



EL CENTRO DE
AMISTAD
THE FRIENDSHIP CENTER

Rooted in Hope, Rising in Strength.

ANNUAL REPORT
FY 24-25

Message from the Executive Director

Dear Esteemed Members and Supporters,

As we reflect on the past year, I am filled with deep gratitude and pride for the progress El Centro de Amistad (ECDA) has made since its founding in 1977. What began as a vision to serve a community that had long been overlooked has evolved into a thriving organization committed to healing, strengthening, and empowering families throughout the San Fernando Valley.

This year marked a remarkable milestone in our journey, the opening of our FamilySource Center in Panorama City. This new center, awarded to us by the City of Los Angeles, expands our capacity to provide vital family support, financial empowerment, and educational resources to hundreds of families seeking stability and opportunity. The launch of this center represents more than just growth; it symbolizes ECDA's commitment to meeting our community where they are and ensuring no one is left behind.

As I continue to learn from our history and those who helped shape it, I am inspired by the same courage and compassion that drove our founders to act nearly five decades ago. Their belief in equity, access, and the power of community continues to guide us today.

At ECDA, we believe in walking alongside every person we serve, sharing in their challenges, celebrating their achievements, and offering hope and support every step of the way. Our work is made possible by the dedication of our incredible staff, board, and community partners who give their hearts to this mission every day.

Thank you for being part of this journey of growth and impact. Together, we continue to build a stronger, more compassionate future for all.

Muchas Gracias,



Luis Cervantes
Executive Director



Our Mission

El Centro de Amistad, Inc., is a multilingual, cross-cultural organization providing a comprehensive range of mental health services, anticipating the ever-changing needs of families and individuals in the San Fernando Valley. El Centro de Amistad, Inc. is committed to assisting children, adults, and families.



Our History

El Centro de Amistad's journey began in 1977, inspired by a shared commitment to support the Canoga Park community during a time of great need. That year, a \$1 million contract was secured to deliver essential services to local youth—an early milestone that set the foundation for the agency's long-term impact.

El Centro de Amistad began as a grassroots response to the challenges facing the community—unemployment, poverty, substance use, and gang-related activity—that deeply impacted Latino families. Guided by Dr. Martinez it's founder, and supported by San Fernando Mental Health Centers, Inc. and its board of directors, local residents came together to create a community-based mental health resource dedicated to empowering individuals, strengthening families, and fostering lasting positive change.

In collaboration with Tarzana Treatment Center, the agency initially offered supervised substance abuse services under the guidance of a community advisory board. By 1984, El Centro de Amistad had become an independent

nonprofit with its own board of directors. With the advocacy of Supervisor Michael Antonovich, the organization received its first contract—\$68,000 from the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health—to provide outreach and treatment services for at-risk youth.

Over the years, El Centro de Amistad has grown from a small neighborhood effort into a comprehensive mental health agency employing more than 100 staff members. What began as a focus on youth and substance abuse prevention has expanded to include a wide range of culturally responsive services such as counseling, case management, assessments, medication support, and an array of family support services our FamilySource center now provides—benefiting more than 110,000 individuals and families.

Today, El Centro de Amistad continues its mission of strengthening and empowering children, youth, and adults. Guided by dedicated staff, leadership, and community partners, the agency remains committed to building healthier and more resilient communities across the San Fernando Valley.

El Centro de Amistad, Inc. is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide a comprehensive range of mental health services to low-income families and individuals in the San Fernando Valley. El Centro de Amistad, Inc. is committed to assisting children, adults, and families.

Our Programs

Department of Mental Health (DMH) Programs:

Children and Adult Outpatient Programs

Provide ongoing mental health services for individuals from birth through older adulthood. The goal is to stabilize mental health, promote independence, and build healthy coping skills at home, school, work, and in the community. Services include therapy, case management, rehabilitation, peer support, and medication support.

