

Karen Roye, Director, San Francisco Department of Child Support Services



In the beginning

Like so many, I am a proud immigrant to this wonderful country. I was born in London, England to a Cuban mother and a Jamaican father. November 19, 1962, we sailed to the United States on the “Queen Elizabeth” docking in New York’s Ellis Island. The journey across the Atlantic took seven days. At the time of our arrival, my brother was less than a year old and very sick. Through the kindness of immigration officials who expedited our process, police officers who helped us get to the hospital quickly, and the doctors and nurses who treated my brother – he survived. My love for public service and helping others was truly born out of that experience. I have always seen the government as this incredible force for good.

What does it all mean?

I was raised with a strong sense that education was the means to success. My dad didn’t have the opportunity to receive a formal education so he had great respect for it and wanted his children to have the opportunity. Education was built into everything we did. From the age of six, one of my jobs at home was to read the newspaper to him. After I was done, he’d say, “Okay, you know the words, now tell me what they mean.”

It means personal success!

In 1997 I received my Bachelors of Science degree from Cal State University Hayward. In 2006, I enrolled at Golden Gate University to begin work on an Executive Master of Public Administration with a desire to understand the nature of social services—in particular how to manage government programs. I embarked on what I call “the chip-away program,” taking classes here and there as I could. Faced with health and personal challenges along the way, I wouldn’t give up. My professors were so supportive and non-judgmental. My parents and teachers encouraged me not to stop but understood when I needed space. It was like a conversation that didn’t end. I’d come back and they’d welcome me and we’d get back on it. My graduation was one of the most powerful experiences I have ever had. I am the first in my family to receive a master’s degree. Crossing the stage and receiving my diploma, I looked up to heaven and thanked my dad.

Public Service was in my blood

I began my career in charge of Book-Entry Trade settlements for government backed securities for Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company. In 1998, I entered the public sector working for five years with the City and County of San Francisco as a Budget Analyst with the Bureau of Finance for the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission. Following that, I served as a Budget Analyst for Budget and Legislative Affairs for Mayor Willie L. Brown, Jr.

I also volunteer for a variety of positions including the San Francisco Reentry Council, the Family Violence Council, Sentencing Commission, California Board of Behavioral Sciences, and the San Francisco Chapter of the NAACP.

Child Support was a natural outcome

In 2004, I was appointed Director of the San Francisco Department of Child Support Services by Mayor Gavin Newsom. I have had the opportunity to introduce innovative programs and collaborations, helping parents meet the financial needs of their children and improve child support service delivery to families in San Francisco. Today, SF DCSS provides a variety of service models that support parents such as: C-NET, Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration Project (Transitions SF), County Jail Outreach, and enhanced domestic violence case management. We developed a parental empowerment portfolio of innovative services that includes early intervention strategies, family violence prevention, referrals to employment services, and active collaborations with local partners.

“My goal is to create service delivery models that keeps pace with the needs of families today so that children can continue to count on their parents for the financial and medical support that they need to be healthy and successful.”