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Before becoming executive director of ICAN in 1977, Deanne Tilton Durfee was a social worker and court liaison. She also went on to hold several leadership positions within DCFS.

Deanne Tilton Durfee is the executive director of the Los Angeles County Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN) — one of the largest county-based organizations examining child abuse in the country.

In this edition of DCFS at Work, Ms. Tilton Durfee offers an inside look at the various ways in which ICAN is helping to prevent the abuse and neglect of children in L.A. County.

How did you get involved in child abuse prevention work, and what brought you to ICAN?

I have always felt a call to serve children and families. In high school and college, I worked with children with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

My road eventually led to the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). During my time with DCFS, I held various positions that taught me how important it is to collaborate with other disciplines and the difference it can make during an investigation. As a supervisor and administrator, I promoted such cooperation by inviting law enforcement, medical specialists, school principals and resource parents to meet with and train my staff.

In 1977, the L.A. County Board of Supervisors created the Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN). Because of my unique interagency experience, I was selected to coordinate the council. I welcomed this opportunity because I saw enormous potential for ICAN and what it could do for children and families.

What is the primary purpose of ICAN, and what prompted its development?

In the early 1970s, there were five child abuse pioneers who recognized the importance of working together to protect children: a Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department sergeant, a Los Angeles Police Department detective, a Los Angeles County Office of Education administrator, a Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services manager, and a Los Angeles County Assistant District Attorney. They developed a trailblazing training that inspired the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to get involved, taking bold action to keep children safe from harm.

In 1977, the Board voted to establish ICAN as the County's official body to coordinate the prevention, intervention and treatment of child abuse and neglect. ICAN brings together organizations that touch all aspects of the issue to collaboratively review data, examine best practices and explore ways to improve the child welfare system's ability to ensure the well-being of children. The countywide Child Protection Hotline was launched at the same time to facilitate reporting of allegations of abuse and neglect.

Why is collaboration across agencies —particularly the partnership between ICAN and DCFS — important?

Child abuse prevention, intervention and treatment begins with recognizing that this is not a job for one agency or discipline. Over the years, as the breadth of issues addressed by ICAN expanded, our Policy Committee increased from nine to more than 30 members, including heads of county, city, state and federal agencies, the University of California Los Angeles, and five Board appointees. An Operations Committee, 15 interdisciplinary teams and sub-committees address specific issues and events related to child safety and well-being.

Together we have launched public health campaigns, issued comprehensive data reports, developed trainings, organized conferences and held critical interagency workgroup meetings to further our work in this area.

Our collaboration with DCFS is especially important. Social workers are heroes who knock on doors and make critical decisions every day that impact the lives of children and families. They need access to resources, information and a team of active collaborators who represent other disciplines and agencies that touch the lives of children and families. ICAN stands as an unwavering partner to DCFS in our shared goal to see all children grow up in safe and nurturing homes.

What effort at ICAN are you most proud of or, in your opinion, has had the most impact?

I am really proud of the annual conferences that we organize for a broad scope of child and family services providers, such as one around the impact of violence in the home on children and another examining grief and loss in children. I strongly believe in the importance of the various public education campaigns that we promote, including [Safe Surrender](#), [Safe Sleep](#) and the [No-Hit Zone](#) campaign. I am especially proud of our [Child Death Review Team](#), which has been enormously impactful and sparked replication nationally and internationally.

The Child Death Review Team is comprised of representatives from the medical community; the Los Angeles Police and Sheriff's Departments; the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office; the County Offices of Education, County Counsel and the District Attorney; and the County Departments of Children and Family Services, Health Services and Mental Health. Its purpose is to evaluate child fatality data and information from multiple sources and issue recommendations that can be incorporated into policy and practice across the child welfare system.

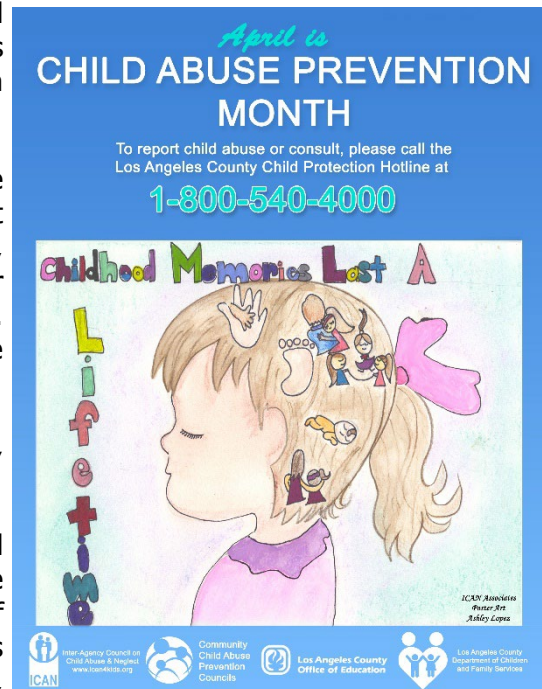
I'm really pleased that our team has served as a model for similar groups in every county across California, all states in the U.S. and even in multiple countries, including England, Scotland, Japan, Portugal and Australia. ([CDRT Multidisciplinary Team Award](#))

What is ICAN doing to observe National Child Abuse Prevention Month?

Leading up to Child Abuse Prevention Month, we recently held the 26th Annual ICAN Nexus Conference titled [Violence in the Home and its Effects on Children](#). The conference, attended by in-person and virtual participants, included more than 100 DCFS representatives.

Each year in April, we also sponsor the Child Abuse Prevention Month Children's [Poster Art Contest](#) along with our related nonprofit organization, ICAN Associates. Hundreds of fourth, fifth and sixth graders throughout the County participate by creating poster art to express their concerns, ideas and recommendations to prevent harm to children. Art docents, county department heads, Board Supervisors and child abuse experts select 25 youth to receive scholarships based on the impact of their artwork. Another 100 students will receive Honorable Mention recognition this year.

More information on ICAN projects, reports and activities is available at www.ican4kids.org.



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