

LIFT UP

THE CHILD ADVOCATES OF SILICON VALLEY MAGAZINE

2021
WINTER

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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.

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OVERWHELMED WITH GRATITUDE

Civil and political unrest, rising COVID cases, wildfires, a fluttering economy - needless to say, the last few months have presented us with unrelenting and complicated challenges. Nevertheless, the Silicon Valley community continues to prioritize the health and well-being of its foster children, and for that, I am overwhelmed with gratitude.

In the last few months, over 200 community members participated in our #GivingTuesday and holiday fundraising campaigns. Over 175 community members have become Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteers. New partnerships were made with community organizations, like the Red Ladder Theatre Company and the San Jose Public Library (book delivery pictured right), to provide our kids with enrichment activities. And with the support of our partners and CASA Volunteers, every foster child we serve - over 500 children and youth - received a large bag filled with holiday gifts from us and their CASA.



During a time of uncertainty and unrest, we continue to **SHOW UP** for our foster children and youth. Our staff and CASA Volunteers have continued to attend Court hearings remotely and be a voice to the Court on behalf of their child/youth.

Our ability to provide our foster kids with the nurturing support, effective advocacy and resources, is only made possible by the hard work of our staff, the commitment of our CASA Volunteers and the support we receive from donors, private foundations, corporations, government partners and community organizations.

Together we **STAND UP** for our foster children.

As we embark on 2021, our attention is focused on four emerging priorities:

- Ensuring the outcomes of the children we serve are on par and/or better than that of their peers. We are doing this by enhancing our CASA program with tools and training so that our CASA Volunteers are better equipped to report the progress of our children. You can learn more about this work on page 7.
- Implementing tools to better communicate with our cadre of CASA Volunteers and that also allows them to better interact with one another; our goal is to build a vibrant community for and with our CASAs.
- Re-committing to our values as an organization and receiving training to ensure that our work is rooted in diversity, equity and inclusion principles. This will influence our thinking as we begin a year long strategic planning process.
- Serving all of our children. Currently on our waitlist, 107 children are placed out of Santa Clara County and 40 children require a Spanish speaking CASA. It is imperative that we create new strategies to ensure these children receive the advocacy they deserve.
- Continuing to develop partnerships with community organizations that benefit our foster kids. Stay tuned for our announcements of some exciting new partners we will be highlighting this Spring.

Our goals are ambitious, but they have to be. If we can do better, then we must.

I will always be grateful for the unwavering support that has been demonstrated for our foster children. With the way our community responded this past fall and winter, I am confident that we can continue to **LIFT UP** every foster kid in Silicon Valley.

DOING WHATEVER IT TAKES TO **STAND UP**

Trisha's Advocacy Story

After hearing her friend's experience as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteer, Trisha Garrett decided to become a CASA with Child Advocates of Silicon Valley. Her advocacy journey began in the spring of 2019.

Shortly into Trisha's first assignment, Dorothy, her assigned CASA Specialist, saw the passion that Trisha brought to her advocacy and asked her if she was willing to take on a second assignment, Joseph, a foster teen with nonverbal cognitive challenges. Trisha, unreluctantly, said yes.

"Once I say yes and I'm committed, I'm committed," said Trisha, "I take it very seriously when I'm supposed to be an Advocate for a child, especially a child that has special needs."

Unlike her first assignment, Joseph required more support; his Child and Family Team (CFT) also included San Andreas Regional Center (SARC) professionals. Knowing this case would challenge her, Trisha adjusted her approach as a CASA. She connected with Joseph's psychologist and his team of caregivers to figure out how to best connect and support Joseph.

Trisha began her advocacy by **SHOWING UP**. From her previous CASA experience, she knew that establishing herself as a constant figure would aid her efforts to build a rapport with the youth. Because Joseph was nonverbal, she had to learn how to best communicate and interact with him and found that he responded well to physical touch and enjoyed going on walks.

"You don't get the immediate feedback with a child with severe special needs. I had to be open to what was happening in the moment. I might visit him wanting to read a book and do something that I think would be a cool thing to do but it might not work," recalled Trisha, "Each time I had to be open to where he was at for the day and what would work for him and our time together."

SERVING THE MOST VULNERABLE

At Child Advocates of Silicon Valley, we serve foster children aged birth to 21 years old who are placed in the Santa Clara County Dependency Court System (commonly referred to as foster care) for having experience abuse, neglect and/or abandonment.

