

2026 FAMILY STRENGTHENING NETWORK VIRTUAL SUMMIT

The Power of Presence: Caring for Families, Caring for Ourselves, Strengthening Our Communities

MEETING INFORMATION

Date: Tuesday, June 09, 2026
Time: 9:00 am - 12:30 pm

 Zoom Link: [Click Here](#)

 Meeting ID: 854 7691 6617

 Call In #: +1-669-444-9171

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: KALI THORNE LADD



Kali Thorne Ladd is the Chief Executive Officer of Children's Institute. She is a visionary leader and advocate of educational equity and early childhood development. She is a former co-founder and executive director of KairosPDX, a culturally specific organization that aims to close opportunity and achievement gaps for historically underserved children. She has served in leadership positions throughout Oregon, such as membership on the Oregon Governor's Early Learning Council, chairing the Board of Portland Community College, and working for education initiatives in the City of Portland and the Oregon Department of Education. Thorne has master's degree in education policy from Harvard University and bachelor's degrees in elementary education and psychology from Boston College.

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OBJECTIVES

Participants will be able to:

Presence, Caring, and Strength by the Numbers: Highlight and celebrate the collective reach, impact, and relationship-centered work of the Family Strengthening Network through data on families served, client demographics, and program outcomes that reflect the power of presence, care, and community connection.

Keynote: The Transformative Power of Love

Participants will be able to:

1. Have a deeper understanding that love is a verb and is a “need” to have, not a nice to have for both children and adults to thrive.
2. Have a deeper understanding of self-care and restorative practices as critical supports for providers who work with infants and their families.
3. Hear simple, accessible, inspiring stories that highlight how the neuroscience of love and belonging shapes our wellbeing not only as babies but as adults who are supporting new parents

From Babies to Big Kids: Families Reflect on Their Home Visiting Journey

1. Gain a richer understanding of how home visiting benefits families, with specific examples shared by parents and children who participated in home visiting programs
2. Hear the perspective and recollections of parents several years after they participated in a home visiting program

LA County Wins: How the Home Visiting Consortium is Empowering Staff to Support Families

1. Identify the six Consortium workgroups and their 2025–2026 accomplishments.
2. Describe key policy wins advancing maternal and child health in LA County.
3. Recognize the significance of Home Visiting Day and how LA County celebrated it on April 17, 2026.

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The Power of Presence: Caring for Families, Caring for Ourselves, Strengthening Our Communities

TIME	PRESENTATION	SPEAKERS
9:00 am - 9:20 am	Opening Remarks, Welcome & Introductions	Patrick Flippin-Weston, BA <i>Senior Training Coordinator, LA Best Babies Network</i> Karla Pleitez Howell, BA, JD <i>President and CEO, First 5 LA</i> Joselyn Gaitan, MS, CLE <i>Program Manager, LA County Department of Public Health</i> Sharlene Gozalians, DrPH, MPH, CHES <i>Director, LA Best Babies Network</i>
9:20 am - 9:55 am	Presence, Caring, and Strength by the Numbers	Delisa Culver, MA <i>Manager of Data & Evaluation, LA Best Babies Network</i> Monica Charles, MPH <i>Senior Data Analyst, LA Best Babies Network</i> Helen Chan, BS <i>Data Analyst, LA Best Babies Network</i>
9:55 am - 10:55 am	The Transformative Power of Love	Kali Thorne Ladd <i>Children's Institute Chief Executive Officer</i>
11:05 am - 11:05 am	Break: Music by Juan Hernandez	Juan Hernandez <i>Administrative Coordinator, Maternal and Child Health Access</i>
11:05 am - 11:15 am	Somatic Self-Care	Teresa McKee, MS <i>CEO, Work2Live</i>
11:15 am - 11:50 am	From Babies to Big Kids: Families Reflect on Their Home Visiting Journey	Steve Nish, MA <i>Manager of Communications, LA Best Babies Network</i> Helen Kontorosis, BS <i>Communications Specialist, LA Best Babies Network</i> Parent Alumni: Luz and Tony , participated in PAT program with Child Care Resource Center in San Fernando Valley Dustin and Jilienne , participated in Welcome Baby program with El Nido Family Centers - Valley Presbyterian Hospital
11:50 am - 12:10 pm	LA County Wins: How the Home Visiting Consortium is Empowering Staff to Support Families	Anna Ghukasyan, MPH <i>Senior Policy Research Associate, LA Best Babies Network</i>
12:10 - 12:25 pm	Spoken Word	Alyesha Wise <i>Director of Programming for Street Poets, Inc.</i>
12:25- 12:30 pm	Closing Message, Evaluation & Adjourn	Kathryn Ewing, MA <i>Senior Public Health Research Associate, LA Best Babies Network</i>



KEYNOTE
SPEAKER



Kali Thorne Ladd

Chief Executive Officer of Children's Institute

Kali Thorne Ladd is the Chief Executive Officer of Children's Institute. She is a visionary leader and advocate of educational equity and early childhood development. She is a former co-founder and executive director of KairosPDX, a culturally specific organization that aims to close opportunity and achievement gaps for historically underserved children. She has served in leadership positions throughout Oregon such as membership on the Oregon Governor's Early Learning Council, chairing the board of Portland Community College, and working for education initiatives in the City of Portland and the Oregon Department of Education. Thorne has master's degree in education policy from Harvard University and bachelor's degrees in elementary education and psychology from Boston College.

SPOKEN
WORD



Alyesha Wise

Director of Programming for Street Poets, Inc.

Alyesha Wise is an award-winning poet, educator and speaker from Camden, N.J. Currently a resident of Los Angeles, she is the Director of Programming for Street Poets, Inc., an organization mostly serving injustice-impacted youth with mentorship and arts programming. A recipient of a 2025 Los Angeles Preservation Award, Alyesha has been featured on platforms and in publications such as OWN TV, BET, LA Times, Bustle, Afropunk, PBS, BuzzFeed and more. Other collabs include the ACLU, The Shabazz Center, The Nantucket Project, Brave New Films and the Google Interstellar Project. Ron Howard once wrote about Alyesha's work, "Very Powerful." My Older Brother, A Famous Rapper, is Alyesha's latest book of poetry, released in fall 2025 by El Martillo Press.

