

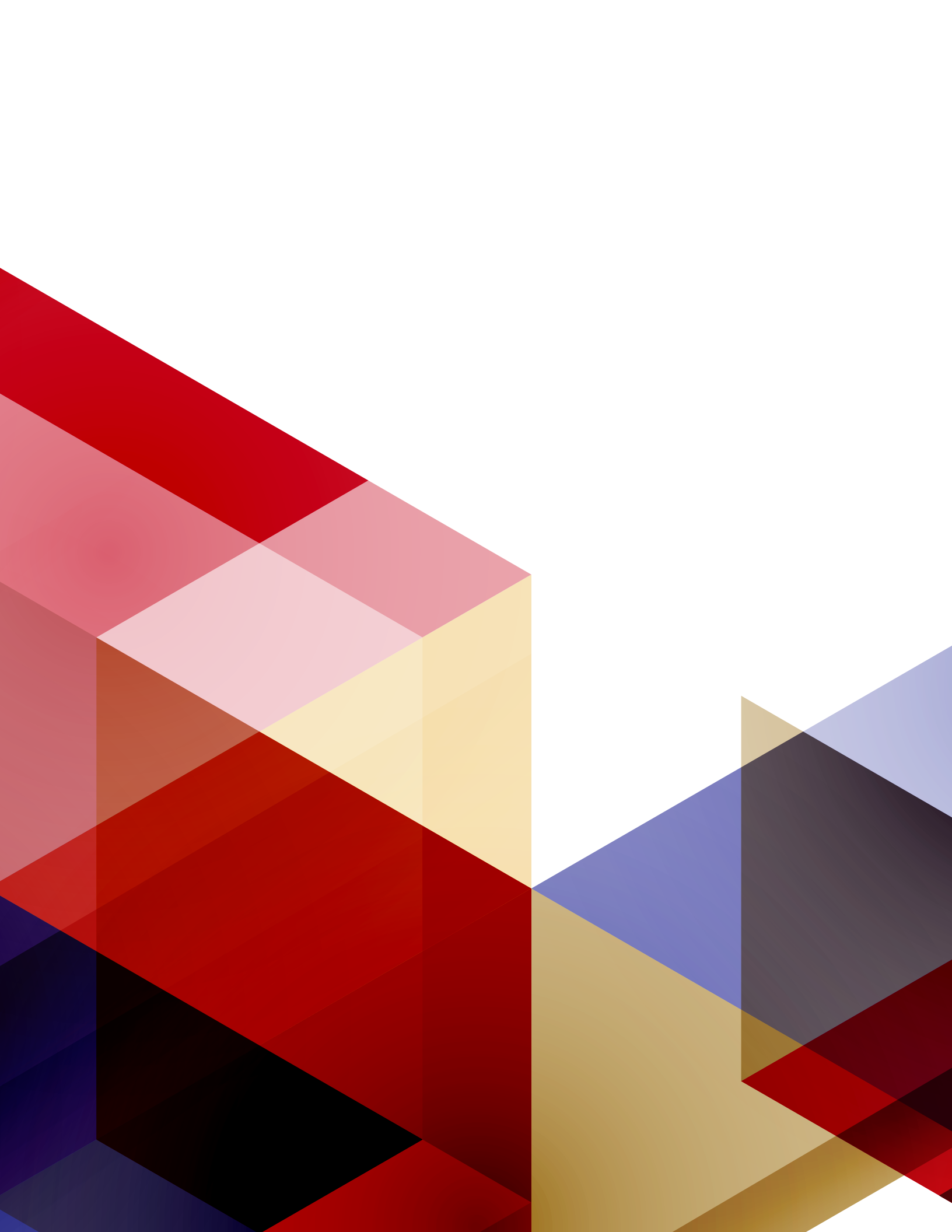
Center for  
Strategic  
Public-Private  
Partnerships

# WE'RE IN IT TOGETHER

The Story of the Center  
for Strategic Public-Private  
Partnerships' First Year

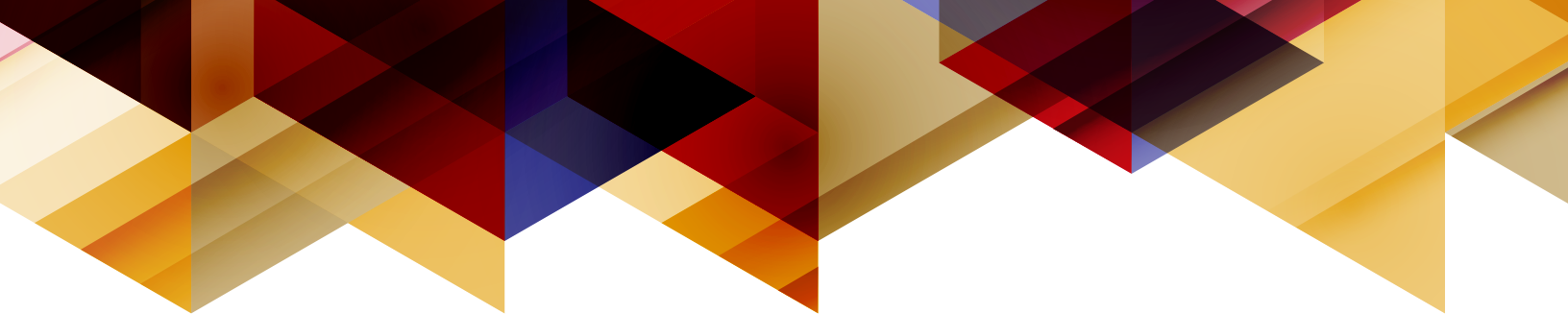


SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA  
GRANTMAKERS



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# Introduction

*Possibilities.  
Multiplier.  
Leverage.  
Inclusiveness.  
Innovation.*

Key stakeholders of the Center for Strategic Public-Private Partnerships (CSPPP), located within the Office of Child Protection in Los Angeles County, were recently asked to describe public-private partnership in just one word. The variety of responses reflected the wide array of perspectives and personalities that had gathered for the Center’s June 7 briefing, which included several County department administrators, as well as a number of key local foundation leaders. But they had one thing in common. They were unfailingly hopeful.

Conspicuously absent were other words: *Difficult. Transactional. Risky.*

James Ferris, Director of the Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy at the University of Southern California, observes that in recent years, public and private partners are generating promising new models of working together. This certainly seems to be the case in LA County, where the Center was created in 2016 with the goal of supporting innovation and systems change within the County’s child protective services (CPS) system.

This is no small feat in Los Angeles County, which is not only the largest county in the United States, but is—with 10 million people

living in more than 4,000 square miles—itsself larger than 42 states. The County’s CPS system serves more than 30,000 children each year and faces a host of challenges, including high caseloads and a dire shortage of foster families.

Despite these concerns, at meetings like the Center’s recent stakeholder briefing, there is a general spirit of optimism that positive change is on the horizon. Kate Anderson, the Center’s director, credits several factors—including a supportive Board of Supervisors, a spirit of openness among County administrators, a high level of interest and enthusiasm among philanthropic partners, and the creation of the County’s new Office of Child Protection—as providing a unique moment of opportunity for improving outcomes for children and families.

This report chronicles that moment of opportunity, and how government and philanthropy in LA County are coming together to capitalize on it through the Center’s creation and the efforts of its first year.

## Origins: How the Center Came to Be

### A SCATTERING OF SEEDS

The answer to the question of how the Center began depends on who you ask. Different stakeholders describe the sowing of a variety of seeds, which speaks to the community’s broad sense of shared ownership around

the effort. It also reflects the number of supportive forces that came together at once to create what Christine (Chris) Essel, President and CEO of Southern California Grantmakers (SCG), a regional association of philanthropists working to make a difference in their communities, describes as “one of those moments you look for.”

One seed can be found in the groundwork laid by the City of Los Angeles Office of Strategic Partnerships (OSP), a precursor to the County’s Center, which had been established in 2009 under former Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. Several of the philanthropic partners who now support CSPPP, including the California Endowment and the Weingart and Ahmanson Foundations, had also supported the City’s earlier public-private initiative; others quickly recognized its value. When Mayor Eric Garcetti was elected in 2013, he did not continue this office (opting instead to create his Mayor’s Fund). This was viewed by some in the philanthropic community as a natural opportunity to turn their attention to the County.

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**Everything is about timing. Had all this not played out as it had, [the Center] might not have happened. It had to do with a lot of people who were, for different reasons, sharing a similar vision and looking opportunistically at how to execute it.**

WINNIE WECHSLER  
Executive Director, Anthony and Jeanne Pritzker Family Foundation

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The success of the City’s venture made some foundations more amenable to investing in a County office. “We really reaped the benefits from the investments of our colleagues [in the OSP],” notes Peter Long, President and CEO of Blue Shield of California Foundation. And creating a similar office to work with the County in some ways made even more sense,

because many philanthropic interests, particularly in the area of health and human services, were more closely related to work at the County than the City level.

Another seed was planted when the Executive Director of the Anthony and Jeanne Pritzker Family Foundation, Winnie Wechsler, began a quest to better understand how foundations like Pritzker could support the strategic priorities of the County’s Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). In 2013, along with Casey Family Programs and a small group of child advocates, she was engaged in a series of conversations with DCFS representatives to explore this question, ultimately resulting in the presentation of a short list of potential joint projects to then-DCFS director Philip Browning in the spring of 2014.

Also at this time, LA County was experiencing widespread community outrage around child safety, precipitated in part by the tragic death of an 8-year-old boy at the hands of his mother and her boyfriend. The County Board of Supervisors established a Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection on June 25, 2013, and charged it with investigating the issue and releasing a report and recommendations for child protection reform.

After almost a year of stakeholder interviews and in-depth study, the Commission released its recommendations. Chief among them was a call for the creation of a countywide Office of Child Protection to plan and implement a more comprehensive approach to child safety in Los Angeles County. The director of this new Office was encouraged to “reach out to the philanthropic community and build strategic partnerships to help improve the child protection system.” In making this recommendation, the Commission’s final report recognized, “the power of public-private partnerships has been under-utilized by the County to date and should be an important strategy for improving services.”



## Fertile Ground

SCG provided the fertile ground where all of these seeds came together.

In May 2014, when the Blue Ribbon Commission report was issued, SCG immediately recognized the document's significance for its members with an interest in child welfare. Essel invited the Commission's chair, David Sanders (Executive Vice President of Casey Family Programs), along with Aileen Adams (Co-Executive Director of the Blue Ribbon Commission and former director of the City's OSP) to present at a forum to advise SCG members about the findings. Wechsler also was invited to speak, offering her perspective as a foundation director widely recognized as being knowledgeable about DCFS.

