

# The Children's Council

of Los Angeles County

500 West Temple Street, Room B-26  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

## **Meeting of The Children's Council**

**May 21, 2009**

**3:00 p.m.**

Magnolia Place

1910 Magnolia Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90007

Present: Nancy Haruye Au  
Samuel Q. Chan, representing the Health and Mental Health Services Cluster  
Carol Clem, representing the Public Safety Cluster  
Jennifer Coultas, representing the Children, Families, and Adults Well-Being Cluster  
Deborah Davies  
Jeff Farber  
Russ Guiney  
Jon R. Gundry, representing Darline Robles  
Cynthia Harding, representing the Health and Mental Health Services Cluster  
Whitcomb W. Hayslip, representing Ramon Cortines  
Miriam Long  
Martha Molina-Aviles, representing Chair Gloria Molina  
Elisa Nicholas  
Trish Ploehn  
Danny Ramos  
Bruce Saltzer  
Miguel Santana, representing Bill T Fujioka  
Walter Taylor  
Margaret Donnellan Todd  
Phillip L. Williams

Guest: Linda Smith, Second Supervisorial District

In the absence of Chair Gloria Molina, Martha Molina-Aviles brought the meeting to order at 3:15 p.m., welcoming everyone and asking Children's Council members and the audience to introduce themselves.

Molina-Aviles then invited Alex Morales, president and CEO of the Children's Bureau, to speak about the concepts behind Magnolia Place, which that agency opened last year. Morales offered attendees "an opportunity for you to tour what you have helped create" after the meeting, explaining that the Children's Bureau had used the best thinking of advocates across the coun-

try—including the Children's Planning Council—to design the community initiative here. "You help carry us," Morales told everyone, "with your goals for the children of Los Angeles County around economic stability, relationship-based organizing, and transforming communities to help themselves. We have forty partner organizations working in a three-and-a-half-square-mile area, and the organizations housed in this building include county departments such as Public Social Services, Child Support Services, Children and Family Services, Health Services, Public Health, and Mental Health, as well as Public Counsel, a preschool, and a library. The SPA 4 Council community organizers are also housed on-site, and we're planning to bring in a credit union as well. We thank you for your wisdom over the years, allowing us to put into place a tangible product from what you've helped us dream about."

### **Report on the Council's Objectives for 2008–2009: Sharon G. Watson**

Sharon Watson updated members on accomplishments toward meeting the objectives adopted by the Council in February.

- The goal of **establishing an additional 36 neighborhood action councils**—four per SPA Council and the American Indian Children's Council—has already been exceeded. About 120 of these resident-driven groups are now active in the county, with another dozen or so in the process of being formed. (A list of groups was included in member packets.) By the end of the summer, the Council expects a total of 130 groups whose members work to increase the quality of life in their communities, reduce social isolation, and learn more about child development and improved parenting.
- The work of the economic well-being roundtable—**one of five roundtables to be formed around the outcome areas of child well-being**—has dovetailed with the work of these resident groups. Between January and April, the Greater Los Angeles Economic Alliance partnered with group members to establish and publicize 35 tax preparation sites across the county, through which over 5,000 low-income residents claimed the Earned Income Tax Credit and other tax benefits, bringing about \$5 million into the county's economy. (Results from the GLAEA effort and from tax preparation events held by the American Indian Children's Council were included in member packets.) Residents are also receiving training and support for starting home-based businesses, and plans are proceeding to create economic resource hubs in each SPA that will offer comprehensive financial, business, housing, child care, job, and child support services. In addition, the roundtable hopes to work with the Chief Executive Office on planning for an anticipated second round of economic stimulus plan funding, channeling it especially toward community-based organizations. Watson thanked roundtable co-chairs Phil Browning and Beatriz Olvera Stotzer, GLAEA, Wells Fargo Bank, Citibank, and the Pacific Asian Consortium in Employment (PACE) for their work.

