

WHAT'S INSIDE:



A CSW's perspective on working with a parent and the struggles and successes that came with it.
PAGE 2



Have some fun this summer. 5 family things to do around Los Angeles.
PAGE 3



Are you ready to help others? Get information about Parents in Partnership program & Office locations.
PAGE 4

Parents working with other parents toward the goal of reunifying or maintaining their family

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THE PIP POST

A PIP's Story: mending one family at a time



My name is Laura Espinoza and I am 26yrs old. I'm a parent of 3 children: Kayla Angeline (4), Rene Jr. (3), and my baby boy Vincent (1). I was born in Torrance, raised in Wilmington, and now live in Bixby Knolls, CA. I am the youngest of 5 sisters. My parents have been happily married for happily 39 years. I had a normal and healthy life growing up. I've had numerous accomplishments throughout my life that ranged from 8 yrs as a synchronized swimmer, 2 yrs in concert band playing bass-clarinet, 4 yrs as a Varsity Cheerleader, and being a Honors Graduate from High school with a 3.9 GPA! I joined the military and graduated from the automated logistical specialist academy. Once out of the military I returned to school and graduated as a Medical Assistant, Phlebotomist, and EKG Specialist (with a 4.0 GPA and Perfect attendance). I continued with my education and graduated as a Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) also with a high 3.8 GPA. My education plans were put on hold when I became pregnant because I wanted to be a dedicated mother and wife.

In the beginning of my relationship it was pretty good, and there were some positive memories until I became pregnant with my second child Rene Jr. That is when the domestic violence began. I stayed in the relationship and months later I became pregnant with my 3rd child Vincent. I tested positive for meth and so did my baby boy. The hospital labeled my baby as a "meth-exposed infant." The hospital reported

me to DCFS and shortly after I received a visit from an Emergency Response Worker. I was blessed to have been given the opportunity to take my baby home, and we were told to attend a Team Decision-Making (TDM) meeting. It was decided at the TDM that my case would be a Voluntary Family Maintenance case. This meant no courts were involved. They allowed me to stay at home but my son's dad had to monitor me and could not leave me alone with my children.

The abuse became like a nightmare. I just kept asking myself "why me?" Nothing stopped him. Not even being pregnant with his children. The abuse I lived with was physical, mental, and sexual. My meth use was my way out to not feel the pain of the abuse. My son's father and I continued using meth until I tested positive and DCFS intervened. Another TDM was called immediately and this day became the turning point of my life. My baby & 2 year old son were removed from my care and placed with their father, and my 3 yr old daughter was placed with my parents. The pain and suffering of the separation cannot be described; it felt like someone ripped out my heart without remorse. If only I would of spoken up in the TDM about the abuse that was happening in my home and the real reason why I was self-medicating! But I was scared. I was being loyal to my partner, and I was a victim. I was ordered to do several programs and random drug testing in order for my children to be returned. In 6 months I completed everything in my case plan. I also completed several other classes because I wanted my children back. My social worker called me in and handed me a paper that stated my case was closed. I was happy and it was unbelievable

continued on page 2

my case was actually closed. I had one question. Where are my children? My case was closed but my children were not returned to me because their father had filed in family law for their custody. I was devastated. I felt like everything

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I did was worthless. I hired an attorney and after 2 family law trials, a joint legal & physical custody was ordered. I had no words, but to thank my attorney, the judge, and my God. Throughout my journey, there were several times I just wanted to give up. But I had been part of a support group with The Parents in Partnership Program to help me cope with the separation and to know I wasn’t alone in the system. They taught me to know about my rights as a parent.

Today, I am a Parent Partner with the Parents in Partnership Program. I share my story to prove that anybody can make mistakes and turn it around. I do the parents rights’ orientation to educate families. I have the opportunity to work in partnership with my social worker who has seen me at my worst. I never thought I would be working in the same building, on the same floor, and in the same program with the social worker that handled my case. Best of all I have my children back and I’m a good mother to my children!

A CSW’S STORY

“she has become a better parent as a result of her experience.”