During a Q&A session following the presentations, Wendy Garen, President and CEO of The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation and then-President of SCG's board of directors, wondered aloud how to move the assembled group from knowledge to action. A letter of support was proposed. In the end, 17 foundation leaders joined Essel in signing SCG's letter endorsing the Commission's recommendations.

In addition to signing the letter, several SCG members testified at the hearing, including Garen, Wechsler and James Herr of the California Community Foundation. Such a move was unprecedented for SCG, which had never involved itself in local government, but Essel and those who testified agreed that such a critical opportunity for reform warranted bold, new action. The letter of support and testimony of key community investors are recognized by several close observers as playing a key role in achieving a 4-1 Board vote in support of the Commission's report.

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**For LA County—meaning everyone in the County, including philanthropy—this is the moment. This is the moment to do something big and grand, because these problems need to be addressed.**

BEATRIZ SOLÍS  
Program Director, The California Endowment;  
SCG Board Chair

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Not wanting to lose the momentum created by the Blue Ribbon Commission and other efforts, in September of that year SCG formed a collaborative of funders interested in child welfare, co-led by Garen and Wechsler. Approximately 40 funders attended the first meeting, along with key DCFS staff. It was the first time that the majority of funders had met with DCFS leaders, and the excitement about this new connection was palpable.

However, it quickly became clear that the group was going to require dedicated leadership to be truly effective in connecting funders in a meaningful way to the County's strategic interests. DCFS, meanwhile, was acknowledging the need for someone to help the agency work more effectively with the foundation world—a world that was still largely mysterious to County staff—and capitalize on this new level of private sector interest and engagement.



## Key Decision Points

Fesia Davenport, who was at this time serving as DCFS Chief Deputy, was named acting executive director of the new Office of Child Protection (OCP) at the end of 2014. She soon engaged a small group of key players in discussions about how to operationalize the idea of a liaison between the County and the private sector. The group included Essel, Garen and Adams; as well as Torie Osborn, who had been a founder of Mayor Villaraigosa's OSP; and Fred Ali, President and CEO of the Weingart Foundation, who also had been deeply involved in the creation of the OSP. Together, this powerful think tank began working through the critical questions of how the Center should be formed, spurred on by a June 2015 Board motion instructing the County CEO to collaborate with SCG to develop options for establishing such a position with the OCP and identify funding for the initiative.

They began with the question of positioning: Would the Center be most effective as an "insider" to County government, or a neutral third party? One advantage of placing the Center outside of the County hierarchy was thought to be the greater ability to position the Center as a true "change agent," free of the government bureaucracy. In the end, however, that was seen to be less important than the advantages offered by a County address. Davenport notes, "If you want them to be seen as a trusted, County internal entity, then they need to be housed in the County. When you make a phone call, it's, 'Oh, they're calling from the CEO's office downtown, they must be important.'"

The next question was where exactly within County government the Center should be housed. There was less agreement on this point, with some stakeholders feeling strongly that the Center would be best positioned reporting directly to the Board of Supervisors. Ultimately, it was decided that the Center needed to be housed in an organizational unit

that could provide administrative support to help the Center hit the ground running, without spending as much time on start-up. Because the Center focused on child welfare, the newly formed OCP seemed to founders to be the Center's most logical home. If, after the three-year pilot period, the Board of Supervisors determines it would like to expand the Center's scope, its placement within the OCP can be reconsidered.

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**It's really important, where [the Center] sits. It has to not be able to be buffeted by the political winds, by term limits, by one politician's whims being supplanted by another's. It has to be embedded in the bureaucracy but it also has to be connected enough to foundation land to usher in innovation and fresh air.**

TORIE OSBORN  
Senior Strategist, Office of Supervisor Sheila Kuehl

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Finally, there was the question of funding. Early philanthropic investors conducted outreach among their peers to bring others to the table. In the end, a subset of members of SCG's Child Welfare Funders Collaborative, together with a few philanthropists interested in public-private partnership for more general capacity building, came together to support the proposed Center. In a June letter signed by Essel and Ali, SCG proposed that a group of 12 foundations would provide half of the needed funds for the operation of a public-private partnership center within the OCP for three years, if the County would provide the other half. (The number of investors has since grown to 15, not counting those who fund specific Center projects.) On October 6, 2015, the Board of Supervisors passed a motion instructing the CEO to establish the Center and hire a director.

## Building the Center's Backbone

Around the time of the first board motion, SCG received a large operating grant to build capacity and enhance its work in social justice and public policy. A portion of that grant was used to fund a consultant, Gita Murthy Cugley, to manage the nascent child welfare funders collaborative and its steering committee, begin brokering relationships between foundations and the County, and help to operationalize the Center.

"It required a lot of consensus building before [a Director] even came on board," Cugley says, "to get folks to see the value of what the Center could bring and to agree on ways to move forward in an inclusive way."

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**It takes an organization like SCG to have the capacity, the strength, the desire, the drive to see something like this come into being and be willing to assume the requisite responsibilities of managing it on the philanthropic side.**

CHRIS ESSEL  
President and CEO, Southern California Grantmakers

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To that end, in the six months between the Board motion and when the Center's Director was named, Cugley laid essential groundwork for the Center's incoming staff. A veteran of the County for nearly 20 years, Cugley focused first on learning the philanthropic landscape, by conducting a survey of SCG's members and talking with foundation leaders one on one about their interests and values. She also delved deeply into the world of public-private partnership, researching successful models in other jurisdictions, including New York City and Michigan. Drawing on this information, she helped the County develop job

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**Even though there are some people who clearly are the subject matter experts from the philanthropic side, I got the sense that people felt this was very much a level playing field, that everyone's voice was really valued at the table. I think that has enormous ramifications, both for this project and for how folks interact with one another in philanthropic LA moving forward.**

MICHAEL FLEMING  
Executive Director, David Bohnett Foundation

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descriptions and an operational structure that would be suited to the local environment.

SCG also led the search, on the County's behalf, for the right person to lead the Center going forward. The CEO's letter to the Board of Supervisors proposed a director charged with facilitating communication among stakeholders, working collaboratively with philanthropy and government to plan and develop initiatives aligning with the goals of both, and otherwise supporting the goals of the OCP.

Cugley and Essel worked closely with a search firm and a small group of philanthropic partners to conduct outreach and identify and screen applicants. Top candidates were then vetted by the Board of Supervisors' Children's Deputies, and the final decision was made by Judge Michael Nash (ret.), the new Executive Director of the Office of Child Protection, with input from all. Judge Nash underscores the collaborative nature of the process, "No single individual or entity made that decision."

SCG also took the lead in developing language for the dozen individual foundation grants needed to support the Center's work, each of which involved a different set of application (and reporting) requirements. This kind of fiscal agency is part of the package of ongoing support that SCG has provided throughout the Center's first year. Its finance staff continues to play a critical role in managing and tracking budgets, receiving and disbursing funds, and working directly with vendors.





# Sparking Innovation: Government + Philanthropy

## A Cultural Divide

Pointing out that the cultures of government and philanthropy are vastly different is stating the obvious; the differences are glaring, at least in LA County, even in a brief visit to the physical spaces where each sector does its work.

The County building is solid, stable and reflects the gravitas of a long history of public service. Its eighth-floor balcony offers a broad view of its surroundings and the people it serves. Still, no one would argue with the fact that it could benefit from some updating, and its maze of hallways and locked doors can be difficult for an outsider to navigate. In this way, it stands in stark contrast to modern, well-appointed foundation offices, where sleek interiors and walls of windows are more the norm.

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**The combination of what government can bring to the table and philanthropy can bring to the table, to me, is the magic spark that makes these changes take shape.**

JOHN WAGNER  
Executive Vice President, First 5 LA

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**It's hard to gamble on an idea with public money, to show that an innovative idea works. We'd like to do that, but it goes against traditional government's structure. Philanthropy has more capacity to try things, to see if it's a good investment or not.**

BRANDON NICHOLS  
Acting Director, Department of Children and Family Services

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Philanthropy has the unique luxury of stepping back from the daily grind of need that County employees face each day. Foundations also can be highly selective in their focus—both in the issues they choose to tackle and the ways they choose to engage. This may at times result in a “pie in the sky” idealism that can feel quite foreign to employees of the County, where immediate service delivery is the priority.

This necessary focus on citizens' urgent, immediate needs, in turn, results in a culture that can be averse to risk and slow to integrate new ideas. Of course there are plenty of exceptions on both sides—innovators in government, philanthropists with a deep understanding of the realities of work in the trenches. However, these cultural divides are generally acknowledged and sometimes result in misunderstandings, missteps and false starts, even with the best intentions.

## Bridging the Gap

In LA County today, there is a more ready appreciation among government and philanthropic partners alike of the advantages of working together and what each brings to the table. Bridging this cultural gap, by helping everyone more fully understand each other's goals and strengths, has been a critical focus of the Center's first year. Brandon Nichols, acting director of DCFS, says, "My understanding of philanthropy's goals has changed over time, in part because of the Center. They've helped educate me about what philanthropy wants and doesn't want to do. Their goals are to magnify their impact into systemic change. To make a small investment that serves as an example or a catalyst for a larger reform or improvement."

The County's funding, scope and ability to bring new solutions to scale make it a desirable partner for philanthropists who want to magnify their impact. Garen observes, "Philanthropy can help test ideas, but we're not going to support them long-term. We're secret sauce; we're not dinner."

The County also has an unparalleled view of the problems that need to be addressed, including access to vast amounts of data and frontline staff who are intimately familiar with the challenges facing the County's most vulnerable families.

With this tremendous scope of responsibility come certain challenges. The County is a massive bureaucracy, in which very little happens quickly. Granted, responsibility for public funds is critical. As Davenport notes, "When you have a government process, people complain about the bureaucracy—but a lot of the bureaucracy is accountability." Still, some have likened change-making within such a system to trying to turn around a big ship. It can be done, but it requires time and effort.

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**The funders that join an organization like ours, or that support the Center or its projects, are ones that are collaborative; they are strategic; and in the end they want to make the world a better place.**

CHRIS ESSEL  
President and CEO, SCG

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This is where philanthropy comes in. "Philanthropy is perceived as the bureaucracy antidote," says Davenport. Although still accountable to their own stakeholders, including boards of directors and other community members, philanthropic partners generally bring flexibility and speed to pilot projects, research and evaluations. They can do in a matter of weeks or months what can take the County literally years to achieve under current contracting guidelines. According to Garen, "The County has the money. But what we have is freedom. We can act, we can execute."

Much like light streaming in the windows of foundation offices, philanthropic partners can bring new ideas and perspectives to illuminate longstanding County challenges. Nichols, for one, welcomes their insight: "I personally like outside entities that drive the department forward. The more people we have joining the dialogue, the better. Just the fact that there are more people at the table is better for the system."

