

# Headlines

## Foster Care: David & Kelly Mann Find Purpose

**EHSD Live!  
Watch Parties 2.0**

**Flipping the Script  
on Getting Older**

**Customer Service Champions:  
Resource Family Clerical Team,  
Jennifer Miller**



# EHSD Budget Presentation: Our Services Across the Lifespan

By Christine Anuskiewicz, Community Relations/Media

At the April 28–29 special budget session, EHSD Director Marla Stuart and Chief Deputy Director Anissa Basoco-Villarreal presented the department’s \$731.7 million budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2025–26 to the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors. EHSD’s recommended budget maintains critical service levels while addressing the continued demand for safety net services in the face of economic uncertainty and potential federal funding cuts.



The proposed budget reflects strategic shifts in funding sources, improved federal claiming, and adjusted Measure X allocations. EHSD’s budget presentation underscored our delivery of services across the lifespan.

As Marla explained, EHSD’s “...dedicated, mission-driven, county employees collectively envision a thriving community, which we achieve by partnering to deliver quality services that ensure access to resources that support, protect, and empower households to achieve self-sufficiency.”

Marla emphasized EHSD’s role in supporting more than 300,000 Medi-Cal recipients and more than 100,000 CalFresh participants, with 29% of county households receiving some form of financial assistance last year. The department reaffirmed its commitment to equitable, culturally responsive service delivery—including for Contra Costa’s immigrant communities—who often face added barriers in accessing vital programs.

Despite uncertainty about possible future federal policy changes, EHSD remains focused on improving performance, reducing its vacancy rate, and strengthening community partnerships to meet the growing needs of our county’s most vulnerable residents.

You can view the Contra Costa County Budget Hearings, including EHSD’s presentation, on the [County website](#). The budget returns to the Board for final adoption on May 20th.

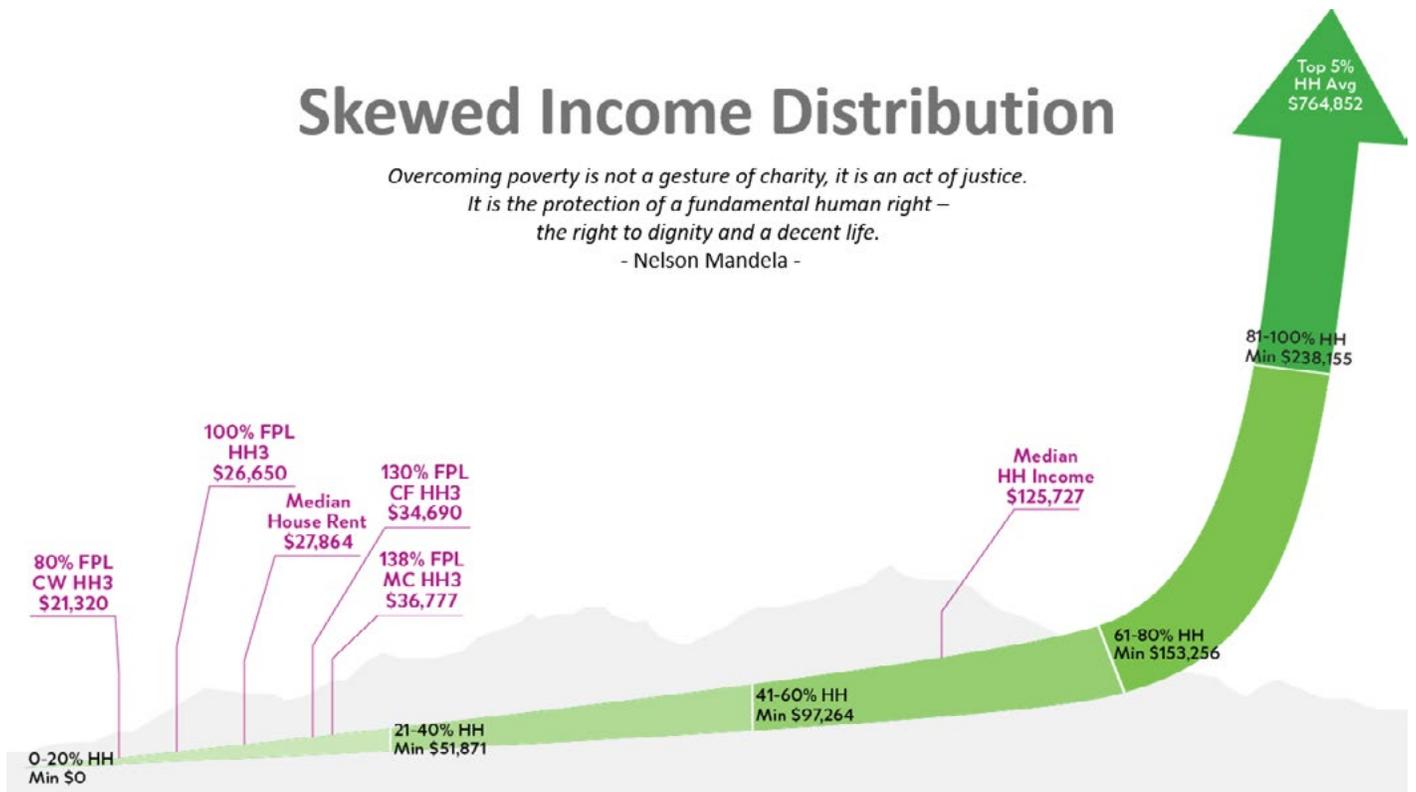
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## EHSD Budget Presentation: Our Services Across the Lifespan

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### Skewed Income Distribution

*Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity, it is an act of justice.  
It is the protection of a fundamental human right –  
the right to dignity and a decent life.  
- Nelson Mandela -*



Part of EHSD’s budget presentation underscored the experience of severe poverty for many of our residents. The light gray silhouette of Mt. Diablo symbolizes a normal curve if income is evenly distributed. The green arrow indicates income is skewed, with EHSD serving those in the lowest quintile (tail end of the arrow). The federal poverty level (FPL) is \$26,650 for a three-person household (middle of lowest quintile), yet more than 40% live with an income exceeding \$153K (where arrow turns upward).

