

# Handle with Care Plus+

Annual Update 2021-2022



Department of  
Behavioral Health

## Introduction

Handle with Care Plus+ is a \$1,527,000, three-year pilot project funded under the Mental Health Services Act's (MHSA) Innovation component by the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH). The pilot program activates timely responses to children and their families immediately after a trauma or stressful life event occurs. This project will provide early support, screenings, and assess children for early indications of mental health symptoms resulting from trauma. It seeks to empower the family with the tools they need to cope, recover, and connect them and their children to any additional resources.

The Department partnered with the Fresno County Superintendent of School (FCSS), the Resiliency Center, Fresno Unified School District, the University of California Davis' Center for Reducing Health Disparities, and Brainwise Solutions to develop and implement the Handle with Care Plus project.

DBH and its partners are seeking to adapt the national Handle with Care model (an evidence-based program for parents, caregivers, and educators of young children) by adding clinical support and a parent and family engagement component using a Parent Café to provide some education and support to families. Four elementary schools (Lowell, Heaton, Del Mar, and Pyle) in the City of Fresno will serve as the pilot sites. The project seeks to measure how a rapid response may reduce trauma for the students, as well as how providing information to parents/caretakers may mitigate the impact of trauma and adverse childhood experiences. The Chaplaincy can identify service calls in the neighborhoods around the four schools in real-time and review them to identify which calls may have been a life-impacting event. Data from the Resiliency Center showed an average month in the City of Fresno, there are 36,000 calls for services, of those, between 500-800 are ones that could be traumatic to a child or person.

FCSS, through an existing partnership with DBH, funded by MHSA, called All4Youth, already provides school-based behavioral health services at those schools. The Handle with Care Plus+ team (FCSS) will receive information from the Resiliency Center, notify the appropriate school personnel, provide any support to the student, and provide more intensive services, if needed.

The Resiliency Center will engage families and facilitate the Parent Cafés, a safe and welcoming setting for parents to share experiences and learn how to develop the resilience of their child and family through a customized trauma-informed curriculum.

## Background

Based on the targeted schools and communities, the program sought to support resilience in families who have experienced a life impacting event or trauma who have a student/child who attends one of the four identified schools. These will be children between ages 4-11 years of age. These students will vary in age, gender, and ethnicity, however, based on the location of the schools many of the students will be Latino. The students in general will be from lower social-economic backgrounds, and who have traditionally been underserved by the behavioral health system. A small portion of the students will be English learners, and thus the need for bilingual response team. At the time this plan was approved the Fresno Police Chaplaincy reported that on average 60 calls per month came from the neighborhoods for these schools. The average of 60 calls per month, multiplied by two school sites in the first year (over 12 months) would have been approximately 1,440 possible calls for services. In years two and three of the project, where there will be two additional schools (four total), with the same formula, the project estimates serving 5,760 families/students who may benefit from services. The project had estimated to contact up to a total 7,200 students. This projected number could not factor in those who will decline services, those who will only participate partially, homes or students who may already be engaged in services, or those who may be duplicated. The team was unable to effectively determine the number of parents/caregivers who would be served by the Parent' Café, due to some of the same variables noted above. Also, the number of parents/caregivers in each household is unknown and difficult to project. However, over the course of this project, it was anticipated 25 (eight-week) Parent Cafés will be conducted. It was anticipated a third of parent/caregivers participate in one of the 25 Parent Cafés over the three years, 2,400 parent/caregivers could be served through this project.

All the planning and projected numbers were all based on information before the COVID-19 pandemic. The change in how schools provided education (virtual and not in person), the closing of retail, and community centers, more families being at home all had an impact on the project. The data has changed as has how people lived their lives during the past two years.

The school closures, and subsequent distant learning had significant impact on the project. The implementation of the project and services were delayed by over a full year.

