acknowledgements

Many thanks to the following for their active participation and guidance in developing Child Advocates of Silicon Valley’s Strategic Plan FY2024-FY2026:

• Strategic Planning Committee
• Child Advocates’ Board of Directors and staff
• Youth and CASA volunteers who participated in focus groups
• Key stakeholders who participated in interviews and focus groups
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a message from our CEO

From good to great. Better to best. That’s the direction we’re headed, what our next strategic plan aims to accomplish. It’s a step Child Advocates is well positioned to take because of everything we accomplished the past three years.

- Broadened reach to serving 84% of children in care, exceeding our target of 75%.
- Created Advocacy Plans - a tool that measures a child’s well-being and development, and informs and records the services and resources provided - for nearly 650 children.
- Established partnerships with 17 local agencies who offer positive childhood experiences, resources and/or programming that are proven to help children heal from trauma.
- Grew sustainable funding from $1.68 M to $4 M, while diversifying funding to decrease reliance on events from 33% to 7% of overall revenue.
- Launched a successful rebranding campaign to expand name recognition, resulting in 458 CASA Volunteers recruited and a 37% increase in fundraising from individuals.

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. With this new plan, we will make significant strides towards these ends over the next three years. Not only because we’ve positioned ourselves well to do so, but because it’s what is required of us at this time.

Over the course of nine months, we worked intimately with MIG, a consulting firm, to develop our new strategic plan. This process included a thorough environmental scan, stakeholder interviews and focus groups. Many lessons were learned but there were two really significant findings:

- The number of children entering foster care is decreasing as a result of the Family First Prevention Services Act - an act that focuses child welfare systems toward keeping children safely with their families to avoid the trauma that results when children are placed in foster care;
Latino youth are grossly overrepresented in foster care - roughly 70% of children in and entering foster care each year in Santa Clara County are Latino, while only 34% of the population of children in the County are Latino.

These findings, along with others, were used in the creation of three strategic priorities.

Reach Every Youth. Provide an advocate for every youth in foster care. Our Court Appointed Special Advocate Program is a proven intervention that works and every foster kid will have a CASA by their side.

Serve Deeply and Effectively. Achieve greater impact by enhancing services to be fully inclusive, responsive, and trauma informed. Although there are less children entering the system, these children, and the hundreds of children already in the system, will require more meaningful support. We’re ready and equipped to provide this support in ways we’ve never been able to before.

Advocate for All. Advocate for a responsive, equitable service system for all child-welfare involved families, children, and youth in our county. The overrepresentation of Latino children in the system is proof that our work goes beyond child welfare, this is also a social justice issue that requires thoughtful reform and advocacy.

These priorities will guide our work from FY24 - FY26, bringing us steps closer to making our vision a reality, every foster child thriving.

We look forward to working in partnership with you to LIFT UP every foster child and youth in Silicon Valley.

Frederick J. Ferrer
CEO
1 moving to excellence for youth in foster care
moving to excellence for youth in foster care

This strategic plan catapults Child Advocates of Silicon Valley (Child Advocates) from strong, solid work to excellence on behalf of Santa Clara County’s most vulnerable youth.

The three-year plan defines our vision, mission, and values; sets ambitious strategic priorities; and establishes a shared foundation for action. With the convergence of several key opportunities, now is the time to make transformative change for the children and youth we serve. With ample resources and clear direction, over the next three years Child Advocates will provide inclusive, responsive, and trauma-informed services to every youth. We will center racial equity and create greater access for people with lived experience to influence those who shape policy and practice. Through our work, we will take giant steps toward our vision of a Silicon Valley where every foster child has the nurturing support and resources needed to thrive.

Our Planning Approach

With the goal of creating an innovative and bold plan, Child Advocates established a Strategic Planning Committee composed of Board and staff members and brought on a consultant, MIG, Inc., to assist with the development of the strategic plan.
The following key planning questions were developed as a launching point for the work:

- How many children are in foster care?
- What are their characteristics?
- Why do they enter foster care?
- Have these trends changed over time? Why or why not?

