

LIFT UP

THE CHILD ADVOCATES OF SILICON VALLEY MAGAZINE
+ FY 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

2021 FALL

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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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The list represents the full roster of board members during FY21.

Building Toward Continued Success

In the 35 year history of this agency, we don't believe we've ever experienced one as challenging as this past year. Still, we found ways to appear remotely in Court every day while supporting our Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteers' relationships and their advocacy for our foster youth. As we continued to SHOW UP for foster children this year, it became readily apparent to us that our plans for serving more children more meaningfully must succeed.

To ensure success, this past year we enhanced our CASA Program by:

- Identifying and dedicating resources to ten specialty areas. Each specialty area has a dedicated CASA Specialist responsible for offering activities and resources, identifying community resources to provide support for our CASAs who face challenging situations.
- Creating Advocacy Plans for every child we serve. Advocacy Plans guide our CASAs as to how best to connect and inform and record the services provided to every child throughout their time with Child Advocates. They act as the roadmap for us so we can help our children heal from the trauma they've experienced.
- Establishing partnerships with local, community organizations who have agreed to offer free resources, programming and/or free admission to foster youth. The offerings from these partners are instrumental in allowing CASAs to share these great experiences throughout the year with their youth.
- Implementing Workplace, an online collaborative software tool developed by Facebook, that we use to build community and share information with all of our CASA Volunteers. Also CASA Connect, an online portal system allowing CASAs to add their data and court report materials directly into the child's file.

- Undergoing extensive diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) training to ensure our agency and program practices are established with DEI principles in mind. An overwhelming majority of the children we serve are children of color. To serve these children more meaningfully, it is imperative that our program delivery and agency operations are built on DEI principles.

The program enhancements we made, position us to better serve our children. In addition to enhancing our program, this past year we:

- Recruited more CASA Volunteers than ever before (over 230!).
- Increased the diversity of our CASA Volunteers in both ethnicity and age (22 are LGBTQ+ and the majority are young adults in their 20s and 30s).

This year, we are beginning the planning process for our next strategic plan, a plan which will build on all our successes. As we plan for future years, we are committed to being there for foster children, ensuring that we provide them with the nurturing support and resources needed to thrive. With your continued support, we will be better positioned to **SHOW UP, STAND UP** and **LIFT UP** our foster children.



Frederick J. Ferrer
CEO



Cassio Conceicao
Board Chair FY21

Serving the Most Vulnerable



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

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

677

active Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) in FY 2021.

849

foster children were assigned a CASA Volunteer.

65,930

volunteer hours were contributed by CASAs.

\$2M

estimated value of volunteer hours.



Helping Children Heal

Using Evidence-Based Strategies to Reduce the Effects of Trauma

Helping foster children heal from the trauma they've experienced is a complex task but one we're committed to at Child Advocates of Silicon Valley. It is vital that we understand healthy child development, the effects of trauma from abuse and design a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program that equips our volunteers with the support and resources needed to help our children thrive.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention roughly half of all foster children experience four or more ACEs. According to California Surgeon General, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, as stated in the Roadmap for Resilience Report, "An individual with four or more ACEs is 4.7 times as likely to experience depression and 10.2 times as likely to become dependent on substances; experiencing any ACEs increases the risk of homelessness by two to four times."

This is nothing new, the trauma a foster child endures from ACEs can have lasting effects. We've known this. That is why for 35 years, Child Advocates of Silicon Valley has been helping foster children reduce these effects with an intervention that works, pairing foster children with a CASA Volunteer. Someone who serves as a mentor, advocates for the child in the foster care system and reports their best interests directly to the Court. And the results have been remarkable.

Now, science helps explain why our intervention works.

Trauma is Treatable

According to ACEs Aware, an initiative led by the Office of the California Surgeon General, a consensus of scientific evidence demonstrates that high doses of cumulative adversity experienced during critical and sensitive periods of early life development – without the buffering protections of trusted, nurturing caregivers and safe, stable environments – can lead to long-term disruptions in brain development and immune, hormonal, and metabolic systems, acting through genetic regulatory mechanisms. This condition is now known as the toxic stress response.

Through its research, ACEs Aware has developed a model of evidence-based strategies for toxic stress regulation. If a child can experience a high enough dose over a long enough period of time, in the following seven areas, they can regulate the effects of this toxic stress. The areas are: supportive relationships; quality sleep; balanced nutrition; physical activity; mindfulness practices; access to nature; and mental health care.

