



## April is Child Abuse Prevention Month!

Together, we can create communities filled with hope so that all families thrive!

When the 38-year-old mother of three came to the attention of the [Prevention and Aftercare \(P&A\)](#) community agency, she was nearly at her wits end. Plagued by depression stemming from being abandoned by her own mother as a child, she struggled daily to manage her emotions and persistent negative thoughts about herself, others and her future.

The case of a young father trying to regain custody of his children also arrived at a P&A local agency with a sense of desperation and urgency. A victim of domestic violence, he battled feelings of low self-esteem and guilt as he sought to improve his parenting skills with the hope of moving forward as a single parent.

Alma Golla, P&A program manager, said both instances illustrate the significant and lasting impact that P&A services can have on families at a time when they need help the most.

“We are grateful to be able to connect those in need to resources that can help,” she said. “With services in one place, P&A provides a straightforward avenue for social workers to refer families, offering reassurance that parents and children continue to receive support, even after referrals are closed.”

Implemented in 2015, the P&A program seeks to address underlying factors that are associated with a greater risk of child maltreatment such as social isolation, poverty and lack of access to community resources.

The program is designed to prevent abuse before it occurs by connecting families with supportive services in the community that increase families’ [protective factors](#), attributes known to reduce the need for DCFS intervention and keep families out of the child welfare system.

The goal is to increase social networking, build self-sufficiency and economic stability, increase parental resilience and capacity, improve health outcomes, and broaden access to community supports and activities. Participants may receive counseling, cultivate an interest in a culinary or gardening program, take a parenting education class, or engage with others in a support group, among other options.

The program grew substantially starting in 2018 thanks to the generous support of the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health and Office of Child Protection, which helped identify additional funding to expand service offerings and access to families. During the 2019 contract term, DCFS invested nearly \$20 million in P&A services, with the goal of building communities of hope.

Relative to its size, the six-person P&A team has an outsized influence on the department’s ability to prevent abuse. Through contracts with provider agencies in each service planning area, as well as contracts focusing on the Asian and Pacific Islander and Native American populations, the team has the capacity to help families thrive in every part of Los Angeles County.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, families struggling with illness and economic instability relied more heavily on P&A services like housing and food assistance. As the pandemic continued and families experienced challenges with distance learning, some agencies found creative ways to help. One service provider, for example, turned their parking lot into an outdoor tutoring center where children could get help with homework and families could become more familiar with technology.

A recent analysis suggests that such efforts are paying off, according to Alma. Specifically, families that received P&A services were less likely to have a substantiated referral, and fewer families had to enter the child welfare system.



In the case involving the man who had escaped an abusive relationship and was trying to raise his children on his own, the P&A provider connected him to a series of parenting classes designed to strengthen and develop his protective factors. By implementing the skills learned and taking steps to rebuild the relationship with his children, he was able to regain full custody even when the pandemic tested his conviction.

For the stressed mother of three, the P&A program was truly a lifesaver. Through seven months of therapy, she explored how her feelings of abandonment affected her self-esteem and impacted her relationships with others. She worked hard to battle the depression, build her own resiliency, limit negative thoughts and reflect on the type of parent she wanted to be.

In a note to P&A staff, she wrote:

“Without the support, things would be the same – the same pain and bad relationships. Now, I feel strong and capable, and my life is better. I always wanted the help but could never get it. I’m so grateful that I could get these services.”



Check out our [digital toolkit](#) and help us create awareness about Child Abuse Prevention Month!

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

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