



Parent Spotlight:

Karen Vicente of St. Anne's Family Services

A Path to Leadership

For families at St. Anne's, learning doesn't stop in the classroom, it extends into the home, the community, and future generations. Through the AP-OD program, parents gain the knowledge, confidence, and support to help their children thrive while discovering their own potential as leaders.

For Karen Vicente, parenting has always begun with a simple belief: there is always more to learn. As the mother of a seven-year-old son and a three-year-old daughter, Karen has spent the past five years participating in the AP-OD (Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors) program through St. Anne's Family Services.



As parents, we don't receive an instruction manual. I wanted to learn how to support my children during every stage of their development because I know how important that support is.

That desire to keep learning brought her back to AP-OD year after year. Although she participated in the same curriculum multiple times, each experience offered something new.



Every session taught me something different.

What Karen didn't realize was that her commitment to becoming a better parent would also open doors she never imagined, helping her discover her own voice as an advocate, a leader, and a trusted source of support for other families.

Learning to See the World Through Her Children's Eyes

Among the many lessons Karen learned through AP-OD, two had the greatest impact on her life: understanding that parents are their children's first and most important advocates, and recognizing that emotional well-being is just as essential as physical health.



Another lesson transformed the way she parents every day. Learning about early brain development helped Karen understand that children learn through everyday experiences, meaningful interactions, and play. She realized that what mattered most wasn't how much time she spent with her children, but the quality of the moments they shared together. Karen explains,

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Our children learn through play. Even when we think they aren't learning, they are. Every interaction helps build connections in their brains.



Karen on her AP-OD parent graduation day

That lesson became even more meaningful as she learned to embrace the unique personalities of her two children. Her seven-year-old son is thoughtful and cautious. Before trying something new, he likes to stop and think. Her three-year-old daughter is adventurous, curious, and eager to explore.

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Abriendo Puertas taught me that even though children may be siblings, they are not the same. Each child has a different temperament and way of being.

Instead of expecting them to learn in the same way, Karen began meeting each child where they were—encouraging them to explore, ask questions, and discover the world while knowing their mother would always be there to support them.

The Power of "I'm Bored"

One of Karen's favorite parenting memories perfectly captures what she learned through AP-OD. One afternoon, while Karen was washing dishes, her daughter announced she was bored. Instead of handing her a tablet or turning on the television, Karen encouraged her to use her imagination while she finished her chores.

A few minutes later, the house became unusually quiet.

Like many parents of young children, Karen knew she should probably investigate. She discovered her daughter happily playing with a package of individually wrapped tampons she had found tucked away in a cabinet. To her daughter, they weren't tampons at all—they were colorful little fish riding inside a toy truck.

When her older brother came home from school, the siblings expanded the adventure, creating stingrays and an entire underwater world together.

Rather than interrupting their creativity, Karen watched their imaginations flourish. Today, she often shares that story with other parents because it reminds her of an important lesson:

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When children tell us they're bored, that's often when some of the best learning begins.



Karen's goal is to meet each of her children where they are, recognizing that every child learns in their own unique way.

Instead of constantly entertaining children, Karen believes parents can give them something even more valuable: the opportunity to imagine, create, solve problems, and discover what they are capable of.

Finding the Courage to Advocate

Before participating in AP-OD, speaking up at school felt intimidating.

Like many parents, Karen worried that raising concerns might negatively affect her children. Through the AP-OD program, she realized that advocating for her children wasn't something to fear, it was one of the most important responsibilities she had as a parent.

Today, Karen not only advocates for her own children but also encourages other parents to find their voices.

Whether it's accompanying a parent to speak with a teacher, checking in on a child during the school day, or simply listening when another family needs support, Karen believes strong communities are built when parents care for one another.

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We need to build strong connections within our community. The more united we are, the more we can accomplish.



In Session 9 of the AP-OD Curriculum, parents learn how to become effective advocates for their children



From Parent to Community Leader

As Karen's confidence grew, so did her willingness to step into leadership.

The once shy first-time mother who questioned whether she belonged gradually became involved in parent committees, inspired by the parents she met through AP-OD and encouraged by the supportive community she found at St. Anne's Family Services.

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Abriendo Puertas gave me the little push I needed. It told me, 'You can do this. Believe in what you're capable of doing, and you will accomplish many things.'

Little by little, new opportunities followed. Today, Karen serves as President of the St. Anne's Policy Council, has represented families through the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), and traveled to Sacramento to advocate for Head Start and early childhood programs. During one advocacy visit, she participated in 18 meetings with state legislators in a single day—an experience she says filled her with pride.

Karen also credits St. Anne's Family Services for opening doors for her family and thanks her husband for supporting her every step of the way, making it possible for her to stay involved while raising their children.

Creating Community

While Karen is proud of the leadership roles she has taken on, what means the most to her is the community she has helped build.

She believes every family deserves someone who will listen, offer encouragement, and remind them they are not alone.

"If you need support," she tells other parents, "let's find that support together."

Through AP-OD, Karen found not only practical parenting tools but also lasting friendships, encouragement, and a network of families committed to lifting one another up.



Karen at the National Head Start West conference

The Mother Her Children Need

When asked what AP-OD has given her, Karen doesn't begin by talking about leadership. She talks about motherhood.



I will never be a perfect mother, but I want to be the mother my children need.

That philosophy continues to guide every part of her life—as a parent, a community leader, and a mentor to other families.

Her message to parents is simple: keep learning, believe in yourself, and remember that you are never alone. Every step you take to support your child also strengthens your family and your community. For Karen, AP-OD didn't simply teach parenting strategies. It gave her confidence, a community, and the opportunity to discover strengths she never knew she had. Today, she's paying those lessons forward, supporting other parents, advocating for children, and helping create brighter futures for families throughout her community.



Mission: St. Anne's is dedicated to working together to build safe, nurturing, and resilient families—from pregnancy to parenthood and childhood to adulthood—for generations to come. To learn more, visit <https://stannes.org/> or follow them on:   