**News Release**

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**Local Foster Youth Appointed By President Obama**

**To U.S. Advisory Council On Human Trafficking**

**(December 28, 2015) San Diego, CA**— Former foster youth Suamhirs Piraino-Guzman has been appointed by President Barack Obama to the United States Advisory Council on Human Trafficking. In a [statement released](https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/12/16/president-obama-announces-more-key-administration-posts) by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 16, President Obama announced his intent to appoint 18 individuals, including Suamhirs, to key Administration posts to serve as advisors.

In his role on the Advisory Council, Suamhirs will consult on the matter of national security in human trafficking, working directly with President Obama and his Administration, as well as leaders from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of State, and the Health & Human Services Agency.

President Obama said in the statement, “I am honored that these talented individuals have decided to serve our country. They bring their years of experience and expertise to this Administration, and I look forward to working with them.”

When Suamhirs moved from Honduras to San Diego to live with his godmother, he became a victim of child sex trafficking. Rescued and placed in foster care just before his 16th birthday, Suamhirs spent two years in the system before he was assigned to a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) named Marco by [Voices for Children](https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/12/16/president-obama-announces-more-key-administration-posts) (VFC)—a private, nonprofit organization that recruits, trains, and supervises CASAs who advocate for the rights and well-being of children who pass through foster care. CASA Marco became a consist presence in Suamhirs’ life and advocated for him to receive vital services. Suamhirs remains close with CASA Marco and credits him with helping the then teen to find his voice.

“Marco is more than my CASA. He has never given up on me and was very supportive throughout this whole process,” said Suamhirs. “My story is one that was never meant to be told, but through the help and guidance of Marco and Voices for Children’s Real Word program, I learned that my past did not have to define my life. Sharing my story in a meaningful and impactful way has not only been therapeutic, but also has led to new opportunities which allow me to promote change.”

Suamhirs is a longtime member of Voices for Children’s [Real Word Speakers Panel](https://www.speakupnow.org/real-word/)—a speakers panel comprised of courageous young people who currently live or have lived in San Diego County foster care. At their presentations, panelists are open and forthright about their experiences in foster care. In addition, Suamhirs is a Pathways Initiative Program Coordinator for Harmonium Inc. and separately, serves as a contractor for the [U.S. Department of Justice Office of Victims of Crime](http://www.ovc.gov/) where he advises on best practices.

“All of us at Voices for Children are so very proud of Suamhirs,” said Sharon M. Lawrence, Esq., President/CEO of Voices for Children. “Under the guidance of his CASA, Marco, Suamhirs has transformed from a teen struggling in the foster care system to a confident and compassionate young man. We wish him the best of luck on this new endeavor with the Advisory Council.”

Suamhirs will maintain his residency and employment in San Diego, and will travel to Washington D.C., as needed, to attend Advisory Council meetings. To hear Suamhirs share his personal story of tragedy and triumph, attend the next Real Word Speakers Panel on Tuesday, January 19 from 6:30-8 p.m. at the Bonita/Sunnyside Library. Register at: [speakupnow.org/real-word](https://www.speakupnow.org/real-word/).

**ABOUT VOICES FOR CHILDREN**

**Voices for Children (VFC)** transforms the lives of abused children by providing them with volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs). Voices for Children believes that every child deserves a safe and permanent home and strives to provide a CASA volunteer to every child in the foster care system who needs one. During the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2015, VFC served 5,019 foster children in San Diego County. Of these children, 2,314 had a CASA volunteer; 227 received advocacy through our Case Liaison program, and the file of each and every child in the foster care system in San Diego County was reviewed by VFC volunteers. Earlier this year, Voices for Children began operating in Riverside County.

By monitoring their court cases and through the advocacy of trained volunteer CASAs, VFC ensures that the judge on the case has current and pertinent information when making decisions about a child’s living situation, visits with siblings, medical and educational needs, and other services. Much more than “mentors,” VFC’s volunteer CASAs go through extensive training before being sworn in by a judge, and are in many ways the court’s eyes and ears for the most difficult foster cases. For more information or to inquire about becoming a CASA volunteer in San Diego or Riverside county, visit [www.speakupnow.org](http://www.speakupnow.org).

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