SPECIAL
MUSIC



Juan Hernandez

Administrative Coordinator, Maternal and Child Health Access

Juan is the administrative coordinator for Maternal and Child Health Access, and its Welcome Baby program. He is also a concert guitarist who performs pieces from the Renaissance era to the contemporary. He teaches guitar performance, and was professor of Music Philosophy and Medieval Music History. As part of the Orange County Guitar Orchestra, he participated in the release of the albums Toccata and Maestro. He also performs with fellow professor Ken Rosser as the Pasadena Guitar Duo. He has written articles for the magazine Soundboard and for the PRS Journal. Additionally, Juan is trained in GIM (Guided Imagery and Music), a Jungian therapeutic approach, and facilitates individual and group sessions.

ANNA GHUKASYAN, MPH

Senior Policy Research Associate, LA Best Babies Network

Anna earned her Master of Public Health from the University of Southern California, with an emphasis in Health Services and Policy. In her graduate work, Anna focused on improving access to healthcare services for underserved populations in Los Angeles County through policy and advocacy efforts. Anna is passionate about decreasing rates of adverse childhood experiences among children in Los Angeles County.



DELISA CULVER, MA

Manager of Data and Evaluation, LA Best Babies Network

Delisa earned her master's degree in Experimental Psychology from California State University, San Bernardino. Her professional background includes working as a Research Specialist at Five Acres, a child welfare agency that promotes permanency, safety, and well-being for children and families. She supported continuous quality improvement efforts by partnering with the IT department to make the electronic health record system useful for all staff to meet the agency's mission goals, and by providing useful reports to senior leadership to make data-informed decisions. Delisa also has experience conducting health disparities research, which has helped frame her interpretation of data when examining underserved populations. Delisa is passionate about eliminating disparities in health and education and wants to contribute to this cause by using her research and data skills.



HELEN CHAN, BS

Data Analyst, LA Best Babies Network

Prior to joining LABBN, Helen worked as a research assistant studying the effects of drug compounds on various bacterial strains at the University of Rochester and investigating the role of chemical modifications on proteins at California State University, Los Angeles. During her undergraduate years, she had the opportunity to support rural communities in Honduras by assisting with medical and housing needs.

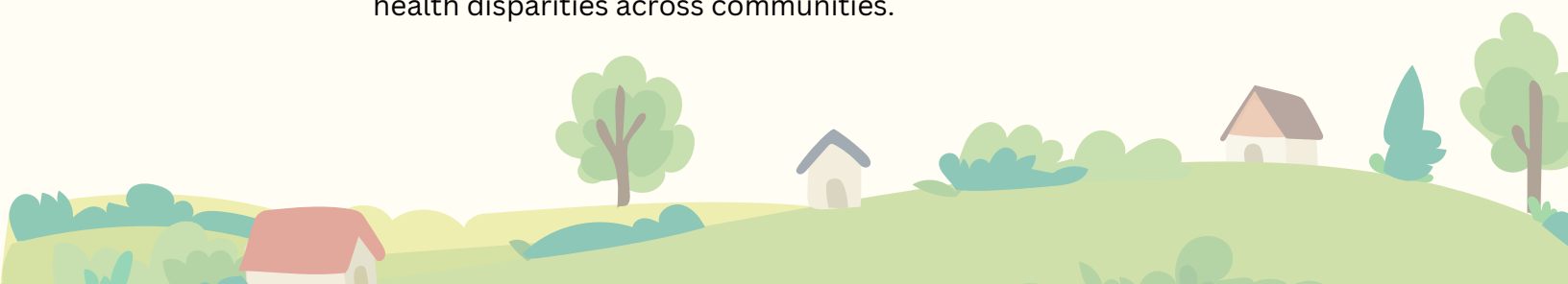
Today, Helen spends her free time enriching the lives of cats and dogs at the Pasadena Humane Society. She is passionate about supporting the community one step at a time, whether through people or animals.



JOSELYN GAITAN, MS, CLE

Program Manager for the CalWORKs Home Visiting Program with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health Division

Joselyn holds a Master's degree in Childhood Studies with an emphasis in Management and Leadership from Walden University and completed the DMH+ UCLA Early Childhood Fellowship in 2022. With over 10 years of experience in home visiting and early childhood systems, Joselyn has worked across multiple evidence-based models and funding streams, including Welcome Baby, California Home Visiting program (CHVP) she currently leads the DPH Home Visiting Program's Centralized Referrals Team, focusing on outreach, retention, and systems collaboration. Joselyn is deeply committed to advancing maternal and child health through trauma-informed care, equity-focused practices, and systems-level collaboration. She is passionate about supporting programs that promote family stability, strengthen parent-child relationships, and reduce health disparities across communities.



KARLA PLEITEZ HOWELL, BA, JD

President and CEO, First 5 LA

Karla Pleitez Howell serves as the organizations CEO. Karla has been a relentless advocate to ensure ALL children have the opportunity to thrive. Through community partnerships and innovative strategies, she has helped to increase resources and targeted programs to those most burdened and furthest from equitable opportunities. Karla has a relentless focus on justice and equity. Karla launched her advocacy for communities furthest from opportunity as an attorney. She also worked as the Directing Attorney for El Rescate Legal Services, a nonprofit focused on assisting families with immigration legal issues. Karla was the Supervising Attorney for Public Counsel's Early Care & Education Law Unit in Los Angeles County. Here she led a coalition in the Southeast cities to increase green space and educational opportunities for young children. As an attorney providing legal services for families stuck in the cycle of poverty, Karla saw patterns of systemic injustices and transitioned to work on policy advocacy. She joined Advancement Project California (now Catalyst California) in 2014. She had the privilege to serve as Director of Education, Managing Director and Chief of Policy and Programs. As an advocate, Karla worked to bring coalitions together to increase childcare facilities funding, improve quality in Transitional Kindergarten programs and increase access to child care for California's youngest learners. In partnership with audacious community partners, Karla has helped direct billions of dollars in investments for low-income communities. Karla earned her BA from UCLA and holds a J.D. from UC Hastings.



