



VOICES FOR CHILDREN

THE VOICE



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WINTER 2020

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"IT'S EASY TO SAY, 'It's not my child, not my community, not my problem.' Then there are those who SEE THE NEED and RESPOND. I consider those people my HEROES."

— FRED ROGERS

OUR MISSION

Voices for Children transforms the lives of abused, abandoned, or neglected children by providing them with trained Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs).

OUR VISION

Voices for Children believes that every child deserves a safe and permanent home and, to that end, will provide a trained CASA volunteer to every abused, abandoned, or neglected child who needs one, and advocate to improve the lives of children in the foster care system.



MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT AND CEO



Since March 2020, experts have shared grim predictions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our community's most vulnerable children. Unfortunately, many have come to fruition. For example:

- Child abuse consultations are up by approximately 82%, according to the Chadwick Center at Rady Children's Hospital.
- At the same time, unreported instances of abuse and neglect are concerning: reports dropped by 60% last spring when schools closed and currently are down by 30%, according to San Diego County Child Welfare Services.
- As many as 3 million marginalized students in the United States, including many children in foster care, may not have received any formal education, whether in-person or virtual, since the shut-down in March 2020, according to an October 2020 study by Bellwether Education Partners.

The pandemic created significant additional stressors for children in foster care. Our featured article in this issue addresses the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on a child's development and well-being, and provides insight as to why children in foster care are especially susceptible to harsh outcomes during these trying times.

Despite the often-daunting facts and statistics, there is reason for hope. Research shows that it can take just one consistent and caring adult to help a child overcome the effects of childhood trauma. For many children in foster care, that person is their CASA. Thanks to the generosity of our community, Voices for Children currently supports more than 1,200 CASAs in San Diego and Riverside Counties. Through our CASAs and staff, we are providing crucial advocacy to nearly 2,000 children in foster care.

As we enter the holiday season, I hope you will be inspired by the words of CASA Carolina, who recently was honored as our CASA of the Year:

A CASA may be the first person to tell a child in foster care that they can be anything they choose to be because they are smart and beautiful and unique ... When given a chance, these children thrive. They blossom. They go from being the scared, shy, unsure children we first met to becoming confident, fearless, and successful. But that truly was who they were all along. They just needed someone to believe in them.

It is your steady and caring support that enables us to let children in foster care know that there is someone in their corner who believes in them. From all of us at Voices for Children, thank you!

With our appreciation,

Kelly Capen Douglas

Kelly Capen Douglas, Esq.
President & CEO

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

The late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg once said, “Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time.” Over the course of the summer, events that transpired locally and on the national stage challenged Voices for Children to evaluate ways in which we could contribute to greater diversity, equity, and inclusion within our organization and in our community for the benefit of the children we serve. Throughout this fiscal year, we will be sharing some of the ways Voices for Children is actively working to support a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive community, including the creation of a staff-led committee dedicated to this purpose. In addition to organization-wide learning, members of our team have spent time learning and sharing resources with each other. Three staff share their recent “top picks” below.



STAFF FAVORITES

Intersectionality Matters

Podcast

<https://aapf.org/podcast>

“This is an excellent podcast, hosted by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a lawyer, professor, civil rights activist, and scholar of critical race theory. I love how the podcast looks at our current events through the lens of critical race theory, explains how our present is influenced by policies of our past, and discusses how race, gender, and economics are intersected in the United States.” —*Nikki-Rose H.*

Code Switch

Podcast

<https://www.npr.org/podcasts/510312/codeswitch>

“Each episode dives into ways that race intersects with and impacts daily life in the U.S. I love the way the journalists tackle each topic and strike a balance between informative, insightful, and funny. It started 4 years ago, but the very first episode is just as relevant today as it was then. I highly recommend it for anyone interested in learning from diverse perspectives in an open and honest way.” —*Nicole K.*

13th

Netflix Documentary

<https://www.netflix.com/title/80091741>

“13th is a shocking, revelatory look at the system of mass incarceration in the United States and how it came to be. It’s a must watch for anyone hoping to understand how historical structures of racism of the past still haunt our present day lives in the U.S.” —*Sabrina G.*

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

How ACEs and the pandemic affect childhood development

What are ACEs?

Child psychologists and child development experts have spent many decades trying to understand childhood trauma and the effects it can have on one's future health and wellbeing. Those potentially traumatic events that occurred in childhood have come to be known as Adverse Childhood Experiences, sometimes referred to as "ACEs"¹.

