

FROM MANDATED REPORTING TO MANDATED SUPPORTING

A COMMUNITY VISION TO GET FAMILIES THE RESOURCES THEY NEED TO THRIVE TOGETHER

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 CASTILLO
CONSULTING
PARTNERS

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INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

Black and Indigenous children and families are disproportionately impacted by current mandated reporting practices. A 2021 study found that more than half of all Black and Indigenous children in the state of California will undergo a child welfare investigation before their 18th birthday.¹ The vast majority of these investigations are spurred by mandated reporters.²

Recognizing the impacts of bias and racism in the mandated reporting process, in May of 2023, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a motion that takes a substantial step toward addressing this disparity by “evolving from mandated reporter to mandated supporter.”³ The motion acknowledges that mandated reporters, who are mostly educators, law enforcement and medical staff, make up the majority (82.5%) of callers to the child protection hotline, yet have a substantiation rate of only 16% following an investigation by the Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS). The motion also references research that states, “While mandated reporting is intended to protect children from abuse and neglect, the current state of practice results in the child welfare system’s over surveillance and harm of marginalized communities of color. This has the potential to increase child and family vulnerability, the opposite of the intended consequence.”

MORE THAN
50% OF ALL
BLACK & INDIGENOUS CHILDREN
IN CALIFORNIA
WILL UNDERGO A
**CHILD WELFARE
INVESTIGATION**

EDUCATORS, LAW ENFORCEMENT, & MEDICAL STAFF
MAKE UP **82.5%** OF CALLERS TO THE CHILD PROTECTION HOTLINE
BUT ONLY **16%** ARE SUBSTANTIATED
FOLLOWING AN INVESTIGATION

¹ <https://www.motherjones.com/crime-justice/2021/04/child-protective-services-investigates-half-of-all-black-children-in-california/>

² <https://lao.ca.gov/handouts/socservices/2022/CWS-Analysis-Questions-030922.pdf>

³ <https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/180181.pdf>

THIS REPORT PROVIDES
INSIGHT
INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF THOSE
IMPACTED
BY MANDATED REPORTING

In an effort to address the biases and inequities inherent within mandated reporting, the Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families has partnered with a growing coalition of community members and organizations that are working to transform LA County's system of mandated reporting into a system of mandated supporting. The Commission is partnering with Inglewood Unified School District (IUSD), the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) and Los Angeles County Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) to devise a sort of case study that will offer deeper insight into the current mandated reporting process on a somewhat micro-level within the County, which will in turn inform a plan for transitioning to mandated supporting. Hearing about the experiences of LA County residents who have been directly impacted by mandated reporting is a key element in the Commission's efforts to inform the development of a new process that centers and supports families.

This report provides insights into the experiences of those impacted, as well as their vision for change. A review of the data collected from community listening sessions focused in Inglewood, but including perspectives from residents across Los Angeles County, has revealed many helpful insights and guidance about how to best transition the present day process of mandated reporting to mandated supporting. Personal anecdotes from mandated reporters, parents and students who have been reported, and individuals who have been witness to the process have made it evident that not only do Inglewood residents and community members across Los Angeles County believe that a more supportive and equitable system is needed, but they have also already enacted notable practices towards self-determination and communal care while the current system is still in place.

COMMUNITY VOICES INFORM
HOW TO BEST TRANSITION FROM PRESENT DAY MANDATED REPORTING TO
MANDATED SUPPORTING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In the summer of 2023, Castillo Consulting Partners was invited to seek out the voices of community members, namely those who have personal, lived experience with mandated reporting, to help us better understand the current impacts of mandated reporting and community members' vision for change. Our goals with this data collection process were two-fold:

1 Understand the experiences that community members, especially parents and students, have had with mandated reporting, and the impacts of those experiences

2 Learn what community members envision as an alternative to the current mandated reporting process. In other words, if they could reimagine mandated reporting with a focus on supporting families, what would they include in this reimagined process?

Our team hosted six listening sessions that included a total of 93 community members. Here's what we heard from listening session participants:

Community members feel that mandated reporting is a punitive process that does little, if anything, to support families. Individuals who both have and have not personally experienced mandated reporting expressed feelings of being surveilled and described mandated reporters as, "there to police families."

Mandated reporting has played a key role in diminishing the trust and faith that community members, including parents, students and mandated reporters, have in government. As a result, many opt not to seek support or services when they need them for fear of the negative consequences that pursuing resources might have on their families or families they are trying to help.

Individuals who have experienced mandated reporting find the system to be racist, sexist and patriarchal, and overwhelmingly agree that the mandated reporting process causes more harm than good.

Currently, rather than seeking assistance from government agencies, the majority of community members are finding support and services with faith-based and community based organizations, and would like to see a mandated supporting process that includes access to more of these types of organizations.

Parents, in particular, believe that the most important thing that can be done to transition from mandated reporting to mandated supporting is to equip professionals with the skills to build authentic relationships with families so they can establish genuine trust.

Another critical action required to move to mandated supporting is to develop a comprehensive learning and development plan for professionals that will effectively equip them to support families by first understanding the impacts of systemic racism and other biases, recognizing their own biases and knowing how to leverage resources and tools to provide families with the support they need.



EQUIP PROFESSIONALS WITH THE SKILLS TO BUILD
AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS
WITH FAMILIES

This report takes a deeper dive into the above key takeaways using a thematic analysis of insights that emerged from community listening sessions, and concludes by offering recommendations grounded in community members' ideas and vision for a reimagined process that supports rather than reports families.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With our research goals in mind, the Castillo Consulting Partners research team solicited input from the Los Angeles County Mandated Supporters and Champions leadership team to devise the following research instrument:

Personal Experiences with Mandated Reporting

- 01** What is your understanding of the role of a mandated reporter?
- 02** What are some of the experiences you've had with mandated reporting?
- 03** What was the emotional and/or mental impact of having been reported?
- 04** What impact did being reported have on your relationship with your family?
- 05** How did being reported affect your relationship with the government and social services?
- 06** What are some steps that could have been taken before or instead of reporting?

Vision for Moving to Community Supporting

- 07** What are some resources you currently trust getting support from when it comes to your and/or your child's wellbeing?
- 08** If you have none, what would you like these resources to look like?
- 09** If there is concern about you or your child being abused or neglected, how do you think this should be handled?
- 10** If you could design a new system that is focused on supporting rather than reporting, what would it look like? What would you include?

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

Our research team conducted community outreach with the expressed desire to hear from individuals who had personally experienced mandated reporting within Inglewood Unified School District. We were intrigued to see the diversity of community members who were drawn to participate in the listening sessions for various reasons.