KATHRYN EWING, MA

Senior Public Health Research Associate, LA Best Babies Network

Kathryn coordinates technical assistance and support for First 5 LA-funded home visiting programs. She also serves as a co-lead of the Advocacy Workgroup within the LA County Perinatal and Early Childhood Home Visitation Consortium. Kathryn is a Certified Postpartum Doula and holds an MA in Infant, Child, and Family Mental Health from Fielding Graduate University. Kathryn is passionate about normalizing the need for parent support and expanding equitable access to it. Her professional experience includes advocating for improved perinatal mental health screening within obstetric settings at the Postpartum Depression Foundation in Chicago. She also coordinated a health equity grant for the Family and Child Health Department in Pittsburgh, PA, where she facilitated cross-sector efforts to reduce racial inequities in maternal and infant health outcomes. This involved addressing stigma around mental health and building interdisciplinary coalitions to strengthen access to local resources. Her research interests focus on how non-clinical support systems can strengthen parenting capacity, reflective functioning, and family resilience. Kathryn is deeply committed to exploring how systems, programs, and communities can work in partnership to ensure families feel supported, connected, and resourced—so they can thrive.



MONICA CHARLES, MPH

Senior Data Analyst, LA Best Babies Network

Monica earned her Master of Public Health from the George Washington University. Through her graduate studies and professional experience, she combines expertise in process improvement, quality assurance, and data analytics with a commitment to improving health outcomes in underserved populations. Monica is passionate about utilizing IT innovations and data to find evidence-based solutions to public health issues.



PATRICK FLIPPIN-WESTON, BA

Senior Training Coordinator, LA Best Babies Network

With a degree in Psychology, he has worked in the social services field in northern and southern California. Prior to joining LABBN, he was an Outreach Caseworker at the Alameda County Community Food Bank, where he assisted with connecting individuals and families with federal nutrition programs. He also worked at the University of California, Los Angeles, as a Training Coordinator for the emerging California Hub and Spoke Program. There, he assisted with statewide trainings on the tools, medication, and resources needed to combat the opioid crisis. Patrick is a true believer that knowledge is power and passionately aims to connect individuals and communities with the resources they need to thrive.



SHARLENE GOZALIANS, DRPH, MPH, CHES

Director, LA Best Babies Network

Sharlene Gozalians, DrPH, MPH, CHES, is the Director for LA Best Babies Network. She earned her Master of Public Health in Health Education and Promotion from the University of Southern California and later earned her Doctorate in Public Health from Loma Linda University. Her professional background focuses on maternal and child health, home visiting, trauma-informed care, healing-centered engagement, maternal mental health, and systems-level public health initiatives serving children and families across Los Angeles County.



Sharlene currently leads large-scale maternal and child health initiatives focused on strengthening home visiting systems, supporting hospitals and community-based organizations, advancing workforce development, and improving outcomes for underserved families. Her expertise includes program planning and implementation, data analysis and evaluation, technical assistance, continuous quality improvement, training and facilitation, cross-sector collaboration, and public speaking. She is particularly passionate about using data to tell meaningful stories, inform systems change, and strengthen services for families and communities. In addition to her maternal and child health work, Sharlene has experience focused on healthy food access, built environment issues in Los Angeles County, youth empowerment and advocacy, community health promotion, corner store conversions, teaching, and community-based participatory approaches to public health. Her volunteer and international experience includes work in Tanzania, Brazil, and Armenia focused on prevention, health education, and maternal and child health initiatives.

Outside of her professional work, Sharlene is deeply involved in youth leadership and scouting through Homenetmen Western USA, where she has served in regional leadership roles supporting youth development, mentorship, outdoor education, and community engagement. Sharlene's passion for public health centers on advancing equity, strengthening communities, and supporting underserved and vulnerable populations through compassionate, relationship-centered, and systems-informed approaches.

Steve Nish, MA,

Manager of Communications and Outreach, LA Best Babies Network.

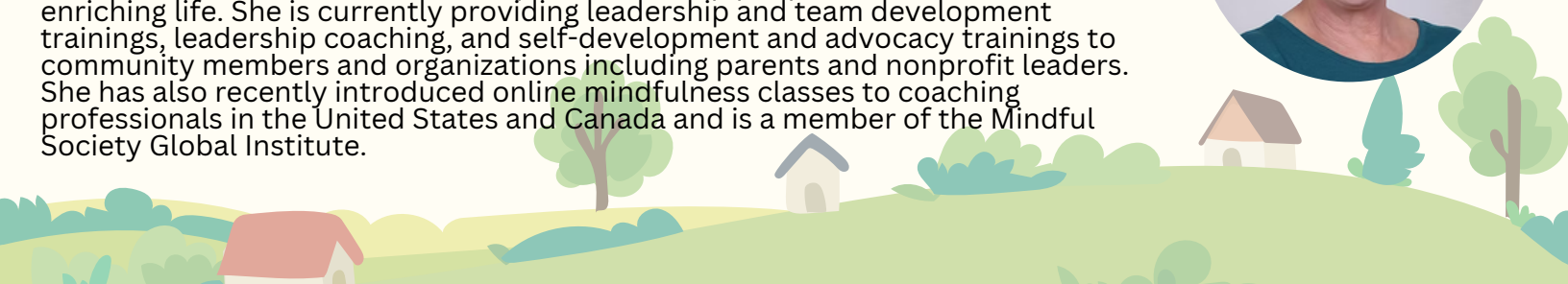
With 20 years of experience in the communications field, he has led national and global communications campaigns in education, corporate ethics, and community building. Prior to working with LABBN, he was Senior Editor of the Los Angeles-based Josephson Institute, where he focused on sustainability and ethics in business, and on character development in schools and youth service programs. He did his undergraduate work at University of California, Santa Barbara, and has a master's from Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.



