



STRATEGY BRIEF

SAFE CHILDREN

How do St. Anne's programs for pregnant and parenting young mothers **break the cycle of child abuse and neglect?**

Expectant and parenting youth and their children are an especially vulnerable population. Many adolescent parents do not have a stable parent to model appropriate parenting behavior. They may lack basic parenting skills and have limited knowledge about child development. Since adolescents tend to be inwardly focused on their own transition to adulthood, they may fail to recognize and respond to their children's needs and emotions, contributing to further parenting challenges. The [developmental impacts of the trauma](#) that young parents in foster care have experienced may lead them to be even less prepared for parenthood than other adolescent parents.

[St. Anne's](#) in the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles is one of few programs across the country specifically designed to meet the [unique needs of pregnant and parenting youth and young women in foster care](#) and end the cycle of child abuse and neglect.¹



How do St. Anne's programs for pregnant and parenting young mothers break the cycle of child abuse and neglect?

Overview

More than a century ago, St. Anne's was a very different place: a refuge for unwed mothers seeking to conceal their pregnancies from the community. At that time, more than 90% of the young women gave their babies up for adoption. Since that time, St. Anne's has evolved to respond to changing needs and societal views on teen pregnancy, while staying true to its mission of serving vulnerable women and their children.

Today, the agency occupies a six-acre campus and provides support for pregnant and parenting youth currently in foster care, and young women who recently have transitioned out of foster care. Goals include keeping young mothers and their children together, helping mothers heal from their own trauma, and giving these young adults the tools and support they need to transition to adulthood, and keep their children safe and healthy.

St. Anne's receives funding from several Los Angeles County government departments, including Education, Children and Family Services, and Probation, along with the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. The agency also was awarded a 2017 Family Youth Services Bureau's Transitional Living Program federal grant to support long-term residential services to older homeless youth, ages 16 to 22. Government funding is supplemented with grants from the philanthropic community and individual donations.

While St. Anne's does not currently collect child welfare outcome data, the agency does track outcomes related to workforce, education, mental health, and parental capacity. According to its [2016 annual report](#):

- 75% of adult residents have completed an internship and are currently working or enrolled in school.
- 95% of youth in the residential treatment program are enrolled in school.
- 66% of young women in the transitional housing program have raised their income.
- 91% of parents have a better understanding of child development.

- 81% of those receiving community-based services have met one or more of their goals after completing mental health services.
- 95% of families participating in wraparound services have completed their goals.

Services

St. Anne's provides a continuum of comprehensive services to pregnant and parenting youth and young women in Los Angeles County: safe, stable housing; high-quality early childhood education; mental health counseling; and various other life skills and supportive services crucial to achieving independence.

Residential treatment program

The residential treatment program serves pregnant or parenting 13- to 18-year olds currently in the foster care and/or juvenile justice systems, and their children. St. Anne's has the capacity to house up to 32 youth and 18 of their children. All of the residents are either in the care of the Department of Children and Family Services or in the probation system and are referred by their social worker or probation officer. St. Anne's recently [transitioned from being a group home](#) to a short-term residential treatment program facility. That change led to a renewed focus on keeping stays as brief as possible, and providing services to support transition to a more family-like setting.

St. Anne's provides individual clinical and educational counseling, life skills, and parenting classes, and each young person is either enrolled in school full time or placed at a job/internship. Residents have the choice of staying in their local schools, attending school on campus, or taking online courses. St. Anne's staff provide transportation services to and from medical appointments, school, and court, if necessary. There is also an early learning center onsite for the children to attend during the day while their mothers are in school.

Transitional housing program

St. Anne's is one of a small number of facilities that offers transitional housing for pregnant or parenting

How do St. Anne's programs for pregnant and parenting young mothers break the cycle of child abuse and neglect?

youth ages 18 to 24 who were formerly in foster care or the probation system, and their children. They reside in one- or two-bedroom apartments with up to two of their children. The young women may remain in the program for up to three years or until they turn 24, whichever comes first (this change from a previous time limit of two years reflects a more realistic amount of time needed to transition out of state care). Residents must be enrolled in school or employed, and pay 30% of their monthly income to cover rent and utilities.

In addition to the transitional housing program, St. Anne's recently opened its permanent supportive housing complex, Beverly Terrace. This certified LEED Platinum building is located just blocks from St. Anne's main campus and houses 39 one- and two-bedroom apartments along with an early learning center. Beverly Terrace residents are families with a history of experiencing homelessness, including past residents from St. Anne's transitional housing program and their children, as well as families from St. Anne's early childhood and mental health services programs. In February 2019, about 40 families with 69 children under age 18 lived in the building. St. Anne's supportive services are available onsite to all residents: case management, mental health and workforce development, and free early childhood education for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers at the early learning center.

Early learning centers

St. Anne's six early learning centers serve both St. Anne's clients and the broader community to promote developmental and school readiness for low-income children ages 4 months to 5 years. These licensed centers use an evidence-based Head Start curriculum to prepare children for school academically,

emotionally, and socially. The centers encourage parents to volunteer in the classroom and the teachers meet regularly with parents to instruct them about appropriate developmental milestones. In addition, St. Anne's has specialists who provide in-home early learning services in order to [promote healthy child development](#) and prepare children for preschool and kindergarten.