While the partner agencies

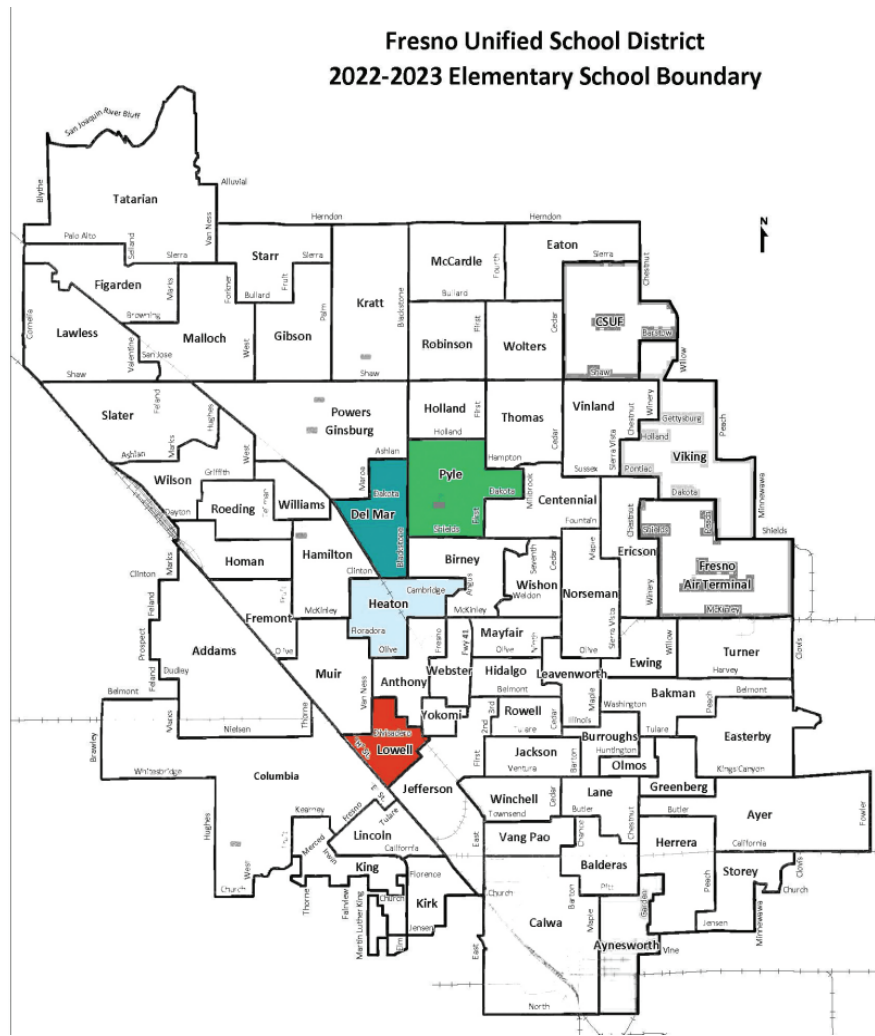


Figure 1. In color are the four school boundaries for this pilot

were meeting and working to develop logistics, implementation plans, care coordination, and other aspects of the program, nothing could be solidified due the unknowns posed by COVID-19. Schools were uncertain of when in-person instructions would begin, how they provide on-site services, etc. The ebbs and flows in the COVID-19 rates during that time would allow for some planning and then all the plans to change and so actual program planning was limited to or would have be all contingencies and as such the start was delayed.

## Project Activities

Handle With Care Plus began to operate on October 2021. This first step was the project's "ramp up" phase which included the implication of version agreements, MOUs, development of outreach materials, and curriculum development.

- **Curriculum** One of the main activities of the initial wrap up was to develop a specific trauma informed and educating development of Parent Café curriculum. It was critical for a curriculum to be something that can be driven by the participants and the peer/parent partner. Additionally, it was important for the curriculum to provide flexibility so the learning could have anyone join and learn, rather than having to be delayed and wait for the next time the curriculum would start over. Brainwise was able to address this key component and developed the curriculum and tested it with some parents before delivering it for the project. The creation of the curriculum and training was some of the initial work.
- **Handle With Care Notification** The Department, FCSS' All4Youth services, Fresno Unified and the Resiliency Center had to develop protocols and process for sharing of notification and ensuring the communication would occur with the identified personnel. This included notification of district and school site personnel. Coordination of the referrals, parental contact and used of the electronic health record (EHR).
- **Call Identification** The Resiliency Center works with the Fresno Police Chaplaincy who in turn works with the Fresno Police Department (including the dispatchers) to obtain access to call logs and service call information. A process was put into place for the calls to be screened and narrowed down to calls that would include children/youth likely to attend the four target schools. The Chaplaincy and the Resiliency Center will be exploring a use of a phone App to be implemented with Fresno PD that will allow officers to directly make referrals for any cases/calls in which a child or family may experience a "life-changing" event. This will improve and expedite Handle With Care notifications by providing the

staff with only related type of calls they can examine and review for Handle With Care notification.