Multidisciplinary Assessment Team (MAT)

A partnership with DCFS, DMH, and community providers to ensure immediate, comprehensive assessments for children entering out-of-home placement, helping families address needs that may lead to separation.



CalWORKs Program

Offers mental health services, medication support, employment services, case management, peer advocacy, and outreach to help adults with children overcome mental health barriers to employment. Referrals come through DPSS GAIN.

Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Programs:

Family Preservation (FP)

Provides strength-based services to DCFS-referred families, helping them build on their strengths, resolve child safety concerns, advocate for their children, and connect with community resources.

Relative Home Assessment Services (RHAS)

A child-centered caregiver approval process for children removed from their homes and placed with relatives. RHAS, in partnership with DCFS, ensures consistent approval standards for all caregivers.

Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH)

Offers evidence-based mental health services for children ages 0–12, with a focus on ages 0–5. The program also provides mental health consultation and training to families, providers, and community partners to support healthy development and reduce trauma-related risks.





FamilySource Center (FSC)

A community hub offering social, educational, workforce, and family support services for low- and moderate-income households with children up to age 17. FSC helps families work toward economic stability, supports youth academic success, prevents housing instability, and strengthens financial well-being.



Free Services Include:

- Multi-benefit screening
- Information & referrals
- Case management
- Financial education & coaching
- Income tax preparation
- Housing advocacy & limited financial assistance*
- Mental health referrals
- Employment support
- College Corner tutoring & mentoring
- Art & cultural activities
- Parenting, immigration, and other supportive services
- Civic engagement *Separate application required.

Note: Programs serve low-income families. ECDA accepts Medi-Cal, MCE, and MCHIP coverage. Services are provided virtually, in the office, at home, in schools, and in community settings. Limited funding is available for uninsured consumers.



Our Services

All services are offered in English and Spanish and are subject to criteria and capacity.

Mental Health - Therapy & Treatment includes assessments, treatment planning, and individual, family, and group therapy using evidence-based, culturally informed practices.

Case Management - Linkage, referrals, advocacy, and support to access medical, educational, social, vocational, and community resources.

School-Linked - On-campus mental health, case management, and consultation for eligible students in contracted LAUSD and Charter schools.

Medication Support - Psychiatric evaluations, follow-up, and prescriptions by a licensed psychiatrist.

Peer Support - Strength-based non-clinical support from trained Peer Partners with lived experience, including outreach, education, and resource navigation.

Employment Services - Coaching, job readiness, and support with short- and long-term employment goals for current and former CalWORKs participants.

Family Preservation (FP) In-Home Outreach Counseling Services (IHOC) - In-home counseling, parenting support, child activities, teaching/demonstrating, mentoring, and case management.

Relative Home Assessment Services (RHAS) - Comprehensive psychosocial assessments, home evaluations, orientation, and caregiver training.

Infant Massage (IM) - Short-term services for infants 0–6 months to support development and bonding. Sessions are baby-led and focus on families impacted by trauma.

Free Legal Clinic - Free civil legal assistance for ECDAs clients through a privately funded program.

Mental Health Consultation - Collaborative support for caregivers and early childhood providers to build capacity in preventing and addressing mental health concerns for children ages 0–6.

Training - Free community trainings on early childhood topics such as trauma, child development, and cultural factors (offered through the IECMH Program).

Psychological Assessment Services - Comprehensive evaluations for youth ages 6–16 to assess cognitive, social, emotional, and academic functioning. Conducted by licensed psychologists or supervised clinicians. Testing includes interviews and multiple sessions (4–6), with recommendations provided.

Neurofeedback - A brain-based intervention that trains healthier brain activity using real-time feedback through videos, games, or music. Often used for stress, trauma symptoms, migraines, and emotional regulation. Typical treatment is ~20 sessions, with many clients noticing improvements after 5–10 sessions.



The Impact of Our Multidisciplinary Assessment Team (MAT)

Our Multidisciplinary Assessment Team (MAT) is a dedicated group of therapists who support children entering foster care, from birth to age seventeen. During this vulnerable transition, our team works closely with DCFS and DMH to promote each child's safety, stability, and emotional well-being.