At any given time, there are up to 1,000 children in the Santa Clara County Dependency Court System.

As she built a rapport with Joseph, Trisha made it a point to **STAND UP** for him in Court. Based on her personal experience working with medical professionals and caregivers, Trisha firmly believed that having a figure present can affect how someone receives care. During Court hearings, if anyone had questions about Joseph, she wanted to be there to speak on his behalf and share relevant information.

"It makes a difference when someone shows up for you. I did my best to show up for every court appearance or a call because it makes a difference," Trisha stated.

Over 18 months into her assignment, Joseph turned 18-years old and had a Court hearing to determine if he would remain in the Dependency Court System. Trisha advocated for him to remain in the system as a non-minor dependent (NMD) to extend certain services, including keeping her as his assigned CASA. Unfortunately, the criteria for NMD status stipulates that the youth must currently be employed or enrolled in school/vocational training. Joseph did not meet this criteria so the Court was unable to grant Joseph NMD status. Although the Court's ruling didn't allow for Trisha to remain as Joseph's CASA, she decided she would continue to be present in Joseph's life.

"As part of his team, Trisha's advocacy has impacted the life and future of a child in foster care in significant and life enhancing ways," said Dorothy. "Her consistent support, concern and efforts to help ensure her youth's needs were acknowledged and met, even in the face of challenges, are the qualities that make her a truly dedicated and amazing Advocate."

Disclaimer: The story is based on Trisha Garrett's experience as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteer. Some details about the foster youth she served have been altered in an effort to keep the youth's identity anonymous.



“

My life has been enriched through this advocacy journey and being a CASA tapped into a part of my heart that I didn't know was available to share love. Having the support of the social worker, Dorothy and the attorney really helped. It's really nice to have a group that's there to support and advocate for the child's best interest. Having that strong support system, makes it easier to be an Advocate for a child.



400
Active
Advocates



510
Foster children
with an
Advocate



255
Foster children
waiting for an
Advocate

**These stats are as of January 2021.*

COMMUNITY SHOWS UP

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



Since the summer, we've added 175+ CASA Volunteers! 200+ donors participated in our fall and winter fundraising campaigns. And four new members joined our Board: Tony Rangel, Jeannette Guinn, Wayne Smith and Leslie Rodriguez.



From books to school supplies, theatre lessons and back-to-school masks, our partners came through for our kids. Thanks to Mix 106.5, 94.5 Bay FM, San Jose Public Library, Bookelicious, Junior League of San Jose, Red Ladder Theatre Company and Ticket to Dream.

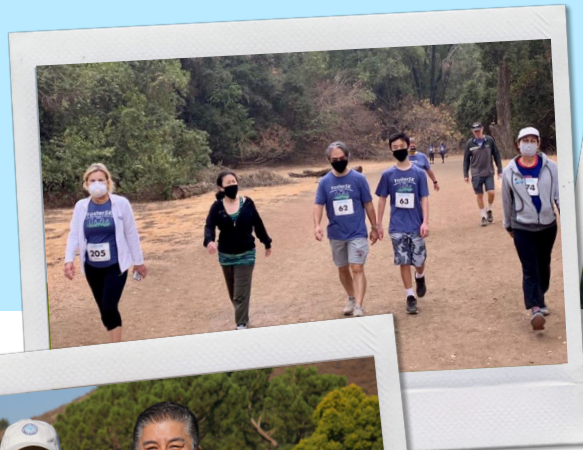




HOLIDAY CHEER

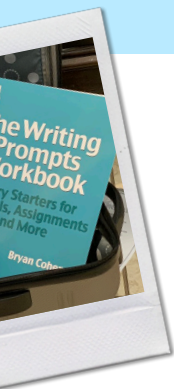


With the help of our CASAs we delivered a holiday gift bag to every kid we serve! We even met with Santa virtually. Thanks to all of the generous toy drive donors that made it possible: Alpha Media, Family Giving Tree, St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, Turning Wheels for Kids, Atlas Trillo, Teddy's for Tots and countless individual donors.



EVENTS

Our Golf "FORE" Foster Kids event and virtual auction was a hole-in-one. We presented Michael O'Leary with the 2020 "Skip" Shaw Inspiration Award for his dedication to helping foster kids. CASAs and children participated in a Virtual PRIDE Celebration 5K and 398 community members participated virtually in the 4th Annual Foster5K!



