

The Child Advocates of Silicon Valley Magazine

# LIFT UP

Healing  
Through  
**Positive  
Experiences**

PAGE 6

**ADVOCACY  
STORY**

*Annette  
Makes a  
Difference*

PAGE 10

**COMMUNITY  
SHOWS UP**

*Holidays  
2022*

PAGE 12

2023 SPRING

# 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 2023.

# THE TIME IS NOW

Supporting foster children and youth is challenging in so many regards. Our foster kids are challenged in a multitude of ways and yet through no fault of their own are often left to face these challenges with minimal family support. After four years of serving as CEO of Child Advocates of Silicon Valley, I realize the enormity of their challenges and am convinced it can only take a comprehensive, integrated and abundant response if we want our foster children and youth to thrive.

Our staff has worked tirelessly at recruiting, training and supporting a record number of CASAs and we are close to eliminating the waiting list. So now is the time to intensify our efforts to deeply support our foster children and youth with a *whatever it takes* approach.

I've had the honor of providing leadership to many strategic plans in my nonprofit career. But I have never been so excited about a strategic plan as I am about Child Advocates' new plan, because I truly believe it will bring about the changes and the proper interventions to assure our foster kids' success.

We must be better at carrying out our commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in our CASA recruitment but also in all our work. We need to become a stronger voice in policy that affects our foster youth. And we must continue to build the infrastructure to bring about these changes that we envision for our youth.

We will invest the time, energy and resources required to help foster children heal.

Taking the time to ensure our CASA Program is trauma informed and offers a variety of positive childhood experiences, will help improve child and youth outcomes.

The energy we bring to the work we do for foster kids will be infectious and galvanize the greater Silicon Valley community. We will set the tone for SHOWING UP.

We won't be afraid to use our resources to ensure we have the right people on the job; experts in our respective fields who know how to get the job done, coupled with the voices of the lived experience of our youth.

But it all starts with you, volunteers, partners, funders and donors. Your investment in us, in our mission, is what enables us to be there for every foster child and youth in Silicon Valley.

As we embark on a new strategic plan this summer, we humbly ask that you continue to invest in us. With this new plan, together, we will...

**Reach Every Youth.  
Serve Deeply and Effectively.  
Advocate for All.**

“  
**We invest the  
time, energy  
and resources  
required to  
help foster  
children heal.**

Frederick J. Ferrer  
**CEO**







## MEET DIEGO

10-year-old Diego emigrated to the United States to stay with his madrina, hoping for a brighter future. After Sunday church mass, Diego would enjoy strolling through "La Pulga" with his madrina while drinking a delicious agua fresca. Once they walked a lap navigating the diverse market vendors, they would spend the remainder of the afternoon listening to mariachi and other cultural entertainers performing that day.

However, due to unfortunate circumstances, and through no fault of his own, Diego entered the foster care system. Diego was placed in a group home. His new caregivers do the best they can to acclimate Diego. However, cultural barriers such as language and customs exist between the caregivers and him. Without the support of culturally matched service providers, Diego is missing out on having a sense of comunidad, a sense of belonging, and having supporters dedicated to his success, on top of having to navigate the foster care system.

Currently, **over 64% of the children** in the Santa Clara County foster care system are Hispanic; an overrepresentation given that **only 34% of the children** in this county are Hispanic.

Diego's story, although fictionalized to protect the anonymity of our children, is an accurate portrayal of the experience many of the 390 Hispanic foster children in Santa Clara County endure.



# Whatever it Takes

Our mission is to be there for every child in Silicon Valley who has experienced abuse, neglect and/or abandonment. We ensure they receive the nurturing support and resources needed to thrive.

From the creation of Advocacy Plans to improved outcomes for foster kids, to offering a variety of positive childhood experiences, we are continually enhancing our program offerings to ensure the children we serve have the resources they need to heal from the trauma they've endured.

Their ability to access these resources is made possible by our Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteers. They're the secret sauce that makes it all work. They provide the nurturing support. In the past few years, we've seen a myriad of community members **SHOW UP** for foster kids like never before. So many, that the number of children on our waitlist - currently waiting for a CASA - is nearly at zero.

As remarkable as this accomplishment is, we are faced with a challenge. The children remaining on our waitlist are some of the hardest children to assign a CASA to, children like Diego. Today there are six children on our waitlist who require a Spanish speaking CASA. There are children whose placement is in a neighboring county, necessitating a CASA who is willing to travel a long distance to provide the nurturing support the youth deserves. In other cases, the child simply wants an Advocate they can relate to, someone with a similar ethnic background, religion or sexual orientation.

