the oral language and social emotional skills to support cognitive and academic development; by age five, children in the Alum Rock community are ready to learn as they enter Kindergarten; and that children in the (TK-3) Alum Rock community experience success in school and are meeting Common Core grade level expectations.

Although we have seen, in the last few years, a significant improvement in reading scores of children in the Alum Rock Union Elementary School District, when compared to other regions in the County as seen in the chart below, there is still an unacceptable gap. Children in Alum Rock should be getting the education that produces results that are equivalent to the best in Silicon Valley (e.g. Cupertino).



What we have learned over the years is that this gap starts even before children start school. By the time they enter Kindergarten, these children already exhibit a 2-year gap in development skills relative to their more affluent peers (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). This gap in cognitive and language development widens with age, and has dire implications for school readiness, school success and overall quality of life. Research at the Language Learning Lab at Stanford University shows that such disparities are evident even before a child reaches 2 years of age – well before they enter school. At 1 ½ years of age, children from disadvantaged households are already 6 months behind their more advantaged peers in

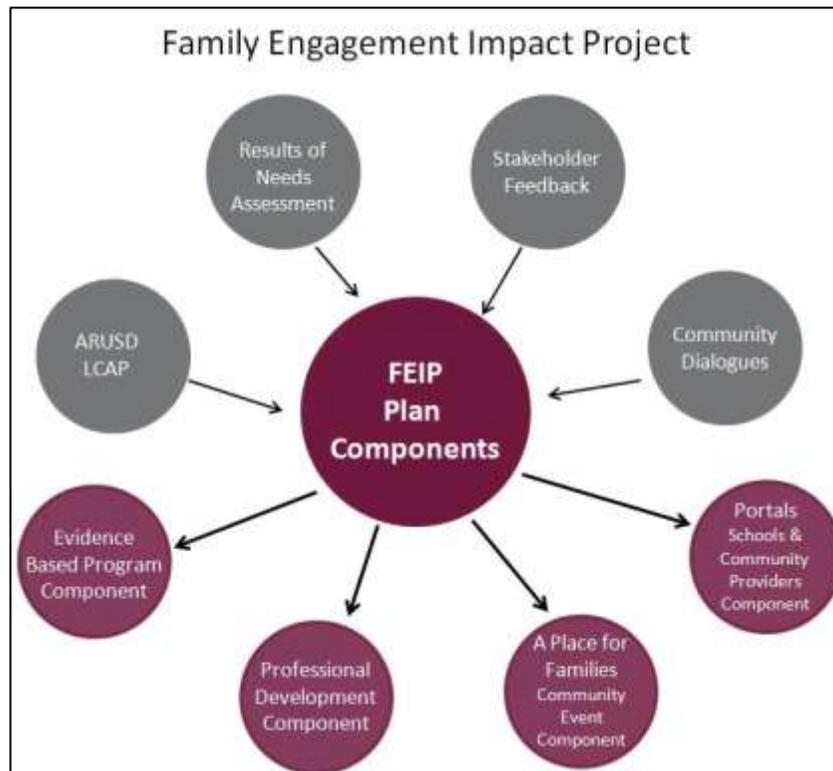
language processing skills. (Fernald, Marchman & Weisleder, 2013). We know that language helps children to think, to problem solve, and to interact with people and successfully participate in school. To achieve their potential, children need a rich language environment – with exposure to diverse vocabulary, lots of stories and books, and opportunities to develop their own expressive abilities. Language development is a continuous process taking many years.

These findings have informed our decision to target the infant/toddler age group. Our focus for the next four years is to: become the Alum Rock focal “Community Portal” for parents with children ages 0-3 with a strong emphasis on infant and toddlers oral language, cognitive development and parent engagement.

*We build a thriving community* by responding to emerging trends and by strategically engaging others to respond to needs, as well as by providing community residents with skills to advocate for themselves and their children.

The long term goal in this area is that the children of Alum Rock have excellent schools, that the community embraces families engaged in their children’s learning, and that there is increased active civic engagement; that there are healthy peer-to-peer relationships; and that through skill development and opportunity there is a path to economic stability.

Our focus in this area for the next four years is to support effective systems and community collaborations by linking programs through the implementation of the “Community Portal Concept” that strengthens service providers’ collaborations and increases collective impact.



