

November 2016



OUR CHILDREN LA

Resources for Improving Our Children's Quality of Life.



Happy 1st Anniversary to OCLA!

As I write this I can't believe it has been a year since we launched our 3 free countywide programs. With the support of our incredible volunteers and donors, Our Children LA published *The Directory of Services for Homeless Youth* in May 2015, the *website* launched in September 2015, and the *WIN mobile app* was released in both the Googleplay and Apple app stores by late November of 2015. Thanks to the fundraising efforts of valued supporters, Jeanne and Tom Lawson and Anne Costin, (who hosted two evenings benefiting OCLA last fall), we had the financial resources this year to not only continue but improve our programs, raise awareness about our free resources and form valued community relationships.

Of primary importance to us has been getting the word out to youth experiencing homelessness and, of course, to the professionals and volunteers who work with and care about these vulnerable youth. We have also been busy working to expand our database to include more free services accessible to youth in need, and updating the print directory in readiness for new publication. We have continued to listen to both youth and providers discuss their needs so they can guide our efforts to explore new ways our technology can serve this vulnerable population. (Please read Carla Buck's article inside which describes for you the new features we have added to WIN since we launched last year!) Finally, connecting and working with others has also been a priority so that wherever possible, we leverage the very scarce resources available to assist homeless and resource-insecure youth.

We are proud that the Directory, the WIN app and our website were recognized by the county CEO's office as premier resources for the homeless and resource-insecure youth and young adults of LA County. And we are incredibly grateful to all our supporters, volunteers and donors who have made our programs possible. But on this first anniversary, we are keenly aware that there is so much more to be done...*no young person deserves to be homeless.*

~ In appreciation, Denise McCain-Tharnstrom
Our Children LA, Founder & President

OUR MISSION

Our Children LA (OCLA) is a Los Angeles nonprofit organization formed to use mobile-centric communication and web-based resources to raise regional awareness and offer support for improving the life conditions for local children and youth under 25 with a unique emphasis on those who are under-served and at-risk.

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November is National Homeless Awareness Month

Why are so many of LA's youth homeless, on the streets, sleeping in cars or couch-surfing?

The LA County January 2016 Homeless Count reported over 3,540 youth experiencing homelessness on that one night. In June 2016, Cal State Long Beach Professor Crutchfield released findings that 1 in 10 Cal State students are homeless. Meanwhile, the LA County Office of Education reports that in 2015-2016, 62,931 homeless students were identified across 80 school districts and 270 charter schools.

Most young students have homeless families. Gay or pregnant youth may be homeless because their families kicked them out. Other youth have fled abusive environments. Foster youth and youth recently released from the criminal justice system often just don't have a home to return to at all. Shockingly, many college youth are also homeless; their loans and aid simply don't cover the high cost of housing in LA so they sleep in cars or couch surf.

On September 13, 2016, the US Census Bureau released the 2015 Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) which looks at an individual's cash income, as well as accounts for data on the costs of basic necessities adjusted for geographic differences. California's SPM rate is the highest of any state; 1/5 of the state's population is living in poverty under the SPM and this is largely attributable to the state's high housing costs. How will youth leave the streets, obtain needed education and/or vocational training without affordable housing?

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DIRECTORY OF SERVICES FOR HOMELESS YOUTH

This 146-page directory of service providers lists resources and basic services that can be accessed directly by youth without prescreening or referral. It is intended to serve as a resource guide for outreach workers, librarians, educators and others who seek to connect homeless or resource-insecure youth to services. **The LA City Library** has placed 2 copies of the Directory in every branch, and a PDF of the Directory may be found in the Library's teen web pages. The Directory PDF is also hosted on the **LA County Library, LA County Office of Education and LA Homeless Services Authority** websites!

WEBSITE

www.OurChildrenLA.org

A seminal "go-to" website with a resource and community engagement center for regional child advocates, policymakers, service providers, youth and others. The website currently includes an Information Center, a News Center, Research Center, and a Community Resource Center. It also hosts the 2015 Directory for Services for Homeless Youth in Los Angeles and the web version of the mobile app **WIN: What I Need**.

LGBT Youth Homelessness – October 8, 2016.

OCLA's President and Founder *Denise McCain-Tharnstrom* was one of two featured panelists invited by the True Colors Foundation to present on the "There's an App for That" panel during the **40 to None 2016 National Summit** in Los Angeles. This is the only national annual gathering focused on LGBT youth homelessness. It examines the intersectional systems and experiences that impact the lives of LGBT youth at-risk of or experiencing homelessness.

During Denise's presentation, attendees learned that mobile technology is the best way to reach youth...research shows that 70% of homeless youth have access to a smart phone, and virtually all say they regularly use a computer. She shared **WIN's** features with the national audience, while emphasizing that its development was guided by LA's homeless youth, including LGBT youth focus groups. While **WIN** empowers regional homeless or resource-insecure youth under age 25 to locate and connect to 12 types of basic services available without a referral, attendees were interested to hear **WIN** is scalable and can be brought to other communities!



