First Person: San Diego Foster Youth Heads To College

By Megan Burke

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http://www.kpbs.org/news/2017/may/22/first-person-san-diego-foster-youth-heads-college/

Before all the pomp and circumstance of high school commencement ceremonies in June, a small group of San Diego high school seniors will celebrate another graduation, from foster care.

Voices For Children, a San Diego nonprofit that connects foster youth with volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates or "CASAs" is hosting the graduation celebration on May 31.

Alaysia, 19, whose last name is withheld to protect her privacy, spent the last four years living and attending high school at San Pasqual Academy, a school and residence in Escondido for foster youth. She is among the less than 50 percent of California foster youth who graduate from high school, according to a 2013 study by the nonprofit Stuart Foundation. Even fewer foster youth go to college.

Alaysia plans to major in political science at San Francisco State University, then she wants to go to law school.

When asked why she thought she achieved so much against the odds, Alaysia, who said she takes her education seriously, gave some credit to her experience in the foster care system.

"I think it was the fact that I was in more foster homes than I was group homes. So I saw what it was like to be in a family, so I learned things from each of those families," Alaysia said. "Then on top of that, I think it was the fact that I had a CASA at such a young age and a committed staff at such a young age that really helped me, because not a lot of CASAs stay that long and not a lot of staff want to be your mentor later on."

Alaysia will continue to receive some benefits through the foster care system while she goes to school, including help paying for college through Voices For Children's Learning to Succeed program. At San Francisco State, another program called Guardian Scholars, will provide year-round housing, educational support and a connection to a social worker.

For this episode of First Person, Alaysia spoke with her CASA, Erin Pavelko, who has mentored her since she was 10 years old, about her hopes and some fears about starting college next month.

JANUARY 31, 2019

Meet Kathryn Ashworth of Voices for Children

Today we'd like to introduce you to Kathryn Ashworth.

Kathryn, please share your story with us. How did you get to where you are today?
I've always loved kids. I was the eldest of five children in my family, the youngest of which was 25 years younger than me. After attending college and earning a degree in English, I got married and had three children of my own. And, like my mother, I was very active in the community. One role I held was as a volunteer with the Junior League, where we focused on child abuse and prevention and child advocacy. From my perspective, the bureaucracy of the child welfare system seemed very stratified and static. I knew we could do more for the most vulnerable children in our community. So, I decided to go back to school, this time to become a lawyer. Ironically, I later discovered that another role – that of a volunteer – had the most capacity to make a difference in the overburdened child welfare system.

In law school, we were each assigned a topic for a particular paper, and mine read, "Is foster care good for kids?" I dug deep into the foster care system and learned a great deal about child development as I crafted my paper. Through my research, I discovered a project conducted by the National Council of Juvenile Court Judges, which utilized volunteers to review the files of children in care. This was the spark that eventually became Voices for Children and its Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program. With the support of the Presiding Judge at the time and $5,000 from the San Diego Bar Association, I worked with a former social worker, Elizabeth Bacon, and a group of volunteers to review case files of children in San Diego County foster care. We were able to identify the most urgent cases and, in addition to helping kids, raise awareness of the issues surrounding foster care.

Later, Elizabeth and I attended a meeting of Juvenile Court Supervising Judges from all 50 counties in California. At that event, a woman from Seattle spoke about a new program model utilizing volunteers called Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs). This unique role matched a caring volunteer with a child in foster care who was in a dire situation and needed someone to speak up for them. A CASA served as a consistent adult presence in the child's life and advocated for their best interests in court. San Diego County's Juvenile Court Presiding Judge looked at me and said, "We have to have that." That was 1983, and today, Voices for Children operates a thriving CASA program that serves more than 3,200 children across San Diego and Riverside Counties through the work of more than 1,600 CASA volunteers.

We're always bombarded by how great it is to pursue your passion, etc. – but we've spoken with enough people to know that it's not always easy. Overall, would you say things have been easy for you?