- What does Child Advocates do well?
- What challenges is Child Advocates facing?
- What else should Child Advocates be doing?

- What are the major trends affecting CASA programs and volunteer programs?
- Are there opportunities in our environment that Child Advocates should be aware of or try to leverage now?
- Are there challenges on the horizon that Child Advocates should plan for?
Listening and Learning

The strategic plan was informed by three key planning activities, which are described below. Findings and recommendations were continually discussed with the Strategic Planning Committee, which made final recommendations to the Board of Directors.

Environmental Scan

The MIG Team conducted an environmental scan using two primary methods: 1) literature review; and 2) stakeholder interviews. The goal of the scan was to understand:

- **The external environment**—What are the opportunities and potential threats in the field?
- **The internal environment**—What is the organization doing well and where could improvement be made?
- **Best practices**—Were there CASA programs or other types of mentoring programs Child Advocates could learn from?

Child Advocates’ staff and Strategic Planning Committee members recommended salient documents for MIG to review. MIG also did its own search to identify literature and research that could inform Child Advocates about opportunities, potential threats, and best practices in the CASA, child welfare, human services, and mentoring fields. The consultants followed up on promising and best practices by interviewing
staff members to get a deeper understanding of the work and its relevance for Child Advocates.

Staff and the Strategic Planning Committee also recommended key stakeholders to interview about the broader environment, as well as strengths and areas of improvement for Child Advocates. MIG conducted 14 interviews with local, state, and national stakeholders.

**Focus Groups**
Feedback was gathered from youth served by Child Advocates, CASA Volunteers, and Child Advocates’ partners on how the organization could strengthen programming to meet the diverse needs of children, youth, and their families. Focus group questions were tailored for each group. Child Advocates recruited participants, MIG conducted the focus groups, and all participants were given a stipend.

**Board and Staff Session**
Both the Board of Directors and all Child Advocates’ staff were engaged at key junctures in strategic planning process—to review findings from the environmental assessment, to review focus groups findings, and to review proposed elements of the strategic plan.
2 understanding the context
understanding the context

Several important findings from across our listening and learning activities guided the focus of our new strategic plan.

An understanding of the children in foster care today, the trends in the broader landscape, and the existing strengths of the organization helped us narrow in on where there is alignment between the needs of youth, the opportunities that exist now, and what is feasible for the organization to accomplish. This is where we strategically chose to focus our time, energy, and resources for the next three years to improve outcomes for the vulnerable children and youth we serve.
647 children are in foster care in Santa Clara County.¹ The number of children in care and entering care each year has been declining. This is true across all age groups and ethnicities.

80% of the children who enter foster care do so for reasons of neglect. Neglect often includes a combination of parental substance use, mental illness, and/or domestic violence. The remaining 20% enter for physical or sexual abuse.

70% of children in and entering foster care each year in Santa Clara County are Latino. Since only 34% of the population of children in the County are Latino, this is a significant overrepresentation.

¹ CWS/CMS 2022 Quarter 3 Extract
Trends, Opportunities and Threats

Major changes occurred in the field since Child Advocates developed its previous FY2019-FY2021 Strategic Plan. The global pandemic, a national racial reckoning, and one of the most significant child welfare policy changes in over a decade altered the landscape substantially. The trends, opportunities, and threats described below were particularly important to consider in determining the strategic direction of the organization for the next three years.

Trends and Opportunities

- **Increased Focus on Racial Equity**—Since the death of George Floyd, the focus on racial equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts has skyrocketed in the public, nonprofit, and private sectors. Diversity, equity, and inclusion were added to the national Standards for Local CASA/GAL Programs in 2020.

- **Pandemic is Having Lasting Effects**—Children and youth, as well as their caregivers, are still feeling the impact of the pandemic. They are disengaged in school and experiencing higher levels of mental health and substance use issues.

- **Child Welfare Shifting toward Prevention**—The Federal Family First Prevention Services Act is shifting child welfare back toward a greater focus on preventing placement and preserving families. Depending on the success of these efforts, child welfare caseloads may continue to decline in the coming years.

