

ADVOCACY



Standards of Effective Care

The Clinic recognizes that families are the strongest advocates for their children. Services are delivered in ways which strengthen family cohesion and integrity . . . The Parent Partner is a key addition to the team, with the central duty to engage with and support the parent in the process of treatment.

Breaking the Barriers to Stronger Families

For Juan Alvarez, being a good parent—and sharing the parenting skills he has learned—is both a passion and a joy. “I am the bridge,” he says of what he calls his “wonderful job” as a Parent Partner in the Full Service Partnership at the Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic. “I connect parents to the therapist and help to break the barriers to their receiving care.”

Mr. Alvarez first learned about the Clinic in 2003, when a staff member spoke to a parenting class he attended at a local PACE Head Start facility. He had enrolled to become a better father to his two daughters. “When I looked to my background, I realized I didn’t have the skills. From my father, I learned spanking. I didn’t want to do that,” he says. “I needed to work on myself before I could help others.”

In 2005, he joined the Clinic staff as a Parent Partner in its Stepping Up to School Readiness Program, which offered mental health training to teachers and direct services to children and parents.

When that program ended two years later, he joined Full Service Partnership, where he addresses a wide range of needs for each family, from custody issues and stable housing to other essential resources. “My goal is to empower each family,” he says. Operating as a “navigator”, he guides families through an intricate system of community and government resources. “I offer my hand,” he says, “and, if they take it, we walk the road together.”

In addition to daily home visits, he conducts a 12-week series of parenting classes at the Clinic’s Exposition Park site a few times a year. He teaches parents how to communicate with their children and how to set limits using discipline, not punishment. His daughters, now 9 and 7, once asked why he works on Saturdays. “I told them, ‘I am helping other parents to help their children without yelling or hitting—to let children be children.’”

Mr. Alvarez first came to the United States from Guatemala in 1991 at the age of 20. With a deep appreciation of the power of knowledge, he immediately went to school to learn English and complete his high school degree. Since attending that first parenting class, he has taken more courses to add to his arsenal of techniques.

He begins each new relationship by putting on what he calls his imaginary “green glasses” – the accepting, not the judgmental, pair. He focuses on the positives: the strengths each family member already has. “I believe in the parents. They take my words, and they believe them.”

He cites the family that once was homeless and now lives in a house, the father who no longer uses corporal punishment, the once-violent uncle who is attending parenting classes. Each of these, and more, he says, are his reward.



Parent Partner Juan Alvarez, above and opposite page, serves as navigator, guiding families through an intricate system of community resources and teaching them parenting skills.