This is a challenge we're committed to tackling. And the priorities of our new strategic plan do exactly that:

- **Reach Every Youth.** Provide an advocate for every youth in foster care.
- **Serve Deeply and Effectively.** Achieve greater impact by enhancing services to be fully inclusive, responsive, and trauma informed.
- **Advocate for All.** Advocate for a responsive, equitable service system for all child-welfare involved families, children, and youth in our county.

The needs of foster children haven't changed. There have always been children placed out of county, children who need someone who speaks a specific language and children who would benefit from having a CASA they can relate to at a deeper level. However, what has changed is our ability to better meet the needs of the children we serve. And we will do whatever it takes to do just that.







# *Promoting Healing Through* **POSITIVE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES**

Our Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program is committed to helping the children we serve heal from the trauma they've experienced. One of the ways we do this is by providing our youth and CASA Volunteers with continual access to positive childhood experiences, evidence-based strategies that help counteract the negative effects of toxic stress endured from having experienced trauma. In the past year, we hosted 10 such experiences for our CASAs and their youth. Each one fell under at least one of the following evidence-based strategies: supportive relationships, quality sleep, balanced nutrition, physical activity, mindfulness practice, access to nature and mental health care.



\*\*The following images depict activities that we have done with our CASA Volunteers and children. Faces of children have been omitted due to confidentiality.

# Building Supportive Relationships

Being a CASA starts with building a supportive relationship. Every positive childhood experience we offer enables our CASAs to do just that. Through various enriching activities at the events, CASAs and youth engage with one another, contributing to their one-to-one trusted relationship. Additionally, our events provide our youth a safe space to connect and interact with other peers and build friendships that can be long lasting.



Our Picnic in the Park created a safe space with CASAs to let children explore and have fun through play while developing cognitive, physical, and social skills. All important skills that help improve their overall emotional well-being.



Social events with CASAs and children, like our LGBTQ+ Bowling Party and Holiday Party, create a supportive environment with activities focused on building relationships which is imperative when creating positive outcomes for our youth.

By collaborating in group activities at events like Young Scientist STEM Fest and Adventures in Bookland Bash, our children have an opportunity to develop relationships with their peers that can result in social support and reduce toxic stress.





# Developing Healthier Habits Through Quality Sleep, Balanced Nutrition & Physical Activity

We continue to promote healthier habits for children and young adults so they can have the resources and tools needed to help reduce toxic stress and significantly improve their overall wellbeing. At each event, the dietary choices focused on fun healthy snacks while providing physical activities for the youth to participate in with their CASAs and/or other peers. To increase quality sleep, our agency provides appropriate sleep kits that our youth can use at their placements.



Our sleeping kits contain a blanket, plush toy and a white noise machine to help ensure our children have access to tools that can provide better sleeping habits, which is crucial to their development.

By encouraging our children to participate in physical activity with their CASA or their peers at our events, we are reducing toxic stress and building resiliency that will improve their long-term health outcomes.







Mindfulness practice activities such as arts & crafts and reading help support children's over all emotional well-being.

## Exploring Access to Nature, Mindfulness Practice & Mental Health Care

Through collaborations with organizations such as Veggielution, Animal Assisted Happiness and more, we're able to offer our youth activities that include access to nature and mindfulness practices that improve their wellbeing. Additionally, we provide mental health kits with self care books and sensory items to use at their placements.



Our mental health kits contain sensory items and mindfulness activities that help ensure our children have access to tools to improve their mental well-being and reduce the impacts of experiencing trauma.

Nature is inherently calming and offers an abundance of tactile experiences that enhances children's senses that promotes healing.





“

I am proud to be part of a community of Advocates who are able to serve every foster child meaningfully so they can thrive.

-Annette

### Advocacy Story

“HELLO,  
MY NAME IS  
ANNETTE.”

I worked in healthcare for over 40 years. In my practice, I enjoyed caring most for children and found myself often assigned to cover the pediatric unit. As my retirement approached, I knew that I wanted to keep busy.

Due to the pandemic causing everything to shut down, transitioning from a full-time career to retirement was difficult for me. However, one day as I scrolled through social media, I came across a post to participate in a volunteer information session to learn more about supporting children in the foster care system by Child Advocates of Silicon Valley. Given there was no obligation, I decided to attend.



Once I learned more about the role of a CASA Volunteer and how many foster kids needed a CASA, my mind was made up. I immediately signed up to become one. During my pre-service training, I decided I wanted to work with the 0-5 age group. After being sworn in, I received a court order to immediately advocate for two sisters ages 2 & 4.