Davenport agrees: "Philanthropy has to be embraced and engaged as a true partner, not an ATM." This is an aspect of philanthropy that others in the public sector sometimes fail to appreciate, if they take a narrow view of foundations as sources of funding only. "People have to begin to grasp the [true] value of working with philanthropy: the intellectual capital, the work on the ground," adds Essel.

Wendy Garen sums up the present state of things in LA County: "The County clearly has the willingness, and [philanthropy] is anxious to help. So it's a matter of figuring out the places where it could matter. There's so much willingness to make a difference, we should be able to convert that into something that matters."



## Center Staffing

The decision to hire Center Director Kate Anderson was announced in April 2016. Anderson was not a County “insider,” nor did she come directly from the philanthropic community. Instead she brought a wealth of experience in both the public and private sectors. She had begun her career working for Congressman Henry Waxman in Washington, DC, and had served briefly as Deputy Chief of Staff to Congresswoman Jane Harman. Yet she also brought experience as an attorney in a private law firm and serving as the Los Angeles Director of Children Now, a statewide child advocacy organization.

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**I like bringing people together. It’s what brings me joy.**

KATE ANDERSON  
CSPPP Director

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Many feel that this combination of public and private experience has been critical to Anderson’s success during her first year. Having a “foot in both camps” may be key to building trust among stakeholders with disparate perspectives and interests, particularly in areas where historic distrust may muddy the waters. This is not strictly a matter of experience—it’s also a question of perspective, having an orientation that is truly bicultural, and the ability to “translate” the perspectives of different groups, helping them to meet in the middle.

Stakeholders agree that the position requires

a broad skill set, and relational skills are at the top of that list. “You have to be an ambassador, first and foremost,” says Dr. Jonathan E. Sherin, who himself brings a variety of public and private experience to his role as director of LA County’s Department of Mental Health. Those skills include frequent and forthright communication, ranging from the most informal check-in phone calls to presentations, proposals and reports.

In the Center’s first year, the position has required a balance of deep listening one-on-one with stakeholders and bringing people together, which is a skill in and of itself. Osborn notes, “[Convening] is not just about ordering the lunch and getting a nice venue and flowers for the tables. It’s a lot about follow-up, it’s about making sure people show up, it’s about creative programming that elicits thoughtful input, digging a little deeper and getting to the real issues.”

Along with these softer skills, the position requires some knowledge and understanding of the challenges of child protection, as well as a more general understanding of how human service systems work, how to measure outcomes and impact, and how to tell a compelling story. You need someone “almost like a systems engineer,” says SCG Board Chair Beatriz Solís.

The Center’s work also calls for a fair amount of practical rolling-up of sleeves: from writing proposals to providing the thoughtful project management necessary to move collaborative efforts from Point A to Point B. “While this of-

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**You need somebody who is ... humble enough to understand how big the task is, and at the same time, bold enough to convene stakeholders and be very communicative.**

BEATRIZ SOLÍS  
SCG Board Chair

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office is about building relationships, that is only the beginning,” says Anderson. “Once we’ve done that work, we are the ones that take it the next step, too. We don’t hand that off to someone else.”

Anderson is now supported in her work by Associate Center Director Lizzie Cohen, who brings her own impressive combination of private sector and political experience (formerly serving in the Office of Scheduling and Advance for President Barack Obama and working at a major educational nonprofit organization). Since joining the Center in December, Cohen has proven to be a valuable addition, adding subject matter capacity and providing expertise in events, convenings, fundraising and working with philanthropy.

Anderson and Cohen are currently the only two official Center staff members. But they do share some administrative support with the OCP, and they are supported behind the scenes by a number of SCG staff members. “We clearly feel more ownership of our funders’ investment in this project than we do our typical fiscal agent role,” says Essel.

In addition to the considerable effort involved in handling the Center’s ongoing fiscal and grant management needs, SCG’s program staff offer subject matter expertise, programmatic thought-partnership and a deep understanding of what matters to funders. Administrative staff coordinate the logistics for Center convenings. Essel herself remains involved with the Center in an advisory role, providing leadership support and coaching.

SCG’s public policy arm also plays an important role, both keeping the Center informed about the political landscape at the local, state and national levels, and providing an outside voice to advocate for change when needed. In a recent example, SCG was able to help rally widespread private-sector support for a state bill that provides for priority childcare slots for young children in the CPS system. SCG Board Chair Solís comments, “Having SCG as a backbone to help educate and inform the Center on what’s working and not working is really critical for philanthropy to be more impactful.”

The efforts of the Center’s two full-time staff have been further enhanced by the continued involvement of Cugley, the consultant who has supported SCG since the Center’s conception. Cugley brings a much-needed “insider” perspective—she worked for LA County for nearly 20 years and has a deep understanding of its inner workings that, were she not involved, could have taken the Center staff years to develop. There is broad agreement among stakeholders that Cugley’s involvement has supercharged the Center’s efforts and has been key to enabling the Center to achieve some concrete successes in addition to the relationship-building and agenda-setting that would otherwise have defined much of its first year.





# Setting Priorities

Upon assuming her role on April 1, 2016, one of Anderson's first steps was to engage in an intensive listening tour, to deeply understand the concerns of stakeholders in both government and the private sector, and to identify shared priorities to guide the Center's work.

## Finding the Way: A Listening Tour

In her first three months, Anderson met with more than 100 people and participated in over a dozen conferences with representatives of all of the following groups:

- Board deputies from each supervisorial district
- Philanthropic leaders
- County personnel
- Community-based organizations
- Union representatives
- Local child-serving commissions
- Business representatives

The outcome of this process was an interim report to the Board of Supervisors detailing the primary areas of importance to all stakeholders and proposing these as a focus for the Center's efforts. This process was important to develop buy-in, as well as to ensure that Center initiatives addressed the most critical issues affecting the lives of children and families in LA County.

Anderson says, "[The Center] came into being through the discussions and the listening that came from that tour. I honestly can't imagine I would have started any other way."

## A Shared Agenda

From the listening tour emerged the Center's shared agenda—three priority areas where local foundations' interests aligned most closely with the OCP's goals and priorities:

- Preventing children from entering the child protection system
- Recruiting and retaining resource families for children in foster care, including placing them with relatives whenever possible
- Supporting transition-age youth moving from foster care to independent adulthood

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**I think prevention is the most important thing that we do. If we can find ways to safely keep people out of the system, that's better for everybody.**

BRANDON NICHOLS  
Acting Director, DCFS

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## PREVENTION

For families in crisis, it is essential that an agency like DCFS have the resources and ability to step in and provide immediate protection. However, removing children from their homes—and often their neighborhoods, schools, extended family and friends—is a drastic step, and one that no community should take lightly. Much better, most experts agree, to provide supports that enable children to stay with their own families whenever possible, ensuring their safety and well-being while avoiding further trauma.

According to the Blue Ribbon Commission’s findings, prevention also makes financial sense: “The most cost-effective way to reduce the rippling costs of child welfare is to prevent abuse in the first place.” For these reasons, prevention is a primary focus of the OCP and the Center.

## RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF RESOURCE FAMILIES

LA County currently faces a critical shortage of families willing and able to care for foster children. In fact, since 1999, the County’s number of available out-of-home care providers has dropped by more than half. County representatives and those in the philanthropic community agree that the County’s efforts to recruit families to fill the gap have not kept pace with the need.

This means that children in crisis, who have already experienced trauma and loss well out of proportion for their young ages, often experience longer stays in temporary, emergency and congregate care (“group homes”), while caseworkers scramble to find them the safe and supportive family environments that all children deserve and require to heal. It also means that children in neighborhoods where resource families are particularly scarce may be placed further and further from their homes, schools and communities, compounding their losses and making visits with family members even more difficult.

## TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH

On a given day, more than 5,000 of the youth in LA County’s foster care system are “transition age,” meaning they are 16 or older and are preparing for the transition from foster care to independent adulthood.

These youth are a particularly vulnerable group. Unlike many young adults, who can ease their way into adulthood while still relying on their family as a “safety net,” many former foster youth lack a connection to any caring adults to whom they can turn for advice or assistance during a difficult time. CSPPP Associate Director Cohen points out, “We don’t expect an 18-year-old to be able to find their own apartment and pay for it and be totally independent ... unless they’re in the foster care system.” Without focused intervention, far too many of these youth face futures that include homelessness, incarceration or young parenthood themselves, at risk of repeating the cycle of abuse or neglect with their own children.





## The Center's Work

Since the Center's launch, it has engaged in 21 joint initiatives in its three priority areas, with 22 public and private partners, and has brought more than \$500,000 in private sector investments to County systems. (For more information about select initiatives, see Appendix B.)

That's a lot of activity. According to Anderson, the common thread throughout each of these initiatives is systems change. She notes, "Our partners did not create this Center for small fixes. They created this Center to make real change... So we shape joint initiatives that have a through-line to transformation and ask our partners to join in with us when we believe the work will move the ball down the field. Some of the initiatives are small and the ball is only moved a little; others are more ambitious and we hope to move it further."

Systems change is a long journey, though, and like any journey, it is made up of small steps. The significance of each step may only become clear when viewed with a broad lens, over time. Most Center initiatives involve one or more of these components:

- **BROKER.** Sometimes, Center initiatives may look as simple as introducing the right people to each other and letting the sparks fly. But orchestrating that "simple" handshake can involve weeks (or more) of behind-the-scenes work: listening carefully to determine who needs to meet, lifting up each partner's stories in a way that will attract others, and then having the dogged persistence to get busy

people in the same room at the same time and facilitate productive engagement. It's clear that the Center's benefits have already extended beyond the expected introductions between County and foundation staff. Some of the most promising developments have come from people being introduced to others within their own sectors—linking County departments to each other in new ways, for example, or connecting philanthropists with similar interests.

**EXAMPLE:** The Center has been particularly well-positioned to bring stakeholders together around the expansion of home visiting services, a key element of the OCP Prevention Plan. Anderson has a deep background in home visiting and family strengthening, so in December of 2016, when the Board of Supervisors passed a motion directing the County's Department of Public Health (DPH) to coordinate with other departments and partners to develop a plan to expand the County's home visiting network, she quickly volunteered the Center's assistance. Anderson has convened and facilitates several ongoing workgroups of interested private partners, as well as providing education and technical assistance to key County departments to support their engagement. At the same time, the Center has been helping to broker a pilot project among the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS), nonprofit SHIELDS for Families and First 5 LA to expand access to evidence-based home

visiting services for DPSS families in one high-need neighborhood.

