



DCFS at Work Investing in Los Angeles County families every day

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Foster parents Maria and Jorge celebrate Jose's high school graduation, a milestone they helped make possible after welcoming him into their home at age 12.

One Couple Redefines the Term 'Family Medicine'

Growing up in Mexico in the 1980s, Maria and Jorge each experienced the warmth and connection of a large extended family rooted in shared history, identity and tradition.

After marrying, settling in the east San Gabriel Valley and raising two children, Maria found herself reflecting on those close family bonds. She realized that her daughter and son would likely never experience the same sense of extended family she had known. Inspired by a friend who had become a foster parent, Maria and Jorge began considering an alternate path to expanding their family.

"We talked about it with our kids and they got very excited about having siblings in the home," Maria said.

In 2018, Maria and Jorge became foster parents, first welcoming a sibling set into their home temporarily. Soon after, they welcomed Daniel, an 11-year-old boy, and later learned he had a 12-year-old brother, Jose, who had diabetes and needed unique care. Rather than seeing Jose's healthcare needs as a barrier, they embraced the opportunity to keep the brothers together, and offered to provide them both with a safe, stable home alongside their biological children. Through the Medical Case Management Services (MCMS) Unit at the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the couple completed training to learn how to properly care for Jose, one of nearly 300 children and youth receiving services from the department who are deemed medically fragile.

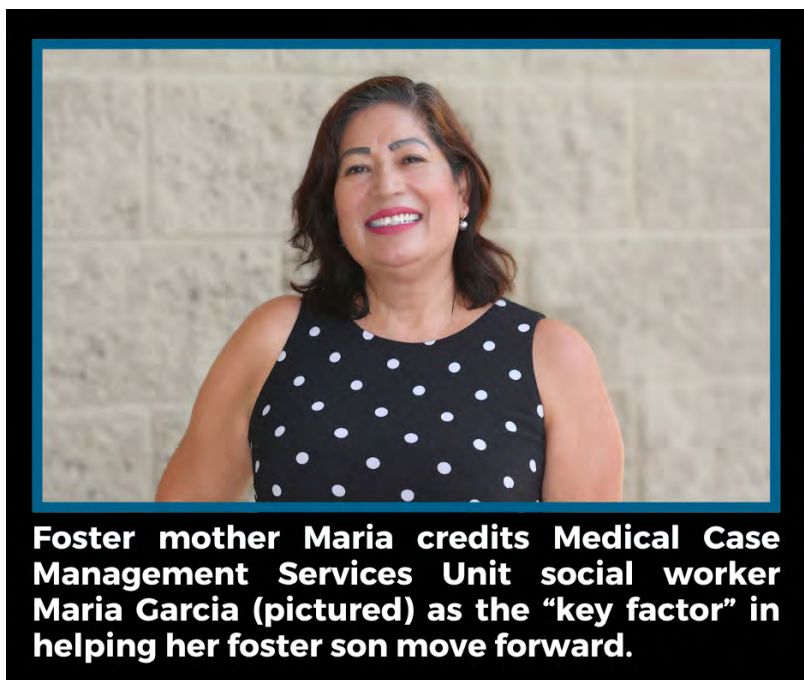
The designation applies to children and young adults — from birth through age 21 — who have health conditions that require individualized assistance and trained caregiver support. In concert with two dedicated intake coordinators, MCMS social workers arrange specialized medical care, connect families with training, equipment and services, and match children with medically trained caregivers. These foster families make it possible for children with complex health care needs to grow and heal while receiving the tailored support they need until they can safely return home, when possible.



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At Maria and Jorge's house, helping Jose manage the condition swiftly became part of the family's routine. Every night around midnight, Maria quietly checked Jose's blood sugar and left juice nearby in case his levels dropped. While she worked nights, Jorge prepared carefully portioned school lunches and diabetes-friendly snacks. Each morning, Maria again checked Jose's levels; and, after school, Jose texted her his glucose reading so they could determine his insulin dose.

Over the years, Jose, his siblings and foster parents enjoyed family movie nights, home-cooked meals and shared a lot of laughter. While his illness factored into the family's everyday lives, it did not lessen their quality of life or joy.



"They're very family-oriented," said Maria Garcia, a MCMS social worker who has worked with Jose since his biological parents began receiving services from DCFS. "Aside from ensuring that Jose's medical needs are met, they provide Jose with a warm, nurturing and safe home. Jose's foster siblings, too, have played a major role in his stability. They all look out for each other and celebrate one another's accomplishments."

Shortly after the boys came into their care, Maria and Jorge learned their father was battling terminal cancer. Before his death, they vowed to care for his sons.

Today, Jose is 19 years old and entering his second year at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, effectively navigating his health while pursuing his degree. Daniel, now 18, is preparing to begin his freshman year at University of California, Santa Cruz. Both remain close with their foster parents and siblings, their family in every sense of the word.

Watching the brothers graduate from high school, enroll in college, and seeing Jose manage his diabetes independently has made Maria and Jorge feel that they are honoring their promise to care for them.

"When they accomplish something in life, I tell them, 'Dedicate that to your dad,'" Maria said. "In my prayers, I say to their dad, 'Look what your boys have accomplished.'"