*Building Brighter  
Futures Together*

# Mentoring Begins for Diverse 2025 Cohort



The EHS D Mentoring Program is excited to launch its 2025 cohort, proudly featuring full representation from every EHS D bureau. This year's selection reflects a strong commitment to inclusivity and professional development across the department.

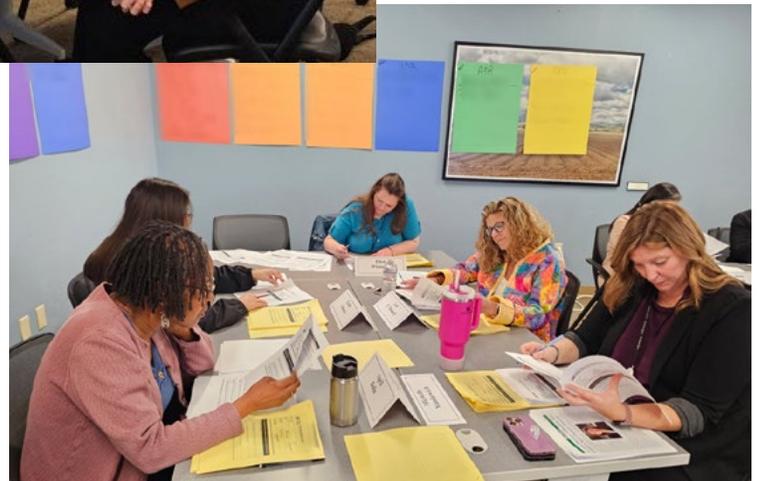
The Mentoring Advisory Group played an instrumental role in shaping the program, carefully reviewing 28 applications from prospective mentees and 22 from potential mentors. After thoughtful consideration, 20 mentors and mentees were selected to participate, each bringing valuable perspectives and a shared dedication to growth and learning.

A heartfelt thank you to the Mentoring Advisory Group for their time, insight, and commitment to fostering a meaningful and inclusive program. We also extend our gratitude to all who applied and continue to support the program—your passion for growth and collaboration is what drives its success.

Right (L-R): **Leilani Lunch** – Staff Development Supervisor; **Terrie Adams** – Division Manager; **Amber Sandoval-Sullivan** – Appeals Officer; **Stephen Quesada** – former Eligibility Work Supervisor

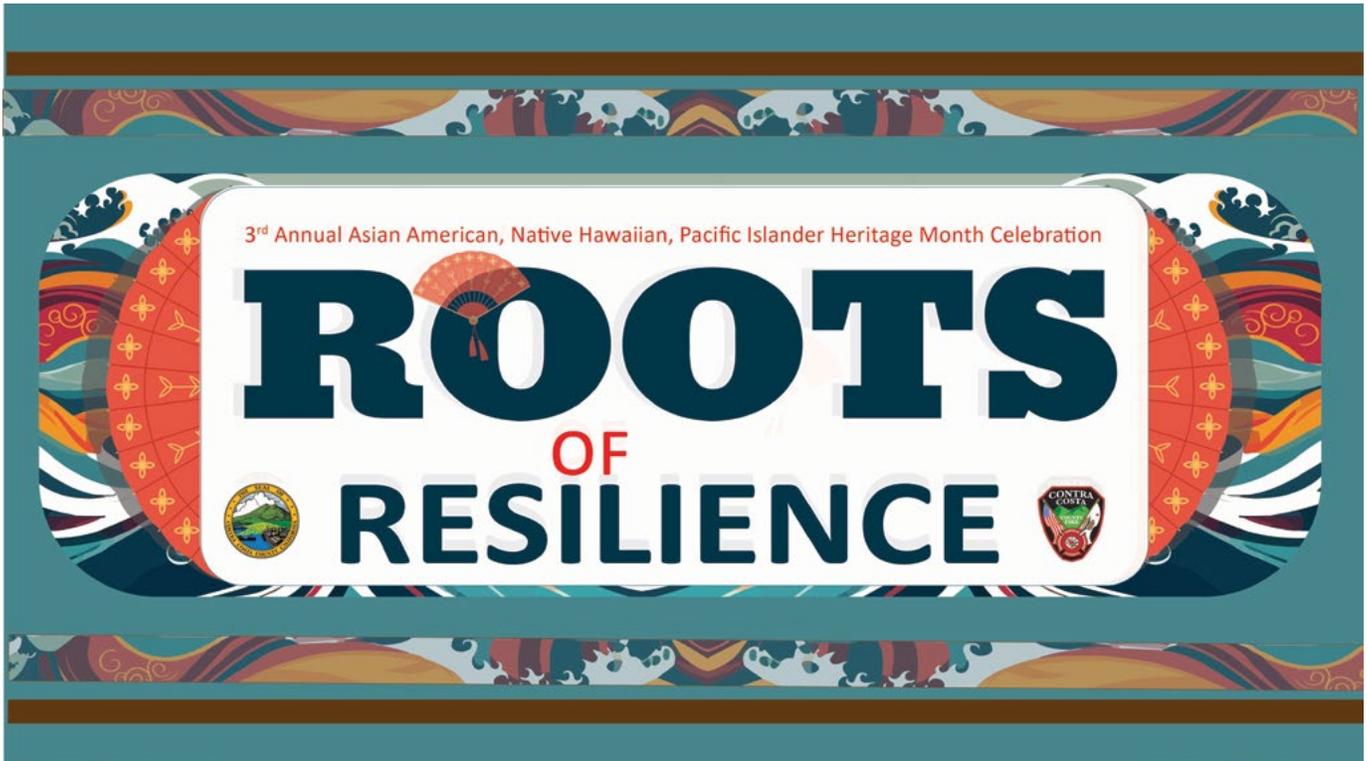


Left, front table (L-R): **Tracey Lee** – Staff Development Division Manager; **Jennifer Miller** – EW Supervisor  
Back table: **April Bolin** – Staff Development Supervisor; **Evette Thomas** – SSPA (former mentee)