As a defined set of events, experts have been able to better understand ACEs and the ways in which they can impair multiple aspects of health and development². In fact, a 2019 study found that ACEs can even affect the structural and functional development in the brain³. The more ACEs a child is exposed to, the higher the risk of serious mental and physical health issues in adulthood². Child development experts have created a questionnaire that assesses how many potential ACEs a child has experienced.

Some examples of ACEs include abuse, abandonment, and neglect. If this list sounds familiar, it's because these three ACEs are identified in our mission at Voices for Children. Unfortunately, 51 percent of children who have spent time in foster care and have taken the questionnaire have had four or more ACEs. Outside of the child welfare system, only 13 percent of children had this many ACEs⁴.

ACEs and the global pandemic

Dr. Moisés Barón, a psychologist with more than 26 years of clinical and administrative experience, is the President and CEO of the San Diego Center for Children, a local nonprofit organization whose vision is to inspire a world where all children and families live joyful and healthy lives.

According to Dr. Barón, when a child has been exposed to ACEs, they are even more vulnerable to be impacted by external stressors, such as the current global pandemic. Challenges society is facing as a whole can be trauma-inducing by themselves. Coupled with previous trauma a child has experienced, societal pressures can worsen any underlying difficulties for that child.

How Can A CASA Help?

Dr. Barón suggests that the way forward is to better assess a child's exposure to ACEs as early as possible in order to intervene. Early identification of ACEs and early intervention are key for better outcomes for our youth.

For children, challenges they experience are often manifested in behavior, as that is how children communicate and express what they are feeling. It's crucial that any person interacting with children, and particularly those children in the dependency system, have a

The full list of ACEs includes:

ABUSE:

- Emotional
- Physical
- Sexual

NEGLECT:

- Emotional
- Physical

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION:

- Domestic violence
- Parental separation or divorce
- Mental illness in household
- Household substance abuse
- Incarcerated household member

ACEs: Quick Facts¹

- **1 in 6 adults** experienced four or more types of ACEs.
- At least **5 of the top 10** leading causes of death are associated with ACEs.
- Preventing ACEs could reduce the number of adults with depression by as much as **44%**.

trauma-informed lens in order to help them understand what might be underlying the behavior.

"For child welfare youth, we need to have the understanding that developmental trauma is likely present; we need consistency in the services being provided to them and we need to not add more ACEs because that will make things significantly worse," Dr. Barón noted.

Fortunately for many youth in foster care, Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers provide consistency and support through trauma-informed advocacy. When there is an understanding of the traumatic experiences a child has endured, such as being

removed from their homes, the manifestation of trauma in behaviors can be mitigated, as we frequently see through the work of CASAs.

Dr. Barón added, “CASAs, with their role, could really have that lens. [They can ask] is the youth receiving the appropriate interventions for mental health, or for education?”

Learn how to become a CASA volunteer by signing up for an online Volunteer Information Session today by visiting speakupnow.org/volunteer.

A special “thank you” to Dr. Moisés Barón and the San Diego Center for Children for their contributions to this article.

1. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
2. Child Trends, Adverse Childhood Experiences
3. Heliyon, Childhood adversity and trauma: experiences of professionals trained to routinely enquire about childhood adversity
4. Embrella, Understanding Childhood Trauma: Aces And Foster Children

Colin's Story

CASA Peter has been assigned to Colin's case since October 2018. Colin is a teenager and has been in six different placements since coming into the dependency system in November 2017. At his current placement, a Short Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP), or more commonly known as a group home, Colin tends to keep to himself and does not interact much with the other residents at the group home. He struggles with anxiety, depression, and substance abuse, but is actively participating in weekly therapy. Peter has been able to strengthen his relationship with Colin by setting up monthly sibling visits with his adult brother, for whom he is also the CASA. Without the CASA, the brothers would have barely seen each other, which would have been detrimental to their overall well-being.

While COVID-19 has severely impacted Peter's ability to continue to spend time with Colin and continue with these sibling visits, he has been

able to do what he can to help support him. Colin was dealing with significant mental health challenges in April 2020, and the only person with whom he was willing to speak was CASA Peter. Since restrictions have eased slightly, Colin and his CASA have been able to do a few brief and safe outdoor visits at his group home. During these visits, Colin was mostly upbeat and positive and it was clear that he appreciated these breaks from his usual routine.

Peter also holds Colin's educational rights and has done a great job working with his school to ensure he has a chance to be successful now that classes have been moved online. With the consistent support of CASA Peter, Colin had a caring adult constantly checking in on him and encouraging him to continue in his studies, with the goal of graduating in the next two years.



Updates from Riverside County

Advocate University “Drive-Thru” Celebrations

Voices for Children transitioned our 35-hour training, called Advocate University, to a virtual format in March 2020 to ensure that children would still have volunteers to advocate for them during the pandemic. Since then, 67 new CASA volunteers have completed Advocate University virtually in Riverside County.