TERESA MCKEE, MS

CEO, Work2Live

Teresa is a transformation and leadership coach, certified mindfulness meditation facilitator, EFT practitioner and writer. Combining her training and education, including a B.S. in Business Administration and an M.S. in Psychology, specializing in Leadership Coaching Psychology, with her experience of over 35 years as a business consultant, Teresa integrates behavioral science with results-oriented processes to help executives and teams achieve their goals. In addition to executive coaching, Teresa facilitates workshops and webinars, conducts conference presentations and facilitates the Dynamic Coaching Certification Program. She is also the host of A Mindful Moment podcast to help people learn how to live a more enriching life. She is currently providing leadership and team development trainings, leadership coaching, and self-development and advocacy trainings to community members and organizations including parents and nonprofit leaders. She has also recently introduced online mindfulness classes to coaching professionals in the United States and Canada and is a member of the Mindful Society Global Institute.



FAMILY STRENGTHENING OVERSIGHT ENTITY



First 5 LA

First 5 LA is a leading early childhood advocate organization created by California voters to invest Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues. In partnership with others, First 5 LA strengthens families, communities and systems of services and supports so that all children in Los Angeles County enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school and life.

LA BEST BABIES NETWORK



LA Best Babies Network (LABBN)

LA Best Babies Network is dedicated to achieving healthy pregnancies and births in LA County by providing the infrastructure, programs, advocacy and support to increase the capacity of community partners to succeed in these efforts. Through the Network's trainings, technical assistance and advocacy work, perinatal providers and advocates across the County unite to increase access to quality perinatal care and inter-conception care, create a safety net of resources for at-risk families, create community driven forums to disseminate best practices and find solutions and advance policies that promote healthy deliveries. LABBN is a community benefit program of California Hospital Medical Center; a member of the CommonSpirit and Dignity Health system of hospitals.



Work2Live Well

Work2Live Well's mission is to empower individuals and organizations through mindfulness, strengths-based positive psychology, alternative modalities, and cognitive behavioral transformation to enhance the quality of life to the level of flourishing in all key areas. In addition to being one of the oversight entities for the First 5 funded Welcome Baby and Home Visiting programs in L.A. County, we provide coaching, training and development to the staff implementing those programs. Through leadership coaching, team workshops, conflict resolution/mediation, leadership development retreats and multi-media education, our aim is to enhance and maintain team cohesion, while supporting individual staff members delivering direct services, so that they can achieve overall well-being and success. This results in increased productivity, reduced burn-out and compassion fatigue and, through the parallel process, improved outcomes for both staff and clients. In addition to our work with Welcome Baby and Home Visiting programs, Work2Live provides trainings to nonprofit and school-based programs, conducts workshops for parents and individuals in disadvantaged communities, provides mindfulness training and curriculum development to clients in the U.S. and Canada, and offers certification programs in both leadership and professional coaching. Work2Live also produces a highly rated mental health podcast, A Mindful Moment™, in both English and Spanish.



FAMILY STRENGTHENING OVERSIGHT ENTITY BIOS

FIRST 5 LA

Alison Kellman, MSc is a **Program Officer** on the Family Supports Team at First 5, Los Angeles (F5LA) with over 30 years of experience in Public Health. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Rhetoric and Communication from University of California, Davis and earned a Master of Science in Health Education and Promotion from South Bank University, London. Alison has partnered with many family-serving agencies to include spending ten years at a South Los Angeles agency supporting maternal and child health initiatives, including oversight of a Black Infant Health (BIH) Project. Before joining F5LA in 2021, Alison spent the former eleven years, contributing her expertise at a (Los Angeles) neighboring health department, establishing and cultivating collaborative partnerships with family and community health programs; as well as medical and health community stakeholders, to create and implement countywide emergency preparedness plans for 34 cities working in tandem with law enforcement, city officials and community agencies.

Claudia Molina, MPH is a **Program Officer** at First 5 LA. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Pitzer College. She worked as a program coordinator for several years for a case management program serving high-risk families in South Los Angeles. She earned her Master's of Public Health at Boston University with a concentration on maternal and child health. Ms. Molina has over ten years of experience in program planning, implementation, and grantmaking. Since being at First 5 LA, she has worked on family-strengthening and sustainability strategies, including the Baby Friendly Initiative, the Targeted Case Management (TCM), and County-Based Medi-Cal Administrative Activities (CMAA) pilots.

Connie Preciado-Gonzalez, MA, AMFT, is a **Senior Program Officer at First 5 LA**. Connie joined the Family Supports team September of 2022. Her focus area is sustainability. Connie has over 20 years of experience working with pregnant people and families with children 0-5. She received her Master's Degree in Marriage and Family Therapy with a specialization in working with Latino Families from Pacific Oaks College. She has a bachelor's degree in Social Ecology with a specialization in Clinical and Developmental Psychology from UCI. Prior to joining First 5 LA, Connie was a Director of Home-Based Services at a partner community-based organization overseeing 0-5 home visiting programs. She has experience providing clinical services with an emphasis on infant mental health as well as in the early childhood education realm as a primary provider for infants and toddlers.

Diana Careaga, MPH, MA is the **Director** of the Family Supports Team at First 5 LA. Ms. Careaga has over twenty-six years' experience in public health and program design, with a strong foundation in maternal and child health and deep roots in community engagement. As the Director of the Family Supports Department, her work focuses on enhancing family well-being by ensuring that parents and caregivers have the resources they need to support their children's well-being and healthy development. Her efforts include guiding strategies that coordinate services and partnership efforts and advance policy and systems change to improve how families access early supports.