The 2014-2018 Strategic Plan includes three key objectives:

**1. Lead community change through collaboration, best practices and sharing results. Learn with and from the best.**

In order to achieve this objective the following strategies need to be successfully executed:

**Strategy:** Strengthen community capacity through the coordination of systemic and sustainable strategies, programs and activities that promote Family Engagement, early literacy and oral language development for Alum Rock families.

• **Activities:**

- Implement the “Community Portal” concept for the Alum Rock Community.
- Facilitate regular key partner meetings to develop community messages around Family Engagement and a delivery plan through “Community Portals”: Alum Rock Union School District, SOMOS Mayfair; Our Lady of Guadalupe; Mexican Heritage Plaza/School of Arts and Culture and Alum Rock Counseling Center.
- Implement an Evidence Based Practice that promotes Family Engagement at school, home and center-based settings.
- Collaboratively develop and implement community events that promote Family Engagement.
- Implement the Yes We Can...Read!™ Children’s Initiative at three elementary schools in the Alum Rock School District by year 3.

- **Strategy:** Promote the importance of oral language and cognitive development through the Habla Conmigo Academy within the Alum Rock community and beyond.

• **Activities:**

- Package materials and complete curriculum revision for replication (create a replicable model, balancing unique needs with program consistency and integrity).
- Develop a train the trainer package.
- Train a GFS staff member as a certified facilitator so that we can incorporate the Academy as a regular service offering to GFS families and move the project from a demonstration site to a pilot.
- Continue partnership with Stanford University for ongoing evaluation efforts of the impact of the Habla Conmigo Academy.
- Develop a plan to scale the Habla Conmigo Academy to other communities.
- Secure financial resources for the design and planning of scaling activities.
- Strategically collaborate and engage new partners to leverage their resources, networks, infrastructure and leadership to scale the Academy: First 5, Community Action Project.
- Make modifications to the Habla Conmigo Academy curriculum based on the evaluation results, as needed.
- Identify platforms/channels for scaling (assess pros and cons, consider room for future growth, channels and platforms that do not limit our effort).
- Develop a strategy for deployment.
- Monitor and maintain the program and growth (balance flexibility for responsiveness with structure and discipline).
- Secure policy support for scaling efforts of the Habla Conmigo Academy. Determine the number of sites and number of people to be served through expansion efforts.

- **Strategy:** Share GFS evaluation tools, findings and curricula to strengthen services to Alum Rock families and beyond.
- **Activities:**
  - Develop formal process to share intellectual property with others.
  - Secure legal expertise that provides GFS with tools and information to protect intellectual property.
  - Develop training for the use of GFS evaluation tools and curricula.

## 2. Expand impact beyond Alum Rock district

We have developed evidence based practices that result in positive outcomes for children and families. There is a significant need in other communities throughout the country serving a similar population, and we have been approached by others to share our learnings. With the Latino community being the largest growing population in the US, we see that there is a unique opportunity for GFS to share its expertise and products.

In order to achieve this objective the following strategies and activities need to be successfully executed:

- **Strategy:** Increase our reach and impact by strategically targeting one to three outside communities for the implementation of GFS programs.
- **Activities:**
  - Develop selection criteria for the implementation of services outside of the Alum Rock area.
  - Explore three partnerships that have expansion potential of GFS's reach outside of the Alum Rock Area. For example: Oklahoma through Community Action Project; Sonoma County through La Luz, or First 5 Santa Clara County.
  - Implement GFS program(s) at one off-site location outside of the Alum Rock Area in year 1; grow expansion in Year 2 to two offsite locations; and three in Year 3.
  - Make sure that expansion activities continue to grow the evidence by requiring that expansion includes alignment with GFS data collection processes, etc. Allow for leap frogging (we learn from and with other communities).

## 3. Excellence in execution-including delivery of services, sustainability, capacity, processes, staff development and more.

- **Strategy:** Ensure that quality systems and procedures produce excellence in execution.
- **Activities:**
  - Improve IMS (Information Management Systems) for tracking program participation, volunteers, process metrics, results and outcomes.
  - Formally establish a Program Committee of the Board with members providing targeted, specific skill-sets.
  - In year three, allocate a half-time employee for performance assessment/quality control.

