

## JCOD Honors First All-Female Firefighter Training Cohort at LACTC



As part of Second Chance Month, JCOD proudly celebrated the launch of its first all-female cohort of the Firefighter Training Program at the Los Angeles County Training Center (LACTC) in Calabasas on Monday, April 28.

The women who make up Cohort 2 are more than just cadets in training, they are trailblazers, many of whom who have overcome justice involvement or other significant challenges.

"This group of women is a powerful reflection of what happens when we create space for purpose and growth. Each cadet embodies a commitment to service and transformation," said Judge Songhai Armstead (Ret.). "This program is more than firefighting. It's about restoring dignity, building futures and proving what's possible when individuals are truly supported and given a chance to succeed."

Currently, only 9% of firefighters nationwide are women. JCOD's Firefighter Training Program is working to shift that statistic by creating a supportive, inclusive pathway for women into the fire service.

"It is especially meaningful to see these brave, strong, courageous women step up into this opportunity to protect this space, to protect our communities and to use the skills that they will develop and the training that they will experience to serve Los Angeles County," said LA County Third District Supervisor Lindsey P. Horvath. "This isn't just a win for women, although that's reason to celebrate enough. It is a win for public safety, for representation and for the future of Los Angeles County."

The Firefighter Training Program is made possible through collaboration between the Los Angeles County Fire Department, Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC), Amity Foundation and Operation Flame. Participants receive comprehensive support services, certifications and mentorship as they train toward long-term employment in fire service.

"Through the Firefighter Training Program, each candidate will embark on a profound and life-changing journey," said LA County Fire Department Deputy Chief Jon O'Brien. "This training opportunity will equip them with the practical skills and valuable resources, including structural and wildland firefighting, first aid and CPR training, as well as a wide array of essential life skills."

Beyond the training, this moment marked a transformative turning point for several cadets.

"I found love for firefighting. I found passion. I found a purpose for my life. Like, I was able to give back, was able to help people... I'm not scared. I know what I'm doing. I've been trained well by both LA County and CAL FIRE," said Cohort 2 Cadet Patricia M.



"I wanted to work at CAL FIRE, you know, I just wanted something better for myself. I've spent my whole life taking from the communities I lived in, taking from people, taking from my family. I just wanted to get back. I want to give back to others. I want to be of service to the communities I once took from," said Cohort 2 Cadet Tiffany F. "And this month is about second chances and I wouldn't have that if it wasn't for my family and just a few people who believed in me and are still being supportive to this day."

Graduates receive certifications in wildland and structural firefighting, hazmat and EMT, as well as career readiness preparation and access to certifications needed for successful employment in fire service.

Participants receive not only fire service training but a pathway to long-term careers.

"You know, these programs are really about getting people into good career paths, but also doing all the therapeutic work, all the emotional work," said Amity Foundation President and CEO Doug Bond.

"When you graduate and you're out fighting fires or you have downtime, please come back and tell the next group of ladies that they can do it, encourage them, mentor them, and help them make it to the next level," said ARC Executive Director Sam Lewis.

Watch a recap of the event <u>here</u>.

# Rapid Diversion Program Celebrates 1,000 Graduates and Over 3,000 Diversions



The Justice, Care and Opportunities Department (JCOD) recently celebrated a major milestone with the 1,000th graduate of its Rapid Diversion Program (RDP). The ceremony was held on Thursday, April 24, at the Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Center and recognized five new graduates.

RDP is a pre-plea mental health diversion program designed for individuals with mental health or substance use disorders. Since its launch in 2019, RDP has diverted more than 3,000 cases from the criminal legal system into treatment and supportive services.

Participants enrolled in RDP receive clinical evaluations, case management, housing support and access to care and treatment for one to two years, depending on the severity of charges and individual's needs.

A recent evaluation by the RAND Corporation found that 91% of participants who successfully complete RDP avoid any new case filings in Los Angeles County.

