



VOICES FOR CHILDREN

# THE VOICE

Volume No. 33 | Issue I

FALL 2021

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**“If children feel safe,  
THEY CAN TAKE RISKS,  
ask questions, make mistakes,  
LEARN TO TRUST,  
share their feelings,  
AND GROW.”**

— ALFIE KOHN

#### OUR MISSION

**Voices for Children transforms the lives of abused, abandoned, or neglected children by providing them with trained volunteer 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 CEO

### Dear Friends,

“I just kept showing up.” That’s what CASA Tim recently shared when reflecting on his experience as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer for Josh. As Josh navigated his way through the foster care system as a teenager and young adult, CASA Tim was by his side, providing crucial advocacy and caring support. Their relationship, built on trust and consistency, helped to prepare Josh for independence and stability when he recently aged out of the system.

This year, Voices for Children will support nearly 1,500 CASA volunteers like CASA Tim across San Diego and Riverside Counties. Our CASAs are from all walks of life and are extraordinary community members: tireless advocates, selfless, humble, reliable, and consistent. But what makes them most special is their unwavering commitment to make a difference in the life of a child. Have you considered becoming a CASA? To learn more, or to connect us with others who would be interested in a volunteer experience like no other, please visit our website at [www.speakupnow.org](http://www.speakupnow.org).

As we respond to today’s challenges, we also are making plans for the future because we know that tomorrow’s children in foster care will need the advocacy and support of CASA volunteers. In June 2021, thanks to the generous support of the Sahm Family Foundation and following a collaborative process that included extensive input from our various stakeholders, our Board of Directors approved our new Strategic Plan. The plan is grounded in our mission to provide a CASA to every child who needs one and to advance our vision to serve every child in the foster care system through our advocacy, case monitoring, and case assessment services. Over the next three years, we will put the plan’s programmatic and other priorities into action through a series of initiatives that will drive our future strength and success. We look forward to sharing our progress with you.

Our special work is made possible thanks to the many community members who are champions of our mission. In the pages that follow, we hope you will be inspired by the stories of our CASAs, our community partners, and our generous philanthropic supporters.

From all of us at Voices for Children, thank you for “showing up” for children in foster care and for your support!

With our sincere appreciation,

Kelly Capen Douglas, Esq.  
President & CEO





## VFC Recognized Nationally for LGBTQ+ Inclusion Efforts

This summer, Voices for Children joined 119 child welfare agencies across the country who worked with the HRC Foundation's All Children - All Families (ACAF) program to improve the services we provide to the LGBTQ+ community, including youth in foster care. Participating organizations conducted an internal self-assessment, provided professional development to staff, and implemented ACAF's "Benchmarks of LGBTQ Inclusion," which track policy and practice changes within agencies. Voices for Children is proud to have earned the Innovative Inclusion Tier of Recognition for 2021, which is the highest tier of recognition granted.



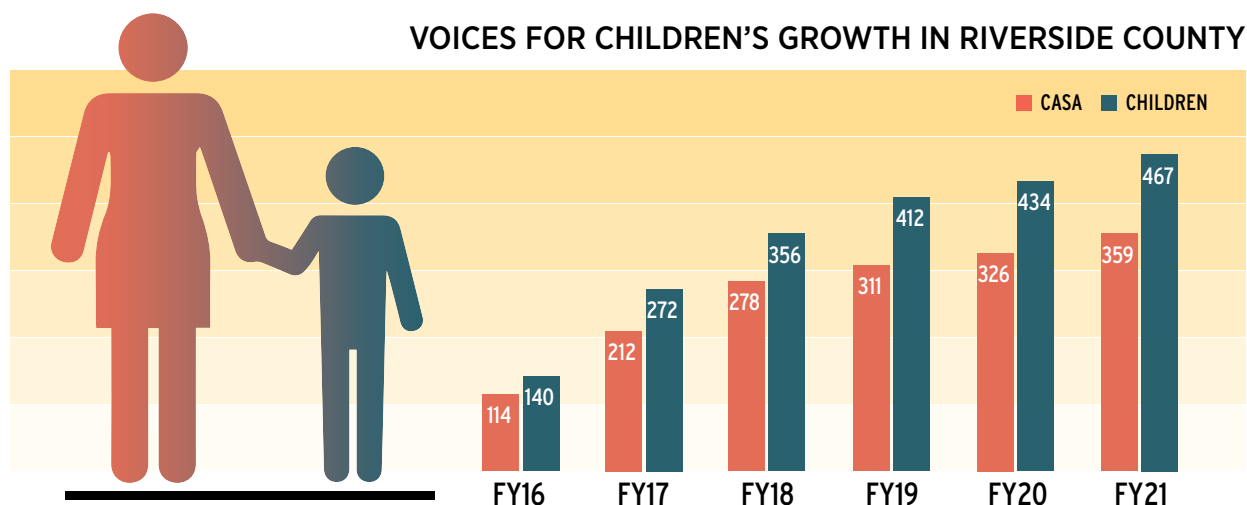
**Above:** Voices for Children team members Christina London, Sabrina Goosby, Jenna Price, Christina Piranio, and Kristen Brandley show their pride at a staff breakfast in June

