

## ZOOM HOLIDAY'S AT CASA

CASA Staff was making the best of the holidays this year from home. While it was not the same, we still did our best to make the most of it. Like many others, we have missed our office, our friends and most importantly, our volunteers. As much fun as these Zoom Holidays were, everyone at the CASA office is hoping 2021 is filled with in-person celebrations.

*Happy Holidays!*



## Cookies for CASA

**Cookies, cocoa and coffee!** The SEVA organization handed out delicious cookies to anyone who wanted to stop by, in fun drive-through fashion. They did not ask for a set price, but instead asked for donations. This event was full of Christmas Spirit and we are so grateful to SEVA for thinking of us! We also want to thank everyone who showed up and purchased cookies and at the same time, supported Merced County Foster Youth.



**I am for the child™**

CASA of Merced County

P O Box 2362

Merced, CA 95344

Fall 2020 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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## CASA Drive Through Christmas Extravaganza

The Christmas Spirit was alive on December 17 2020! Santa came to the CASA office and the staff put on a Drive-Through Extravaganza. At the various stations we had hot chocolate, stockings supplied by Dr. Thomas Lequia, cookies & rice crispy treats made especially for us by Carol Etcheverry, a craft item to take home and create, more stockings, head phones, and of course, SANTA himself passing out gifts to the kiddos! Even though we celebrated Christmas a little differently this year, we still had a wonderful time together! We want to give a special thanks to our neighbors Dr. Thomas Lequia and Berliner Cohen LLC, in addition to Gerald and Darla Soto, MID, Spinardi and Jones, Westmark, CHP, M-Mig Construction, Starbucks, UC Merced, Adam Castro and Rafael V. Gonzalez, our CASA board members, and all of those generous businesses who supported us, for all of their help putting on this magical event for our CASA foster youth! The finale to our Nonevent Fundraiser was celebrated the same evening when Santa drew the names of the lucky winners from our wonderful donors. The following are the lucky prize winners: Pebble Beach Resort Gift Card won by: **Westside Ag Consultants Mitch Arambel**

Wine.com Gift Card won by: **Anita Marquez**  
Crinklaw Fine Art original painting won by: **John & Terri Rohrer**  
Golf Package at Quail Lodge—Carmel won by: **Curt & Gaye Riggs**  
Blue Apron Gift Card won by: **Randy & Agnes Bardini**  
**A BIG thank you to all who supported CASA via our Nonevent Fundraiser!**

This year has been tough for everyone, but imagine how it must feel for a child in the foster care system. This year, for a New Years Resolution, consider becoming a volunteer and advocating for a child who feels alone and unwanted. Make a difference in their life and yours! Please call the CASA Office at 209-722-2272 and find out what it takes to change a child's story.



Dear Casa,  
Thank you guys so much for everything you guys push for me & many others do. It really makes a difference in kids/teen's life bc it shows that there is ppl we don't even know on a personal level that care about us. This is my last yr kind of as a casa kid b/c ill be 18 next yrs and I really have appreciated over 9 yrs being able to have you guys and my casa as family now.  
Thank you love,  
CASA Kid  
12/17/2020

## Upcoming CASA of Merced County Events:

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Monday, 1-18-2021 | CASA Office closed for Martin Luther King Jr Day |
| Tuesday, 2-2-2021 | Zoom CASA Information Session at 12PM            |
| Friday, 2-12-2021 | CASA Office closed for Lincoln's Birthday        |
| Sunday, 2-15-2021 | CASA Office closed for Presidents Day            |
| Tuesday, 3-2-2021 | Zoom CASA Information Session at 12PM            |
| Sunday, 3-14-2021 | Daylight Savings Time Begins                     |

