



More than 20 years ago, Social Worker Tanya Russell decided that when there was a crisis in Los Angeles County involving children she wanted to be among the first on the scene to offer hope and comfort to families.

Tanya arrived at this realization during one of her first investigations. On that occasion, she met a 9-year-old who had been sexually assaulted by a 15-year-old cousin. After the child revealed the secret, Tanya was there to help her family pick up the pieces.

She still remembers the tears streaming down the father's face and the helplessness he expressed because he hadn't been able to protect his child.

"That made me realize the power of social work," Tanya said. "You are going to be on cases where the family is hurt, all kinds of things are going on, and we have to help them believe that everything is going to be okay. I go into every situation humble and saying, 'What can I do to help you get through this.'"

Tanya, who began her career with the Department of Children and Family Services as a social worker trainee, joined the Emergency Response Command Post (ERCP) in 1999. While there have been opportunities to explore different career paths with the department, Tanya has elected to remain with ERCP indefinitely.

The team – comprised of more than 80 social workers, supervisors, assistant regional administrators, health services administrators and clerical staff – respond to all child abuse reports made to the county's Child Protection Hotline that require an immediate in-person response between 5 p.m. and 8 a.m.

After DCFS business hours conclude, on weekends and holidays, ERCP is responsible for the safety and well-being of the county's more than 2 million children. It is a 24-hour operation where Tanya currently works the graveyard shift from 11 p.m. to 9:30 a.m.

Given that ERCP staff are only called to assist in cases that require immediate support, their tasks regularly include picking up children at police stations and hospitals, and transporting youth who have run away from their placements and need emergency shelter care.

As Tanya tells it, the team works by one motto, "I got you," and the challenges posed by the pandemic have not fazed them. From driving COVID-positive youth, to holding and feeding a COVID-positive baby, to helping two young children (age 11 and 9) who were residing in a homeless shelter with their father when they all tested positive for the virus.

In the latter situation, the ERCP team located the children's mother, whom they had not seen for almost two years, attempted to orchestrate a virtual visit with their ailing father and mobilized an intervention when it came time to apprise the children that their father had passed away. ERCP then connected the family to resources including grief counseling.

For the team, it is hard to show up for families during challenging times, but it is also a privilege. "They do not complain," Tanya said. "They put on their personal protective equipment and it is all about the families."

In January, Director Bobby Cagle recognized ERCP's unwavering commitment to helping children, youth and families with the Director's Employee Recognition Award. After so many years of doing this demanding work, Tanya explains why this her home.

"I love ERCP," she said. "We work as a team and we are one big family, showing up for our DCFS family, and for all families in Los Angeles County."



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

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