Our clinicians conduct comprehensive assessments of a child's mental, developmental, educational, physical, and social-emotional needs. These evaluations highlight both the child's needs and their strengths, helping us collaborate with caregivers and DCFS to build a circle of support and connect youth to services such as mental health care, academic support, and enrichment activities.

We also help nurture each child's interests—whether dance, soccer, or community programs—to foster joy, purpose, and connection.

Our team supports foster parents as well, providing education and resources that strengthen their relationships with the children in their care.

At the core of our work is the belief that healing and growth are possible. With cultural humility and collaboration, we partner with therapists, caregivers, parents, and community providers to help children move toward stability, resilience, and well-being.



A New Chapter: Opening the Panorama City FamilySource Center



Empowering Families Through Stability and Hope

Emma, a single mother of four, came to ECDA's FamilySource Center while living in an overcrowded apartment and facing significant challenges. With the support of FSC staff—through financial coaching, housing referrals, and advocacy—she created a housing plan and received help with her deposit. Emma and her children are now thriving in their new home, and she continues to attend FSC workshops to build long-term stability.

Since launching the Community Emergency Assistance Initiative in June 2025, the FamilySource Center has provided over \$20,000 in rental and utility assistance and \$40,000 in grocery support, helping families maintain housing and meet basic needs.

In August 2024, El Centro de Amistad (ECDA) opened its new Panorama City FamilySource Center, expanding support for low- and moderate-income families across the San Fernando Valley. The Center provides case management, employment help, mental health referrals, financial education, tutoring, and housing advocacy all in one accessible location.

Community leaders, including Congressman Tony Cárdenas and Assemblymember Luz Rivas, joined ECDA for the ribbon-cutting celebration. "Our new FamilySource Center allows us to take a holistic approach to helping families thrive," said Executive Director Luis Cervantes.

The opening marks another step in ECDA's growth from a small storefront in 1977 to a trusted, multilingual organization serving thousands of families each year.

Real Lives, Real Impact: A Client's Success Story & Community Impact

SAMHSA Success Story: A Journey Toward Confidence and Calm

A 5-year-old boy was referred to our mental health services due to severe anxiety, rigid routines, and daily bathroom challenges at school that often required his mother to intervene. Through supportive dyadic work with our clinician, he gradually built flexibility and confidence—reducing school incidents to just 1–2 times per week and becoming more open to new environments.

After coordinating further evaluations, autism was ruled out, but other developmental needs were identified, and the family was connected to helpful medical and therapeutic services. Today, he enjoys family outings, transitions more smoothly between routines, and no longer has bathroom accidents at home.

This story reflects the heart of our Birth to Five Program: partnering with parents, fostering emotional growth, and connecting families to the resources they need to thrive.

El Centro de Amistad remains committed to expanding access to essential mental health and family support services across the San Fernando Valley, helping families build resilience and long-term well-being.



This year, we delivered over 25,000 hours of essential care to our community—including mental health services, case management, medication support, and caregiver training— helping families heal, grow, and thrive.



21,690
HOURS

of mental health services delivered to individuals and families



364
HOURS

of medication support services offered



1,713
HOURS

of caregiver training delivered to relative caregivers

1,422
HOURS

of case management support provided



SCAN HERE FOR MORE OF OUR CLIENT'S SUCCESS STORIES.

Building Bridges: Supporting Children Through Transdisciplinary Work

Hosted by:

El Centro de Amistad

Date: May 14–15, 2025

Location: Virtual

In May 2025, El Centro de Amistad (ECDA) proudly hosted its virtual conference, **Building Bridges: Supporting Children Through Transdisciplinary Work**—a two-day interactive event designed to strengthen collaboration among professionals supporting children’s development.

The conference welcomed 404 participants, reflecting strong engagement from educators, clinicians, and community partners eager to advance interdisciplinary care. Moderated by Maria G. Williams, MA, LMFT, the event featured expert-led sessions and discussions that promoted shared learning and connection.