At our Virtual CASA Summit last spring, Dr. Rachel Gilgoff, a board-certified General Pediatrician and Child Abuse Pediatrician, described how the ACEs Aware model works and demonstrated how CASAs can implement its evidence-based strategies when working with the foster children we serve.

According to the research evidence, Dr. Gilgoff explained, **"Toxic stress is treatable. We have tools and strategies to help people, kids and adults, heal their toxic stress."** Dr. Gilgoff's review of the research confirmed that the enhancements we've been making to our CASA Program are right in line with these evidence-based strategies.

ACES AWARE MODEL



Employing evidence-base strategies for toxic stress regulation can help children reduce stress and build resilience. This rendering was reproduced from the ACEs Aware model.

Relationships Equipped to Succeed

"It just takes one stable relationship with a caring adult to help reverse the negative impacts on a child who's experienced abuse and neglect," states California Surgeon General, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris.

Child Advocates agrees with the Surgeon General and we also believe that the caring adult must be trained, supported and equipped to succeed when helping a child reverse those negative impacts.

It all begins with recruiting the best people to be CASAs; candidates that are willing to dedicate their time and energy to advocate for a child or youth in the foster care system, that also represent the cultures and backgrounds that our foster kids can identify with. Next is high quality training. Over the past year and a half we have refined our CASA pre-service training. In addition to learning about Court proceedings and how the foster system works in Santa Clara County, our curriculum also covers child development best practices, diversity, equity and inclusion practices and insight into the physical, mental and emotional effects of trauma. We want our CASA Volunteers to truly learn what a child is going through so that they can develop a welcoming relationship built on genuine understanding and trust. After training, every CASA Volunteer is paired with a CASA Supervisor, someone they can turn to with questions, for expertise, support and guidance throughout their advocacy journey.

Trained and supported, CASA Volunteers are tasked with starting their advocacy by getting to know the child they're serving. All of our children have experienced trauma but not all of their trauma is the same nor is the toxic stress they're coping with. It is vital that our CASA Volunteers get to know their child so that we can help them create an Advocacy Plan tailored to the child they're serving.

Advocacy Plans - added to our CASA Program earlier this year - give the CASAs insight into a child's well-being and development, and informs and records the services and resources provided to every child throughout their time with Child Advocates, from CASA Volunteer assignment to Court case closure. This is done by completing a series of surveys and questionnaires - one of which is an ACEs survey - at the start of their relationship and every six months thereafter. These plans are intended to strengthen the most important aspects of the role of a CASA Volunteer: building a trusting relationship with the youth, knowing what resources to advocate for within the system and voicing the child's genuine needs and wants to the Court. They also act as the roadmap for helping a child heal from the trauma they've experienced.

Once a CASA Volunteer has a thorough understanding of the child they're serving - the trauma they've experienced, their assets and opportunities for growth, and the type of support and resources they require - they can turn to our ACE's Aware model for guidance on what to do with their child or youth. Child Advocates also has identified and dedicated resources to specialty areas that enhance our CASA's support when there is a particular challenge facing the child. Each specialty area has a dedicated CASA Specialist responsible for offering activities and resources, identifying community resources and tracking child outcomes. Our specialty areas are instrumental in equipping CASA Volunteers with the knowledge and resources required to help children overcome the effects of having experienced trauma.



MENTOR

CASAs build a one-to-one trusted relationship with their foster child and consistently **SHOW UP** by planning weekly in-person visits and activities.



ADVOCATE

CASAs **STAND UP** for their foster child within the system to ensure they receive the services and resources they're entitled to and would benefit from.



VOICE

CASAs attend court hearings and submit written reports directly to the Court to assist the judge in making decisions that will **LIFT UP** the child.



How It All Works

As the ACES Aware model demonstrates, you can reduce toxic stress by increasing exposure and activities in the following seven areas: supportive relationships; quality sleep; balanced nutrition; physical activity; mindfulness practices; access to nature; and mental health care. By introducing a CASA Volunteer into a foster child’s life, we are offering that child a supportive relationship that can increase access to activities that fall within these seven areas. At Child Advocates, we want our children and their CASA Volunteers to have continual access to these activities. We believe dosage and duration are key in helping children heal; the quality of the activities matters, as does frequent exposure to all the activities. That is why we have established, what we call, ACEs Aware partnerships - partnerships with local, community organizations that have agreed to offer free resources, programming and/or free admission to the children we serve. A majority of the offerings from these partners fall under the seven areas of the ACEs Aware model.