(L-R) **April Bolin** – Staff Development Supervisor; **Evette Thomas** – SSPA (former mentee); **Ellen Wienecke** – Clerical Supervisor; **Lori O'Donnell** – Staff Development Supervisor; **Michelle Mankewich** – ASA III

## County Honors Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage



All are invited to celebrate the rich cultural heritage and contributions of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) communities at the 3rd Annual Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Heritage (AANHPI) Month commemorative event. The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors will host the celebration at 11 a.m., on Tuesday, May 13th, at the Board Chambers, 1025 Escobar St., in Martinez.

This year's theme is Roots of Resilience, emphasizing how cultural heritages and lived experiences influence who we are today. The event is an opportunity for younger and future generations to honor their AANHPI roots.

The multimedia event will feature live performances representing traditions from Pacific Islander, Chinese, Polynesian, Japanese, and other AANHPI cultures.

“The Board of Supervisors is honored to recognize the invaluable contributions of AANHPI communities in Contra Costa County,” said Board Chair Candace Andersen, District 2 Supervisor. “This event is an opportunity to learn more and ensure that these rich traditions continue for generations to come.”

You can join the festivities in person or live on Contra Costa Television (CCTV) channels and the County website, starting at 11 a.m. More information about the AANHPI celebration is on the [County website](#).

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE DEPARTMENT OF IN

## The Foster Care Call: A Couple's Journey

By Alan Wang, Community Relations, Media Specialist

When Kelly and David Mann first considered becoming foster parents, their motivation was simple: they wanted to grow their family and possibly adopt children who were already waiting for a home. But life, as it often does, had bigger plans.

While living in Texas, the couple found themselves surrounded by a strong community of foster parents. Through that network, they began to see the enormous need for safe, loving homes – not just for young children, but for sibling groups, teen moms, and others who are often more difficult to place. That's when their purpose began to shift.

Since beginning their journey as foster parents, Kelly and David have welcomed eight children into their home. Their experience includes a sibling set of three, a teen mom and her baby, and even a child who returned to their care after reunification didn't work out the first time. They've cared for children as young as two months and as old as 15 years.

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## The Foster Care Call: A Couple's Journey

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Currently, they are fostering a 15-year-old teen mom and her 3-year-old child, a dynamic that many might shy away from. But for the Manns, it's exactly what they feel called to do.

"We realized we had the space and flexibility to say yes to the kids who needed someone most," Kelly shared. "We wanted to be there not just for the children, but also for the parents – to help make a really hard time just a little less scary."

That perspective has been transformational. The Manns believe deeply in supporting reunification when it's safe and possible, and they've found that building trusting relationships with birth parents can make a world of difference – for everyone involved.

"There's no handbook," Kelly laughed. "You have to be flexible and lean into your support system. The community we've built, especially through our resource center and support group, has been a lifeline."

**"There's a world before foster care and a world after. It's not easy, but it's absolutely the best thing we've ever done."**

One moment that stands out in their journey was with the first child placed in their care – a young girl who was with them only a month before moving in with a relative. She returned to care a few months later, and when the transporter brought her back to the Manns' home, the little girl was overjoyed.

"She couldn't stop talking about the 'mermaid pickles' house," Kelly recalled, smiling. "We had a mermaid bath toy she named Pickles, and even though she had only been with us a short time, that memory stayed with her. It reminded us that the small things matter."

To those thinking about fostering, Kelly and David have one message: "There's a world before foster care and a world after. It's not easy, but it's absolutely the best thing we've ever done. And if you've ever considered fostering teens – go for it. Our teens have been some of the most amazing kids."

In a world full of uncertainty, the Manns continue to offer a steady hand, an open heart, and, sometimes, even a mermaid named Pickles – proving that love, patience, and presence can truly change lives.



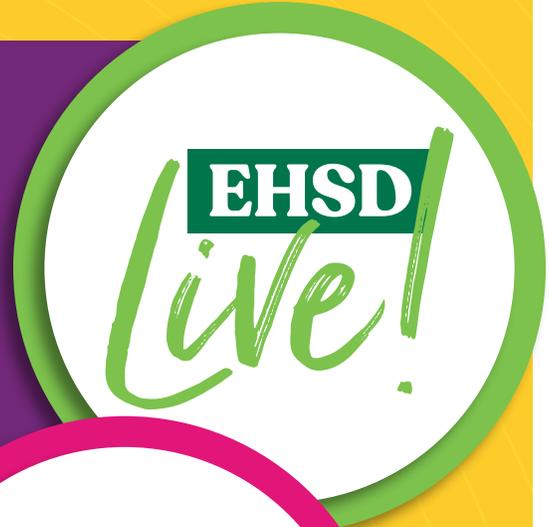
Kelly and David's first foster experience came in the form of respite care in which they stood in as back up care for foster parents who needed a break. Dipping their toes into the water first helped them ease into full time foster parenting. [CLICK](#) on the play button to hear Kelly and David talk more about their experiences as foster parents.

## Level Up Your Watch Party!

Huddle with your team in front of the big screen to watch ***EHSD Live!*** on May 15th.

**All Watch Parties will receive:**

- > LIVE shout out on the broadcast
- > FREE popcorn to enjoy during the event
- > Feature in the June issue of *Headlines*



**THURSDAY**  
**May 15th**  
**11 a.m.**

### NEW... Level it up!

EHSD Web Producer **Larena Baldazo** will join one lucky group in person for an extra special feature of your team LIVE during the event!