Although it has been extremely rewarding, it has not always been a smooth road. The most difficult barrier for me was the inertia of "the system." Children were not meant to grow up in a bureaucracy, but they also need to be kept safe. We had to work very hard to get buy-in at all levels. Even though we had the official seal of approval from the Presiding Judge, it took many years before social workers and attorneys started to see CASAs as partners in achieving the best outcome for a child. As with any new idea, they were skeptical that we would stick around. As we grew, there were growing pains of finding adequate space and funding, but our community consistently came through.

So let's switch gears a bit and go into the Voices for Children story. Tell us more about it.

Voices for Children (VFC) is a nonprofit organization that connects caring individuals with children in foster care who need someone to speak up for them. Children are in foster care because they have been abused, neglected, or abandoned and have been removed from their family of origin for their safety. They enter an overburdened foster care system, where their voices too often get drowned out. VFC believes that every child deserves for their voice to be heard and deserves a safe, permanent home. To that end, VFC recruits, trains, and supports volunteers who serve as Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs).

CASAs get to know their case child(ren) and use that information to ensure their needs are being met. While many CASAs act as mentors, role models, confidantes, and friends for the vulnerable children they serve, their primary role is an advocate. Aside from their time spent with the child, CASAs communicate with all of the other adults in a child's life – judges, teachers, doctors, lawyers, probation officers, biological families, social workers, and caregivers. With the knowledge they glean, they request important services for a child, such as counseling, tutoring, physical therapy, or medical care. At critical junctures in the case, they submit reports to the court, which judges use to make important decisions about the child's future.

I am most proud that, in addition to serving so many children, we have been able to build a constituency of people who care about children in foster care.

Contact Info:

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- **Instagram:** https://www.instagram.com/voices_for_children/
- **Facebook:** https://www.facebook.com/VoicesForChildrenSD/
- **Twitter:** https://twitter.com/Voices4Childrn
- **Other:** https://www.youtube.com/user/Voices4ChildrenSD1

Attorney Kathy Ashworth, left, social worker Suzanne Wilka founded group to protect youngsters.

