



DCFS at Work Investing in Los Angeles County families every day

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For kinship caregiver Jessica, who unexpectedly stepped in to care for her two younger siblings, support from her community provided a lifeline.

An Older Sister's Journey to Becoming a Single Parent Overnight

Deep in personal grief after the passing of her partner earlier this year, San Fernando Valley resident Jessica, 30, stepped into a role she never expected just six days after his funeral.

She became a kinship caregiver to her two sisters, ages 11 and 12, when they could no longer safely live with their mother.

Kinship caregivers are relatives or others with a close connection to a child who temporarily become their primary caregivers until their parents can safely bring them back home. In Los Angeles County, roughly 45% of youth in care reside with kin.

Fueled by love, faith and an instinct to protect the girls, Jessica welcomed them without hesitation, assuming the role of a single parent and taking responsibility for their full-time care. This included preparing their meals, making sure they had clean clothing and providing reliable transportation to and from school. She also began doing this on one income while working full time to pay rent and utilities and spending hundreds of dollars a week on gas.

"At first, I was very stressed because I didn't know how we were going to get things done," Jessica said.

Recognizing the financial and emotional toll of the situation on Jessica, the family's social worker reached out to Yanel Buenrostro, an adoptions assistant for the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) at its Van Nuys regional office. Working with Faith-Based Liaison (FBL) and Children's Services Administrator Candice Price, Yanel helps connect families with urgent needs to local churches, community organizations and donors by way of an online platform called CarePortal.



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Requests may range from essentials such as a bed, groceries, clothing or a car seat to more specific ones like transportation to a medical appointment, a wheelchair or help with temporary housing. The most pressing requests are often fulfilled within 24 hours, while others generally take one to five days. In the first half of this year, 477 requests for families in crisis were fulfilled through CarePortal.

For kinship caregivers like Jessica, the help can be especially important as they often have little time to prepare, and it can take weeks for financial support through DCFS to begin. With Yanel's assistance, Jessica swiftly received the practical help she needed within days. A local church provided Jessica with \$1,500 in gift cards, which she used for food and clothing. Another church provided two couches, a gift that was particularly meaningful once Jessica realized it came from the church she attends every Sunday.

Having this kind of resource for families in need is invaluable, according to Yanel.

"Most of these caregivers are grandmothers who haven't worked in a while, and they need milk, a crib, car seats," Yanel said. "It's for emergencies. Especially with Jessica, the girls arrived with nothing; no backpack, no clothes."

Often initiated by CarePortal exchanges — with FBLs active in all 19 regional offices — relationships between requesters and donors sometimes grow into lasting connections and continued sources of support after the first interaction.

Since DCFS introduced CarePortal in 2020, approximately 6,000 children have benefitted from more than \$4 million in fulfilled requests, and the department continues to expand CarePortal's reach.

For Jessica, that connection is proof she is not carrying the responsibility of caring for her sisters alone.

"Having that additional help was a reminder of how God still continues to provide," she said. "It felt like grace that I was receiving."



Through her role at DCFS, Yanel Buenrostro connects caregivers to support through CarePortal.