



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION

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COUNTY KIDS PROGRAM WINS TOP STATE HONOR

Neighborhoods for Kids, an initiative of San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency, has been named the winner of the 2009 California State Association of Counties' (CSAC) prestigious California Counties Innovation Award – the top honor in their annual Challenge Awards.

The award recognizes the innovative and creative spirit of California county governments as they find new and effective ways of providing programs and services to their citizens, according to the organization's web site.

The Neighborhoods for Kids initiative began in 2004, and strives to keep abused and neglected children in safe, familiar environments and in their same school when it is not possible to keep them with their parents. The objective is to minimize disruption in the child's life by keeping as many support structures and routines as intact as possible, while family reunification efforts are in process.

"It is a tremendous honor to be selected by CSAC as the winner of the Innovation Award," said Dianne Jacob, Chairwoman of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors. "This is an important recognition for the hard work and extreme dedication of the County's Child Welfare Services workers and the efforts they put in every day to make sure the children of our County are able to grow up in safe environments."

"San Diego County employees are dedicated to serving our communities and it's nice to see them recognized with such a prestigious honor," said Walt Ekard, San Diego County Chief Administrative Officer. "Citizens of San Diego County, and especially the foster families and children, appreciate the efforts of our social service workers and the innovation of such programs as Neighborhood for Kids."

"This is a unique program that is seeing tremendous results," said HHSA Deputy Director Pam Smith. "Over half of the 350 children in East County who require out-of-home placement are placed with relatives or family friends. Nearly all (72%) of those children not living with relatives are placed in

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East County foster homes. Sixty-seven percent of the school-aged children in out-of-home care maintained same-school enrollment. It's important to find that special person that cares about the child and allows as little disruption as possible to their lives and normal routines."

HHSA partnered with East County schools and other community groups to improve child-protective outcomes and academic success. Child welfare staff work in five distinct geographical clusters in order to forge relationships with school personnel, foster parents, service organizations, non-profit organizations, law enforcement and faith-based groups. In the end, Neighborhoods for Kids is about neighbors helping neighbors to improve the lives of children.

"This is a great example of program innovation and the determination and dedication of HHSA social workers coming together to produce successful outcomes for the families and children in East County," said Nick Macchione, HHSA Director. "That is what we strive for as an agency – making a difference in people's lives every day."

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