# Hello 2021



## MEMORIALS & HONORARIUMS



*In Memory of Skip Harris*  
by Stephen & Sharon Wainwright

*In Honor of Mike Cuchna*  
by Pauline Cuchna

*In Memory of Skip Harris*  
by Brenda Hughes

*In Honor of Chris & Natalie Butler*  
by Mary Camper

*In Memory of Elyse Etcheverry*  
by Amador & Mary Zabalbeascoa

*In Memory of Linda Erickson*  
by Daniel & Cynthia Arambel

*In Memory of James Areias Sr.*  
by Daniel & Cynthia Arambel

*In Memory of John Forte*  
by Daniel & Cynthia Arambel

*In Honor of Dorothy Menezes*  
by Mike and Katherine Crinklaw

*In Memory of Skip Harris*  
by Lutie Reid Harris & Sharon Reid

*In Honor of Dorothy Menezes*  
by Diane Neves



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**Volunteers**

**By Executive Director, Cathie Lancaster**

As 2020 ends (finally), I would like to take a few minutes to reflect on what CASA of Merced County accomplished during these difficult times. I have a deep sense of gratitude for the myriad of ways the CASA of Merced County Board of Directors, staff and volunteers have demonstrated resilience, creativity and determination to continue the important work of serving children and families. It bears repeating everyone rose to the challenge with every new obstacle, and I cannot be more proud or thankful.

So many things have changed in the way we had to do business in 2020 and the start of 2021. The one thing that has not changed is the difference that a CASA volunteer makes in a child's life. CASA volunteers have been a source of hope for children suffering from the challenge of living in this world, living with the trauma of domestic violence, child abuse, neglect, and abandonment as well as dealing with a pandemic. Because our wonderful CASA volunteers stayed the course, we were able to ensure the safety of hundreds of children.

Our Advocates have made a heavy year lighter for the children being served by CASA. Though we have had many challenges this year, it is important to pause and reflect on some of our accomplishments (there were many firsts):

We had to cancel our spring fundraiser and did not plan our fall event. But we had a successful Nonevent Fundraiser. The office closed to the public on 4/1/2020 and staff started working remotely, the same day our new Instructor Angela Mickellar started her employment.

The staff had to make changes to continue to assist Advocates and Advocates had to be creative in order to continue to serve our children and we embraced Zoom.

We were able to continue to recruit new volunteers and provide training while working on our soon to be online training platform.

We held Zoom Information Sessions, Zoom pre-training interviews, Zoom Continuing Education Training, and Zoom Board of Director meetings.

We had to reduce the class sizes to comply with pandemic guidelines, but we still have people waiting to become Advocates. We held Zoom swearing-in ceremonies for new volunteers so we could serve more children.

We created a Facebook page for our Advocates to safely "chat" with each other and to share ways to remain involved while keeping safe.

We created a page on our website devoted solely to COVID-19.

Volunteers continue to provide stability to their youth, through socially distant advocacy—FaceTime, text, Zoom and "visiting" from the safety of the window or sidewalk. Our Advocates continue to be that caring, consistent adult, and have seen the certainty in uncertain times for the children we serve.

All of our high school seniors graduated this year and thanks to generous board members and friends, we were able to provide all of our seniors and eight grade graduates wonderful gifts to celebrate their "Pandemic Graduation."

We held a Zoom Advocate Appreciation so our volunteers would know how much we value what they do for the children we serve. We had several business reach out to us to conduct successful fundraising events – Kona Ice (twice), Dutch Bros, Mix Bakery, Idris and Estelle Bath Co LLC, Ravellos, Hot Cuts and SEVA

MID, Spinardi & Jones, Dr. Lequia, Berlimer Cohen, Westmark, CHP, M-MIG Construction, UC Merced, Adam Castro, Rafael Gonzales, Carol Etcheverry and Starbucks all contributed to make sure our children had a wonderful Christmas.

We held our first (and hopefully only) Drive through Christmas Extravaganza and it was a success!

We continued to have children come into care and we continue to assign Advocates to these children.

One of our Advocates recently told me that when he started working with his child, the child was falling in school. He is now getting all A's and B's! Another Advocate was the only person to wish her CASA child Happy Birthday! Several of our Advocates helped their youth move into a first apartment! These are just a few of our success stories. Advocates work has been incredible.