- **TRANSLATOR.** When people are coming from worlds as different as government and philanthropy, the potential for misunderstandings is great. Many stakeholders in LA can recall missed opportunities in the past—funding requests that didn't meet a foundation's guidelines, or offers of help that failed to address the County's most urgent priorities. "If you don't have the Rosetta Stone, a full translation, you're often going to miss each other. Even when there is a funding relationship, even when you try things, they're going to be sub-optimal," says Peter Long, President and CEO of Blue Shield of California Foundation. Because of their deep relationships in both sectors, Center staff are able to provide the kind of translation that prevents breakdowns and keeps discussions moving forward in a productive way.

**EXAMPLE:** DCFS and a small group of funders wanted to create a pilot project to address the lack of emergency access to child care for foster children, one of the top barriers to foster parent recruitment and timely placement of very young children. However, the workgroup ran into a snag when it became clear that the pilot

project they were planning would have to risk paying for empty child care slots in order to "hold" those slots until a priority family could be identified. The Center is credited with helping both parties understand the other's concerns and constraints and ultimately agree to share the risk. In the end, this was a nonissue, with all slots filled within the program's first month. Without the Center's assistance at a delicate point in the negotiation, however, the project—which may ultimately provide data to support a case for funding similar programs statewide—might have been over before it began.

- **BACKBONE.** When partners come together and agree on a direction, it's exciting—and it's just the beginning. Sometimes, the partners have the capacity to take it from there, and there's nothing further needed from the Center. More often, the Center is finding, partners need continued support to do the "boots on the ground" work to move a project forward. Center staff often step in to fill the gaps—drafting a proposal, hosting a training, or providing project management support, depending on each project's unique needs. This kind of support does not mean the Center is taking ownership of the initiative. "They're not imposing their ideas," says Jackie Mizell-Burt, a Program Director with DPSS, of the Center's work with her agency. "They're just supporting the structure and development of the process as we move along."

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**We have a county that is so willing and interested in partnering with the private sector, and we have a private sector that wants to better serve these kids and recognizes that this \$2 billion child welfare system is the place where real and lasting difference can be made ... The story of the Center is in helping both of them realize that vision.**

KATE ANDERSON  
Director, CSPPP

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**Did collaboration happen in Los Angeles before the Center? Yes, there were already relationships out there. But this formalized it, made it a specific, ongoing goal to bring these two communities together. This way, it becomes an ongoing practice.**

JUDGE MICHAEL NASH (RET.)  
Executive Director of the LA County Office of Child Protection

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**EXAMPLE:** “Fostering Home” is a new project focused on testing strategies to end the foster parent recruitment crisis in LA County by transforming the application process and making support more accessible to interested families. From the beginning, the Center has served as a backbone for this partnership between DCFS and foundation, community and faith partners. To ensure the success of its first event, a faith-based “one-stop shop” for prospective resource families that was held in June, the Center wrote proposals to secure \$60,000 in philanthropic and County-matched funds. Center consultant Gita Murthy Cugley was intimately involved in advising on the program concept and design. She and Associate Director Lizzie Cohen also worked closely with the consultant hired to conduct outreach to local churches and other event planning services. Although the recruitment outcomes won’t be known for several months, hundreds of families participated and the County now has a turn-key plan it can use to create similar recruitment events in other parts of the County. “The one-day convening brought private organizations, philanthropic groups, other County departments and faith institutions together in a way that told the prospective foster parents that a large and diverse community was there to help them and watch out for them—it was not just DCFS alone,” says Nichols.

Perhaps most importantly, the Center institutionalizes partnership as a way of doing business. Edmund Cain, Vice President of Grant Programs at the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, calls entities like the Center “collaborative mechanisms,” and he considers investing in these mechanisms to be a core element of the Hilton Foundation’s strategy. “We don’t like to fund an individual grantee or promote a particular program of our own, without making concurrent investments in collaborative mechanisms, making sure that all the interested parties are engaged in solving a particular issue or problem.”

Osborn agrees that the Center’s very existence at the County changes everything. “Once you have a bridge-building office, building bridges becomes the way you do things.”

Already, the County seems to be finding some additional room for flexibility and innovation—as can be seen in its ability to provide funds for the one-day convening or to share the risk of funding reserved child care slots for the emergency child care pilot.





## Challenges Ahead

Despite all that the Center has been able to accomplish in its first year, staff and stakeholders are frank about the challenges that still lie ahead.

### The Size and Complexity of LA County

When it comes to creating systems change, LA County's size and complexity are daunting at every level. The County's geography itself is a formidable barrier, both to the optimal operation of the child protection system—children must sometimes be placed hours from their communities and families, making critical visits difficult if not impossible for some families—and in the Center's day-to-day work. As Cohen points out, "Traveling to a meeting across town can take half a day. It's a lot of running around and trying to meet people where they are."

Within County government, departments often are not co-located, which can contribute to a tendency to work in silos. Each agency is divided into regional offices, and even these do not correspond from agency to agency. Just finding the right person to talk to can be a challenge.

The bureaucracy accompanying such a large and complex governmental structure can be equally challenging. The County's procurement process is mentioned often as a barrier to making change—getting a new contract in place can take 2 years from start to completion. This could inhibit the County's capacity

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**The message is not to give up, to continue to work together and know that, on the County side, there's a very strong commitment to developing more efficient ways of doing our work that would allow us to be more nimble and more flexible ... We're still the government and sometimes we do take a little bit longer to get things done. But, we will get there.**

LINDA ARAGON

Division of Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health, DPH

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to scale up better solutions, even those proven through a successful pilot. Similarly, County staffing guidelines, including union rules, may hamper its ability to staff up quickly for pilot projects or move personnel among roles nimbly to accommodate changes in focus or approach.

Placed within the County, but bringing an "outsider" perspective, the Center is making some inroads. By varying the location of meetings, they are successfully piercing the "bubbles" that have been described as surrounding both the County and philanthropy, bringing County officials out into the community, and bringing fresh perspectives—quite literally—into the halls of County buildings.

The bottom line is that LA County's size, while formidable, is not insurmountable. According to Helen Berberian, Deputy Director, Bureau of Clinical Resources and Services at DCFS, "We had heard of other jurisdictions where they

had worked successfully with private funders and made a difference and solved issues. I used to think, ‘Well, LA’s different from everybody else.’ But there happens to be a way to do it, no matter what your size is.”

## “Multiple Masters”: The Need to Focus

At the time of this report, the Center is just beginning the second year of its own three-year pilot phase. Having so many stakeholders engaged—and the optimism and high hopes that the Center’s early efforts have engendered across sectors—mean that there are currently a vast array of expectations, and many eyes watching to see what it will accomplish.

The Center’s task is a big one, and the staff’s ability to identify and pursue focused goals over the next two years will be critical to its success.

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**One thing I tried to do [at the City’s OSP] from the beginning was to limit the focus. Otherwise you get pulled in so many different directions, you can’t get anything accomplished. You can’t go in every direction where there’s a need.**

AILEEN ADAMS  
Former Director of the City of Los Angeles Office of Strategic Partnerships (OSP)

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John Wagner of First 5 LA says, “If there’s a cautionary flag, I think it’s typical of what we all face, and that is how do you maintain your focus so you can have that impact without getting overly stretched and involved in so many different issues of the day, or crises, or things that people want to improve, that it dissipates your impact. I think that’s something to be watching.”

Although a vast array of stakeholders agree on the need to focus in principle, finding consensus around what exactly that focus should be may prove to be more difficult. Some stakeholders have expressed the belief that the goal of the Center should be nothing short of systems change within child welfare. This might mean taking a look at the system as a whole and systematically infusing research and evaluation at each decision point to see how children and families can be more effectively prevented from moving toward deeper-end engagement. At the least, it’s a matter of saying no to smaller, more opportunistic projects in the interest of pursuing only those that will promote true innovation and catalytic change.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who see the Center’s greatest value in establishing the structures and mechanisms for future partnerships between the County and the philanthropic community. For this group, the “what” of individual projects may be less important than establishing “how” this work gets done. For these stakeholders, any successful projects at this point may be viewed as productive, laying important groundwork for future expansions of the Center’s scope and impact.

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**Innovation is not just about finding a new solution to a problem or discovering something new—innovation is also finding ways to collaborate around problems for which we already know the solution ... in other words, discovering innovative ways to foster effective collaboration.**

EDMUND CAIN  
Vice President, Grant Programs, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

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Peter Lynn, Executive Director of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), notes, “You need to hold people accountable, but you need to do it within a community. So you have to build the community first, and then you can talk through the systemic barriers to change.”

The Center has been successful in building critical relationships. It remains to be seen to what extent the Center will be able to get its stakeholders on the same page and moving toward a common goal and impact during the remaining two years of its current funding cycle.

## The Ongoing Work of Engagement

Getting people’s attention is one thing. Keeping it is another matter.

Although the majority of stakeholders seem to agree that the Center’s work is valuable and shows promise, they are realistic about the community’s attention span and the Center’s need to stay relevant. Peter Lynn observes, “One challenge that folks can have is that campaigns can burn out, and you don’t want that.”

Keeping the right people at the right level engaged is a critical step. This means ensuring

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**Relationships have to be institutionalized. You have to tend to them and support them just like you would a plant. People in the County move on, they get promoted. You have shifts in policy when you have new management coming in. So it’s not a one-off.**

FESIA DAVENPORT  
Assistant Chief Executive Officer, LA County

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that people at the executive level are informed and bought-in to the Center’s work. “If we get the CEOs bought into this, that raises the level of the game,” says Essel.

The Center’s twice-annual CEO briefings are an important piece of that work, as are Anderson’s ongoing efforts to make less formal one-on-one contact. How that is accomplished depends on individual needs and preferences, whether that means regular breakfast meetings with one key funder who wants to stay apprised of happenings within the County more generally, or picking up the phone to share a piece of news only when it’s specifically relevant to another.

However, it also means knowing when the CEOs are not the most important people to have in the room. For specific project planning, program staff are often more informed about the details. “In the early days ... you do need high-level buy-in,” says Cain. “But when you get on to the work itself, you need to take it to a level that is actually doing the work.”

Some stakeholders also would want the Center staff to keep in mind that staying relevant means staying close to the needs of children and families and making sure those community voices are heard and represented. Denise Tom, a Program Officer at the California Community Foundation points out, “Who knows best what they need? It’s the community. I don’t think you can ever go wrong, seeking out their voice.”

## External Forces

It would be naïve to ignore the fact that external forces also will shape the Center's work over the next several years.

Within the County, turnover in key positions is always a concern. Currently the Center is bolstered by a very supportive Board of Supervisors. However, changes at the time of the next election (November 2018) could upset the balance and affect the Center's future beyond its initial three-year term.