Traditionally, our staff celebrates our new CASA volunteers at a graduation reception. Determined to recognize these new volunteers for their commitment to children in foster care, despite the ongoing public health crisis, our Riverside County team held “drive-thru” graduations in Riverside, Murrieta, and Palm Desert. New CASA volunteers received their certificates, court badges, and t-shirts. Our staff had a great time thanking our newest volunteers for speaking up for children in foster care.



THE 2020 NONPROFIT OF THE YEAR AWARD GOES TO....

Voices for Children!

The Murrieta/Wildomar Chamber of Commerce named Voices for Children the Nonprofit of the Year during a virtual ceremony on October 1, 2020. We were recognized for our outstanding advocacy on behalf of children in southwest Riverside County. Voices for Children's Riverside County executive director, Jessica Muñoz, was honored to accept this award on behalf of CASAs serving in Murrieta, Wildomar, and throughout Riverside County.



DONOR SPOTLIGHT

H.N. and Frances C. Berger Foundation

Voices for Children's Riverside County program was honored to receive a Coachella Valley Spotlight grant from the H.N. and Frances C. Berger Foundation in July 2020. This \$25,000 grant will fund recruitment, training, and ongoing professional support for CASA volunteers serving children in the Coachella Valley.

This year's Coachella Valley Spotlight grant recipients were all selected at the end of 2019, and each one is honored monthly by receiving grant funding and media exposure. Last year, 90 applications were received for 12 grants. Through the Coachella Valley Spotlight partnership with the H.N. and Frances C. Berger Foundation and Coachella Valley's News Channel 3, Voices for Children was featured on News Channel 3 programming, in public service announcements, and on kesq.com.

COMMUNITY PARTNER HIGHLIGHT — JEFFERY LEMON, HHSA

Voices for Children has the privilege of working with many wonderful professionals who support children in foster care in San Diego and Riverside Counties. These individuals serve as partners and resources for our staff and CASAs and work tirelessly to improve the lives of children.

Jeffery Lemon is an experienced social worker with the Child Welfare Services (CWS) division of the San Diego County Health & Human Services Agency (HHSA). He is currently serving in Residential Services in the Dual/Extended Foster Care Unit where his case load consists of youth that are on juvenile probation and youth aged 17 – 21 who are participating in Extended Foster Care (EFC).

Lemon shared, “One of the most rewarding experiences is definitely when I get to witness how my work has positively influenced a youth and made a profound and lasting impact.” He has found it particularly meaningful when former foster youth recognize him in public and thank him for being honest with them.

He added, “Our work is truly about connecting, listening, understanding, and providing collaborative support.”

Many Voices for Children program staff have had the privilege of working with Lemon. Chief Program Officer, Stephen Moore shared, “Jeffery is known for working collaboratively to find solutions to meet the needs of the children and youth in our community. We are fortunate that we often get to experience professionals in this field going above and beyond and Jeffery is certainly no exception.”

Lemon shared, “It has been an absolute pleasure working with Voices for Children’s team of staff and volunteers on so many levels. Excellent cooperation and coordination make for effective work and support the youth in a seamless manner.”

Jeffery—Thank you for all that you do for the children in our community! We appreciate you and are grateful for your partnership!



MAKING A DIFFERENCE: THE ROSE FOUNDATION

The Rose Foundation has partnered with Voices for Children over the past eleven years to make a lasting impact in the lives of infants and toddlers in foster care. Established by Pamela Wygod in 1992, The Rose Foundation made their first grant to Voices for Children in 2009. In 2010, they provided the seed money to establish our Infants and Toddlers (ITP) program. This grant enabled us to develop specialized training for CASAs to more effectively address the needs of children during the critical stages of early childhood development. Over the past decade, Voices for Children has served hundreds of infants and toddlers through the ITP program and deepened our training for CASA volunteers. We are incredibly grateful for The Rose Foundation’s vision, passion, and commitment to the youngest children in foster care.

Fun Without Faces



Focusing Philanthropy Matching Campaign in Riverside County

We are proud to partner with Focusing Philanthropy for a 2020 Matching Campaign. For every \$2 raised by Voices for Children for our CASA program in Riverside County, Focusing Philanthropy will generously donate \$1 until the campaign's goal of \$100,000 is reached. We will use the funds raised through this campaign to recruit, train, and support dedicated volunteer advocates.

In Riverside County, it costs just \$2,000 to recruit, train, and support a CASA volunteer for one child for an entire year. Reaching our goal of \$150,000 will enable Voices for Children to support approximately 75 children.

