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**Child Protection Hotline Social Worker Teri Johnson Kemp works with experts to connect families with resources through the Domestic Violence Project.**

Those immersed in the field of child welfare such as the staff at the county’s Child Protection Hotline (CPH) understand that allegations of child abuse and family violence may sometimes be linked.

The key to helping families is recognizing that, while intimate partner violence may occur in a home, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) should only intervene if children are at imminent risk of harm.

To better address the needs of families facing domestic violence, the department launched the Domestic Violence Project in March. CPH Division Chief Carlos Torres called the pilot a game-changing initiative.

“We now have access to experts who can give us an enhanced perspective into a complex issue, and who provide invaluable guidance, insight and training to inform our decision making,” he said.

Carlos gave credit to Assistant Regional Administrator Shiloh Davenport, who spearheaded the two-year effort alongside a number of internal and external partners, for recognizing the benefits the innovative pilot could have for families early on. Now, veteran Social Worker Teri Johnson Kemp and a small team of hotline workers are the project’s driving force as it continues to evolve.

Teri, a hotline worker since 2010, said that while DCFS’ focus is the safety of the children, the organization is also concerned about the well-being of the whole family unit.

“Domestic violence is a complex issue that affects so many people, and there’s a big need for resources to help address it throughout our communities,” she said. “This project is helping us better understand the extent of this need and where additional investment is warranted.”

The Domestic Violence Project calls for hotline personnel to flag calls involving allegations of intimate partner violence. Thereafter, Teri and the team coordinate with domestic violence experts at the [YWCA of San Gabriel Valley](#) to provide a tailored list of resources depending on a family’s circumstances. Families may be referred to local shelters, anger management or parenting classes. Resource recommendations are also shared with investigating social workers, while the expert remains available for consultation and follow-up.

One of the primary purposes of the project is to collect and analyze data on calls to the hotline that involve intimate partner violence. This will inform future planning and resource allocation, as well as identify *hot spots* where more local resources are needed.



The project continues to build momentum. In August, more than 500 calls were flagged and referred to the project team. DCFS leadership is confident that the partnership has led to better decision-making and quicker connections to services for families.

“Before the project, our assessment was a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ as to whether domestic violence was involved,” Carlos said. “Now they are more comprehensive and precise and we are using data to identify trends and areas of need.”

While not all calls involving intimate partner violence include an immediate risk to the safety of children in the home, the Domestic Violence Project offers an opportunity to provide help and show families that services and supports are available.

“This project perfectly encapsulates the department’s shift from ‘mandated reporters to mandated supporters,’” Teri said. “Even when we determine that a child is safe, we don’t simply hang up the phone. Offering connections to domestic violence resources at an early stage allows us to support and strengthen the entire family, reducing risk and creating a safer environment for children and youth.”

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

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