Likewise, LA County is currently engaged in the search for a new director of DCFS, since the long-term former director, Philip Browning, retired in January of this year. There is always the possibility that an agency as large and influential as DCFS may be reluctant to go too far in any direction without a permanent leader in place. Similarly, any new directions established in the interim period are at risk of not being continued under a new director, who will bring his or her own priorities.

Reforms at the state level already impact the Center's work, for example, the state's Congregate Care Reform mandate and settlement of the Katie A. lawsuit, which affects the delivery of mental health and other supportive services to children and youth in or at risk of involvement with CPS.

Finally, the current national political landscape may be a particularly uncertain one for human services, and it will be important for the Center to stay apprised of changes. SCG Board Chair Beatriz Solís predicts, "There are large, looming national changes that will impact the work ... How that will hit, I'm not really clear. But assuming that certain policies are enacted at the federal level that pull back public benefits or dollars for social services for low-income people and vulnerable children, that has a direct impact on the services and addressing the need. So the Center will have to think about what that will mean in terms of real lives."





# Conclusion

Just over one year into its journey, the Center has proven itself to be an effective and essential partner in conceiving and developing joint initiatives between LA County government and the private sector.

## Keys to Success

A number of factors appear to have contributed to the Center's success to date, including the following:

- **PUBLIC WILL.** The choice of child protection as a topical focus, building on the public attention surrounding the Blue Ribbon Commission report, has helped to ensure that the Center has the political backing it needs to be effective. Continued engagement on behalf of the Board of Supervisors is evidenced by the appearance of the Center's name in several recent Board motions. Both County and private sector stakeholders are eager to work together to make a difference for LA County children and families.
- **BICULTURAL ORIENTATION.** The current team of Center staff has worked diligently to gain a deep understanding of the County's culture and needs, and the concerns and interests of local foundation leaders. Stakeholders generally feel that the Center has been effective in highlighting the strengths that each sector brings to the table and improving communication between the two. The staff have been aided in this by Cugley, a seasoned County employee turned consul-

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**This is a signature project. It fulfills the possibility of what philanthropy working together with government could be, on a transformational scale.**

CHRIS ESSEL  
President and CEO, SCG

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tant for SCG, who laid early groundwork.

- **JOINT OWNERSHIP.** Joint funding of the Center means that public and private partners both have a stake in the Center's success, and it helps to avoid the perception that the Center is merely a fundraising arm for the County. Center staff have facilitated the sense of joint ownership by bringing public and private partners together frequently and holding meetings in a variety of public and private spaces.
- **EARLY WINS.** It has been important for the Center to establish trust among stakeholders by facilitating some shorter-term projects that provide an immediate sense of success, in addition to working toward longer-term systems change.
- **COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT.** Center staff have worked hard to engage the right players, attracting attention and support from leaders in both philanthropy and the County. Although executives at this level are not needed at every meeting, their buy-in has been critical to the Center's initial success. Frequent, personalized communica-

tion from Anderson, in particular, is cited by many foundation leaders as a factor in their continued engagement.

- **BACKBONE SUPPORT.** SCG and OCP provide a number of functions that enhance the capacity of Center staff. It would not have been possible for the current staff alone to accomplish what they have without additional support from SCG in the areas of fiscal agency, management and reporting; convening; public policy; and programs.

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**You have to be willing to disappoint people. It is a little risky, but more risky is somehow trying to please everyone and then having no time to focus. That's worse.**

WENDY GAREN  
President and CEO, Ralph M. Parsons Foundation

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## Next Steps

In its start-up year, the Center cast a wide net—seeking to deeply understand stakeholder needs and concerns, establishing a shared agenda, and building trust with and among key partners. With this groundwork laid, and almost two dozen initiatives under its belt, the Center is now poised to enter a new phase of development, requiring more focused pursuit of its purpose—bringing public and private partners together to catalyze change within the LA County child protection system.

To be successful in this, the Center will need the continued engagement and support of its stakeholders. In addition, stakeholders and observers have suggested that supplemental capacity may be needed in the following areas to address and overcome identified challenges:

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**[The Center] has to be entirely mission focused. Any misalignment ... is going to ultimately lead to a problem, because decisions will be made based on different agendas. And that can be disastrous.**

DR. JONATHAN E. SHERIN  
Director, LA County Department of Mental Health

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- **STRATEGIC CONSULTATION.** Determining how the Center's success will be defined—and securing key stakeholder agreement—will be critical to the Center's ability to make a strong case for continued support. A neutral consultant may be useful in helping the Center staff build clarity and consensus around key priorities, create strategic plans with concrete steps to move the needle in each key area, say “no” to requests that do not align with the Center's core mission, and create and pursue a viable sustainability plan.
- **EVALUATION.** Once success is defined, it must be measured. Most likely, for the Center, this will require a combination of outcome and process measures. In a system as large and complex as LA County, the Center cannot be wholly responsible for preventing child abuse and neglect or eliminating the foster parent recruitment crisis. On the other hand, tracking activities completed or even dollars raised will not be enough. Measures must be carefully selected to demonstrate impact in areas that matter to stakeholders. Judge Nash notes, “Some people view [the Center] as a fundraiser. ‘How much money did you raise in the last year?’ That's not the point ... It's not a matter of dollars and cents. It's ultimately, what have we been able to accomplish by creating public-private partnerships?”



- **STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION.** The Center must continue to enhance its ability to communicate effectively, with impact and in ways that are more accessible to its target audience. “It’s not enough to do it without being able to say it and show it,” says Peter Lynn of LAHSA. That involves building a communication plan that builds on the Center’s strategic plan to keep stakeholders informed and engaged around priorities, goals and impact—rather than activities. One key way to do that is to keep the focus on the children and families who ultimately benefit, by telling their stories. Aileen Adams advises, “For somebody who isn’t intimately involved in the Center’s work, and this would include a lot of people, it’s the stories that bring it to life. ... A lot of this work is revolutionary—it has huge significance—but you don’t understand that until you hear the stories.”
- **PROJECT MANAGEMENT.** As this chronicle has shown, partnerships require significant nuts and bolts support. Stakeholders generally agree that the Center’s charge and goals are ambitious given the size of its staff. Additional project management support, particularly from staff with intimate knowledge of the County administration and relevant subject matter expertise, will help the Center be successful in continuing to move critical initiatives forward.

When CSPPP stakeholders are asked what advice they would offer another jurisdiction interested in starting a public-private partnership initiative like this one, they commonly reply with an enthusiastic, “Do it!” For a County and philanthropic community that have historically struggled to connect, that might be the strongest endorsement for the Center’s work thus far. “I don’t see a down side,” says Nichols.

There is still plenty of work ahead to live up to the Center’s vision and potential. But, as Essel summed up, one thing is now clear: “We’re in it together; it’s not us and them. We are partners.”





# Appendix A: Acknowledgments

Casey Family Programs engaged Jill Rivera Greene to chronicle the Center for Strategic Public-Private Partnership's first year. Ms. Greene and Casey Family Programs are grateful to the following individuals who agreed to be interviewed for this report:

- Aileen Adams, Former Los Angeles Deputy Mayor, Office of Strategic Partnerships
- William H. Ahmanson, President, The Ahmanson Foundation
- Fred Ali, President and CEO, Weingart Foundation
- Kate Anderson, Director, Center for Strategic Public-Private Partnerships
- Linda Aragon, Director, Division of Maternal, Child, Adolescent Health, LA County Department of Public Health
- Helen Berberian, Deputy Director, Bureau of Clinical Resources and Services, LA County Department of Children and Family Services
- Edmund J. Cain, Vice President, Grant Programs, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
- Lizzie Cohen, Associate Director, Center for Strategic Public-Private Partnerships
- Gita Murthy Cugley, Consultant, Southern California Grantmakers
- Fesia Davenport, Assistant Chief Executive Officer, LA County
- Taylor Dudley, Children's Deputy, Office of Supervisor Hilda L. Solis
- Christine Essel, President and CEO, Southern California Grantmakers
- Dorothy Fleisher, Ph.D., Program Director, W. M. Keck Foundation
- Michael Fleming, Executive Director, David Bohnett Foundation
- Wendy Garen, President and CEO, The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation
- Daniel Heimpel, Founder and Executive Director, Fostering Media Connections
- Peter Long, Ph.D., President and CEO, Blue Shield of California Foundation
- Peter Lynn, Executive Director, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority
- Jackie Mizell-Burt, Program Director, LA County Department of Public Social Services
- Judge Michael Nash (ret.), Executive Director, Office of Child Protection
- Brandon T. Nichols, Acting Director, LA County Department of Children and Family Services
- Torie Osborn, Senior Strategist, Office of Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
- Jonathan E. Sherin, M.D., Ph.D., Director, LA County Department of Mental Health
- Anneli Stone, Senior Program Officer, W. M. Keck Foundation
- Beatriz Solís, Program Director, The California Endowment; Chair, Southern California Grantmakers
- Denise Tom, Program Officer, Health, Transition Aged Youth and Nonprofit Sustainability, California Community Foundation
- John Wagner, Executive Vice President, First 5 LA
- Winnie Wechsler, Executive Director, Anthony & Jeanne Pritzker Family Foundation



## Appendix B: Center Initiatives

The following sections provide highlights of the Center’s work to date in each of its priority areas.

### Prevention: Planning for Stronger Families

Prevention is a top priority of both the OCP and the Center, as it was a strong focus of the Blue Ribbon Commission that sparked the creation of both. “Prevention saves the County money, addresses the recruitment and retention problem, and is simply what’s best for these families,” Anderson says. “It’s not rocket science.”

Seeing that prevention is the right thing to do may be simple. But creating a robust family-strengthening system in a County as large and complex as Los Angeles is not.

In its first year, the Center has been deeply engaged with helping the OCP develop its draft prevention plan, released on June 30, 2017, a process that the team has taken to calling a “gorilla initiative” because of its size and complexity. The Center’s role has been to help shape what the OCP is developing and, in Anderson’s words, “help them think big,” with an eye toward joint initiatives with the private sector.

The Center has done this in part through deep engagement with the LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment, a group of funders that has been focused for the past

decade on public-private partnerships in this arena. It also has worked closely with First 5 LA in this effort. The Partnership and First 5 LA have committed to working collaboratively with the Center to approach philanthropy, both locally and nationally, to support the Prevention Plan. In addition, the Center has engaged the business community through many meetings with the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. Finally, the Center’s innovative work has attracted attention from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. ACF’s Region IX staff is interested in engaging with the County to explore how it might support public-private innovations in implementing the Prevention Plan.