Participant demographics:

81%

Women

19%

Men

62%

current or former
Inglewood residents

38%

LA County residents
outside of Inglewood

37%

had experience with
mandated reporting

25%

mandated reporters

39%

no experience with reporting
but felt surveilled

Three profiles of participants emerged across the sessions:

36.94%

of participants were individuals (mostly parents, but some students, as well) who had personally experienced mandated reporting

24.56%

of participants were individuals who identified as mandated reporters themselves, some of whom disclosed that they had also personally experienced mandated reporting; all of whom expressed concerns and/or disagreement with the mandated reporting process

38.6%

of participants were individuals who had not experienced mandated reporting or were unaware if they had ever been reported, but were interested in learning more about mandated reporting and their rights as parents because they felt that they were being wrongfully surveilled by school site staff, educators and/or administrators and were concerned that their family is under threat of being reported

FINDINGS

As themes emerged from the listening sessions, the research team noted that there were several commonalities across these different participant profiles, despite their differing reasons for attending the sessions. The themes are divided into two categories:



Themes Pertaining to Personal Experiences with Mandated Reporting

Mandated reporting is punitive and in no way supportive of families. Families that have not, or are unsure whether or not they have been reported feel that they are being surveilled and under constant threat of being reported.

Mandated reporting diminishes trust in schools, health care facilities, children & family services, the legal system, and government more broadly by those who are reported, those who believe they are being surveilled, and those who have submitted reports that resulted in negative or no outcome.

Those impacted by mandated reporting have experienced the system to be racist, sexist, patriarchal, and believe that these reports cause more harm than good.

Themes Pertaining to a Collective Vision for Mandated Supporting

Community members would like to see faith based organizations and community organizations receive the investments necessary to provide support to families that prevent them from coming into contact with DCFS.

Community members believe that one of the most important things that mandated reporters can do to support families is build authentic relationships with parents to establish trust and assure them that their goal is to help, not hurt or cause harm to their families by linking them to resources rather than reporting them.

Community members want mandated supporters to receive comprehensive training that includes a deep dive into anti-bias and anti-racism, as well as a look into how their own biases can cloud their judgment and result in harm to families.



Although there was significant alignment in the defining of mandated reporting across all participants, our research team observed the following nuanced distinctions among each group:

Parents who had not experienced reporting, or who were unaware if they had been reported had a general understanding of the role of mandated reporters as professionals who are required to report abuse. They associated mandated reporting with surveillance and invasive questioning, as illustrated by “Kim” a mom who disclosed that, “I have never been reported, as far as I know. But I feel like my son’s teacher is policing me. She questions and documents everything. Last month he had a sty on his eye and she called to ask about it, as if he had been abused. She wasn’t even trying to help, just questioning me as if I am a bad parent.”

Mandated reporters were more likely to share a concrete definition, often providing insight into the fact that mandated reporters can be held accountable for not reporting a concern, thus shedding light on the reality that most mandated reporters err on the side of reporting everything in order to protect themselves, even if there are not clear signs of abuse that would lead to a report. Several mandated reporters expressed that, “I would rather help a family than report them. But if there is even a little suspicion that there is abuse or they need help and I don’t report them, my job is on the line. As mandated reporters, we are basically incentivized to report, report, report.”

Individuals who had been reported, including parents, students and even mandated reporters who had been reported by someone else expressed concern and frustration with what they believed to be an inability on the part of mandated reporters to correctly identify the difference between abuse and discipline, and the role that implicit bias and racism play in reporting decisions. For example, “Leonard,” a mandated reporter and father of 5 who had one of his children taken away after being reported, shared that he now understands the role as one in which “corporal punishment is the language they use to tear our families apart.” In using the term “corporal punishment,” Leonard highlights some of the rhetoric used to undermine his right to “discipline my own child” and classify it as child abuse. Other mandated reporters who had also experienced being reported shared that in their experience, mandated reporters’ inability to differentiate between discipline and abuse is related to personal unconscious biases and ineffective training that leads to harm.

In one narrative, a community leader shared how a parent in her organization's tutoring program almost lost her son to a false mandated report that was made by a school administrator in retaliation for the mother's advocacy for her son's educational rights. "I couldn't believe it. The only reason this child was not taken from his mother is because I had personally documented everything that was going on with this family and provided the proof when the social worker came with the police to take this woman's only child from her. I personally called the school administrator and asked how he could do this - attempt to take this beautiful Black boy, this mother's only son, from her. His response was that she had embarrassed him and his school in her advocacy. This had nothing to do with a concern of abuse or the safety of a child. It was straight up retaliation and I was utterly disgusted."

Participants' overall sentiments about mandated reporting are that, while it is intended to stop child abuse, in practice, it is a punitive practice that does little, if anything, to support families or children. With the exception of one example of a positive outcome from a mandated report made by an educator who helped her student out of an abusive situation, every story that was shared about individuals' experiences with mandated reporting had negative, traumatic and or harmful outcomes.

MANDATED REPORTING

IS A PUNITIVE

PRACTICE THAT DOES LITTLE, IF ANYTHING, TO SUPPORT

FAMILIES OR CHILDREN



Mandated Reporting Diminishes Trust

"I don't trust the child welfare system. I don't trust LAPD. I don't trust the family court. They are interlocking systems that don't provide support."

Across all participant profiles, one sentiment was clear: mandated reporting has led to diminished trust and a "lack of faith" in government and social services.

As a result of their negative and traumatic experiences with mandated reporting, every person who had experienced mandated reporting expressed that they had lost all trust and faith in the public and social services that were supposed to support them. One mother concisely stated, "We do not trust government organizations because they have harmed us." Her statement was received with applause and agreement by everyone else in her group, and reinforced by similar sentiments from participants in other listening sessions. Another participant shared that various agencies talk to each other and "spread misinformation, which is why none of them can be trusted." She went on to explain, "As a Black woman who has gone through this legal system for 10 years and I've never been arrested or convicted of anything, I've come to realize how interconnected these issues are. All of these systems work together and they work against you, not for you. They cannot be trusted."

Even those who had not been reported had concerns about whether or not they could trust the programs and services that should be a source of safety and support for them. "Keisha" shared that although she had not been reported, she was afraid to seek help because she knows people who have been reported when they sought help and did not want to risk having her family ripped apart. "While I was dealing with postpartum depression, I didn't trust going to therapy or counseling because I was afraid it could affect my kids." Others who had not personally experienced mandated reporting were in agreement that a fear of being investigated made them hesitant, resistant even, to seeking services. "Why would I go and ask for help when I'm struggling if it means that I might be questioned as a parent and have my kids taken away? I'd rather figure it out on my own than put my family through that."



Mandated reporters expressed that the system they were operating under was flawed and harmful, and also made them feel hopeless about the potential outcomes of reporting a family. The dichotomy of wanting to support families with the proper resources but fearing that they might cause more harm if they pursue their only path (mandated reporting), which feels like “a wild card” because they never know what the outcome will be, left folks with feelings of resentment and in many cases shame.

