



VoyageLA

Meet Delara Tehranchi of Coco's Angels Nonprofit Foundation

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Today we'd like to introduce you to Delara Tehranchi.

Hi Delara, we'd love for you to start by introducing yourself.

My sophomore year of high school, my family met an unhoused pregnant woman unable to get the medical resources she vitally needed. Battling housing insecurity, poverty, malnutrition, and substance addiction she was taken to Cedars Sinai where my mother, a board-certified OB-GYN, delivered the baby. The newborn was suffering from both heroin and crystal meth withdrawals, so social services immediately informed the hospital staff that they were going to take custody of the baby, named Coco.

When I learned that Coco was going to be taken away, I begged my mother to not give up on the baby because she had been fighting against all odds since before she was born. It was that moment that sealed the deal and the day I became a foster sister—a day that catalyzed my purpose in life. In the ensuing months, Coco became my little sister during the pandemic where she would sit with me during my virtual classes for school as I graphed logarithmic equations for my Honors Precalculus homework and went into breakout rooms to conjugate Spanish verbs. Coco even changed my Spotify Wrapped list of the year—a year when the Arctic Monkeys and Lana Del Rey were replaced with CoComelon, Baby Shark, and Disney lullabies. Skin-to-skin



contact was essential for infants separated from their birth mothers, and I felt a profound impact knowing that I was bonding with someone so vulnerable who mattered so much to me.

But Coco also did something else far more profound. As I sat with her social worker during a wellness visit, I listened to the DCFS (Department of Children and Family Services) worker lament about the hundreds of foster children who wouldn't be receiving Christmas gifts that year because of the lack of funds. As her tears fell, I thought about Coco who was in my arms, and how unfair it was that children like this were denied equitable opportunities throughout their entire lives. Coco had us but what about all the other kids who were still in state facilities or homes where finances were tight, at best? Vowing to take action, I contacted private agencies that worked with social work and human services, engaged in meaningful conversations with volunteers and campaign organizers, and within the week, designed the website of my nonprofit, Coco's Angels. As Christmas approached, I collected wish lists from Los Angeles County children, raised over \$60,000 in a single month, and garnered support from local businesses to rent and decorate a bus that would deliver hand-wrapped gifts from the children's top three wish list items in cities like Compton, South Central, Crenshaw, and East L.A.

That holiday season, Coco's Angel's was born, and since then, I've continued imploring myself to find ways that spur equality for children in foster care— providing memorable experiences they wouldn't have been afforded otherwise. Whether partnering with Guardians of Love, a foster care service in Los Angeles or hosting a back-to-school event with the LA Mission to provide more than 1,000 foster children school supplies, Coco's Angels continues to grow, affirming for me that this is what I was destined for. Because of Coco being in my family's life, it has inspired me to begin dual enrollment in college to study coursework relating to social work. Recently, Coco's Angels appeared on "The Dr. Phil Show" to discuss the nonprofit and there isn't a day that goes by that I don't feel gratitude towards Coco for not only opening my eyes to the world of inequity faced by foster children but for compelling me to take actionable steps to provide life-changing opportunities for those who truly deserve it most.

Alright, so let's dig a little deeper into the story – has it been an easy path overall and if not, what were the challenges you've had to overcome?

Creating any nonprofit organization is never without barriers, pressure, and unexpected challenges. I've been told "no" time and time again when reaching out to local businesses and organizations for partnerships and rejected for donations and volunteers. Being told "no," I've learned really means to ask again in different ways. My own experiences facilitating events that serve L.A. county's youth have been difficult, to say the least, as there is so much coordination that each event's success depends on. I've learned to forge strong relationships with organizations and truly appreciate those that have partnered with me like: XOS Trucks, Los Angeles Mission, Guardians of Love Agency, and Bethel Missionary Baptist Church SoLA. I've learned to not try to do everything on my own but to involve my community of peers to facilitate volunteer participation, share responsibilities with representatives from our partners,



and work months ahead of an event to ensure that even when something goes wrong or we might have unforeseen costs arise, we are prepared for that.