SERVING KIDS MORE MEANINGFULLY

Strengthening the Role of a CASA

Claims are made that children with a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteer receive more educational and health services; are more likely to find a safe, permanent home; perform better in school; and spend less time in foster care than children without a CASA Volunteer. That's the power of having a caring adult.

There are 44 separate CASA organizations in California and we all belong to an umbrella organization, California CASA (CAL CASA). This statewide organization is a clearinghouse for all of the CASA organizations and takes on challenges that are faced by all of us. One such challenge has been that there is usually only anecdotal evidence to back up claims made by CASA organizations about the positive impact of a CASA. CAL CASA initiated a statewide Outcomes Committee last year to look at what specific data is collected and how we might bolster our empirical evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of the CASA model. Our CEO, Frederick Ferrer, serves on this committee and they're going to release their findings and work this Spring. We are grateful to our colleagues at CASA LA who have spearheaded this work and have gathered all the tools and drafted logic models for all the different age groups we serve.

At Child Advocates of Silicon Valley, we want to ensure every foster child receives all the possible benefits they can and that their outcomes are on par and/or better than that of their peers. We are doing this by enhancing our CASA program with tools and training that will help our CASA Volunteers with submitting Court reports with enhanced insights about the child they serve. That is why, in the spring of 2020, we contracted with Applied Survey Research (ASR), a social research organization dedicated to helping agencies measure and improve the impact of their services.

Working with ASR, we developed an agency-wide logic model that will act as the blueprint for developing and measuring agency-wide outcomes and impact. This work includes the development of Advocacy Plans that measure a child's well-being and development, and informs and records the services and resources provided to every child throughout their service history, from CASA assignment to Court case closure. ASR is currently working with our staff to finalize the Advocacy Plans and develop training for CASA Volunteers, as we hope to go live with them this spring.

Our Advocacy Plans will provide the data we need to continuously improve the services we provide our foster children. They will also help us measure success and identify challenges so that we can improve our program design and enhance our CASA training.

These plans are intended to strengthen the most important aspects of the role of a CASA: building a relationship with the youth, advocating for them in the system and voicing their concerns to the Court. We believe these plans will deepen a CASAs understanding of the child they serve, create a roadmap for ensuring their child receives the right services and enhance the insights reported to the Court.





TAILORING PLANS FOR EVERY CHILD'S NEEDS

HOW IT WORKS

Advocacy Plan

After assignment, as the CASA gets to know the child, they will complete a series of surveys and questionnaires (S&Qs) to learn about the child's current well-being. This will help the CASA determine what activities, resources and services will best support the child. In preparation for Court hearings, every 6 months, the CASA will review the S&Qs and adjust the plan as needed. The S&Qs will lastly be reviewed as the case is closed. Throughout the case, the CASA will also report their experiences with the child in the Narrative section of the plan.

Surveys & Questionnaires

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) Survey (all ages)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Kaiser's Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, identified 10 ACE measures strongly associated with increased health and social risks. The responses to these questions will help the CASA understand how the child's past may negatively impact them, with planning supportive enrichment activities during visits and with advocating for services.

Ages & Stages Questionnaire-3 (ASQ-3) & Ages & Stages Questionnaire-SE (ASQ-SE) (ages 0-5)

The Ages & Stages Questionnaire is used to measure the stage of child development (ASQ-3) as well as social emotional stage (ASQ-SE) for children 0-5 years of age. Each questionnaire measures developmental stages that will then allow the CASA to better plan referrals or activities/experiences they will do during their visits.

Measures of Well-being (all ages 6+)

This component measures a child's well-being in the following domains: critical thinking; self-regulation; agency; resiliency/hope. Again, looking at where a young person might be in any of these areas will help the CASA seek relevant resources and activities.

Narrative

The CASA will document their experiences with their assigned child or youth. This is similar to our current Court reports, but now they will be entered ongoingly by the CASA.

Q&A

WITH JESSICA ALVAREZ

CHILD ADVOCATES OF SILICON VALLEY CASA SPECIALIST

As a CASA Specialist, Jessica Alvarez supervises 25 CASA Volunteers, 7 CASA mentors and has been trained to lead our Reproductive Health/ Teen Parent program area. As a former foster youth who had a CASA Volunteer while navigating the system, Jessica understands first hand and believes in the impact of a CASA.