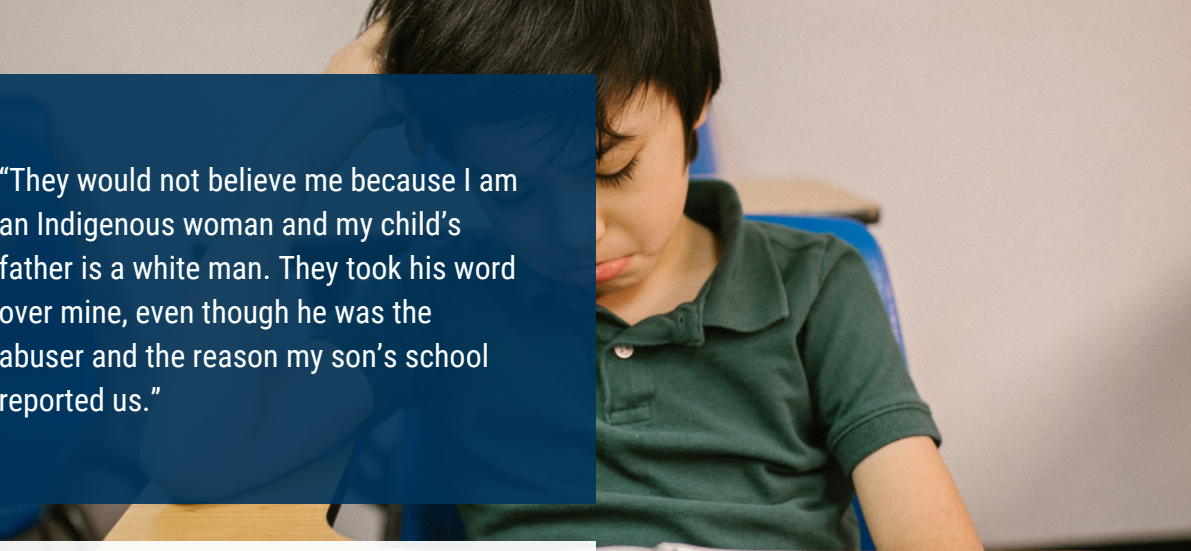
“Ms. Johnson,” a high school teacher, shared about a time when she called the hotline to report a family, only to have the parents and student confront her after they were investigated and found to be innocent of wrongdoing. “They were so mad at me. I felt horrible and questioned whether or not I should ever make a report again because I don’t want to be wrong and put anyone else through that.” Mandated reporters expressed a desire for more clarity about what happens once a report is made, and details about the outcomes for families that they have reported. “Most of us have no idea what happens after we make a report. And from what I can tell, my intent to help by reporting is actually leading to harm, which is the exact opposite of why I called to report in the first place.”

With one participant, personal experiences with DCFS in their childhood had such a significant impact on their later relationship with mandated reporting to the extent that, even if suspicions about a child’s wellbeing were held, they decided to handle the matter internally rather than through a report. “Tabitha,” a childcare provider and mandated reporter, felt as though “the foster care system was to be avoided at all costs. Even if I think there are safety concerns or potential abuse in the home, I am willing to put my business and family in jeopardy if it means helping a family stay together and not have to go through the nightmare of foster care.” Tabitha went on to explain, “When I learned that I was required to be a mandated reporter as a childcare provider, I thought I was the system. But I wasn’t going to be the reason people’s babies were taken away. So, I took on the role of a mentor to teach parenting skills and help families rather than tear them apart.” Tabitha’s experience with being reported as a child was traumatizing enough for her to take matters into her own hands and work toward developing an alternative approach so that she would not be complicit in a system that she does not trust and believes causes harm to families.

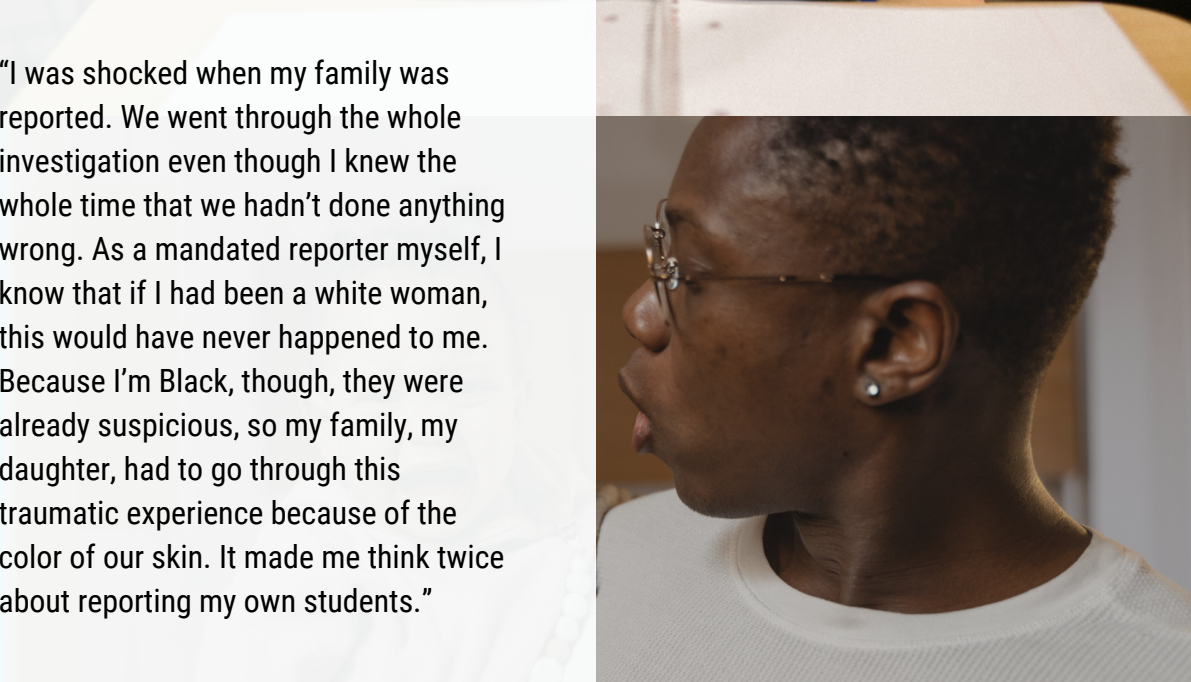
Mandated Reporting Upholds a Racist System That Harms Families

“The system is racist. Period. All you have to do is look at who’s being taken away. If there were as many white children in foster care as there are Black and brown, this would be considered a crisis and it would have been fixed a long time ago.”

As the majority of listening session attendees were Black, Indigenous and Latina women, systemic racism, sexism and patriarchy were hot topics during each listening session. Parents, students, community leaders and mandated reporters were clear that current mandated reporting practices are perpetuating and upholding a racist system that disproportionately harms families of color. Examples of the role of racism, often at the intersection of sexism and patriarchy play include:



“They would not believe me because I am an Indigenous woman and my child’s father is a white man. They took his word over mine, even though he was the abuser and the reason my son’s school reported us.”



“I was shocked when my family was reported. We went through the whole investigation even though I knew the whole time that we hadn’t done anything wrong. As a mandated reporter myself, I know that if I had been a white woman, this would have never happened to me. Because I’m Black, though, they were already suspicious, so my family, my daughter, had to go through this traumatic experience because of the color of our skin. It made me think twice about reporting my own students.”

“When you look at the data, and I’ve looked at the data, it’s clear that this system exists to punish Black and brown parents by taking away the thing that is most precious to them and making them jump through hoops to try to get them back, only to keep moving the finish line and making it impossible to ever get them back. Then, when they do come back, providing no resources or support to repair the damage that has been caused by forced separation. It’s racist and it’s wrong.”