Ellaine Hartley-Polinsky, MPH is a **Program Officer** on the Family Supports Team at First 5 LA. She joined First 5 LA in May of 2012 originally with the Best Start Initiative before transitioning to the Family Supports Team in 2015 to support systems change and optimization efforts of the Welcome Baby and Select Home Visitation programs. She is also the internal point person for the Healthy Families America program. Her professional background includes over 20 years working in health promotion and intervention programs geared towards pregnant women and children; and includes programs such as the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition program and First 5 LA's Healthy Births Initiative. She joined the First 5 LA team to fulfill a passion of promoting healthy communities and increasing access to resources for pregnant women and children. She earned her Bachelors in Health Science with an option in Health Education, and her Masters of Public Health with an emphasis in Community Health Education from California State University, Northridge. During her free time, she enjoys going on new "adventures" and making memories with her husband and "energizer bunny" 6-year-old son

Karlo Herrera, M. Ed., is a **Program Associate** in the Family Supports department at First 5 LA. Mr. Herrera joined First 5 LA 14 years ago as part of the Best Start Communities department. Since joining the Family Supports department, Mr. Herrera has had several portfolios that included work with the Baby Friendly Initiative, Black Infant Health, a Fatherhood grant with several L.A. County partners, several Select



Home Visiting Healthy Families America grantees, and is currently part of a team at First 5 LA working with the Department of Mental Health pilot grant. Mr. Herrera also assists his colleagues with the initial review of Welcome Baby and Select Home Visitation invoices; and manages all things related to DocuSign submissions during contract renewals season, as well as Amendments and Formal Budget modifications throughout the fiscal year. Mr. Herrera is a team player and helps his department in any way that he can to keep the work moving along. Prior to joining First 5 LA, Mr. Herrera was a teacher and taught children from elementary school age through high school students. He is a huge Dodgers fan, but above all he is the biggest fan of his two kids. Being an active and engaged father is his main drive to wake up every morning.

Karla Pleitéz Howell, BA, JD, is the **Executive Director** at F5LA. Appointed by First 5 LA's Board of Commissioners on Nov. 10, 2022, Karla Pleitéz Howell serves as the organizations executive director. Karla has been a relentless advocate to ensure ALL children have the opportunity to thrive. Through community partnerships and innovative strategies, she has helped to increase resources and targeted programs to those most burdened and furthest from equitable opportunities. Karla has a relentless focus on justice and equity. Karla launched her advocacy for communities furthest from opportunity as an attorney. She also worked as the Directing Attorney for El Rescate Legal Services, a nonprofit focused on assisting families with immigration legal issues. Karla was the Supervising Attorney for Public Counsel's Early Care & Education Law Unit in Los Angeles County. Here she led a coalition in the Southeast cities to increase green space and educational opportunities for young children. As an attorney providing legal services for families stuck in the cycle of poverty, Karla saw patterns of systemic injustices and transitioned to work on policy advocacy. She joined Advancement Project California (now Catalyst California) in 2014. She had the privilege to serve as Director of Education, Managing Director and Chief of Policy and Programs. As an advocate, Karla worked to bring coalitions together to increase child care facilities funding, improve quality in Transitional Kindergarten programs and increase access to child care for California's youngest learners. In partnership with audacious community partners, Karla has helped direct billions of dollars in investments for low-income communities. Karla earned her BA from UCLA and holds a J.D. from UC Hastings. On weekends, Karla enjoys the outdoors with her husband and family and loves to listen to the latest humorous philosophical ponderings from their two kids.

Laura Hoyos Kainsinger, MPH is a **Program Officer** for the Family Supports Department at First 5 LA. She received her Bachelor of Science in Physiological Science and a Master of Public Health in Community Health Sciences from the University of California, Los Angeles. Before joining First 5 LA, she was a program manager for Prevention and Aftercare, a comprehensive, strengths-based program that provides resources and activities to vulnerable children and families in Los Angeles County. Prior to this work, Laura was the Director of Community Outreach for Growing Great, where she built and maintained positive, collaborative relationships with community partners and was responsible for developing, implementing, and evaluating school-based nutrition programs. Her professional experience includes work in parenting education, health access, and academic event planning. Laura has over 20 years of experience working with community-based programs that provide services to culturally diverse and at-risk families.

Marlene Cole, MPH is a **Program Officer** on the Family Supports Team at First 5 LA with over 25 years of experience working in the fields of maternal and reproductive health and youth development. Marlene oversees grants within the Family Strengthening Network. She is the internal point person for the Parents as Teachers program, provides programmatic guidance to the Stronger Families Database workgroup, manages First 5 LA's health plan grants, and serves as a co-lead for the Los Angeles County Perinatal and Early Childhood Home Visitation Consortium Referrals Workgroup. Before joining the Family Supports Team, Marlene worked as a Program Officer with the Best Start communities and with Healthy Births Initiative grantees. Marlene has a BA in Sociology from UC Santa Cruz and an MPH from Emory University.

Vanessa Mendez, MA is the **Senior Program Officer** at First 5 LA. She joined First 5 LA and the Family Supports team in June 2021. Her focus is on systems change and optimization efforts. Vanessa has over 15 years of experience overseeing, implementing and evaluating community and school-based programs that serve children, youth and families in California, Minnesota and Michigan. Prior to her role at First 5 LA, Vanessa served as the Director of Community Services at Children's Bureau overseeing prevention programming in Metro Los Angeles. Her content knowledge is focused on early childhood development, child abuse prevention, parent-child attachment, family support and community involvement. Vanessa enjoys working collaboratively with partners to contribute to the development of impactful opportunities for families, particularly those with young children. She has a master's degree in Ecological-Community Psychology from Michigan State University.



