

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: BY SHAR HERRERA

I am happy to share with you that 2015 continued to be a year of growth for CASA of Merced County. Due to our donors and volunteers, amazing things were made possible:

◆ **25 NEW VOLUNTEERS** joined the CASA team, completing a 40 hour training program.

◆ **65 VOLUNTEERS** served children as CASA Advocates.

◆ **137 CHILDREN** who are dependents of the Court, received a powerful gift: a volunteer to advocate for them and to make sure they are safe.

◆ **90 COURT REPORTS** containing critically important information were submitted to the Court on behalf of **CHILDREN**

◆ During the year, CASA volunteers donated more than **9,576 HOURS** of their time to advocate for abused and neglected children, providing **\$248,976 IN VALUE** to our community.

While we celebrate these successes, we also know that there are still more than 450 children in dependency in Merced County that need a CASA. Our goal is to increase our recruitment and training efforts so that by 2020 we will be able to provide support to more than 350 children.

How can you help? CASA needs dedicated volunteers. The average CASA Advocate spends 8-10 hours a month on their case. If you or someone you know, would be interested in providing stability and hope to a child in foster care, please call our office for more information.

If you do not feel that you have the time to be an Advocate, there are other ways to help, such as helping with mailings or fundraising events.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIFE OF A CHILD.

Call our office to find out how you can help, (209) 722-2272.

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT BY MARY MILLER

The Board of Directors of CASA recently held its annual retreat on a Sunday afternoon. Each year, the focus of the retreat differs, based partly on current needs and issues. This year's retreat focus was on resource development, with particular emphasis on fundraising. We were fortunate enough to have as our facilitator Colleen McGauley, long-serving and highly respected executive director of CASA of Kern County. Colleen inspired the board with great ideas and unbridled enthusiasm. The focus on resources was especially important this year, because the annual startup grant from National CASA, which we received for the past four years, is no longer available to us. This is a significant funding drop. So it is up to CASA and the board to replace that funding with additional grants and

donations, adding to our current success in those categories.

During the retreat, we identified several grant opportunities that we will pursue. We also discussed Merced County businesses and organizations that might be interested in supporting the good work performed by CASA advocates. Finally, we discussed personal giving. Over the past two years, we have greatly increased the number of participants in our Voices4CASA program, in which individuals contribute money annually to support the program. We will continue to request ongoing donations from existing members, as well as increase the number of participants.

However, a major source of funds for CASA is our annual fundraisers, one in the fall and one in the spring. The fall events have been in Los Banos and the spring events are in Merced. The revenue realized from these

events has grown each year. This year, the spring event will be held at the Merced Fairgrounds on April 9. The theme is a repeat of last year, mostly by popular demand of the attendees. It will again be called the CASA Cup: A Night at the Races. Last year's event was a blast, and this year purports to be even better.

I hope each of you will consider attending the spring event. Information on the event is included elsewhere in the newsletter. Not only will you have a good time, you will also be helping to provide a necessary service to improve life for vulnerable children. I also hope you will consider becoming a Voice4CASA, or continuing your participation if you have already joined.

The children need your help, and society needs your help. Please support CASA and the wonderful work the selfless advocates do for the children.

I am for the child™



JOIN



CASA relies on individual and corporate volunteers 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. Join the current group of 143 VOICES4CASA.

Call our office or go to our website.

You can help make a difference!

THANK YOU ADVOCATES AND VOLUNTEERS!

Faria Alamkhel
Aloura Alcantar
Ryan Alcaraz
Ruth Alejo
Karolyn Alvarez
Edna Asquith
David Benavides
Debbie Bier
Jan Bradley
Diane Butts
Jalissa Chambers

Youa Chang
Galen Chastain
Marcie Correa
Jerry Lou Davis
Lynda Dyas
Nancy Edmiston
Bill Fishback
Martha Flores
Ruben Fuentes
Taylor Fugere-Cale
Michelle Hafer

Wayne Hague
Carol Hamm
Skip Harris
Juene Hazlett
Diane Hockersmith
Caitlin Imelio
Ashley Johnson
Debbi Johnston
Veda Jones
Claudia Kalmin
Cathy Keegan

Jeanette King
Tanya Livingston
Justin Lopes
Jan Lorenzi
Helena Marciochi
Teresa Martinez
Kim McAuley
Amy McNeill
Kristine Minor
Stan Mollart
Kay Morgan

Kathy Moser
Lynda Osborn
Ashley Otani
Jane Paulo
Sandy Peterson
Sylvia Pettit
Therasa Pfeil
Ann Pike
Robyn Piro
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Judy Rose
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Judith Salzberg
Erin Smelcer
Karen Smith
LaDenta Smith
Stephanie Souza
Patty van Lobensels
Margie Villarreal

Marci White
Deborah Workman
Jon Zalinski
Sherri Zook



CASA of Merced County

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CASA Notes

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FOSTER CARE POPULATION DROPS IN CALIFORNIA

Sacramento—California has seen decreases in the number of children in foster care in the past decade, but child advocates say the need for high-quality foster parents remains high.