In addition to discussing the systemic impacts of mandated reporting, parents with lived experience described the personal impact of having their family broken apart as traumatic and irreparable. Most mothers who engaged in the listening sessions shared their difficulties navigating the child welfare system and uplifted that they were failed by the very agencies that claimed to be there to help them. “Diane,” a mother whose child was removed from her care after a mandated report gave an emotional testimony, “It’s been 7 years of someone else deciding my fate. 7 years, I could have been mothering. I could have had another child. I can’t have another child.”

When discussing individual experiences with being reported, many expressed that both the process and aftermath (i.e. the investigation, whether or not a case was opened) had negative impacts on their emotional, mental, and in some cases, physical health. One mother erupted in tears as she explained,

“No one talks about the toll this takes on you, as a mother. I’ve lost weight, lost my hair from the stress of trying to get my child back. I’ve been depressed, chronically sick, and the only explanation for this is that I am fighting so hard, day and night, to get my baby back.”

Another talked about the impacts on her child,

“As a result of DCFS involvement after a mandated report for domestic violence, my child has been left vulnerable. You’re either experiencing too much contact with the system or not enough... And women become discredited, often due to patriarchy [in the system].”

Broadly speaking, the harms of mandated reporting, as presented primarily by individuals who have personally experienced a mandated report, appear to outweigh the intended benefits, which are to protect children from abuse. For these reasons, 100% of the listening session participants agreed that the entire mandated reporting process needs to be overhauled.



A NOTE ABOUT **Domestic Violence**

INSTEAD OF HELPING

THE ABUSED MOTHERS DCFS TOOK THEIR CHILDREN AWAY

The reporting of victims of domestic violence is a topic that was raised as a concern in each listening session, but became the focal point of discussion in one particular group discussion. In this session, several domestic violence survivors who had their children removed by DCFS were in attendance as they'd learned about the listening session from a peer in a support group for survivors who had attended a different session through her connection to one of the organizations that co-hosted a session with us.

The primary concern that was raised in various listening sessions, but became clearer in this group of mostly survivors, is that when teachers or other mandated reporters contact the child protection hotline because of their concerns about domestic violence in the home, they cause more harm than good. The participants each shared heartbreaking stories about the lengths they had gone to to leave their abusers and the obstacles they encountered in their efforts to seek safety. After a mandated report was made, instead of helping the abused mothers, DCFS determined that these mothers had "failed to protect" their children and took their children away, despite the physical abuse not being against the children.

The mothers in this group shared vulnerably about the pain that being separated from their children caused them, especially considering their deep love for their children and their countless efforts to protect their children from the abuse that they had endured. Once their children were detained by DCFS, each mother struggled to meet the demands required to be reunified with their children and found that DCFS provided no support to them. Each sought assistance from community based organizations and their communities of faith, including financial support, housing and counseling because the services provided by DCFS were inadequate or biased and "rigged against us" from their perspective.

Community Members Want Support From Faith-Based Organizations & CBOs

When participants were asked to share resources they currently trust getting assistance from to support their child's wellbeing, an overwhelming majority identified churches and other faith-based organizations, and community-based organizations as their preferred sources of support. The second most common response was family members and friends. However, some, such as "Danielle," a young Black mother, shared that they "don't have any type of support system but would want to get help from my community rather than social services." Some of the services and supports that community members have received through faith-based organizations and CBOs include:



- Financial resources
- Support with finding affordable housing
- Therapy and other mental health services
- Gift cards for food, gas and other basic needs
- Tutoring and other educational support
- Marital counseling
- Parenting classes

In some instances, participants shared that they turned to their faith community for support after a mandated report was made, their children were taken away, and they were not provided with resources by DCFS to help them meet the requirements to get their children back. "I needed to find housing within a certain amount of time and DCFS was not helping me. I went to my pastor in tears and asked if he could help me get enough money for the deposit. The church raised \$1,000 which made it possible for me to get an apartment."

Faith leaders who participated in the listening session expressed their sincere desire to play a role in supporting families so they can have the resources they need to thrive. "Rev. Smith" opened up about how her personal experiences and professional pathway led her to becoming a pastor on a mission to "help families heal and stay whole." "I experienced a mandated report when my son, who is now an adult, was a baby... We went through a full investigation for something that never needed to be questioned. I became a social worker after that and retired from DCFS after many years. I've seen some things... As a pastor and a member of this community, I know that many clergy and their congregations want to help. We want to be a resource."

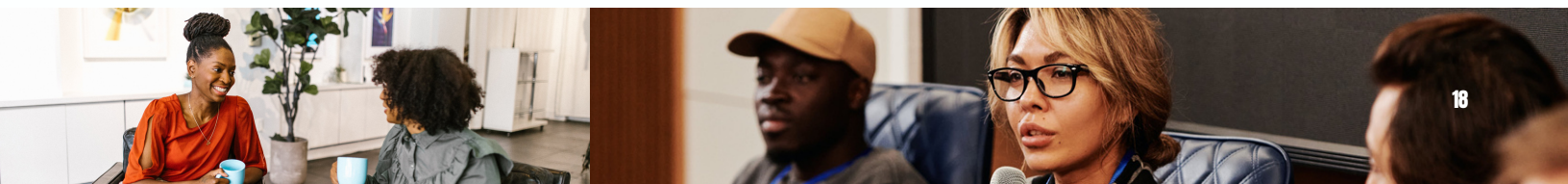
Community based organization leaders offered innovative ways to support families as a means of prevention and intervention. “Nesha” runs a horseback riding program as an alternative form of therapy for children and shared that, “some families just need to get connected to experiences that they may not otherwise have exposure to. Our horseback riding program has provided healing to a lot of children and families. We need more innovative approaches and services like this.” “Imani’s” full service after school tutoring and summer programs serve as more than a space for learning,

“We serve over one hundred families throughout the year and have been a safe place for Black parents to talk about their struggles, knowing that we’re here to help and not report them. It takes a village and we are that village.”



Even as community members championed the idea of having faith-based and community based organizations become more central to the network of services offered to families, some expressed reservations about the relationship between these entities and DCFS becoming “too close” such that the organizations become an extension of DCFS rather than maintaining their independence and trust within the community.

“The last thing we need is for churches and community organizations to become another arm of DCFS. We’ve already seen this happen with programs like the PIPs [Parents in Partnership] and now we don’t feel like we can trust them.”





Community Members Want Authentic Relationships & Resources

In addition to having access to supportive services from faith-based and community based organizations, listening session participants also expressed a desire for authentic relationships with the adults who interact with their children. These include teachers, administrators, school site staff, medical providers and others.

“If you’re interacting with my children, you should get to know me. Show an interest in my family before you have a concern. Build a relationship so we can establish trust.”

When participants were asked how they think concerns about a child’s well being should be addressed in a mandated supporting process, almost all participants mentioned that going to the parent should be the first step. This sentiment was typically expressed in conjunction with the idea that communication with parents or caregivers can only be effective when there is a relationship already established between the supporter and the caregiver.



