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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Program Aimed at Fighting Childhood Obesity Through Healthy Habits

(MAY 18, 2009) RIVERSIDE, CA — Improper nutrition, obesity and other unhealthful conditions among young children continue to rise. A recent study found that more than half a million — nearly 1 in 5 — 4-year-olds across the country are obese (*Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, 2009).

To help address increasing prevention needs in Riverside County, First 5 Riverside awarded a grant to the county's Nutrition Services Branch to promote and operate a health program focused on physical fitness and healthy nutrition activities for children through age 5 and their caregivers. More than 500 licensed center-based and family child care home providers who serve more than 6,000 children have already been trained.

Free workshops are held throughout the county to train providers on how to implement Sesame Workshop's Healthy Habits for Life. The strategies, which are promoted by several Sesame Street characters and most recently, First Lady Michelle Obama, focus on teaching healthy behaviors in fun and practical ways.

Experts say that the chances of developing poor nutritional habits and attitudes significantly increase if a child doesn't learn about healthy eating by age 5.

"Nowadays, the children don't eat healthy," said Mary Marquez, who had 14 staff members of Melody Lane Children's Center in Riverside attend the Healthy Habits training. "There's more junk food and chips and not enough natural foods. Not many people think about little kids and major health problems like diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure."

Over the past three decades, the childhood obesity rate has more than doubled for children 2 to 5 years old, according to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey.

Susie Dauto, administrator of Storyland in Desert Hot Springs and El Jardin in Coachella, also sent some staff to training. She said that the more education they get, the more they can pass on to children. Since being trained, she said her staff weaves exercise and conversations about healthy and new foods into their daily care.

"We all know it's important to have healthy habits, but we tend to ignore it. But having someone from the health department come in and tell us that we have to be healthy to be good role models makes a huge impact."

Riverside County's Healthy Habits program released its NEW evening workshop schedule this month. It is also participating and previewing some techniques in the First 5 Kid Fit Friday event May 29 at Ramona High School in Riverside. For more information about Healthy Habits, call Andrea Donald, health education assistant, at 951-358-5311 or e-mail adonald@co.riverside.ca.us.

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First 5 Riverside, the Riverside County Children & Families Commission, is a public entity funded by Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues and established by the County Board of Supervisors in 1999. First 5 Riverside provides funding of early education, health and child care services that help children through age 5 develop a strong foundation for success in school and throughout their lives. For more information about First 5 Riverside programs and other funded services, call 951-248-0014 or Toll Free 800-266-3880 or visit www.rccfc.org.