



Under a microscope, an analysis of Jesse Moreno’s DNA would reveal his ancestry, physical features and, perhaps, upon closer inspection, a genetic predisposition for helping others.

His daughter Jessica Moreno and her four sisters grew up listening to stories of how their father was changing lives every day. Jesse shared how rewarding it was to be there for children and youth who didn’t have fathers or other positive male role models in their lives.

“My father was the biggest influence in the choosing of my career path,” she said. “I met a lot of my dad’s friends growing up and they always talked about how fulfilling it was to work with the community.”

Profoundly moved by her father’s experience, Jessica followed in his footsteps in 2016 and today works as a continuing services children’s social worker. Now, her eldest daughter, Jenica, is currently earning a psychology degree from UCLA and

considering a career in social work at DCFS. Jenica is expected to graduate in June.

Back when it all began, Jesse — then, preparing to return to teach children in a classroom — could’ve never imagined the legacy he was destined to build. Perusing through a newspaper in 1994, an employment ad for social workers caught Jesse’s eye and he thought, “That would be a great summer job!”

Nearly 30 years later, his summer with DCFS has not ended. Jesse, now a [Core Practice Model \(CPM\)](#) countywide coach, is a subject-matter expert on California’s child welfare framework that guides social work practice, service delivery and decision-making.

Jesse, who joined the department in an era of pagers and handwritten court reports, has seen many developments over the years. It is the current practice change, however, that makes him hopeful that families are being empowered to make behavioral changes that ultimately will keep their children safe.

“I have personally seen how we are growing, shifting from the old practice of telling families what to do, to getting into deep conversations about what has happened to them,” Jesse said. “We are identifying their strengths and getting to their underlying needs. That is key to this new practice.



Jessica and her father Jesse on the day of her First Communion in 1988.



"We have a much more balanced approach that acknowledges that every family has also had a history of protection at one point or another," he added. "So, we know that they are capable of protecting their children. With that in mind, we assess and identify protective factors that can lead to safety with our guidance."

As Jessica tells it, among the benefits of having a CPM expert in the family are the gems of knowledge imparted by her father. On one occasion, Jessica recalls she had a teenager on her caseload who had been in Transitional Shelter Care for an extended time period.

As she encountered some challenges in connecting with the youth, Jessica felt frustrated and stuck. Coincidentally, Jessica was working at the same

office as her dad at that time. So, she turned to him for guidance in his formal capacity as CPM coach and asked him to visit with the young man. She watched them interact and observed the engaging techniques he used with the teen.

At first the teenager had a wall up and wasn't responding. But by the time they concluded the visit, Jesse had managed to get the youth to open up. It was in that moment that the teenager finally shared what he wanted, a placement with someone who, in his words, "actually cared."

As the father and daughter left the location, Jesse said, "Sometimes you just have to spend time with them. Even if it's just sitting there, playing a video game. You must first connect and build trust before people can tell you what is going on with them inside their minds and hearts."

"Our job is not just about writing a report or doing paperwork," Jesse added. "It is about spending time with children and building a rapport. That is the most important part of social work."

That advice stayed with Jessica and she continues to apply that mindset to all of her cases. Jessica, who graduated from high school while pregnant with her second child and earned her college degree as a mother of five, now fully understands the personal and professional fulfillment of helping others that still fuels her father's passion.

As her own daughter explores careers paths, the prospect of welcoming her to DCFS thrills both Jessica and grandfather Jesse. The latter begs the question, might helping others and, perhaps, social work be in their family DNA?

"I don't know about the DNA part," said Jessica, laughing. "I was just fortunate to be born into a family who taught me to love myself and to love all people."

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