



STAFF ANALYSIS – DEL NORTE COUNTY

Innovation (INN) Project Name:	Text2Grow
Total INN Funding Requested:	\$262,846
Duration of Innovative Project:	Three (3) Years

Review History:

Approved by the County Board of Supervisors:	March 27, 2018
County submitted INN Project:	June 19, 2018
MHSOAC consideration of INN Project:	July 26, 2018

Project Introduction:

In order to provide support for parents with children ages 0-5 who live in isolated, rural locations within Del Norte County, the County would like to implement a texting program that will offer tips on family strengthening, parental mental health and self-care, and linkage to resources and services. The County will work in collaboration with First 5 Del Norte, Parent Powered, Applied Survey Research, the Child Abuse Prevention Center, families, service providers, and other community members to help develop and test the content of the texting program to ensure efficacy.

In the balance of this brief we address specific criteria that the MHSOAC looks for when evaluating Innovation Plans, including:

- *What is the unmet need that the county is trying to address?*
- *Does the proposed project address the need?*
- *Are there clear learning objectives that link to the need?*
- *Will the proposed evaluation allow the county to make any conclusions regarding their learning objectives?*

In addition, the MHSOAC checks to see that the Innovation meets regulatory requirements, that the proposed project aligns with the core MHSA principles, promotes learning, funds exploration of a new and/or locally adapted mental health approach/practice, and targets one of the four (4) allowable primary purposes: increases access to mental health services to underserved groups; increases the quality of mental

health services, including better outcomes; promotes interagency collaboration; and increases access to services, including, but not limited to, services provided through permanent supportive housing.

The County states this Innovation Project meets the primary purpose of increasing access to mental health services to underserved groups and meets the innovation project category by taking a promising community driven practice from other fields (text-based programs) and applying it to the mental health system.

The Need

The County states there are geographically isolated regions within Del Norte where individuals residing in the community live in poverty in contrast with other California residents. As of 2016, Del Norte County households had a median annual income of \$42,363, which is less than the median annual income of the United States (\$55,322) and considerably less than the median annual income of other California residents (\$63,783). Additionally, the poverty rate for the United States is 14% compared with the poverty rate in Del Norte County, 23.7%.

In initial discussions regarding the development of this project, the need for families to feel supported arose (explained later in the Response and Community Program Planning sections of this analysis). The County hopes to reach out to those families, address those needs as expressed and provide parental support for families. Although there are family strengthening programs currently being offered in Crescent City (at least 20 minutes away from most rural communities), these programs are typically offered in the evening when the public transportation system does not operate which makes traveling to and from the program impractical.

To address the barriers of not being able to reach families living in rural areas of the County along with addressing the needs expressed by parents during interviews leading up to this project, the County would like to implement a texting program to provide familial strengthening and support.

The Response

Research to address the need for parental support began in January 2016 when a total of 27 families and 11 early childhood educators were interviewed by non-profit and public agency leaders in an effort to understand the low literacy rates within the County. For example, Del Norte indicated that half of the third grade students are able to read at that grade level. Through the interview of families and childhood educators, it became apparent that families were in need of more supportive networks and available county resources.

This innovation project was developed after a series of interviews conducted with parents regarding the low literacy rates within the County. These interviews resulted in several findings including, but not limited to:

- Parents feeling they are not connected to supportive networks or resources
- Parents expressing concern over the mental health of their children

- Parents not being able to know how to properly support their children's kindergarten readiness

To address the needs of parents not feeling they receive family strengthening support and available resources within the County, Del Norte is proposing to implement a text-based program for parents of children 0-5 years of age by developing and expanding upon an existing text-based model geared to assist young children prepare for school readiness. **The County may wish to provide rationale as to why this is not a Prevention and Early Intervention project as the plan seems to focus on healthy child development and works in conjunction with First 5 Del Norte.**

The County will work in collaboration with First 5 Del Norte, the Literacy Core Design Team (original creator of existing school readiness texting model), ParentPowered (innovation project contractor), stakeholders, service/program providers, along with the parents living within the Community to develop messaging content.

Outreach and enrollment into Text2Grow texting program will be assisted by the Wonder Bus Program which is essentially a mobile children's library and Family Resource Center. Funded predominantly by First 5 Del Norte, the Wonder Bus Program will enter into a contract with the Child Abuse Prevention Center to obtain two (2) AmeriCorps volunteers whose primary responsibility will be to recruit and enroll parents into the Text2Grow program.

Text content will be culturally informed by Tribal, Latino, and Hmong communities with the expectation of being able to provide thoughtful tips and advice on how to strengthen the family unit. Parts of the Klamath and Smith River communities have large populations of Native and Latino families, so enrollment into this project will be a priority. Text messages will be available in English and Spanish and each family will have the option of choosing a program specific to their culture, if desired.

Del Norte states this texting program will be customized for parents in their County and may become a template for other counties to replicate. The County indicates First 5 Del Norte and ParentPowered (the contractor) will co-author a white paper at the conclusion of the project and present the findings at various early childhood conferences. The County also states that other First 5 agencies from other jurisdictions are watching Del Norte County's innovation project carefully and the County hopes this project, if successful, can be replicated statewide.

The County may wish to provide clarity regarding whether parents are able to respond to text messages and how the county will be prepared to respond to family questions and/or respond to possible crises.