Through the efforts of the good health roundtable, a policy statement has been inserted into the county's General Plan update that supports the expansion of community gardens and urban farming programs, and an implementation action has also been included that would identify county-owned land parcels and other potential sites for these endeavors. The Department of Public Works will undertake to find vacant land that can be used for gardens by interested resident groups, and the Department of Parks and Recreation's Smart Garden Learning Centers will provide training. Watson expressed appreciation to Lari Sheehan

(deputy Chief Executive Officer over the community and municipal services cluster), the planning departments of both the city and county of Los Angeles, the Department of Public Works, the Agricultural Commissioner/Weights and Measures, Parks and Recreation, and roundtable co-chairs Cindy Harding from the Department of Public Health and Elisa Nicholas from The Children's Clinic in Long Beach.

In future months, the Education Coordinating Council will spearhead the achievement and workforce readiness roundtable, and the Policy Roundtable for Child Care will take leadership on the social and emotional well-being roundtable. Once the county's gang reduction initiative is approved by the Board of Supervisors, the safety and survival roundtable will form to determine its participation in that work.

- The county's **seven children's commissions** have held joint monthly meetings since March, and have agreed to work together in the prevention arena, building on, coordinating, and integrating current initiatives. They will likely begin by holding a summit of child-related entities this fall where participants would endorse and agree to work together on achieving four or five specific prevention-oriented outcomes during the upcoming year.
- With respect to the goal of reconvening and restructuring the Council's **data efforts**, a number of university-based and independent researchers and evaluators associated with a host of prevention initiatives, plus a group of First 5 LA research staff, have been meeting since last fall. They have agreed on common performance measures and protocols for prevention-oriented research, and are now working on ways to measure the impact of community-building work on child and family well-being. A subgroup will decide which of these indicators might be used as the foundation for the Council's 2010 Children's ScoreCard.

A full report on the Council's goals and objectives for 2008–2009 is now being finalized and will be posted on the Council website—<http://thechildrenscouncil.net>—in a couple of weeks.

#### **Foundation Board Report: Phillip L. Williams**

- **Strengthening the financial security of The Children's Council** was the fifth goal agreed upon at the organization's last meeting, and Phillip Williams, president of the board of directors of The Children's Council Foundation, Inc., reported that the clean audit received in February for fiscal year 2007–2008 was a good step in that direction. In addition, as previously announced, three individuals with strong business or philanthropic connections have been added to the Foundation Board, and a policy requesting each director to make or secure a significant financial donation to support the work of the Council has been established.

Since that time, the Foundation Board has created a new office of vice president to champion and oversee its board development and fundraising goals, and has elected David Grannis to fill that seat. Grannis is drafting a development plan to guide the further expansion and diversification of the Foundation Board and direct its fundraising efforts. A grant of \$75,000 has already been received this year, and a proposal for another \$100,000 has been submitted.

- Williams presented the Council's budget for 2009–2010, which the Foundation Board approved at its May 11 meeting. Projected income—\$1,450,000 from county sources and

\$1,281,250 from non-county sources—totals \$2,731,250, with an additional \$100,000 to be raised from private donors or foundations. “Although in today’s economic environment,” Williams commented, “even that relatively small amount may be a challenge.”

Administrative costs are about 13.7 percent of total expenses, in keeping with guidelines for nonprofit organizations. The SPA Councils and the AICC are allocated \$200,000 each for their community-building expenses—half for personnel and half for program activities—a figure that is consistent with this year’s amount. Personnel costs are projected to be 53.6 percent less than in last year’s budget, primarily because of major reductions in administrative and non-SPA-related program staff. The Foundation faces significant unemployment costs—about \$30,000 per quarter—associated with the termination of those employees last fall, although a portion of that outlay may at some point be reimbursed through the Federal stimulus package. Total expenses are expected to exceed revenues by about \$415,000, which will be funded from cash reserves.

**Phillip Williams moved that the proposed Children’s Council budget for 2009–2010 be adopted. Danny Ramos seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.**

#### **Highlights of the Los Angeles County 2009–2010 Budget and Stimulus Plan, and Their Impact on Children and Families: Miguel Santana**

Deputy Chief Executive Officer Miguel Santana expressed his pleasure at being at Magnolia Place, which he believes exemplifies a model that should exist throughout Los Angeles County. “We want to create places where, regardless of a family’s need or question, any county staff member can assist them,” he said. “Whatever department they’re part of, we want them all to be generalists—a kind of ‘super social worker’—knowing how the county as a whole operates and what it can do to help and strengthen families. We’re piloting that concept here and at 8300 Vermont Avenue, which expects its grand opening soon.”

