



DCFS at Work Investing in Los Angeles County families every day

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Child Care Program provides meaningful support for caregivers

For people with caretaking responsibilities involving children, few things offer the peace of mind that comes from finding dependable, affordable child care where little ones are safe, nurtured and introduced to educational concepts.

Suzette and Chris Gagne, both full-time employees, understand this first-hand. For the past six years, the Palmdale couple have been raising three grandchildren – two 6-year-olds and a 4-year-old – whom they are in the process of adopting.



Suzette and Chris Gagne are in the process of adopting the three young grandchildren in their care.

Daily after school, their grandchildren attend a licensed, in-home child care facility in their community. There, they spend afternoons creating arts and crafts projects, playing, doing homework and sometimes napping – all under the watchful eye of a neighbor whom the children “love like she’s family,” said Suzette.

“The child care has been a blessing,” she added, underscoring her gratitude for Social Worker Andrea Webb, who linked the couple with the Child Care Program at the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

The program, which provides up to \$1,500 per child per month, offers a community of care for children in vulnerable situations, according to Child Care Program Director Steve Sturm. The benefit is available to parents, relative caregivers and foster parents whose children are 13 years old or younger and receive support services from DCFS. Youth with exceptional needs may qualify for extended support through age 21.

Once approved, families may choose any licensed child care facility that works best for them. The department then provides them with financial support for two-year increments, which continues during that period even if their case closes.



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“Getting a child into a social and educational setting helps them immensely as they grow up,” said Steve, who has been with DCFS for 31 years. “For the families we serve, it’s a huge cost savings and gives caregivers respite or allows them to work or attend school.”

Steve oversees a team of 36 staff, whom he characterizes as “the most dedicated, devoted, inspirational employees.” While the program already supports 1,500 families annually, it is piloting an expansion intended to assist higher-need families in the emergency response stage. Steve estimates the expansion may be able to reach as many as 1,400 additional families.

The pilot will initially focus on families in the Antelope Valley and South Los Angeles, with a goal of expanding department-wide by the end of the year.



Child Care Program Director Steve Sturm oversees a team of three dozen staff who help families find child care and other practical resources.