## 1,000<sup>TH</sup> CHILD SERVED IN RIVERSIDE COUNTY

In 2015, VFC became the CASA program for Riverside County when the previous program closed its doors. This program has grown steadily each year, serving 140 children in 2016 to 467 children in 2021. This fall, VFC reached a special milestone: 1,000 children served since the program's inception.

VFC is deeply grateful to all the CASA volunteers who have served in Riverside County and the generous donors who ensure the program has the resources needed to expand its capacity. VFC appreciates its collaborative working relationships with the Court, the Department of Public Social Services, the attorneys for children and parents, the Department of Probation, and the many service providers who work hard to meet the needs of children in foster care.

The Riverside County program's executive director, Jessica Muñoz, stated, "With the continued support and generosity of our community, we will continue to grow and someday provide a CASA volunteer for every child who needs one."





# *The Ties That Bind*

## Sibling Relationships in Foster Care



**Above:** Luis, Sean, and CASA Art take in a San Diego Chargers game at Qualcomm Stadium in the early 2000s **Right:** Luis and Sean in 2021



Whether loving, competitive, supportive, or difficult, there's nothing quite like the relationship between siblings. From childhood homes to family traditions, siblings share the same experiences during formative years, and the relationships with one's siblings are often the longest in one's lifetime. That sibling bond can be even more complex for youth in the dependency system. For a child in foster care, their brothers and sisters likely also experienced abuse or neglect and are the only other people who truly understand.

Research shows that keeping siblings in foster care together leads to improved experiences and outcomes. According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway, siblings placed together:

- Are happier and mentally healthier
- Perform better in school
- Develop closer relationships with foster caregivers
- Adjust better to foster placements
- Have higher rates of reunification, adoption, and guardianship

Generally speaking, the foster care system aims to place brothers and sisters together. (Federal and state law require agencies to make reasonable efforts to do so.) However, for a multitude of reasons, this isn't always possible. In San Diego and Riverside Counties, more than half of all children in foster care are part of a sibling group. Of those, about 60 percent are placed with all of their siblings, 20 percent live with some of

their siblings, and 20 percent reside with no siblings.

### Sean and Luis's Story

On a spring day in 2000, brothers Luis and Sean Green (then ages 10 and 7) were supposed to meet their mother at the bus stop after a day of playing at the park. One hour passed. Two hours passed. Night was falling, and there was still no sign of her.

"We had no doubt about it that she was going to come back and pick us up," Sean said.

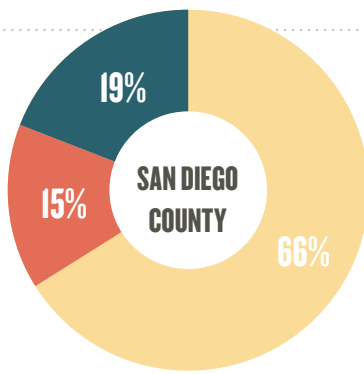
They never saw their biological mother again.