Randy and Cambra Finch, Zoe and Eric Kleinbub, and Becca and Jason Craig

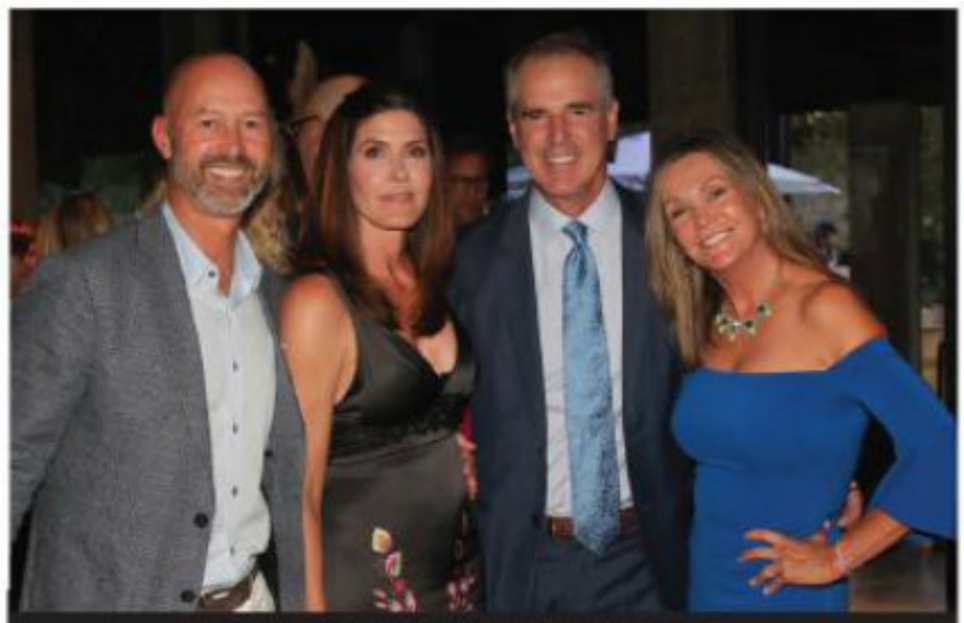
Starry Starry Night

Starry Starry Night, the signature event of Voices for Children, was held at the Sahm Estate at Del Dios Ranch. The 16th annual gala grossed $1.5 million in support of Voices for Children and its volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program. A highlight of the event was the premiere of *Dear CASA*, a short film produced by Briefcase Studios, in which a foster youth named Josh surprises his volunteer CASA, Tim, with a heartfelt letter of gratitude, revealing how one caring adult can have a lasting impact in a child's life. Gala co-chairs were Becca and Jason Craig, Cambra and Randy Finch, and Zoe and Eric Kleinbub.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JENNIFER NELSON

Derek and Mary Ann Eisele with Lany and Alex Zikakis

Mary Murray and Peter DeSilva



Rande and Erin Turner with Rolf and Mary Benirschke

Mark and Joie Parmenter

Ray and Gina Ellis with Allie Dixon and Mark Kersey

David and Jennifer Namazy with Patsy Marino

Jay and Tracy Hagan with David Marino

Maria Delgado and Jolane Crawford

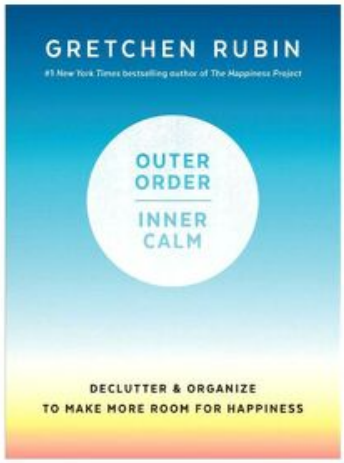
Jenny Craig and Michelle Weinger

Finding Inner Calm

The Happiness Project author turns attention to clutter

Gretchen Rubin

WHETHER OR NOT YOU'RE an avid self-help reader, there's no denying the universal appeal of author Gretchen Rubin's approach to finding joy. Her 2009 *New York Times* bestselling book, *The Happiness Project*, was an "aha moment" for millions seeking greater happiness throughout their lives, and follow-up works *Happier at Home*, *Better Than Before*, and *The Four Tendencies* have helped people in their pursuit through every aspect of life. Her tour for her latest book, *Outer Order, Inner Calm*, will bring the author to San Diego for a luncheon in partnership with La Jolla's independent bookstore, Warwick's, on Tuesday, March 19 at the Atkinson Pavilion of the Ida & Cecil Green Faculty Club at UC San Diego.



"Ever since I wrote *The Happiness Project*, one thing that has really struck me is how much I feel, and clearly other people feel the same way, that there's something about getting outer order that contributes to inner calm more than it should. We can all agree that in the context of a happy life, something like a crowded coat closet or office is trivial, and yet over and over people tell me that when you feel in control of the 'stuff' of your life, you feel more in control of your life generally," explains Rubin. "I always think of a friend who told me, 'I finally cleaned out my fridge, and now I know I can switch careers.' It's an element that keeps coming up in the study of happiness, which is that our surroundings shape our emotional state, so it's worth thinking about."

There couldn't be a better time to talk about the role that our material things play (or how they inhibit us) in overall happiness given the current buzz around this topic in large part due to the success of the *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo* Netflix series, though Rubin's approach differs greatly from Kondo's strict methods. "I don't believe that there's a magic one-size-fits-all solution," she says. "Some people like to do small incremental changes, and some people like big, transformative, radical changes, and neither one is better or worse. It's just whatever works for you."