The poster is for the 5th Annual Mental Health Virtual Conference by El Centro de Amistad. It features a central graphic of a tree with colorful leaves. On either side of the tree are portraits of speakers: Julia Bantimba on the left and Cheili Otieno on the right. The text includes the conference title, registration website (www.ecda.org), and the specific topics for each speaker's session.

El Centro de Amistad
5th Annual Mental Health Virtual Conference
To register visit www.ecda.org

BUILDING BRIDGES: SUPPORTING CHILDREN THROUGH TRANSDISCIPLINARY WORK

Julia Bantimba
MS, OTR/L, RCMHS, RP II
Healing the Body & Mind: Approaching Trauma Treatment from a Sensory Perspective

Cheili Otieno
MS, CCC-SLP
Supporting Speech, Language, and Communication Development: A Whole-Child Approach

Key sessions highlighted the vital roles of Occupational Therapists and Speech-Language Pathologists in addressing children’s behavioral, sensory, and developmental needs. A dynamic roundtable featuring psychologists, social workers, parent partners, and therapists showcased how coordinated,

cross-disciplinary efforts can close service gaps and enhance family-centered care.

The 2025 Building Bridges conference reinforced ECDA’s ongoing commitment to fostering collaboration, innovation, and integrated approaches that help all children reach their full potential.

Making a Difference

For nearly five decades, El Centro de Amistad (ECDA) has enriched the lives of children, adults, and families across the San Fernando Valley through vital mental health and family support services. Our longstanding commitment reflects our mission to strengthen the community and create lasting positive change. Through outreach and philanthropy, ECDA helps address local needs, bridge service gaps, and foster unity—bringing hope and support to those facing difficult circumstances.



Empowering Students for a Strong Start

Back-to-School Event hosted on August 2, 2024

Bringing the community together is a core priority for El Centro de Amistad (ECDA). In honor of National Back-to-School Month, ECDA hosted its annual Back-to-School Distribution Event on August 2, 2024, ensuring children served by our agency had the supplies needed for a strong start to the school year.

With support from the Perez family, ECDA staff, community donors, and a \$2,000 Walmart Spark Good grant, more than 150 backpacks filled with essential supplies were distributed across our East and West Valley offices. The event was filled with gratitude and excitement as families prepared for the new school year.

By providing students with the tools they need to succeed, ECDA continues to empower families and nurture brighter futures throughout the San Fernando Valley.



Thanksgiving Joy Delivered

Thanksgiving Event hosted on November 19, 2024

El Centro de Amistad (ECDA) launched the holiday season with a Thanksgiving fundraiser that brought the community together to support families in need. With turkey vouchers from Councilwoman Monica Rodriguez, canned goods from Chaminade College Preparatory School, beautifully prepared bags and gift cards from Enrique Sanchez, CPA, and SLTG, LLP, and additional gift card donations from the Perez family, ECDA provided 85 families with Thanksgiving baskets and \$50 gift cards.



