

The Los Angeles Child Development Center

Founded in 1978 by Dr. Miriam Williams, The Los Angeles Child Development Center's (LACDC) mission is to identify, intervene, and resolve the mental health challenges of children in poverty before they become debilitating and dangerous chronic conditions. "Therapy for children is not a luxury, but a social necessity." (Dr. Miriam Williams)

Dr. Williams was born in 1915, in a part of Austria that is now considered Poland. She earned her medical degree from Berlin University in Germany in 1937. The ninth of eleven children, she urged her family to flee to the U.K. with her and escape the Nazi regime. They refused and perished in the concentration camps. She continued her studies at Edinburgh University before moving to London, where she worked in a private practice and as a casualty doctor helping evacuate women and children during the war. She worked and studied with Anna Freud and continued her work at the Institute for the Scientific Treatment of Delinquency, before moving to the United States in 1954. From 1956-1976, Dr. Williams worked as director of training at the Reiss Davis Child Study Center. While her private practice flourished, she wanted to give back to the community, and in 1978 she founded the LACDC.

The Center began as a "Clinic Without Walls", a network of private therapists providing low-cost, open-ended psychotherapy to children and their families who otherwise could not afford these services. Therapists who provided treatment received pro-bono supervision from trained child analysts. Myrtle Mandiberg, M.A., directed the clinic from 1982-1996 and Joan Rieger, L.C.S.W., continued the work until 2002.

In addition, Dr. Williams began a group for Holocaust survivors in 1981 with Bella Leveen, also a survivor of the camps. This group met on a weekly basis, and ran for a year. The group provided a safe milieu for survivors to discuss the trauma they experienced and how it had affected them. The Second Generation Group, began meeting in December 1984 and continued for almost 10 years.

A new model arose in 1985 emphasizing free, open-ended individual and group psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapy in school settings. Concurrently, mental health needs increased just as schools cut critical mental health budgets. LACDC's evolution was part of a movement in the mental health field to provide school-based early identification and intervention. Support was provided for teachers and parents, as was hands-on training for the next generation of culturally-competent mental health professionals. The board found that local schools in Santa Monica, West Los Angeles, and Culver City were eager to involve the LACDC in the provision of counseling on school grounds.

The early school based counseling program encompassed three separate but related entities – the Field Placement Program, The Elementary School Program and The Divorce Project – all

providing mental health services on site in the schools, and reaching young children who would not otherwise have received the help they needed.

The Field Placement Program

The Field Placement Program began in 1985 primarily as group counseling in the Santa Monica School District. Student interns, supervised by licensed LACDC supervisors, held groups for teens and elementary age students at John Adams Middle School, Lincoln Middle School and John Muir Elementary. In early 1986 the LACDC Program Director, Michelle Cutrow, met with the Culver City Unified School District (CCUSD) Advisory Council and discussed starting a school-based health clinic serving middle and high school students. The program that evolved was led by Johanna Schwab, L.C.S.W.. Treatment was provided by interns from schools of social work, MFT interns, and PhD interns in psychology. The interns were supervised by LACDC licensed clinicians, including our directors and volunteers. This program continues to this day, providing treatment to the middle, high and alternative school students in the Culver City School District. Directed by Dr. Francine Bartfield and Dr. Cecile Falk, since 2001, this program has provided over 4000 hours of clinical service to students and families every year for the last 20 years. Services are provided at the Sandy Segal Youth Health Center located on the middle school campus.

The Elementary School Program

By 1996, the Center had over 10 years of success offering counseling in schools to disadvantaged youth and teens in middle and high schools. The Board recognized the need to provide intervention services to children at an earlier stage in their development, helping to resolve problems before they became more serious and thus increasing the children's chances of recovery. This led to the development of the second of our school-based counseling programs, The Elementary School Program. Directed by Dr. Anita Saunders, and financially assisted by a large grant from the Dwight Stuart Youth Foundation, the work began initially in Linwood Howe Preschool, Linwood Howe Elementary in Culver City, as well as Farragut Elementary and Overland Avenue Elementary in the LAUSD.

The program offered early intervention services for troubled children between the ages of 3 to 11. At the preschool level, it helped parents and teachers understand behavior, helping to identify and address early indicators of developmental delays, as well as social and behavioral concerns. We also provided both individual and group therapy to children whose parents and/or teachers referred them to our school-based therapists. A wide variety of modalities were implemented to facilitate communication with each child.

By 2001, the program was providing services in 10 schools (3 preschools and 5 elementary schools in Culver City, 2 charter elementary schools in West LA). Unfortunately, in 2005, because of lack of funding for our services the LACDC had to close the program in West Los Angeles. However, thanks to the continuing support of the Friends of the Culver City Youth Health Center, the Field Placement Program was able to continue in the upper schools in Culver City.

The Divorce Project

In January, 1998 grants from Mervyn's California, the Peter Norton Family Foundation and PacifiCare were secured in order to develop a pilot program called the Divorce Project, a school-based group counseling program for children and their parents who were affected by divorce. The first two pilot counseling groups for 8th graders in the Culver City Unified School District were enormously successful and LACDC began to work towards establishing the Divorce Project as a permanent program through the School-Based Counseling Program.

