



# DCFS at Work Investing in Los Angeles County families every day

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**Jennifer Olague of Santa Fe Springs helps other parents find hope and healing as a mentor with DCFS' Parents in Partnership program.**

## After achieving family reunification, one mom pays it forward

If Jennifer Olague was someone easily influenced by the opinions or judgments of others, she might've opted to keep her complicated past to herself.

Instead, Jennifer — one of 20 Parent Partners with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) — shares her experiences openly to help other parents facing similar situations.

"I love encouraging parents to see that there is more to them than the allegations in their file," said Jennifer, a 15-year veteran of the Parents in Partnership program at DCFS. "If an addict like me can be where I am today, I'm proof that they can change too."

At 30, Jennifer experienced a severe relapse and a prolonged period of instability, prompting her mother to contact DCFS. After an investigation, the allegations made against Jennifer were substantiated, and her daughters were relocated for their safety to a foster home nearly 90 miles away in San Bernardino County.

"I was angry and loud," Jennifer said, recalling her first meeting with a DCFS social worker. "I hit the table, told DCFS to pretty much screw themselves, and stormed out of the office."

Not long after that meeting, Jennifer entered an outpatient drug program and the hard work began with one goal in mind: To be a better mother to her daughters by creating a safe home environment, so they could all be together.

"My girls never once judged me," Jennifer said. "They were my driving force to get clean and stay clean."



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For some time, feeling hopeless, ashamed and frustrated, Jennifer pushed away social workers and others. She relapsed before court hearings, went to jail, and eventually stopped seeing her girls altogether when the pain of being separated became more than she could withstand.

All of this changed, however, at an inpatient treatment program when her social worker helped her confront deep-rooted issues that had been sabotaging her recovery. Jennifer vividly recalls her words: "Let's do this together."

Jennifer explains, "It was at that moment that I knew I could lean on this person and that she didn't just see me as another drug addict mom. We were a team, and that's when I knew that I could do this."

The breakthrough allowed Jennifer to surrender fully to the recovery process. Over many months, Jennifer took steps to heal unresolved, painful emotions and self-defeating thoughts from the childhood trauma that initially made her seek relief in drugs. With newfound support, she began substance abuse and mental health treatment and gradually rebuilt her relationships with her daughters, progressing from one-hour visits to overnight stays. Eventually, through the Section 8 housing program, Jennifer secured a three-bedroom home for her and her girls.

"I tell parents the whole process is hard," Jennifer said. "It's hard to change your life, but it can be done."

After her case was closed, Jennifer was inspired to help others. Today, she continues to use her bilingual skills, lived experience and compassion to serve families in the communities of Santa Fe Springs, Pomona and Glendora.

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**- Jennifer Olague  
Parent Partner**