"This achievement reflects the power of second chances and the impact we can make when we provide the support and care for those who are ready to do the hard work to change their lives," said JCOD Director Judge Songhai Armstead (Ret.). "The Rapid Diversion Program empowers individuals to build new futures while helping create healthier, safer communities."

RDP currently operates in seven courthouses across LA County including Clara Shortridge Fo<del>ltz</del> (Downtown), Long Beach, Van Nuys, Airport, Lancaster, Compton and Pasadena. The program's success is made possible through collaboration with the courts, defense, prosecution, and clinical providers. For more information on the program visit <u>here</u>.

# JCOD Celebrates Graduation of Incubation Academy Cohort 8



The 8<sup>th</sup> cohort of JCOD's Incubation Academy graduated on Wednesday, April 30. Incubation Academy teaches community-based organizations sustainability, nonprofit management, LA County contracts, grant writing, leveraging relationships with established providers, financial management and more.

Including the 26 organizations in Cohort 8, 192 organizations have successfully completed the program since its inception in 2021. This year's graduating cohort is the most organizationally diverse to date, representing a wide range of focus areas including reentry services, creative and cultural arts, neurodivergent and health equity initiatives, STEM education, workforce development, social services and transitional housing support.

JCOD's Incubation Academy is committed to empowering grassroots, non-profit organizations that support justice-impacted individuals and underserved communities. Many of these organizations face significant challenges securing government contracts and funding.

The Incubation Academy builds the capacities of these organizations through 12 weeks of intensive training and provides a full year of continued support, including technical help and peer advising. To date, graduates have been awarded more than \$72 million in combined capacity-building grants and Care First Community Investment (CFCI) Care Grants. Among the Cohort 8 graduates, 14 organizations are CFCI Care Grant recipients and have been awarded a combined \$13.2 million in CFCI Care Grants.

Following the graduation, JCOD hosted its first Incubation Academy Alumni Reclamation Event, aimed at building deeper connections among Incubation Academy graduates across all cohorts. The event underscored the program's long-term vision to build a network of community-based organizations, that not only know each other, but work together to bridge the gaps our communities face every day.

Cohort 9 is scheduled to begin on June 4. Organizations interested in participating in the Incubation Academy can apply on a rolling basis. For more information and to apply, click <u>here</u>.

### JCOD's Second Chance Month Events Sprawl Across All 5 LA County Districts



April was Second Chance Month, and JCOD facilitated and collaborated on 8 events across all five LA County districts, from Long Beach to Lancaster.

Kicking off the slate of events was a Justice, Equity & Opportunity Resource Fair at

Long Beach City College on April 9, which provided attendees a chance to connect to job opportunities, resources, and services.

From there, the team went to Lancaster for a full day consisting of three different events in the Antelope Valley. First, it was the Youth Overcoming (YO!) graduation at Catalyst Foundation for their third cohort. YO! is a transformative mentoring program that helps young adults reach developmental milestones by engaging them productively in education, work and civic life.

After the YO! graduation, we welcomed the community to our DOORS Antelope Valley location for the *Rebuild and Thrive: Second Chance Summit*, which brought together vital resources for individuals reentering society, including practical workshops on financial literacy and career development.

We closed out the busy day with another graduation, this time at Lost Angels Career Center to celebrate the culmination of their 13<sup>th</sup> cohort. Lost Angels serves disadvantaged transitional aged youth, families and distressed communities through innovative vocational training in the aerospace industry.

On April 14, we went to Rio Hondo college for a college and career fair where JCOD Director Judge Armstead (Ret.) spoke to Rio Hondo's RISE scholars about the various programs JCOD offers.

The team visited Cal State LA's programs for justice-impacted students – Cal State LA – the Prison Graduation Initiative (PGI), for an event on April 23. The PGI program offers education and the ability to earn a bachelor's degree for individuals who are still incarcerated.

From Cal State LA, we went south to Compton for the Beyond Barriers: Building Reentry Bridges to Housing and Public Safety event, where Judge Armstead (Ret.) spoke about JCOD's various housing programs for justice-impacted individuals, including our Breaking Barriers program, which allows participants to move into a unit and "transition in place" by taking over the full rent amount after up to 24 months of housing assistance and stable employment.