“Address the parent by building a rapport, include them in the solutions. It could be simple - assume innocence until proven otherwise; address the low burden of proof. Speaking to the parent is going to give you the answers you need.”

One individual further expressed that when it comes to matters of child safety, a “partnership” needs to be in place that prevents any difficult power dynamics between the parent and mandated supporters.

“We need to work together. If there is a constant threat of this person having the power to take your child away, then the relationship is not authentic and I’m not going to come to them for support, no matter how desperate I might be.”

Community Members Want Professionals to be Adequately Trained

One thing that was abundantly clear across all focus groups is that, in order to transition from a system that thrives on mandated reporting to one that centers and supports families, there is a need to develop a curriculum that offers alternative approaches to ensuring child welfare, including providing families with resources and community support. This mandated supporting framework must center families through equitable, harm reductionist, and anti-racist practices, while divesting from practices and systems of surveillance and punishment.

Mandated supporting will require professionals to have knowledge of, connections with and access to a diverse array of resources and services in the community. Listening session participants want mandated supporters to be equipped to link families to community-based services and resources such as:

- Educators
- School Administrators
- School Counselors and Psychologists
- Medical Professionals
- Local Community Based Organizations
- Mental Health Services
- Housing
- Know Your Rights - Legal Support
- What To Do When
- Life Skills
- Parental Support
- Toolkits
- Who To Call When

Moreover, mandated supporting will require professionals to be trained in unconscious bias, the impacts of systemic racism, trauma responsive, healing centered and restorative practices, among other learning and development opportunities that will strengthen their ability to effectively support families.



CLOSING & RECOMMENDATIONS



In addition to the work that is already being done to gather information to help Los Angeles County better understand the breadth and depth of the impacts of mandated reporting on the families directly impacted by it, based on insights from community listening sessions, we recommend that the County, in partnership with with LACOE, DCFS and IUSD, take the following steps to move toward supporting rather than reporting families:

1 Develop an educational campaign to change the narrative about the role of mandated supporters.

The notion that mandated reporters must report any and everything to protect themselves from a lawsuit seems to be deeply ingrained and a huge source of fear for mandated reporters. Shifting this mindset of fear will be imperative to the successful transition from mandated reporting to mandated supporting. Studying successful narrative change campaigns such as the *No Such Thing as a Child Prostitute*⁴ initiative that completely altered the way law enforcement and child welfare agencies view and treat child victims and survivors of commercial sexual exploitation is a good place to start.

2 Design and implement a comprehensive mandated supporter training curriculum rooted in an intersectional anti-racist, trauma responsive and healing centered framework.

Work in collaboration with anti-racism experts to co-design a learning and development curriculum for mandated supporters that includes a scope and sequence of trainings that take a deep dive into unconscious bias, systemic racism, and other previously mentioned professional development opportunities. Helping supporters understand the historical and present day systemic impacts of racism and other biases on communities that have experienced decades of disinvestment, and how their own backgrounds shape their personal, sometimes unconscious biases toward these communities will be key to shifting mindsets and minimizing biases that often get in the way of getting families the support they need.



⁴ <https://rights4girls.org/campaign/>

3

Build a database of faith-based organizations and CBOs that can serve as a resource hub for mandated supporters.

If mandated supporters have resources readily available at their fingertips, in an easily navigable database, they are more likely to offer support to families when they have a concern or see a need. The database can include County departments and services, but given the mistrust of County agencies due to the history of harm caused by mandated reporting, the majority of the resources should be based in the community. Recognizing that educators have a lot of responsibility, schools might consider having a team of staff dedicated to following up with families to ensure they have the resources and support they need after a teacher or other school site staff has identified a need and recommended resources.

4

Redesign the child protection hotline process so that hotline staff are equipped to walk mandated supporters through a comprehensive assessment process that minimizes the risk of a family being investigated due to a bias and provides callers with the resources and information they need to effectively support the family.

Making a hotline call should be the last resort for any mandated supporter. If supporters have done what they can to provide a family with support and have exhausted all of the resources, yet still come to the conclusion that there is a reasonable concern that a child's safety is at risk, then the hotline should be a sort of checks and balances for them. In essence, everyone in the system, from the mandated supporter to the hotline worker, to the social worker should be held accountable for triple checking that their personal biases, systemic biases, or other mechanisms that might be clouding their judgment are not leading to a family being unnecessarily subjected to a traumatic and invasive investigation. New legislation in Texas (House Bill 63) might serve as a model for what this could look like. Furthermore, hotline staff should be responsible for following up with the mandated supporter to provide an update to close the loop on any family that is investigated as a result of their call. The details of what can and should be shared must be determined; but what is clear is that those who make calls to the hotline would benefit from knowing the outcome of their call, whether it resulted in an investigation or not.

A HOTLINE CALL SHOULD BE THE LAST RESORT



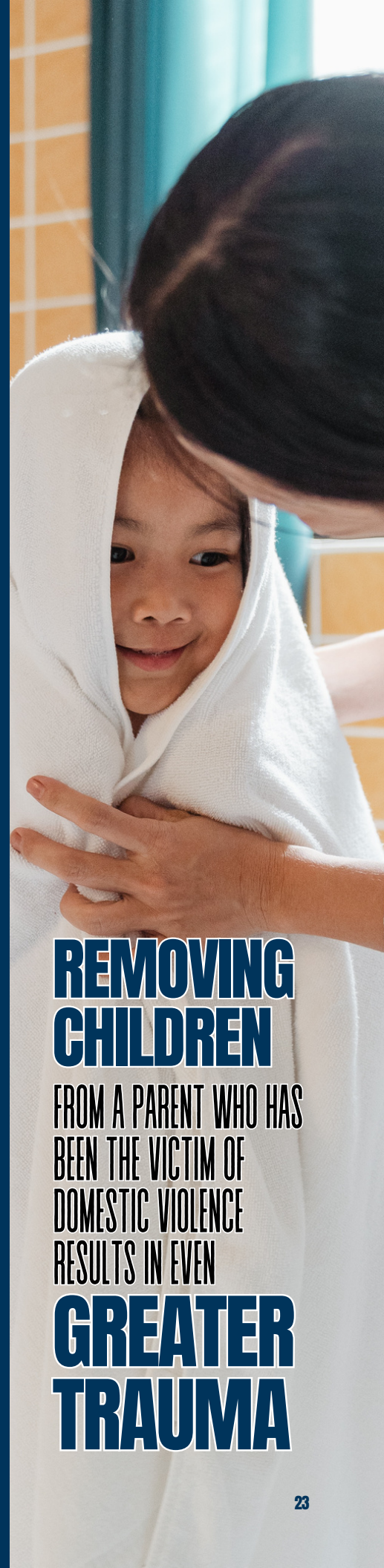
5

Review and revise policies regarding the removal of children due to “failure to protect” as a result of domestic violence, and consider innovative ways to support the victims/survivors and their children.

