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In 2005, Isabel Solis became a relative caregiver when a cousin struggling with a substance use disorder needed help. The Pacoima preschool teacher did not think twice about taking in her cousin's young children, the oldest of whom was 11 at the time.

"We said yes right away," recalls Isabel, referring to the decision she and husband Miguel made at the time. "We didn't really know what to expect, but we knew it was family and that we had the space and plenty of love to give."

When a child or youth may not safely remain at home and must enter foster care, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) strives to develop connections with relatives whenever possible.

By prioritizing kinship placements, DCFS seeks to improve stability and minimize instances of disruption and trauma.

The Department has multiple programs devoted to establishing family connections for children and youth in DCFS care, including the Permanency Partners Program (P3) and Upfront Family Finding (UFF). UFF, in particular, focuses on initiating family finding services within days of a child entering care, helping to increase the chances of placing children with relative caregivers.

"The early identification and involvement of relatives empowers families to play an active role in case planning and keeps children with caring adults with whom they have a trusting relationship," said Jane Gonzalez, a DCFS children services administrator with P3.

"Studies have shown that children placed with relatives experience reduced trauma and an increased sense of stability," she added. "They are more likely to remain in their schools and familiar communities, with trusted adults who have a vested focus on their continued physical and emotional well-being."

Isabel's young relatives were reunited with their mother after about a year, when she had received the help she needed. The experience, however, awakened something within Isabel, revealing an instinctive desire to help that she simply could not ignore.

For years after, Isabel and her husband worked with DCFS to foster a number of infants and young children. And then, thirteen years after it all began, the couple adopted a son.

Isabel acknowledges that being a caregiver is not without its challenges, noting that it can be intensely emotional and that navigating relationships can be tricky. However, she firmly maintains that it is an incredible gift to open your home to a child in need, especially one who is part of your own family.

Speaking from her own positive experience, Isabel strongly encourages others in her shoes to consider taking this meaningful step.

“Do what your heart feels, but remember that kids in the system don’t ask to be there,” she said. “They’re going through a challenging experience and being with a family member could help them feel more at home. There are also many resources available through DCFS and the community that can help.”

Looking back at the experience that started it all in 2005, Isabel knows she would do it all over again.

“Kinship care was new to us, and there were certainly times when it was hard,” she said. “But I also know that we were able to help my cousin’s children and give them love when they needed it most. We were really blessed to be able to do that for them, and I know I will continue to help children in need for as long as I possibly can.”



Isabel Solis and her husband, Miguel, who began their journey as relative caregivers in 2005.

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