

# LIFT UP

THE CHILD ADVOCATES OF SILICON VALLEY MAGAZINE

2020  
SPRING/SUMMER

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## MESSAGE FROM THE CEO **FREDERICK J. FERRER**



**“It is our responsibility to **SHOW UP** for our foster kids.”**

That's all I could think of the day we closed our offices. The world was shutting down. Everyone was ordered to shelter-in-place. I knew kids that have gone through trauma would have even greater challenges in this new pandemic world. And especially now that their in-person CASA visits were being ended.

But what I wasn't expecting was how our community **SHOWED UP** and helped us obtain food, clothing, toiletries, laptops and more – all of which have been and continue to be delivered to our kids. Working closely with neighboring CASA organizations we published an Op-Ed in the Mercury News to declare that foster children are our children, and we must help them through this pandemic which impacts

them so disproportionately. We spotlighted the plight of our kids and the community responded.

Currently, over 60 individuals are completing our virtual pre-service Spring training. Foster children on our waiting list will soon have a CASA Volunteer to **STAND UP** and be their advocate.

All the while, we continue to make program improvements that will help us serve more children, more meaningfully. From implementing a new database to developing outcomes for our eight program specialty areas, we will continue to pursue opportunities, partnerships and strategies, while continuing to work with the Court, that enhance our ability to **LIFT UP** the children we serve.

In the end, it will always be about our kids, and doing whatever it takes to help them thrive.

With community by our side, we will be there for every foster child in Silicon Valley.

**Frederick J. Ferrer**

*Chief Executive Officer*

Child Advocates of Silicon Valley

# MEET THE NEED

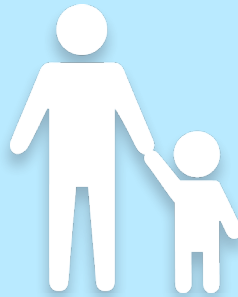
At any given time, there are about **1,000 children** in the Santa Clara County Dependency Court.

**Every one** of these children has experienced trauma in the form of abuse, neglect and/or abandonment.

**Every one** of these children deserves to have a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteer.



**476**  
Active Advocates



**600**  
Foster Children with  
an Advocate



**250**  
Foster Children  
waiting for an  
Advocate

*\*The current stats are as of May 2020.*

## MISSION

To be there for every foster child in Silicon Valley who has experienced abuse, neglect and/or abandonment.

## VISION

A Silicon Valley where every foster child has the nurturing support and resources needed to thrive.



**Become an Advocate.** Visit  
[ChildAdvocatesSV.org/Volunteer](https://ChildAdvocatesSV.org/Volunteer)

# YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND IN ME

RAMA & JENNI

***"If I were to give advice to anyone who is getting a CASA, especially an NMD who is already a little bit more independent and might feel like they don't really need anyone else, is that it's a lot more helpful if you are open with your CASA. If you're not really telling them anything about your life then you can't really make that connection."***

-Jenni, former Non-Minor Dependent (NMD)

A little over three years ago Jenni was a freshman at San Jose State University pursuing a STEM degree. Having just turned 18, living on campus and trying to navigate the rigors of early morning classes, she received an email from a stranger named Rama. Rama, a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteer with Child Advocates of Silicon Valley, was seeking to be Jenni's CASA.

At the time Jenni thought, "why would I need this? I have an Independent Living Program Case Manager and I have a social worker." Adding another person to her circle of support didn't seem to make sense but ultimately, she thought to herself, "why not?"



CASA Volunteer Rama (left) and former NMD Jenni (right) pictured together on their annual visit to Christmas in the Park in San Jose.

And so, their relationship began.

Having only worked with younger children as a CASA, Rama was a little apprehensive about working with an NMD. "Would she be interested?" "Might she reject me?" "Will it be hard to communicate and set up visits?" Luckily, these concerns never materialized.