While mentioned briefly in this report, mandated reports due to concerns of domestic violence were an emotional topic raised during all listening session discussions. Mothers who were separated from their children for “failing to protect” them from emotional abuse or neglect when they were being abused by a partner were devastated by the removal of their little ones whom they’d done their best to protect within the complexities of an abusive relationship. While witnessing abuse is undoubtedly a traumatic experience for anyone, especially children, research shows that removing children from a parent who has been the victim of domestic violence results in even greater trauma, psychological harm and adverse childhood experiences that have long lasting impacts that span far beyond the initial witnessing of abuse. In October 2004, the New York Court of Appeals unanimously held that:

*“A mother’s inability to protect a child from witnessing abuse does not constitute neglect, and therefore cannot be the sole basis for removal. Furthermore, the Court held that any decision to remove a child must be weighed against the psychological harm to the child that could be created by the removal itself, and that only in the rarest of instances should this decision be made without judicial approval.”*⁵

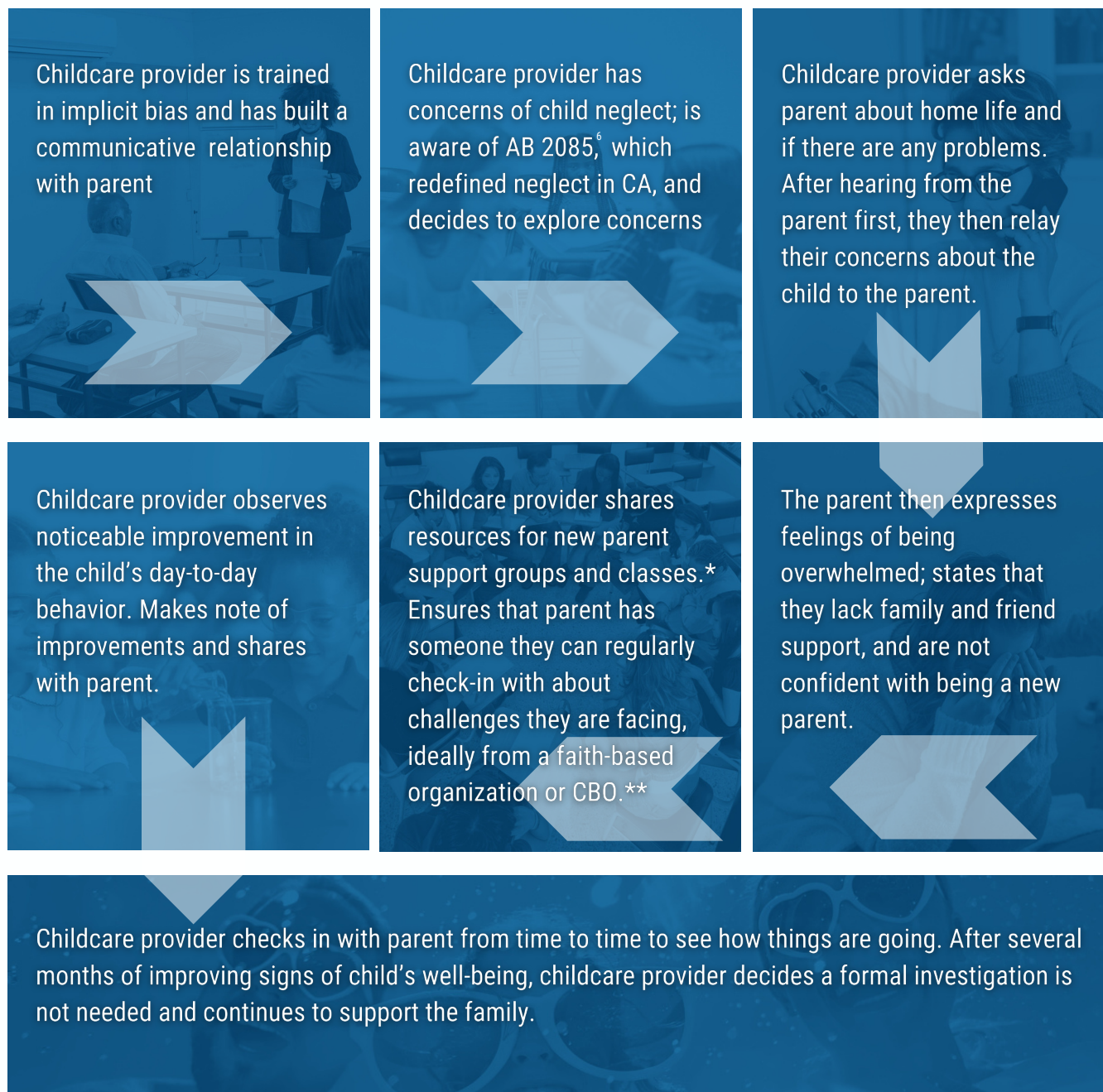
We recommend that DCFS examine its policies regarding the removal of children who bear witness to domestic violence, consider the harmful impacts of such removals, and identify alternative ways to support victims, survivors and their children that minimize further harm. Partnering with schools and other community centers to serve as safe places for victims to seek support to get out of an abusive relationship without the threat of having their children taken away might be a good place to start.



**REMOVING
CHILDREN
FROM A PARENT WHO HAS
BEEN THE VICTIM OF
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
RESULTS IN EVEN
GREATER
TRAUMA**

⁵ <https://www.nyclu.org/en/cases/nicholson-v-williams-defending-parental-rights-mothers-who-are-domestic-violence-victims#:~:text=On%20Oct.,the%20sole%20basis%20for%20removal.>

In an ideal world where families are centered, instead of a mandated report, a family in need will experience wrap-around support that helps them to thrive. That process might look like this:



*Short-term support **Long-term support

Ultimately, the goal of mandated supporting should be to build trusting relationships with families so they feel comfortable and confident seeking and receiving support that will strengthen their families and help them thrive. The vision and recommendations put forward in this report, as communicated by community members, offer guidance on some of the steps necessary to move from mandated reporting to mandated supporting. Community members, especially those with lived experience who have been directly impacted, are ready to help the County get there.

⁶ <https://www.nyclu.org/en/cases/nicholson-v-williams-defending-parental-rights-mothers-who-are-domestic-violence-victims#:~:text=On%20Oct.,the%20sole%20basis%20for%20removal.>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was made possible by community members, including parents, students, childcare providers and educators who were willing to be vulnerable and transparent about their personal, lived experiences with mandated reporting in Inglewood, CA and throughout Los Angeles County. We offer our deepest appreciation to each person who pushed past the stigmas associated with mandated reporting, and demonstrated courage in sharing their often painful personal stories and profound vision for a reimagined process to truly support families.

