

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: BY SHAR HERRERA

By the time you finish reading this article, more than 30 cases of child abuse will have been reported to authorities nationwide. By the end of today, that number will swell past 9,000. Four of those children will die at the hands of their abuser. All in a single day!

When we take stock of these sobering statistics during April – National Child Abuse Prevention Month – it’s easy to be overwhelmed and to ask yourself, “What can I possibly do to make a difference?”

The answer is, you can do a lot. Everybody can play a role in preventing child abuse and neglect by becoming advocates for children.

For some of us, that advocacy comes in a

formal role. Teachers, child care workers, health care providers and others who come into daily contact with children can be vigilant for signs of abuse and neglect. Their actions to report suspected abuse or to offer extra time and attention to fragile children can do more than make a difference. It can save lives.

CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) volunteers stand up for abused and neglected children, giving them a voice in an overburdened child welfare system .

Children with CASA volunteers find safe, permanent homes more quickly, are half as likely to re-enter the foster care system, and do better in school. That’s making a profound

difference in the lives of hundreds of thousands of abused and neglected children across the country. But there are far too many children who are left to fend for themselves.

CASA of Merced County is one of over 950 CASA programs across the country committed to more than doubling our number of volunteers by 2020, so that every child who needs a CASA volunteer has one.

Not everyone can be a CASA volunteer, but everyone can be an advocate. Your advocacy for children will not only help end child abuse, it will improve our community for everyone who lives here. When we work together to protect vulnerable children, it saves lives while also saving tax dollars.

We all have a role to play. What will yours be?

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT BY MARY MILLER

2014 ended with an extremely gratifying achievement for CASA of Merced County. We closed out our **Voices4CASA** Charter Member campaign with 112 members. We are so grateful to all CASA supporters, and especially to those who joined **Voices4CASA**, a program that demonstrates an ongoing community commitment to helping foster children succeed in life.

There are many ways that caring, responsible adults can help foster kids. First, of course, is to become a foster parent and provide a loving home for a child needing one. This is often a life-changing opportunity for both the child and the adults. Many foster children’s lives have been redirected because of the love, support and stability they received in a foster home. Too often, however, a foster child needs additional support and representation, and this is where a CASA fits in. The CASA develops a relationship with the child and speaks on behalf of the child before the court, providing insight that assists others to make decisions that are the most beneficial for the child. CASAs volunteer their time and energy with no thought of

compensation other than the satisfaction of making a positive difference in the life of a child.

For those without the time or ability to become a foster parent or CASA, there are still other ways to help. Becoming a **Voice4CASA** is one. Beyond the obvious need for funding, a **Voice4CASA** assists with making the community aware of how many foster children reside in the county and are in need of assistance in some form. This visibility results in the recruitment of more advocates and in the acquisition of more financial support.

Finally, an important way to support the foster children is to attend the events that raise the funds to train advocates, provide programs for the children and maintain the organization. Merced County’s CASA has two major fundraisers each year, one in Merced in the spring and one in Los Banos in the fall. This year’s spring fundraiser is April 18. In addition to this event being the major fundraiser, it is always fun and often inspirational for those who attend. I hope that many of you will be able to participate.

I am for the child®

Yes, I want to join

I would like to become a **VOICES4CASA** partner at the level below :

- \$200 / month or \$2,400 / year
- \$150 / month or \$1,800 / year
- \$100 / month or \$1,200 / year
- \$50 / month or \$600 / year
- \$25 / month or \$300 / year
- \$10 / month or \$120 / year
- Other, specify \$ _____ / _____
- One time gift of \$ _____

Check made payable to **CASA Of Merced County**

Please charge my credit card.

Visa _____ Mastercard _____ Am Ex _____ Expiration: _____

Cardholder Name: _____

Card #: _____ Code: _____

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

CASA of Merced County PO Box 2362 Merced, CA 95344

FAMILY CONNECTIONS BY COLBY ALVARADO

As the Family Connections Coordinator for 2.5 years, my time here has meant so much to me. Working with youth, their families, HSA and all other parties involved in the case has been such an eye opening experience for how

important strong life-long connections really are. The Human Services Agency has been great in working closely with Family Connections to make sure we are on the same page as we try to meet the needs of the

children. It has been amazing working with advocates on cases, as they provide an extra hand in making contacts and keeping communications going. Things are not over for Family Connections. I am happy to announce that there is a new Family Connections Coordinator, Faria. She is going to be a great asset to the CASA team!

THANK YOU ADVOCATES AND VOLUNTEERS!

