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MORE THAN A MAGAZINE, A MOVEMENT

Foster Care Reimagined: How Two Sisters Are Changing the Lives of L.A. Youth

Aina Marzia | December 7, 2022



Christmas is a big deal in the Tehranchi household. Every year they put out carrots and cookies for Santa, prepare a Persian feast for dinner and open presents on Christmas Eve. For sisters Layla, 16, and Delara, 17, these actions were just part of their family tradition—something they assumed all kids had.

Meeting their (newly adopted) little sister helped them begin to recognize their own privilege. “It was probably the saddest and most eye-opening experience,” said Delara. “I think my sisters and I have been through, we weren’t really introduced to that kind of world before Coco.”

Having Coco, 2, join their family inspired Layla and Delara to start [Coco's Angels](#). The organization helps kids in foster care across L.A., through tutoring services, education funding and donation drives. Layla and Delara began their first fundraiser with [GoFundMe](#) in 2020 raising over \$60,000 and allowing them to order over 600 personalized holiday gifts for foster care kids. Since December 2020, the girls have raised over \$125,000.



Using the momentum from their holiday success, the girls organized a back-to-school drive in August 2021. Working with local nonprofits, including The Guardians of Love Agency and the Los Angeles Mission, they held a backpack giveaway for foster youth.

“Although we were so passionate about giving kids childhood experiences like different holiday events, we wanted to make sure that we put education as a priority, given what the circumstances of the world were,” said Delara. The girls hope to make this a recurring annual event for the back-to-school season.



Delara and Layla at their backpack drive fundraiser. (Courtesy)

There are over 22,000 kids in foster care in L.A. and more than 424,000 children in foster care nationally—23 percent of which are Black girls, according to the National Women’s Law Center.



Black girls average more than 10 home placements in the foster system, compared to the national average of 8 home placements per child.

Through their work, Layla and Delara found there is often a lack of cultural connection within foster homes.

“We were finding that foster kids, especially those in the POC community, were being placed in non-POC environments and families,” Delara said, “A lot of the time those families didn’t even have access to being able to give them the resources they needed to make sure that they were culturally appreciated.”

“This is a real issue,” said Dr. Sarah Font, a post-doctoral researcher on the child welfare system. “Under the Multiethnic Placement Act, states are required to make efforts to recruit foster families that represent the population of kids coming into foster care.” While great in theory, this hasn’t been executed very well.

In an effort to combat the lack of diverse foster homes in Los Angeles, Coco’s Angels hosted an informational event where they provided a variety of resources to foster parents, including hair care supplies, non-English children’s books and recommendations on where to find further representation.

Font supports the work of the Tehranchi sisters. “Kids benefit when there are more people working on their behalf. Any time you can add more people, bringing time and energy to the table that’s always in their favor.”



The girls present at a Los Angeles community event. (Courtesy)

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