Since 2000, California has reduced the number of kids in foster care from 103,501 to 55,218, a 47 percent drop driven by policies that emphasize keeping families together when possible and, when not, increasing permanent placements.

California - which has the country's largest foster-care population - far outpaced the 27 percent decline seen nationally.

Working on outcomes:

"With the decline in the case load, it may be easy to become complacent and say we've solved the problem," said Jill Duerr Berrick, co-director at UC Berkeley's Center for Child and Youth Policy. "And that would not be where I want us to land."

Berrick said much work remains to improve the education and health outcomes for children who enter foster care, which is a challenge, considering that many have suffered significant trauma and are in need of mental health services.

Studies have shown that children in foster care are less likely to complete high school or enroll in community college,

even when compared with young people with similar disadvantages. A report released this year by the Stuart Foundation found that only 45 percent of California's foster youths graduate from high school, a statistic driven by the nomadic lifestyle many kids lead while waiting for a permanent home. While in foster care, 70 percent of youths had three or more placements.

"For children who are in out-of-home care, what they need are really high-quality foster parents," Berrick said. "They need caregivers who will love them and be incredibly devoted to them."



However, the demand for foster parents almost always exceeds the supply, Berrick said. California now licenses 6,600 foster homes, down from 7,300 in 2009.

Frank Mecca, executive director of the County Welfare Directors Association of California, said recruiting and retaining caregivers are among the biggest challenges in foster care.

"It's a difficult job; the cost of living in California makes it difficult to reduce work hours to devote to children who in most cases have suffered a significant degree of trauma," Mecca said.

The basic amount foster parents receive each month ranges from \$657 to \$820, depending on the age of the child. Amounts are increased for children with special needs.

Lorraine Hanks, a Bayview foster parent, said money goes quickly when kids are enrolled in extracurricular activities like sports and dance.

Hanks has had more than 20 kids placed in her home over the years and currently has three foster children.

"You have to have patience," said Hanks, 47. "You have to be open and you have to communicate. Without those things, it all goes downhill."

Family and Children Services agency have led to more support for families, such as training programs and retreats.

"In any job you can burn out," Hanks said. "This is a 24-hour job. If you feel respected, you can handle anything. ... I do this because when you look at where the children came from, this gives them an opportunity to see something different, to reach their goals and reach for success."

SFGATE

A VOICE FOR A CHILD

BY A CASA ADVOCATE

Teen's CASA Volunteer Is Key to Finding Older Sibling to Provide Home

CASA volunteer, Chris*, was assigned to a teenage boy - James* - who had been in foster care for five years. It was thought that James would end up aging out of the foster care system when he turned 18. But Chris had other ideas.

Once Chris was assigned to James, things began to turn around. Chris built a strong

relationship with James and was determined not to just wait around for him to age out of the system.

Chris did some research and helped to find James' older brother, who turned out to be someone who James could potentially live with permanently. Chris not only helped James, but also supported his brother as he took the steps to bring James into his home.

James now lives with his older brother, thanks in large part to the consistency, investigation and

devotion of his CASA volunteer Chris.

A CASA VOLUNTEER MAKES A DIFFERENCE!



SPOTLIGHT ON AN ADVOCATE:

Helena's experience with CASA began in 2013 after retiring from Merced County Superior Court, where she had worked for 28 years. Helena always knew she wanted to volunteer after she retired, she was just unsure what that volunteer role would be.

"After retirement I had the misfortune of having to deal with cancer. Being a full believer in a higher power, I made the promise to do something to help others," Helena explains. Through years of experience with the court, Helena became familiar with CASA and how advocates played a role in helping children in the foster care system. She decided

that being an advocate would be the best way to devote her time to others.

Helena's years of experience raising children of her own and participating in activities with other children through 4-H, Brownies, and baseball, gave her the skills necessary to interact and connect with her CASA kids. These skills have aided her in forming caring and trusting relationships with the children on both of her CASA cases.

"My goal with CASA is to do whatever possible I can to make a difference in a child's life. I feel that many times one special person can make all the



difference in the world to them."

Her advice to advocates is, "You need to come to terms with the fact that you cannot save a child from their situations. Do the best you can with a child and not question yourself, such as if you did the right thing, or did you do enough".

Her favorite saying is, "Plant the seed if you want growth."

Helena is doing just that. She is making a difference!



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SAVE THE DATES SAVE THE DATES SAVE THE DATES

April 9, 2016 The CASA CUP returns, a Night of Horse Races, Merced County Fairgrounds Pavilion

September 17, 2016 CASA Casino Night, Los Banos O'Banion Auditorium