

LIFT UP

THE CHILD ADVOCATES OF SILICON VALLEY MAGAZINE

2022 SPRING

**Message
from the CEO**

Page 2

**Sabrina's
Advocacy Journey**

Page 7

**Community
SHOWS UP**

Page 13



SHOW UP. STAND UP. LIFT UP. FOR FOSTER YOUTH

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 as of February 2022.

CEO MESSAGE

Fostering Success for Teens & Young Adults

Message from the CEO: Frederick J. Ferrer

There are currently over 900 children and youth in the Santa Clara County Dependency System. 140 of these youth are teens. When you include non-minor dependents (18-21 year olds), that number climbs to nearly 250.

It is common to focus on babies, toddlers and school aged children when thinking of children in foster care, especially because of their age and vulnerability. But teens and young adults tend to be in the system much longer and can be easily forgotten but they shouldn't be.

When teens experience trauma and get derailed from a healthy development path, there is an even greater need for adults to step up, understand the trauma and its effects and then take concrete steps to support the teenager. Remember the teen years are when we form our identity, so we all need support to develop a healthy, positive and loving identity.

We rely on our Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteers to provide foster teens and young adults with the nurturing support they need to cope with the effects of having experienced trauma. As an agency, it is imperative that we train and equip our CASA Volunteers with the resources they need to mentor and advocate effectively. That is why we have dedicated staff that oversee our Teens and our Non-Minor Dependents (NMD) specialty areas. These CASA Specialists are responsible for problem solving tough teen issues with CASA Volunteers as well as connecting our CASA Volunteers with relevant community resources and partnerships.

Last year, we announced eight partnerships with community organizations who agreed to offer free resources, programming and/or admission to foster children. This year, we are working to create new partnerships and opportunities, focused on helping our teens and young adults thrive.

- We recently announced a partnership with **Bloom Energy** to recruit our teens and young adults for the 300+ new manufacturing and maintenance careers Bloom Energy is bringing to the Bay Area.
- We are working with **Excite Credit Union** to provide every teen and NMD with a college savings plan.
- We are launching a new **Non-Minor Dependent Transition Fund** aimed at supporting NMDs as they age out of care.

We are counting on the greater Silicon Valley community to continue to **SHOW UP** for our teens and NMDs. Your overwhelming support this past holiday season is a testament to your commitment to **LIFTING UP** our community's most vulnerable children and youth. Thank you for your investment in us and the children we serve.

This year, we look forward to sharing with you new CASA program developments, the experiences of our CASA Volunteers, our new strategic plan (currently under development), and most importantly, how you help **LIFT UP** foster children and youth.



SERVING THE MOST VULNERABLE

TEENAGERS

AGES 13-17

Adolescence is the period of developmental transition between childhood and adulthood. It involves changes in personality, as well as in physical, intellectual and social development. The Teens specialty area enhances the ability of our Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteers to support teens in the key areas of academics, personal growth and transitional needs. We also provide additional support and training to CASAs serving teens that identify as LGBTQ+.



123

Teenagers are assigned a CASA Volunteer.

49

Teenagers are Hispanic.

32

Teenagers are waiting for an Advocate.



SERVING
THE MOST VULNERABLE

NON-MINOR DEPENDENTS

AGES 17-21

A Non-Minor Dependent (NMD) is a current non-minor under the jurisdiction of the Dependency Court. The NMD specialty area enhances the ability of our Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteers to support NMDs in the key areas of: academics, employment, financial literacy and housing. We also provide additional support and training to CASAs serving NMDs that identify as LGBTQ+.



88

NMDs are assigned a CASA Volunteer.

50

NMDs are Hispanic.

13

NMDs are waiting for an Advocate.



Teen to NMD & Everything in Between

Sabrina's Advocacy Journey

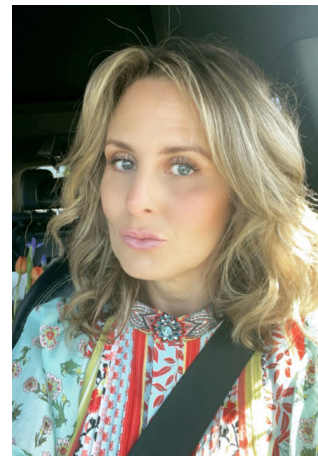
“ALWAYS BE THERE.”

Always being up for the challenge, ambitious Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteer Sabrina Martire asked her CASA Supervisor, Jessica Alvarez, for a difficult dependency case with an older foster youth. Jessica suggested a **dually involved youth** (DIY)**, which is a youth involved with both the Juvenile Justice and the Dependency Court System. The teen had a history of delinquency and risky behaviors due to trauma but Sabrina was up for the task. In March, 2020, the Court appointed Sabrina as CASA to Mia, a rebellious 17-year-old.