Rama and Jenni started meeting every week or so and within a couple of months Jenni felt like she was talking to one of her best friends. From the start Rama wanted to demonstrate to Jenni that she would be there for her and hopefully Jenni would be open to it. Learning that Rama picked her – that she wasn't assigned to her – was all Jenni needed to know to allow Rama into her life. Sharing a love for coffee and a sense of humor only made it easier.

Naturally, like most relationships, theirs was not devoid of stressful moments. None greater than when Jenni was disqualified from San Jose State. Wanting nothing more than to take a break and get her bearings straight, Jenni hoped Rama would understand. Rama did, but it wasn't easy. Being supportive of Jenni's decision and not forcefully encouraging her to continue with her education was

difficult. Rama thought it best to demonstrate support, to let Jenni know she would be there for her no matter what, and that's exactly what she did.

Within due time, Jenni enrolled at San Jose City College. At City Jenni really reinvigorated her passion for learning, taking as many different classes as she could. Unlike before, she was able to choose what she wanted to learn and this helped her find her way academically.

Earlier this year, Jenni learned that she would be attending her dream school this fall, UC Santa Cruz, in the pursuit of a double-major in sociology and critical race and ethnic studies. Self-described as "criers" Rama and Jenni shed tears of joy the day Jenni shared the news.

Having recently aged out of her NMD status, Rama is no longer Jenni's CASA. But that hasn't changed their relationship. Rama and Jenni have forged a friendship that they both intend to continue. In fact, they've already started to map out all of the best coffee shops in Santa Cruz.

# GOING ABOVE & BEYOND

## ANN TOWNE'S ADVOCACY JOURNEY

*It's three days before she has to move to a new placement and she's only been home for two days since the birth of her newborn. That's when Ann, her Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), arrives with clean laundry in hand, some food and toiletries, and most importantly, bags of newly purchased baby clothes, diapers and formula. If she hadn't realized it before, she did now, she has an Advocate she can rely on.*

Having worked her entire career in corporate finance, Ann Towne found herself enjoying retirement but looking for a meaningful and challenging experience. Scouring the internet for different volunteer opportunities she finally came across one that checked all of the boxes.

Five years and five assignments later, Ann still does whatever it takes to help our foster kids.

The anecdote above is just one example of Ann's propensity for SHOWING UP when she's needed most. Currently, she has two assignments - the foster teen from the story above and a three-year-old that is soon to be adopted. She also serves as a CASA Mentor for Child Advocates of Silicon Valley. As a CASA Mentor she is responsible for helping 9 other CASA Volunteers fulfill their duties as a mentor, advocate and voice in the Court for the children they serve. Between her two assignments and her CASAs' assignments, Ann is helping 10 foster youth today. That's 10 kids who will have better health, education and placement outcomes.

"When I first learned about the mentor program, and met the

lady that ran it, I set a goal to one day become a mentor. I knew it was something I had to do." And do it she has. Ann will be the first to admit that being a mentor is more challenging than she expected but that doesn't keep her from becoming a better mentor. In fact, having only worked with children aged 0-5, Ann took on her current teen assignment so that she could become a more well-rounded CASA Mentor. To date, it has been her most challenging experience at Child Advocates.

"She wouldn't engage with me," Ann shared. "In fact, sometimes she was verbally abusive towards me." Ann struggled at first to build a relationship with her teen but understood this is common with foster teens that have been in and out of group homes without a reliable adult to trust. But then it happened. Ann's teen turned 18 and voluntarily chose to become a Non-Minor Dependent (NMD) of the Court, which allowed her to keep Ann as a CASA.

That's all Ann needed, the opportunity for more time to make a difference. She knows it may not be easy but she's committed to put in the time and effort it takes to build a trusting relationship with her teen. Ann is that kind of Advocate.

