



DCFS AT WORK

Investing in Los Angeles County families every day

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Social Worker Ivonne Crescioni believes every child deserves a loving home. So, even when she is off the clock, her recruiting hat is always on. Ivonne often strikes up conversations about the benefits of becoming a foster parent with anyone willing to listen.

“I recruit at every chance I have,” said Ivonne, who has been with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) since 1997, focusing on outreach and recruitment for the last 13 years of her career. “A DCFS staff member saw me talking to people at a car wash one Sunday morning and joked that I should be getting overtime. I even recruited the office manager at my dog’s veterinary office. When I first heard about Juntos con los Niños, I immediately volunteered because I knew I needed to be a part of this work.”

The Juntos con los Niños (JCLN) recruitment campaign was championed by Los Angeles County Supervisor Hilda Solis as a joint effort between DCFS and the Office of Immigrant Affairs. The objective of the campaign was to raise awareness about the need for Spanish-speaking foster families to support children and youth from the Latinx community. It also sought to dispel common myths about the requirements and process of becoming a resource parent.

With her affinity for recruitment and Spanish-language proficiency, Ivonne was a natural fit for the campaign. Recruiting foster families is a difficulty all child welfare agencies face, but Los Angeles County’s racial and ethnic diversity presents an added challenge for DCFS. Of the approximately 19,000 children in out-of-home placement, roughly half come from Latinx households where Spanish is the primary language.

Placing these children with bilingual families reduces language barriers and helps them feel more comfortable during a time that can otherwise be stressful and frightening. This also allows them to maintain a cultural connection, as DCFS strives to match children with families of similar heritage whenever possible. Common language and shared traditions can mitigate some of the negative impacts of childhood trauma, regardless of whether a placement is permanent or only temporary. With a name that means “Together with the Children,” JCLN aimed to support this type of cultural connection between child and foster parent.

Launched in March, the JCLN campaign encountered an immediate obstacle when the COVID-19 pandemic exploded around the world. County officials issued stay-at-home orders, limiting social interaction and closing government offices and other businesses as a health precaution.

In-person recruitment orientations were postponed as a result, but the JCLN campaign forged ahead nonetheless. The orientation was offered online, but this shift was a challenge for many Spanish-speaking families who tended to prefer in-person support and speaking directly with a bilingual social worker, according to Ivonne. She spent hours on the phone with families, answering questions, clarifying misinformation about the requirements to become a resource parent and assisting them with the application or online orientation.

Ultimately, more than 750 potential resource families expressed interest and requested additional information through the campaign. JCLN even generated interest from families in surrounding counties, according to Ivonne, who referred them to their county of residence. Seeing the positive impact that JCLN had on recruitment efforts, as well as its ability to reach into adjacent counties, was an exciting and encouraging sign for someone so dedicated to the cause.

While the campaign concluded at the end of September, Ivonne remains optimistic about the viability of future recruitment efforts. She believes that JCLN was successful in bringing attention to the needs of Latinx foster children and youth, while recognizing that this is an ongoing issue that cannot be solved with a single campaign.

“I come from a long line of professors and teachers, but I was rebellious and became a social worker instead,” Ivonne joked. “I believe recruitment is everyone’s responsibility, and it’s really a long game. Even if a family isn’t ready now, you never know about the future. You wouldn’t believe the number of calls I get two or three years later from families telling me they’re finally ready to open their hearts and home to a child in need.”



DCFS Chief Deputy Virginia Pryor and Supervisor Hilda Solis at the Juntos Con Los Niños press conference in March.

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