“Our prevention plan is, at its core, a family strengthening plan,” Anderson says. “Fully realized, it will be the basis for an early childhood system that truly supports our vulnerable families with quality early childhood education, universal home visiting, housing and food security, and connections to community resources both for times of need and for decreasing isolation. The vision is large and exciting and somewhat daunting. But you can’t get what you don’t ask for, and we’re working toward it.”

Even while the OCP’s plan has been in development, the Center has worked on several smaller initiatives building toward this larger vision.

## FEATURED INITIATIVE: EXPANDING ACCESS TO HOME VISITING

Having a baby is wonderful ... and stressful. Anyone who has brought home a newborn, or potty-trained a toddler, can probably remember a time when they needed a little help.

When families face additional stressors—such as a job loss, mental health concern, or simply a lack of friends and family nearby to provide encouragement—their ability to bond with and nurture their child may be affected in ways that can have long-term consequences. A well-timed visit from a friendly face, providing reassurance, information about child development and a connection to community resources, can make all the difference in a young family's ability to cope with difficulties and begin to thrive.

Home visiting is an effective prevention strategy that improves an array of child and family outcomes, while saving money that would otherwise be spent on more costly interventions. In LA County, however, these programs currently reach only a fraction of the families who could benefit.

In December of 2016, the Board of Supervisors passed a motion directing the County's Department of Public Health to coordinate with other County departments and partners to develop a plan to enhance and expand the network of home visiting programs in LA County.

This type of charge was right up Anderson's alley, and she went straight to work. With the blessing of Linda Aragon, Director of DPH's Division of Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health, Anderson pulled together a small ad hoc committee of philanthropy representatives to be thought-partners for planning and ambassadors for future funding opportunities. She also helped to gather a small workgroup of core partners to support the plan's development and helped to secure funding for a consultant to provide additional backbone support for the effort. The Center also helped build sup-

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**This is absolutely a new era in public-private partnership ... I'm excited that folks want to hear from us, and there's a true commitment and interest in engaging and looking at opportunities.**

LINDA ARAGON  
LA County Dept. of Public Health

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port in key County departments, including the Department of Mental Health and Department of Public Social Services, through technical assistance and education of key leaders.

A comprehensive Interim Report was delivered to the Board of Supervisors on June 21, 2017, laying out a vision for a robust system of home visiting throughout the County. County departments that were named in the Board motion made preliminary commitments about how they hope to support this vision, and through the Center's efforts, the private sector was also at the table. Throughout the process, the ad hoc committee was engaged in helping to explore how private-sector investments could be catalytic to the County's efforts. Various components for potential investment—technology, capacity building, evaluation—were identified to track the commitments of various County departments. As the County continues its work, the Center will bring the private sector along to help fully realize the potential. A follow-up report is scheduled for September 26, 2017.

In the meantime, connections being made through the development of both the OCP's plan and the home visiting plan are already resulting in the fabric of home visiting services being woven a little more tightly, at least in one community.

At a November 2016 meeting between the OCP and the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) to discuss an early draft of the prevention plan, DPSS director Sheryl Spiller reportedly made an observation about the number of families receiving DPSS services who also wind up in the child protection

system. “We should be able to do something about this. How do we stop it?”

Jackie Mizell-Burt, a Program Director within DPSS, had already been thinking along these lines. “People don’t really see us as doing prevention,” she says. “But it’s a natural fit—some of the basic needs are some of the [families’] biggest problems. That’s where we come in ... That’s my side of the house.”

As it turned out, all she needed was the right partner—Kathy Icenhower, Executive Director of the private nonprofit organization SHIELDS for Families, operating in some of South Los Angeles’ most disadvantaged neighborhoods. Jacquelyn McCroskey, a member of the County’s Commission on Children and Families, arranged that meeting, invited the Center, and sparks began to fly. “[Icenhower] and I hit it off right away. We’re a dangerous duo,” jokes Mizell-Burt.

SHIELDS was already providing home visiting services using the evidence-based Healthy Families America (HFA) model, funded by First 5 LA. However, due to funding and program limitations, only families giving birth in certain hospitals were eligible to participate in these voluntary services. These eligibility requirements left many other families with young children, including many who were reliant on DPSS services such as CalWORKS (TANF), without access to home visiting services as their children grew or when they experienced stressful changes in their family situation. The goal is to connect families to home visiting services when they need them the most—before their family reaches a crisis that brings them to the attention of DCFS.

Although 26 states support home visiting with their TANF dollars, Los Angeles County does not. The Center recognized and helped to realize the potential of connecting DPSS families to this evidence-based home visiting program, and Anderson knew that First 5 LA needed to be at the table to make that possible. She

called the next meeting, bringing the OCP, DPSS, First 5 LA and SHIELDS into one room to brainstorm the possibilities.

The Center then provided backbone support to keep planning and implementation on track. It brought the parties together, helped to develop the concept and framework for a pilot, and grounded the work in the OCP’s Prevention Plan. First 5 LA has agreed to fund a two-year pilot project that will allow DPSS, for the first time ever, to refer clients to SHIELDS’ evidence-based home visiting services. To ensure the formation and details of the pilot are documented, the Center also sought and obtained funding from the Reissa Foundation to develop a report.

If this pilot can successfully demonstrate results—and from past evidence of home visiting, there’s every reason to believe it will—the hope is that DPSS will fund home visiting services for more of their families in the future.

Anderson points out, “This has never happened in LA County before. If we’re successful in this, it could change the game for family strengthening and open up services to tens of thousands of families who could benefit tremendously.”

## Recruiting and Retaining Foster Families: Harnessing Collective Wisdom

Addressing the foster parent crisis has long been a priority for many of the Center’s philanthropic partners. This is one area where the County and philanthropy agree: The current crisis is severe, and just continuing to do what the County has always done will not be enough to solve it.

Some have suggested a media campaign, but many believe the problem goes deeper than simply raising awareness. Judge Nash ob-

serves, “We don’t have a user-friendly system when it comes to recruiting or allowing people to apply to become a part of the system. Many people get frustrated and walk away.” Until the internal barriers are addressed, some stakeholders suggest, a media campaign may have the unwanted effect of simply generating more frustration, rather than attracting new foster families.

Nichols is hopeful that the Center can help. “There’s an opportunity here for the Center to bring in experts or demonstrate better approaches that the County could then adopt on a big scale... if we could learn from someone else how to do it better, then we could take that and scale it up.” He admits that, on its own, the County has sometimes been slow to change. “I think we are kind of stuck in the old ... We need to cast off some of our old bad habits and learn newer habits. The Center can help guide us there... I am optimistic about it.”

Garen agrees that fresh perspectives are needed. “We just can’t wait,” she says. “Nothing will change until we start looking at it, collectively, from a systems-thinking perspective, and see what we can do to make change happen.” The Center’s formation seems to have provided just that kind of opportunity.

That’s why the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation recently approached the Center for support in creating a Collective Impact initiative that would address the recruitment crisis by drawing on the wisdom of stakeholders from various sectors. Although this effort is in its very beginning stages, the collective impact approach has shown promise in tackling other complex social problems.

Early meetings have been positive, with stakeholders eager to engage, and a general interest in developing a landscape of the issue as a first step, which First5LA has funded. So far, the Center has been instrumental as a thought partner, providing some backbone support and helping to bring the right County partners

to the table. They will continue to be involved going forward, working in close partnership with the County and the Parsons team.

Daniel Heimpel, Founder and Executive Director of Fostering Media Connections, believes this is one of the Center’s most promising initiatives, and he urges the Center to continue to take a leadership role. “You’ve got all of the heavy hitters already engaged. So you have a real opportunity to do something and communicate about that in a way that really inspires other jurisdictions. It’s a huge opportunity for the kids in LA, and for kids across the country, and for people who care about kids.”

## **FEATURED INITIATIVE: FOSTERING HOME**

The plight of foster children needing homes touches the hearts of many. But a desire to help often comes with a host of questions: What does it take to become a foster parent? Will I qualify? What would it really be like to have a child in my home? What support is available? Interested families need answers, help and guidance to successfully complete the approval process and become foster parents.

To address this need, the Center brought together DCFS with foundation, community and faith partners to create “Fostering Home”—a unique partnership focused on easing the process of becoming a resource family and making support more accessible to interested families. The project held its first event, a “one-stop shop” for prospective resource families, on June 3, 2017. The Center secured \$30,000 in philanthropic funding from the Parsons Foundation and the Pritzker Foster Care Initiative to develop and test this new approach to recruitment. DCFS demonstrated its commitment by matching the philanthropic contribution. The event’s design accelerates the Resource Family Approval (RFA) process by bringing together key resources such as an orientation, Live Scan (fingerprinting) and health screenings and hands-on application assistance from

qualified social workers. Refreshments and child care are provided, and each participant receives personalized follow-up and support throughout the approval process, should they choose to continue. This first event was held at the Center of Hope in Inglewood, an area with a large African American population. If successful, however, the event can be easily replicated in other areas and with other target populations.

“This model has the ability to transform the way the County approaches recruitment,” says Gita Murthy Cugley, consultant to SCG and the Center. “It capitalizes on the untapped resources and support of the faith community, which can translate across to other communities.”

Judge Nash, Executive Director of the OCP, hopes the approach will have a ripple effect. “The first step you need to take is refine the process to make it more user-friendly, and then invite people in. If they participate in a user-friendly process, you will recruit people who will then, by word of mouth, help recruit other people over the longer term.”

Other event goals were to raise awareness about the needs of foster youth and highlight other ways, in addition to becoming foster parents themselves, that families and communities can help children in need. This is especially relevant for faith communities, who have a history of providing emotional and concrete support for member families who foster. It is hoped that events like these can help DCFS establish and strengthen relationships with churches in key areas.

To this end, the planning team conducted outreach to South L.A. faith communities for three months prior to the event, including meeting individually with community leaders, hosting faith leader luncheons and conducting personal visits to churches to appeal directly to congregations. This personal approach is credited with generating interest and attendance at the event, and it is igniting hope for

more collaboration in the future.

“What’s exciting about the faith initiative is not just the foster parent recruitment, it’s establishing the relationship. Everyone knows that they [churches] are a critical partner ... I think the response that [the Center is] getting for this convening, that’s going to have a collateral effect,” says Fesia Davenport, Assistant Chief Executive Officer, LA County.

Obviously, the effort’s primary goal is to bring new resource families into the system—and those results won’t be available for many weeks or months, because the approval process takes time. However, initial feedback has been positive. Hundreds of families attended the event, and survey results indicate that most were interested in becoming foster parents or, at minimum, learning more about the process.

One prospective foster parent who attended summed up his experience: “It’s a great place to start. It really jump-starts you and gets you a lot farther, right up front, than if you were trying to ping-pong yourself through a whole bunch of different individual places ... It just really helps speed it up overall.”