- **Understanding of Trauma is Advancing**—The ACEs Aware Initiative, the pandemic, and some high-profile abuse stories are beginning to shift the public’s perception of trauma and mental health issues. There’s greater understanding of trauma and the need for trauma-informed engagement and care.

- **Local Policy Maker Investment**—The Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors is highly invested in the welfare of children.
• **Volunteer Engagement is Up**—Since the pandemic, more people want to volunteer their time in “worthwhile efforts”; Gen Z is particularly interested in volunteerism; the trend, however, is toward short-term, flexible projects.

**Potential Threats**

• **Children and Families in Care Face Multiple Challenges**—The good news is that the number of children in and entering foster care continues to decline. The challenge for Child Advocates is that the children who do enter care are those who have experienced significant trauma and whose families struggle with complex behavioral health, as well as housing and income insecurity.

• **Out of County Placements**—CASAs struggle to support children and youth in foster care placement settings in other counties.

**Child Advocates’ Strengths**

Child Advocates achieved or exceeded all the goals in its previous strategic plan. The strengths highlighted below provide the necessary foundation for the organization to be bold in the next three years and drive toward service excellence.

• **Huge success in fund development**—Child Advocates has tripled its revenue since 2016, which provides the resources to be innovative and flexible in program strategy.

• **Increased visibility**—The recent rebranding and marketing efforts are increasing the organization’s visibility.

• **Existing volunteers**—Tap into the strength of existing, successful volunteers by learning more about what makes their relationships so strong and engaging them more in volunteer recruitment.
• **Connections**—Child Advocates has expanded its connections with policy makers and partners throughout the County.

• **Reputation**—Child Advocates is seen as a highly credible, national organization and is well respected locally.

**What We Heard From Youth, CASAs, and Partners**

The focus groups were rich and meaningful. Participants were candid and passionate about their hopes and concerns for children and youth in foster care. The themes that emerged across the discussions are captured below.

• **CASA mentors and network are invaluable**—CASA Mentors are experienced CASA Volunteers who are recruited to supervise and support CASA Volunteers. They are one of the most helpful tools. CASAs expressed a desire for more direct peer support and communication opportunities.

• **Need additional training and preparation through a trauma informed lens**—There is a desire for more training to navigate complex familial relationships, and tools to better support children through a trauma-informed lens when they transition homes.

• **Kids just want to have fun**—There is a need for more fun events for kids hosted by Child Advocates. CASAs would also like more direct financial support and reimbursement for fun activities.

• **Youth should be more involved in meaningful engagement**—Youth should be engaged in the development of policy and programming and with how equity and inclusion are achieved in program model effectiveness.
• **CASAs should reflect the community they are serving**—There is a need for more recruitment of diverse volunteers. It is important that CASAs look like the children they serve and share language and lived experience. The current volunteers are not representative of those they serve.

• **Child Advocates should play a larger role in policy and advocacy**—As a trusted, respected brand there is an opportunity to bring together the intersection of services, needs and resources to help the client population. There is a need for a more intentional role in policy and advocacy.

• **There’s an opportunity to strengthen strategic partnerships**—Partnerships with other organizations and community can strengthen general knowledge of and access to services and improve long-term outcomes for clients.
a new, ambitious direction
a new, ambitious direction

This section presents the underpinnings of Child Advocates’ work, including the mission, vision, and guiding values; the strategic priorities for the next three years; how we will achieve our aims; and how we will know when we get there.

Child Advocates Vision, Mission, Values

**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.

**values**
- Accountability
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Community
- Diversity
- Equity
Strategic Priorities

Below are Child Advocates’ strategic priorities for the next three years.

**STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1**
**reach every youth**

Provide an advocate for every youth in foster care.

Our Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) services are available to every child and youth in foster care in Santa Clara County, no matter their ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, whether they have run away, or if they are placed in settings outside the County.

**STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2**
**serve deeply & effectively**

Achieve greater impact by enhancing services to be fully inclusive, responsive, and trauma informed.