*It's now been months since she moved into her new placement. Being a mom has given her a sense of purpose and she's even keeping up with her schooling online. She still doesn't initiate contact but she responds every time Ann reaches out. Their relationship isn't where Ann would like it to be, yet, but it's headed in the right direction.*



***"This has been a humbling experience. You know this stuff is out there but until you meet the kids and see what their experience is like, that's when you really understand what they're going through."***

- Ann Towne, a committed CASA Volunteer & CASA Mentor

**Become an Advocate.** Visit [ChildAdvocatesSV.org/Volunteer](https://ChildAdvocatesSV.org/Volunteer)

# NEW & NEWSWORTHY

Celebrated Child Advocates staff at Inaugural Staff Service Awards Luncheon

The Court swore in 51 new, brave and compassionate individuals as CASAs

Contracted with Applied Survey Research to develop program outcomes

January

February

March

Converted our CASA training to 18hrs in-person and 12hrs online

Implemented a new database, CASA Manager, to increase efficiencies

Created remote advocacy guidelines for CASAs to advocate during COVID-19

## COMMUNITY SHOWS UP

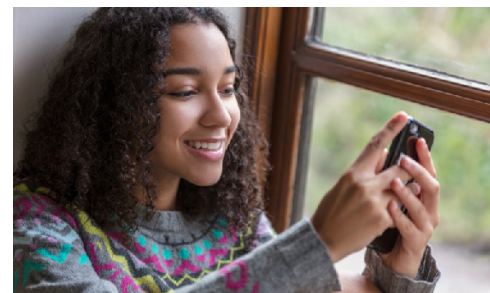
Being there for every foster child takes hard work, determination and, most importantly, collaboration. We're extremely grateful that our community continues to **SHOW UP** for foster kids.



CASA Village and holiday events made special by: individual donors, Verizon, Mix 106 and 94.5 Bay FM, Redfin, YMSL Rancho Chapter, Project Glimmer, SCU Delta Epsilon Mu, National Charity League, Family Giving Tree, Autumn Young and the Krishna Family.



We partnered with Grocery Outlet and Daylight Foods to deliver perishable and non-perishable food directly to our food insecure foster kids sheltering-in-place during the COVID-19 pandemic.



In partnership with iFoster we distributed FREE cell phones to foster teens and non-minor dependents so that they can remain connected while sheltering-in-place.

We believe these recent milestones, program improvements and events enhance our ability to **LIFT UP** our foster kids.

Pivoted to a virtual Court process to fulfill our Court responsibilities

Assessed the essential needs of our children and began delivering resources

Celebrated Santa Clara County's approval of nation's first basic income for former foster youth

*April*

*May*

Filled every staff opening to improve our Specialist to CASA Ratio to 1:20

Refreshed our brand and launched a new website

Recruited 71 community members to our first ever all virtual CASA training

# FOR FOSTER KIDS



Community members donated 10 brand new laptops allowing our foster youth to keep up with their distance learning while sheltering-in-place.



Renowned designer, Stacey Bendet, CEO and Creative Director of Alice and Olivia, graciously donated 100 masks, 100 designer tees and 100 custom ring pops for our foster youth.



FIRST 5 Santa Clara County donated Calming Kits for CASAs to use with their children during the pandemic. These kits are designed for children to ease emotional tensions created through stressful situations.

# Q&A

## WITH NICHOLAS AGUILAR

*\*Nicholas Aguilar is a CASA Specialist on our staff who supervises 20 CASA Volunteers, two mentors and has been trained to lead our LGBTQ+ Specialty Area.*

### Okay Nick, let's start with an easy one, what brought you to Child Advocates?

Being a CASA myself gave me the desire to provide exceptional service to the youth most in need in our community. I find that working with our fellow CASAs and through them, the youth, brings me much joy and intrinsic rewards. Being part of the LGBTQ+ community myself and understanding what our youth go through, I'm able to provide insights and resources for our CASAs to best serve our LGBTQ+ children and youth.

### Why does Child Advocates have a LGBTQ+ specialty area?

According to the 2016 Children Now Report Card, 74% of LGBTQ+ foster youth believe they experience prejudicial treatment by service providers because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. That's a very alarming statistic. Our LGBTQ+ youth need a CASA Volunteer that knows how to not only identify this unjust treatment and feel prepared to intervene with helpful tools and resources, but also offer non-judgmental support.