Some examples: to get youth outside and into nature, we have partnered with Happy Hollow Park and Zoo, Jasper Ridge Farms and the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority. To encourage nutrition and physical activity, we have a partnership with the YMCA and the Children’s Discovery Museum. For mental health care, we have a partnership with Red Ladder Theatre Company to help youth explore creativity, decision making and expression through the theatre arts. Finally, San Jose Public Library and FIRST 5 of Santa Clara County have partnered with us to secure resources for our youngest children and to support their healthy development. Child Advocates is committed to establishing more partnerships to increase access to more activities and resources that fall under the ACEs Aware model.

By providing opportunities for our foster youth to build a healthy relationship with their CASA, and providing foster youth with these resources and experiences, we are helping address trauma and mitigating the effects of toxic stress. Foster kids are everyone’s children, and when our entire community - volunteers, donors, funders and partner organizations - come together, our children heal. Together we can truly **LIFT UP** every foster child.

The following images were provided to us by our partners to depict the activities our foster children will enjoy.



CHILDREN'S DISCOVERY MUSEUM
“Serving children in the community, including those most vulnerable, has been the museum’s priority. We are thrilled to provide an enriching environment where children in foster care can play, explore and learn while healing from toxic stress. “

Marilee Jennings
Executive Director of Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose

HAPPY HOLLOW PARK AND ZOO
“There is so much to experience at Happy Hollow. I recently got to spend 3 hours at the zoo with the kid I serve. There are many things at the park that the children we serve have never experienced before, so it is very enriching. I am so grateful for my complimentary membership!”

Karen A. Krall
Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteer



SANTA CLARA VALLEY OPEN SPACE AUTHORITY
“My youth and I attended the Open Space Series event earlier this summer. They provided a safe and fun learning opportunity for us in attendance. I appreciate the efforts of everyone involved in providing such an enriching and delightful day. We both had a marvelous time creating memories outdoors!”

Leslie Anido
Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteer

RED LADDER THEATRE COMPANY
“Our missions align tremendously with one another. Child Advocates exists to STAND UP for foster youth while we exist to voice the stories that go untold in our community. Together we provide opportunities that LIFT UP foster children by tapping into their own creativity and helping them imagine different possibilities for themselves.”

Karen Altree Piemme
Director of Red Ladder Theatre Company



Learning to LIFT UP Your Voice

Adults often say, “You’re too young to understand.” Although this is true in most cases, at Child Advocates of Silicon Valley, we know that trauma affects youth and children regardless of their understanding.

Lily, a 12-year old foster youth, was placed into protective custody after reporting problems at home to a trusting adult. Although she reached out for support, Lily never expected that her confiding in someone would result in her entering foster care. She couldn’t understand why she was being removed from her home for having done the right thing.

“The first time I met Lily I could feel the reservation,” said Debbie Locke, Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteer. “Even though it was for her own safety, she genuinely believed adults caused her removal from her family. That’s devastating for a child to go through.”

As a middle school teacher, Debbie has firsthand experience working with youth, including students in foster care. She understands the vulnerability all foster children face due to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and the negative impact those ACEs can have on their future outcomes.

After being sworn-in as a CASA Volunteer during the pandemic, Debbie knew it was critical to start her relationship with Lily by building trust. Debbie did this by continually **SHOWING UP**, planning virtual visits and creative, enriching activities for them to do together. Debbie and Lily began to take ‘virtual field trips’ visiting Disneyland Paris and other locations around the world. All of the activities were strategically planned by Debbie to engage Lily and to help her develop agency, the ability to voice her needs and wants.

“I let her talk. It’s important to listen to what a child is telling you and not insert your words,” said Debbie. “Although specific opportunities may be a positive benefit for Lily, I had to allow her to make that decision and let her voice be heard.”

Slowly, the youth started to open up to her CASA. It started with small conversations about things the youth saw. As they built a rapport, Lily began to open up about experiences and personal struggles. In one instance, with Debbie’s guidance, Lily was able to communicate academic concerns to her teacher; something Lily couldn’t confidently do when she first entered foster care.

Additionally, Lily would discuss her feelings about returning home. As her voice in Court, Debbie made it a point to **STAND UP** for Lily during hearings. She advocated for Lily’s interest to return to her mother’s custody and ensured the Court that she would support Lily and her mother towards a successful reunification, which they have now accomplished.