First Year Landmarks:

- **County:** Just months after the Directory was distributed and the WIN app launched, the **LA County CEO's** surveyed the landscape of existing tools available for homeless youth. In their **written report to the Board of Supervisors**, *only three resources for youth in the county were recommended—OCLA's Directory of Services for Homeless Youth and our WIN mobile app were two of three!*
- **County & State:** The **Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE)** presented on the Directory and WIN app, at the **Safe Families Conference held at USC** (March 2016) which drew participants from outside the LA County.
- **National:** *Irma Seilicovich, LMFT, COO, The Village Family Services*, presented on WIN at the **National Center for Child Traumatic Stress All Network Conference** held in March 2016. The panel was entitled **"Using Social Media, Digital Media, and Technology to Reach Children and Youth: Examples, Challenges, Opportunities"**.
- **National:** *Paul Freese, Director of Litigation and Policy Advocacy at Neighborhood Legal Services*, promoted the WIN app and Directory to his colleagues at the **American Bar Association's Annual Meeting** on August 5, 2016 during his presentation as a roundtable panelist in the **When School Is Your Home: Why Educating A Million Homeless Students Is A Civil Rights Battle**.



OCLA/WIN Volunteer Ambassadors Needed

If teachers, librarians, service providers, police officers, firemen, emergency room doctors, health care professionals, priests, ministers, rabbis, social workers, and other caring adults know about the Directory and WIN, they can use either of these tools to help a youth in need of support. If every young person knows about the availability of WIN and the Directory, youth-in-need will know they can access WIN via our website or will download the app in the Google Play or iTunes app stores when they want to search for supportive services. Volunteers are needed to help spread the word! Email us at info@ourchildrenla.org if you would like to be an OCLA/WIN ambassador.

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Our Users

To date, the WIN Mobile App has over 800 unique users, and the Our Children LA website has more than 3,300 Users. Website users routinely visit the WIN web-version, the Directory, OCLA's Home, About US and News pages. WIN mobile app users search all categories; the top five searches are for Shelter, Crisis Support, Food, Benefits and Education.

Directory Update

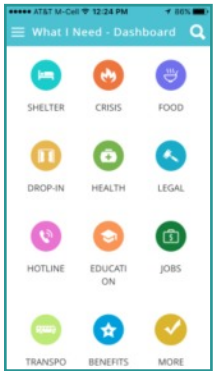
In the summer of 2016, invaluable support updating our database was given by volunteer Jennifer Gomeztrejo (co-founder, Student Support Services Solutions, Inc.) and OCLA's summer student interns, Aalia Thomas and Gretchen Devoney. Talented graphic designer Jennifer Essen (who designed our 2012 and 2015 Directory) will be updating the design and preparing the newest edition for print! We will keep you updated on its forthcoming availability!

Social Media

Thank you to Envision Consulting and LAPD Lorry Perez who tweeted about WIN to their followers, and to CASA who promoted WIN in its weekly Monday newsletter for several weeks in a row to their agency volunteers, staff and supporters! We love being promoted by supporters on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram accounts!

WIN Update

by Carla Buck, WIN Operations & Development



New agencies/programs added to the database. Since January, 2016, OCLA has added 50 new agencies and 387 new programs to our database including programs such as Tarzana Treatment Centers, which provides services for medical detoxification and sober living for youth. Since we've rolled out WIN across the county, we have identified many more services that might be of use to LA's homeless youth and are working to determine which ones are truly youth appropriate and ensure we have the correct agency information. We only included those that can be directly accessed by unaccompanied youth ages 12-25 and are free or low cost. If you know of additional programs for our database, please contact us at info@ourchildrenla.org.

New Features added to the WIN app. In Spring, 2016, we sat down with homeless youth in Venice and asked how we could improve WIN. They offered 5 suggestions: (1) adding directions; (2) making it easier to find what they are looking for; (3) adding new ways to share search results; (4) adding new types of resources; and (5) making WIN faster. Denise was also contacted by folks in Santa Clarita Valley asking if they could be listed separately from San Fernando Valley. In May 2016, based on these suggestions, OCLA launched a new release of WIN. New features include Directions, MapView of search results, a Santa Clarita region, and the ability to share search results via text messaging and Facebook Messenger. We also created a 12th category – MORE – to connect youth to free showers, haircuts, laundry, and public restrooms. To read more about WIN's new features, please see Carla's detailed article at www.ourchildrenla.org/win-app.



