



# DCFS AT WORK

Investing in Los Angeles County families every day

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When Michael “Andreas” Thompson, an early COVID-19 survivor and social worker, was summoned to serve as a Los Angeles County Disaster Services Worker (DSW) with LA Family Housing, he immediately understood the risks that he would face. Yet, without apprehension he suited up and set out to help.

Donning personal protective equipment and fortified with hand sanitizer, Andreas walked up to 20,000 steps each day visiting homeless encampments for 12 weeks this summer, providing food and supplies, connecting residents with services and conducting tent-side coronavirus testing.

Partnered with another DCFS employee, Patrisha Taylor, Andreas found that it was second nature for them to dig deeper and keep asking questions in order to figure out how best to help. The two social workers are among thousands of county employees, across various departments, who have been tapped to serve in temporary assignments during the pandemic to ensure that essential services continue for county residents.

“It was easy to engage with the people we met because that’s what I do every day,” said Andreas, who is assigned to the Lancaster Emergency Response unit. “I think it was my background as a CSW—knowing what to do and who to call—that helped me push that extra mile to help.”

A marriage and family therapist, Andreas joined DCFS four years ago with a deep desire to help improve the lives of those less fortunate. During his recent stint as a DSW, he was reminded of why he does this work.

“Unfortunately, we live in a society where many families are two or three paychecks away from becoming homeless,” he said, noting that many of those he met were homeless as a direct result of the pandemic. “These are people in critical need, and without our support they wouldn’t have food or supplies, and some may have even lose their lives along the way. I always wanted to make a difference, and as I see it, what I did as a DSW is truly social work in its rawest form.”

Andreas and his fellow DSWs conducted outreach with homeless populations in North Hollywood, Studio City and the San Fernando Valley. Their goal was to get people off the street or make them as comfortable as possible when relocation was not an option.

While most of the people that he encountered living on the streets were unconcerned with the pandemic, Andreas witnessed rampant substance abuse and heard of instances of sexual assaults.

In fact, during his three-month assignment Andreas identified and forged connections with four youth who had been in foster care under the Extended Foster Care Program established by Assembly Bill 12 that allows eligible youth to stay in care until age 21. Andreas was able to use his expertise to reconnect the youth with their case workers and ultimately get them off the street.



On another particularly memorable occasion, he provided services to a 15-year-old pregnant youth who had been involved with DCFS but, more recently, had been reported missing. When Andreas encountered her at a homeless camp, she was with three adult men. Allegations of abuse involving the girl were reported to law enforcement.

Andreas said the experience opened his eyes to how intertwined child welfare and homeless issues can be. Although grateful to have helped those he met while working as a DSW, he acknowledges that there are likely other youths who have left foster care and may now be living among the county's homeless.

He now better understands the importance of maintaining strong partnerships with other agencies to better support vulnerable families and youth who are struggling to stay afloat amid increasing economic challenges.

Now back to his regular job at DCFS, Andreas expressed a profound appreciation for his experience as a DSW. "These past few months working with the homeless has taught me to re-evaluate my own actions, be more conscious of what I do on a daily basis, and truly appreciate everything that I have."



[Watch DCFS Children's Services Administrator Patrisha Taylor share her DSW experience.](#)

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