The boys knew the bus routes and made it back to the homeless shelter where they had been living. Police officers woke them in the middle of the night and took them to an emergency children's shelter. When no family members came forward, Luis and Sean entered foster care.

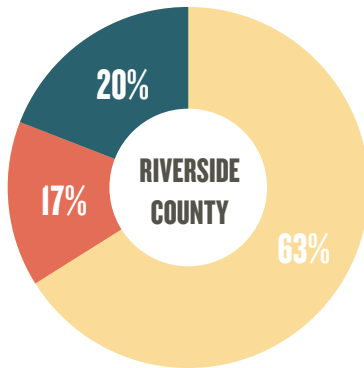
During their four years in the system, the boys lived in 11 different placements. Every few months, it felt as though their entire lives—their home, caregivers, school, friends—changed. The only constant was each other.

"Sean was the only person I didn't have to re-establish a relationship with," Luis explained.

The brothers were always placed together, a silver lining they



Number of children in care with siblings: 1,095



Number of children in care with siblings: 1,818

## SIBLINGS IN FOSTER CARE

- Placed with all siblings
- Placed with some siblings
- Placed with no siblings

Source: San Diego County Child Welfare Services (CWS)  
Monthly Dashboard – July 2021

attribute to the advocacy of their Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), Art Tabanao.

### CASAs and Sibling Sets

Art, a retired kindergarten teacher and engineer, was assigned to the brothers' case shortly after completing Advocate University, Voices for Children's training program for new CASA volunteers. After meeting the boys, Art could clearly see their strong bond and how Luis protected his little brother. He made keeping them together a priority.

"It's a hard enough thing to lose their parents. They shouldn't have to lose the only other person they have," Art said.

Like Art, many Voices for Children CASA volunteers advocate for siblings. In San Diego County, 61 percent of volunteers are assigned to entire sibling groups or children who are part of sibling groups. In Riverside County, 49 percent of active volunteers are serving a child with a sibling who has also been referred for a CASA.

Advocating for siblings can be a balancing act for CASAs. For example, CASAs may have to attend separate teacher conferences for each child, possibly at different schools. They may need to maintain relationships with multiple therapists, doctors, service providers, and different biological family members. For siblings living separately, CASA outings may be the only time they are able to see their brothers and sisters. Large sibling groups living apart may be assigned multiple CASAs. In those instances, CASAs work with one another to coordinate visits.

CASA Art visited Luis and Sean frequently, driving them to therapy appointments, taking them out to eat, and attending sporting events. Luis fondly recalls the time Art arranged for him and his brother to receive new bicycles through Voices for Children.

"It was the first big gift I had ever gotten in my life," Luis said. "I just remember being so happy."

Art also spent a few hours each week in the boys' classrooms after school. It was there that he learned Sean's teacher, Ms. Green, was interested in adopting the boys. Despite an uphill climb through the legal system, Art advocated tirelessly for the placement. The Greens say the adoption wouldn't have happened without Art's commitment and dedication.

Today, Luis and Sean live 3,000 miles apart; Sean, now 29, works as a developer in San Diego, and Luis, now 31, is a business owner and dad in Florida. Despite the distance between them, the brothers are still best friends. The experiences they shared in foster care led to an unbreakable sibling bond.

### Maintaining the sibling bond

For siblings living separately in foster care, CASAs can play a vital role in maintaining their sibling bond. After being removed from their home in a traumatic way, Christopher and Vanessa never lived together again and walked very different paths through the foster care system. Visit our YouTube channel to watch their inspirational story, which premiered at our Starry Starry Night gala on September 25, and see how CASA Laura kept them connected.

YouTube @Voices4ChildrenSDI





# CASA Nominated as Wildomar Volunteer of the Year



**Above:** CASA Tuan Phan and Advocacy Supervisor Nicole Boettger

serving our community. Tuan worked hard to get to know his assigned youth, even when they couldn't have in-person visits.

Nicole Boettger, Tuan's advocacy supervisor at Voices for Children, describes Tuan as "dedicated, selfless, and reliable" and adds that Tuan is always looking for ways to "go above and beyond his duties." When Tuan's youth was moved to a placement more than 200 miles from Tuan's home, Tuan arranged a visit almost immediately.