As the world was tossed into chaos with the onset of COVID, Sabrina was determined to help fulfill the essential needs for her newly assigned youth. Not knowing what to expect during her first encounter, Sabrina was excited to meet Mia to deliver a laptop for distance learning. Mia pulled up to her placement after Sabrina's arrival and told her caregiver to take the laptop with no acknowledgment of her CASA's presence. Shortly after, the teen violated her probation and was placed into juvenile hall.

Not being discouraged by hearing the news, Sabrina was committed to **SHOWING UP** for the teen. She connected with CASA Specialist, Dorothy Ross, whose specialty is working with DIY cases. Due to the pandemic, no visitors were allowed at the facility, but Dorothy was able to aid Sabrina in communicating with Mia by setting up virtual Zoom visits. Mia did not attend the first six virtual calls. Eventually, Mia would attend but was disengaged.

Upon discovering the teen's favorite book, Sabrina started sending snippets of Cat in the Hat to a representative who then would give them to Mia. During their Zoom calls, Sabrina started to read the children's classic in a filibuster attempt. No longer being able to contain her laughter, it appeared as though Sabrina's persistence finally worked, as they started to have real conversations from that moment on.



As a staff member for Child Advocates of Silicon Valley, Sabrina Martire oversees 25 CASA Volunteers, supports our 50 CASA Mentors and leads our Non-Minor Dependent (18-21 year olds) specialty area. Sabrina has also served as a CASA Volunteer since October 2018 and has worked on seven dependency cases to date with children of all ages. Currently, she is assigned to two youth. This story is her experience advocating for a youth whose case presents many challenges.

Key Terms**

Dually Involved Youth: Youth who are involved in both the Juvenile Justice and Juvenile Dependency Courts. 14% of teens & NMDs Child Advocates currently serves are DIY.

“

It's honorable to have the NMDs trust us, an adult, because most of them don't have adults that they can look up to. You'll find yourself getting inspired by them more often than not.

Sabrina Martire

CASA Programs Specialist
& CASA Volunteer



“NOT ABOUT US, IT’S ABOUT HER.”

Due to the spike in COVID within the juvenile hall, Mia was transferred to the ranch, a juvenile detention facility. Unlike other dependency cases, Mia’s **dual status**** meant her **Child and Family Team** (CFT)** was larger than most. She had an estimated 20 providers working collaboratively to support her through both her dependency and juvenile case. Among the CFT, was her CASA.

Being overwhelmed with an extensive team of providers, Mia’s anxiety increased during their weekly meetings. As a CASA, Sabrina used her role to **STAND UP** for Mia’s best interests. To minimize Mia’s anxiety, Sabrina advocated for everyone to stop sharing video screens during the CFT meetings. This allowed Mia to have control over her environment. The individuals who had their cameras on were the four individuals she felt comfortable to see, one of them being Sabrina.

In December 2020, Mia was eligible for early release on good behavior. Sabrina was asked by the Juvenile Court Judge if she would agree to sign for the teen’s release. Having committed to the challenge, Sabrina agreed. Getting her teen ready for a new placement, she visited the Child Advocates of Silicon Valley CASA Store, a dedicated room filled with new items for foster children and youth. Once in The Store, Sabrina thoughtfully gathered all the essentials, clothes, bedding, school supplies and more.

The day finally arrived.

Leading to this moment, Mia and Sabrina discussed what Mia would want to eat upon being released. Mia’s response: al pastor burrito with no onions and no beans from La Victoria’s Taqueria. Not knowing that her CASA purposefully saved her order on a sticky note during their prior calls, Mia was shocked to see Sabrina waiting for her with the perfect burrito. For years, everyone got Mia’s order wrong, but not her CASA. “I think because of that, it was Mia’s turning point, [she learned] that I’m here for the long haul. I understand her and will advocate for her and what she needs.”

This marked Mia and Sabrina’s first in-person meeting in seven months.

Key Terms**
Dual Status: Youth simultaneously adjudicated in both the juvenile dependency (child welfare) and juvenile justice systems.

Child & Family Team: A collaborative team of individuals assigned to a child’s case for the purposes of collaboration, coordination and efficiently meeting the current needs of the child. This includes but is not limited to: social worker, CASA Volunteer and lawyer.

TRAUMA & IMPACT ON ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

When teens, like Mia, experience trauma, which may derail them from a healthy development path, there is an even greater need for adults, like Sabrina, to step up, understand the trauma and its effects and then take concrete steps to **support** the teenager. Remember the teen years are when we form our identity, so we all need **support** to develop a healthy, positive and loving identity.



The ACEs Aware model (depicted above) was created by ACEs Aware, an initiative led by the Office of the California Surgeon General and the Department of Health Care Services. This model gives evidence-based strategies to help counteract the negative effects of toxic stress endured from having experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Child Advocates of Silicon Valley uses these strategies to help CASA Volunteers with reducing the toxic stress our foster children and youth experience.