We also want to thank the community based organizations and communities of faith that conducted outreach among their constituents and congregants to solicit their participation in the listening sessions that served as the basis for data collection and ideation for this report. These organizations and leaders entrusted the hearts and stories of the people with whom they have worked so hard to build trust to our research team, which we recognize can come with great risk given the history of extractive and exploitative research practices, especially in economically deprived communities and communities of color. They believe in the possibility of transformation that can come from this research and trusted us to do right by their members. For this we are tremendously grateful and would like to extend our gratitude to:

Al Wooten Center

Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches (LAM)

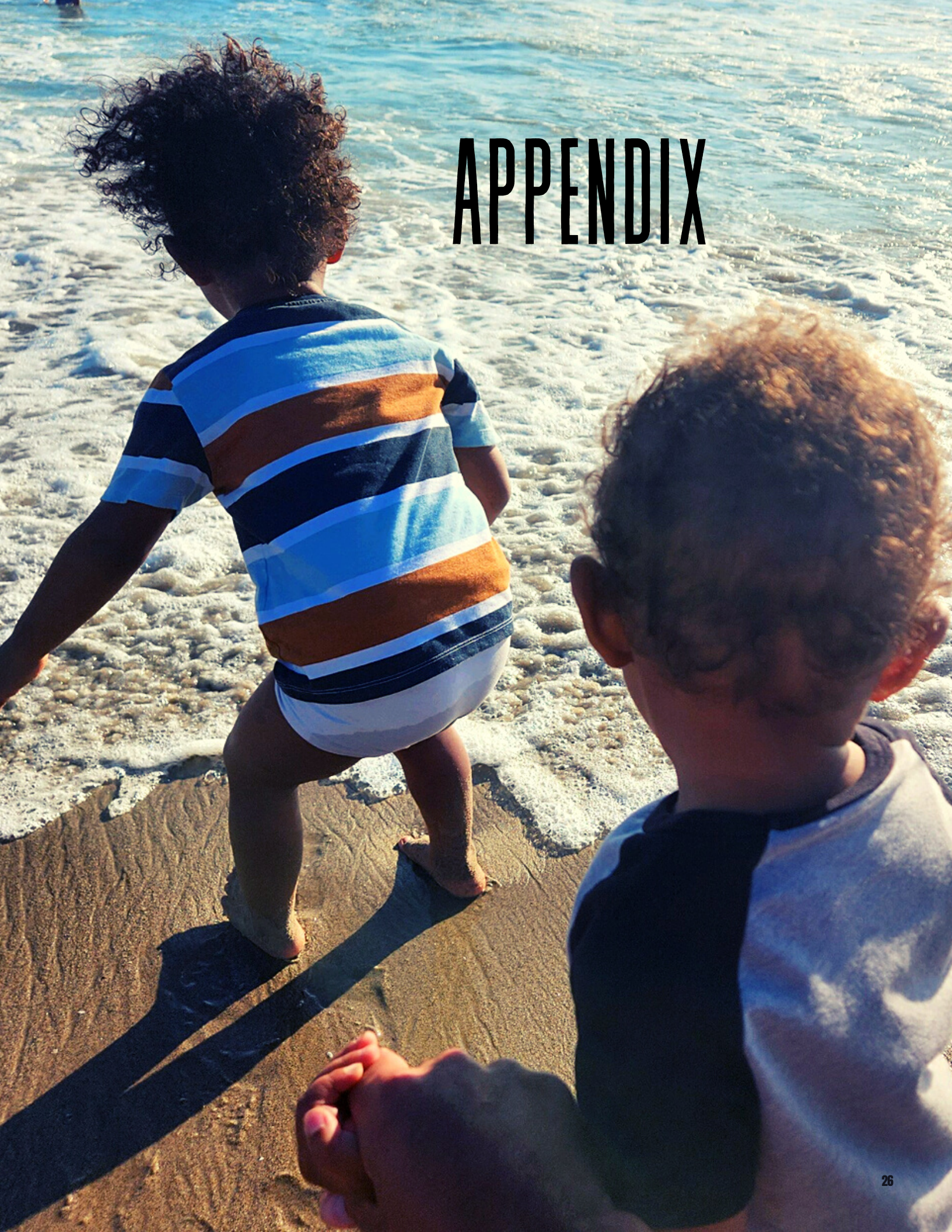
National Association of African-American Parents and Youth (NAAAPY)

Reimagine Child Safety Coalition

In addition to our community partners, we would like to thank Justin Lee and Casey Family Programs for funding this research to ensure that community voices are included in the work that is being done to move from Mandated Reporting to Mandated Supporting in Los Angeles County.

Last, but certainly not least, we would like to thank our dynamic research team, Qui'Yona "Yahniie" Bridges, Megan Castillo and Jayla Sheffield, our listening session facilitators, Cannan Baxter, Jeffrey Hines, Gia Pendergraph and Emanie White-Heard, who worked tirelessly and were vulnerable in sharing their own lived experiences to create a safe and brave space for community members to share their stories and vision for change. And, of course, special thanks to our report designer, Daniel P. Castillo, for so beautifully capturing the community's voices.

APPENDIX



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Goals

Our goals with this data collection process were two-fold:

- 01** Understand the experiences that community members, especially parents and students, have had with mandated reporting, and the impacts of those experiences
- 02** Learn what community members envision as an alternative to the current mandated reporting process. In other words, if they could reimagine mandated reporting with a focus on supporting families, what would they include in this reimagined process?

With these goals in mind, the Castillo Consulting Partners research team solicited input from the Los Angeles County Mandated Supporters and Champions leadership team to devise the following research instrument:

Personal Experiences with Mandated Reporting

- 01** What is your understanding of the role of a mandated reporter?
- 02** What are some of the experiences you've had with mandated reporting?
- 03** What was the emotional and/or mental impact of having been reported?
- 04** What impact did being reported have on your relationship with your family?
- 05** How did being reported affect your relationship with the government and social services?
- 06** What are some steps that could have been taken before or instead of reporting?

Vision for Moving to Community Supporting

- 07** What are some resources you currently trust getting support from when it comes to your and/or your child's wellbeing?
- 08** If you have none, what would you like these resources to look like?
- 09** If there is concern about you or your child being abused or neglected, how do you think this should be handled?
- 10** If you could design a new system that is focused on supporting rather than reporting, what would it look like? What would you include?

Data Sources

In order to achieve our research goals, the Castillo Consulting Partners team opted to host listening sessions for community members who have experienced mandated reporting. We identified and conducted outreach to community and faith-based organizations in Inglewood, CA, as well as organizations that serve residents in Inglewood, CA, though are located in other adjacent communities, such as South Los Angeles. Our team also researched and conducted outreach to charter schools within Inglewood's borders, school-based organizations that serve parents and students in Inglewood Unified School District (i.e. Parent-Teacher Associations and foster-youth resource groups), among others.

Altogether, the research team contacted over 30 organizations with a request for them to partner with us to host a listening session and/or share information about listening sessions with their constituents. Of these organizations, four co-hosted listening sessions with us for their constituents, and over one dozen invited members of their communities to attend sessions that our team scheduled for broader audiences.

Data Collection & Analysis

Over the course of two months the research team hosted six listening sessions with a total of 93 participants across all sessions. Five sessions were hosted virtually via Zoom and one was held in person at a community-based organization. Four sessions were co-hosted in partnership with community based organizations and outreach was only targeted to members of those organizations. Two listening sessions were open to broader audiences, with outreach being conducted through e-blasts to organizations that were unable to co-host a session and using social media.

