



Like most people who find their way into social work, Carlos wanted a career where he could make meaningful contributions to the lives of others. He began working with children at a local group home, which gave him a window into the aftereffects of childhood trauma. He joined DCFS in 1995 hoping to find a way to help children upfront, wanting to intervene early on before negative social and systemic experiences took a foothold.

When Carlos began working at the hotline eight years ago, he felt that he had found his calling. Carlos

walked in to a dynamic environment of systems and software designed to protect the wellbeing of children and improve outcomes. A perennial student with a love of math, physics and economics, he was excited to pursue his passion for helping people by exploring innovative ways to improve upon the impressive array of technology already in place.

In 2019, Carlos became the division's chief and – inspired by the transformational changes initiated by his predecessor, now Deputy Director Jennie Fera – committed to following the same path.

One such achievement was a project called, “Moving Families from the Hotline to a Helpline,” which was developed in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Office of Child Protection. Through this project, a mechanism was designed by which families who were referred to the hotline could be swiftly connected to child abuse prevention and aftercare services, expanding on the capabilities of the existing Community Based Response program.

The result of the “Hotline to Helpline” project was three times as many families receiving assistance. The project – praised for its innovation and results – earned the 2019 Gold Eagle Award bestowed by the Los Angeles County Productivity and Quality Commission.

While removing children from the home is sometimes unavoidable, in recent years, the department has shifted its focus to strengthening families through prevention and aftercare services which are intended to provide support to those at risk of becoming involved with the child welfare system.

With a staff of 200 employees who speak numerous languages, including Spanish, Cantonese and Armenian, the hotline receives as many as 1,200 daily calls. The phone lines are monitored 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with about 150 social workers on hand to assess each referral and determine how to respond. Carlos and five assistant regional administrators are always on hand, either on-site or on-call, to oversee operations.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, calls to the hotline declined by about forty percent as children were largely out of the line of sight of mandated reporters such as teachers and medical

personnel. These numbers have steadily increased after an extensive public education campaign that began in May urging community members to report suspected neglect or abuse.

Ultimately, Carlos recognizes that the success of the hotline doesn't rest on his shoulders alone. More than an intake unit, staff fielding calls must exhibit emotional intelligence to effectively interact with a variety of people, elicit important information and make real-time assessments about the appropriate response for each case. The work is fast-paced and the hours demanding yet the staff continues to thrive.



"During the current public health crisis, our staff at the hotline is still going strong, and I'm really proud of that," Carlos said.



Watch the Department receive the 2019 Golden Eagle Award for the "Hotline to Helpline" project.

Report Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect to 800-540-4000

Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services | www.dcfslacounty.gov | Follow us on [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)