Community-based services

Beyond the Echo Park campus, St. Anne's works in the community to strengthen families and prevent children from entering foster care. The agency provides mental health services, including individual, family, and group therapy, as well as a wraparound program consisting of a four-person treatment team that delivers integrated services to help families navigate crises, develop strategies to overcome challenges, and strengthen problem-solving and coping skills. In 2016, St. Anne's community-based services served more than 500 adults and children.

Workforce development

Given the challenges faced by many alumni from foster care to secure stable employment, one of St. Anne's primary goals is to help youth acquire work skills and employment experience to secure and sustain meaningful jobs. The program offers a workforce curriculum designed to address specific challenges of youth in foster care, and emphasizes skill building, such as interviewing, assertive communication, professional dress, and career exploration. The young mothers also receive paid, 200-hour internships that enable them to put the curriculum into practice while gaining workplace experience and skills. Participants work one-on-one with workforce development specialists to identify

It is hard enough to be a single youth in care. Adding a child makes it even more difficult to do what they need to do to succeed in life. It's important for us to always be available for them, and to meet the girls where they are.

— TONY WEAVER,
DIRECTOR, ST. ANNE'S SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROGRAMS

How do St. Anne's programs for pregnant and parenting young mothers break the cycle of child abuse and neglect?

short- and long-term goals and access the resources needed to attain them. The workforce specialists also help young women manage workplace challenges and balance work with the competing obligations of motherhood and school. The specialists steer young women to educational or training programs that match their vocational interests and assist in the search for permanent jobs.

Essential elements

St. Anne's has evolved its programming and approach over time, identifying a set of core elements to provide pregnant and parenting residents with the independent skills they need to create a stable home and survive on their own, heal from the trauma they experienced, and build the parental capacities to keep their children safe and healthy.

Trauma-informed care

Given the trauma that a majority of the youth and young women at St. Anne's have experienced, a [trauma-informed approach](#) provides the foundation for how all levels of staff engage with the residents. Every staff member has been extensively trained on the core concepts, science, and practice related to trauma-informed care, and provided with concrete strategies needed to effectively serve the youth and young women involved in their programs. They are

taught how to approach the youth in a way that builds trust and safety and does not re-traumatize.

In addition, clinically trained staff are available all day to support youth in crisis and coach staff about how to deliver trauma-informed care. For example, they provide background information about residents' previous experiences so staff can better understand behavior patterns and triggers. They also employ family crisis specialists, who focus exclusively on building personal relationships with each of the clients so they can teach them techniques for coping and de-escalating crises.

Parenting support

A primary goal of St. Anne's is to [break the cycle of abuse and neglect](#). Many of the mothers were not exposed to healthy parenting techniques when they were children and often lack basic parenting skills. For the young women in the residential treatment and transitional housing programs, staff seek ways to model healthy parenting behaviors and assist in building parental capacity to address adverse childhood experiences through the promotion of protective factors. Young parents are encouraged to attend group or individual parenting classes and workshops that teach them how to meet the social and emotional needs of their children and understand realistic expectations of child behavior. In addition, teachers



How do St. Anne's programs for pregnant and parenting young mothers break the cycle of child abuse and neglect?

in the early learning centers meet regularly with young mothers so they understand developmental milestones and learn how to appropriately interact with their child's teachers and ask questions about their child's education.

Accessible services

St. Anne's decided over the years to have all resident services provided onsite. Traveling across town to participate in therapy or classes with young children was at times an insurmountable barrier for young parents. St. Anne's found that offering needed services in one accessible location increased the likelihood of young parents to participate. Onsite mental health services, child care, workforce development classes, and parenting classes also are provided during times that are convenient for a range of school and work schedules.

Focus on individual needs

In addition to a history of abuse and neglect, many of St. Anne's residents also struggle with identity issues, often feeling like their lives have been upended since becoming a parent. They also may feel like people are more concerned about how their children are doing than how they are doing. St. Anne's takes special care to concentrate time and effort on the support and healing of the young mothers. As one staff member commented, "The babies aren't in care; the girls are."

All residents are assigned to a family advocate who works one-on-one with them to develop goals and tailor services to meet their unique needs. The family advocate meets with the resident once a week in the young woman's apartment to promote comfort in familiar surroundings. The home visit also gives the advocate time to observe the family dynamic in the home, and model relevant life skills. Many of the advocates utilize trauma-informed techniques to help the young women, such as deep breathing and meditation. They seek to inspire and instill hope through the use of vision boards to help clarify, concentrate, and maintain focus on a specific life goal, and calendars to teach time management. Family advocates also help young mothers navigate and connect to community services that help them achieve their goals. The family advocates and young women complete self-sufficiency forms every three months to track progress and reassess goals and timelines.

Homelike setting

Another principle of the St. Anne's approach is to nurture a sense of belonging through a soothing and welcoming physical environment. For example, each young woman in the transitional housing program is provided with an apartment that is clean, spacious, and furnished. The apartment is also equipped with home goods they can take with them when they move out. Efforts are made to make common areas feel more homey and less institutional. The building was designed to foster a sense of community and fellowship between residents: there is a common area where young women can watch TV, use the computer, and entertain guests.

1 Information in this brief was derived from a February 6, 2019 interview with Tony Weaver, Program Director, St. Anne's Supportive Housing Programs.

P 800.228.3559

P 206.282.7300

F 206.282.3555

casey.org | KMResources@casey.org

