

# CASA Notes

Volume 4, Issue 4 Fall 2016

A Member of the National CASA Association

## CASA of Merced County

### Message from the Executive Director by Shar Herrera

*Every child deserves a champion – an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be.* By Rita Pierson

A CASA volunteer is that champion. I am in awe of our group of volunteers who work tirelessly towards helping these foster children become the best they can be. It is amazing to see the difference that a CASA volunteer makes in the life of a child!

CASA of Merced County has made great growth since the first class of volunteers was trained six years ago. Over 136 volunteers have

been trained and have supported approximately 254 children. The Board, Staff and Volunteers have worked together to create a strong program that is focused on meeting the needs of abused and neglected children. The community has supported the program by becoming volunteers and providing financial support.

It has been my privilege to be involved with this remarkable program for the past 5 ½ years. There have been tears of joy and tears of sadness as volunteers worked closely with children and became their voice in a complicated foster care system. It is now time for

me to retire and allow someone else to continue to lead this program toward greatness. The Board of Directors has begun a search for a new Executive Director. I will assist with the transition and do all I can to help the program continue to grow and serve more children.

In closing, I would like to thank each one of you who support the program. CASA of Merced County would not survive without your support.

**YOU are making a difference!**



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**#GIVINGTUESDAY**  
11.29.2016

The 2016 Holiday Season is almost upon us. Commercials will soon advertise this season's hottest deals, must-have toys, and latest gadgets. For the past few years a new holiday event has begun putting more emphasis on the good work nonprofits are doing and shifting the focus from getting to giving. Four years ago the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y in New York City and the United Nations Foundation joined together and founded **#GivingTuesday**, a one-day annual movement focused on charitable giving during the holiday season. **#GivingTuesday** has expanded and become a worldwide drive for philanthropy.

Now we have Black Friday, followed by Cyber Monday and capped off with **#GivingTuesday**. This year **#GivingTuesday** is on November 29 and CASA of Merced County will be participating! Help us reach our goal. Go online to our website: [mercedcasa.org](http://mercedcasa.org) and click on the **#GivingTuesday** link. We thank you!

### Spotlight on an advocate

Faria was born in Afghanistan. She and her family immigrated to Pakistan after the Taliban invaded Afghanistan in 1996. She and her family lived in Pakistan until she was 12 years old. They came to the United States as Political refugees in September of 2001, just 12 days after 9/11. As a child she was very shy and kept to herself...if you know Faria now, this piece of information really is a surprise. She enjoyed playing with her younger brother and spending time with her family.

Faria has 9 siblings with whom she is very close. She is the youngest girl. Most of her family live in the Bay Area. Faria has lived in Merced since 2014 with her fiancé. She is currently working on her Masters Degree in social work. She loves animals and has volunteered with Stanislaus and Merced County rescue groups.

Faria has been instrumental in finding a permanent placement for her CASA child. The family who was fostering her youth would go to



Mexico every Christmas and put the foster children who lived with them in respite care. Faria's CASA child didn't like respite care because she didn't know anybody in the home. The CASA youth's teacher invited the youth to spend Christmas at her house. One of the best memories Faria has is when she was able to tell her CASA youth that the teacher wanted her to be placed in her home permanently and that she would not be returning to the former foster home. The child's

excited response is the memory that Faria will forever cherish!

Some foster youth who are in care do not have a support system. They don't have an adult who genuinely cares about them and wants to help them become productive members of our society. Faria feels that having a CASA for a child in care means that there is someone who believes in them no matter what. A CASA is that person who has the best interest of the child in mind at all times.

Faria has worked with foster youth since 2010. While she was attending CSU East Bay, she mentored foster youth who were attending the school. Her fiancé is a former foster youth, so she has learned a lot about the foster youths' experiences through him. When she is working with her CASA youth, she uses all her knowledge about foster youth to advocate for them to the best of her ability.

Faria is making a difference!

*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](http://MercedCASA.org).*

**SAVE THE DATE**



**APRIL 1, 2017**

**THE CASA CUP — A NIGHT AT THE RACES**

**SAVE THE DATE**





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### Message from the Board President by Mary Miller

This is my last article for the CASA newsletter as president of the Board of Directors. It is with mixed emotions that I say that. The past three years as president have been an incredible experience. I have said often that I can think of no greater volunteer service than the role the CASA advocate plays in the life of a child. I am honored to have been able to play a small part in growing this service in Merced County. However, three years of one president is more than enough, and I am happy to say that my successor, Bette Woolstenhulme, is an excellent choice and will move the organization forward and upward.

But, more important than the change in Board leadership is the change we are facing in the Executive Director. You have read elsewhere in this newsletter that our outstanding ED, Shar Herrera, has decided to retire from the position. Although we understand (many of us are retired from our

paid positions), we are very sad to see Shar leave this role. I cannot emphasize enough what an outstanding leader she has been. CASA has grown and thrived with Shar at the helm. She has done it all, from hiring and training the excellent staff, to setting up the programs, to acquiring resources, to managing all the mundane day-to-day needs. She has been the face of CASA to the community, has formed liaisons with CASA directors throughout the state and with key partners in the county, and has developed a strong relationship with the Board of Directors. We are all indebted to Shar for her energy, enthusiasm, wisdom, and unwavering passion for the foster children of Merced County.

The Board has established a search committee, and the position has been advertised. We will begin reviewing applications December 1, and will continue until we find an excellent candidate to succeed Shar, who has agreed to help with the transition to new leadership. We are also very pleased that Shar has agreed to remain involved

on a part-time basis with various projects as needed.

I close this article with a repeat of my ongoing plea. There are still hundreds of foster children in Merced County who need Advocates. They are in foster care through no fault of their own; they have been abused, neglected or abandoned by the adults whose job it is to love, nurture and support them. They are often frightened, bewildered and despondent. They desperately need an adult who will be their voice, who will be there for them. Please consider being that voice.



### JOIN



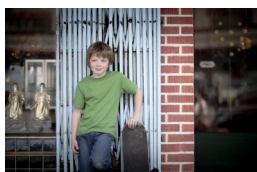
CASA relies on individual and corporate volunteers and financial partners to make its work possible. Financial support is needed to recruit, train and supervise advocates. Our **VOICES4CASA** are asked to support the organization with an annual donation. We welcome all support, including volunteers who 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](http://www.MercedCASA.org)

You can help make a difference!

**I am for the child™**



Lift up a child's voice.  
 A child's life.™