



DCFS AT WORK

Investing in Los Angeles County families every day

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High school cheerleading coach Nicole Trimble had never given much thought to the foster care system before she received a call for help from a Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) social worker in 2016. With one of her students in dire need of support after losing her foster care placement, Nicole made the decision to become a resource parent and has never looked back.

“When I went through the approval process, my youngest son was a senior in high school,” Nicole said. “But I just love having children around and once I got involved there was no way I could let it go without doing everything I could to help. My goal is to make memories with these children so they can look back on their time in foster care as a positive experience.”

Nicole is currently caring for two young children—one of whom she is in the process of adopting—as well as a daughter she legally adopted at age two. She credits the assistance and support of dedicated child welfare professionals like those in the DCFS

Resource Family Support Liaison (RFSL) Unit with helping her manage the day-to-day challenges of being a resource parent.

“The Resource Family Support Liaisons have always been so warm and welcoming,” she said. “They have been able to point me in the right direction when I hit bumps in the road, and because of them I truly feel like a partner in care.”

Recognizing the vital service that resource families provide and the impact they can have on child and family well-being, DCFS established the RFSL Unit in 2017 to strengthen connections between the department and approved caregivers and to offer additional resources around support and retention. Supervising Children’s Social Worker Jennifer Kerr oversees the unit, which is comprised of six liaisons and one support staff member.

According to Rebecca McCullough, a 37-year DCFS social worker who has been with the unit since its inception, the system naturally focuses on the needs of children and biological families, which can leave resource families feeling overlooked.

“Caregivers don’t always know where to go and case-carrying social workers are really busy,” Rebecca said. “Our job is to fill in that gap and do what we can to be a bridge between primary social workers, community agencies and the families caring for children who have been placed outside the home.”

RFSL liaisons each focus their efforts on different service planning areas across Los Angeles County. As social workers themselves, they speak the language and can address most common situations that arise, such as interpreting paperwork, troubleshooting issues and connecting families with resources in their communities.

"It's important that our families know they aren't doing this alone," said Anthony Cervantes, another social worker in the RFSL Unit. "If they feel alone, we want them to reach out to us for support. Sometimes it helps that we are able to step in and give a fresh perspective to make sure their needs are met."

According to Anthony, the work of a liaison varies depending on the needs of each case. They often serve crisis management and case navigation functions, and frequently work to identify tangible resources, answer questions or simply act as sounding boards.

"We aren't trying to take over for the primary social worker," he said. We take care to involve them in all decision-making and follow their lead when making suggestions. My philosophy is that we are all in this together to support families. If I don't have the answer, I will connect them with someone who does."



The unit maintains an open line of communication with all caregivers, engaging them on a regular basis to share resources, offer assistance and provide a forum for dialogue. The team members have also stepped up to assist the department with backlogs in recent years by temporarily managing a limited number of cases in addition to their regular liaison responsibilities.

Drive 4 Our Children

Become a LA County Resource Parent and Make a Difference "Grab and Go" Event

Learn how to become a foster or adoptive parent. Receive a Resource Family Approval packet and more.

MAY 22, 2021 / 10 AM - 12 PM
 Bethany Baptist Church of West LA
 4115 W. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd,
 Los Angeles, CA 90008
To RSVP call (888) 811-1121 or visit
www.FosterLAKids.org

Everyone must wear a face mask and remain in their vehicle.



Ensuring that resource parents feel heard and appreciated is at the heart of everything the liaison unit does. In addition to focusing on customer service in their day-to-day interactions with caregivers, the unit also plans and hosts appreciation events for families throughout the county.

"Sometimes all it takes is one moment, but it's so important," Anthony said. "Just knowing that someone appreciates them and is ready and willing to help can give families the oxygen to keep going."

The largest such event in recent years was in September 2019, where hundreds of children, youth and families were able to connect and enjoy a magical day together at Disneyland. While the pandemic curtailed in-person events such as these, the liaisons look forward to the day when these types of events will resume. In the meantime, they are currently working to secure appreciation pins that will be mailed to more than 8,500

caregivers across the county as part of National Foster Care Month.

Reflecting on her time as a resource parent, Nicole agreed that the sense of appreciation cultivated by the RFSL Unit has been invaluable.

"It really is a thankless job making sure we feel supported and valued, but I think what this unit does is so vital," she said. "Oftentimes as resource parents we feel expendable, but the liaisons are intentional

about finding ways to celebrate and appreciate us. They treat us like partners in every way and remind us that our thoughts, opinions and experiences matter.”

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