Faria Alankhel
Ruth Alejo
Karolyn Alvarez
Debbie Bier
Jan Bradley
Diane Butts
Jalissa Chambers
Moua Chang
Youa Chang

Galen Chastain
Marcie Correa
Jerry Lou Davis
Lynda Dyas
Bill Fishback
Martha Flores
Ruben Fuentes
Wayne Hague
Skip Harris

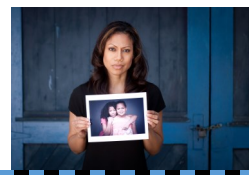
Caitlin Imelio
Angela Ivani
Diane Jenkin
Ashley Johnson
Torrin Johnson
Debbi Johnston
Veda Jones
Claudia Kalmin
Cathy Keegan

Jeanette King
Judith Salzberg Kirihara
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Robyn Piro
Sheila Quall
Christopher Ramirez
Mary Rojas
Rita Romero
Judy Rose
Marge Sadler
Patty van LobenSels
LaDenta Smith
Stephanie Souza

Brynn Wolcott
Deborah Workman
Aida Ybarra
Jon Zalinski
Sherri Zook



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CASA Notes

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A Member of the National CASA Association

APRIL IS NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH



We invite you to join us in preventing child abuse and neglect. The future success of our county relies on the healthy growth and development of all children. When we work together to ensure their healthy development, the next generation pays it back through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship. With the support of engaged communities and nurturing families, all children can thrive and have the opportunity to grow into contributing, caring, and healthy adults.

Children's healthy development is the foundation for community and economic development. Research tells us that children's experiences literally build the developing

architecture of their maturing brains. Children's brains are built in a sequence of phases, with each phase forming the foundation for the one that follows. Just like a house needs a strong foundation, the quality of a child's brain architecture affects all the development that follows. That's why getting it right the first time is so important. Trying to change behavior or build new skills on a foundation that was not built properly is costly and not as effective.

Children thrive when they have nurturing, supportive relationships and interactions with the adults in their lives. Like the process of serve and return in a game of tennis, children of all ages naturally reach out to the adults in their lives. When those adults respond in a caring, nurturing and supportive way, children thrive.

When children are abused or neglected they are in a constant state of stress. In the absence of

supportive relationships to help buffer the stress, they can have a toxic stress reaction. When this happens, harmful chemicals flood the child's brain and body causing damage to the developing brain architecture, disrupting normal child development. This leaves children vulnerable, causing many of them to adopt risky social and health behaviors, such as smoking, sexual promiscuity at an early age, and illegal drug and alcohol use, among others. These risky behaviors lead to poor physical, emotional, and mental health and even early death.

(excerpt from Prevent Child Abuse America)

It shouldn't hurt to be a child. Help break the cycle of abuse.

If you think a child is being mistreated, take immediate action. Call Child Protective Services, 24 hours a day, at **209 385-3104**.

YOU can make a difference for a child!

CASA'S LIFE'S INSIGHTS FOR EVERYONE PROGRAM

The focus of CASA's LIFE program is to help foster youth be better prepared to make decisions and judicious choices in all aspects of their lives. Recent studies show that within 12-18 months after exiting foster care: 54% earn a high school diploma, 2% earn a bachelor's degree, 84% become a parent, and 51% are unemployed.

The LIFE Program was developed to improve the outcomes for these foster youth by working with students between the ages of 12-18 and their Advocates. CASA provides a safe and stimulating learning environment where youth can explore a range of work roles and

career paths. Working in partnership with Merced County Office of Education and the Human Services Agency, CASA strives to provide activities that will prepare the youth for their future. The learning environment includes a variety of experiences to prepare the youth for employment. The culminating activity for all youth who complete the course, is to receive paid work experience at a local business.

The long term goals of the LIFE Program are to increase the number of foster youth graduating from high school, attending college or another form of higher education, and

increase the percentage of foster youth employed and involved in the community.

The CASA Advocate is a key player in providing follow-up support and assistance – **making a difference one youth at a time.**



SPOTLIGHT ON AN ADVOCATE: BY CAITLIN IMELIO



CASA is there to serve children — what greater purpose could there be.

Sherri Zook began her work as a CASA after graduating from the tenth training group in May 2014. Sherri had been familiar with CASA but did not believe she would be able to find the time to get involved. "By 2014, life happens and a lot of things had changed. I found that I was now looking for a new purpose. Since I love kids I wanted to do something that involved them. I was seriously thinking about fostering, but soon realized that involved my household and I was looking for

something for just me," Sherri explained. With the support of her husband, family and friends, Sherri decided that it was the right time to become a CASA. Through her years of experience working with children as a Girl Scout Leader and a Service Unit Manager, Sherri learned how to have patience, communicate, and listen to children. These skills have helped her in her role as a CASA Advocate.

Soon after being sworn in, Sherri was assigned to a sibling group of 3 children. Although it seemed that these kids would be in care for a long time, they have recently been

reunited with family. Sherri continues to play a vital role in helping this family through the transition and being a support system for not only the children, but the family as well.

The advice that Sherri would give future advocates is, "Don't judge a case by what you read. You may think some kids are unreachable, but with time, patience, and of course understanding, all kids can be reached."

Sherri has demonstrated that even in a short period of time, a volunteer can play an important role in changing the life of a child.



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JOIN US AT OUR 5TH ANNUAL CASA SPRING FUNDRAISER

THE CASA CUP : A NIGHT AT THE RACES

SATURDAY, APRIL 18TH

CALL 722-CASA (2272) TO RESERVE YOUR TICKETS