The Community Planning Process

This project came to fruition after a series of interviews were held with families and early childhood educators. Families that were interviewed represented random sampling of the community to include ethnicity, economic status, education, and the various areas of the county where these families resided. As this innovation project has progressed, these

same families that were interviewed continued to be an integral part of the development and planning of this project.

As part of MHSa General Standards for cultural competency, the content of the text messaging will be developed by the Yurok and Tolowa Dee-Ni' Tribal Communities, the Latino Community, and the Hmong Community, joining in collaboration with their respective cultural service providers. In terms of community collaboration, Del Norte indicates this project has been developed alongside First 5 Del Norte and will be the first collaboration between these agencies regarding the delivery of mental health services. The County also states the project is client-driven as it was initiated and will continue to be developed with the input of parents (clients).

The County shared this Innovation Project with local stakeholders beginning January 4, 2018 and received letters of support along with a letter of concern during the public comment period (County attached letters with the project plan). The letter of concern that was received indicated that certain parts of the County to include Klamath and Gasquet, remain unserved in many ways and urged the County to address the needs in those areas. The County has included the individual to assist in the development of this project and to ensure culturally appropriate messages are generated; additionally, the County will work with the stakeholder to address his needs and the needs of the Klamath community.

Learning Objectives and Evaluation

Del Norte County has proposed implementing a text-based parent support program that is partially based on the Ready4K school readiness texting program. Text2GROW will expand upon Ready4K by introducing localized and culturally-relevant family strengthening content that is geared toward parents and families. The County will target parents of children ages 0 to 5 years. Del Norte County will serve approximately 250 families in the project's first year, and 100 families in subsequent years.

In order to guide the project, The County has identified three main learning questions:

1. Is texting an effective tool for providing preventative mental health services to a county-wide population?
2. Will providing families with specific, purposefully-timed information about available programs and services, especially around mental health, increase participation in those services and increase families' connection to support networks?
3. Will providing families with broad-based, multi-domain support lead to children being better prepared for kindergarten both academically and social-emotionally?

Del Norte County intends to use an experimental and control group to evaluate the changes to the Ready4K program compared to Text2GROW program. Using the last digit of the participant's telephone number, parents will be randomly placed in the Ready4K control group, or the Text2GROW experimental group. Although the County states Ready4K has proven to be successful in their County, having two (2) control groups will allow Del Norte to evaluate the efficacy of those who receive Text2Grow messaging in comparison with those who will be receiving Ready 4K messaging.

The County may wish to identify intended outcomes of the Text2GROW project.

In order to address each learning question, the County has identified a number of different measures. These include: satisfaction and usage of the texting program over time; frequency of resource contact/usage; and improvements in social and emotional readiness for kindergarten (**see pgs. 10-12 of county plan**). In order to gather the data necessary, the County will use a number of different methods, including: pencil-and-paper surveys, and online surveys to participants as well as organizations; focus groups with parents; text-based feedback analysis conducted by ParentPowered; and kindergarten readiness assessments administered through First 5 along with Applied Survey Research (ASR-evaluator). Survey instruments and other methods will be developed through a collaboration with First 5 and ASR—ASR will be primarily responsible for data analysis.

Throughout the duration of the project, regular progress meetings will be held between project staff and the Local Mental Health Board and County Board of Supervisors. Results from the project will be presented at childhood/childhood development conferences as well as shared with all other First 5 commissions.

The Budget

The proposed budget for this Innovation Project is \$262,846 over three (3) years. The largest portion of the budget is for consultant and contract costs totaling \$189,504, or 72% of the budget. The specific breakdown of the \$189,504 allotted for consultant and contract costs are comprised as follows: Parent Powered (\$125,433), Applied Survey Research (\$39,900); and Child Abuse Prevention Center (\$24,171). The amount allocated for the evaluation component is \$8,565 (3.3%).

The personnel costs for this project totals \$47,077, or 18% of the total budget. Salaries and benefits will help pay for the First 5 Executive Director and First 5's accounting technician for the three years of the project duration. The First 5 Director will be the primary contact for the contractor, ParentPowered. The accounting technician will be responsible for the processing of contract payments, travel, and project operating costs.

A total \$15,200 (5.8%) is for operating costs for the County that will cover the cost of recruitment materials, parent focus groups and the travel costs associated with the dissemination of findings after the project has ended. Non-recurring costs of \$2,500 are for the purchase of two iPads, which will help facilitate online enrollment, as well as a purchase of a shared laptop, which will be used for data entry purposes.

If the evaluation determines that this innovation project is successful, First 5 Del Norte will continue offering this innovation project. The bulk of the project cost occurs in the beginning to assist in the development and testing the right combination of texts in conjunction with the timing of the text messages. The maintenance and continuous costs are relatively minor in comparison, so the County indicates this project would be able to be sustained by First 5.

In reference to Assembly Bill 114 regarding reversion of funds, the County states they will be using current Innovation funds as there are no Innovation funds set for reversion. The entire amount for this project will be drawn from Innovation funding from the Mental Health Services Act.

Additional Regulatory Requirements

The proposed project appears to meet the minimum requirements listed under MHPA Innovation regulations.

References

<https://datausa.io/profile/geo/del-norte-county-ca/>

<https://datausa.io/profile/geo/del-norte-county-ca/?compare=united-states>

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/delnortecountycalifornia/PST045217>

Full project proposal can be accessed here:

<http://mhsoac.ca.gov/document/2018-06/del-norte-county-inn-plan-text2grow-july-26-2018>