



DCFS at Work Investing in Los Angeles County families every day

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DCFS social worker Michael Jules, founder of the “A Greater Me” (AGM) program, stands surrounded by proud graduates on Feb. 28.

How ‘A Greater Me’ is Empowering Young Men in Foster Care

For the hundreds of young men leaving foster care in Los Angeles County each year, adulthood can arrive abruptly, often with little certainty about long-term housing and steady guidance. Research shows that by their mid-20s, only about half of former foster youth are employed and many experience housing instability. Yet studies also reveal something powerful: one consistent adult relationship can alter that trajectory.

That insight is the core of “A Greater Me” (AGM), a Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) program now in its second year. This innovative series

of weekly workshops empowers young men in foster care, ages 14 to 21, to build what its founder calls a “vibrant, resilient and forward-thinking community.”

Michael Jules, a DCFS social worker in the Torrance Office who created AGM, said he was inspired to start the program to help young people transition from care with the practical tools needed for independent living.

Supported by DCFS staff and community volunteers, AGM helps young men successfully navigate housing, employment and healthy relationships. Before graduation, participants are gifted professional attire, shoes and backpacks to help them move forward in pursuing their education and career goals.

After graduating 17 young men in AGM’s inaugural year in 2025 — five of whom returned this year as volunteer mentors — Michael expanded the program from five to nine consecutive Saturdays. This year’s cohort met at Metro LA Church of Christ in Gardena, culminating with a graduation ceremony on Feb. 28. Each week, participants engaged in 45-minute workshops on topics such as financial literacy, emergency preparedness and conflict de-escalation strategies — all designed to help them build independence and self-worth.

Over the past decade, DCFS has increasingly invested in strategies to support transition age youth in moving from care to independence. For example, the department’s Youth Development Services Division works with young people to navigate housing and employment and prepare for higher education.



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At last month's AGM graduation ceremony, 20 young men walked across the stage in new suits, ties, caps and gowns, and smiles on their faces. For some, it was the first graduation ceremony of their lives. The church where they had met for the past two months was now filled with family members, social workers, friends, community supporters and volunteers, all proudly watching them take steps to achieve their dreams.

Among the graduates was 16-year-old J'Sean from South Los Angeles, a returning participant and one of this year's graduation speakers. The thunderous applause that greeted him made it clear that he had emerged as a leader among his peers.

"This program has taught me a lot of things I didn't know before," he told those in attendance.



AGM graduate J'Sean, 16, feels more confident about his life path after completing the nine-week DCFS program.

J'Sean shared how AGM had sharpened his focus and clarified his ambitions, including his dream of becoming a civil engineer to build affordable housing, and one day attending UCLA. This year's financial literacy sessions left a strong impression on him, notably the lessons on compound interest and protecting his credit, which J'Sean sees as foundational to long-term independence. Equally meaningful, he said, were the bonds he formed with his cohort, connections that will continue through their group chat, named "The Valuables."

J'Sean's message to future AGM participants: "If you don't have a goal, get one. If you see an opportunity, take it. Never wait to do things because sometimes the opportunity may pass."

On the first day of this year's program, each young man received a pot, a handful of soil, a seed, and instructions on the importance of nurturing it and returning each week ready to water it again. At graduation, each participant entered the auditorium carrying their small, uniquely decorated earthen pot sheltering a green seedling stretching toward the sky, a fitting start to a day marked by growth and achievement.

"The platform of the program is planting a seed," said Michael, who is already planning for next year's AGM cohort, in addition to exploring the possibility of launching something similar for youth ages 10 to 14. "I tell them, 'You're the seed. The soil is all the people you let assist you. Because it takes a village. It's up to you to choose the right nutrients.'"