Between March and November 2013, Harder+Company Community Research conducted eight community asset-mapping sessions throughout San Bernardino County with the goal of better understanding the needs, assets, resources, and gaps in services that families with young children in San Bernardino County face. Each session consisted of interactive activities for parents, community residents and local service providers that focused on a broad range of topics, from early education and medical resources to places where children can be active and community sources of pride. This report presents the findings from the Colton Asset Mapping session conducted on November 14, 2013.
The Approach: Asset Mapping

For this project, First 5 San Bernardino and Harder+Company Community Research adopted asset mapping as an approach to understanding community needs. Asset mapping has at least two important advantages over other traditional needs assessment approaches that made it well-suited to meet First 5 San Bernardino’s goals: it is strengths-based and inclusive.

Asset mapping focuses first on what is available and working in a community. These resources can then be leveraged to help address the needs of that same community – allowing for a strengths-based approach to problem solving. Simply put, being aware of both the resources and needs of a community allows for the development of more strategic solutions that have a higher likelihood of achieving outcomes. Traditional needs assessment focuses primarily on what’s missing from a community.

Second, asset mapping is inclusive – the technique makes it possible for a diverse group of people to work together to describe and understand the community. First 5 San Bernardino was eager to include a strong parent perspective in this project alongside the professional knowledge that service providers and leaders bring. Anyone who lives in a community is well-positioned to participate in asset mapping regardless of education, literacy level, language spoken or prior experience with this type of activity. Asset mapping truly allows a seat at the table for anyone with firsthand knowledge of the community.

Asset mapping sessions resulted in lively discussions and debates about every community we conducted them in. We hope the information in this brief report conveys the passion that community members brought to the session. We are indebted to them for their time and participation in this process.

About this report:

The fold out map to the right provides an overview of the mappable assets and needs in Joshua Tree and Yucca Valley. The report that follows provides more detailed information about the community–identified assets and needs.
MAPPING SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY’S NEEDS AND ASSETS

Joshua Tree + Yucca Valley Asset Mapping

This summary map shows community identified assets and needs in the Joshua Tree and Yucca Valley community. During the asset mapping workshop a mix of 7 local parents, residents, and service providers worked together to identify current community strengths and challenges. Participants discussed a broad range of assets including schools, child care, food outlets and health care facilities. Although this is not an exhaustive list, First 5 San Bernardino and key community partners can use this map to identify existing resources that can be built upon to strengthen the foundation of services for children 0-5 and their families.

Key Findings:

+ Residents are particularly proud of the outdoor assets in Joshua Tree and Yucca Valley. In addition to the Joshua Tree National Park, the community boasts two museums devoted to the natural setting and outdoor art. While participants identified the opportunities afforded to families who live near such unique outdoor venues, they also noted basic park needs, such as shade and lights.

+ Participants highlighted the need for improved public infrastructure. Specifically, they mentioned the need for navigable sidewalks, bike paths and public transportation. Parents don’t feel comfortable walking with their children to nearby parks due to safety concerns, and residents can’t take public transportation out of “the basin.”

+ Nearly every asset is adjacent to the Twentynine Palms Highway (HWY 62), and the majority of the items are found where Hwy 62 meets Old Woman Springs Road (Hwy 247). Families in the neighborhoods further from these highways have access to fewer, if any, assets in their immediate proximity.

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For a full report please go to: www.first5sanbernardino.org, click on Downloads
Joshua Tree and Yucca Valley are adjacent cities located in the High Desert Region of San Bernardino County. As a result of their proximity, community resources and needs are often shared. For example, while each city is an independent entity, the two communities share a school district, and participants identified amenities and services in both communities.\(^1\)

Joshua Tree and Yucca Valley are situated amongst notable outdoor assets, including Joshua Tree National Park, and residents value local venues and activities that showcase this aspect of their community life. Assets are clustered along the Twentynine Palms Highway; specifically, where it meets Old Woman Springs Road in the heart of Yucca Valley. Families in neighborhoods further from these roads have access to few, if any, assets. Even short distances are noteworthy in these communities due to infrastructure challenges, such as the lack of navigable sidewalks, bike paths, and limited public transportation options.

Families utilize multiple grocery stores in Yucca Valley, but sometimes travel outside the area for healthy and affordable options. The grocery stores identified by participants are all located in Yucca Valley except for those available to military families who can shop “on base” at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center. Most participants buy groceries from Vons because it has quality produce, a good organic section and a lot of affordable options. They also frequent Food 4 Less because they have “family size” products and reasonable prices on produce and meat. Earth Wise Organic Farmers’ Market is held every Thursday night in Yucca Valley, and participants identified it as a good place to buy wholesale, organic produce. Residents also frequently shop outside the area at specialty stores like Trader Joe’s or Cardenas for deals on ethnic and organic foods, or at bulk stores like Costco. Overall, participants indicated that they shop where there

\(^1\) The Morongo Unified School District
are good prices and diverse selections. While they were aware of venues, such as farmers’ markets, where organic produce was available, participants identified a need for access to more affordable, high quality (e.g., local and organic) fruits and vegetables in the area.

According to families, restaurant choices are limited in the Joshua Tree and Yucca Valley area, so they frequently travel outside the area to dine out. This commonly included restaurant chains such as Denny’s and Sizzler and local establishments too, including La Casita where kids eat free on Wednesdays.