The virtual and in-person listening sessions each included a variety of engagement tactics to solicit participation for each attendee. As sessions had an average of 15 participants, our research and facilitation team utilized Zoom breakout rooms to create more intimate small group discussions of no more than five to six participants in each virtual session, and pair shares for the in-person session. Whenever possible, one researcher and one facilitator were present in each breakout room to ensure that one person was able to focus on facilitating while the other was able to take copious notes. In cases where there were not enough researchers and facilitators to pair up in breakout sessions, at least one facilitator was present to facilitate and take notes.

Jamboards and chat features were utilized to gather input from quieter participants who felt more comfortable sharing their thoughts in writing rather than orally. Facilitators also used the Jamboard to type comments from participants who shared aloud to ensure that their thoughts were represented visually for all participants to see and process. Similarly, in-person participants were invited to write their reflections on post-it notes that were visually displayed for others to see and respond to. Both virtual post-its from the Jamboards, and physical post-its from the in-person sessions were included in the thematic analysis included in the findings of this report.

All listening session attendees were provided a \$50 e-gift card for their participation. Attendees were invited to complete a brief feedback survey with questions about their experience in the listening session and any additional ideas they had about reimagining mandated reporting, which served as a secondary data source following the listening sessions.

Limitations

As with all research endeavors, our research team encountered some obstacles along the way. The primary limitations of our research included:

Poor Timing - The Castillo Consulting Partners team was invited to conduct community listening sessions beginning in June 2023 and asked to complete listening sessions by the beginning of the fall. Unfortunately, the timing of the request did not align well with the academic calendar, which meant that schools were starting summer break right as we began our research. As a result, we faced several obstacles in our outreach to different schools and organizations about scheduling listening sessions. Many of the administrators that we had reached out to were on vacation, thus unavailable to provide approvals or connect us with others who could help us schedule a session with their families. Consequently, we were unable to schedule listening sessions with school sites, which we believe would have been a valuable asset to our research.

- **Sample Limitations** - While our intention was to have a truly randomized sample of participants, given the previously mentioned time constraints, and our outreach tactics, we recognize that there is some sampling bias in our research. Co-hosting listening sessions with specific organizations presents an inherent sampling bias. Our research team attempted to compensate for this bias by reaching out to a variety of organizations (i.e. faith based organizations, tutoring programs, childcare centers, schools, community health and wellness programs, youth leadership development organizations and parent associations, to name a few), and by hosting listening sessions that were open to the general public using outreach methods to broader audiences (i.e. through social media). Nevertheless, we recognize and acknowledge that much of our outreach relied on connections to specific organizations and word of mouth through personal connections, which presents a limitation in our findings that may or may not be a concern as the target audience for this research overall are individuals who have experienced mandated reporting; a group that is difficult to identify and connect with outside of those who have open cases with the Department of Children & Family Services.

- **Budgetary Constraints** - Another limitation that we faced was budgetary constraints, which limited our capacity to hold more listening sessions. Ideally, we would have hosted more in-person sessions, which provide more personal and intimate environments for this type of data collection. However, our limited budget prevented us from being able to do so. Despite this, our team worked diligently to replicate the type of intimate, safe and brave space for virtual participants and found the Zoom sessions to be just as effective and insightful as the in-person session.

Overall, while these obstacles did impact the amount of time it took to collect and analyze the data of our research, in no way did they impact on the quality of the data itself.

Listening Session RSVP Form

Thank you for your interest in participating in a Mandated Reporting Listening Session. Please see details below and complete this brief form to help us verify your eligibility for participation. If you have any questions, contact info@castilloconsultingpartners.com.

Eligibility

All participants must meet the following criteria:

- Be a current or past resident in Inglewood, CA
- Be a current or past student within Inglewood Unified School District
- Be a parent with a child currently or previously in a school within Inglewood Unified School District
- Have experienced mandated reporting in Inglewood as a parent, child or both

If you meet the above criteria and are interested in sharing about your experience in a listening session, please complete this form by 5pm PT on Tuesday, August 29th and we will follow-up with a Zoom link for your session.

If you DO NOT meet the above criteria, we thank you for your consideration, but ask that you not complete this form, as the listening session is designed to be a safe and brave space for individuals who have experienced mandated reporting in Inglewood, CA. If you are interested in learning more about the work that is being done to shift from mandated reporting to mandated supporting, please be on the lookout for future communications from us via email.

Our Aim

We are looking to gain insight from Inglewood community members (parents and students) about their experiences with mandated reporting, with the intention of collecting their feedback on how we can transform the process so that families receive support and resources.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

Please know that all information shared during the listening session will be confidential and anonymous. The Castillo Consulting Partners team will include common themes across all listening sessions and quotes from each discussion in a report that is intended to transform mandated reporting to mandated supporting. We will not include any names or other identifying information in the final report.

A Token of Our Appreciation

In an effort to honor your voice and thank you for your participation, Castillo Consulting Partners will compensate all participants with a \$50 e-gift card following the listening session. Participants will be invited to complete a brief feedback form at the end of the session to receive the e-gift card.

- First Name
- Last Name
- Email Address
- Phone Number
- Affiliation
- Do you have personal experience with mandated reporting?
 - Yes, I am a parent who was reported by a mandated reporter.
 - Yes, I am a student whose family was reported by a mandated reporter.
 - Yes, I am a mandated reporter.
 - No, I have not experienced mandated reporting.
- If yes to the above, did you experience mandated reporting as a student, parent or both?
 - As a student.
 - As a parent.
 - As a student and as a parent.
- Do you currently, or did you previously reside in Inglewood, CA?
 - Yes, I currently live in Inglewood, CA.
 - Yes, I previously lived in Inglewood, CA.
 - No, I have never lived in Inglewood, CA.
- Where did the mandated reporting incident occur?
 - At a school within Inglewood Unified School District.
 - At a medical facility, such as a hospital or doctor's office in Inglewood, CA.
 - At a medical facility, such as a hospital or doctor's office NOT in Inglewood, CA.
- Who submitted the mandated report?
 - A teacher.
 - Another school staff person, not a teacher (i.e. teaching assistant, principal, school nurse, etc.)
 - A medical professional (i.e. doctor, nurse, medical assistant)
 - A police officer.
 - Other
- When did the mandated report take place? (Please share the year)

Listening Session Follow-Up/Feedback Form

Thank you for your participation in one of our listening sessions to learn about community members' experiences with mandated reporting. Please take a few minutes to complete this brief form to share your feedback about the listening session, as well as any other thoughts about mandated reporting that you would like to share. As a token of our appreciation, we will e-mail a \$50 e-gift card.

- First Name
- Last Name
- Email Address
- Phone Number
- Affiliation
- Do you have personal experience with mandated reporting?
 - Yes, I am a parent who was reported by a mandated reporter.
 - Yes, I am a student whose family was reported by a mandated reporter.
 - Yes, I am a mandated reporter.
 - No, I have not experienced mandated reporting.
- In your opinion, what is the most important thing that can change about mandated reporting to ensure families receive the support they need?
- Thank you, again, for your participation. Please share any feedback you have about your experience in the listening session or any additional information about your experience with mandated reporting that you would like us to consider as we draft our report.