‘Love Is’ fundraiser will benefit nonprofits in helping teens with their mental health, relationships

One counseling group will hold a live Facebook event in Spanish and English.

Ana Nogales, founder and CEO of Casa de la Familia, sits in a park in Tustin on Thursday, February 4, 2021. Casa de la Familia, a non-profit organization, is dedicated to the mental health of individuals through counseling, support groups, advocacy, crisis intervention, and outreach. (Photo by Mark Rightmire, Orange County Register/SCNG)

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For decades, psychologist Ana Nogales has dispensed personal advice to people willing to share their struggles with an audience of strangers on the radio and TV talk shows she hosts on Spanish-language media.

She listens. She advises. The callers — and the audience — get assistance.

But last year, with the coronavirus pandemic disrupting everyone’s lives, Nogales started giving presentations and taking questions on Facebook live. The idea was to broaden
the reach offered by Casa de la Familia, the 25-year-old Santa Ana nonprofit Nogales founded to help victims of trauma.

On Wednesday, Feb. 10, Nogales will be joined by a group of other counselors from Casa de la Familia for a day-long bilingual Facebook live event focused on helping teens recognize and develop healthy relationships. The event is part of a 24-hour online fundraising marathon called “Love Is Giving Day”, that will raise money for 10 Orange County nonprofits, including Casa de la Familia, to support their work with teens.

The Love Is Giving Day will take place during Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month, with Valentine’s Day on the horizon and the pandemic in the background.

That last element matters.

In the past 12 months of pandemic-related loss and isolation, Casa de la Familia’s offices in Santa Ana and Los Angeles have seen a spike in the number of people calling to seek counseling. And all of that counseling is being offered electronically because COVID-19 concerns prevent face-to-face meetings.
In all, calls are up 20% from two years ago, forcing Casa de la Familia to add counselors. Since March, Nogales, chief executive at Casa de la Familia, has made presentations on Facebook that include taking questions from participants. In August, the nonprofit hired a full-time counselor to handle the flood of inquiries sent via social media.

Nogales doubts she’ll hear from many, if any, teens on Wednesday. Most find it difficult to ask adults for help even in the best of times. The idea behind the Casa de la Familia live talk on Facebook — free hour-long sessions on different topics in English from 8 a.m. to noon and in Spanish from 1 to 7 p.m. — is to help the teens by helping their caretakers.

“That’s OK, if we help the parents understand what’s going on with their kids,” Nogales said.

Participants can raise questions and share information through Facebook comments. Questions also can be submitted anonymously.

Nogales said she’s heard from plenty of adults about how the pandemic is affecting the mental health and behavior of adolescents.

“Parents are asking for help with their children. Or, when it’s an emergency, they are calling on behalf of their children.”

The trend is bigger than Casa de la Familia.

The Teen Line, a Los Angeles-based peer-to-peer hotline that serves all of Southern California, has seen calls jump dramatically in the past year as the pandemic fueled added stress, anxiety and feelings of physical danger. And in November, public health officials in Orange County launched a public service campaign that included the “Be A Friend for Life” outreach to prevent youth suicide.

The Love Is Giving Day is part of a series of social media-driven, collaborative donation marathons with specific themes that Orange County Community Foundation started a few years ago, pre pandemic. In 2020, “Love Is” day raised $117,918 on behalf of 12 nonprofits.

The 2021 version runs Wednesday from 12:01 a.m. to 11:59 p.m., with a goal of raising $100,000 among the 10 participating nonprofits: Casa de la Familia; Find Your Anchor; Initiative to End Family Violence, UC Irvine; Laura’s House; LGBTQ Center OC; OC Pride; Orange County Family Justice Center Foundation; Planned Parenthood-Orange & San Bernardino Counties, Inc.; The Priority Center; Women’s Transitional Living Center, Inc; and newly added this year, Orange County Family Justice Center. More information about all of the groups is available at love-is-giving-day.ocnonprofitcentral.org.
Some nonprofits have created special promotions.

There’s a humorous, torch-passing “opening ceremony” recorded by Women’s Transitional Living Center, and there’s an Instagram ode to going viral in 2020 from Laura’s House. The LGBTQ Center’s staff created a 4-minute video answering “How would you love your younger self?”

The broader message is that all teens need to be empowered and supported, particularly when it comes to how they handle their relationships with others. To Nogales, those teen relationships touch everyone — parents, siblings, friends, peers, romantic interests, themselves. And, she added, modern teen relationships also include social media.

In general, Nogales said the health responses to the pandemic have tended to focus on older people, which is natural because that group is most at risk of severe illness or death from COVID. But teens — who are living in a world of closed campuses and few social opportunities — are suffering from isolation.

“They feel lonely. They feel like they don’t have a purpose,” Nogales said.

“They feel like they have been neglected and punished for something that they didn’t do.”