LA BEST BABIES NETWORK

Alexis Marron, MPH, is the **Public Health Research Associate and Training Coordinator**. She received her BS in Public Health and Master of Science in Public Health in Health Education and Promotion at California Baptist University. While she was a student there, she served as the President for the Eta Sigma Gamma Chapter. Prior to joining LABBN, Alexis has worked as a Health Educator for the Riverside County Department of Public Health, helping to educate first responders, hospital staff, families, and community members on ways to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. More recently, Alexis worked at the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health in their Education Sector Unit, where she had the opportunity to work on piloting programs aimed at improving student health outcomes. Through these programs, she had the opportunity to work closely with schools and families to discuss the health issues that Los Angeles County students may be facing and preventing them from reaching their full education potential. She also led all program communication efforts as well, helping to connect Los Angeles families with valuable resources and health education. Alexis also has volunteer experience with planning and hosting non-profit Health Fairs, helping to connect local community members with health education, resources, and basic check-ups. Alexis is passionate about health equity and helping to address health challenges and barriers for underserved populations.

Amie Aguiar, BA, is the **Communications Specialist II**. She has progressive experience in communications, community outreach, and public relations, with a demonstrated record of developing innovative communication strategies that strengthen brand awareness. The majority of her work has been in the education and healthcare fields. She has always been passionate about finding ways to leave a lasting, positive impact through her work – especially in her local community. She is happy to be working toward advancing the mission of LABBN and is committed to showcasing all of the wonderful work the Network is doing. Amie earned her BA in Communication Studies from the University of California, Los Angeles.

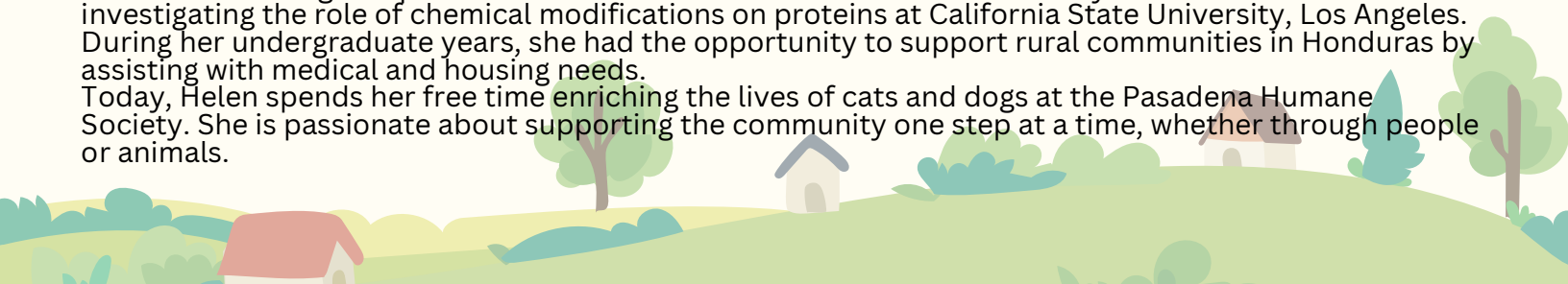
Anna Ghukasyan, MPH, is the **Senior Policy Research Associate**. Anna earned her Master of Public Health from the University of Southern California, with an emphasis in Health Services and Policy. In her graduate work, Anna focused on improving access to healthcare services for underserved populations in Los Angeles County through policy and advocacy efforts. Anna is passionate about decreasing rates of adverse childhood experiences among children in Los Angeles County.

Delisa Culver, MA, is the **Manager of Data and Evaluation**. She earned her master's degree in Experimental Psychology at California State University, San Bernardino. With over a decade of experience, she oversees database development, reporting, and continuous quality improvement efforts across a network of home visiting agencies. Her background includes health disparities research, as well as research exploring racial identity and its impact on self-identity, perception, and behavior. Delisa is passionate about using data and research to support informed decision-making and improve outcomes for children and families, particularly within underserved communities.

Faith Soltero, MS, is the **Public Health Research Associate and Training Coordinator I**. Prior to joining LABBN, Faith gained experience in administrative and project management roles within community and maternal health. Her latest experience, she worked at the Department of Health Care Services, where she supported staff analysts in the Breast and Cervical Cancer Treatment Program; serving medical beneficiaries receiving care. She holds a Master of Science in Healthcare Management from California State University, Los Angeles. She is passionate about serving her community, with a strong commitment to reducing healthcare disparities. She is happy to be a part of the LABBN technical assistance and training team, supporting its mission to serve families across Los Angeles County.

Genesis Salcedo, BS is the **Office Coordinator**. She attended California State University – Northridge where she received her Bachelors of Science in Public Health. She pursued this field to be able to assist families in need and bridge the gap between healthcare disparities. Prior to joining LABBN, she worked at a family source center as a Navigator. In that role, she provided families with one-on-one navigation services, conducted community outreach, and hosted educational workshops. She is very passionate about being part of the LABBN team and growing in her career.

Helen Chan, BS is a **Data Analyst**. Prior to joining LABBN, Helen worked as a research assistant studying the effects of drug compounds on various bacterial strains at the University of Rochester and investigating the role of chemical modifications on proteins at California State University, Los Angeles. During her undergraduate years, she had the opportunity to support rural communities in Honduras by assisting with medical and housing needs. Today, Helen spends her free time enriching the lives of cats and dogs at the Pasadena Humane Society. She is passionate about supporting the community one step at a time, whether through people or animals.



Helen Kontorousis, BS is a **Communications Specialist**. She earned her BS in Telecommunication from the University of Florida and comes from a journalism background with experience in the television news industry. Helen has worked behind the scenes as a producer, covering a wide range of stories including politics, health, environmental issues, entertainment, and community-focused topics. At LABBN, she is passionate about using her storytelling skills to highlight home visiting services and its powerful impact on families and the community.