Tuan is an inspiration not only to the youth he serves but to the entire Voices for Children team. Tuan arrived in the United States at the age of five as a refugee from Vietnam and is always thinking about how he can serve others. In part because he was inspired by his service as a CASA, Tuan decided to pursue a graduate degree in social work. Tuan started courses for his Master of Social Work degree at the University of Denver this fall.

**Thank you, Tuan, for your dedicated advocacy and passion for service.**

Riverside County CASA Tuan Phan was nominated for the Murrieta/Wildomar Chamber of Commerce - Wildomar Volunteer of the Year Award.

Tuan serves a 16-year-old youth and has worked closely with the child's social worker, school counselor, therapist, caregiver, and attorney to ensure that the youth's needs are being met. Like many CASAs, Tuan has helped to ensure his youth's voice is heard when decisions are being made about his life. For example, Tuan brainstormed with school staff to find ways to keep his youth engaged in distance learning in light of the youth's need for special education services.

Tuan began his service at the outset of the pandemic. When so many of us had our hands full meeting our own needs, Tuan chose to dedicate his energy and care to

Introducing our  
new website!  
[speakupnow.org](https://speakupnow.org)



In September, Voices for Children launched its new and improved website! As our portal to the public, we wanted our website to be easy to use, accessible to all, and full of engaging content. Please take a few minutes to browse our revamped site, [speakupnow.org](https://speakupnow.org)!



## CARING IN ACTION

Voices for Children works alongside many wonderful community organizations that are dedicated to serving youth in foster care. In San Diego County, one such organization is Children's Legal Services of San Diego (CLSSD). CLSSD is a nonprofit organization that protects and defends the rights of children in the child welfare system through high-quality, compassionate legal representation. The attorneys that serve through CLSSD are passionate about the well-being of youth and serve both minors and nonminors in San Diego County's Juvenile Dependency Court.

Non Minor Dependents—referred to as nonminors or NMDs—are youth between the ages of 18 and 21 who choose to participate in California's extended foster care program. NMDs must meet eligibility requirements to continue receiving foster care benefits and resources until they reach 21 years of age. As they transition into adulthood, the needs of a nonminor will differ from those of a minor in foster care. NMD attorneys with CLSSD are experts in tailoring their courtroom advocacy to accommodate a nonminor's unique transitional needs.

"Our representation includes conversations about proper resources, grants, scholarships, etc.; developing independent skills; and pursuing employment and education," shared CLSSD Staff Attorney Justin Shagrin. "The Transitional Independent Living Plan is a vital document developed collaboratively that helps steer the ship for the youth towards success after dependency jurisdiction ends."

Managing Attorney Steve Wedel added, "The goal [...] is to support our clients as adults and help them to transition to being an adult once they turn 21. We ensure that their voice is heard in court—either by representing their interests or encouraging them to attend court so their own voice can be heard. We work to build their trust in us and then to maintain that trust throughout the case."

In securing the best outcomes for youth in extended foster care, CLSSD attorneys often work in parallel

with Voices for Children staff and Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers.

"I have seen some really wonderful CASAs reach and form bonds with really tough clients," said NMD and Dual Lead Attorney Caitlin Zaback. "CASAs often have a different relationship with clients than we do as attorneys, and sometimes they can help bring to light issues that I was not aware of. I have seen some really positive outcomes when CASAs have stuck by NMDs for many years."

Ensuring that a child achieves their best outcome is a community effort. Attorneys, CASAs, social workers, caregivers, and others each play a vital role in ensuring children have the support and services they need. Thank you to Children's Legal Services of San Diego and all of the compassionate attorneys who have dedicated their careers to serving youth in child welfare. Learn more about CLSSD at [www.clssandiego.org](http://www.clssandiego.org).