For giving eligibility and more information, please visit our website at speakupnow.org/focusing-philanthropy-riverside-county.



Top right: Every month since California's "Stay-at-Home" orders have been in effect, CASA Kavita has assembled and delivered care packages for her case child. Each package contains tasty treats and thoughtful notes to help the young girl get through the stress of quarantine. **Center right:** Thanks to our friends at Merlin's Magic Wand, CASA Cindy was able to treat her case youth to a trip to Legoland prior to the public health crisis. The children had a blast chasing each other around on the Skipper School Boat Rid. **Bottom right:** CASA Allison was able to take her case child on fun trips to the arcade. The young boy is pictured here having a great time playing skeeball. **Bottom left:** Thanks to our partnership with the San Diego Zoo, CASA Emily was able to take her case child to the San Diego Zoo Safari Park. They enjoyed meeting the animals, and are pictured here taking a look at an African pancake tortoise. **Center left:** At the beginning of this year, CASA Gwen enjoyed a fun outing with her case child at the San Diego Zoo. The young boy loved seeing the flamingos and other animals.

Bottom four photos were taken prior to COVID-19 restrictions.



Giving Tuesday Save-The-Date

Giving Tuesday started in 2012 as a simple idea: a day that encourages people to do good. Since then, it has grown into a global movement that has inspired millions of people to come together and support their local communities.

This year, Giving Tuesday will be on December 1, and it will be a great opportunity to support the advocacy provided by Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) in San Diego and Riverside Counties. We are excited to share powerful stories of the impact a CASA can have on a child's future through our campaign "Launching A Life." **We hope you will join us for this day of generosity on Tuesday, December 1, 2020.**

Ways to Give

Courtesy of Dowling & Yahnke Wealth Advisors

The passage of the \$2 trillion relief package known as the CARES Act may allow you to make an even bigger philanthropic impact during these difficult times. The 2020 charitable contribution limitation for individuals will now be 100% of adjusted-gross-income (AGI) if you donate cash directly to a charity (contributions to donor advised funds and Section 509(a)(3) supporting organizations are not eligible). Cash donations were previously limited to 60% of AGI. Any deduction for charitable contributions above this income limitation (100% of AGI for cash and 30% of AGI for stock gifts) carries over for five years. Additionally, Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs) from IRA accounts continue to be allowed starting at age 70½ up to a limit of \$100,000 per year per IRA owner. QCDs can be made in 2020 even with the waiver of Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs). Consider giving what would have been your IRA RMD for the year to your favorite charity in the form of QCDs.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT — SEMPRA ENERGY

Voices for Children would like to recognize Sempra Energy for a collaborative partnership that spans more than a decade.



Since 2007, Sempra Energy and The Sempra Energy Foundation have donated more than \$190,000 to Voices for Children through event sponsorships, community grants, and through the company's generous employee matching program. This spring, Voices for Children received a grant of \$30,000 from the foundation's COVID-19 Response Fund, which allowed us to continue our mission during the global pandemic. Sempra Energy also stepped up once again as a Hope Sponsor for our Starry Starry Night virtual gala, which took place on October 3.

But Sempra is committed to more than philanthropy. They also inspire and encourage their employees to volunteer. Erbin B. Keith, a 22-year veteran of Sempra Energy serving as deputy general counsel, brings business expertise to his role as a member of the Voices for Children Board of Directors. Robert J. Borthwick also serves as deputy general counsel for Sempra and volunteers as a CASA outside of work. Over the last eight years, Robert has been matched with five different children and has undoubtedly left an indelible mark on the youth for whom he advocated.

Sempra Energy, thank you for making a positive difference in our community. We are grateful for your ongoing support of our mission to improve the lives of vulnerable children living in foster care.



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Starry Starry Night 2020

On October 3, Voices for Children kicked off its 40th year of service in San Diego County at the 18th annual, and first ever virtual, Starry Starry Night gala. The event engaged more than 750 participants in #lightingtheway for San Diego's youth in foster care. The funds raised through the event will support the life-changing advocacy of Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers. The evening's pre-show featured the Mainly Mozart Youth Orchestra, and the San Diego Children's Choir started the program with a moving performance of "You Will Be Found." Throughout the evening, participants learned about the impact of our CASA program, competitively bid on exclusive live auction items, celebrated our outstanding CASA of the Year, and virtually raised their paddles to Fund-A-CASA. The signature event raised more than \$1,276,000 to provide one-on-one advocacy to more than 500 vulnerable children in San Diego County. Starry Starry Night was a remarkable success, and we could not be more grateful to our incredible sponsors, honorary committee members, donors, and event supporters. Thanks to you, children in foster care in San Diego County will have the consistent care and support of CASA volunteers.