- **Phased Implementation** Initially the proposed plan was to on-board schools in phases, but the delays in implementation due to COVID-19 pandemic allowed for all four schools have the support services in place by the time the Handle With Care was able to go live and so all four schools began at the same time.
- **Press Event** One of the big activities in the first year was the multi-agency press event, which sought to highlight this new multi-agency, multi-sector collaboration to support children.

A multi-agency press event (click [here](#) to view event) was held on January 28, 2022, to help highlight the new resource and cross sector collaboration to support children and their families. The Press event lead by the Department included DBH Director, Susan Holt, Fresno County Board of Supervisors Chairman, Brian Pacheco, The Resiliency Center's Executive Director, Rodney Lowery, The Fresno County Superintendent, Jim Yovino, and City of Fresno's Police Chief, Paco Balderrama.



*Figure 2. Kick off press event lead by DBH and including cross sector partners.*

- **Extension and approval** On June 9, 2022, the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC) approved the Departments request to extend the project term from a three-year term to a five-year term. This extension did not include a change to the overall project funding. The project was approved back in May 2020; however, the COVID-19 Pandemic had limited education to a virtual or distance learning and thus students were not attending school on campus, and that posed challenges for

the project design and implementation. There was a risk to try and implement the project to accommodate the virtual learning, however there were concerns that the model would have to be changed again with return to in-person schooling and would have a significant impact on the model.

Thus, the partners opted to keep with the original model and to try and implement once schools were back in person. Schools did not return to in-person learning until August 2021. The project was then able to move forward with the plan and programs were able to employ staff, begin training, etc.

The delay of over a year and a half impacted the reversion timeline and thus the requested extension to allow the program to fully complete the three years of services as the project was delayed. The extension letter has been added to the appendix.

## Outcomes

In the initial year of the program a total of 96 referrals were made that fell into the project's parameters and in the pilot school areas. These were calls that were screened by the Fresno Police Chaplaincy which were identified as calls that should be part of the Handle with Care.

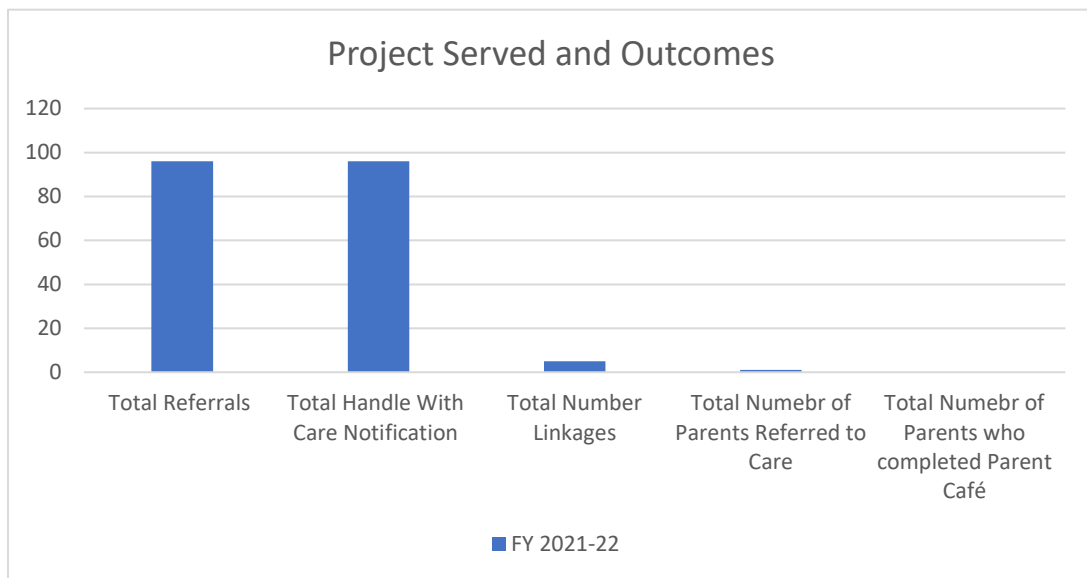


Figure 3. Outcomes Table 2021-2022

Of those 96 calls, all 96 were provided with a Handle with Care notification. Those were coordinated with the district and the schools. Of those Handle with Care notifications there were five (5) students who were identified as in need of additional supports. Those five students were referred and linked to care services. Of those calls, all households were invited to the Parent Café and offered additional services. There was one parent who engaged in services as a result of the engagement. While several parents sought out some services, none in the initial year completed the Parent Café

