

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BY SHAR HERRERA

Greetings to all of our CASA friends!

I want to thank you all of you who attended The CASA Cup: A Night at the Races. It was a fun evening that brought in much needed funds that will help increase the number of children assigned a CASA volunteer.

May is National Foster Care Month. It's a time to recognize that we each can play a part in enhancing the lives of children and youth in foster care. It is also a month set aside to acknowledge foster parents, family members, volunteers, mentors, policymakers, child welfare professionals, and other members of the community who help children and

youth in foster care find permanent homes and connections. During National Foster Care Month, we renew our commitment to ensuring a bright future for the more than 500 children and youth in foster care in Merced County, and we celebrate all those who make a meaningful difference in their

lives. In Merced County, we are very fortunate to have a group of professionals and volunteers who are passionate about the work they do. It is not an easy job. We appreciate all they do.

If you are interested in finding out how you can join us in making a difference for children in foster, call our office or go to our website at MercedCASA.org.



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

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT BY MARY MILLER

Many good things have been happening at CASA, thus allowing CASA to do even more good things for the foster children of Merced County. First, we held a very successful and fun spring fundraiser. Entitled the CASA Cup: A Night at the Races, it was attended by about 330 supporters, many decked out in fine Derby attire, and all having a grand time socializing, eating a fabulous dinner, bidding on auction items and, best of all, "betting" (with play money, of course) on exciting horse races, everyone loudly cheering on their chosen horses. We were able to raise substantial funds to continue to train and support Advocates.

Second, CASA of Merced County was one of only six awardees to receive a national award. We were the only CASA organization in the country to receive the

Allied Professional Award, which was accepted on our behalf in Washington, D.C. by a representative of National CASA. We were nominated by Congressman Jim Costa, and he announced our selection as awardee at our CASA Cup event. This award is especially appropriate for CASA, because, with rare exception, foster children are all victims of crime. Our goal is to mitigate the negative impacts on the children through the wonderful support provided by the Advocates. The beautiful award is proudly on display in our office.

Finally, and most important, we continue to attract strong, selfless individuals to serve as Advocates. We recently swore in several new ones and have just started training for the next cadre. You may have seen a flyer included in both the Merced Sun-Star and the Los Banos Enterprise. Those flyers raised awareness and resulted in many phone

calls from prospective volunteers. We applied for a Victims of Crime (VOCA) grant and, if successful, will have the resources to do much more advertising to solicit Advocates. Hundreds more foster children in Merced County do not have Advocates and would greatly benefit from them. Our highest priority is to provide a CASA to every foster child who could benefit from one.

In addition to our success in attracting volunteer Advocates, we increased the size of the Board of Directors and have been fortunate enough to acquire additional members whose commitment to foster children is amazing. We at CASA appreciate all the support, including financial support, volunteer efforts and moral support, that we receive throughout the county and beyond. Together, through all of our efforts, we will make a difference in the lives of our foster 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 www.MercedCASA.org

You can help make a difference!

THANK YOU ADVOCATES AND VOLUNTEERS!

Faria Alamkhel
Aloura Alcantar
Ryan Alcaraz
Ruth Alejo
Colby Alvarado
Karolyn Alvarez
Edna Asquith
David Benavides
Debbie Bier
Jan Bradley
Brenda Bravo

Diane Butts
Rita Carlson
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

Stan Mollart
Kay Morgan
Kathy Moser
Linda Murphy
Rita Nord
Lynda Osborn
Ashley Otani
Jane Paulo
Sandy Peterson
Sylvia Pettit
Therasa Pfeil
Ann Pike
Robyn Piro

Barbara Purslow
Sheila Quall
Christopher Ramirez
Sarah Reel
Mary Rojas
Rita Romero
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Marge Sadler
Judith Salzberg
Erin Smelcer
Karen Smith
LaDenta Smith
Stephanie Souza

Barbara Stroud
Patty van Lobensels
Margie Villarreal
Marci White
Deborah Workman
Jon Zalinski



CASA Notes

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A Member of the National CASA Association

CASA of Merced County Honored with Victims' Rights Caucus Award

April 14, 2016

WASHINGTON, D.C. – At the annual Congressional Victims' Rights Caucus (VRC) Awards held on Wednesday April 13, 2016, Rep. Jim Costa (D-CA) and Rep. Ted Poe (R-TX) honored CASA of Merced County with the 2016 Allied Professional Award for the program's outstanding service on behalf of abused and neglected children in California's central valley.

