

## Staff Christmas Party

"Great things in business are never done by one person; they're done by a team of people." – Steve Jobs

To celebrate the holidays and each other, the CASA Staff gathered together outside of the office for some camaraderie. They enjoyed lunch at Tary Boscolo's Pizzeria & Italian Restaurant and bowling at the newly remodeled Bellevue Bowl! It was a wonderful day filled with laughter and fun!

The staff cannot agree with Steve Jobs more, a great team of people that work together can do great things! Towards the end of the year, there is always a long list of things to be grateful for and at CASA of Merced County our list is extraordinarily long.

We hope you all had a wonderful Christmas Season!



## MID Traeger Grill WINNER



## Congratulations Angela McKellar!!

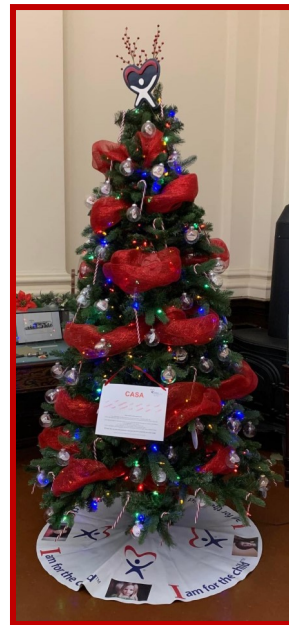
## Christmas Donations for our CASA Kiddos!

Every year we have our CASA kiddos fill out a wish-list and we (along with our fantastic community) work hard to make sure we can get everything the children asked for. This year the community responded in a HUGE way and our kiddos received the gifts on their wish-list and then some! We want to give a special shout out to some amazing organizations and generous individuals that went ABOVE & BEYOND for the foster children in Merced County this year.

**Thank you to: MID, West-Mark, Interwest Insurance, Ticket to Dream, Tequila Café, Dr. LeQuia, Berliner Cohen, UC Merced, Starbucks, CHP of Merced, Corbin Cash, MIG Construction, All Dads Matter, Red Sky Comics, Comic Book Clubhouse, Layla Lancaster, Jack Charters, Khloe Alexander, Emma & Jace Anderson, Lucy Lopez, and Linda Osborn.**



## Courthouse Christmas Tree



Every year, CASA has the pleasure of putting up and decorating a Christmas Tree inside the Historic Courthouse Museum. This year we filled the tree with candy canes and ornaments with pictures of our amazing CASA Volunteers. In 2021 more than 60 community groups put up trees! If you have never experienced this annual event, you should definitely plan to go next year. It is a unique display of holiday cheer.



CASA of Merced County

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Merced, CA 95344

Fall 2021 CASA Notes Newsletter

Follow us on  
Social Media!



@ MERCEDCASA

*Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Merced County advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children within the court system.*  
**VOLUNTEER. DONATE. GET INVOLVED.**

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US POSTAGE PAID  
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## Memorials & Honorariums

*In Memory of Jim O'Banion  
by Fred Erickson*

*In Memory of Kathy Hassett  
by Jan Bradley*

*In Honor of Debbi Johnston  
by John and Leigh Walth*

*In Memory of Norman Freitas  
by Juan and Carmen Amparan*

*In Honor of Rachel Ryskin & Dan Katz  
by Mary Camper*

*In Honor of Theresa Nadeau  
by Mary Camper*

*In Honor of Brian McCabe  
by Mary Camper*

*In Memory of Louis Aufdermaur Jr  
by Christine Kinsley*

*In Memory of Winifred Jose  
by David and Marlene Brazil*

*In honor of Nancy Young-Bergman  
by Janet Riley*

*In Memory of Sharon Barton Mueller  
by Herky and Jayne Gonsalves*

*In honor of Carol Etcheverry  
& Diane Neves  
by Robert and Cheryl Fantazia*

## Upcoming CASA of Merced County Events:

Monday, 1-17-2022	CASA Office closed for Martin Luther King Jr Day
Thursday, 1-20-2022	Training Class 42 Begins
Tuesday, 2-1-2022	Zoom CASA Information Session at 12PM
Friday, 2-18-2022	CASA Office closed for Lincoln's Birthday
Monday, 2-21-2022	CASA Office closed for Presidents Day
Tuesday, 3-1-2022	Zoom CASA Information Session at 12PM

Join the current  
group of  
Voices4CASA  
members!



Our VOICES4CASA are asked to support the organization with an annual donation. We welcome all support.

**You can help make a difference!**

CASA relies on individual and corporate donors and financial partners to make its work possible. Financial support is needed to recruit, train, and supervise advocates.



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# CASA Notes

Volume 9, Issue 4 Fall 2021

## A message to Advocates, Donors, Staff, and Volunteers

### By Executive Director, Cathie Lancaster



One child enters foster care every 2 minutes. For 2022, that means that 216,000 children will enter foster care in the United States. Some will come into care for the first time with little or no personal belongings. Some may be stuck in a cycle of entering and exiting the foster care system until they become adults. In Merced County, we have over 800 youth in foster care or 0.37% of the nation's foster youth.

As we approach the third year of the pandemic, we are seeing the disproportionate impact it is having on kids, particularly children in foster care. Many of these children have lost their caregivers, endured months of isolation, have been separated from their siblings and deprived of basic education and health resources. These children need a CASA Volunteer.