Jennifer Jimenez, BS, is the **Public Health Research Associate**. Jennifer has centered much of her career on supporting the needs of families. Prior to joining LABBN, Jennifer worked as a Service Coordinator at Westside Regional Center, where she was responsible for the case management of over 100 bilingual families with children with disabilities. As a member of the LA Best Babies Network team, she is grateful to be part of such an impactful organization and to be able to support its mission to ensure families have the support necessary to thrive and create healthy and prosperous futures for their children. Jennifer received her Bachelor of Science in Psychology and Child and Adolescent Development and plans to pursue a Master of Public Health (MPH) degree.

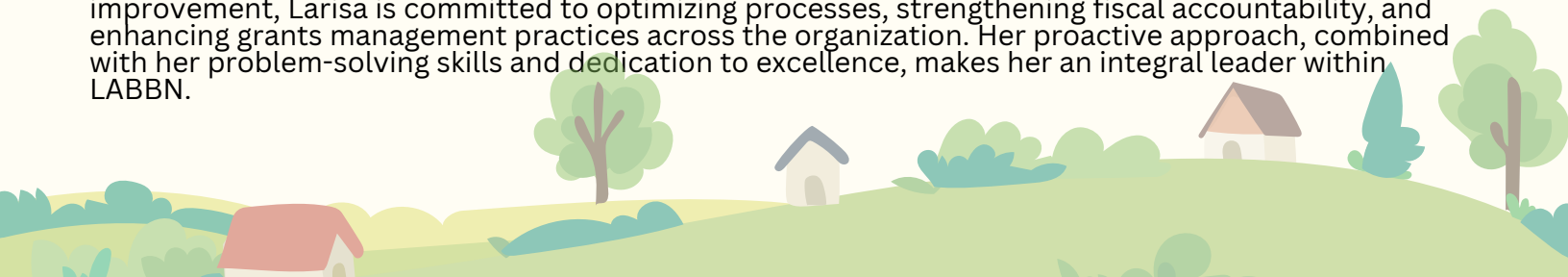
Joanna Ramos, BA, is the **Administrative Coordinator**. Joanna is an experienced administrative professional with a strong background in marketing, event coordination, and program development. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Journalism with a Public Relations emphasis from California State University, Northridge. Before joining LABBN, Joanna worked in higher education, focusing on marketing and event planning for first-generation students. Her background also includes experience in local government and service-oriented initiatives through AmeriCorps, where she developed her skills in strategic planning and program management. Joanna is passionate about supporting organizational success by implementing efficient operations, creating meaningful programs, and fostering collaboration through effective communication.

Jonathan Jimenez, BA, is the **Senior Data System Analyst**. Prior to joining LABBN, he was a data analyst for a cloud-based POS company. With a background in volunteer work for immigrant groups and others in need, Jonathan says he is happy to be working for an organization whose mission comports with his passion for helping underserved communities. He earned his degree in Business Management from California State University, Northridge, and hopes to pursue an MBA in the healthcare field in the near future.

Kathryn Ewing, MA, is the **Senior Public Health Research Associate**. Kathryn coordinates technical assistance and support for First 5 LA-funded home visiting programs. She also serves as a co-lead of the Advocacy Workgroup within the LA County Perinatal and Early Childhood Home Visitation Consortium. Kathryn is a Certified Postpartum Doula and holds an MA in Infant, Child, and Family Mental Health from Fielding Graduate University. Kathryn is passionate about normalizing the need for parent support and expanding equitable access to it. Her professional experience includes advocating for improved perinatal mental health screening within obstetric settings at the Postpartum Depression Foundation in Chicago. She also coordinated a health equity grant for the Family and Child Health Department in Pittsburgh, PA, where she facilitated cross-sector efforts to reduce racial inequities in maternal and infant health outcomes. This involved addressing stigma around mental health and building interdisciplinary coalitions to strengthen access to local resources.

Larisa Malek, BS, is the **Manager of Operations and Grants**. She plays a pivotal role in strengthening the organization's financial stability and operational effectiveness. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Accounting from California State University, Los Angeles, and brings a strong foundation in financial management, compliance, and grants management. In her role, Larisa oversees the development and administration of LABBN's annual budget, ensuring alignment with organizational goals and funding requirements. She closely monitors financial performance, tracks expenditures across multiple funding streams, and ensures full compliance with grant and contract regulations. Her expertise in grants management includes overseeing the full grant lifecycle from post-award administration and budget tracking to reporting and compliance, ensuring all deliverables and fiscal requirements are met accurately and on time. She also prepares detailed financial reports for both internal leadership and external stakeholders, supporting transparency and informed decision-making.

Beyond financial oversight, Larisa manages day-to-day operations, identifying opportunities to enhance efficiency and streamline workflows across departments. She collaborates cross-functionally to support program implementation, contract management, and compliance efforts. Known for her analytical mindset and attention to detail, she is skilled at identifying challenges, implementing solutions, and improving systems that support long-term sustainability. With a passion for continuous improvement, Larisa is committed to optimizing processes, strengthening fiscal accountability, and enhancing grants management practices across the organization. Her proactive approach, combined with her problem-solving skills and dedication to excellence, makes her an integral leader within LABBN.



Lynnette Marquez, BA, is the **Policy Administrative Assistant**. Prior to joining LABBN, Lynnette worked as a Health Program Analyst at the L.A. County Department of Public Health and as a Health Educator at a nonprofit focused on lung health. She has experience overseeing the implementation of health education programs and coordinating partnerships with community organizations. She wants to continue to help advance public health outcomes, particularly for underserved and vulnerable communities in L.A. County. Lynnette earned her BA in Public Policy from the University of California, Riverside. She also plans to pursue a Master of Public Health degree.

Laurel Murray, BA, is the **Policy Specialist**. Laurel is a Los Angeles native who has a passion for supporting underserved communities. Prior to working at LA Best Babies Network, she worked in several units at California Hospital Medical Center. She has a Bachelor's degree in psychology. She is also a big lover of animals, traveling, music and rockhounding.