"CASA of Merced County's board members, staff and volunteers are honored to receive this national award," said CASA of Merced County Executive Director Shar Herrera. "Our volunteer advocates work tirelessly to provide stability and hope to the abused, abandoned and neglected children in foster care—children who face a bleak future without the powerful advocacy of a CASA volunteer."

According to the Office for Victims of Crimes, this award recognizes an individual or individuals from a specific discipline outside the victim assistance field for their service to victims and/or contribution to the victims' field.

"Sadly, children in the foster care system are too often in a situation where they do not have



a single person in their life to trust and rely on," explained Congressman Jim Costa. "But Merced CASA volunteers have changed that horrible reality for hundreds of children throughout the county."

"CASA works with a mission to place every child in a safe, loving, and permanent home. CASA relies on the work of volunteer advocates for the interests of children overlooked by society," said Congressman Ted Poe (TX-R). "The Merced CASA is absolutely deserving of the Victims' Rights Caucus' Allied Professional Award."

Phil Ladew, Associate and Legal Director of California CASA, the state-level CASA organization expressed his appreciation for the VRC's recognition of Shar and CASA of Merced's work on behalf of children living in the foster care system, "because children in foster care are frequently victims of crimes in their own right."

Each year Reps. Poe and Costa, along with other members of the bipartisan VRC, host an awards ceremony to honor outstanding individuals and organizations for their tireless efforts to support and empower victims of crime. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Bi-Partisan Congressional Victims' Rights Caucus, co-founded by Reps. Poe and Costa.

CASA of Merced County is part of the California CASA Association and a member of the National CASA Association, a nationwide network that trains and supports volunteer advocates who speak up for abused and neglected children. CASA of Merced County follows nationally recognized standards that are highly respected by judges and child welfare professionals across the country.

A VOICE FOR A CHILD

Baby "Eva" was six and a half months old when she first became a foster child. "Eva's" parents were quite young: her mother was sixteen years old and her father was seventeen years old. Fortunately, a paternal aunt was willing to have "Eva" placed in her home.

Debbie, a CASA volunteer, was assigned to "Eva" to advocate for this infant.

In order for "Eva's" parents to



regain custody, the court required both parents take classes to learn better parenting skills and practices. Her mother attended classes erratically and her father's participation was non-existent. After an intervention, "Eva's" mother was placed in an out-of-county facility where she was able to successfully complete a parenting course and make sufficient progress toward reunification with "Eva."

"Eva's" mother regained custody but soon fell back into her old pattern of parenting. Because the CASA, Debbie, had built a relationship of trust with

all the parties involved in the case, she was able to stay well-informed about "Eva's" status. When the father unexpectedly showed up at the paternal aunt's home and dropped off the baby, the paternal aunt notified the CASA.

The mother decided that she was not able to care for a baby by herself. Today "Eva" is with her aunt and uncle. The adoption process has begun and "Eva" will be with family in a stable living situation.

**A CASA VOLUNTEER
MAKES A DIFFERENCE!**

SPOTLIGHT ON AN ADVOCATE



Colby grew up in Merced. Her parents divorced when she was 6 years old and she lived primarily with her mom and visited her dad on the weekends. She has one brother. When she was 12, her mom remarried and she got 2 step-brothers.

Colby says that CASA is a special organization because it allows people in the community to work with the children that are the future of OUR community. Without CASA, many children would be lost in the foster care system.

In January of 2012, Colby started CASA training. During her time with CASA she has had three cases, all girls, who, of

course, just love Colby! Her goals in joining CASA were to make a difference in the life of a child, to learn more about the foster care system and to be more objective about the way families live in our community.

Colby is also a Peer Coordinator (while teaching full-time!). She works with four advocates to help them see the children and the family with an objective point of view. She helps her advocates understand that they need to listen and not be quick to judge. "The kids really just want someone to listen to them, no matter how unimportant what they have to say might sound".

Two of the values that CASA brings to the table are generosity and acceptance. We can clearly see those qualities in our advocates who work tirelessly on their cases.

Colby has a wonderful husband and three children. Two of her kids stop by the office from time to time...they are adorable.

Before Colby started her teaching job, she worked as the Family Connection Coordinator in the CASA office. She has some interesting stories from those days. If you see her, you might want to ask about the family she found who thought their kids had been adopted and eventually were reunited with them as a family. It's an amazing story and she was an important part!



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SAVE THE DATE

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September 17, 2016

CASA Casino Night, Los Banos O'Banion Auditorium