We achieve greater impact by more deeply addressing the specific and diverse needs of children and youth. With support from a wide range of community partners, all services are provided in a way that is inclusive of and responsive to children’s unique backgrounds and identities and demonstrates an understanding of the impact of trauma and the need for healing.

**STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3**
**advocate for all**

Advocate for a responsive, equitable service system for all child-welfare involved families, children, and youth in our county.

We are proactive in identifying local, state, and national system trends and advocating for strategic responses to benefit the children and youth we serve. We center racial equity by seeking to understand and address disproportionality and disparity in child welfare outcomes, and we create greater access for people with lived experience to influence those who shape policy and practice.
## Strategies and Success Metrics

### STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: REACH EVERY YOUTH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.1</th>
<th>Develop CASA advocacy models and programming to serve youth placed in settings outside of Santa Clara County, accounting for differences such as geographic distances and advocacy strategies in other counties. Ensure all youth have full access to the range of resources and support offered by CASA Programs.</th>
<th>• % of out of county youth served</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Continue to refine and improve pre-service training and continuing education for CASAs to reflect the best practices in pedagogy, research, evidence-based practices, and trauma-informed and healing-centered training, while meeting National CASA Standards.</td>
<td>• % of CASAs satisfied with training • % of CASAs completing continuing ed requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Improve access to child-specific data to support CASA Volunteers in understanding the child’s/youth’s experience, strengths, and needs. As a standard practice, use CASA Connect to provide this information in a way that is easily accessible and available in real time to volunteers.</td>
<td>• % of CASAs using information provided</td>
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## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: SERVE DEEPLY & EFFECTIVELY

| 2.1 | Continue to utilize outcomes data to better understand youth needs, inform program design, and measure youth development. | • Data in Annual Outcomes Report used to set annual program planning goals |
| 2.2 | Develop a specialized CASA cohort, composed of experienced volunteers, which will receive additional training and support to advocate for children and youth with specialized needs (e.g., those who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation, those with more severe trauma histories, etc.). | • Number of specialized CASAs complete training • % of children with specialized needs matched with a CASA |
| 2.3 | Continue commitment to recruit, train and support volunteers who reflect the ethnicity, primary language, sexual orientation, and gender identity of the children and youth in care through targeted marketing campaigns. | • % of youth matched with CASA based on key characteristics |
| 2.4 | Deepen Child Advocates leadership and engagement in the Dependency Wellness Court (DWC) to strengthen the CASAs abilities to advocate for the child/youth and improve the opportunities for reunification. | • % of children in DWC with a CASA • % of children and families served by DWC events |
| 2.5 | Improve outcomes for Non-Minor Dependents (NMDs) by creating and implementing innovative intervention models for NMDs, with more intensive intervention for those who are failing to thrive. Integrate CASA volunteers into the intervention to ensure engagement, support and mentoring and create specialized training for these CASA volunteers. | • % of NMDs meeting the Court participation requirement |
## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: SERVE DEEPLY & EFFECTIVELY (continued)

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<th>Description</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
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<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Develop an integrated wellness program for teens and NMDs to meet their social, physical, and mental health goals ensuring their ability to thrive.</td>
<td>• % of teens and NMDs with positive overall health outcomes in identified areas</td>
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| 2.7 | Remodel The Store as a CASA Positive and Adverse Childhood Experiences (PACEs) intervention, incorporating the best practices for strengthening youth agency and self-esteem. Reach out to local partners for support and donations. | • Annual traffic through store  
• % youth and CASAs who use store are satisfied  
• % of volunteers recording PACES into CASA Connect |
| 2.8 | Create a welcoming, culturally responsive, accessible kids’ club/youth lounge for CASAs and children/youth to gather to study, do homework, play games, cook, attend workshops, hold youth leadership meetings, etc. Partner with community organizations and business to bring resources that could be valuable to youth and volunteers to the space on a regular basis to promote fun and learning. | • % of CASA Volunteer’s satisfaction with the lounge (e.g. accessibility, convenience, comfort, offerings)  
• Number of store visits  
• Increase in CASA’s participation in training due to accessibility of the lounge |
### STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: ADVOCATE FOR ALL

