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# CASA Notes

Volume 6, Issue 1 Spring 2018  
A Member of the National CASA Association

CASA would like to thank you all of you who attended CASA Derby Night! It was a fun evening that brought in much needed funds that will help increase the number of children assigned a CASA volunteer. If you were not able to attend this year, we hope you will consider joining the fun in 2019!



**VOICES4CASA** Join the current group of 163 **Voices4CASA** members!

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. Our **VOICES4CASA** are asked to support the organization with an annual donation. We welcome all support including volunteers who can donate time for even just a few hours throughout the year. **You can help make a difference!**

Call our office or go to [www.MercedCASA.org](http://www.MercedCASA.org)



I am for the child™

CASA of Merced County  
P O Box 2362  
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*Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Merced County advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children within the court system.*



In April, Aaron Pankratz Associate Director of CASA of Santa Barbara County bicycled 588 miles from the Courthouse in Santa Barbara to the State Capitol to raise awareness for abused and neglected children and the need for more advocates during Child Abuse Awareness month. CASA volunteers experience many hills and hurdles while working on a child's case. While their hills are more metaphorical, Aaron's were more literal. Aaron made stops at nine CASA offices along his journey. Charissa Beardsley Family Connections Coordinator from Merced joined Aaron at his stop in Merced and rode with him to CASA of Stanislaus County.

**Memorials & Honorariums**

<b>In Honor of Dwight Sharpe</b> Greg Olzack	<b>In Memory of Carolyn Jones</b> Sue & Eric Conley
<b>In Honor of Marge Sadler &amp; Bette Woolstenhulme</b> Karen Albright	<b>In Memory of Betty McCully</b> Kathy Scotto
<b>In Memory of Carolyn Jones</b> Robin & Eileen Ingraham	<b>In Memory of Bob, Mary &amp; Mike Anderson</b> Cathie Lancaster

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**Message from the Executive Director, Cathie Lancaster**

CASA of Merced County aspires to improve the lives of children in foster care by providing trained volunteers to advocate for their best interests in the foster care system and to prepare them for the future. We currently have 100 advocates serving 110 children, with 11 future advocates being sworn in in June. With a CASA, children in foster care have someone who will care and listen to them. Their CASA meets with them on a regular basis and speaks up for their best interests. It is amazing how much these volunteers accomplish for our children! Please read *Spotlight on an Advocate* for a real life example of how one of our own CASAs helped improve the life of a Merced County youth in foster care.

I am always happy to share exciting news about CASA of Merced County and this newsletter is no exception! Keep reading for a small sample of what we have been doing over the past few months.

First, I would like to thank everyone that participated in CASA Derby Night on March 24; whether you donated an item, a baked good, your time or were an attendee, you helped to make our night a success and we cannot thank you enough! Our speaker this year was former foster youth Raquel, who told her heart-moving story about being in foster care as a teenager. Raquel shared how her life would have been different if she had a CASA; she stated, "I believe every youth should have the advocacy of a CASA volunteer. CASA volunteers can leave the most positive impact on children." I think we all agree with Raquel.

I would like to welcome two new employees to our CASA staff, Charissa Beardsley and Whitney Cornish. Charissa joined CASA in November as our Family Connections Coordinator. Charissa's goal is to provide permanency for foster youth by connecting them with as many appropriate relatives and non-relatives, as possible, and assist them in developing lasting relationships. Whitney joined CASA in March as our Early Childhood Specialist / Advocate Coordinator. This is a brand new position for CASA of Merced County. Whitney will provide direct services to early childhood aged children and their caregivers as well as supervise advocates specifically assigned to these young children. We are very happy to have Charissa and Whitney join our CASA family.

During the past few months, we have welcomed several new members to our Board of Directors: Dena Traina, Natasha Crivelli, Wendy Spencer, Uday Bali, Emily Haden and Steve Tietjen. CASA sadly said good-bye to Stephen Jones and John Carlisle who had been on the CASA Board of Directors since we were in the planning stages. None of our work could be accomplished without the vision, support, and generosity of our Board of Directors.

In September, we are going to have a new type of fundraiser – a No Show Fundraiser. Look for more information in your mailboxes this September. Our fund raising events are very important; the proceeds from these events help us recruit, train and develop advocates to help the neglected and abused foster youth of Merced County.

Finally, I want to personally thank each one of you who support our program through financial giving and/or volunteering time. We cannot continue our mission without your help.

**Message from Vice President Henry Strength**

No one likes to think child abuse exists in their community. However, sadly, it does exist in every community in America. Here in Merced County in 2017, over 549 children were found by the courts to have been abused or neglected by their families. When that happens, the child may enter foster care, which can be a disorienting, frightening and unsettling experience for any age child. As we observe Child Abuse Prevention Month, let us recommit ourselves to ending the vicious cycle of abuse, and to stand up for every child too young to speak for themselves.

One of the most effective ways to do this is by becoming a CASA volunteer. We are thankful that 154 children in foster care in Merced County have a Court Appointed Special Advocate, a CASA, to help guide and advocate for them in the judicial and child welfare system.

Research shows that children in foster care, who have a CASA, live happier, healthier lives as adults than children in foster care who have not had the benefit of a CASA's support.

At Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Merced County, we believe that all children in foster care deserve a CASA who can help them to understand their situation and can advocate fiercely on their behalf. To become a Court Appointed Special Advocate contact 209-722-2272, visit our website [www.mercedcasa.org](http://www.mercedcasa.org) or attend an Informational Session the first Tuesday of each month in the CASA office at noon. We have two more trainings in 2018; our summer class starts July 9 and our fall class starts September 20 and we would love to see you there! Bring a friend and begin this heartwarming journey together.

**Spotlight on an Advocate—Elisa Pouncey**



Elisa grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area raised by a single father along with her special needs sister in a multi-generational, bilingual Mexican household. Her father was a high school Spanish teacher and tennis coach and spent a lot of time on the court with Elisa. As big fans of tennis, they went to New York to watch the U.S. Open; Elisa has also been to Wimbledon and the French Open!

Elisa attended UC Berkeley where she met her husband of 38 years who is from Merced. While attending college as a psychology major she played on the first UC Berkeley girl's rugby team. Elisa and her husband have two sons and has one grandson. Fortunately, her boys all live within two hours of Merced, so she gets to see them often.

Now that Elisa is retired, she keeps busy with volunteer activities, home improvements and travel. She calls herself "Support Services" and is happy to help family, friends and organizations who need volunteers.

Elisa has friends who are advocates and others who are social workers. Those friends thought that her personality and skill set would fit in well with CASA. The big selling point for Elisa in becoming a CASA was the statistic that Merced County CASA has a high percentage of youths graduating from high school. She believes that education is crucial to our youth's success.

Elisa joined CASA Training Class 17 and has been an advocate since June 2016. She feels the social service system is

fraught with problems and a CASA can help fill any gaps that may happen to children because of overworked social workers or a busy school.

Elisa's CASA youth has had some serious and traumatic events in the time they have been together. As she

helped him through these hard times, they created a bond. One of her fondest memories is when her youth told her that he

never really knew what a CASA was and did not think he needed one. Now that he has Elisa, he knows what it is like to have someone he can trust and he knows they were brought together for a reason. He recently told his caregiver "Elisa is my person, she is always there for me and I love her!" She is very grateful that her youth is able to trust her considering the difficulties in his life, they both see proof positive that a foster youth needs just one constant person in their life to make a difference.

Elisa is proud to share that her youth will be graduating from high school in June (something that did not appear to be likely a year ago) and has been accepted into college!



**THANK YOU ADVOCATES AND VOLUNTEERS!**



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