“It turned out well,” said Debbie. “Their home, living conditions and their ability to communicate as a family is so much better now than it was before. Lily is very happy to be home.”

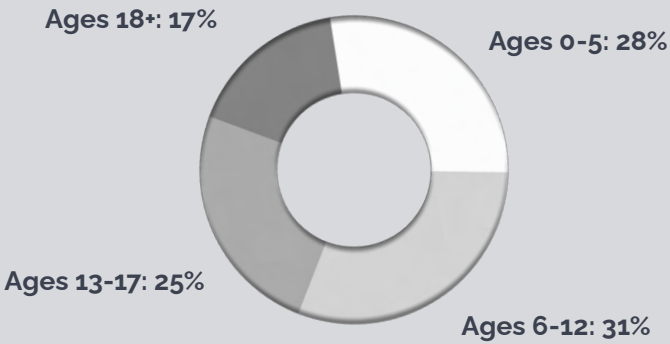
After supporting Lily’ successful reunification, Debbie continued to **SHOW UP** for Lily by planning a nursery trip. While painting succulent pots, the pair spoke openly about Lily’s accomplishments. With Debbie’s nurturing support, Lily was able to take a traumatic situation she didn’t quite understand, learn from it and develop the ability to speak up for her own well-being.

“As a CASA, not only are you helping this one child, you’re helping yourself. You start to see yourself in a way you never experienced before,” said Debbie. “You’re able to help someone become so much more than they could ever imagine themselves to be, and that’s fulfilling.”

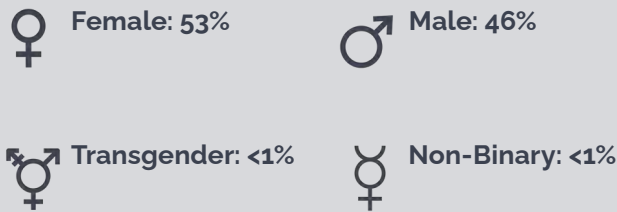
Disclaimer: The story is based on Debbie Locke’s experience as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteer. Some details about the foster youth she served have been altered in an effort to keep the youth’s identity anonymous.

FY 2021 BY THE NUMBERS

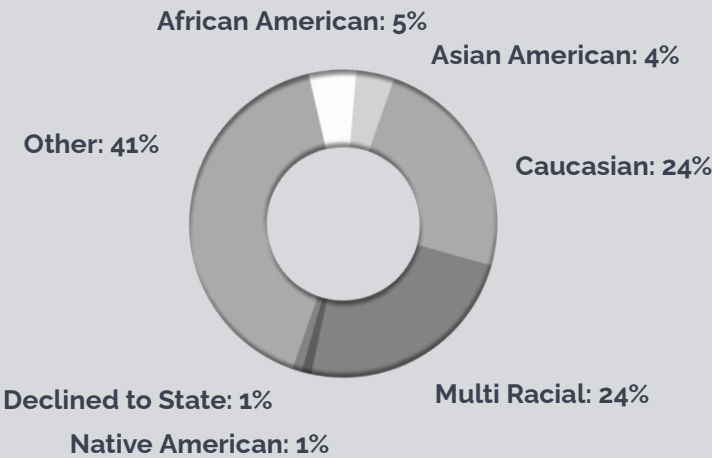
Age of Children Served



Gender of Children Served



Race of Children Served



60% of youth served are Hispanic.