- **Strategy:** Expand Board of Directors recruitment and training activities.
- **Activities:**
  - Recruit a minimum of four new board members in year one, four in year two and four in year three and year four to ensure smooth transition of existing board members leaving the Board and to strengthen the Board.
  - Complete a new board orientation packet.
  - Develop a Program Committee of the Board that would support program development, scaling and expansion efforts as well as evaluation.
  - Develop a Fundraising Committee as a standing committee to increase individual giving and other fundraising activities.
- **Strategy:** Establish a consistent, regular process to review and maintain alignment between growth of programs and growth of funding.
- **Activities:**
  - Grow annual fundraising event to increase individual donors and supporters.
  - Implement at least two new fundraising activities to increase unrestricted funding.
  - Develop a work plan to target corporate donations-year grants.
  - Pursue funding opportunities that will support expansion of programs and staffing.
- **Strategy:** Increase agency's visibility and community support.
- **Activities:**
  - Develop agency's new website.
  - Develop and implement agency's communication plan.
  - Increase number of electronic and printed communications with donors and the community at large.
  - Increase the use of social media as a means of engaging a broader audience.
- **Strategy:** Conduct needs assessment and develop multi-year facilities management plan.
- **Activities:**
  - Partner with Grail Community Home Owner Association to manage common grounds.
  - Conduct analysis to determine building capacity; estimate unused capacity and potential additional uses for the capacity.
  - Explore partnerships with other providers to maximize use of facility.
- **Strategy:** Develop agency's leadership as the organization transitions to the next level.
- **Activities:**
  - Create individual professional development plans, including leadership development, for senior level staff.
  - Create leadership development plans for Board members.
  - Identify and evaluate leadership development sources.

## Target Populations

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Grail Family Services serves families with children 0-8 years old residing in the 95116 and 95122 zip codes of East San José, which is in the Alum Rock Union Elementary School District (ARUESD). Families in this area are primarily Spanish-speaking immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala. These residents are some of Silicon Valley's most at-risk families. Many of the parents have limited English skills, limited formal education, and low literacy skills even in their native language. Children in this community are scoring well below the proficient level on standardized tests for English language arts and literacy skills. In the Alum Rock Union Elementary School District, only 44% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders are reading at grade level, compared to 61% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in Santa Clara County and 83% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in the Cupertino School District. (*California Department of Education*) Test scores are representative of a crisis affecting Latinos at the national level: 56% of Latino 4<sup>th</sup> graders read below the basic level, which means they have difficulty reading and comprehending simple texts. Of the remaining 4<sup>th</sup> grade students, 29% read at basic level, and 15% read at the proficient or advanced levels. (*U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Education Progress*)

The East San Jose zip codes of 95116 and 95122 have one of the highest incidences of Child Protective Services (CPS) calls in the county. The families living in these neighborhoods experience a wide range of problems associated with poverty and social isolation, including child abuse; domestic violence; health and safety risks; unsafe child care arrangements; overcrowded housing; overwhelming stress; and consequent neglect of children's essential health, safety, and developmental needs.

The needs that GFS programs address extend beyond the neighborhoods of East San Jose. In fact, according to Governor Jerry Brown's new state budget, Latinos were projected to become the largest single racial/ethnic group in California by March of this year, making up 39% of the state's population. This growth will present a number of challenges and opportunities for organizations that serve this population. In 2011, the Hispanic Foundation of Silicon Valley published the first-ever Silicon Valley Latino Report Card, which presented some interesting findings:

- Latino children have entered Kindergarten increasingly ready to learn, but not at the level needed for success by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Only one-third of Latino students are at grade level in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math.
- A recent longitudinal analysis of Santa Clara and San Mateo County students found that Kindergarten readiness levels generally were a stronger predictor of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade performance for Latino students than for other students. (*Applied Survey Research*)
- In 2009, the level of educational attainment among Latinos in Silicon Valley was higher than Latinos across the state, but lower than non-Latinos in Silicon Valley.

GFS' work in oral language development, literacy and family engagement helps build a strong foundation in young children that will put them on the path to academic and life success. Expanding this to other areas of Santa Clara County and beyond will help improve these findings from the Latino Report Card:

- Nearly one quarter of Latino high school students drop out of school — and this rate is climbing.
- Just a quarter of Latino high school graduates have completed the courses needed for transfer to UC/CSU.

- Latinos have not been able to attain the level of education needed to be competitive in the job market: just over a third have had some college or completed a college education, compared to nearly 80% of non-Latinos.

The need in the area of oral language development expands to communities across the US, especially those communities with disadvantaged and underserved Latino children.

Studies in the past have identified a significant “achievement gap” between 3-year olds from professional families and those from poorer families, rooted in findings that advantaged children hear 30 million more words than their poorer counterparts by the age of 3. This has led to a national movement by child advocates and educators for universal pre-school. Research conducted by the Stanford University Language Learning Lab indicates that this gap begins much earlier – as early as 18 months – and continues to widen as these disadvantaged children reach school age.

