



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

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**Talya Thompson's participation in the BREATHE Los Angeles County pilot led to her job with the South Bay Center for Counseling.**

## Program Puts More Than \$15 Million Directly Into the Hands of Youth in Foster Care

In 2021, while still in extended foster care, Talya Thompson applied to be a part of Los Angeles County's groundbreaking universal basic income pilot, BREATHE, which included current and former youth in care.

Once enrolled, Thompson received a monthly stipend of \$1,000 and case navigation services. With that support, she earned her high school diploma and her license as an esthetician.

But perhaps most transformative was her connection to a coach from South Bay Center for Counseling (SBCC), the 50-year-old community-centered nonprofit

administering the program. That mentorship set Thompson on a path to a career where she could do what she loves most: positively impact the life trajectories of other youth transitioning out of foster care.

"My coach at SBCC was really focused on supporting me in my interests," Thompson said. "They saw me. They matched me with resources. I felt that awe moment, like I found a second home."

Today, Thompson works at SBCC herself. She is one of a dozen youth formerly in foster care who graduated from BREATHE into full-time employment as coaches and resource navigators for the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) ENRICH Stipend Program. Launched in late 2024 and set to conclude this year, ENRICH targeted 2,100 youth in care ages 18 to 21 who were participating in the county's Supervised Independent Living Program.

At its inception, DCFS Deputy Director Kym Renner and her team allocated more than half (\$19 million) of a time-limited \$33 million state grant to create ENRICH with remarkable speed. The program builds off the infrastructure pioneered by the Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office's Poverty Alleviation Initiative and SBCC through BREATHE to offer young participants debit cards that they can use for almost anything that adds value to their lives, from driving and music lessons to yoga classes and even dinners with friends and family. Each young person gets \$500 a month to spend on these items.

"These experiences are critical to the development of the youth in care," Renner said. "All children and youth deserve to do something enriching, that enhances their confidence, builds new skills and possibly sparks a lifelong interest."



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Of the \$19 million being poured into the program, \$15.5 million is in direct payments to youth, while SBCC uses \$3.3 million to support participants with coaching, financial literacy education and overall support, including the guidance of coaches like Thompson who experienced the child welfare system firsthand.

Jennifer Henriquez is an eight-year veteran of DCFS who started working with youth preparing to exit foster care a little less than two years ago. She currently handles a caseload of 15 young people enrolled in ENRICH. Henriquez loves the flexibility of the program, which she says, reinforces to youth: “You are not just a number in the foster care system. We want you to be empowered.”

Henriquez shared an example of one of her clients who used her stipend to pay for a passport application fee and buy a plane ticket to visit her nieces and nephews in Mexico.

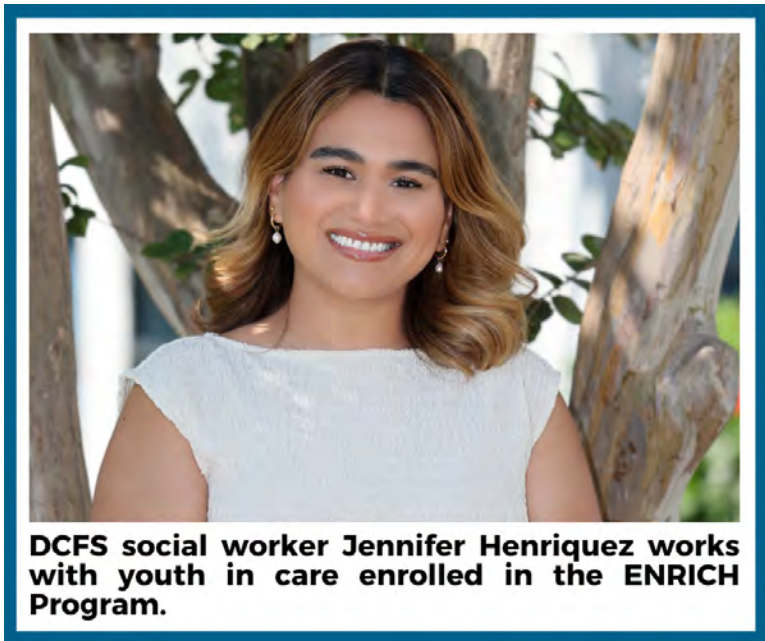
“This program helps young people maintain meaningful connections, which is so important,” she said.

Another ENRICH participant used her stipend to put herself through a six-week course to become an eyelash technician and now runs her own business at home.

“She messages me saying I am in the wrong field,” Henriquez said with a chuckle. “These lash technicians can make so much!”

Thompson, now part of the SBCC leadership team designing youth development curricula, relishes the chance to give back. She talks about helping young people get their driver’s licenses and supporting them in identifying opportunities to improve their mental wellness, which can be as simple as going to the hair salon.

“For me, being a former foster youth, I know the impact the BREATHE program had on me,” Thompson said. “I know what the impact of having a one-on-one mentor can be. And now I get to do it myself, and I am seeing the impact immediately.”



**DCFS social worker Jennifer Henriquez works with youth in care enrolled in the ENRICH Program.**