Rubin's San Diego stop is the first of what is hoped to be many events in a newly-forged partnership between Warwick's and local nonprofit Voices for Children, an organization dedicated to supporting children in foster care in San Diego and Riverside counties by providing court-appointed special advocates (CASAs) to defend the children's rights and promote their well-being. The event will include lunch, a signed copy of *Outer Order, Inner Calm*, and Rubin's presentation and discussion of the book. With only 120 seats available at the intimate event, it is anticipated to sell out. Half of the luncheon's $150 ticket price will go directly to Voices for Children. *speakupnow.org/warwicks* DEANNA MURPHY

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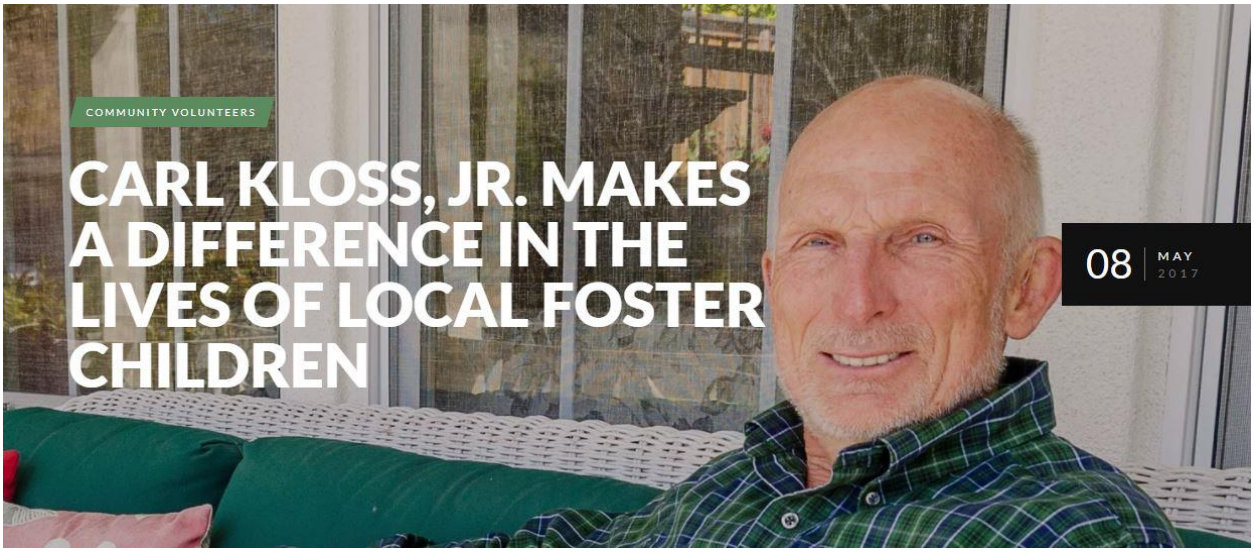


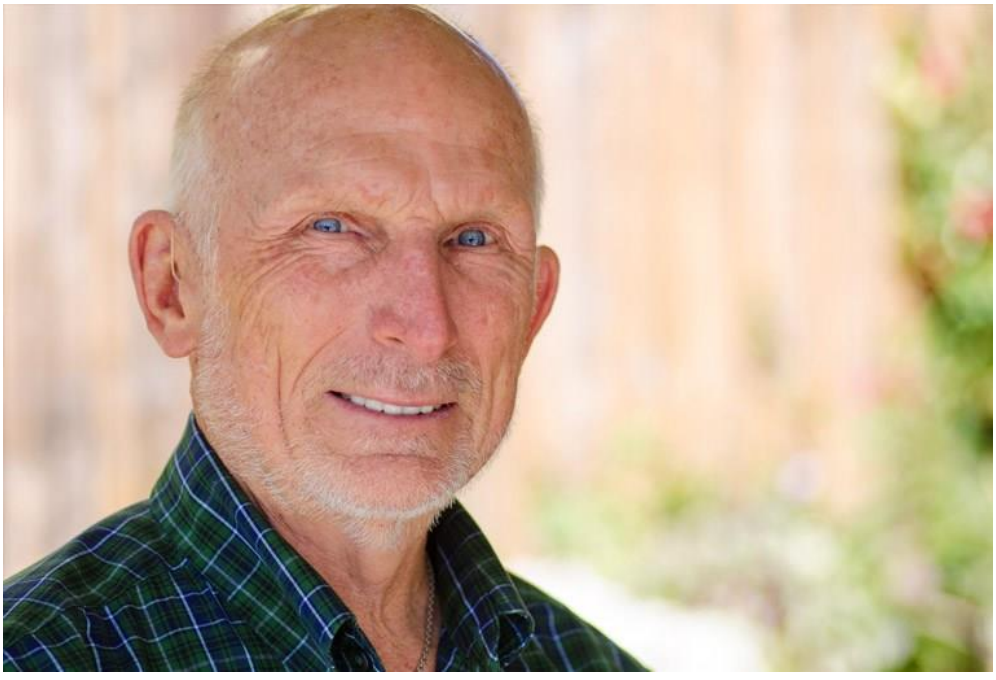
by JENNIFER FRAKES | photos by Alicia Jeanne Photography