My name is Bernie Gooden and I am a Children’s Social Worker in the DCFS South County office. It has been a pleasure witnessing the personal growth and evolution of Laura Espinoza. Two years ago when I received Laura’s case I never would have imagined that she would serve in the capacity as a Parent Partner. Laura’s case came to the Department’s attention because of concerns of drug abuse and neglect. Laura entered a Voluntary Family Maintenance contract with the Department where she agreed to attend an outpatient drug treatment program to address her addiction. Unfortunately, Laura relapsed and a plan was developed where her sons stayed with their father and daughter Kayla with her maternal

grandparents. This day was emotionally draining for me and devastating for Laura as she had never been separated from her children. I was certain that Laura’s separation from her children would only push Laura into further drug use. Fortunately, it was this very act that motivated Laura to change her life for the better. Laura vigorously participated in the Department’s safety plan enrolling in Circle of Friends Outpatient Treatment Center, participating in weekly counseling sessions through the Family Preservation program and attending all monthly scheduled social work contacts. Laura was critical of some aspects of the case plan; however she refused to throw in the towel facing every challenge “head on.” It was

inevitable she would fulfill the Department’s expectations and successfully close her Voluntary Family Maintenance case. Laura is an outspoken parent advocate that uses her testimony to motivate and inspire others. She has shared her experience at the PIP retreat, Parent Leadership Conference, 2010 Family Reunification Celebration and numerous other community and social service agencies in the South County area. I have enjoyed watching her transformation and to know that she has become a better parent as a result of her experience. Laura’s advocacy is invaluable to new parents navigating the dependency system. Her experience exemplifies the metaphor of making lemonade from lemons.



PIP SPOTLIGHT

PIP’s at the 2010 Parent Leadership Conference.





The Treasure Box provides families and individuals with a substantial box of grocery store quality food retailing between \$65-100 for just \$30 each. The Treasure Box cultivates relationships with more than 500 major food manufacturers across the country to purchase and provide top quality, nutritious food at sizeable volume discounts to the general public.

Each Treasure Box contains between 21-25 pounds of high quality, frozen foods, including chicken, pork, beef, or seafood, as well as vegetables, fruit, a side dish and a dessert. One Treasure Box is enough food to nutritiously feed a family of four lunch and dinner for almost a week or a senior citizen for nearly a month.

The Treasure Boxes are offered through surrounding host locations – community action or outreach programs and faith-based organizations. Representing a savings of nearly 60% off of grocery store prices, The Treasure Box provides a positive and healthy impact to families and individuals during this economically challenging time.

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RESULTS ARE THE BEST RECOGNITION!



Parents in Partnership are always on the look for potential Parent Partners. This is a parent that has successfully reunified with their children, a parent whose case has been closed for some period of time, and a parent that has a desire to assist other parents work toward their goal of reunifying or maintaining their family.

Potential PIP's participate in a month long training process that covers various topics such as: An orientation to PIP Process, Forms, Policies Procedures and Advocacy, The ABC's of DCFS, Building a Better Future, Grief & Loss, An Overview of Child Abuse, Substance Abuse, Domestic Violence, Cultural Competence Ethics & Values, Mental Health, and Telling Your Story For Effective Engagement.

This year participating offices have completed 2 core trainings. We would like to congratulate all of the new Parent Partners, from the Palmdale/Lancaster

office: (Debra Woods, Vanessa Humphrey, Precillia Diaz, Michiko Shimizu, Richard Matthews, and Elvira Rodriguez) and from the Lakewood training that covered the Lakewood/Belvedere and Pomona/El Monte offices, we want to congratulate: (Julie Emery, Laurie Aviles, Lena Velasquez, Graciela Cordova, Rosmarie Escudero, Diana Nichols, Maria Calvillo, Laura Espinoza, Anthony Alvitre, Randy Contreras, Andrea Miles, and Kelli Stephenson).