Join on Zoom:  
<https://cccouny-us.zoom.us/j/85365042316>

Register your Watch Party per the instructions.

In your email, tell us WHY you want us to join your Watch Party. What stands out about your unit/group? How will you celebrate your Watch Party? We welcome costumes, decorations, a song – anything creative and fun!

### How to register:

1. Plan a Watch Party (5+ viewers) to watch EHSD Live! on Thursday, May 15th.
2. Email [EventsCommittee@ehsd.cccounty.us](mailto:EventsCommittee@ehsd.cccounty.us) by **Wednesday, May 7th** and include:
  - Names of each staff member
  - Location where you will watch together
3. Reserve a conference room with a big screen for the Zoom event.
4. Get ready for a spotlight on EHSD Live!
5. Send us a group photo for June *Headlines*.



# Soar Higher

By Larena Baldazo, EHSD Web Producer

Community Relations' Web Producer **Larena Baldazo** represented the EHSD Community Relations/Media Team at the **California Association of Public Information Officials (CAPIO)** conference in Napa last month. More than 700 government communicators attended.

CAPIO is committed to advancing public sector communications through honest, transparent, and effective storytelling. Workshops focused on AI, building trust within our communities, storytelling using an iPhone, survey do's and don'ts, and many other topics.

During the conference awards luncheon and dinner, our very own Contra Costa County Office of Communications (OCM) team won an Award of Distinction in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) category for their Juneteenth video: <https://lnkd.in/gFpK9S5S>

OCM also earned a Certificate of Excellence for storytelling about the Port Chicago explosion: <https://lnkd.in/gVqnWt78>. Congratulations to our colleagues at OCM!

Keep sending your stories to the Community Relations Team. We look forward to "Soaring Higher" in 2025 as we share them to help our community members better understand the incredible work you all do. Your stories matter.



Contra Costa County PIO, Kristi Jourdan, represented the Office of Communications and took home an Award of Distinction along with a Certificate of Excellence.



On day two of the conference, attendees flooded *The Art of Prompt Engineering: Crafting Precision for Optimal AI Interaction* workshop and demo, led by Josh Hirsch. Here, the group also learned that AI truly does have a mind of its own.



# CalFresh for All: Helping Contra Costa Eat Well and Thrive

By Christine Anuszkiewicz, Community Relations/Media

May is **CalFresh Awareness Month**, and this year's theme, "CalFresh for All," reminds us that everyone deserves access to healthy, nutritious food. In recognition, the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors is officially proclaiming May 2025 as CalFresh Awareness Month, celebrating the positive impact CalFresh has on local families and communities.

CalFresh helps stretch household budgets so individuals and families can afford fresh fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods. In 2024 alone, more than 105,000 Contra Costa residents received CalFresh benefits, contributing \$244 million to the county's economy and making it easier for families to put nourishing meals on the table.

Supporting these efforts is CalFresh Healthy Living, a statewide program that teaches CalFresh-eligible residents how to shop smart, eat healthy on a budget, and stay active. From fun community activities like "Bingoize" classes for seniors, to partnerships with schools, markets, and local parks, CalFresh Healthy Living brings nutrition education and healthy living tips to every corner of the state.

New projects are making an even bigger difference. The Healthy CalFresh Initiative is working closely with county eligibility offices to connect applicants with healthy eating resources right from the start.

Help spread the word: **CalFresh is here to help everyone thrive.** Whether it's shopping for groceries, finding healthy recipes online, or joining a free local class, CalFresh offers the tools to build stronger, healthier communities—one meal at a time.

## Helpful Resources for CalFresh Participants

### [CalFresh Healthy Living](#)

Tips for eating healthy on a budget, staying active, and more.

Follow on

[Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#) | [Pinterest](#)

for daily tips & inspiration.

### [EatFresh.org](#)

Free healthy recipes, nutrition tips, and an "Ask a Dietitian" feature.

### [MyPlate.gov](#)

Meal planning tools, budget-friendly recipes, and healthy eating guidelines.

### [BenefitsCal.com](#)

Apply for CalFresh

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Futures Together*

## Countywide CalFresh Training Enhanced ME Training for Our CalFresh Staff

By Nanci Powers, Workforce Services Specialist, and Victoria Virgen, CalFresh Program Analyst

EHSD's CalFresh participated in an in-person training series focused on the CalFresh Management Evaluation Program Response Improvement (PIR). The training, held from April 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>, was led by Crissy Harrigan-Smith, Technical Assistance Manager from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS). It addressed key findings from the Federal Fiscal Year 2025 CalFresh Management Evaluation to strengthen the county's CalFresh program administration.

The collaborative learning experience brought together CalFresh eligibility and program staff during sessions at the Martinez Event Center and Antioch Community Center. The primary goal was to review and improve processes, ensuring that staff are equipped to provide accurate, timely, and client-focused service.

The comprehensive training agenda addressed areas critical to CalFresh program integrity and access:

- **Program Access:** Identifying and eliminating barriers to CalFresh participation, improving customer service, and ensuring applicants are informed of all methods to apply (in person, online, phone, mail, and fax).
- **Applications and Interviews:** Best practices for application intake, interview scheduling, and documentation, with emphasis on maintaining confidentiality, timely processing, and correct procedures for expedited services.
- **Verifications and the CW 2200 Form:** Proper use of the CW 2200 form for verification requests, avoiding unnecessary documentation, and ensuring clarity and accuracy in all client communications.

- **Quality Assurance:** Reviewing common error trends, such as miscalculated income, incomplete documentation, and improper notice procedures, and discussing corrective actions to address these issues.
- **Review of 2025 ME Findings:** An analysis of recent ME results for EHSD highlighted both strengths and areas for improvement, such as application date stamping, personal contact attempts, and timely issuance of notices.



Crissy Harrigan-Smith training EHSD CalFresh staff at the Antioch Community Center.