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<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Metrics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Develop and implement a comprehensive Diversity, Equity and Inclusion plan that meets National CASA Standards that inform all agency principles, practices, and operations.</td>
<td>• DEI plan metrics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3.2 | Create a plan to center the lived experience of our foster youth in influencing Child Advocate’s programming, as well as broader policy and systems change. As part of the plan, engage youth in expanding culturally responsive activities and practices to ensure events, incentives, and store items reflect the diverse ethnicity, primary language, sexual orientation, gender identity, and ability of children and youth in foster care and are trauma-informed and healing practices. | • % of youth who engage in at least one opportunity annually  
• % youth believe leadership skills increased due to engaging |
| 3.3 | Create an advocacy agenda that positions Child Advocates for influence. Identify and track key national, state, and local opportunities to influence policy change, policy implementation, and systems improvement related to children and youth in foster care. Position Child Advocates to be a member of and/or key leader in these initiatives/efforts, including California CASA. Engage the Santa Clara County community in dialogues that raise awareness of the critical issues facing foster kids. | • % of advocacy objectives accomplished annually |
what’s next?
what’s next?

Our commitment over the next three years is to reach every youth, serve deeply and effectively, and advocate for all.

Too often, the gap between our ambitions and our accomplishments is not a poor strategy, but a result of inadequate discipline and rigor in our implementation approach. Child Advocates’ next step is to develop an implementation plan and coordinated process to ensure we hit the mark each year. The implementation plan will strategically sequence strategy implementation, set specific targets for the success metrics, and outline a process for continuous monitoring and improvement.

We will simultaneously build on our strong operating foundation so that Child Advocates has the staffing, professional development, information technology, facilities, communications, and funding to achieve our bold aims. On the following pages, we articulate our operational strategies and success metrics.
## OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES AND SUCCESS METRICS

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<th>Description</th>
<th>Success Metrics</th>
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| 1 | Develop and implement an agency stability plan that ensures financial sustainability, employee satisfaction and recognition, technology transformation, ongoing identification of trends and opportunities, and the highest quality work environments. | • Meet annual financial growth targets  
• % employee satisfaction |
| 2 | Develop and implement an agency growth plan that creates a net zero waiting list and serves children and youth with highly trained, culturally matched, and continually supported CASAs. | • % of youth on waiting list  
• % of youth matched with CASA based on culture |
| 3 | Develop and implement a more comprehensive, integrated wellness program for staff to be able to manage their own secondary effects of trauma, including financial, physical, and social emotional health. | • % of employees who participate in one or more aspects of the wellness program  
• % employees satisfied with wellness program  
• % of employees who feel well due to wellness program |
OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES AND SUCCESS METRICS (continued)

[Table]

- Identify and relocate to a new facility that better meets our operational business needs and strengthens our ability to recruit and train CASA Volunteers to better serve our children. Additionally, work with local partners to identify a facility to house a shared kids’ club/youth lounge to enhance our programmatic service delivery.

- % of CASA satisfaction with lounge (accessibility, convenience, comfort)
- Number of store visits
- Increase in CASAs participating in training due to accessibility of lounge

As we take the next steps to develop our implementation plan, we will create ways to keep the voices of youth and CASA Volunteers at the center of our work to ensure our strategies are implemented in a way that is responsive to their needs and lived experience. We will use an intentional continuous improvement process, integrating feedback loops with youth and volunteers so that we understand what is working well and where we may need to change course.

As all strong leaders do, Child Advocates recognizes that it is part of a broader system of advocates and providers that are working to improve outcomes for children and youth in foster care and throughout the County. As we move into the implementation phase of our work, we will do so in collaboration with system and community partners, keeping our finger on the pulse of the ever-evolving trends and opportunities.
Every day, we will be there for every foster child in Silicon Valley who has experienced abuse, neglect and/or abandonment.

The landscape has changed, and Child Advocates will quickly adapt and strategically leverage new opportunities to ensure children and youth have the nurturing support and resources to thrive.
SHOW UP.
STAND UP.
LIFT UP.

FOSTER YOUTH