The lack of parental participation has been raised as a concern. The Parent Café, which seeks to provide trauma informed education and supports, is important to try and provide the child and household with tools to be resilient in the face of adverse life changing events. Additionally, the Parent Café is also a tool in itself to allow for engagement of families for additional supports, referrals, resources and linkages. The Resiliency Center will be exploring use of personalize invitations, follow up calls as ways to build up engagement and possible participation in the Parent Café. The psychoeducation provided in the Parent Café as well as tools to support the child's wellness and resilience are key aspects of the pilot, but so will be understanding why some are opting not to participate, so to inform ways to make the more accessible.

## Next Steps

The program has received referrals as planned at the school through a system developed between the Resiliency Center, FCSS' All4Youth program, and Fresno Unified, and has been able to screen calls and identify possible handle with care notification for the project. A total of 96 Handle with Care Notifications have been sent in the first year of the project.

Of those, five (5) students were in need of additional supports and were linked and provided those care services.

A total of one parent was engaged for participation in the parent Café. The engagement started with a visit by the Chaplains, then calls and letters inviting parents to the workshop. However, participation had been low as has retention for parents who have engaged. The Resiliency Center plans to mail the individual invitations as well so that the invite is more personal to the family.



There were questions about adapting some workshops, but all the partners agreed that the fidelity of the curriculum for the Parent Café is important while not central to the overall research (as the curriculum is not being evaluated) but continuity was important. Thus, no changes to the curriculum or how its implemented have been made.

For the coming year, some partners have inquired if the project needs to change or expand the number of schools if the referrals for Handle With Care Plus are low. While this may be discussed, it is likely that for the purpose of learning the project will remain with the initial four school locations. Those four sites were specifically identified based on health scores, poverty levels, student absences, crime rates in the area, and other environmental factors that made those four sites the best for testing the pilot. There will be discussions in the coming year, and the Department shall consult with the evaluators (UC Davis' Center for Reducing Health Disparities) to examine how such a change may impact the learning parameters.

The project partners will continue to monitor all facets of the program, from calls/referrals, notification, need for services, to parental engagement in the Parent Café. All facets of the program can be important in developing an effective model and learning.

The project has experienced delays in establishing the evaluation agreement with UC Davis. The Department staff continue to work with UC Davis to execute an evaluation agreement. The project has only rendered services for six months and thus the data and participation has been limited. However, UC Davis has been involved in the planning, in establishing the data needed and on the monthly project calls. Once the agreement is officially executed UC Davis can begin the initial data analysis for the evaluation.

## Budget

Total budget is \$1,527,00. There were several components to this pilot program. The budget is divided among the direct service providers (FCSS and the Resiliency Center), administration (which is allotted to DBH) and a portion was allocated for curriculum development (by Brain Wise

Solutions).

The expenditures were initially utilized for the pilot ramp-up and implementation of which included curriculum for the Parent Café which was developed by Brain Wise and providing instruction for its utilization.

The direct services (FCSS and the Resilience Center) began with development of processes for notification and coordination, care services, administration, and evaluation. They had to employ and render training to the service partners.

The following provides information on each of those components and what has been expended to date for each.

- **Brainwise Solutions**- Curriculum development \$13,500 (this was fully expended)
- **Resilience Center**- expended \$114,646 on services in the first year, which included staffing, ramp up costs, training, etc.
- **FCSS** expended \$108,850 in the initial year, which was for staffing related to process planning, student screening, referral/linkages, care services and other supports.
- **Fresno County**- expended \$14,454.10 in the year related to administrative functions.
- **UC Davis Center for Reducing Health Disparities**-The County has not yet been able to secure an agreement the identified evaluator, UC Davis, and thus not funds have been expended for evaluation to date.

In all the program expended \$298,480.93 in the first year. The budget for year two of the pilot is projected at \$511,897.

<b>FY 21/22</b>	<b>Brainwise Solutions</b>	<b>FCSS</b>	<b>Resiliency Center</b>	<b>DBH</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Spent</b>	\$13,500	\$108,850	\$114,646	\$14,454.10	\$298,480.93

Fresno County will continue to monitor the expenditures to ensure utilization of the funds and if there needs to be any additional adjustments to the budgets to support other strategies for increasing parent participation or support for the pilot.