We ended the month with a powerful event on April 28, celebrating the launch of our first all-female cohort of the Firefighter Training Program at the Los Angeles County Training Center in Calabasas; an inspiring milestone in JCOD's mission to create inclusive, transformative pathways for justice-impacted individuals.



### Staff Spotlight

# Varduhi Niksalyan – Senior Program Manager, LA County Training Center



Varduhi Niksalyan serves as the Senior Program Manager at the Los Angeles County Training Center (LACTC), where she oversees JCOD's Firefighter Training Program. She joined JCOD last year as a Senior Project Manager, managing several projects at LACTC before stepping into her current role in December 2024.

Varduhi was born and raised in Yerevan, Armenia, and moved to the United States at the age of 16. She holds a bachelor's degree in nutrition and dietetics from California State University, Northridge and a master's degree in public health from UCLA. After completing her graduate studies during the onset of the COVID-19

pandemic, she supported emergency response efforts by training contact tracers and case investigators.

In 2021, she joined the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Health as a Senior Health Educator, where she helped schools return to in-person learning. After witnessing how older adults, especially those in nursing homes, were impacted by the pandemic, she transitioned to a new role within the department to lead infection prevention training for staff in skilled nursing facilities.

"I saw it as a chance to strengthen systems that were failing the most vulnerable. That same commitment to systems change is what led me to JCOD," said Varduhi. "Across every role I have pursued, one constant has been my drive to improve systems so they truly serve the communities they are meant to support."

Varduhi recently assisted in the launch of JCOD's first all-female firefighter training cohort at LACTC, working closely behind the scenes with various partners to bring the program to life. "Watching them break barriers, grow together and succeed in a traditionally male-dominated field has been truly inspiring," she shared.

She recalls one standout moment during the physical fitness evaluation, when one

applicant turned back mid-run to support another who was falling behind. Both finished within the allotted time. "Her actions challenged the idea that women must compete for limited opportunities and showed that we're strongest when we uplift one another," said Varduhi. "This group showed a remarkable level of cohesion and actively shaped their own experience."

For Varduhi, the most fulfilling part of her work has been witnessing the growth of cadets from start to finish. "Watching individuals begin with uncertainty and graduate with confidence, purpose, and a sense of belonging is incredibly powerful," she shared. "This program does not just teach skills, it helps people reclaim their stories, reconnect with their strengths and step into futures they may not have thought possible."

Outside of work, Varduhi enjoys exploring LA's many gardens and museums, attending comedy shows and spending quiet evenings at home with her husband.



### **AngelCity Aerospace**



Officially established on Sept. 11, 2023, AngelCity Aerospace Foundation was created to serve as a gateway to aerospace and aviation for youth in underserved

areas of Los Angeles County. Founder and CEO Mia Hutcherson had volunteered with several aviation organizations, and realized that many didn't truly reach students living in the underserved communities of Los Angeles County. She wanted to change that.

"I began my journey to becoming a pilot at 29 years old—something I had always wanted to do but had no idea how to get started. Throughout that journey, I often found myself being the only Black person in the room. As of 2025, Black pilots represent only 2% of the entire pilot population in the United States, and Black women make up less than 1%. I quickly realized the issue wasn't a lack of interest or education, but a lack of exposure," said Mia.

Mia would soon join JCOD's Incubation Academy, which teaches small community-based organizations (CBOs) sustainability, nonprofit management, LA County contracting practices, grant writing, leveraging relationships with providers, financial management and so much more. "As a new organization, JCOD has been instrumental in helping us grow. Through their Incubation Academy, we gained the tools to fine-tune our operations and build capacity to scale. Before joining JCOD's Incubation Academy, I struggled to keep up with the community's demand for services, all while balancing the chaos of being both a hybrid board member and employee—and managing my own full-time career, which isn't your typical 9-to-5," she added.