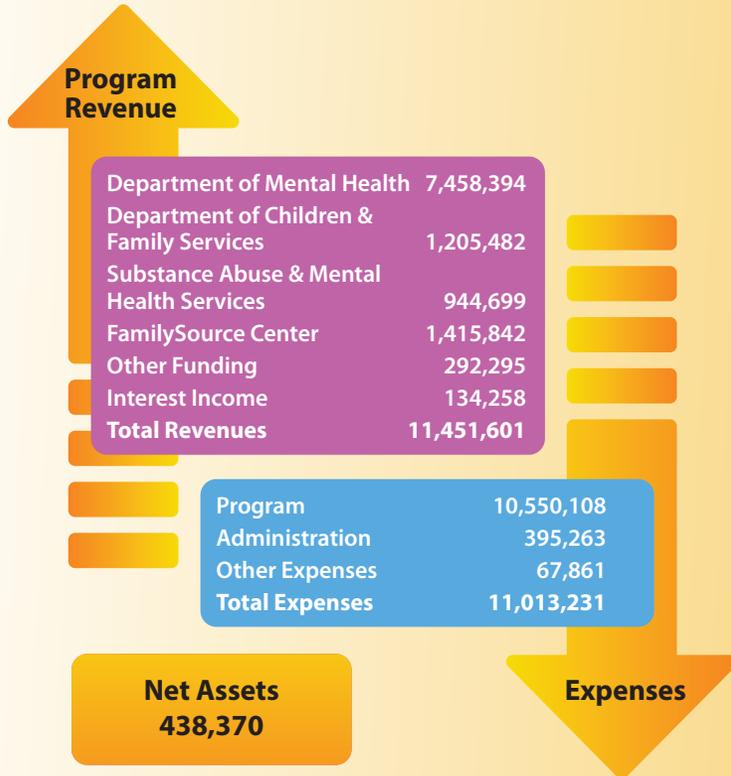
Spreading Christmas Magic

Adopt-A-Family Distribution event hosted on December 17, 2025

ECDA's Adopt-A-Family Program brings the spirit of giving to life by connecting caring sponsors with families facing financial hardship, ensuring they experience the joy of Christmas. Through the generosity of individuals, corporations, and community groups, families receive thoughtful gifts that make the season brighter—many sponsors return year after year because of the program's meaningful impact.

Each family creates a wish list based on their needs, and sponsors purchase one gift under \$50 for every child. This year, we were grateful for the support of Chase Bank, Kaiser Permanente—Panorama City, SLTG, LLP, and many dedicated community members who helped make the holidays unforgettable for our families. Your kindness truly brightened the season.

Revenues And Other Support



Meet Our Team

Board of Directors:



Enrique Sanchez,
President



Juliana Ocegueda,
Vice President



Nely Meza-Andrade,
Board Secretary



Ramon Retirado,
Board Treasurer



Rich Golisch,
Sergeant at Arms



Dr. Danitza Pantoja,
Board Member



Magali Gallegos,
Board Member



Doug Barnett,
Board Member

Spotlight

Executive Leadership Team:



Luis Cervantes,
Executive Director



Tania Fallert-Del Gatto,
Associate Director



Sara Pineda,
Director of Operations

Meet Ruchika Puri, LMFT

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist

I am a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist of East Asian descent and have proudly served at El Centro de Amistad since 2012. My therapeutic approach blends traditional talk therapy with EEG Neurofeedback, allowing me to tailor treatment to each client's unique needs.

While grounded in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), I incorporate various evidence-based practices, including Seeking Safety, Interpersonal Therapy, Cognitive Processing Therapy for PTSD, and Trauma-Focused CBT. My CBT subspecialties include eating disorders, OCD, suicidal behavior, and anger and aggression.

What I value most is walking alongside individuals and families from diverse backgrounds as they pursue healing and stability. Contributing to their journey toward renewed hope and well-being is truly meaningful.

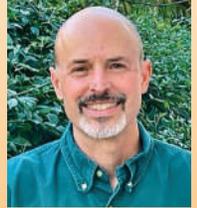


Meet Greg Konick, LMFT

Clinical Supervisor

For the past decade, since joining ECDA in October 2015, 've had the privilege of serving as a Clinical Supervisor at our Canoga Park office. I provide weekly supervision to therapists as they work toward licensure, offering clinical guidance and administrative support to help them feel confident and supported.

What I value most is seeing our therapists grow professionally and witnessing the meaningful progress clients make in therapy. Knowing our work helps families find greater peace and joy is incredibly rewarding. I also appreciate our quarterly All-Staff activities, which allow me to connect with colleagues across the organization.



Meet Our Partners

Our Partners in Hope

We are deeply grateful to our dedicated partners whose steadfast support continues to strengthen El Centro de Amistad's mission. Their commitment enables us to expand our reach across diverse communities, ensuring that mental health and well-being remain at the heart of everything we do.