Santana went on to update attendees on the state and county budget situation in this unprecedented economic downturn. The decline was first noticed early last year with an increase in the population on General Relief (which provides the very poor \$221 a month), rolls that have grown 2 to 3 percent every month for the past several months. The Board of Supervisors added \$40 million in county funds to this program this year, and is anticipating even larger GR enrollment next year.

Unemployment is approaching 12 percent in Los Angeles County (higher than in the state as a whole), and the Department of Public Social Services is also seeing huge increases in applications. As the *Los Angeles Times* detailed in a recent article, many of these are from middle-class individuals who find that they are ineligible for help because they still own an SUV, have some retirement savings, or can still pay the mortgage on their homes. “Because of Federal laws and regulations,” Santana said, “we have to tell those folks to come back when they’re living in their cars.” Child support caseloads, too, have climbed from 200 cases per month to 500, as a direct result of the economy.

These demands on county services are coming at the same time as a deep drop in revenue from the state and Federal governments. With the failure of the budget-related ballot measures last week, Los Angeles County is expecting a \$300 million shortfall next year. The budget brought to

the Board of Supervisors last week identified \$100 million in cuts throughout the county—all done, Santana said, without a single layoff. “We are fortunate that the Board has historically been fiscally conservative enough to establish a reserve,” he noted. “During the good years, we spent money on one-time capital expenses, not on creating ongoing programs, so we’re able to tighten our belts. These are all bearable cuts.” With the continuation of the recession, however, plus an expected dramatic decrease in sales tax revenue, the county is anticipating starting its next fiscal year \$100 million short, even after this initial \$100 million in cuts. “We’re looking at every single program,” Santana said, “asking whether it’s central to our mission to help save lives and families. We have difficult choices to make. Our primary priority is to minimize the impact of these cuts on people who rely on the county for their livelihood. We intend to minimize layoffs or avoid them altogether, since our workforce is critical to maintaining the level of services we provide. We already have a hard hiring freeze and constraints on travel and purchasing services and supplies. We’re doing everything we can to make it through these difficult times.”

Similar challenges exist in the nonprofit community, Santana added, but overall, he sees the situation as offering opportunities for everyone to examine the way they do business. “Do we really need to do a particular thing?” he asked. “Is this the best of way going about it? Can we do it in a smarter, more efficient way, perhaps consolidating it with other functions? Can other partners do it more cost-effectively?” The children, families, and adults well-being cluster is currently engaged in looking at all these issues and developing a set of recommendations for streamlining county government.

Santana’s cluster is also responsible for overseeing 30 grants from the Federal stimulus package, some of which were detailed in a handout included in member packets.

- As implemented in Los Angeles County—unlike its design in other jurisdictions—a Transitional Subsidized Employment program will provide 10,000 job opportunities for welfare-to-work clients, equally divided among the governmental, nonprofit, and private sectors. The county will pay 80 percent of the cost to employ participating workers, while employers pay a 20 percent portion that includes the costs of supervision, management, supplies, and training for that employee—making the investment by employers as little as 5 to 10 percent of the actual cost to employ the worker. The South Bay Workforce Investment Board and other One-Stop/Worksource Centers throughout the county—with which the county has long-standing contracting relationships—will serve as employer of record, sending workers to jobs in the various sectors as requested.

Santana anticipates workers being hired to clean beaches and parks, scan legal documents, organize libraries, serve as aides to nurses and social workers, and so on. In particular, he is championing the creation of a new ‘customer service advocate’ position within the county, whose employees would greet prospective clients at county department offices, emergency rooms, and elsewhere to orient them, give them a sense of the process they will face, and make sure all their paperwork is in order. “Who better to give you that orientation than someone who’s gone through it themselves?” he asked. “We want an army of workers at all public facilities that will make the customer experience welcoming and give a much clearer idea of what’s expected. All these jobs are an opportunity for workers to build skill sets so that when we’re out of this recession, they can be employed. I encourage all of you to con-

sider bringing these people on, if you run a nonprofit or a private business, or if you're part of government in L.A. or other municipalities. This is an opportunity to get our county working again. We've got folks who want to work, who have experience and drive, and now we're subsidizing jobs for them at almost no cost to you as an employer."