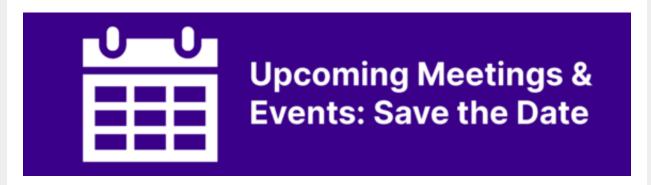


Getting the business side of running her non-profit in order has allowed Mia to fully enjoy the youth she has an opportunity to work with. She continued, "My favorite moment so far was hosting our first Girls in Aviation Day event. We partnered with three different flight schools who generously donated introductory flight lessons to 300 youth of color. One high school student told me that she had planned to takes

photos and videos of her first flight—but didn't take a single one because she was so awestruck. She wanted to fully experience the moment. That really stuck with me."

Mia advises other CBOs to treat their nonprofit like a business. She says passion is essential, but structure, sustainability, and community alignment are what keep it going. "Don't be afraid to ask for help—and build a strong network early on," she concluded.

For more information about Angel City Aerospace Foundation, you visit their website: <a href="https://www.angelcityaerospace.org">https://www.angelcityaerospace.org</a>



#### Rights & Resources Hosted by JCOD DOORS LA

JCOD's DOORS-LA is thrilled to launch our monthly Legal Clinics!

Join us for the first event-featuring free legal support, community resources, music, lunch, giveaways, and raffles. Let's build power and community together!

Wednesday, May 14, 2025 10:00 AM-1:00 PM

3965 S Vermont Ave. 3rd Floor Los Angeles, CA 90037

#### JCOD Community Pop Up / DOORs AV Block Party May 15, 2025 | 9:00 AM- 5:00 PM

Get Ready for the Next JCOD Community Pop-Up at DOORS Antelope Valley! **Location:** 

1753 Avenue J, Unit B, Lancaster, CA 93534

Join us for a powerful day of community, connection, and celebration featuring:



And when the Pop-Up wraps...

Stick around for the BLOCK PARTY hosted by JCOD's DOORS AV – because we're keeping the good vibes going all day long!

Click here to RSVP to the event

### <u>Care First Community Investment (CFCI) Advisory Committee - Thursday, May 15, 2025, 4:00 PM-6:00 PM</u>

#### **Meeting Location:**

Earvin "Magic" Johnson Park- John Hall Room 12601 Wadsworth Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90059

To participate via computer or smart phone:

Click Here For Access

To participate via telephone only:

Dial-In: **+1** 669 900 9128 Meeting ID: 861 0182 2883# Passcode: 437765

<u>Care First Community Investment (CFCI) Advisory Committee - Thursday, May 29, 2025, 4:00 PM-6:00 PM</u>

#### **Meeting Location:**

Virtual

To participate via computer or smart phone:

Click Here For Access

To participate via telephone only:

Dial-In: **+1 669 900 9128**Meeting ID: **861 0182 2883#** 

Passcode: 437765

Follow us on social media: @LACJCOD

Questions or comments? Email us at: jcod@lacounty.gov

Or visit us on the web: jcod.lacounty.gov

#### SUBSCRIBER SERVICES:

Manage Subscriptions I Help

You received this email because you subscribed to the *Justice, Care and Opportunities Department* mailing list to receive notices about the County's new central agency unifying LA County's efforts to serve vulnerable justice-impacted people and communities.

This service is provided to you at no charge by County of Los Angeles.

Update your subscriptions, modify your password or email address, or stop subscriptions at any time on your <u>Subscriber Preferences Page</u>. You will need to use your email address to log in. If you have questions or problems with the subscription service, please visit <u>subscriberhelp.govdelivery.com</u>.

This service is provided to you at no charge by **County of Los Angeles**.

This email was sent using GovDelivery Communications Cloud to Email Address on behalf of: County of Los Angeles, California · 500 W. Temple St. · Los Angeles 90012