Grail Family Services
Strategic Plan
2019 – 2022

August, 2019

Grail Family Services partners with families, schools and communities
to promote children’s success and well-being.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Grail Family Services (GFS) has been serving families with young children in East San Jose for nearly twenty years. During that time, we have become a leading expert in supporting the healthy development of children, and a recognized innovator in family engagement. At GFS we create equity for marginalized communities, ensuring low income families have access to high quality education and vital information about the latest research and strategies that promote childhood success.

GFS focuses on giving young children a strong start from birth, and providing their parents with the knowledge and tools to support their children’s success and well-being. We achieve this by designing and delivering effective programs and services that are research-informed and tailored to meet the needs of the community.

The delivery of impactful services is where our work starts; what makes us unique is our collaborative approach to working with the community. We believe families are equal partners in the education of their children, and are integral in helping create high quality learning environments at school, in the home and throughout a child’s neighborhood. In our efforts to improve educational opportunities for underserved families we are leading a culture shift to help schools, educators and systems look at families as true partners in the development of their children.

Children who receive quality early education demonstrate greater cognitive and socio-emotional growth than children who do not. Children who face adversity during this period, such as living in poverty, are at risk for experiencing lifelong effects that negatively impact their learning, behavior, and physical and mental health. More than five decades of research confirms that engaging families in their children’s education early in their lives improves school readiness, produces higher gains in reading and math achievement, and increases graduation rates. Specifically, during the first five years, a child’s brain is at its most flexible, making this a critical period for learning and growth. This is why GFS focuses our work on families with children birth to age five. Waiting until kindergarten to promote children’s healthy learning is too late.

Families in our community want to support their children’s success, yet many of them are uncertain about how to engage in their education. They don’t know what schools expect from them, and feel they lack the necessary skills to help their children. In addition, many are experiencing the pressures of the growing economic divide, increased racism and anti-immigrant sentiments. Families are navigating these challenges against the backdrop of a shifting landscape. East San Jose is on the brink of change. A robust and growing economy is transforming downtown San Jose and its surrounding neighborhoods, diminishing the availability of affordable housing and displacing low-income families.

Grail Family Services believes that creating equity through education is the best way to uplift and transform underserved communities, and to directly combat the growing socioeconomic divide that jeopardizes the healthy development of low income children, and perpetuates disparities in education, employment and housing. That is why over the next three years we will continue to strengthen our families by increasing access to high quality early care and education, building family capacity, and creating a culture shift in how systems perceive the families they serve. To be prepared for the changes that are already occurring in East San Jose, we will strengthen our infrastructure to best respond to the needs of the community and prepare for the continued growth of the organization.
As we proceed with our work, we plan to intentionally target systemic racism in education, advancing the work of community partnerships such as the Sí Se Puede Collective, and playing a central role in local government initiatives to improve universal access to high quality early child care and education. Through this work we hope to get closer to our vision of a community where all children and families have equitable opportunities to learn, grow and thrive.

MISSION
Grail Family Services partners with families, schools and communities to promote children’s success and well-being.

VALUES
GFS has been profoundly influenced by the values of our founding organization: The Grail. These six core values guide our work with each other and with our clients, funders, partners, and the community:

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.

Inclusion
We value equity, inclusion, and dignity for all. We pledge to support and maintain an environment that respects the diversity of the people with whom we engage.

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.
ACCOMPLISHMENTS
Our 2014-2018 Strategic Plan produced key milestones, which have positioned GFS to further advance our work over the next three years.

Objective #1: Lead community change through collaboration, best practices and sharing results. We learn with and from the best.

Milestone: Shifting systems and policies cannot be done alone. GFS developed partnerships across the community through our work as the lead organization of the Family Engagement Impact Project (FEIP). This project gave us the opportunity to develop and share best practices around family engagement, which is at the core of our work, develop a common definition, and a replicable Family Engagement Framework.

Milestone: Our long history of serving the community led us to engage with four other organizations to form the Si Se Puede! Collective (SSPC) with the goal of producing greater collective impact for low-income families living in the Mayfair community. The SSPC is comprised of: Amigos de Guadalupe, Grail Family Services, School of Arts & Culture, Somos Mayfair, and Veggielution. Together these organizations leverage their collective resources and influence to improve access to basic needs, education, literacy and community engagement. As the lead in the education focus area for the Collective, we work to ensure that families become equal partners in the education of their children.

Objective #2: Expand reach beyond Alum Rock district.

