



# 4th of July Parade!



Executive Director, Cathie Lancaster, showcasing CASA making the front page in the Merced County Times paper!



**FUN FACT:** The first Independence Day celebration took place in Philadelphia on July 8, 1776. This was also the day that the Declaration of Independence was first read in public after people were summoned by the ringing of the Liberty Bell.

This year our CASA staff, advocates, and their families participated in the 4th of July parade, showing off their patriotic spirit! The theme for the 2019 float was Community over Self – Atwater Pride City Wide. We want to thank our amazing volunteers for offering so much of their time to ensure our Foster Youth are supported and loved. We would not be successful without each and every one of you!

## Spotlight on an Advocate: Albert Barreno



Albert grew up in the Central Valley; specifically the Fresno area. When he was about 10/11 years old, Albert and his 10 siblings were placed into

various foster homes, which greatly impacted him for the rest of his life. Having been a victim of abandonment, abuse, and neglect as a child; he recognizes the kind of support a child deserves. He is a fighter for the "little guy" and works hard to protect the children in need.

Albert loves to spend his time volunteering. He is a member of the Family Selection Committee, he serves on the Board of Directors for Habitat for Humanity of Tuolumne Co, as well as a member of the Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Justice Commission. He and his wife have 2 adult children together

and 6 beautiful grandkids. He enjoys to ski in the winter and attend Oakland A's games in the summer (with his grandkids of course). His favorite pastime is spending time with his wife of 38 years, Evelyn.

Albert has always known the value of a CASA, since he had been in the foster care system for two years himself. There was no CASA program while he was in care, but he knew he definitely could have used one. He knows the impact a stable adult can have on a child's life. He has always wanted to grow up to be the kind of person he needed as a child. Albert states, "In the child's eyes, we are that constant steady in their lives". His dream is to move back to Sonora, in a few years, to start a CASA program there for the children that need it most.

When he first met his CASA kiddo, the child did not want anything to do with him. He was visiting the child at either his group home (out of county) or juvenile hall. About 2 months in, Albert used some techniques he had recently learned at a Continuing Ed class in town. The biggest breakthrough came when the child learned that Albert was not a

paid court employee, but a volunteer who was there just for him. In the 7 months he has been with his kiddo, he's been in 3 different group homes and 2 different juvenile halls. That's a lot of different people taking care of him!

Albert's words of advice for all future advocates are, "go into your first visit with an open mind. Don't be upset if the visit doesn't go well. A lot of kiddos have had many adults come in and out of their lives, only to continue to let them down with broken promises. It takes a while to build a bond. Also, use your support system! Between your Peer Coordinator and the CASA staff, they are there to support you anytime. Most importantly, know that even though your kiddo may never say or do anything that tells you he appreciates you, he does!"

Finally, Albert wanted to say you've made the right choice to be a CASA; that no matter how bad of a day or visit you have, keep on fighting the good fight for your kiddo...if you don't, who will?

## Swearing in Ceremony for CASA CLASS 29 & 30!



### Congratulations Class 29!

Alma Benavides, Yalitzza Gonzalez, Joel Hernandez, Angela McKellar, Stephanie Rivero, Daisy Torres-Pinon & Ana Cuevas



### Congratulations Class 30!

Dan Smith, Caroline Meraz, Nate Marciochi, Nereida Hurtado, Violet Huff, Luzie Harville, Jessica Gillis, Tony Fuentes, & Sonja Downing.

Sixteen community citizens will soon begin advocating for Merced County foster youth. Graduates of CASA's twenty-ninth & thirtieth training classes have completed 30 hours of training, 5 hours of courtroom observation, multiple background checks, multiple reference checks and will make a minimum commitment of 18 months to the child they will serve.

A CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) is a trained volunteer who is appointed by the Judge to represent the best interests of a child currently in foster care. The CASA Volunteer provides the presiding Juvenile Dependency Judge with recommendations that help the Court make difficult decisions about the child's future. No specific type of background is required to become a Volunteer. CASA of Merced County provides all necessary training needed to become a Court Appointed Special Advocate. Learn more about how to become a CASA Volunteer by visiting our website at [www.mercedcasa.org](http://www.mercedcasa.org) or calling our office at 209-722-2272.

**Our next training class starts October 7, 2019; would you like to join us?**