



Edwina and her adopted son in 1993.

Practicing what you preach is a way of life for veteran Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Social Worker Edwina Lewis, albeit one she did not necessarily expect when she entered the profession more than 35 years ago.

Early in her career, she fell in love with and adopted a young boy in foster care who had struggled to find a permanent home.

“For me this is deeply personal,” Edwina said. “My son is my inspiration and my continued reminder of why I do this work, especially when I try to imagine what his life might have been like if he had grown up in the system as an African American child.”

Edwina has spent a significant part of her social work career bringing interested individuals into the fold to serve as foster or adoptive parents – commonly known as “resource families” – for children and youth in the child welfare system. She currently works in the Outreach & Recruitment (O&R) Section of the Resource Family Recruitment and Approval Division.

Her efforts to recruit prospective parents are all the more meaningful because she knows firsthand the impact this bond can have on both parent and child. Recruiting prospective families, however, is an enduring challenge, particularly in Los Angeles County due to the size of the system and the number of children under DCFS supervision. One of the primary goals of the O&R section is to engage with and remind local communities of these children who are in need of loving support.

“These children are individuals, not just numbers,” Edwina said. “They have goals, aspirations and dreams, and just need someone to believe in them. People want to help, but they need information and guidance to do so, and that’s where we come in. Sometimes it takes engaging 100 families just to get one family who will move forward, but it’s worth it because that one can make a difference in the life of a child.”

According to Edwina, the [Resource Family Approval](#) (RFA) process can be daunting, but the O&R team is there to simplify and assist wherever possible. In addition to community education and outreach, O&R staff conduct work on the front end to ensure that applications move forward smoothly on the path toward approval for prospective resource families. Such prep work includes helping families get through paperwork and conducting orientations to prepare them for the road ahead.

“We are the first face in the RFA process and we pride ourselves in effective customer service,” Edwina said, noting that the strength of this team of outreach recruiters lies in their mutual respect and collaborative efforts to identify resources and provide support for families as they go through the process.



Prior to the pandemic, the section attended and hosted a variety of in-person events to educate the community. Multi-faceted events – such as the “Fostering Home” events held between May and November 2019 – were intended to reach as many families as possible and help them make informed decisions. These events also sought to streamline the process by offering all-in-one services onsite including orientation, training registration and Live Scan fingerprinting.

Such gatherings have been curtailed in the last year, moving to largely virtual platforms which made it challenging to reach families who are less technology-savvy. The team recently began engaging again with families in-person, which Edwina hopes will bring more prospective foster parents on board.

Despite the need, Edwina also recognizes that becoming a resource parent is not for everyone. She cautions against setting unrealistic expectations and seeks to be as forthcoming as possible with potential families.



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“Fostering or adopting can be beautiful and rewarding, but it is not without its challenges,” she said. “My experience helps me be authentic and honest about what families can expect.”

Edwina recommends attending an orientation session as a first step for those considering fostering or adopting. Even if prospective applicants ultimately decide that a parenting role isn't the best fit, she says there are many ways to get involved.

Three decades after becoming a family, Edwina's son, now 34, continues to motivate her own actions and how she

approaches her work.

“When I started out, I knew I wanted to go into an area of service where I could make a difference,” Edwina said. “I stay because the need is still so great. My son reminds me every day of how impactful this work can be. After more than 35 years, I have seen many positive changes and trends, but no matter what happens, the need is still there and there is still work to be done.”

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