- A Workforce Investment Act program for adult and dislocated workers is being expanded to re-train employees who have lost their jobs—"from janitors to CEOs," as Santana put it—into new fields. The South Bay WIB will again be the primary clearinghouse for this program and for linking with other city and county WIBs.
- Another Workforce Investment Act program targets youth ages 14 to 24, providing \$14.9 million to resurrect a program the county had to eliminate as a result of the budget crisis. "We want these young people to get work experience at no cost to employers," Santana said. "We want to give them the opportunity to imagine themselves in various careers, not just doing filing and other mundane things. We especially want to target kids in foster care and probation."
- Stimulus funds are also available for homeless prevention and re-housing. "During the good years," Santana explained, "the Board of Supervisors invested \$100 million in homeless prevention programs, an unprecedented commitment to making a dent in the 70,000 to 80,000 homeless on the streets in this county." The face of homelessness has changed over the last year, though, with the numbers of homeless families increasing by 30 percent. "More people have for the first time lost both their homes and their livelihoods," Santana continued, "and they're frightened and in shock. One of my first jobs was running a homeless shelter in Whittier, and I learned that once someone adapts to a homeless, survival-based lifestyle, the chance of being able to help them out of it becomes slimmer. We need to focus on individuals who are on the verge of being homeless for the first time, and prevent that from happening—giving them enough cash not to be evicted from their apartment, for example. We want to create a 'no wrong door' environment through our 2-1-1 system, so that when families or individuals inform one county department that they're very close to being homeless, we all pull together to maintain their housing. We'd like to develop a coordinated approach with other municipalities to spending these stimulus funds, creating one countywide strategy for homeless prevention."
- The Community Services Block Grant monies will help create a systematic, centralized approach to improving the prospects of those most likely to become clients of multiple county services: transition-aged youth (18 to 24 years old) on General Relief. "What kind of future does someone have who's relying on \$221 a month?" Santana asked. "Some of these kids are our fault. They've aged out of foster care, and we've contributed to their problems. We want to strengthen the programs around this population with community providers—job training, homeless prevention, substance abuse treatment, mental health services. We want to give these young people an opportunity for a fresh start so they can land on their feet and create a brighter future for themselves."

The final section on the handout lists other grants that Los Angeles County is aggressively applying for, Santana concluded. "We need to identify individuals where one-time assistance can get them back on their feet," he said. "We're very much aware that the stimulus funds are temporary. In eighteen months, they'll be gone. The worst thing we could do is build up a system that we'd just have to dismantle. We want to use existing partners and contracts to target populations we

haven't focused on before because we haven't had funding—those that are ineligible for everything else, say, because of their income—and give them some opportunities. We're fortunate to have a forward-thinking Board of Supervisors who are committed to using the money effectively and creatively. In the end, we think we will demonstrate some more efficient ways of doing things in the long term. Every CalWORKs client should be connected to a job, and it should be easier for employers to offer those jobs. We need to prevent homelessness. We need to focus on transition-age youth—they are our future, and right now too many are on welfare, homeless, or in jail. Ultimately, we need to show the President and Congress that this money has been well spent, and that our systems are better off for it.”

**Relationship-Based Community Organizing Model and Resident (Neighborhood Action) Council Accomplishments: Strengthening Community Capacity Committee**

Colleen Mooney, director of SPA Councils and the American Indian Children's Council, said that the 120 neighborhood action councils formed throughout the county are very diverse in their ethnic, geographic, and cultural composition. Relationship-based organizing is the foundational piece of the SPA Councils' work, a way to bring residents together and empower them to build their own lives and take care of themselves. She introduced a video made in SPA 8 that showed residents talking about their own experiences with relationship-based organizing—what it means to them and how it has affected their lives and their communities. Following the video, Jeff Farber (co-chair of the Strengthening Community Capacity Committee) asked Council members about the challenges they experience in working in communities, and how relationship-based organizing might affect the dynamics of community-level change.