I, personally, will be happy to never use the terms "unprecedented times" or "pandemic" again, but in the meantime, I want to thank our volunteers and supporters for helping us through them. 2021 holds the promise of endless possibilities for all of us. We are very hopeful for a brighter year and a return to a routine—one that includes being physically connected with our friends and loved ones again. Our volunteers are resilient, tenacious, and committed to supporting the lives of the children we serve. Regardless of what next year brings, I know that with the help of our staff, volunteers, Board of Directors, our generous donors and supporters we are equipped to meet the challenges.

Thank you for working alongside and supporting CASA of Merced County. 2021 still holds some uncertainty, but it also brings a sense of hope for good things to come. It will be critical for CASA of Merced County to continue to be flexible in our planning as we adapt to changing circumstances and to remain focused on our mission. As we continue with our strategic planning process in the year ahead, I look forward to staying connected to all of you and to hearing your perspectives about opportunities and issues facing CASA of Merced County. The strength of our program benefits us all, especially the foster youth in Merced County and I am grateful for the role you play!



**EVERY DAY HERO: NAMKHA NGUYEN**

Namkha grew up in Folsom, Ca where he spent most of his childhood being a competitive swimmer and a developing pianist. He enjoyed playing all kinds of sports and traveling with his family within and outside of the United States. Namkha has always had an adventurous spirit; he has always been drawn to the outdoors (hiking, snowboarding, and swimming). He is currently pursuing his Master's Degree in Quantitative and Systems Biology at UC Merced. Outside of school, he is the Emergency Department Volunteer Coordinator at Mercy Medical Center and this will be his 7<sup>th</sup> year volunteering in the ER. He has taught him a great deal about how a positive outlook can uplift someone experiencing seriously unfortunate circumstances. A good attitude is contagious and it helps in all sorts of situations.

Namkha became an advocate from a coincidental series of events. He was talking to a friend who was passionate about the unfortunate circumstances that children in the foster care system faced. She made him curious and concerned about displaced children, which led him to wonder about how foster care was in Merced County. On the drive home after that talk, a CASA sign serendipitously hung above G Street and told him there were volunteering opportunities. He thought "what better way to find out than to see for myself". He has now been a CASA for almost two years.

Social workers have changed faster than the seasons for his kiddo and he may feel like just a court case number from time to time. Namkha says as his CASA, "I am around longer which allows for a deeper relationship to be made". This connection built the trust required for an effective mentorship. In Namkha's case specifically, his kiddo is taking his first steps into adulthood. Knowing him for the past year gave Namkha a big picture of his kiddos habits and abilities which helps him formulate a tailored plan to manage his course load and save up for a car. Namkha's biggest piece of advice is "be persistent with connecting with your CASA kid. Everyone has their walls up and some are a lot higher than others. What worked for me was constantly showing that I was making him a priority. I also made sure that I followed through with whatever I said or promised to portray how reliable I was. I feel this led to a quicker connection".

**Advocate Appreciation**

Advocate of the Year:	Most Hours Spent:	Most Miles Driven:
Rita Carlson	Lynn Parker	Debbie Breth
382 hours	1,988 miles	

This year we hosted a Zoom Celebration instead of our usual dinner, but it was nothing short of FUN! The year 2020 has been a difficult time for everyone, especially our foster youth. But, our amazing Advocates have not let COVID-19 stand in the way of their promise to support and advocate for their kiddos. Even though we could not enjoy each others company in-person, we were still so excited to be able to celebrate with everyone! We LOVE our Volunteers and could not do this without them!



**New window coverings**

Despite the many negatives of this year, CASA is getting a little face lift! The CASA office has already added beautiful stickers to the outside windows and has plans for a make over inside as well! We hope you can all visit us and check out our new & improved office soon!

**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.

You can help make a difference!