CASA volunteers are people just like you; in fact, you might be one. Our CASA volunteers are brave; brave enough to cast aside their doubts and show up for a child during one of the toughest times of their lives. Many of our prospective volunteers worry about the time commitment it takes to be a volunteer. However, the truth is, the amount of time spent is not as critical as being a consistent presence. Volunteers do not need super powers to make a difference in the life of a child; they need to be consistent, show up with a listening ear and an open heart.

January is the time to make resolutions, refresh and renew our lives. Consider becoming a Court Appointed Special Advocate in 2022 and be the beacon of hope in a foster child's life. Or, consider making a donation that CASA can use to help the abused, abandoned and neglected foster youth that CASA of Merced County serves. Either way you are helping to put a smile on the face of a foster youth.

Together we can help them soar into a better future. On behalf of our county's most vulnerable children, I thank you.

- Cathie Lancaster

CASA would like to give a special shout out to the person (or persons) who have been donating to CASA via our Walmart Wish List. We have been excited to open boxes over the past few months with items for our Essential Packs for Every Child (EPEC) kits. The boxes have been delivered without a donor name and we are sad we are unable to thank these donors in person. Please know, whoever you are, you are helping CASA help a child going through one of the worst times of their lives and we thank you!

CASA prepares EPEC kits that are given to children when they have been removed from their home and enter foster care. A lot of the time, children have nothing but the clothes on their back when they are detained. EPEC kits are full of age and gender appropriate goodies such as personal hygiene items, toys, school supplies, socks, and are designed to bring comfort during a traumatic time.

The link to donate items to fill our EPEC kits can be found on the CASA website under "donate" and "wish list." If you chose to donate, please call the CASA office or email Executive Director Cathie Lancaster at [clancaster@mercedcasa.org](mailto:clancaster@mercedcasa.org) so we can properly thank you! Of course, if you wish to remain anonymous, we respect your decision and truly thank you for your thoughtfulness and generosity.



Nitza grew up in Puerto Rico and as a child, she belonged to a police organization that teaches others right and wrong. As an adult, Nitza had a crochet business in Puerto Rico, she is a certified artisan. In college, she studied civil engineering and she belonged to the student council which gave her the opportunity to organize activities at the local orphanage. When she moved to the US, she worked as a First Communion teacher at her church, she was the fellowship hall coordinator, and she helped on the PTA at her son's school. Nitza is a wife and mother of three. She is currently pursuing her bachelor's degree in social work with the intention to further involve herself with foster youth; she also enjoys crafting, baking, and swimming. In 2020, Nitza heard about CASA on the radio and it spoke to her heart, and her desire to help children. Shortly after, she heard on the news about a couple who had killed their 2-year old, because they were irritated with them. The news broke Nitza's heart and that was the push for her to join CASA of Merced County.

Seeing firsthand the difference her presence has been to the kids, to the case, and to the social worker makes all the difference to Nitza. If a person can dedicate one hour a week to make a case less complicated by connecting the dots and inquiring about the needs of the children and how to get the ball rolling for services. Every time Nitza walks through the kid's door, she gets loads of hugs and little handcrafted things. When they go out, the children look to her for approval and encouragement to do things (like getting close to geese at the park or goats at the zoo) and they know she has their backs and that she is there for them always. Nitza says "that difference cannot be bought with money, cannot be well explained without me bursting into tears, and cannot be replaced for the children by any other person than their CASA. Because we DO make a difference, we create that bridge that facilitates the role of everyone involved in the case. So, 4 hours per month, or perhaps 15, make all the difference for a child who needs a role model, a friend, a guide, a confident. It counts."

Nitza's advice to new CASA Volunteers is, "know the players in your case and know when to push and when to respect the boundaries. Educate those that do not know what CASA is, because there are a lot of them. Be patient, but persistent. Plan with your kiddos, at the end of the day if you get to know them well you will know what they need and what they want. Communicate with your peer coordinator (kudos to Ms. Workman and Angela) and ask if you have doubts about something. If your heart is in it, you will be a great CASA".



## EVERY DAY HERO: NITZA PAGAN



## October's Friday Night Fun—Movie Night

October's Friday Night Fun was a huge success for our CASA Kiddos! Thanks to the generosity from The Mainzer, we were able to invite foster youth to watch Hocus Pocus on the big screen! Upon entering the theater, each child was given a stuffed monster to hug if they became scared during the movie. The Mainzer chef out did himself with a delicious dinner of hamburgers, chips, cookies and drinks. Each child was able to take another "to-go" box home filled with other yummy treats as well! After the movie, there was a drawing for prizes and then the kids were able to "trick or treat" CASA style. They each picked a duffle bag to fill with socks, candy, popcorn, blankets, Wendy's Frosty certificates and MANY more goodies! The smile on the kiddos faces when the night was over melted everyone's hearts. Thank you to the advocates, board of directors and social workers who attended our unforgettable Friday Night Fun!

After the guests left for the night, the CASA Staff went downstairs to the restaurant and enjoyed dinner and drinks for the first time ever as a group!

Thank you Cathie Lancaster, David Benavides and Mainzer staff for a memorable night for everyone involved.