Trish Ploehn, director of the Department of Children and Family Services, said that initial discussions about the Prevention Initiative Demonstration Project (a pilot going on in several communities throughout the county that also uses the relationship-based organizing model) had centered on the law's mandate to serve children and families only after abuse or neglect had already occurred. “If we could get ahead of the game, we thought, and deal with them before anything bad happened,” she asked, “wouldn't we be serving everyone much better?” Through much joint planning, 20 government entities came together with communities partners to begin PIDP last year, and “it's taken on a life of its own,” according to Ploehn. With only \$5 million funding for the entire one-year program, partners have worked with communities, families, and children to find out what they need and make that happen. “PIDP had three goals,” Ploehn explained. “We wanted to build community-based networks in every part of Los Angeles County, we wanted to support those networks to become economically viable on their own and not rely on county or government agencies, and we wanted to address the issue of social isolation. It's clear that of the many reasons that kids get abused and neglected, one main cause is that families are isolated and feel they have nowhere to turn and no family supports. They give up hope if no one is there to help them, but these resident groups reach out to each other. What you saw [in the video] is just one example of what's happening in many areas.”

Nancy Haruye Au is First 5 LA's representative to The Children's Council, but is also a resident of SPA 8 and well remembers the first SPA Council organizing meetings there many years ago. First 5 LA's ongoing investment in the Council and its community engagement, organizing, and mobilizing effort, Au said, is making wonderful progress toward better outcomes for children

and families. "It's critical that we invest in models and efforts that are sustainable over time," she continued, "and become the platform from which other ideas can spring. The prevention initiative would not be successful without the platform of the Council's community work, and First 5 is proud to have put significant dollars toward that work."

Elisa Nicholas, too, has watched the resident groups in SPA 8 evolve over many years, and noted that many participating mothers have taken the step of going back to school to get their GEDs or attend college. "That's definitely something to be celebrated," she said.

Yo-Landa Brown, a Council organizer, spoke from the audience. "In 2005, I was a dislocated worker with four kids whose dad had moved out, and I joined a parent group," she said. "Now I'm an organizer in SPA 3 facilitating five parent groups of my own, and that work is awesome. When these parents talk about their concerns, I feel what they feel. They're going through DPSS and other agencies, just like I did, and they need help navigating those systems. With relationship-based organizing, we get to know each other on a different level. We put away our masks and talk about what's really bothering us. One parent came to our group and had been depressed for a long time. After only one meeting, she said, 'I feel so much lighter after coming here. I'll be back next week.' And she did come back, and she shared more about her depression, and the other women in the group supported her in that conversation. They really do become a whole other family for each other. Thank you for the opportunity you've given me to be part of this—I'm very grateful."

Another organizer, Beverly Matthews, had volunteered with SPA 6 for three years before becoming an employee, and has seen the number of resident groups in that area double. She thanked representatives from two host agencies, one that provides young parents with business classes to help them move off public assistance, and one that works with foster youth. "I want to thank them for being here today and for providing that support," Matthews said. "I've used the resources of SPA 6 myself—my daughter graduated from USC last week, one of our fine SPA 6 institutions, with a masters in social work, and is thinking about going to work for DCFS."

Farber asked all the community organizers in attendance to stand, and the Council and audience recognized them with applause. "They are the connectors to the community," Farber said. "As we all look at the mission and values of our organizations, these are the folks to connect with." Miguel Santana suggested that the organizers could be helpful in designing the consumer advocate/customer service representative position that he spoke of earlier, and he would very much like to brainstorm the idea with them. "I'll have Jenny Serrano from my office get in touch about setting up a focus group," he said. "How can we be most effective in reaching out to people in need? There are lots of ways *not* to do it, but you folks are the ones who know how."

Miriam Long—now a deputy mayor for the city of Los Angeles, but previously a long-time deputy to the Second Supervisorial District—expressed her appreciation for everything she has learned from her time with the county and the people in the room. "Right now one of my tasks is to achieve the goals of Mayor Villaraigosa around education in low-performing schools," Long said. "We need to prove to the world that these kids are valuable, and we have partnerships working on raising their achievement scores. I'd like to ask for everyone's help in setting a vision around Markham and Gompers, two of the lowest-performing middle schools in LAUSD [the Los Angeles Unified School District]. We want to build villages around these schools using this model, and if you'd like to be involved, please call my office."