## **FEATURED INITIATIVE: EMERGENCY CHILD CARE FOR YOUNG FOSTER CHILDREN**

Imagine being a young child, removed suddenly from your home and family under traumatic circumstances. Now imagine that, instead of being taken immediately to the home of a relative who already knows and loves you, or a welcoming foster family in a familiar neighborhood, you wind up spending hours or even days in a busy office, while a caseworker scrambles to find you a bed.

This has been the fate of too many infants and young children removed from their homes in LA County, where the shortage of available foster families sometimes leaves caseworkers

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**When you have people in the Center who understand both public and private and are able to navigate both, you have a very valuable asset.**

HELEN BERBERIAN  
Deputy Director, Bureau of Clinical Resources and Services DCFS

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scrambling for emergency placements.

Now, in part through the Center's efforts, the County is working with The W.M. Keck Foundation, the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, and First 5 LA to address one of the top barriers to timely placement for very young children: access to child care for working relatives and foster parents. A small pilot project, launched in April of this year, provides priority access to care for children in need. It also trains child care providers in how to respond to the trauma needs of children who have been abused or neglected. Finally, it provides for a child care systems navigator, co-located in a DCFS office, to connect children benefiting from the emergency stipend to permanently funded child care that will help keep the family stable long-term.

Many partners, public and private, worked tirelessly for nearly two years to develop this project. The combination of public and private entities working together made it possible to overcome any barriers that arose—most notably, when foundations and the County agreed to share the risk of paying for reserved but (potentially) unused child care slots that neither could justify paying for alone. (In the end, this became a nonissue, because all five slots were filled within the program's first month.)

According to Helen Berberian, Deputy Director, Bureau of Clinical Resources and Services at DCFS, the Center's role in the negotiations was critical. "The role that the Center played was ... making sure that breakdowns were reduced or minimized through the process of building the pilot. And there was a lot of inter-

pretation that needed to happen. The Center was uniquely positioned to do that."

Private funders have picked up the tab for an evaluation component, already under way, to measure the impact of immediate access to child care on child safety, permanency and well-being, as well as on the recruitment and retention of in-home caregivers. Data from this evaluation may support other jurisdictions looking to implement similar programs, including counties that opt-in on a new emergency child care bridge program, recently enacted (AB-1164), that provides funding to replicate the model statewide.

In the meantime, at least five children have already been placed, presumably faster than would otherwise have been possible, and all of them with relatives. And the Center has earned valuable trust among its partners.

Berberian says, "In the beginning, when the Center was established, I thought, 'Oh, well what are they going to be able to do?' Oh boy did I learn. I learned what they're able to do, because they did it for me."

## **FEATURED INITIATIVE: FAMILY FINDING PILOT EVALUATION**

"If we don't have to remove a child, that's our first choice," explains Berberian. "But if we have to remove a child, our next choice is to place with a relative." Only if a family member can't be found should the Department explore other options, such as placement with a foster family. But too often, efforts to locate family members for children in out-of-home care focus on youth at the back end of the system, after they have already spent years in foster care and are facing the transition to independent living.

In May 2016, the Board of Supervisors called on DCFS to work with the Office of Child Protection to build a robust and consistent

system of finding and engaging family members when a child is first taken into the child protection system. DCFS and the OCP together designed a pilot for two DCFS offices (Santa Fe Springs and Glendora), to substantially increase the number of identified family supports for each child entering the child protection system, and thereby improve outcomes for youth.

Aware that rigorous documentation is necessary for pilots with good results to be brought to scale and implemented with fidelity, they approached the Center for help in ensuring that this work would be sustainable.

The Center agreed to seek a philanthropic partner willing to fund an outside evaluator for the pilot. Anderson did the legwork of engaging potential partners and helped to select an outside entity to perform the work—Child Trends, a national expert on family finding. If the model shows positive results initially, Child Trends will provide technical assistance to help the County replicate the success in additional offices.

The Ahmanson Foundation stepped up with \$100,000 in funding. “What caught my eye [about this project] is that you’ve got a vulnerable population that ends up with strangers at a very traumatic point in their lives. The County is trying to do something that is a new way of doing business,” says President William Ahmanson. “If we can put kids into a better situation that’s less stressful and get them to a sense of normalcy faster, that’s a positive.”

He notes that the project structure was also appealing to how his Foundation likes to do business. “Kids’ lives are on the line. If the County is good enough to fund the pilot, then we are happy to help with the analysis.”

The value that this kind of support adds cannot be overestimated. Anderson notes, “By being able to tell the story, it helps to ensure that this initiative has the muscle to have the resources it will take to roll this out.”

## Transition-Age Youth

Center staff are frank about the fact that Transition-Age Youth is currently the least developed of the Center’s three priority areas. This is a factor of limited staff capacity and the fact that Cohen, who is taking the lead in this area, had just 6 months under her belt when this report was being developed.

That said, even though her time has been spent familiarizing herself with the issues and stakeholders, the Center is already experiencing success through Cohen’s efforts. The Center now co-convenes, along with the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) and United Way, a Youth Housing Subcommittee of the Home for Good Funders Collaborative. Home for Good is a long-standing public-private collaborative that until recently had focused on chronic and veteran homeless issues. The Youth Subcommittee brings together the powerful framework of this existing collaborative with the Center’s connections to the County’s child-serving departments and the housing know-how of LAHSA.

### **FEATURED INITIATIVE: SUPERVISED INDEPENDENT LIVING PLACEMENT (SILP) PILOT**

Youth who reach adulthood while in the LA County foster care system have a unique option available to help ease their transition to self-sufficiency. A Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP) provides youth ages 18 – 21 with monthly financial assistance while they get a taste of independence in their own apartment, dorm room, or room in a shared home.

Unfortunately, this support comes with challenges, making it an unrealistic choice for many of the youth who need it. A lack of affordable housing options, high application and move-in fees, and the need for resources to pay for furniture and utilities can serve as barriers to accessing this funding, which can



only be provided once the youth has gotten him- or herself moved in. Like other 18-year-olds, many foster youth need a little more hands-on support when moving from a family environment to living independently. Histories of trauma can make this leap even more challenging.

At Home for Good's invitation, the Center and LAHSA recently teamed up to develop two pilot projects to address the needs of this vulnerable group. Two nonprofit organizations, The Village Family Services and Hathaway-Sycamores Child and Family Services, will each support a small group of 25-30 transitioning foster youth, to determine whether wrap-around services such as flexible funding, transition planning, and housing navigation help the youth thrive. In doing so, they will consider housing stability as well as other outcomes, such as income, education, or employment.

Recognizing that DCFS is an essential partner, both in the pilots themselves and in any future efforts to bring new services to scale, the Center has worked diligently to keep County staff informed and involved throughout the pilots' development. Center staff also were successful in bringing new funders to the collaborative, bolstering these and future efforts on behalf of transition-age youth.

"This isn't about filling gaps or paying for things the County can't afford," Cohen is quick to point out. "It's about finding spaces where there's a disconnect in the system that we're trying to solve. The pilots themselves are only going to serve a small number of youth. But what we learn from these projects could inform how DCFS thinks overall about transition planning and the SILP program in the future."

## FEATURED INITIATIVE: LEGAL SUPPORT FOR UNDOCUMENTED YOUTH

Systems change takes time, and the issues that the Center is taking on—preventing children from entering the child protection system and resolving the County's longstanding foster parent recruitment crisis—are certainly no exception.

But at the Center's December 2016 funders briefing, staff members also were urged to look for opportunities to be nimble and responsive to needs emerging from the current political environment. At the time, Anderson wasn't sure how that applied to the Center's work. "But I kept it in my head," she says, that a funder had made the request.

An opportunity soon presented itself, at an April meeting of the coordinated entry system collaborative that Cohen attends. A provider spoke up at the meeting, saying that in light of recently heightened tensions around immigration, an unprecedented number of youth were coming to her staff with questions about their legal status. Anxiety about deportation was high, she said, but her staff were experts in housing, not immigration. What should they do?

Cohen responded: "I don't know what to do either. But it's my job to help find resources, so let me look into it."

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**It's really nice to know that we are able to do something to help these kids during such a challenging time, when there is so much uncertainty and fear. It's been great to be able to see a problem and jump in and offer a solution right away. [This initiative] is unique in that way.**

LIZZIE COHEN  
Associate Center Director

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Together, Cohen and Anderson began the search for help. Within just a few weeks, they had reached out to a network that includes the L.A. Justice Fund, private attorneys, Mungler, Tolles & Olson, LLP and O'Melveny & Meyers, LLP, and a local nonprofit, KIND (Kids in Need of Defense). KIND agreed to provide training and serve as a "quarterback" for warm hand-offs to legal assistance. Several private attorneys agreed to prioritize requests coming from KIND for pro bono legal services. The LA Justice Fund will provide additional capacity, if the need winds up being greater than what these private resources can address.

Meanwhile, the Center also reached out to its contacts within DCFS, to keep them apprised of what they were hearing and explore any overlap. They learned (and were able to inform LAHSA providers) that the County has public resources available to help youth connected to the child protection system—which could include some, but not all, of those served by the homeless providers.

In addition to making providers aware of the resources available, the Center also helped connect them with a series of "Know Your Rights" workshops and an immigration law briefing, so that their staff will be more confident and better equipped to serve these vulnerable youth.

Agreements were in place quickly, within about a month of the initial meeting. Although the need for actual legal assistance is anticipated to be small, service providers can now rest easier, knowing that expert help is available to the youth in their care. Reducing the stress and anxiety around immigration helps lighten the load for workers and youth alike, allowing everyone to get back to the business at hand: helping youth find stable housing that will enable them to achieve other goals (such as education or employment) on their way to productive adulthood.

In this case, at least, LA County had a wealth

of resources to help. People just needed to be connected, and making those connections is what the Center does best. According to Anderson, "The value we brought was in knowing who to ask, having the relationships that made the ask easier, making the ask, and connecting the players and getting the commitments."

Cohen agrees. "People could have figured it out on their own," she says, "but we made it easy. We connected them."

## Cross-Priority Activities

In addition to activities within the priority areas, the Center has been engaged in several initiatives that, although they do not fit neatly into any one category, touch on all.

### LGBTQ SCAN EXPANSION

LGBTQ youth experience disproportionate risk in a number of areas, including being twice as likely to be involved with the CPS system. In 2016, LA County engaged expert Khush Cooper to conduct a scan of the county's youth services, to determine how well these vulnerable youth are being served, including areas of strength and opportunities for improvement. The study was even more fruitful than expected; however, that meant that in order to produce the most robust results, it needed to be expanded.

That's where the Center came in. Anderson engaged the David Bohnett Foundation to be a seed funder and quickly pulled together an educational briefing for more than a dozen additional foundations to discuss the work. The briefing was a success: Together, funders committed an additional \$50,000 to support the study.