http://92009magazine.com/2017/05/08/carl-kloss-jr-makes-a-difference-in-the-lives-of-local-foster-children/

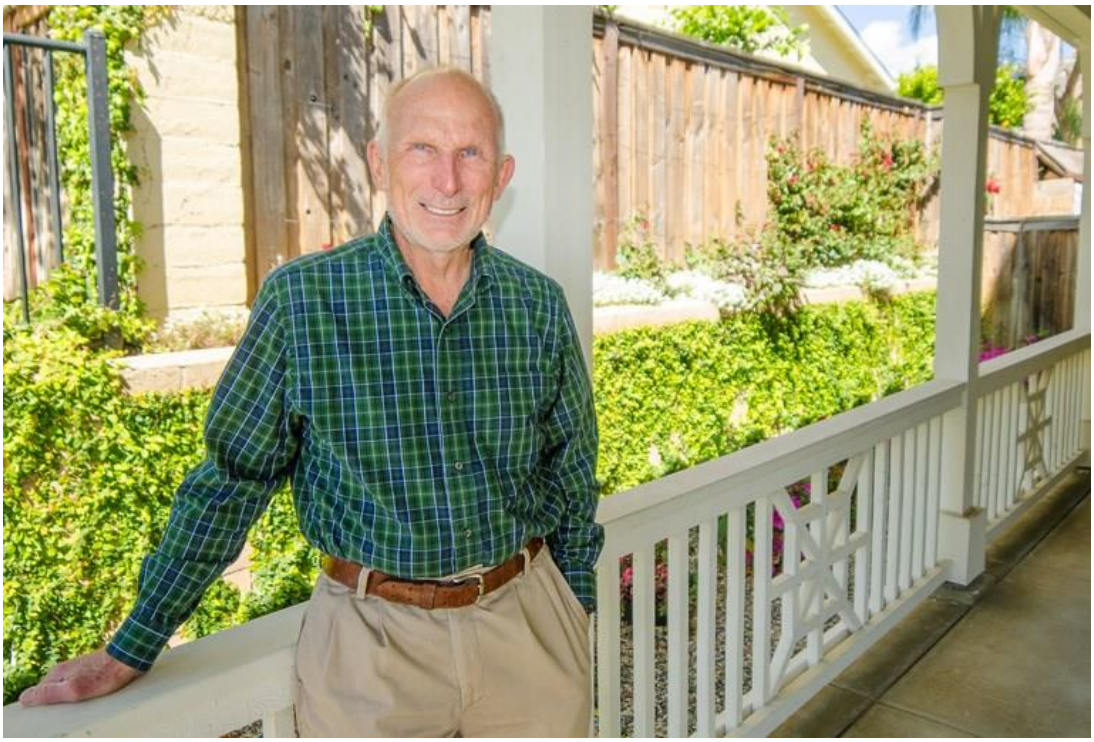
Speaking Up for Children

Carl Kloss, Jr. believes all children deserve a voice, someone who will be their advocate, mentor, and friend. Carl is a Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) through San Diego County's Voices for Children, working with local foster children and making a profound difference in their lives. CASAs are officially appointed by a juvenile court judge, authorizing them to make independent recommendations to the court on behalf of the foster children. "CASAs also serve as mentors for the foster children – meeting them, developing a trusting relationship with them, giving advice, and taking them on outings such as sporting events, theme parks, etc.," explained Carl, whose greatest reward is seeing the children he works with progress in life, stay out of trouble, and succeed in their goals.

Carl found Voices for Children while looking for a meaningful volunteer pursuit and felt that becoming a CASA would be a great fit for him. "My wife and I were temporary foster parents years ago. I truly believe that CASAs make a difference in the lives of foster children. I wish that there was a CASA for every foster child in San Diego County," stated Carl. He encourages all those interested in becoming a CASA and/or supporting Voices for Children to visit www.speakupnow.org. "Voices for Children has several fundraisers throughout the year that are great opportunities to help out and learn more about the work of the organization. Also, the first step to becoming a CASA is to attend an information session. Details about these sessions are on the website," related Carl.



Before moving to Carlsbad nearly 11 years ago, Carl and his wife had a vacation condo in the area that they visited for 16 years. When they made the decision to make a permanent move to the community, they knew it was the right choice for their retirement. “Carlsbad is a well-managed, small city with many volunteers and retirees. I also love how accessible the ocean is to us,” said this beach-loving body surfer. Carl also enjoys spending time with his two grown daughters and six grandchildren, playing basketball and tennis and dining out with his wife of 46 years. Prior to retirement, Carl worked as an engineer who integrated scientific instruments onto spacecraft. “The Jet Propulsion Laboratory sent these spacecraft to Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune,” stated Carl.