We would also like to give special mention to Monica Kirby Matthews, Gilbert Rodriguez, Reco Varnardo, Denise Valdivia, Jennifer Olague, Patricia Castoena, Maria Santos Angulo, and Earl Floyd. These PIPS attended the training to continue work on their personal growth and contribute to the encouragement, success and motivation of the new Parent Partners.



5 things to do this Summer

Griffith Observatory

Griffith Observatory is a national leader in public astronomy, and one of southern California's most popular attractions. The Observatory is located on the southern slope of Mount Hollywood in Griffith Park.

Santa Monica Pier

The beautiful Santa Monica Pier offers a variety of entertainment, dining and shopping experiences, including the thrill rides of Pacific Park; a historic 1922 Carousel, and an interactive aquarium.

California Science Center

A one-of-a-kind venue in Los Angeles, a great hands-on experience for kids. The Science Center successfully combines a dramatic space filled with light and art with three floors of interactive exhibits.

La Brea Tar Pits/Page Museum

Visitors can learn about Los Angeles as it was between 10,000 and 40,000 years ago, during the last Ice Age, when animals such as saber-toothed cats and mammoths roamed the Los Angeles Basin.

Hollywood Walk of Fame

Kids will enjoy tracing their hands on many famous stars' handprints. Walking along the Hollywood will give them a taste of fame. The best part is that it's totally free.

About the PIP Post

The PIP Post is a newsletter written by parents who were once involved in the child welfare system. These parents have had their cases closed and are now voices of experience. Parent Partners hope to share their stories in order to inform and inspire other parents to reunify with their children safely and successfully. They have put together this newsletter to provide birth parents with an additional source of strength and support. If you have stories, recipes, or know of communities events in the Los Angeles area that you would like to share contact Richard Matthews at pipposteditor@live.com or call (661) 435-1261.

Next issue insider:

Halloween treat recipes,
fun activities, and other
holiday events going on
in the Los Angeles area.

Are you ready to help others?

Parents in Partnership is looking for parents to join our team. To qualify you must have had your case closed for at least one year, demonstrate at least 18 months of sobriety, and have a desire to help others. If you are interested, or know of someone who can be an asset to the team contact Anna at: (661) 223-4260 or Maureen at: (213) 639-4801



Parents in Partnership Participating Offices

DCFS BELVEDERE OFFICE

5835 S. Eastern Ave.,
Commerce, Ca 90040

Belvedere PIP Info Line (323) 725-4670

Serving Commerce, East L.A., Bell, Bell Gardens, Cudahy,
Huntington Park, Montebello, Maywood and Pico Rivera

LONG BEACH CITY – PACIFIC COAST CAMPUS

1305 E. Pacific Coast Hwy, Room FF101,
Long Beach, Ca.90806

Lakewood PIP Info Line (562) 497-3654

Serving Lakewood, Carson, Signal Hill, Long Beach, Wilmington,
and San Pedro

DCFS LANCASTER/PALMDALE OFFICES

39959 Sierra Highway, Suite 150, Palmdale, CA 93550

or

1150 W. Avenue J, Lancaster, CA 93534

Lancaster/Palmdale PIP Info Line (661) 223-4232

Serving the Antelope Valley

DCFS POMONA/EL MONTE OFFICES

100 W. Second St.
Pomona, CA 91766

or

4024 Durfee Ave.
El Monte, CA 91732

Pomona/El Monte PIP Info Line (909) 868-4572

Serving Diamond Bar, La Verne, Claremont, San Dimas, Pomona,
So. El Monte, La Puente, and City of Industry

METRO NORTH OFFICE

3075 Wilshire Blvd.,
Los Angeles, CA 90010

Metro North PIP Info Line (213) 639-4072

Serving Korea-town, Hollywood, Echo Park, Lincoln Heights,
Boyle Heights, Westlake, Atwater, Cypress Park, and Civic Center.

SANTA CLARITA OFFICE

28490 Avenue Stanford
Santa Clarita, CA 91355

Santa Clarita PIP Info Line (661) 702-6293

Serving Santa Clarita and the San Fernando Valley.