Melody Mao, BS, is the **Database QA and Project Specialist**. Melody attended University of California, San Diego where she received her Bachelor of Science in Public Health with a concentration in Biostatistics. Prior to joining LABBN, she was a Data Quality Coordinator at a nonprofit that supported young people in foster care or who were experiencing homelessness. In her previous role, she helped build and manage a database, oversaw data entry, and conducted QA processes. She is passionate about improving health outcomes for communities and cares about making healthcare more accessible for all.

Monica Charles, MPH, is the **Senior Data Analyst**. She earned her Master of Public Health from George Washington University. Before joining LABBN, she worked at the Peace Corps Headquarters Office of Health Services on electronic medical record implementation, training, evaluation, and reporting. In her graduate work she focused on improving health outcomes in underserved populations in the Washington, DC, metro area. Monica is passionate about utilizing IT innovations and data to find evidence-based solutions to public health issues.

Oswaldo Lopez, BS, is the **Database Trainer and Support Specialist I**. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Healthcare Administration/Management from California State University, Northridge. Previously, at Arroyo Vista Family Health Center, he conducted analyses of regional health care needs and participated in community outreach, social media, and strategic planning — all with the goal of educating underserved community members and connecting them to health care services. Oswaldo has a passion for education and public health, so he is glad to be part of a network that provides this support to mothers and families across Los Angeles County.

Patrick Flippin-Weston, BA, is the **Senior Training Coordinator**. With a degree in Psychology, he has worked in the social services field in northern and southern California. Prior to joining LABBN, he was an Outreach Caseworker at the Alameda County Community Food Bank, where he assisted with connecting individuals and families with federal nutrition programs. He also worked at the University of California, Los Angeles, as a Training Coordinator for the emerging California Hub and Spoke Program. There, he assisted with statewide training on the tools, medication, and resources needed to combat the opioid crisis. Patrick is a true believer that knowledge is power and passionately aims to connect individuals and communities with the resources they need to thrive.

Vanessa Reyes, MPH, CHES is a **Public Health Research Associate**. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Health Science from California State University, Fullerton. She also recently became certified as a health education specialist. Prior to LABBN, she worked for a private university that focused on allied health occupations where she provided health education, data management, and administrative support. She is passionate about giving back to the community and providing high-quality resources and education to help people lead happy and healthy lives. Vanessa is thankful to have the opportunity to support families across LA County and to be a part of LABBN.

Sharlene Gozaliens, DrPH, MPH, CHES, is the **Director** for LA Best Babies Network. She earned her Master of Public Health in Health Education and Promotion from the University of Southern California and later earned her Doctorate in Public Health from Loma Linda University. Her professional background focuses on maternal and child health, home visiting, trauma-informed care, healing-centered engagement, maternal mental health, and systems-level public health initiatives serving children and families across Los Angeles County.

Sharlene currently leads large-scale maternal and child health initiatives focused on strengthening home visiting systems, supporting hospitals and community-based organizations, advancing workforce development, and improving outcomes for underserved families. Her expertise includes program planning and implementation, data analysis and evaluation, technical assistance, continuous quality improvement, training and facilitation, cross-sector collaboration, and public speaking. She is particularly passionate about using data to tell meaningful stories, inform systems change, and strengthen services for families and communities. In addition to her maternal and child health work, Sharlene has experience focused on healthy food access, built environment issues in Los Angeles County, youth empowerment



and advocacy, community health promotion, corner store conversions, teaching, and community-based participatory approaches to public health. Her volunteer and international experience includes work in Tanzania, Brazil, and Armenia focused on prevention, health education, and maternal and child health initiatives. Outside of her professional work, Sharlene is deeply involved in youth leadership and scouting through Homenetmen Western USA, where she has served in regional leadership roles supporting youth development, mentorship, outdoor education, and community engagement. Sharlene's passion for public health centers on advancing equity, strengthening communities, and supporting underserved and vulnerable populations through compassionate, relationship-centered, and systems-informed approaches.

Steve Nish, MA, is the **Manager of Communications and Outreach**. With 20 years of experience in the communications field, he has led national and global communications campaigns in education, corporate ethics, and community building. Prior to working with LABBN, he was Senior Editor of the Los Angeles-based Josephson Institute, where he focused on sustainability and ethics in business, and on character development in schools and youth service programs. He did his undergraduate work at University of California, Santa Barbara, and has a master's from Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

WORK 2 LIVE WELL

Melissa Sims is the **Program Director** for **Work2Live Well** and the creative voice behind many of the organization's videos, educational content, and voiceovers. With a passion for whole-person wellness, Melissa brings warmth, authenticity, and a grounded approach to the work of supporting mental, emotional, and professional well-being. In addition to her leadership role, Melissa is a Certified Yoga Teacher, which adds a mindful and compassionate perspective to Work2Live Well's mission and message. Her background allows her to blend practical wellness strategies with an understanding of the mind-body connection, helping individuals and organizations create healthier, more sustainable ways of living and working. Through workshops, trainings, and digital content, she is dedicated to making wellness approachable, relatable, and meaningful for everyday life.

Teresa McKee, B.S.B.A., M.S., C.M.M.F., is the **CEO of Work2Live Well** and has been with the Welcome Baby Program since 2013 as a member of the Family Strengthening Oversight Entities and providing staff and team leadership development training. Teresa is a leadership coach and certified mindfulness meditation facilitator. She brings over 30 years' experience in managing projects, organizations, programs and personnel to the program. Combining her experience with a B.S. in Business Administration and an M.S. in Psychology, specializing in Leadership Coaching, Teresa integrates behavioral science and complimentary alternative methods with results-oriented processes to help individuals and teams achieve their goals. She is also the Secretary/Treasurer and an avid volunteer for the My Stuff Bags Foundation, supporting children in crisis.

