

EL NIDO FAMILY CENTERS: HISTORY

Los Angeles today is a profoundly different city than LA in the 1920s. Times change and the problems that people face change. Yet over the years, Los Angeles has consistently been able to turn to an enduring resource for help. El Nido Family Centers has been a constant guiding and giving presence in the Los Angeles community, responding to and offering solutions to the pressures and problems of the day for nearly 90 years.

From the organization's earliest days as a safe haven for sick, abused, and neglected girls, El Nido, which means "the nest" in Spanish, has been guided by a philosophy that "a child cannot grow up twice." While always driven by its mission of improving the lives of children and families, much like Los Angeles itself, a city of reinvention, El Nido has deftly adapted to meeting the changing needs of different generations. Today serving over 10,000 individuals annually, El Nido provides comprehensive childhood and family services from prenatal case management, Early Head Start, parenting programs, youth development and gang intervention programs and family counseling.

Founded in 1925 by the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), the agency was formally incorporated as a 501(c)3 nonprofit social service organization in 1954. This same year, the agency opened its first residential counseling center on South Normandie Avenue. By the 1960s and 1970s, El Nido was expanding its programs to serve both boys and girls, and formally became independent of the NCJW. During this period, El Nido's pioneering programs included the first school-based group counseling programs in Los Angeles in a collaboration with LAUSD, and the groundbreaking Family Life Education program at inner-city churches in partnership with the USC School of Social Work. Family Centers were established in communities of greatest need: South Los Angeles, Pacoima, Compton, and Carson. And El Nido collaborated with major universities to train social workers earning their Master's degrees.

During the 1980s, El Nido continued to grow, collaborating with public and private organizations, working with at-risk children, youth and families across Los Angeles County. A diverse and growing staff began teaching parenting skills at the Vaughn Family Center in Pacoima, offering crisis intervention and kindergarten assessments in Santa Monica elementary schools, leading a gang prevention/intervention collaboration in South Los Angeles, and providing home visits for families referred by the Department of Children and Family Service. Its Adolescent Family Life Program for pregnant and parenting teens helped new mothers to better care for their children, manage their health care, finish high school, and plan for their futures.

The civil unrest of the early 1990s posed new challenges to the city of Los Angeles, and El Nido rose to the occasion. The agency's range and scope of family-oriented services continued to grow to include delinquency prevention; Motherread/Fatherread, a family literacy program; teen pregnancy prevention with teen panel speakers; and a scholarship program for clients graduating from high school and going on to college or vocational school. El Nido Family

Centers covered the Antelope and San Fernando Valleys, in addition to Santa Monica, Compton, Carson, and South Los Angeles.

The 1990s also saw the implementation of Cal-Learn, the state's program for pregnant and parenting teens. The program helps teen parents complete their high school education, become effective parents and self-sufficient members of the community, as well as helping to prevent repeat teen pregnancies. Between 1992 and 2005, the state of California saw its teen pregnancy rate decline by 52%, the most significant decrease during this period in the nation. Due to its outstanding reputation and positive outcomes, El Nido has become the largest provider of Cal-Learn services in California.

In more recent years, with the growing body of research on the importance of early childhood development, El Nido began offering an Early Head Start program in South Los Angeles, which provides comprehensive early education for infants and toddlers ages birth to three, empowering parents as their children's first teachers to help them toward school readiness and success. Through its Best Babies and case management programs for parenting and pregnant teens, El Nido encourages timely prenatal and well-baby care for infants and toddlers. Most recently, El Nido was contracted as one of the City of Los Angeles' FamilySource Centers, providing comprehensive services to impoverished families in Pacoima.

Over the decades, El Nido has never lost sight of its founding principle – that a child cannot grow-up twice – and its programs have consistently reflected this dedication to helping children and adolescents, and strengthening families. Today, El Nido is a beacon in the Los Angeles community providing critical social services to the most disadvantaged and underserved neighborhoods in LA County. With nearly 90 years of experience, and with services for newborns to toddlers to teens and into adulthood, El Nido has improved the lives of tens of thousands of children and families across Los Angeles.