### How does your specialty area help CASA Volunteers become better advocates?

It all starts with familiarity and understanding. The resources and workshops we offer help our CASA Volunteers build capacity to better understand what a LGBTQ+ child may be going through. This understanding helps our CASA Volunteers build better relationships with their child, create a greater sense of awareness for potential issues that may arise and feel more prepared to advocate before the Court.

### Are there any parting thoughts you'd like to share with our readers?

The Human Rights Campaign Youth Report states that 26% of LGBTQ+ youth say their biggest problems are not feeling accepted by their family, trouble at school/bullying, and a fear to be out/open. 22% of non-LGBTQ+ youth say their biggest problems are trouble with class and exams. Having just one accepting adult in the life of a LGBTQ+ youth can help alleviate their stress and improve their overall well-being.



*\*We received the 2020 "Innovator" and the "You Are Welcome Here" Seals of Recognition for our LGBTQ+ work.*

## WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

### Gender Identity vs. Sexual Orientation vs. Gender Expression

**Gender Identity** - One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth. "I am a girl." "I am a man." "I don't consider myself a boy or girl." "I was born with male genitalia but I am a girl."

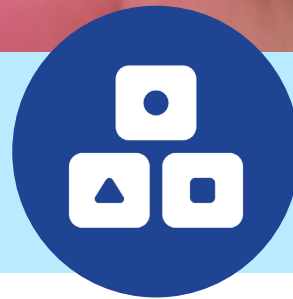
**Sexual Orientation** - An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to another person. "I am gay." "I am straight." "I am bisexual." "I am a transman."

**Gender Expression** - External appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine. "I dress in traditionally masculine ways."

**Everyone has a gender identity, sexual orientation and gender expression.  
Everyone should be accepted regardless of their identity, orientation or expression.**

# A GUIDE FOR **ZERO TO FIVE**

\*These age specific milestones are derived from *Child Development During The First 5 Years: A Guide For Court Appointed Special Advocates*, created for the Child Advocates of Silicon Valley 0-5 Specialty Area by Eleanor Willemssen, PhD.



## **INFANTS/0-12 MONTHS**

The first year is a time of exploration and discovery. Three trends stand out: being a passive consumer to being an active explorer; moving from simple (grasp a rattle) to complex play (pile blocks) including having a play partner; and increasing prioritization of people over things and inclusion of play with objects as a tool of relating. They begin to smile, giggle, babble and become responsive to games like peekaboo. A range of motor skills can be observed throughout the months: rolling over to the tummy, crawling, sitting up alone, scooting, and eventually pulling themselves up to a standing position.

## **ONE YEAR OLDS/12-24 MONTHS**

Year two is very eventful with language emerging or making requests with a small vocabulary, self-awareness increases, physical skills develop such as the use of a fork and spoon, and social relationships take off. They begin to walk around independently and enjoy exploring with their loved ones in close proximity. Toddlers' personalities are readily apparent in the second year; some toddlers are extroverts who love a stimulating environment while others may seem overwhelmed by too much stimulation and prefer sticking with one other playmate and a single activity that interests them.

## **TWO YEAR OLDS/24-36 MONTHS**

The third year is a time of expanding self-awareness and the emergence of rudimentary understanding that others also have feelings. Because of these understandings of self and other, we see more shared play often involving pretend play with roles. Interaction is facilitated by language which really takes off in the third year when most play and household routines are facilitated by conversation. They can apply and remove clothing at this time, and have the ability to follow simple instruction while depending on routine. Walking, running, climbing and jumping is perfected at this stage.

## **THREE, FOUR & FIVE YEAR OLDS/36-72 MONTHS**

The preschool child is a talkative child who likes to read and be read to, who experiments with their own physical skills, and who has confidence in being cared about. We know that our foster care population includes many children who do not have these basics yet. It is critical that they be in an environment (such as preschool) where they can have stories read, play sports like games, interact constructively with other children, and that they have the opportunity to be connected to caring, trusting adults.