A generous grant from the Annenberg Foundation enabled the LACDC to expand the program into the elementary and high schools in Culver City as well as funding the creation of a School-Based Treatment Manual for Children of Divorce entitled *Meeting Children on their own Grounds*, by Carol Silbergeld, L.C.S.W, B.C.D, who also directed the program in the schools.

School-based groups benefit children by providing peer support and an opportunity to identify and express feelings and expand their repertoire of emotional and behavioral responses. Group activities included role plays, drawings, skits and games. Working in the schools provided an excellent opportunity to reach large numbers of children of similar ages with available peer support. The Divorce Project remained in the Culver City Schools until 2005, serving over 300 children and their families.

History of Board Presidents at the LACDC

In 1987, Dr. Stanley Leiken assumed the responsibilities of Board President of the LACDC. He was instrumental in the initiation of the Annual Conferences as well as the collaboration with the Family Courts. Dr. Leiken was succeeded in 1991 by Dr. James Perkins.

Dr. Perkins presided during a period of bittersweet growth, as founder Dr. Miriam Williams passed away in 1997. Dr. Perkins praised Williams as "a remarkable woman who worked tirelessly to improve the quality of life for troubled children whose lives might otherwise be ravaged by drugs, gangs, suicide and violence. She believed in the resilience of the human spirit and that each person, if given the opportunity, has the capacity for growth. Thanks to the inspired work she began, thousands of children are productive members of our city today." Dr. Perkins spearheaded the affiliation between the LACDC and the newly formed New Center for Psychoanalysis. The LACDC became an affiliate of interest at the NCP and moved its offices into the Institute. The NCP has been an active supporter of the programs since that time.

In 2001, Dr. Jeri Weiss took on the role of President of the Center. She was a strong advocate for expanding the school programs that became the foundation of the LACDC mission. In 2005, Dr. Weiss was instrumental in helping to expand and adapt our school-based counseling program to meet the needs of low-income, immigrant Latino children and families at the Camino Nuevo Charter Academy, a groundbreaking charter school in the MacArthur Park area of Los Angeles.

In 2015 Dr. Anita Saunders became the President of the Board of Director of the LACDC.

Annual Conferences

In 1980, the Center began to present annual conferences offering a variety of child-oriented topics. Some of the topics of the yearly all-day conferences included Origins of Gender Identity, Women and Power, Homosexuality Reconsidered, The Impact of Divorce, The Abused Child and Abusing Family, and Coping with Catastrophe. These conferences with distinguished professional presenters were held in different facilities around Los Angeles including UCLA, USC and Cedars Sinai, and attendees received continuing education credits.

Collaboration with Family Courts

In 1998 the LACDC and the Juvenile Court co-sponsored a conference on The Diagnosis and Treatment of Child Mental Health Problems and the Role of the Judge. Judges were asked to present difficult cases they had been asked to resolve. More than 50 judges attended, voicing their growing concern for the welfare of children in their care, and expressing their awareness of how profoundly their decisions impact these troubled youngsters' lives. This project was financed by Louise Hurwitz, who has been a strong supporter of the LACDC for many years.

In 2002 the family court system in LA County asked for a counseling project designed to help children whose families were embroiled in high-conflict divorce proceedings. The Center offered services for dependency court evaluations of troubled youth as well as educational training for judges and attorneys to highlight the human issues informing the legal aspects of child development. Program Director Carol Silbergeld worked with the Director of Family Court Evaluation and Mediations Services, Dr. Margaret Little, to obtain referrals so that children could participate in group therapy sessions. Group sessions commenced in the spring of 2003. Forty children ages 8-10 and 11-13 participated in 10-week sessions. This collaboration made a profound impact on families as well as Judges who preside over high-conflict divorce proceedings.

LACDC at Camino Nuevo

In 2005, the LACDC broadened our work into the Latino community through a partnership with the Camino Nuevo Charter Academy, a mini-district of pre-K through 12th grade charter school campuses (then, three) located in the MacArthur Park neighborhood of Los Angeles. It is a highly-regarded charter school that is steadily improving student achievement and making a positive impact in its neighborhood. The LACDC at Camino Nuevo offers free bilingual and culturally-competent mental health services to students. The students are predominantly low-income, high-risk children who, along with their families, have suffered traumatic experiences and need assistance. Currently running in seven of the Charter's eight schools, the program trains an average of 20 interns each year, from such institutions as The Chicago School, Pacific Oaks, USC and the California State University system. The interns provide individual and group therapy to over 180 students and 60 parents monthly. With the full support of Dr. Ana Ponce,

the C.E.O. of Camino Nuevo, the program was developed by Dr. Jeri Weiss and Gloria de la Cruz-Quiroz, L.C.S.W., who has directed the program since its inception.