Milestone: Our Family Engagement Framework has been adopted by the Santa Clara County Universal Access to Early Care, Education and Health Pilot, which is implemented in the Alum Rock Union and Franklin McKinley School Districts. The Framework has also been adopted by Head Start Santa Clara County and by early childhood organizations in Sunnyvale, and San Benito County. We have trained more than 300 educators and service providers in the use of our Framework.

Milestone: We shared our work in family engagement with early childhood professionals from around the country at the ZERO TO THREE National Convention in Denver, Colorado, and with early care administrators from all over California at the annual meeting of the California Child Development Administrators Association (now called EveryChild California) in Sacramento. We also presented at the Santa Clara County Children’s Summit.

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

Milestone: We completed the Impact Lab Project sponsored by the Sobrato Family Foundation. This intensive 18-month program provided tailored coaching, tools and techniques to improve evaluation systems and strengthen a culture of learning. We enhanced our evaluation tools as well as our evaluation protocols, enabling us to better document project outcomes for our Family Engagement Professional Development Framework.

Milestone: Because of our quality in execution and proven track record, four of our funders converted their investments from annual to multi-year grants, allowing us to increase our capacity and sustainability.
**Milestone:** We expanded our Board of Directors. In the last three years, we added eleven new board members from diverse industries.

**Milestone:** We expanded the agency’s reach and impact, and significantly increased the organizational budget to continue to address the needs of the community.

**Milestone:** Our State-funded preschool received a QRIS (Quality Matters Santa Clara County) rating of 4 out of 5. QRIS is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs. Additionally, our BBP Family Engagement Professional Development Program has been certified as a resource for the 21-hour continuing professional development requirement in QRIS-participating early childhood education sites, and for Quality Matters stipend participants.

**THE CHALLENGE**
The economic gap continues to widen, making the Bay Area a place of both wealth and inequality. Families from underserved communities often have limited access to high quality early education programs and little exposure to best practices to support their children’s development as compared to more affluent families. This information gap exacerbates parental stress and isolation and perpetuates existing inequalities. Further, low-income families are faced with the lack of affordable housing and stable childcare, unemployment, systemic racism, and the current administration’s immigration policies and practices that unfairly target and traumatize them. Add to that the increased fear generated by incidents of Latino families being targeted by white supremacist groups.

Families in Mayfair are also experiencing gentrification of their community. A thriving economy attracts new businesses, which brings the expected influx of people and the subsequent displacement of low-income families. By some estimates, San Jose’s downtown workforce is projected to grow by sixty-five percent in the coming years, further jeopardizing the success and well-being of our families.

Research has shown that early childhood education can mitigate the effects of poverty and narrow disparities of income, indicating that children who receive high quality early childhood education have significantly better life outcomes and pass the positive effects on to their children. The benefits of a quality preschool experience are especially profound for disadvantaged children, but many low income children are missing out on this opportunity. Specifically, San Jose struggles to meet the demand for high quality learning environments, accounting for a seventy-three percent gap in available preschool slots in Santa Clara County. Additionally, through focus groups GFS has conducted over the years, we have learned that parents often identify personnel at schools and other institutions as a barrier to their being an equal partner in promoting their children’s education and well-being.

For our families to move out of poverty they need a comprehensive array of services, including the early education and childcare services GFS provides. Without these stabilizing services, low-income children miss out on the most important developmental period in their lives, which perpetuates the biases that limit opportunities and economic mobility.

**THE SOLUTION**
To address these challenges, Grail Family Services will continue to develop and implement quality, innovative programs, build strong collaborative partnerships, and advocate for systems change that will increase diversity, equity and inclusion for the community we serve. We envision a community where all children have equitable opportunities for quality early care and education; families have the
knowledge, tools and resources to support and advocate for their children’s positive educational and life outcomes; and systems that support children embrace parents and families as equal partners in their children’s success and well-being.

To accomplish our strategic priorities and be prepared for the changing landscape in East San Jose, GFS plans to increase educational resources and refine our services, resulting in greater children’s’ success and well-being. We will strive to close the information gap by improving access for families to research-based strategies that support healthy childhood development and promote lifelong success. We will continue to listen to our families and learn from their experiences through ongoing focus groups and rigorous data collection and analysis. Armed with empirical evidence and best practices, we will advocate for what children need to thrive, advancing our work with the Sí Se Puede! Collective, and partnering with local nonprofits and government to push for more equitable polices that directly improve the lives of low-income families.