There are currently a number of awareness campaigns across the country – including the *Thirty Million Words Initiative* - encouraging parents to speak to their children early and often. However, there are only two programs in the country – *Providence Speaks* (Providence, R.I.) and GFS’s *Habla Conmigo Academy* that are specifically addressing the word gap through an intervention.

GFS has built strong relationships with other organizations serving this target population. Five of those organizations will participate in a collaborative effort, led by Grail Family Services, to promote family engagement for the children of Alum Rock in their homes, their schools and the community. These organizations – Community Portals – are:

**Somos Mayfair**

Formed in 1997, Somos Mayfair focuses on two long-term community priorities – fostering early school success and nurturing family wellness. Somos’ mission is to cultivate the dreams and power of the people of Mayfair through cultural activism, social services and community organizing.

Somos will be the primary Community Portal resource for families with children ages 3-5 years.

**Alum Rock Union Elementary School District (ARUESD)**

The Alum Rock Union Elementary School District operates 19 elementary schools (K-5) and 7 middle schools (6-8) in San Jose. Three of the ARUESD elementary schools – Dorsa, Cesar Chavez and San Antonio – are within the Mayfair Community of East San Jose, our target community.

These schools and by extension, the District, will be the primary Community Portal resource for families with children ages 5-8 years.

**School of Arts & Culture at the Mexican Heritage Plaza**

The School of Arts & Culture at MHP provides a multi- and inter-cultural venue for community events and programs that embrace all cultures, while exploring the artistic traditions, cultural history, and contemporary expression of Mexican Arts.

The School of Arts & Culture will be a Community Portal resource for families with children ages 0-8 years.

**Our Lady of Guadalupe**

Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish was established in East San Jose on June 30, 1962. The parish has been the initiator of many socio-economic, anti-poverty groups and movements. Our Lady of Guadalupe currently has two daily and six Sunday Masses, with nearly 5,000 people attending services every week. Additionally, the church offers a variety of outreach and culturally-sensitive services to the community.

Our Lady of Guadalupe will be a Community Portal resource for families with children ages 0-8 years.

**Alum Rock Counseling Center (ARCC)**

Alum Rock Counseling Center was founded in 1974 by a group of active community members hoping to provide the East San Jose community with the culturally proficient counseling and professional support they needed in order to lead healthier, safer, and more productive lives. ARCC is the only agency that serves youth (ages 0-19) with a specific focus on the East/Central San José area, serving the highest percentage (over 80%) of Latino, immigrant, and monolingual clients in the region.

ARCC will serve as a satellite Community Portal providing resources through schools and the GFS center for families with children ages 0-8 years.

## Opportunities for Innovation

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Through our work in the targeted community over the past 14 years we have learned a number of important lessons, many of which we believe open the door for innovative program opportunities for Grail Family Services.

**Infants in this community are underserved.** GFS is one of the few service providers that has programs focused on the 0-3 years age group. Our Birth & Beyond Family Empowerment program offers stimulating parent/child activities for this age group, and the Habla Conmigo Academy, our collaborative project with Stanford University Language Learning Lab, is focused on oral language and cognitive development within this age group. We know from our work with the Stanford that the “word gap” between low income children, such as those in our target area, and their higher socio-economic counterparts starts at least as early as 18 months, much earlier than previous thought. By the time they enter kindergarten, these children already exhibit a 2-year gap in development skills relative to their more affluent peers (*Ramey & Ramey, 2004*). This gap in cognitive and language development widens with age, and has dire implications for school readiness, school success and overall quality of life. We see this as an opportunity to expand our programming such as Habla to help children in this age group develop a strong foundation for their later learning.

**Parents prefer programs and activities they can do with their children.** As part of the FEIP Phase I planning process, the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, conducted a needs assessment across the six communities involved in Phase I of the project. One of the findings from this assessment had to do with the gap between what service providers are offering in the communities, and what parents say they want in the way of services and programs to support their children’s learning and development. Parents across all six communities indicated that their highest level of interest was in parent-child activities or classes, followed by parent support groups where parents can bring their child, and play groups where parents can bring their child. It’s noteworthy that the least amount of interest was in parent education classes and parent support groups without children, which service providers indicated were the types of family support they most frequently offered. This finding has informed our approach to the Family Engagement plan we will be implementing in collaboration with our working group for the Alum Rock Community.