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The Family First Prevention Services team is engaging professionals and community members to enhance child abuse prevention services in the county.

Community engagement sharpens focus on prevention efforts

The aroma of coffee and a feeling of excitement filled the room as community agency staff, lived experience experts, tribal and system partners greeted one another at a convening in March, where professionals dedicated to the well-being of families gathered for a second day to discuss the status of child abuse prevention services in Los Angeles County.

Those present came together during the [2024 Statewide Collaborative Prevention Convening](#) to talk about local and statewide strategies for implementing the federal [Family First Prevention Services Act \(FFPSA\) legislation](#).

The virtual first day of the state-sponsored convening was attended by more than 820 participants from 48 counties and 19 tribes. Also in attendance were community-based partners, lived experience experts and other subject-matter experts. Breakout workshops included reviews of ongoing prevention efforts throughout the state and conversations about how to engage with community and tribal partners in co-creating prevention programs.

On the second day of the event, counties throughout the state met in person and communicated with state officials by way of virtual platforms. In Los Angeles County, the Department of Children and Family Services' (DCFS) Family First Prevention Services (FFPS) team coordinated the in-person gathering, which allowed for an open dialogue between participants around ongoing prevention pilots featured in the [L.A. County 3-Year Comprehensive Prevention Plan \(CPP\)](#).

The CPP has allowed the county to make the most of its long-standing and diverse relationships with community and system partners, tribes, and lived experience experts to redesign child abuse prevention services. The goal is for all children and families to have access to culturally relevant services in their communities that meet their needs.

DCFS Director Brandon T. Nichols kicked off the conversation with encouraging L.A. County data that indicated the department's cases have declined by more than a third in the past decade. Director Nichols added that the number of young people in care has also decreased by about 40% compared to 15 years ago.

The director also highlighted the central thread running throughout the day's discussion: that the key to improving prevention services is for system administrators like DCFS to adopt an assisting role, allowing providers and residents who are more in tune with local needs to drive decision-making.

“DCFS is humbling itself and realizing the power and insight that exist at the local level,” he said, adding that he views the CPP as a contract with the community — a promise of how collaboration can strengthen families and keep them safely together.

Child and family well-being is a shared responsibility acknowledged by the Los Angeles County contingent of DCFS leaders, providers, advocates, funders, community members and others who attended the convening.

By investing in prevention work on the ground, DCFS intends to make the safety net for children more robust and resources more accessible to families to prevent them from ever becoming involved with the child welfare system.



Deputy Director Angela Parks-Pyles, the executive sponsor of the DCFS FFPS implementation team, echoed Director Nichols’ optimism.

“We will continue to be trailblazers in this work!” she said, pledging the department’s continued cooperation as facilitators and champions while the process to expand services and enhance local capacity evolves.

Throughout the day, those gathered reviewed data and recommendations included in the CPP. FFPS implementation team members additionally shared how the plan addresses the over-representation of Black families in the child welfare system, including identifying culturally relevant services and finding innovative ways to build and sustain these resources.

At small table discussions, more was shared by advocates, service provider representatives, community members and individuals with lived expertise about the ongoing work to shift decision-making on service design and delivery to the community, rather than prescribing a top-down approach.

One attendee said they were surprised not only at the candid feedback gathered from community focus groups but also by the humility shown by system administrators and their receptivity to such feedback.

Attendees ended the day poised to use their collective energy and interdisciplinary knowledge to propel the CPP forward. In the coming months, efforts will focus on establishing reliable feedback channels, as well as recruiting more lived experience experts and helping them develop advocacy abilities to impact system change.

Confident that these next steps will allow the department to better integrate feedback from experts and other local partners, the FFPS team ultimately envisions a county where children and families receive the help they need from community organizations to successfully navigate life’s challenges before ever experiencing a crisis.

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