VALERIE *Attisha*

Chief Development Officer, Voices for Children

"We are all connected as humans, and it is critical to contribute to making our world a better and brighter place for future generations."

–VALERIE ATTISHA

With a motto like "give and give often," Valerie Attisha's passion for helping children in need is what makes San Diego great.

Valerie Attisha was passionate about helping foster children long before starting her career at Voices for Children this past October, and she knows how critical it is for vulnerable youth to have a safe and stable home, as well as a trusted adult who can advocate for their well-being. "At the core of our mission at Voices for Children is connecting volunteers called CASAs (Court Appointed Special Advocates) with children who need someone to speak up for them," she says. "Studies show that foster children with CASAs receive necessary services sooner, are less likely to re-enter the child welfare system and are more likely to do well in school." Here, Attisha discusses her role with Voices, as well as her involvement in other local charities.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR CURRENT CHARITABLE ENDEAVORS.

Personally, I financially contribute to Voices for Children and actively outreach to my network to become CASAs. Professionally, I meet with individuals, foundations and corporations to support and further our organization's mission. This past year, I joined the Junior League of San Diego and San Diego Symphony Notables and have enjoyed becoming involved in each organization's signature fundraising events.

WHAT IS YOUR PHILANTHROPIC GOAL?

It's quite simple: 'Give and give often.'

WHAT INSPIRES YOU TO GIVE BACK?

My parents immigrated to the U.S. in 1970 and immediately became involved in their new community. My father volunteered at a local hospital, and for more than 30 years, my mother has been an active member of an organization that raises money to help individuals who have fallen on hard times or recently arrived in San Diego. For me, giving back is important because it opens the mind and heart, knowing there is a greater purpose and deeper meaning of life.

IS THERE AN UPCOMING CHARITY EVENT YOU'RE REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO ATTENDING?

The 17th anniversary Starry Starry Night benefiting Voices for Children Sept. 28.

PHOTO COURTESY OF VOICES FOR CHILDREN