Victoria Virgen, CalFresh Program Analyst, provided additional county-specific process reminders, ensuring that staff understood local procedures and compliance requirements. Her contributions were praised for their clarity and practical relevance.

The event also fostered team building and engagement. Attendees enjoyed lunch, participated in interactive games, and had the opportunity to win prizes. The in-person format allowed staff to network and share experiences, as well as deepen understanding through direct interaction, which many noted as a valuable aspect of the training.

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## Countywide CalFresh Training

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Staff appreciated the opportunity to learn directly from state experts, clarify complex policies, and discuss real-world scenarios.

The CalFresh Management Evaluation Program Response Improvement training represents a significant step forward in strengthening our

County's CalFresh program. By addressing both state and county-specific findings, the training ensures that staff are better prepared to serve the community, uphold regulatory standards, and continuously improve program delivery.



Crissy Harrigan-Smith sharing Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services Department CalFresh statistics from FFY 2025 Management Evaluation.

CLICK the play button to hear more from **Angie Fuentes**, SSPA at our Sand Creek office in Brentwood. She participated in the three-day CDSS training that brought together EHSD's eligibility and program staff to review and improve CalFresh processes.



## Thank You

- **Lynne McGraw, Kivon Scott, Jalene Collins, Jerald Sams, Gina Hagan, Todd Roberts, Dexter Valencia** and **Wilfredo Aldana** for all the support! We couldn't have done it without you!
- Prabin Regmi & his team from Martinez Event Center
- Stephanie from Antioch Community Center
- La Tapatia, lunch caterer

*Building Brighter Futures Together*



May is Community Action Month and EHSD's Community Services Bureau (CSB) has been the Community Action Agency for Contra Costa County since 1965. For more than 60 years, Community Action

has made significant contributions to individuals and families by creating economic opportunities and strengthening communities, inspiring a spirit of hope. Community Action advocates at the local, state, and national level work to ensure the causes and conditions of poverty are effectively addressed and to strengthen, promote, represent, and serve the community.

Thank you to our community partners, EHSD staff members, and County leaders for delivering high-impact programs and services that help build brighter futures.

## The Promise of Community Action

Community Action changes people's lives,  
embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities,  
and makes America a better place to live.  
We care about the entire community,  
and we are dedicated to helping people  
help themselves and each other.



# Flip the Script on Aging

Challenging outdated narratives about growing older is the focus of **Older Americans Month** in May. The 2025 theme “Flip the Script on Aging” intends to do just that by celebrating diverse experiences, contributions, and independence of older adults across our communities.

Contra Costa County is home to a growing older adult population, with approximately 193,816 residents aged 65 and over, making up 16.7% of the county’s total population.

Our Area Agency on Aging (AAA) supports the implementation of the Master Plan for Aging for Contra Costa County, promoting the development of age- and disability-friendly communities by advocating for an infrastructure that fully and

meaningfully prioritizes the needs of older and disabled adults and those who care for them.

AAA served 25,587 people during Fiscal Year 2023-24 through a variety of services supported by the Older Americans Act (OAA), including home delivered meals, congregate meals, case management, Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP), transportation,

and other programs. AAA helps improve access to information, assistance, and resources to promote equity and visibility of services among older adults, people with disabilities, and family caregivers.

We can all help flip the script on aging by valuing, supporting, and celebrating our older adults!





# Outreach Roundup

## Saturday, April 5<sup>th</sup> – 2025 Congreso Familiar

EHSD Navigators **Joanna Thieme** and **Sandra Figueroa** participated in the Congreso Familiar conference at Pittsburg High School. Congreso Familiar is a well-regarded community event dedicated to empowering Spanish-speaking families, especially those raising children with disabilities. The conference offered a wide range of workshops, childcare services, and valuable resources—all delivered in a welcoming, bilingual environment. With over 200 attendees, it was an energizing space for learning, connection, and community support.



Joanna Thieme and Sandra Figueroa

Joanna and Sandra helped families navigate the many services available to them, providing direct guidance, answering questions, and ensuring attendees could connect with the resources they needed.



## Tuesday, April 8<sup>th</sup> – Richmond YouthWORKS' Career and Information Fair

Close to 200 motivated young adults eager to explore career paths and take the next steps in their professional journeys gathered at the Richmond Memorial Auditorium to learn about and connect with opportunities. EHSD Personnel Technicians **Aisha Burnett** and **Carol Butler** were there as well as Navigator **Sandra Figueroa** who shared resources.



Sandra Figueroa

## Wednesday, April 9<sup>th</sup> – Victims' Rights Week Recognition Ceremony

In honor of National Crime Victims' Week, EHSD Navigators **Natalie Aguilar** and **Casey Costa** attended the Victims' Rights Recognition Ceremony hosted by the Contra Costa District Attorney's Office. Speakers included La Shara Johnson with the Family Justice Center, Marilyn McMullen with Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), Isabel Serena who is a Victim Witness Advocate, and Jenna Franklin with the DA's Office Sexual Assault unit.

A Special Courage Award was presented to Bianca Palomera, who intervened when a special needs individual was being harassed in the restaurant where she was working. Bianca

*Building Brighter Futures Together*

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## Outreach Roundup

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lost vision in one of her eyes due to the assault. Thanks to her brave testimony the perpetrator was convicted for this crime. Bianca is an inspiration to many.

County Navigators **Natalie Aguilar & Casey Costa** offered compassionate support and valuable resources to attendees, helping create a supportive space for healing and empowerment.



Natalie Aguilar and Casey Costa

### Friday, April 11th – Hillview Junior High Adult Prom

Navigators **Joanna Thieme, Cecilia Felan, and Natalie Aguilar** joined forces with Hillview Junior High School in Pittsburg, California, to host a heartfelt and nostalgic Adult Prom. This special evening also served a meaningful purpose with attendees bringing hygiene items to donate to the school's Warrior Co Community Closet, a valuable



Hillview Donations

resource that provides essentials to students in need. With music, dancing, and shared memories, the night brought together alumni, staff, and community members for a cause close to the heart of the Hillview family.

