



DCFS at Work

Investing in Los Angeles County families every day

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The day began with a drum circle by African Soul International, infusing a pulse of culture and community into the 10th Annual Cultural Broker Summit.

Bridging the Gap: Cultural Brokers Celebrate More Than 10 Years of Impact

On Dec. 9, the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) hosted the 10th Annual Cultural Broker Summit. The gathering brought together community and faith-based stakeholders, child welfare professionals, regional leaders and cultural brokers — trusted local paraprofessionals who serve as liaisons between families and systems — to discuss the future of African American and Black families who have long been over-represented and under-supported.

The summit opened with a powerful drumming circle. Emcee Tramisha Poindexter, who entered foster care at 14, reinforced the importance of lived experience and trust, reminding the more than 300 attendees that child welfare systems feel very different depending on where you stand within them. The event's theme, "Honoring Our Legacy, Shaping Our Future," set the tone for a day that balanced reflection with urgency.

"It's clear that safety is a priority of child protection and the only way to ensure safety is engaging the community," said keynote speaker Dr. David Sanders, executive vice president of Casey Family Programs and former DCFS director. Reflecting on his time leading the department more than two decades ago, Dr. Sanders recalled when the City of Compton lacked a DCFS office, despite many families coming from that area. Alongside other critical efforts, the establishment of the DCFS Compton Regional Office (known as the Compton-Carson Office) helped pave the way for many of today's community-centered reforms.

Speakers highlighted measurable progress across Los Angeles County, including a dramatic reduction in the overall number of children in foster care from approximately 34,000 two decades ago to roughly a third of that today.



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Data shared by Dr. Wendy Wiegmann of UC Berkeley's Child Welfare Indicators Project showed similar gains: fewer African American and Black children are entering foster care than in 2019, and children today are half as likely to enter foster care as they were six years ago.

For African American and Black families, cultural brokers have been key to that progress — helping families navigate a system that can feel overwhelming, advocating for strengths, and volunteering their time to help prevent unnecessary system involvement whenever possible so children can remain safely connected to their families and communities.



DCFS Director Brandon T. Nichols spoke with DCFS Deputy Director Angela Parks-Pyles and the Good+ Foundation's Dr. Alan-Michael Graves on the importance of intentionality, trust and partnerships in advancing equity in child welfare at the 10th Annual Cultural Broker Summit.

Still, disparities persist. Dr. Wiegmann underscored that African American and Black children continue to be reported to the county's Child Protection Hotline at disproportionately high rates and remain overrepresented in foster care. Despite notable change, speakers stressed that equity requires sustained commitment through allyship, intentional engagement and innovative approaches that support families earlier, before intervention becomes necessary.

As DCFS Deputy Director Angela Parks-Pyles emphasized: "Community is the heartbeat of this work."

To learn more about the Cultural Broker Program or how to become a volunteer cultural broker, email vip@dcfs.lacounty.gov.