In 2015, because of the enormous need in the Camino Nuevo community we began the Trauma Sensitive Informed School program. The goal of the Trauma Sensitive Informed School program is to mobilize, coordinate, and assist each school's community to provide the best network of support possible in helping a student reach his or her academic potential. By applying mental health research to the classroom, we provide school staff with the skills to understand the difference between normal disruptive classroom behaviors and emerging mental health conditions, and how to create a sense of safety and support in classrooms. By including parents and guardians in training, we are extending insight into the causes and meaning of children's behavior to those who are in the position to affect it most directly. This program is currently underway in three of the Camino Nuevo campuses, with hopes to expand into more campuses.

LACDC at Culver City

The Field Placement Program became the LACDC at the Sandy Segal Youth Health Center, providing culturally-competent, school-based mental health services. Provision of services continues to assist the middle and high school population of Culver City and we expanded to include the students from Culver Park, the continuation school. Our counseling program there has offered an avenue of hope for students most at risk for dropping out, physical violence, gang affiliation and criminal activity.

Begun in 1985, the partnership with the Culver City schools has evolved into a program that annually trains graduate interns from many training institutions, including USC school of social work, Smith College, Pacifica Institute and Pepperdine University. Run by two part-time directors, 3 volunteers and 10 interns, the program offers an average of over 4000 hours of treatment to more than 400 students each year.

LACDC at The Accelerated School

In 2008, the LACDC established a third partnership, a joint venture with The Accelerated School (TAS) in South Los Angeles. TAS offered both individual and group counseling to students and consultation with parents, teachers and administrators while simultaneously training future therapists to work in the diverse school population that TAS serves. From 2008-2015, Rachel Batur, L.C.S.W., Program Director, supervised the counseling program which provided a comprehensive continuum of services to students from pre-K through 12th grade at the TAS campus. The services included crisis intervention, psychosocial assessments and ongoing individual and family therapy. In addition, teachers and administrators received ongoing consultation. In 2015, our program with TAS ended and we focused on our programs at Camino Nuevo and Culver City.

Awards and Honors

In 40 years of providing community service programs in the greater Los Angeles area, the LACDC has been honored in many arenas. Articles about the center and its programs have been

published in many news outlets, including the LA Times, Culver City News, La Opinion, Westside Weekly, Preschoolers Today and The American Psychoanalyst Magazine.

In 2013 the LACDC was selected by the Association for Child Psychoanalysis (ACP) to receive the ACP 2013 Award for Excellence, an award given to a center or program exemplifying the highest level of service, training, outreach or research associated with the profession of Child Psychoanalysis and the ACP.

Transition

In 2015, our devoted and dedicated President, Dr. Jeri Weiss, became ill and passed away in 2016. The Board of Directors at the LACDC began to discuss a succession plan to continue Dr. Weiss' work and leave a lasting legacy. Our programs were thriving under the direction of Dr. Anita Saunders, former director of the Elementary School Program, who became President of the LACDC during Dr. Weiss' illness. Two unique opportunities arose to ensure the continuation of both of our programs.

Dr. Saunders spoke with Dr. Ana Ponce, head of Camino Nuevo Charter Academy (CNCA), about the future of the Camino program, and Dr. Ponce expressed strong interest in housing the Camino program under their development group – Pueblo Nuevo Education & Development Group (PNEDG). The name of the new entity to honor Dr. Jeri Weiss will be called the Jeri Weiss Mental Health Program. The Jeri Weiss Mental Health Program officially launches in July 2018. A wonderful naming ceremony was held on April 13, 2018 at the Eisner Campus of the Camino Nuevo Charter Academy. The program will continue to thrive under the care of Dr. Ana Ponce and Gloria Delacruz-Quiroz, L.C.S.W., who has been the LACDC director of the program since its inception.

Dr. Francine Bartfield and Dr. Cecile Falk had many discussions with the Venice Family Clinic (VFC) and the Friends of the Sandy Segal Youth Health Center to ensure the continuation of the Culver City Program. As a result of their work, the VGC agreed to take over the Culver City program at the Sandy Segal Health Center with the continued financial support of the Friends of Sandy Segal Youth Health Center. The VFC had been running the medical health portion of the Culver City Unified School District and was eager to add our mental health program to their roster. Dr. Bartfield and Dr. Falk will continue to run the LACDC programs in Culver City with the support of the Venice Family Clinic and the Friends of the Culver City Youth Health Center.

Dr. Weiss' published an article in the Winter/Spring 2015 quarterly of The American Psychoanalytic Association. She estimated that the LACDC had offered service to over 14,000 children since beginning our school programs.

It has been a wonderful gift to have been able to serve the Los Angeles community for 40 years and to know that the programs the Center has worked so tirelessly to create and foster over these years will continue to serve children and their families for many years to come.

We are grateful to all of our Board Members, our Supervisors, Directors of Programs, Interns, Donors and our small but crucial administrative staff, past and present, for carrying out the LACDC mission to see and help the unseen child. Our goal has always been to provide accessible, free, mental health services so children can become integrated and productive members of their communities and find success in and outside of their classrooms.

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“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” - Frederick Douglass