Beyond the prom's glitz and glamour, the event marked a poignant farewell to the current Hillview Junior High campus, which is set to be torn down and replaced by a brand-new facility in the fall. The prom offered one last chance for guests to walk the halls, share stories, and honor the legacy of a school that has shaped generations.



Natalie Aguilar, Joanna Thieme, and Cecilia Felan

### Saturday, April 12th – At the Ready Kids Resource Fair

Contra Costa County Navigators **Casey Costa** and **Joanna Thieme** supported the Black and African American families at this event by helping connect families with essential services, programs, resources, and community support. Their presence helped foster greater access to opportunities and well-being with Casey and Joanna showing their strong commitment to equity and empowerment within the community.



Casey Costa and Joanne Thieme

## Practice Healthy Social Media Use

MagellanAscend

Contributed by Personnel Services



**WELLBEING TIP:** Be mindful on social media. Don't compare yourself to others' perfect-looking posts. Take a digital detox now and then.

It is well known that dependence on social media can have a harmful impact on your mental health. Whether you have been adversely impacted or not, it is important to maintain a self-protective, healthy approach to your social media life.

- Remember that your self-worth is not measurable online and should not be compared to other people's.
- If you are feeling "addicted" to certain apps, set a time limit for using them.
- Log off your devices at least an hour before bedtime. Blue light from screens stimulates parts of the brain that keep us alert when we should be winding down.
- If you routinely run into individuals and sources that bring you down, unfollow them.
- Be careful with artificial intelligence, as it has limitations that can cause inaccurate and biased results.
- Take breaks from screen time, you will be creating more time for enriching, real-world experiences.

Browse more articles at <https://member.magellanhealthcare.com/>

### Wellbeing Coaching

Need a little help overcoming a challenge? One of our certified coaches can help you with a variety of life areas such as career, work and educational concerns, relationships, sleep problems, weight management and more. Your coach will help you clarify your goals, identify obstacles that may be holding you back and develop action-based solutions. Visit your member website to learn more.

#### UPCOMING WEBINAR:

**Recognize the Influence of AI and Social Media on Mental Health**  
Wed., May 14th at 11 a.m.

Attend this webinar to:

1. Define artificial intelligence and how it affects social media
2. Learn the signs of technology overuse and its effect on mental health
3. Discover strategies to create a healthier relationship with technology

Missed the live webinar?

Webinars are listed in your Dashboard under "Upcoming." If you haven't signed up to use the County Employee Assistance Program yet, follow these two easy steps:

**Step 1:** Go to <https://member.magellanhealthcare.com/> and click on "Sign up."

**Step 2:** Complete the online registration form and click on "Get Started."

#### YOUR EMPLOYEE DISCOUNTS Save on Major Brands & Everyday Essentials

Save with your Employee Discounts on LifeMart, your online members-only discount center, where you can save big on major purchases like travel, tickets, attractions, electronics, cars vacations, or on day-to-day essentials like groceries and childcare. And best of all, access is free!

[Click here to access the LifeMart Discount Center in your web browser.](#)

# Community Relations Talks Media Pathways at LMC

The Los Medanos College (LMC) Journalism Program hosted its Media Pathways event. Community Relations/Media’s web producer, **Larena Baldazo**, was an event panelist and the Contra Costa Television (CCTV) crew tabled at and livestreamed the event.

Nearly 300 high school students attended the event that kicked off with an icebreaker – “Resisting the Algorithm” – by the LMC Library. The discussion featured a presentation with imagery and students participated in spotting the fake news. It immediately woke up the whole room.

EHSD’s web producer, Larena, served on the panel alongside Krysh Shahin, digital journalist for broadcast company **TEGNA Inc.**, Jose Fajardo, photojournalist for **East Bay Times**, Malcolm Marshall, executive editor for Contra Costa Pulse, Dan Kopf, data editor for the **San Francisco Chronicle**, and Vivienne Aguilar, health equity reporter for The Intersection.

The remainder of the day was open for students to stop by the tables and connect with the pros regarding internships, applying at LMC, and life as a media professional.



Larena joins CCTV’s Chris Verdugo to answer questions about jobs with the County in communications offices.



Web Producer, **Larena Baldazo**, shares her start as an LMC student, reporter and mom and how it led her to EHSD.

# Partnership Makes Strides Against Child Exploitation

By Corinna Espino, MSW, CSEC Services Program Coordinator, Children and Family Services

The Contra Costa County Office of Education (CCCOE) and Children & Family Services' (CFS) CSEC Services Program are making impactful progress in their united efforts to prevent and respond to the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) across the county.



This academic year, the partnership successfully rolled out CSEC 101 training sessions tailored for school district personnel, including school social workers, foster youth services staff, student services teams, and district leadership. Held during both the fall and spring terms of 2024–25, the sessions trained more than 100 professionals, significantly expanding community capacity to identify and support at-risk youth.

Our expanded training capacity with CCCOE represents a major step forward in our prevention work. By focusing on early identification and

intervention, we've seen promising results with more youth being identified as at-risk before exploitation occurs.

Between January and December 2023, 126 at-risk youth – representing 89% of the total youth served – received preventive services, demonstrating the success of this early-intervention approach. These proactive strategies have contributed to a notable reduction in youth exploitation by addressing key vulnerabilities before they escalate.

In addition to training, CCCOE has embraced new initiatives the CSEC Services Program introduced, including the “Click with Caution” awareness campaign focused on online grooming prevention and digital safety, and the “Becoming Me” curriculum designed to support youth survivors in their healing and recovery journeys.