**From back left:** Justin Shagrin, Maria Diaz; **Front row from left:** Caitlin Zaback, Steve Wedel





# Fun Without Faces

**Top and bottom left:** Something as simple as a new backpack can give a child a big boost of confidence as they head back to school. In August, Voices for Children distributed more than 200 backpacks and school supplies to children in foster care. Here are a few CASA youth showing off their snazzy new backpacks!

**Top and bottom right:** This summer, as part of a new partnership with the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, we were so excited to offer tickets to the San Diego Zoo and Safari Park to our youth in foster care and CASA volunteers. For many children, it was their first time ever visiting a zoo and seeing wild animals up close. Some even expressed interest in a career working with animals after their visit. Thank you, San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, for providing unforgettable experiences.

## Together we give.

GIVING  
TUESDAY



## SAVE THE DATE

November 30, 2021

*The grant of \$150,000 will enable Voices for Children to recruit, train, and support 60 CASA volunteers over the next year who will provide advocacy to approximately 90 children in foster care.*



# Giving Consistency

In September, Voices for Children launched a new website. With it came a new, streamlined donation platform that makes online giving quick, easy, and customizable. You can now make a gift directly on our website, easily designate the frequency of recurring gifts, choose from several payment methods, and help make your gift go further by selecting to cover transaction costs.

CASAs provide consistent, year-round support to youth in foster care. You can do the same by becoming a recurring donor. Visit our website to set up your monthly, quarterly, or annual gift today.

[speakupnow.org/giving](https://speakupnow.org/giving)



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS FY2021-2022

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*President & CEO, Voices for Children*

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Riverside County — FY2021-2022  
Yxstian Gutierrez, Ed.D.  
Liz Jones  
Jim Steere  
Hector Zatarain

## A Legacy of Giving

### THE CONRAD PREBYS FOUNDATION

Thanks to the generous support of The Conrad Prebys Foundation, Voices for Children will ensure that children in foster care receive the caring and consistent support of a CASA volunteer.

Voices for Children was one of 102 grant projects funded by The Conrad Prebys Foundation in its summer grant cycle. The grant of \$150,000 will enable Voices for Children to recruit, train, and support 60 CASA volunteers over the next year who will provide advocacy to approximately 90 children in foster care. We are truly grateful for the support of The Conrad Prebys Foundation!

Conrad Prebys created a legacy of philanthropic giving in San Diego. His many gifts supported the San Diego community in the areas of youth development, higher education, visual and performing arts, medical research, health care, and animal conservation. Mr. Prebys passed away five years ago, and The Conrad Prebys Foundation was launched this year to continue his legacy. More than \$9 million was awarded in the Foundation's summer grant cycle. The grants awarded range in size from a \$7,500 one-time grant to a \$2 million multi-year grant.

"During his lifetime, Conrad Prebys experienced so much joy when giving to causes he was passionate about," said Tony Cortes, a longtime friend of Conrad Prebys and board chair of The Conrad Prebys Foundation. "The Foundation board and staff hope these gifts will inspire others in the community to experience that same joy by giving to the causes and organizations that matter most to them."

# Partner Spotlights



## LANY AND ALEX ZIKAKIS



Voices for Children is so grateful for its wonderful partnership with Alex and Lany Zikakis and Carlsbad-based Capstone Advisors. For 17 years, Alex and Lany have been champions of our special mission,

providing leadership and generous philanthropic support, while also helping us to forge a strong corporate partnership with Capstone Advisors.

Led by founder and President Alex Zikakis, Capstone Advisors is a diversified real estate investment, development, and asset management company with properties in California, Arizona, Nevada, Virginia, and Costa Rica. Capstone Advisors' values-based

mission, commitment to excellence and integrity, and dedication to its team are all reflected in its commitment to positively impact the lives of vulnerable children through the gift of critical advocacy and caring support. Capstone Advisors has generously supported Voices for Children over the years, and this year we were honored that they chose to be an Impact Sponsor at our 40th anniversary Starry Starry Night gala.

Lany and Alex's personal commitment to our CASA program is exemplary. Lany served on our Board of Directors from 2013–2017 and continues to be an ambassador for our mission. Recently, she played a key role in creating a new look to our office reception area by facilitating donated services and furniture through McCulley Design and bkm OfficeWorks.