Four strategic priorities will guide our pathway to the future:
1. Increase access to high quality early care and education for children in the community.
2. Strengthen family capacity to support children’s positive educational and life outcomes.
3. Ignite a culture shift that creates equal partnerships between families and the systems that support them.
4. Strengthen GFS infrastructure and sustainability to respond to the needs of the community and growth of the organization.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES
Priority #1: Increase access to high quality early care and education for children in the community
The first five years of a child’s life is a critical period of physical, cognitive, and socioemotional development. The rapid growth and development that occurs during this period creates a foundation for future learning and well-being. This growth is strengthened through regular interaction and stimulation in the home and in high quality early learning environments. GFS is focused on ensuring the children in our community have the quality environments they need – at home, at school, and in the community – to nurture a strong foundation to support their success in school and in life.

In addition to expanding our direct early care and education programs, we will share best practices and expertise with other early educators in the community and beyond. We will also continue to actively participate in local and county efforts that increase access to early education.

Goals
1. Increase the number of preschool slots available to three and four year olds in the community.
2. Incorporate research-based practices to our early education programs in alignment with the needs of our families.
3. Ensure seamless access to early care and education services beyond what GFS offers to the community.
4. Increase outcomes for children and parents by continuing to incorporate evidence-based practices in our early education programs.
5. Advocate for early childhood education by working with local partners, influencers in government, and allies in the public and private sectors.

Priority #2: Strengthen family capacity to support their children’s positive educational and life outcomes
Students whose parents are engaged in their education are more likely to have higher grades and test scores. When parents are engaged, their children attend school regularly, develop better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school. To build capacity to support their children’s success, families require integrated and comprehensive services that are culturally competent and responsive, and proactively address their needs. We will continue to provide parents access to research and strategies that promote childhood success, as well as assess the needs of our families to improve the quality of our programming to help them thrive.

Goals
1. Continue to develop and implement programs, resources and tools that promote family learning at home.
2. Expand the reach of our Building Blocks of Parenting™ (BBP) App countywide.
3. Continue delivering quality services that respond to the needs of families in the community.

Priority #3: Ignite a culture shift that creates equal partnerships between families and the systems that support them.
As an experienced leader in the field of early childhood education and family engagement, we understand to achieve lasting change for low-income families it will take more than effective services. Eliminating racism and inequities, and establishing a true partnership between families and systems, requires a fundamental shift in the way families are treated by the systems that support them. When systems improve access to high quality learning environments increase. GFS will continue to promote this culture shift by expanding the adoption of our Family Engagement Framework, which provides the knowledge, tools and methodology to create a true partnership.

Shifting systems, rewriting policies, and increasing access to educational resources must be done in partnership with other organizations. We will continue to work with the Sí Se Puede Collective to harness the power of collective impact, advocating for systems change that benefits low-income families. Working with additional local partners, government, and allies in the public sector, we will support policies that increase access to early childhood resources and other benefits for underserved families.

Goals
1. Ensure our expertise in family engagement drives how systems work with families.

Priority #4: Strengthen our infrastructure and sustainability in order to continue to respond to the needs of the community and the growth of the organization
We will continue to grow our resources by deliberately sourcing and securing new contracts that support our efforts to improve the success and well-being of families and children. Creating flexible revenue streams through new funders, multi-year grants and fee-for-service opportunities will enhance our sustainability and enable us to share our best practices with others.

Goals
1. Increase total revenue by 30%.
2. Increase GFS brand awareness.
3. Strengthen our evaluation efforts.
THE FUTURE
Grail Family Services is an integral part of the rich social services history of the Mayfair community, and we plan to remain a fundamental part of its future. With a growing and changing East San Jose, GFS must be ready for the anticipated gentrification of the Mayfair community, and with it the displacement of many of the low income families we serve. To support our future, and that of our community, we will hold focus groups with families and local partners to understand their needs and concerns. Armed with this important input we will consider how to best leverage our existing assets in support of our families and the community.

GFS will also continue to look for strategic opportunities to grow our geographical footprint through avenues such as, but not limited to: replication of core services to new municipalities, sharing our Family Engagement Framework with government agencies and nonprofits, and highlighting best practices and learning from our work in the Si Se Puede Collective with other communities interested in developing their own collective impact efforts.

CONCLUSION
As we implement our new Strategic Plan, we envision a diverse, vibrant and communal East San Jose where families from all backgrounds and experiences are able to thrive, and where GFS continues to be a beacon of hope for families. We will increase access to high quality early care and education, strengthen family capacity, create a culture shift in how systems think about family engagement, and build our internal capacity. We will share our insights, expertise and best practices to enhance our collective impact efforts and support our partners. And, most importantly, we will continue to create and deliver innovative, high-quality solutions that promote the success and well-being of families and children, both locally and beyond.