Long also noted that several city departments report to her, including Recreation and Parks and the Department of Cultural Affairs. "Any of our facilities in the neighborhoods where your groups are working, we offer to you," she said. "I've tasked my departments to use those facilities to support children and families and to give them better access to resources. If anyone in the city is not acting in a collegial way with the county family, please let me know."

Danny Ramos spoke of the population density in SPA 3, which stretches from Pasadena to Pomona and encompasses 29 cities and 31 school districts. "How do we make an impact in that large a space?" he asked. "It takes faith—faith that we can change. I'm one of the older warriors in this circle. I've been around since 1995, both in the audience and at the table, and I've watched this organization come full circle a few times. Especially with the young people being involved now, our organizers who are passing this on, I believe we can make change. We're taking flight now, reaching out for the freedom for families to be themselves in their communities. We often talk about connecting the dots, but this work is about connecting *hearts*—it's a movement that changes the community and changes the world. There's a higher purpose to the work being done here, and the lightness that Yo-Landa spoke of is just the beginning. The greatest teacher is not one with the most students, as the saying goes, but the one who creates the most teachers. In indigenous circles around the world, children are taught that they have a place and they have gifts to contribute. We need to change the stigma of 'youth at risk' into a new movement—'youth with gifts.' I get so excited when I walk down the street and see families picking up trash, making their neighborhoods better, with the children laughing and the moms asking their neighbors to join in. And I say to all of you, 'Please join us. This is good work.'"

Walter Taylor concurred. "This is an incredible opportunity to be part of the solution, not part of the problem," he said. "This isn't rocket science, after all. It's just grassroots folks coming together for a common cause—not focusing on their problems or issues, but simply sharing the human condition. We all need to be in relationships, to feel one another, to understand one another. In SPA 6, we're bringing together groups of people that you wouldn't think would ever do that, groups that had never met before. Yes, come join us. Go out into your communities, reach out into your professional arena, into your family arena, and come join us. This is the only way to take the paradigm shift we're experiencing and begin to empower people."

Sam Chan sees The Children's Council's focus on prevention as requiring a spirit of commitment that celebrates true systems transformation—"the promotion of people's strengths and gifts as part of the service delivery system. That's the heart of what we're talking about," he said. Turning around the deficit-based way in which the system usually regards clients was encapsulated by a youth group Chan knows of that changed the 'SED' designation, which clinicians use as an abbreviation for *seriously emotionally disturbed*, to mean instead *strengthening emotional development*. "Families must be able to be free," he added, "as Danny says. And we will have truly arrived when members of the county family are also free to be who they are."

"Half of my job is trying to eliminate bureaucracy," Martha Molina-Aviles commented. "I certainly want to be free. I love leaving the Hall of Administration, and I really appreciate being here at Magnolia Place with all of you. My boss is always saying how much she believes in communities determining their own destiny. Constituents write us letters, and we sometimes develop programs based on those letters. It can't be a cookie-cutter approach. Every community

has different needs—neighborhood cleanup, services for kids, help with small businesses. Whatever works to engage residents in community activity, that's the most important thing. And that's been the most important piece of the neighborhood action council work. I want to thank the leaders and the organizers and the SPA Councils. Without you, this wouldn't have been possible. And I also want to thank Sharon Watson, who's been a breath of fresh air to The Children's Council, helping us see how important the Council's transformation is. With the very little money she's had, she's made some great achievements happen. It's an example that other organizations and departments could look at—the changes that can be accomplished with very few resources and very little bureaucracy.”

Molina-Aviles also thanked Mooney and Farber for their leadership, and the Foundation Board and Santana for providing the money to support the work. She expressed appreciation to Alex Morales and Children's Bureau for hosting the meeting, and to everyone in attendance for the time and creativity they bring to the Council's process. “We appreciate the time and investment that families make, too, in keeping us accountable and honest,” she said. “They teach us how to be better public servants.”

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting of The Children's Council is scheduled for:

**Wednesday, August 12, 2009**  
9:30 to 11:30 a.m.  
St. Anne's  
155 North Occidental Boulevard, Los Angeles

There being no public comment, the meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.