**CSEC 101 training sessions, held during the fall and spring terms of 2024–25, trained more than 100 school district personnel, including school social workers, foster youth services staff, student services teams, and district leadership.**

The collaboration between CCCOE and CFS continues to strengthen, with both agencies committed to preventing and addressing child trafficking and exploitation. If you are interested in CSEC training opportunities or seeking resources for local schools, please contact the CSEC Services Program at [cfcsec@ehsd.cccounty.us](mailto:cfcsec@ehsd.cccounty.us). CSEC 101 training session.

# Staff Development Has Two New Supervisors

By Tracey Lee, Staff Development Division Manager

## Karen Labaniego Named Staff Development Supervisor – Program Training

**Karen Labaniego** brings over 25 years of Social Services experience to her new role as Staff Development Supervisor for Program Training. A UC Davis graduate with a BA in Sociology, Karen began her career as an Eligibility Worker in Solano County, progressing through various roles including CalWORKs caseworker, Job Club facilitator, and CalWIN Help Desk team member.



In 2007, she joined Contra Costa County, where she quickly advanced, becoming a lead worker in the Eligibility Training Unit, then a supervisor of both the On-the-Job Training (OJT) Unit and ETU. Since 2014, Karen has served as a Staff Development Specialist, known for creating dynamic, supportive training experiences for new and seasoned staff alike.

As she steps into her new supervisory role, Karen is dedicated to fostering a positive learning environment that promotes confidence, competence, and engagement. Outside of work, she enjoys life with her husband, their two college-aged children, and their beloved dog, Koda. Karen is widely appreciated for her innovation, forward-thinking, and ever-sunny outlook.

## Leilani Scharff-Lunch Appointed Staff Development Supervisor – Professional Development Training

With 26 years of experience in Employment and Human Services, **Leilani Scharff-Lunch** has officially been named Staff Development Supervisor for Professional Development Training. Throughout her career, she has excelled in the Eligibility Classification Series, gaining deep knowledge of policy, service delivery, and training.



Since 2013, Leilani has served as a Staff Development Specialist, where she played a key role in designing and delivering training for new and experienced staff. She previously held the role of Staff Development Supervisor (TU) and now steps into the position permanently.

Leilani is passionate about professional growth and is known for her dedication to building strong, well-prepared teams. Outside of work, she enjoys biking, supporting her daughters in their careers, and giving back to her community through board service with a nonprofit organization. Her blend of expertise and heart makes her a valued leader in Staff Development.

*Building Brighter Futures Together*

## Customer Service Champions

These individuals are being recognized for going the extra mile by delivering excellent service to our customers. They went above and beyond in their willingness to help and demonstrate EHSD’s emphasis on providing exemplary customer service. Congratulations on a job well done!

### Celebrating Our Exceptional Resource Family Clerical Team

By Candace Yates, CFS Resource Division, Clerical Supervisor

CFS has a dedicated group that works tirelessly behind the scenes. Ours includes the Resource Family Approval (RFA) clerical team, the Emergency Shelter Care (ESC) clerk, the Relative Notification (RA) clerk, and our Children’s Services Clerical Specialists – affectionately known as our “Techs.” They are the backbone of our operations, ensuring that critical tasks are handled with precision and efficiency every day.

Our clerical team starts every day prepared to tackle any challenge. Whether it’s processing Resource Family Approval paperwork, managing emergency shelter care placements, supporting the Relative Notification unit, or handling placement paperwork for children placed out of home, they reliably approach each task with professionalism and dedication.

The team embodies a strong sense of teamwork that stands out. Each member brings specialized knowledge and skills to their roles, and together they create a collaborative, supportive environment. The RFA clerical team’s meticulous



Back (L-R): **Lori Rutledge**, (RFA), **Lynnette Groom**, (ESC), **Angel Arias**, Lead Clerk (RFA), **Stephanie Potts**, (Children’s Services Clerical Specialist)  
Front (L-R): **Jennifer Chalco**, (Children’s Services Clerical Specialist) and **Marie Mosley**, (Children’s Services Clerical Specialist)  
Not pictured: **Bonnie Ruso**, (RFA) and **Linsay Etienne**, (RA)

attention to detail in the approval process, the ESC clerk’s quick response to urgent needs, the RA clerk’s efficient organization of critical notifications, and our Techs all play integral roles. Though each position is specialized, together they ensure that every process is smooth, coordinated and effective. Our Techs bridge communication between CFS social workers and the foster care eligibility team, ensuring placement paperwork is handled promptly and accurately, facilitating

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## Customer Service Champions

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### Commitment in Motion—Jennifer Miller

By Renita Johnson, Secretary, WFS MCSC

There is something truly special about a person who consistently goes above and beyond, not for recognition, but simply because they care. **Jennifer Miller**, our Eligibility Work Supervisor, is that person at MCSC in Antioch.



As a member of the Exemplar Point of Contact Team, Jenn facilitates communication between MCSC and the Exemplar vendor, helping to improve and refine our reporting tools.

Jenn has also volunteered to create the quarterly MCSC newsletter, serving as a go-to resource for the staff at the six MCSC locations.

Jenn happily leads the social committee at MCSC East and contributes to the countywide reputation of “best” annual BBQs. In addition to her daily tasks, Jenn manages countless activities for the MCSC. She handles behind-the-scenes details, allowing for events to appear seamless to the participants. Jenn brings passion, creativity, and heart to everything she does.

Her dedication doesn't just help MCSC run smoothly, it brings the team together. We appreciate all the hard work, warmth, and commitment Jenn brings to our MCSC staff and customers. She has incredible energy that is appreciated by all! Jenn is a great asset to the MCSC team.

### Resource Family Clerical Team

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placements that truly make a difference in children's lives.

**Our Lead Clerk**, Angel Arias, provides exceptional leadership and dedication fostering the success of our team. Not only does she bring invaluable expertise, guidance, and unwavering dedication to ensuring the team works seamlessly together, but she also provides crucial support whenever I am out of the office. Her ability to step in ensures that operations continue without disruption, and I rely on her dedication to maintaining smooth operations.