# DON'T LET PANDEMIC EVOLVE INTO A CHILD ABUSE PANDEMIC

Closure of schools puts Bay Area's foster children at greater risk

The Mercury News  
May 5, 2020  
By: Ginni Ring,  
Renée Espinoza and  
Frederick J. Ferrer

Even in the best of times, child welfare systems in California are beleaguered, underfunded, and stressed. Last year, California had 83,000 children living in foster care—the largest number of any state.

**Times are tough enough for a child who has been removed from their family because of abuse or neglect. But COVID-19 has thrown all of this dysfunction into even more chaos.**

Child welfare departments are limiting in-person visits to only the most severe cases. Welfare check-ups are going down just when the potential for child abuse is rising. The court's mandated visits between biological families and children are on hold. And shutdowns at family courts means longer stays in foster care for children who have already experienced too much trauma.

The closing of schools is a disaster for abused children. Teachers are the primary reporters of suspicious bruises or behavior suggesting child abuse. But now those protective eyes and ears are not on children who may be seriously hurt at home. Hospitals are seeing more children injured by family members. Sadly, history shows us that child abuse increases with heightened family stress.

But there can be other "eyes and ears" on children: Court Appointed Special Advocates—CASAs—who play a powerful part in California's foster care system. In the Bay Area, CASA programs are a vital resource. Our CASAs are ordinary citizens who volunteer to be the "voice" of a child in foster care. They are recruited and well-trained by our CASA programs. Today, across the state, 9,000 volunteers are advocating for 14,000 children in foster care.

Supervised in their advocacy by professionals, CASA volunteers are effective advocates for children in court and in school. They are mentors and friends for children who have suffered greatly and who have lost trust in adults. CASAs help children get the medical and educational support they need.

COVID-19 has dramatically upended the landscape for CASA programs. CASAs can now only connect through text, phone, or Facetime. There are no outings to a park, a library, or an ice cream shop. Dependency courts are shut down or on limited schedules, so CASAs' critical court advocacy is on hold.

Yet, CASAs continue to achieve remarkable results for youth, from securing laptops or cell phones for distance learning and family communication, planning for ensuring college and career, to ensuring the foster home has the food and basics to provide for kids now home 24/7.

While facing drastic drops in income and canceled fundraising events, we're funding urgent needs such as groceries from CASA program budgets, while volunteers advocate for longer term solutions from the counties.

**The Bay Area's children need CASAs now more than ever.** And we need more CASAs. The CASA system in California needs more support.

Foster children are our children, and we must help them through this pandemic which impacts them so disproportionately. Even at the height of this pandemic, Bay Area CASA programs are recruiting volunteers and preparing to conduct training "virtually" while we practice social distancing. What better way to spend time at home than training to be a CASA?

**We cannot let this global health pandemic evolve into a child abuse**

We urge the State Legislature to enact emergency support for the 44 CASA programs helping 14,000 children. And we urge members of the community to step up and volunteer to help a child. We must not forget the abused, neglected children in our community. They need and deserve the advocacy that only a CASA can deliver.

*\*Ginni Ring is executive director of Alameda County CASA. Renee Espinoza is executive director of San Francisco CASA. Frederick J. Ferrer is CEO of Child Advocates of Silicon Valley.*

**Become an Advocate. Visit**  
[ChildAdvocatesSV.org/Volunteer](https://ChildAdvocatesSV.org/Volunteer)



YOU CAN **DOUBLE YOUR**  
**GIFT TODAY\***

**STAND UP** with our generous supporter the Sobrato Family Foundation in giving hope to our foster kids.

*\* Match only applies to new or increased gifts received by June 30th, 2020.*

**Give the Gift of Hope.** Visit [ChildAdvocatesSV.org/Donate](http://ChildAdvocatesSV.org/Donate)

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Listed below are some of our recent government, corporate and community partners whose compassion and generosity enables us to **LIFT UP** our foster children.





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## **DONATE**

Become an Advocate Donor by making a financial gift.



Court Appointed Special Advocates  
FOR CHILDREN

[CHILDADVOCATESSV.ORG](http://CHILDADVOCATESSV.ORG)