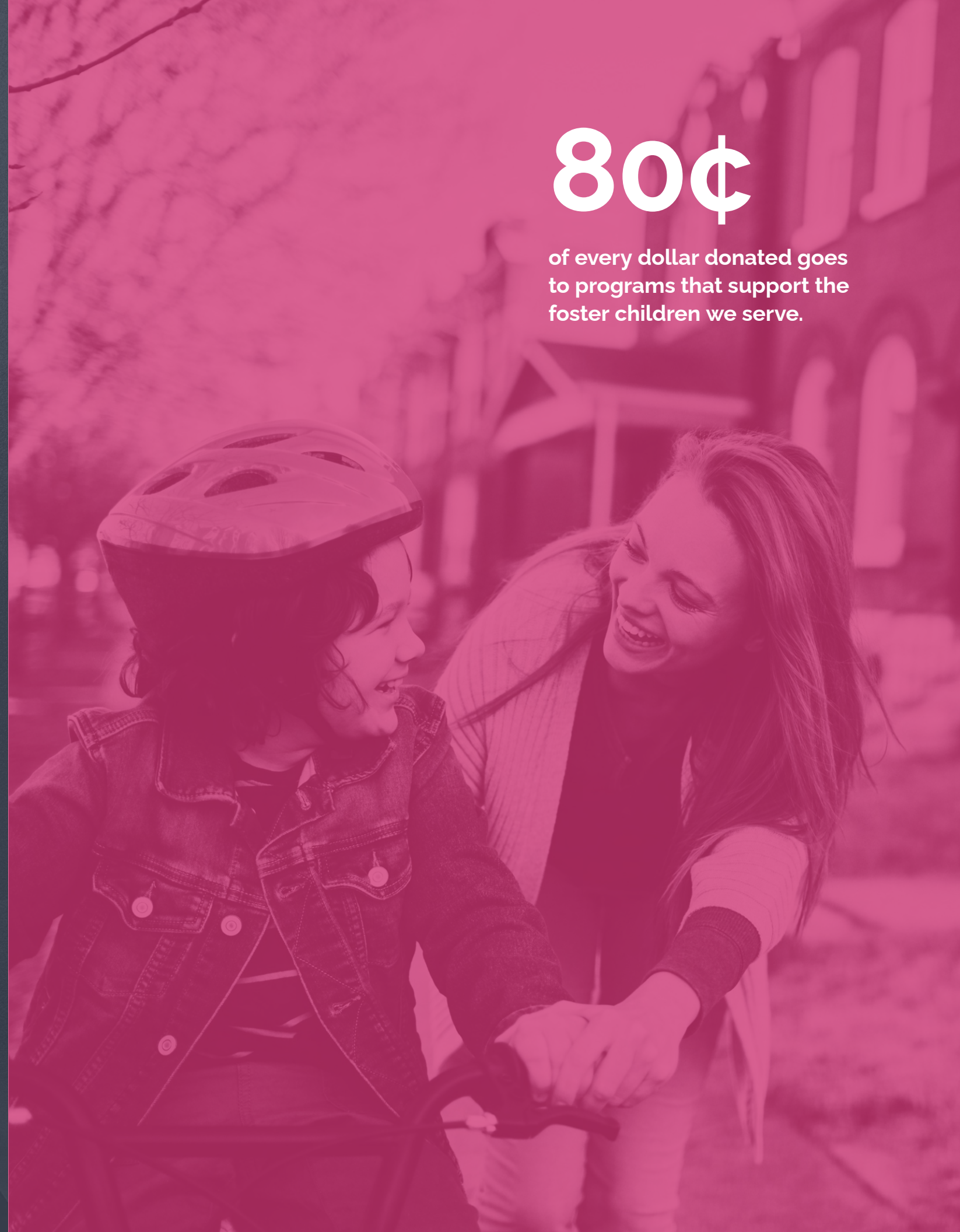
With Gratitude to Our Supporters



Serving our foster youth and children is only made possible by the compassion and generosity of our funders and donors. We are grateful to the many private foundations, corporations, government partners and community members who trust us with their contribution to invest in the future of our community's most vulnerable children.

80¢

of every dollar donated goes to programs that support the foster children we serve.



Financial Activities

Revenue

Gifts & Contributions	\$1,689,036
Special Events	\$93,836
Government Funding	\$2,109,149
Net Investment Income	\$616,082
Total Revenue	\$4,508,103

Expenses

Program	\$2,738,666
Management & General	\$344,624
Fundraising	\$344,976
Total Expenses	\$3,428,266

Financial Position

Assets

Current Assets	\$2,456,043
Property & Equipment	\$74,425
Other Assets	\$3,157,015
Total Assets	\$5,687,483

Liabilities & Net Assets

Current Liabilities	\$922,673
Net Assets	\$4,764,810
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$5,687,483

Our Donors

The following listing represents the immense community support we receive to **LIFT UP** the foster children we serve.

This list reflects donors who generously gave from July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021. If you find an error, please accept our apologies and contact us at **development@childadvocatessv.org** so we can correct our records.



Diamond
\$100,000+

- County of Santa Clara
- California Governor's Office of Emergency Services
- FIRST 5 Santa Clara County
- Judicial Council of California
- Sobrato Family Foundation

Platinum
\$25,000 - \$99,999

- Children's Advocacy Centers of California - Calico Center
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for a foster child.



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“It just takes one stable relationship with a caring adult to help reverse the negative impacts on a child who’s experienced abuse and neglect.”

**Dr. Nadine Burke Harris
California Surgeon General**



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