



**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
FIRE DEPARTMENT**
FIRE CHIEF DARYL L. OSBY

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SPECIALLY PAINTED LA COUNTY LIFEGUARD TOWERSPREADS KINDNESS & MARKS SIRENS OF SILENCE PROGRAM LAUNCH

Supporting autism and special needs awareness and acceptance, Sirens of Silence includes training, special needs-friendly events, and safety-related items.

Los Angeles, CA – The Los Angeles County Fire Department (LACoFD) joined Fourth District County Supervisor Janice Hahn and the Department of Beaches and Harbors today in raising awareness and acceptance of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), while promoting the launch of the Department’s new Sirens of Silence program, through a specially painted lifeguard tower on Mother’s Beach in Marina Del Rey.

“Our first responders know that keeping everyone safe cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. The approach and protocols that work for one person may not be appropriate or helpful for an adult or child with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Through this new training developed by people from within the department who are parents of children with autism, all of our firefighters, paramedics, and lifeguards can learn how to recognize a person with autism and use the new tools at their disposal to give them the best care possible,” said Supervisor

Hahn. "This newly painted lifeguard tower is beautiful, and it sends a message to parents of children with autism across the county that our LA County Fire Department cares for their children and is prepared to serve them and keep them safe."

Designed and painted by LACoFD Ocean Lifeguard Scott Snyder, the temporary artistic mural represents a flurry of vibrant hearts, exemplifying an exuberance of joy, love, and kindness. All the colors together signify our unified effort, in partnership with the County in this campaign: the light blue represents the blue in the County's logo as well as the color of the ocean connected to our LACoFD lifeguards; the darker blue is associated with the uniforms worn by our first responders; and, the red and gold hearts symbolize the LACoFD's official hues, providing communities in our care with the gold level of service.

"Our firefighters and lifeguards interact with special needs families every day and we want to make sure we are doing everything we can to provide the best care possible," said Fire Chief Daryl L. Osby. "As first responders and community helpers, we are here to protect and provide thoughtful service to everyone in our care – and the Sirens of Silence program helps us enhance our ability to do that."

Supported by the LA County Fire Foundation, Sirens of Silence is made up of three components: 1) **education and awareness** for the Department's first responders through a mandatory training module as well as access to visual aids and informational materials with advice and practical tips on how to approach, respond, and communicate; 2) **special needs-friendly events** for residents to meet and interact with first responders in a welcoming and sensory-sensitive space; and, 3) **safety-related and sensory-sensitive items** for patients.

"Autism is invisible. For many, including my older son who is high-functioning, you would not notice until you interact with him," said Karen Zarsadiaz-Ige, LACoFD Communications Manager and creator of the Sirens of Silence program. "If I am unable to be with my child when something happens, I want to make sure someone can understand what he is experiencing and respond appropriately. As parents, we rely on our 'village' of caregivers – and first responders are an integral part of that 'village'."

The Department's picture board and visual schedule for the Sirens of Silence program, exclusively drawn by Los Angeles-based artist Millie Velasco, are useful tools for not only special needs individuals but can also serve as means of communication with victims of trauma or violence (i.e., elder abuse, child

abuse, sex trafficking victims, etc.); patients with medical conditions or challenges (i.e., stroke, dementia, etc.); and, non-English speakers.

This new program will continue to strengthen and evolve as we receive additional input from the ASD community. Materials developed for the LACoFD's Sirens of Silence program are available for use by first responders, therapists, educators, parents, caregivers, and more. To learn more about the Sirens of Silence program and to download materials, please visit fire.lacounty.gov/sirens-of-silence

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The Los Angeles County Fire Department Foundation supports lifesaving programs throughout the region. To be a part of our team, learn more, or donate, visit SupportLACountyFire.org.



The mission of the Los Angeles County Fire Department is to protect lives, the environment, and property by providing prompt, skillful, and cost-effective fire protection and life safety services.

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