Beyond their professionalism and work ethic, this team is a joy to work with. Their positive attitudes, collaborative spirit, and unwavering support create an office environment that is both productive and pleasant. They go above and beyond, often taking on extra responsibilities to ensure no task is left undone. Their teamwork and mutual respect make them not only reliable colleagues but also valued friends in the workplace.

A heartfelt thank you to each member of this incredible team. We are incredibly fortunate to have such a dedicated and hardworking group making a positive impact on our workplace environment.

## PUBLIC SERVICE RECOGNITION WEEK MAY 5-11, 2025

*With gratitude to our EHS/D staff members for serving our community members with excellence.*



## We Care...You Care

**We Care...You Care** is how we recognize our peers, emphasizing internal customer service. **We Care...You Care** nominations tie directly to one or more of our six Core Values. The program gives you the opportunity to show your coworkers how much you appreciate them. If you work with someone who deserves special recognition for internal customer service, check out the We Care...You Care link to the guidelines, then fill out a nomination form and submit it to the supervisor of the person you are nominating.

**We Care guidelines:** [We Care... You Care Guidelines](#)

**We Care nomination form:** [We Care... You Care Nomination Form](#)



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## SERVICE AWARDS | NEW EMPLOYEES | RETIREES

### SERVICE AWARDS

#### 40 YEARS

Debbie Sittser, Clerk-Specialist Level, CFS

#### 25 YEARS

Georgina Brocks, Social Casework Assistant, CFS  
Amy Vallerga, Soc Svc Program Assistant, CFS  
Luke Wheeler, Soc Svc Program Assistant, WFS

#### 15 YEARS

Maria Buban, Master Teacher-Project, CSB  
Romena Calonsag, Soc Svc Program Assistant, AAS  
Jamie Miller, Soc Svc Program Assistant, WFS  
Kimberly Scott, Soc Svc Program Assistant, WFS  
Nicole Sherman, Clerk-Senior Level, WFS

#### 10 YEARS

Cheo Lee, Social Worker III, CFS  
Lorraine Lindell, Soc Svc Program Assistant, WFS  
Estrelita Turner-Chappell, Eligibility Worker II, WFS

### NEW EMPLOYEES

Miguel Argueta, Translator, CFS  
Stephanie Booth, Planners & Evaluator Level A, Admin  
Jason Brumfield, Clerk-Experienced Level, WFS  
Mekia Busley, DHRA II, Admin  
Isabel Candelario, Social Casework Assistant, CFS  
Rosemary Condon, Intermediate Clerk, CSB  
Lindsey DeLost, Clerk-Experienced Level, WFS  
Blair Goff, Social Worker, AAS

Arthur Jones, Clerk-Beginning Level, WFS  
Ciarra Joseph, DHRA II, Admin  
Davon King, Clerk-Experienced Level, WDB  
Lijia Lumsden, Administrative Aide, WDB  
Jocelyn Quijada, Social Services Program Assistant, WFS  
Pratistha Rai, Clerk-Experienced Level, WFS  
Luis Roman Jr., Student Intern II, CSB

### RETIREES

Carmen Castillo-Valladares, Associate Teacher- Project, CSB  
Gyrlenn M Ertmer, Social Service Worker III, CFS  
Kenya Jones, Eligibility Work Supervisor, WFS  
Cheryl Manion, Clerk-Senior Level, CFS  
Aida Naranjo, Comprehensive Svcs Asst Mgr-Pr, CSB

Are you planning a retirement celebration for a staff member and would like to present them with a retirement certificate? **If so, please contact Deb Johnson at [djohnson@ehsd.cccounty.us](mailto:djohnson@ehsd.cccounty.us) or (925) 608-4904.**

# SPREAD THE WORD

## May 2025

- COMMUNITY ACTION MONTH
- CALFRESH AWARENESS MONTH
- OLDER AMERICANS MONTH
- FOSTER CARE MONTH
- MAY 4-10 – Public Service Recognition Week
- MAY 5 – Cinco De Mayo
- MAY 5-9 – Teacher’s Appreciation Week
- MAY 11 – Mother’s Day
- MAY 17 – Armed Forces Day
- MAY 26 – Memorial Day (County holiday)

## June 2025

- COMMUNITY ACTION MONTH
- ELDER & DEPENDENT ADULT ABUSE AWARENESS MONTH
- JUNE 1 – National Cancer Survivor’s Day
- JUNE 8 – Abused Women and Children’s Day
- JUNE 14 – Flag Day
- JUNE 15 – Father’s Day
- JUNE 19 – Juneteenth (County holiday)
- JUNE 20 – Summer Solstice (longest day of the year)
- JUNE 23 – National Hydration Day

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## We Care... You Care

CLICK HERE to learn more about nominating a coworker and see page 23

## Want to know what else we’re doing at EHSD?

Facebook and X @ContraCostaEHSD  
Instagram @HumanaCosta  
Like us on Facebook



We appreciate you closely following our [Submission Guidelines](#) to ensure that your news and photos appear in *Headlines*.

June 2025 issue – submissions due Tuesday, May 20, 2025

## Is there room in your home for one more?

Make a change in a child’s life and become a Resource Parent/ Family for a foster child. Contra Costa County needs your support to provide care for children 0–18 years of age. Please join us for a virtual orientation and learn more about becoming a caregiver.



## FREE VIRTUAL ORIENTATIONS

May 1 or 15 • 4 to 6 p.m.

June 5 • 4 to 6 p.m.

July 3 • 4 to 6 p.m.



For more information about becoming a Resource Parent visit us at [www.ehds.org](http://www.ehds.org). If you belong to an organization or community group interested in learning more about Resource Family Approval/ foster parenting, we can schedule an individual session for your group, in English or Spanish. To register for a class, please call (925) 655-4230 or email [ResourceFamilies@ehsd.cccounty.us](mailto:ResourceFamilies@ehsd.cccounty.us)