REFERENCES


3. Heckman, James. The Perry Preschoolers at Late Midlife: A Study in Design-Specific Inference and Intergenerational and Intragenerational Externalities of the Perry Preschool Project. May, 2019


Grail Family Services Operational Appendix

Strategic Plan 2019-2022

Priority #1: Increase access to high quality early care and education for children in the community

Goals & Activities
1. Increase the number of preschool slots available to three and four year olds in the community.
   a. Add more preschool slots by expanding GFS programming.
   b. Support other nonprofits and government agencies to increase the amount of available preschool slots.
2. Incorporate research-based practices to our early education programs in alignment with the needs of our families.
   a. Strengthen our early math curriculum to respond to the documented low math scores achieved by children in the community.
3. Ensure seamless access to early care and education services beyond what GFS offers to the community.
   a. Continue to play a key role as a partner in Santa Clara County’s Universal Access to Early Care, Education and Health Pilot Project.
4. Increase outcomes for children and parents by continuing to incorporate evidence-based practices in our early education programs.
   a. Use an organizational dashboard to track progress toward child development targets.
   b. Continue to partner with QRIS (Quality Matters Santa Clara County) to ensure continued quality.
5. Advocate for early childhood education by working with local partners, influencers in government, and allies in the public and private sectors.
   a. As the lead for the education focus area for the Sí Se Puede Collective, advocate for the adoption of early childhood education best practices at the local and state level.

Priority #2: Strengthen family capacity to support their children’s positive educational and life outcomes

Goals & Activities
1. Continue to develop and implement programs, resources and tools that promote family learning at home.
   a. Strengthen our Family Math Kits Project through partnerships, evaluation and financial support.
   b. Leverage our participation in the newly formed Family Math Practice Network to connect our community with resources to support early math learning at home
   c. Conduct a needs assessment to identify other areas of support for family learning at home.
   d. Use the results of the needs assessment to develop and implement activities, programs and resources that support family learning at home.
2. Expand the reach of our Building Blocks of Parenting™ (BBP) App countywide.
   a. Complete a business plan for the launch and expansion of the BBP App.
b. Launch and implement the BBP App in partnership with the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) and FIRST 5 Santa Clara County.

c. Recruit additional partners to expand the reach of the BBP App (e.g., Valley Medical Center, Community Health Partnerships Santa Clara County, Kaiser Permanente).

3. Continue delivering quality services that respond to the needs of families in the community.
   a. Continue to collaborate with the Sí Se Puede Collective and implement the SSPC Strategic Plan.
   b. Develop new collaborations that meet the changing needs of the community.
   c. Support local partners who are addressing gentrification, displacement and immigration policies and practices.

Priority #3: Ignite a culture shift that creates equal partnerships between families and the systems that support them.

Goals & Activities
1. Ensure our expertise in family engagement drives how systems work with families.
   a. Expand implementation of our Family Engagement Framework with Head Start Santa Clara County.
   b. Continue to work with the Santa Clara County Universal Access to Early Care, Education and Health Pilot to promote systemic change in family engagement.
   c. Provide family engagement expertise for the local matrix rating system for Quality Matters (QRIS) in Santa Clara County.
   d. Secure new organizations who will adopt our Family Engagement Framework using a fee-for-service model.

   a. Provide expertise to the Santa Clara County Vision Council in the development of a family engagement model for Santa Clara County.
   b. Participate as a member in the Strong Start Santa Clara County Coalition in support of their advocacy efforts.
   c. Advocate for family engagement by working with local partners, influencers within government, and allies in the public and private sectors.
   d. Align our work in early childhood education with recommendations from the California Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission Report on Early Childhood Education.

Priority #4: Strengthen our infrastructure and sustainability in order to continue to respond to the needs of the community and the growth of the organization

Goals & Activities
1. Increase total revenue by 30%.
   a. Identify new organizations that will adopt our Family Engagement Framework on a fee-for-service basis.
   b. Secure corporate partners as investors in our BBP App.
   c. Increase investment in Development and Communication activities.
   d. Secure funding designated for organizational reserves.

2. Increase GFS brand awareness.
   a. Publish an annual report.
b. Design and develop a new website.

c. Package our Family Engagement Professional Development Program for early childhood educators and service providers.

d. Share best practices at local, state and national convenings.

e. Leverage the BBP App to increase brand recognition.

3. Strengthen our evaluation efforts.

a. Ensure that our programs and services respond to the changing needs of the community.

b. Maintain and advance our culture of continuous improvement.

c. Identify core program elements that improve outcomes for children and families.

d. Create an Impact, Learning and Evaluation Committee to improve our ability to make data-informed decisions and to implement a process for ongoing program improvement.