FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 3, 2004

CONTACT: Jolene Smith, FIRST 5
(408) 289-5330
April Bignell, CHD
(408) 985-8114
Lilly Grenz, Family Court
(408) 534-5751

FIRST 5, SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CLARA COUNTY AND THE CENTER FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT CREATE NEW PROGRAM FOR FAMILIES IN THE FAMILY COURT SYSTEM

Parents involved in Family Court get much needed help to resolve their conflicts and stay focused on what's best for their young children

San Jose, CA – FIRST 5, Superior Court and the Center for Healthy Development (CHD) have collaborated to create a *New Skills and Choices Parenting Program*. This innovative program, which is part of FIRST 5's Family Court Services Initiative, brings much needed resources as well as new approaches in delivering services to families with children birth through age 5 involved in the Family Court system.

The *New Skills and Choices Parenting Program* targets high-conflict families who are involved in the Family Court System. Parents participating in the program will have the opportunity to receive counseling for themselves and their children, attend workshops that promote skill development to reduce parental conflict and obtain enhanced parenting skills to support their children's needs appropriately.

"When parents are caught up in the Family Court System it's the young children who are particularly vulnerable, " said Frederick Ferrer, Chairman, FIRST 5. "What FIRST 5 wants to accomplish with this program is to promote healthy families by bridging the gaps in much needed services. Our efforts in effectively supporting families in crisis will help minimize the stress and negative impact a difficult divorce or issues with custody can have on children in the critical first 5 years of life."

- more -

A FIRST 5 survey in 2003 revealed that both families and professionals in family law identified counseling, supervised visitation and group therapy for children as the most needed services, and that these services were difficult to obtain. The *New Skills and Choices Parenting Program,* under the umbrella of CHD, is designed to address these unmet needs.

“The high emotional cost of divorce and chronic parental conflict on a child’s psycho-social development indicates the need for a program such as this,” said Terry McLarnan, Executive Director CHD. “Our classes emphasize that the children of divorce are always missing either their mother or father. At CHD we help parents learn to separate their parental relationship from their personal one so that their children may love both parents freely.”

"All those involved in Family Court are tremendously grateful to FIRST 5 for its support in developing and making affordable these basic services which so many of our families want and need," said Hon. Dolores Carr, Supervising Judge of the Family Division. "*The New Skills and Choices Parenting Program* will teach parents how to resolve issues about their children in a more positive way, leading to less emotional and financial strain, and less litigation."

About FIRST 5

Research shows that a child's brain develops most dramatically in the first five years of life and what parents and caregivers do during these years to support their child's growth will have a meaningful impact throughout the child’s life. Based on this research, California voters passed Proposition 10 in 1998, adding a 50 cent-per pack tax on cigarettes to support programs for expectant parents and children ages prenatal through age 5. FIRST 5 Santa Clara County has approved a $194 million 5-year community investment plan to meet local needs to support the healthy development of children prenatal through age 5 and enrich the lives of their families and communities.

About CHD

The Center for Healthy Development (CHD) is a non-profit counseling agency guided by a strong commitment to the diverse population in the Silicon Valley, assessing each individual’s needs to provide quality, affordable counseling and psychotherapy that may not be sufficiently available through government or for-profit agencies. A diverse professional staff contributes to the rich and vibrant atmosphere for individuals, couples, families and groups who are searching for growth and healing.

# # #