CASA of the Year Carolina Finch (center), with husband, Larry, and son, Nicholas



From left to right: Becca & Jason Craig, Susan & John Laun, Debra & Ed Capozzoli, Raegan & Kevin Prior, Connie & Richard Unger

Many thanks to our generous sponsors!

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Upcoming Information Sessions

San Diego County

Thursday, November 19

Saturday, December 5

Tuesday, December 15

Saturday, January 9

Wednesday, January 27

Riverside County

Monday, December 7

Tuesday, December 8

Tuesday, December 15

Monday, January 4

Tuesday, January 5

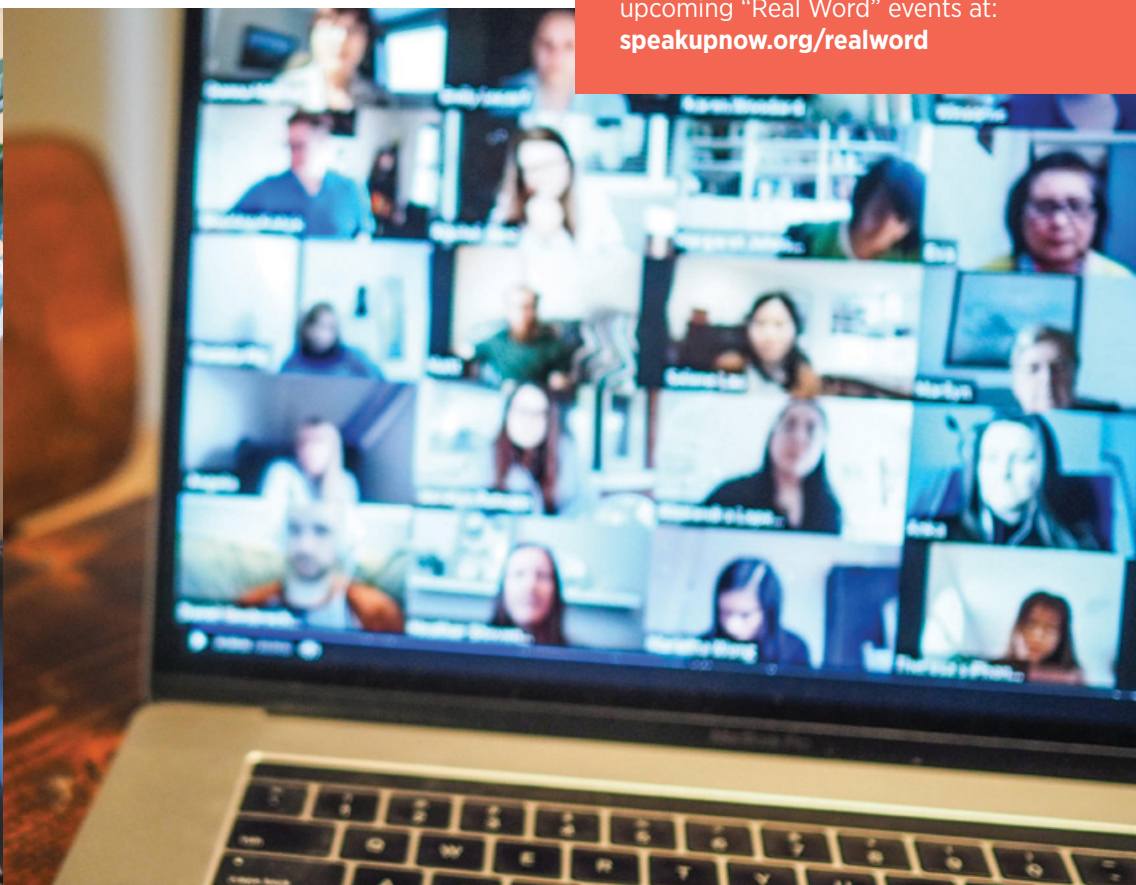
Tuesday, January 26

All information sessions have been moved to an online, virtual format, unless otherwise noted on our website.

REAL WORD SPEAKERS PANEL

Since May of this year, Voices for Children's "Real Word" speakers panel has been held in a virtual, online format. Hundreds of attendees have filled our Zoom presentations to hear directly from our current and former foster youth. Our panelists speak about their time in the foster care system, how COVID-19 is affecting them, and answer questions submitted by the audience. The Real Word provides an educational, eye-opening experience that both celebrates Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers and communicates the vital need for more advocates.

Sign up to receive information on upcoming "Real Word" events at:
speakupnow.org/realword





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