Hi Jessica. We appreciate your willingness to share your story. Can you please start by sharing your experience as a foster youth?

Yeah, when I was nine, my mom was arrested for being under the influence of drugs. The police officers took my mom in one car and me and my four siblings in another. We were all taken to a children's shelter. Upon arrival, we were split up by age and then sent to separate foster homes. During my life as a foster youth, I moved 13 times, attended over 23 different schools and survived abuse. I, and my siblings, remained in the system until we aged out.

Thank you for sharing, we can only imagine how challenging that time was for you and your siblings. At what point did you first encounter Child Advocates?

When I was 16, I became a teen parent and received a letter from Child Advocates telling me I had a CASA Volunteer, Ma. After ignoring the letter, I received a phone call from Ma where she introduced herself, her role and asked me if I was willing to let her be my Advocate. I had no interest in another professional in my life that I had to meet with so I declined.

But Ma wouldn't take no for an answer. I eventually agreed to have lunch with her and we hit it off. Unlike most professionals during a visit, she wasn't checking her watch. Ma genuinely cared.

CASA Volunteers are persistent, that's what makes them such great Advocates. Once you accepted Ma as your CASA, what kind of support did you receive from her?

One of the things I wanted to do for myself was graduate high school and Ma made sure I succeeded. From giving me rides to school, providing resources and tons of tutoring support with my homework, When the big day finally came, she helped me prepare my graduation speech and sat proudly in the audience with

my two children, boyfriend and other support team members. It was a very unforgettable moment.

After graduating, Ma recommended I apply to be a Teen Mom Mentor for other youth serviced by Child Advocates of Silicon Valley. We went through the job application process together and even did mock interviews. After I received the job, we went shopping for work clothes. I was excited and couldn't wait to get dressed up and ready for work. I always imagined being able to put on nylons.

That's awesome. It sounds as though Ma was a really great influence. In what other ways did Ma impact your life?

Ma made me aware of, and prepped me, for the real world. She taught me basic life skills like etiquette, parenting and exploring new places and new things. She even taught me how to drive. I still remember her holding on tight to the bar on the passenger side of the seat, but I knew what I was doing.

Although at times I didn't want to hear it, throughout the years, Ma taught me patience, love and kindness. She's a grandma to my children. Ma has often told me that I have taught her more than she could ever teach me.

Again, Jessica, thank you for sharing your story with our readers. Any last words?

After 23 years of employment with Child Advocates, I firmly believe in our mission. I understand first hand the impact of having a caring adult support you through a difficult time. Currently, as the lead of our Reproductive Health/ Teen Parent program area, I support our CASAs to build a connection with our youth and create a safe space to discuss reproductive health. As a teen parent, Ma helped me connect to resources. My goal is to ensure that every youth receives the same support I had and knows that there are services and resources for them where they can feel safe.



JESSICA'S MUST LIST

MUST WATCH

Love & Basketball. I love this movie! It takes you through the relationship journey of two young athletes and how they mature on and off the court. I recommend it to everyone.

MUST READ

The Shack by William Paul Young. The novel shares a father's transformative and spiritual journey. I recommend reading the book but there's a movie if reading isn't your thing.

MUST TRY

Dance like nobody's watching. It's free, fun and very liberating. Plus, who cares what people think, life's too short for that.

MUST LISTEN TO

Any R&B soul music. It doesn't matter what mood I'm in, I can listen to R&B soul music anytime, anywhere.

UPCOMING EVENTS



5TH ANNUAL FOSTER5K

April 25, 2021

Register
Foster5K.org

This year's benefit run/walk will be virtual. Walk or run ANYWHERE at ANYTIME to support our foster kids. Proceeds from the event benefit Child Advocates of Silicon Valley. Register now!



SAVE THE DATE!

CHILD ADVOCATES OF SILICON VALLEY VIRTUAL SPRING EVENT

May 22, 2021

For more information
development@childadvocatessv.org

Due to the pandemic, our annual GALA will be a virtual event this year. More details will be available soon. Save the date and join us this year to support our foster kids!



If you have any questions or are interested in sponsoring our upcoming events, please contact the Child Advocates of Silicon Valley Development Department at development@childadvocatessv.org.



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VOLUNTEER

Become a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for a foster child.

DONATE

Become an Advocate Donor by making a financial gift*.

*90 cents of every dollar donated goes to services that benefit our foster youth.

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CASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
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