Every time that something challenges an event's execution, it's a learning experience for me, teaching me to be tenacious in my approach to nonprofit management and a reminder that no matter how hard things get, things are harder for the foster children who are the impetus behind my efforts. I'm constantly reminded by the children we serve why I do this and that drives me to do more, knowing how many unmet needs are faced by L.A.'s foster children.

Thanks – so what else should our readers know about Coco's Angels Nonprofit Foundation?

Coco's Angels aims to raise awareness for and support foster children through public campaigns and events that affect change in the children's lives. One of my biggest initiatives for the nonprofit, and what sets us apart, is bringing Coco's Angels to my school, which has allowed me to share my passion for reforming social work to my peers and community. It's been a joy to found a school chapter for Coco's Angels, creating a collaborative network of 50 members who work alongside us by directly suggesting ideas to help foster children. Within a single meeting, we designed a plan to pair high school students with children in the foster care system based on academic needs, peer strength, and common interests. The result of this endeavor was a Peer Tutoring program that now allows for any high school student statewide who is interested in connecting with one of the Department of Child and Family Services' foster children to do so and provide support in math, reading, science and other subjects where foster children need extra support. Though there is much more that remains to be done in order to achieve greater equity in education for children in the system, the success of such actions reminds me that there is so much value in uniting a community with a unified mission of combating systemic challenges that hundreds of thousands of children across the U.S. live with every day.

I am also extremely proud of the partnerships that I've gained through working directly with social justice-oriented organizations in L.A. Being able to cultivate relationships with representatives twice my age, and maintain those relationships, has created interdependent efforts that unite us in our shared mission to elevate L.A. county's foster youth. We have put on the following events and I am proud to share the following accomplishments since November 2020:

Moved by my foster sister's journey and observing first-hand the struggles that foster children endure, my younger sister and I created a registered nonprofit to raise awareness for foster children through public campaigns, drives, and events that directly make a difference in the foster family community.

We collected Christmas wish lists from foster children and raised over \$50k in our first month to purchase the top items from each list, hand-wrapped each gift, and delivered them to each foster child in Los Angeles County; I raised my own funds to rent and decorate a bus to resemble Santa's workshop, hire a Santa impersonator, and travel to Compton, South Central, Crenshaw, and East L.A. while also gifting decorated Christmas trees to foster families in need.



We partnered with LA-based agency Guardians of Love to set up Easter egg hunts and provide egg decoration, free lunches, cookies, ice cream, and supplies for foster children.

In the Fall of 2021, we contacted the LA Mission and ran a back-to-school event where 1000+ foster children received vital school supplies and resources.

Last year, I created a peer tutor program that allows foster children to sign up for free tutoring services, which pairs them directly with an educator in any subject at no-cost; I appeared on "The Dr. Phil Show" to tape an episode in January 2022 that discussed Coco's journey, the challenges faced by children in the foster care system, and how my experiences facilitated the founding of our life-changing nonprofit.

I just hosted the second year of my Coco's Angels Elf Express where, with the help of the L.A. mission, XOS Trucks, and Guardians of Love Agency, we were able to deliver the top gifts to hundreds and hundreds of Los Angeles foster children. They were able to receive all of their top 3 wishes including Apple AirPods, Barbie townhouses, flat screen TVs, robots, drivable cars, bouncy houses, etc.

So maybe we end on discussing what matters most to you and why?

What matters most to me is equality—it's something that intersects many different issues that a very large and very diverse group of people face not only locally for Los Angeles but globally. I have always believed in the philosophy that to institute change, you start in your micro community, then move outwards to gain momentum. Growing up as the daughter of two first-generation immigrants, I learned from their recollections about the challenges faced by refugees to better understand the barriers that exist for ESL (English As A Second Language) citizens and started to wonder how I could one day change our world to become a better place. When Coco entered my life, it was as if she gave me a reminder of what mattered most to me – giving me a stark realization that so many foster children aren't so lucky – that there are so many Coco's out there who are marginalized by a system that is under-resourced and not equipped to provide for a thriving life for foster children. We must change this, and I feel that my role in life is to become a voice for children whose challenges can be overcome, whose inequity can be reversed if only we combine civic efforts, public funding, and private partnerships with an empathy-driven initiative for social justice.

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