As you may imagine during the pandemic, initial visits were virtual and holding the attention of very young children on facetime was challenging. Through the agency's partnership with Red Ladder Theatre Company, I received three interactive videos to help connect and engage with the girls. Shortly after, the case was closed due to a successful reunification.

I still felt I had more to give as a CASA and wanted to support more children. In October 2021, I was paired with 2-year-old, Joey. During this time, the pandemic eased up and in-person visits were encouraged to build relationships between the CASAs and children. To aid this effort, Child Advocates hosted monthly events for CASAs and children to participate in.

Last fall I took Joey to the annual Pumpkin Patch at Animal Assisted Happiness where we spent the time petting the farm animals and taking home pumpkins that we decorated together. Soon after, the agency organized a wonderful holiday event. I kept busy following my little guy around which I find to be one of the benefits of advocating for an active young boy. We participated in more arts and crafts, enjoyed refreshments and of course, Santa was there. Each child received a shopping bag filled with goodies as a special holiday treat.

As a CASA, you have to LIFT UP your child's voice in the Court. Given that at 2 years old, Joey does not have the words to express his feelings, I felt it was my responsibility to advocate for his needs. To feel comfortable with my recommendations of reunifications in the court report, I needed to ensure that Joey would



be safe and loved when returned to his home. Joey's mom welcomed me to join her scheduled visits with him. During these visits, we shared time with Joey walking the park and attending a few of the Child Advocates' events. It made me happy to see and be a part of the growing bond between Joey and his mom. Witnessing growth provided me with the confidence to make a strong recommendation to the Court.

During my tenure as a CASA, I have enjoyed following my child's journey. Being able to connect with Joey and the other children I served has given me a wider range of understanding of the challenges foster children face. Although I have helped make an impact on their life through my advocacy, they have in return made an impact on mine.



Now with my experience as a CASA, I am able to use that knowledge to pass on my expertise to my fellow CASAs as a CASA Mentor. I am proud to be part of a community of Advocates who are able to serve every foster child meaningfully so they can thrive.

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



## COMMUNITY SHOWS UP FOR FOSTER YOUTH

## *During the Holidays*

**92% of the  
children we  
serve** received  
a gift during  
the holidays.

Being there for every foster child takes commitment and collaboration. This past holiday season, through the spirit of giving, we received over \$60,000 in gifts and cash donations to go directly for gifts for our children.

Items provided during the holidays were gifted to our youth through our holiday events, via mail for children placed out of county, and at CASA Village, a holiday workshop at our office filled with festive decor and toys. In addition to picking up gifts at CASA Village, youth and CASAs would browse items for additional presents for the youth and their families.



Listed below are some of our  
generous donors that helped  
LIFT UP our foster youth this  
holiday season.

Core Companies

Cisco

Open Mind School  
Menlo Park

Palmer College of  
Chiropractic West

Saint Nicholas  
Greek Orthodox Church

Primrose Cupertino

Primrose Willow Glen

National Charities League  
Orchard Valley Chapter

Ticket to Dream Foundation

Sons' of Sicily – San Jose  
Women's Club

Concrete Rose Coalition

Pacific Hearing Service

Foothill Congregational

Family Giving Tree

Verizon

Turning Wheels for Kids

Teddy's for Tots

California Highway Patrol





# Thank You From Our Children!

Actual thank you cards from our kids.



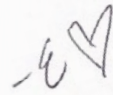
Hi, thank you for these toys, they're super cool. I like my new toys, and thanks for buying me new toys because I like for Christmas. Thanks for buying me the BEST AWESOME TOYS EVER!!! I like my new toys.



thank you for my christmas gifts. my favorite was the Lego set



Thank you for all that you do for us it means a lot to us and our families things during holidays can be hard but everything you donate makes it 10000 % better again thank you!



Hi!  
Thank you so very much for my Christmas bag of goodies. I'm so excited.

Hugs,



(I'm 20 months old!)





# 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.



## UPCOMING EVENTS



**May 20, 2023**

5:30 pm  
Computer History Museum



**August 28, 2023**

10:00 am  
Los Altos Golf & Country Club



**October 22, 2023**

Time TBD  
Blanco Urban Venue

**Sponsorship opportunities are available.**

Please contact the development department for more information.

[Development@childadvocatessv.org](mailto:Development@childadvocatessv.org) • 408.573.5679



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# GET INVOLVED

## DONATE

Make a financial donation today to support our CASA Program and the children we serve.

## SHOP | VOLUNTEER | FOLLOW

There are multiple ways you can get involved to help foster kids. Scan the QR code to find the opportunity that works best for you.



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