To Lany and Alex, and to the team at Capstone Advisors, thank you for being difference-makers and for your generous support!



## U.S. BANK

Voices for Children's Riverside County program is grateful to the U.S. Bank Foundation for its steadfast support of our mission. U.S. Bank believes that philanthropy is an important catalyst for change. Their focus is on identifying organizations who are addressing systemic and structural barriers to success for women, people of color, and low-moderate income communities. U.S. Bank was among the first corporations to invest in VFC's Riverside County program. Specifically, U.S. Bank supports VFC's work with older youth who are preparing for life after foster care and need assistance with developing life skills and job readiness.

In addition to the generous grants, U.S. Bank supports VFC in other ways. U.S. Bank team members have served on Riverside County's Community Advisory Council and have volunteered their time to present workshops to assist CASAs working with youth on financial literacy. VFC was also selected to participate in a virtual volunteer fair that U.S. Bank hosted for their employees at the height of the pandemic. VFC is grateful for U.S. Bank's impactful financial contributions and their authentic partnership. Most of all, VFC appreciates their commitment to the children we serve.





MG Properties Group Guests



Performance by the Mainly Mozart Youth Orchestra



Greg Richardson and VFC Board Member Monique Rodriguez



Lany Zikakis

VIEW  
MORE PHOTOS  
.....  
[voicesforchildrenSSN.org](https://www.voicesforchildrenSSN.org)  
.....  
& DOWNLOAD  
YOURS



Chairs Julie and Dale Yahnke



VFC Board Member Randy Finch and Cambra Finch, Raegan and Kevin Prior

## STARRY STARRY NIGHT

On Saturday, September 25, Voices for Children hosted more than 500 guests for a spectacular evening at The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park. The 2021 gala celebrated and honored our 40th year of service to children in San Diego County with uplifting music, impactful stories, and generous commitments from supporters to invest in our CASA program. In total, sponsors and guests contributed more than \$2.1 million to continue providing critical advocacy to children in our community who have experienced abuse and neglect.

Special thanks to our generous sponsors, including Visionary Sponsor Dale & Julie Yahnke; Presenting Sponsors Annette & Daniel Bradbury and Maryanne & Harley K. Sefton; Impact Sponsors Capstone Advisors, Farrell Family Foundation, George Lai, Maravai LifeSciences, MG Properties Group, Qualcomm, Sempra, Darlene Marcos Shiley, and Katie & Dan Sullivan; Advocate Sponsors Finch, Thornton, Baird LLP, Jennifer Adams Home, KPBS, Silvergate Bank, the Schievelbein Foundation, and the San Diego Padres; Hope Sponsors AlphaCore Wealth Advisory, Genentech, Molly's Angels Foundation, Perkins Coie, and the Pulido/Walker Foundation; Starry Sponsors California Bank & Trust, City National Bank, Cresa, Higgs Fletcher Mack, Hughes Marino, Jones Day, JP Morgan Chase & Co., Meyers Nave, Moss Adams, Paul, Plevin, Sullivan & Connaughton, LLP, PBO Advisory Group, Procopio, Cameron Kay & Kathleen Rains, and UPS; and In-Kind Sponsors Alaska Airlines, Giving Back Magazine, Crossover Print Management, Liquid Blue Party Band, and Ranch & Coast Magazine.



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Phone: 951-472-9301

## *Speak Up for a Child in Foster Care*

**Learn more about volunteering and ask questions of a current CASA at an upcoming Volunteer Information Session.**

### **San Diego County**

Wednesday, November 17  
Saturday, December 4  
Saturday, January 8  
Wednesday, January 19

### **Riverside County**

Friday, November 19  
Monday, November 22  
Tuesday, November 30  
Monday, December 6

*All information sessions will take place in an online, virtual format unless otherwise noted on our website.*

.....  
**Sign up today!**

Visit  
[speakupnow.org/volunteer](https://speakupnow.org/volunteer)

.....

**Follow Us!**



Voices for Children is active on social media! Like us on Facebook, follow us on Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter, and watch our most recent videos on YouTube.