Our postcard-sized mini posters are eye-catching... and we want to see them in local coffee houses, libraries, schools, temples or churches, YMCA's, Boys and Girls Clubs...and anywhere else frequented by youth. These mini posters, available in both English and Spanish, were designed by valued OCLA volunteer, Ashley Maxwell, (a local commercial architect and interior designer). If you can print or distribute these cards, please contact us at info@ourchildrenla.org.

We've Been Getting the Word Out!

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<p>Youth Focus Groups</p> <p>We have hosted additional focus groups with youth...not only to inquire if/how they are using the WIN app but also to promote its use and solicit suggestions on how we can continue to improve it.</p>	<p>LA County Office of Education</p> <p>Melissa Schoonmaker, LCSW, Homeless Education Consultant II, LACOE, ensured that the Directory and WIN posters were printed and distributed to every school district and homeless coalition in the county.</p>	<p>LA Homeless Services Authority</p> <p>LAHSA launched a youth portal in the summer of 2016 to educate youth about WIN and link to our website! www.lahsa.org/homeless-resources/young-adults</p>
<p>WIN Launch Parties</p> <p>7 pizza parties were held in Homeless Youth Drop-in Centers around the county between December 2015 and April 2016 to introduce WIN to youth and center staff.</p>	<p>SPA 8's South Bay Coalition to End Homelessness</p> <p>The OCLA WIN website link, description of WIN and the WIN logo is featured on their website.</p>	<p>LA County 1000 Jobs Day (For Youth)</p> <p>In February 2016 LAHSA promoted OCLA and WIN to all attendees—they gave out WIN posters, Directories, and handouts about OCLA & WIN.</p>

Very special thanks to LA City Librarian John Szabo who has made the 2015 Homeless Directory available in every city library in the county.



OUR LEGAL HERO

Bill Finkelstein, Senior Counsel at Steptoe & Johnson LLP is a true friend and hero to Our Children LA and has given us hundreds of hours of pro bono legal services to Our Children LA. Guiding a long and arduous process, he successfully trademarked the Our Children LA name before we launched in 2015. In 2016 he again volunteered his legal expertise and time to successfully guide the WIN name and logo trademark process!

Please consider donating to Our Children LA! The youth we serve have many needs that OCLA can support with your grants and private donations. Our website, Directory and WIN app are free, and while our organizational leadership is volunteer, our programs depend on our paid developers, costly underlying technology platforms, paid intern support, and other expenses. Financial support is needed so that we can maintain our programs, improve WIN, further our outreach, and expand our organizational capacity.

DONATE TO OCLA

Volunteer with OCLA

We are a largely volunteer organization – and we’d love to have you volunteer for us! Do you like to fundraise or plan events? Are you interested in marketing or outreach efforts to spread the word about WIN? Do you have a few free hours/week to offer for clerical/office work or accounting/bookkeeping support? Can you help us tell our story through writing, video or photography? Are you tech savvy – would you like to help us build a team of local technology advisors/experts? To volunteer or learn more, please contact us at info@ourchildrenla.org.

Our Youngest Fundraisers

We wish to spotlight two very special ten-year-old boys, Roman & Damon, who put the WIN app on their birthday lists. For their 10th birthday party, they decided not to ask for gifts. Instead, they encouraged their friends to make donations to OCLA/WIN so they could help homeless youth find needed services and support. Thanks to their generosity of spirit, OCLA raised over \$300 dollars through its donation page. Thank you Roman & Damon!

Your Donations Matter!

Donate at www.ourchildrenla.org/donate or mail your check to Our Children LA, P.O. Box 676, Pacific Palisades, CA 90272.

- \$100. Underwrites the cost of 10 gift cards given to a 10 person youth focus group (\$10/youth)
- \$250. Underwrites one month of Our Children LA’s website maintenance
- \$300. Prints 1000 WIN thick “business” cards for organizations to give to vulnerable youth
- \$950. Underwrites one month of WIN basic technology operational costs
- \$3000. Covers the wages/taxes for 1 college intern at 15 hours/week per 14-week semester
- \$5,000-\$10,000. Improve WIN – add text notifications

Join Young Professionals Who Want to Make a Difference

In June 2016, Devyn Tharnstrom, Maddie Amos, Dani Morse, and Christina Almeida hosted an awareness-raising event for young professionals to learn about the mission of OCLA. They raised over \$750 in a single evening at a wine tasting led by Wally’s wine expert Andrew Pattison who donated his services. These dynamic women are now seeking to form a Juniors Group (\$250 annual donation per person) to support and raise funds for OCLA. If you or someone you know is interested in joining, please contact Devyn at devynetharnstrom@gmail.com.

Newsletter Editor

Maria Hwang de Bravo, co-founder of Student Support Services Solutions, Inc. and OCLA volunteer, oversees the editing/design of our newsletter. She is amazing and we are so grateful for her guidance and expertise!