

By Judi Jordan and Kay Reed



## Building Brighter Futures Helps Parents Meet Child Support Obligations

**N**o one would drive in Los Angeles rush hour traffic wearing a blindfold. Yet, many people drive blindly into parenting. Unstable families, custody battles, and child support problems result.

Non-custodial parents who do not fulfill their child support payments often become stuck with a suspended driver's license, garnished wages, and revoked professional licenses. They show up at the Los Angeles County Child Support Services Department (CSSD) desperate to resolve their problems.

A conversation with CSSD Director Steven Golightly inspired The Dibble Institute to create *Building Brighter Futures* (BBF), a new approach that teaches adults relationship and parenting skills while encouraging them to meet their child support obligations. Since it was initiated in 2013, BBF has yielded a 24 percent increase in child support compliance within those piloted cases.

"When The Dibble Institute approached Dr. Golightly offering relationship education classes to our non-custodial parents as a strategy to decrease parenting disengagement, increase co-parenting skills, increase economic stability and improve child support compliance, we were eager to collaborate," said Kimberly Britt, special assistant overseeing CSSD Fatherhood initiatives. "The Building Brighter Futures program aligns with our efforts to provide a holistic service approach to families."



Building Brighter Future participants (above) learn valuable life and parenting skills using Love Notes relationship curriculum.



### A Productive Child Support Services Partnership

No one going to CSSD is expecting a helping hand like *Building Brighter Futures*. For stressed parents, the smallest acts of kindness have enormous consequences; BBF, with its encouraging environment, works powerfully. Co-parenting, relationship communication skills, and understanding what children need to thrive are just some of the topics covered by BBF over eight weeks.

The Dibble Institute's relationship curriculum "Love Notes" by Marlene Pearson is the key intervention used in BBF. It has proven to be successful as a new approach for non-custodial parents stuck in negative relationship patterns. Designed to increase parental involvement (financial and emotional) with their children and increase payment compliance, it has garnered significant traction and notable increases in child support payments.

BBF participants are engaged in a variety of ways, including videos, personality assessments, discussions, lectures, and training that qualifies them for ServSafe®—a food handler's license. They also receive a meal, gift cards when they come to class, and reinstatement of their driver's license for up to six months. For many, these incentives are crucial to paying for gas or food while they job-hunt, and for getting caught up on support payments.

### Building Brighter Futures Works

For a non-custodial parent earning \$1,200 a month, \$172 is the minimum

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*This is the final article in the 2015 Partnering For Impact series.*



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**Title:** Director, Policy and Government Affairs

**Time at APHSA:** Joined APHSA in July.

**Life Before APHSA:** Prior to APHSA I was a lobbyist at the National League of Cities (NLC) for 8.5 years. My portfolio at NLC included education, workforce, health care, pensions, and social services. I was the policy director at GLSEN—the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network—for 3.5 years. I promoted safe school policies for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. I also worked for the National Association of Counties for 18.5 years where I was associate legislative director for labor and employment. I graduated from Rutgers University with a Master of City and Regional Planning, and from The George Washington University with a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy.

**Priorities at APHSA:** First, to maintain APHSA's position with Congress and the Administration as the go-to national organization on human service issues. Second, to be a resource for state human service leaders on a wide range of topics, including Congress and the Administration and legislation and regulations. Third, to have fun doing what I do.

**What I Can Do for Our Members:** I want to be your eyes and ears in Washington on all things legislative and regulatory; to help you better understand the whys and wherefores of Congress and the Administration; to let Congress and the Administration know how you are transforming the nation's human service system; and to provide you with the tools to be successful human service advocates.

**Best Way to Reach Me:** The best way to reach me is by email ([nbomberg@aphsa.org](mailto:nbomberg@aphsa.org)) or text (202-255-2704). I hate talking on the phone!

**When Not Working:** You can find me listening to music, reading, at the gym, or at a movie. My favorite musicians are Joan Baez and Patti Smith; my favorite author is Thomas Pynchon; my gym is Vida Fitness at 15th and P Streets, NW; and my favorite recent film is *Melancholia* by Lars von Trier. When I am not doing those things you might find me playing with my granddaughter.

**Motto to Live By:** I have two. The first is Kant's "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law." The second is from John Lennon's song, *Beautiful Boy*, "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." 📖

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child support payment in the state of California. And, when you are unemployed, it's almost impossible to stay current. That's Leo's situation. A proud dad of three, Leo's oldest son's handprint is tattooed on his forearm, evidence of his love for his children. But Leo wasn't always so sure of his worth.

"I came in not knowing, am I a good person or a bad person," Leo said. For these [mostly] young adults with no previous concept of—or access to—objective emotional support, BBF was an eye-opener. Leo really responded to the self-awareness exercises. "I was surprised at how caring I am, I have this heart," he said. He left the class with a plan to do better by his children.

Tested in a pilot funded by the Office of Family Assistance since 2013, BBF's two expert instructors, Maria Ricarte and Van Ray Murphy, and host/

recruiter José Valencia build strong rapport with participants.

Educator Maria Ricarte's thought-provoking Q&A and solid facts covering parenting, relationship realities, domestic violence, and societal labels stir engaged discussions. Maria's focus is clear: "This is a preventative curriculum. You have to be willing to put your own personal life and blunders out there."

Host and recruiter José Valencia came to the classes initially as a dad with intense child support and relationship issues.

"I was dying inside," he said.

Completing BBF, Jose became the paradigm for the program's potential. "I'm going to change everything!"

As the BBF recruiter, José has a table right in the Child Support offices. He shines in that role, guiding distressed

parents to learn the skills needed to become better parents and partners. The department's Vera Ashley-Potter concurs. "José is the epitome of the desired BBF outcome."

*Building Brighter Futures* works. Pain, frustration, and confusion give way to clarity, understanding, and enthusiasm to apply BBF tools in real life. Program participants experience improved parenting confidence, enhanced communication skills, and greater relationship competency to help them take their blindfolds off and navigate the challenging roadways of the parenting journey. 📖

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