Even more importantly, attendees asked to be reconvened when the report was released, to hear about the results and discuss how they could be applied to improve county services for youth in the future.

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**There's a subtle shift in the culture of the county when you bring in philanthropy to fund something and then you keep them engaged. It creates more accountability, more eyes, more stakeholders, more sunlight. More kids are going to be saved, period. There's just no way around it.**

TORIE OSBORN  
on the LGBTQ Scan Expansion

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The Center also brought an immediate opportunity to the group: The County Health “Hub” at Los Angeles County’s USC Medical Center has a teen clinic that is already engaging in the best practices identified in the study for serving LGBTQ teens. The County funds other Health hubs in other communities, but none have a teen clinic. The County was interested in replicating this clinic, but it needed private sector support to standardize the model so that it could be re-created effectively. The Reissa Foundation stepped up to fund a program manager position, and the Center will continue working with the County to build support for replication of this model in other hubs.

In addition to critical funding support, the County now has a new cadre of thought-partners, supporting and holding them accountable as they move forward in making public services more welcoming for vulnerable youth.

## PORTRAIT OF LOS ANGELES

Public-private partnership isn’t always about bringing private funding to support government initiatives. Sometimes, it’s just the opposite.

The Portrait of Los Angeles began as a philanthropic effort. Supported by 14 philanthropic funders and the County, this initiative promotes the development of a common, countywide set of analytics (produced by Measure of America, a program of the Social Science Research Council) to benchmark well-being, identify areas for improvement and ultimately measure progress. Several foundations were already on board before the Center became involved. However, previous efforts by philanthropy to engage the County had not been successful.

Experience from other communities had shown that the involvement of key government decision-makers would be critical to ensuring that this work would not just become another report on a shelf, but would be actively used to inform policy decisions and target services to families most in need. So the Center worked with the OCP to draft a grant proposal to LA County’s Productivity Investment Fund. These County funds would support a consultant to lead a local advisory board and deepen stakeholder engagement.

Approval of this grant in April brings more than the County’s significant monetary investment of \$125,000. It brings the promise of engagement by multiple departments, including DCFS, DPH and DPSS, among others. And it has expanded the capacity to connect and integrate this effort with other County data initiatives, multiplying its relevance and reach.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Los Angeles County Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection. (2014). *The road to safety for our children*. [http://ceo.lacounty.gov/pdf/brc/BRCCP\\_Final\\_Report\\_April\\_18\\_2014.pdf](http://ceo.lacounty.gov/pdf/brc/BRCCP_Final_Report_April_18_2014.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Essel, C. (2014, June 13). A major step forward in protecting LA County children. Southern California Grantmakers. <https://www.socalgrantmakers.org/news/major-step-forward-protecting-la-county-children>

<sup>3</sup> Los Angeles County Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection. *The road to safety for our children*. p. 26.

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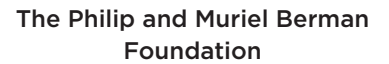


PRITZKER FOSTER CARE INITIATIVE

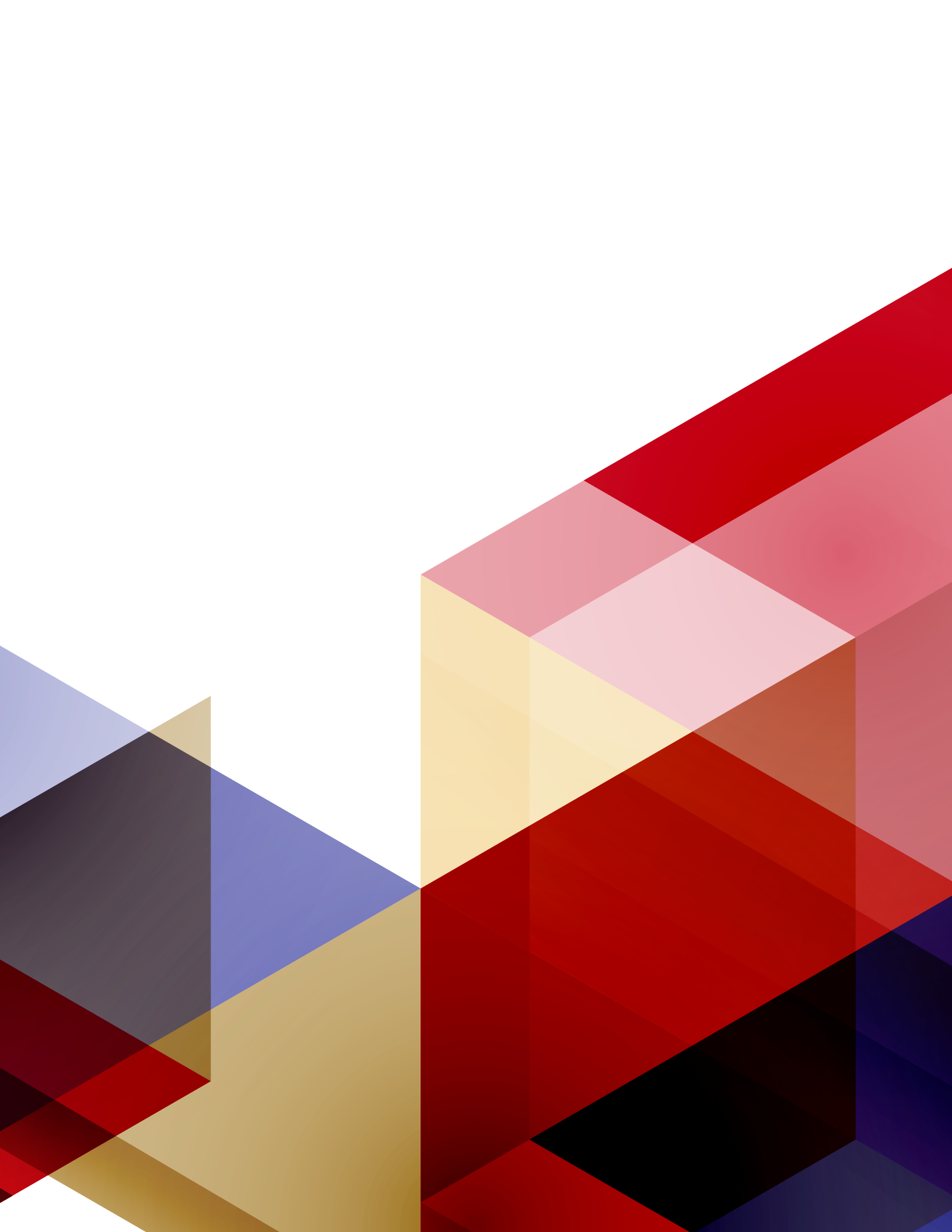
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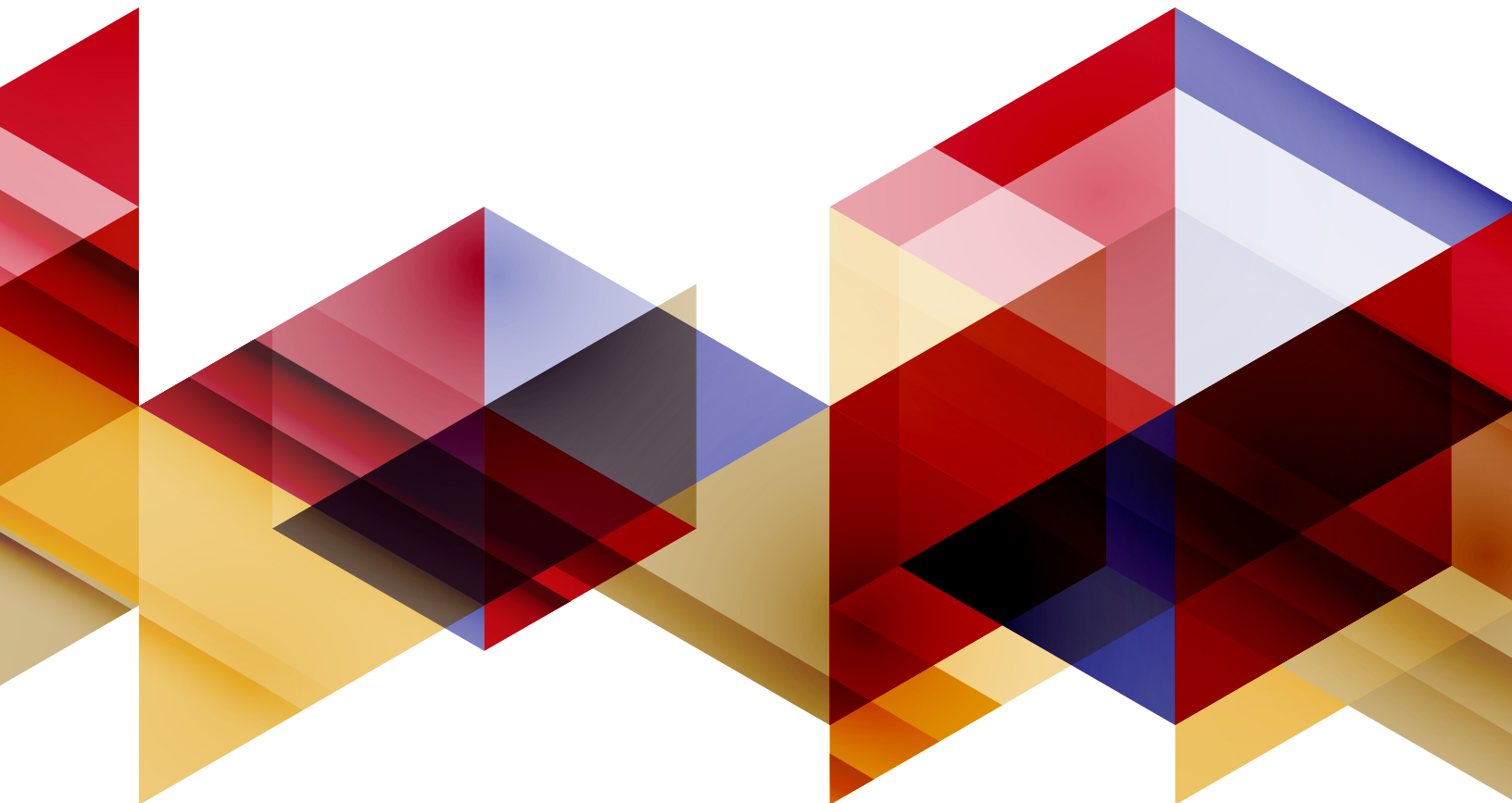


# Partners in the Center's Joint Initiatives









SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA  
GRANTMAKERS