In 2024, our network of partners grew stronger than ever. Through collaboration, generosity, and shared purpose, they helped transform our mission into a collective movement—one that champions access to care, promotes resilience, and uplifts individuals and families across the San Fernando Valley.

To each of our partners, we extend our sincere appreciation for your invaluable contributions and unwavering belief in our work. Together, we are empowering lives today and building a brighter, healthier tomorrow for all.

Community Supporters:

Congresswoman Luz Rivas
Senator Caroline Menjivar
Assemblymember Jesse Gabriel
Assemblymember Celeste Rodriguez
Supervisor Lindsey Horvath
Councilwoman Monica Rodriguez
Councilwoman Imelda Padilla
Angelica Padilla, FundaMental Change

Donors & Partners

Alliant International University
Annenberg Foundation
Antioch University
Baby2Baby
Big Sunday
Biola University
CalMHSA
California Community Foundation
California State University, Northridge
Capella University
Cedars-Sinai Foundation
Chaminade College Preparatory School
Chase Bank
City of San Fernando
Community Foundation of the Valley
Community Investment for Families Department
County of Los Angeles
Department of Children and Family Services
FamilySource Center
FundaMental Change
Grand Canyon University
LAUSD Board of Education
Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health
Mount Saint Mary's University
National University
Our Lady of the Lake University
Pacific Oaks College
Pacific Graduate Institute

Pepperdine Graduate University
Philliber Research and Evaluation
Phillips Graduate University
Pritzker Foster Care Initiative
Providence St. Joseph Foundation
QueensCare Foundation
SAMHSA
San Jose State University
S. Mark Taper Foundation
Sierra Health Foundation
SLTG, LLP
The Ahmanson Foundation
The California Wellness Foundation
The Chicago School of Professional Psychology
The Ozzello Practice Law Firm
The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation
Toys for Tots
UMass Global
University of La Verne
University of Southern California
Valley Presbyterian Hospital
Vaughn Next Century Learning Center
Volunteers of America
Walmart Spark Good Foundation
Weingart Foundation
Whole Foods Market Foundation

Join Our Movement

Supporting El Centro de Amistad (ECDA) means investing in hope, healing, and the well-being of our community. Mental health challenges touch people from all walks of life—children, families, veterans, and individuals experiencing homelessness. At ECDA, we are committed to breaking the stigma surrounding mental health and ensuring that everyone has access to compassionate, culturally responsive care.

Through our educational workshops in schools, workplaces, and community spaces, we raise awareness and empower individuals with knowledge and tools to support their own mental wellness and that of others.

Your generosity makes this work possible. Every donation helps us expand our reach, provide ritual services, and create safe spaces for connection, understanding, and recovery.

When you join our movement, you become part of a community dedicated to making mental health care accessible for all—building a future defined by empathy, inclusion, and hope.

Together, we can change lives.

Connect & Share

Stay informed and engaged by subscribing to our newsletter, where we share valuable insights on mental health and updates on our impact. Connect with us on Facebook, follow us on Instagram and LinkedIn, and subscribe to our YouTube channel to join a growing community dedicated to mental wellness and inclusivity.

We deeply appreciate your commitment to mental health awareness and your partnership with our mission. Together, we are making a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve.

Thank you for your continued support!

Website www.ecda.org

Facebook [fb.com/elcentrodeamistad.thefriendshipcenter](https://www.facebook.com/elcentrodeamistad.thefriendshipcenter)

Instagram [@elcentrodeamistad](https://www.instagram.com/elcentrodeamistad)

LinkedIn [El Centro de Amistad](https://www.linkedin.com/company/el-centro-de-amistad)

YouTube [El Centro de Amistad Inc.](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)



Every gift matters. Your tax-deductible donation helps underserved communities receive essential mental health support.

Give communities receive essential mental health support.

Donations of any size are impactful and appreciated.

Donate now at <https://ecda.org/donation/>.





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