“DON'T GIVE UP ON THEM.

Although Mia was no longer in the ranch, she still had to face different challenges. One of them was to decide whether she wanted to stay in the dependency system as a **non-minor-dependent** (NMD)** now that she turned 18. However, in order to do so, Mia would have to agree to meet the **participation criteria.**** With the support of her now reduced CFT, Mia was encouraged to accept extended foster care services. She worked diligently through her independent studies program to try to complete her high school diploma. Mia would also check in regularly with Sabrina for updates.

Unfortunately, foster youth experience multiple traumas and disruptive events that have an impact on their development. Without early interventions and constant support, youth who deal with ongoing trauma, are at greater risk of developing unhealthy habits and risky behaviors that lead to negative adult outcomes. Even though she now has Sabrina by her side, this is something that Mia still grapples with.

Despite her progress, Mia returned to a tumultuous relationship, one in which she was exposed to domestic violence, began disregarding her school work and started disconnecting from Sabrina. This behavior compromises Mia's ability to meet her participation criteria, which places her NMD status and extended foster care services at risk. This includes losing access to Sabrina as her CASA, something Mia can't afford to have happen and that Sabrina is determined to prevent.

“She has had a lot of trauma in her life. Her actions are her processing and working through current trauma. I just have to be patient and not give up.”

Currently, Mia's CFT and Sabrina are working together to help Mia stay on a positive path. Even though Mia is slowly making progress towards meeting the participation criteria, the path is not linear. Nevertheless, when Mia is put in a position where she knows she needs additional help, she reaches out to Sabrina. Regardless of the situation, Sabrina will be there without judgment to help **LIFT UP** Mia.

Disclaimer: The story is based on Sabrina Martire's experience as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteer. Some details about the non-minor dependent she serves have been altered in an effort to keep the youth's identity anonymous.

Key Terms**
Non-Minor Dependent: A youth "under an order of foster care" on their 18th birthday is eligible to stay a dependent with financial support and case management until age 21. Participation by the youth is voluntary and they must sign a mutual agreement to meet one of the "participation criteria".

Participation Criteria: 1) Complete high school or equivalent program; or 2) Be enrolled in college, community college or a vocational education program; or 3) Participate in a program designed to remove barriers to employment; or 4) Employed at least 80 hours a month; or 5) Unable to do one of the above because of a medical or mental health condition.

Corporate & Community Partners

Below are some of our recent government, corporate and community partners whose compassion and generosity enables us to **LIFT UP** foster children in our community. Additionally, listed below are partnerships focused on helping our teens and young adults thrive.



TEEN PARTNERS

- Bloom Energy**
Recruiting our teens and young adults for the 300+ new manufacturing and maintenance careers Bloom Energy is bringing to the Bay Area.
- Excite Credit Union**
Providing every teen and NMD with a college savings plan.
- Work2Future**
Providing internships, resume assistance, interview prep and continued job support. Participants have a case manager who uses career assessment tools to identify career options and assist with all parts of the process.
- iFoster**
Supplying our teens with a free cell phone and cell service.
- Foster Youth Success Initiative**
A Campus and Community Partner Network of colleges and organizations supporting foster youth with monthly meetings to share information, provide campus tours, etc.
- Silicon Valley Career Technical Education**
A STEM high school program offering 23 courses (18 of which are UC "a-g" approved) that prepare students for college and future careers. The program is free for qualified 11th & 12th grade students who are training for a specific career path.



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.

Partnership Press Conference

Child Advocates of Silicon Valley hosted a press conference at the Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose to announce first of its kind community-wide partnerships to support foster children and their CASA Volunteers. Eight local partners agreed to offer free resources, programming and/or admission to foster youth. San Jose City Councilmember Maya Esparza was a guest speaker.

O'Leary Golf Classic

Over 120 community members gathered to golf "FORE" foster youth at Child Advocates of Silicon Valley's O'Leary Golf Classic, renamed in memory of dedicated board member and champion of the golf tournament, Michael O' Leary. The sold-out event raised over \$200,000 to support foster children in Santa Clara County.

Pumpkin Patch

Over 30 children and youth, some dressed in their festive costumes, along with their CASA Volunteers joined us to celebrate the Halloween season at the Child Advocates of Silicon Valley's Pumpkin Patch. The spook-tacular event included pumpkin decorating, fall theme photo station and other kid-friendly activities.

Holidays at Child Advocates

This past holiday season, Child Advocates hosted a series of events for our foster youth and their CASA Volunteers filled with old holiday traditions and introduced a few new ones, like tree decorating at Christmas in the Park. At our Annual Holiday Party, over 50 children and youth along with their CASA Volunteers celebrated the holiday cheer. Activities included building ornaments, designing t-shirts and drafting letters to Santa Claus.





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

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Become an Advocate Donor by making a financial gift.*

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

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