Community members value outdoor spaces and activities. Residents are particularly proud of the outdoor assets in Joshua Tree and Yucca Valley. Joshua Tree National Park is a place where families hang out, exercise, and learn about the environment. The community also boasts museums devoted to nature (Hi-Desert Nature Museum) and art that incorporates the local landscape (The Noah Purifoy Outdoor Desert Art Museum). The Yucca Valley Community Park is a community hub where children and families can play, take classes at the Community Center, and visit the Yucca Valley Library.

While participants were proud of the opportunities afforded to families who live near such unique outdoor venues, they also desired more community activities and noted existing parks lack some basic amenities that would make them more accessible to the surrounding neighborhoods. This included shade (making them inaccessible in hot summer months), lights (making them inaccessible in the evening), and navigable sidewalks or bike paths (making it difficult for families to safely and easily get to nearby parks without having to drive or rely on limited public transit). The result is that children often play at home or in their neighborhoods. Additionally, participants said they felt it was unsafe for kids to be out of the house after dark, especially given the prevalence of drug use and gangs in the area.

“We need more activities besides the parks.”

~Joshua Tree/Yucca Valley Participant
Community Desires for the High Desert Region

The word cloud to below illustrates what resources participants most desire for Joshua Tree, Yucca Valley, and surrounding cities. Participants were asked to identify resources they would like to see in their community. Words in larger type appeared more frequently in their responses. Overall, community members desire more teachers and school choices, grocery stores and food options, and increases in recreation and entertainment opportunities.
Basic services are met by a small number of providers. Participants reported that regular and emergency medical care is available in Joshua Tree and Yucca Valley. The Hi-Desert Medical Center is convenient, accepts Medi-Cal insurance, offers emergency care. In addition, its associated Family Health Clinics have introduced expanded services (including pediatric and mental health services) to under-insured families in the area. Families utilize Morongo Basin OBGYN Medical and Desert Pediatrics for family medicine, and prenatal care is available through the Hi-Desert Medical Center and a local midwife. Military families are able to access care all necessary medical care “on base” at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center. Families did not mention having to leave the area for medical care although one participant did mention a prenatal doctor in Palm Springs.

Ensuring children practice good oral health is a priority for parents. Every participant indicated they attempt to instill good oral health habits to their children, including brushing their teeth, flossing, and eating calcium-rich food daily. However, many parents continue to face challenges in ensuring their children maintain good oral health. Although participants reported taking their children to the dentist, they also cited a lack of affordable care, the wide availability of sugary drinks and sweets, and difficulty getting their children to cooperate as barriers to maintaining good oral health. Most parents get their information from dentists, such as those at Joshua Tree Family Dentistry, and the internet.

Identifying parent’s practice and knowledge:

Community members utilized “placemats” like the one pictured here, and worked in teams to identify dental health practices, challenges, and gaps in services.
Parents value education for their children and opportunities to learn together. All parent participants reported that they engage in educational activities with their children regularly; this includes reading to them, playing educational games, field trips to museums, and outdoor activities. Parents also take advantage of educational resources in the area. For example, Unity Home provides peer support and parenting classes, and the Hi-Desert Nature Museum offers kids’ activities. According to participants, the Community Center also offers classes for kids and families, but they are often cancelled because of low turnout. Participants identified Yucca Valley HeadStart and Joshua Tree Preschool as key local resources for preschool. However, parents mentioned some concerns about the quality of the programs.
Summary of community-identified needs in Joshua Tree and Yucca Valley

- Participants highlighted the need for improved infrastructure, including: sidewalks, bike paths, and public transportation.
- Local parks often do not have lights or shaded areas for families. Families would also appreciate further investment in a recreation center to complement available outside activities.
- Parents are concerned about drug use in their neighborhoods.

Summary of needs in the High Desert Region*

*Community members were asked to name some things that families with young children need that currently are not available in the region. The “word cloud” to the below illustrates their responses. Words appearing in larger type appeared more frequently in their responses. Overall, sidewalks and bike paths; organized cultural, outdoor and recreational programming; and accessible homeless services appear to be the largest needs for families in the High Desert Region.
Summary and conclusions

The communities of Joshua Tree and Yucca Valley care deeply about the well-being of young children and their families. The High Desert is generally more isolated from resources when compared to other regions of the county. There is a perception that access to important community resources (such as parks) along specific corridors is inhibited by transportation and infrastructure challenges, and that most neighborhood parks are in need of improvement. The rich base of outdoor resources and strong desire for increased community programming will serve as assets in First 5 San Bernardino’s work to improve life for children zero to five and their families in the High Desert.

THANK YOU!

Many thanks to the community residents who attended this asset mapping event and worked diligently to identify their community’s needs and assets. We also want to thank local non-profits and churches that helped recruit community members and provided their knowledge and support every step of the way.
First 5 San Bernardino was created in December, 1998 in order to realize the benefits of Proposition 10 (California Children and Families Act) for the County’s youngest residents and their families. The act created a program for the purpose of promoting, supporting, and improving the early development of children from the prenatal stage to five years of age.

Vision – All children in San Bernardino County are healthy, safe, nurtured, eager to learn and ready to succeed.

Mission – Promote, support and enhance the health and early development of children prenatal through age five and their families and communities.

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