



VOICES FOR CHILDREN

THE VOICE

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"If you want to touch the past,
touch a rock. If you want to touch
the present, touch a flower.
If you want to touch the future,
touch a life.

— AUTHOR UNKNOWN

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,

One of our signature programs at Voices for Children is The Real Word, a speakers panel comprised of young adults with lived experience in the foster care system. Earlier this year, we hosted one of our virtual Real Word events, in which two young adults, along with their Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers, shared what life was like for them growing up in the foster care system. During the program, one of the panelists shared a particularly poignant moment when she was moving to yet another new home placement and feeling as if everything in her world was changing. When she shared these thoughts with her CASA, her CASA reminded her, **"I'm still here."**

Those three words capture an essential role played by a CASA volunteer: being a consistent and reliable presence in the lives of their CASA children. This year, Voices for Children will provide advocacy to more than 2,500 children who experienced abuse, neglect, or abandonment and, as a result, entered the foster care system. New homes, new schools, separation from family, and uncertain futures compound the trauma they already have experienced. CASAs provide crucial support to children whose lives have been turned upside down, ensuring they have access to the resources they need to thrive. For many in foster care, their CASA is the person who is "still here", providing the stable and consistent support that research shows to be the number one predictor of a child's ability to overcome trauma.

Voices for Children will support nearly 1,500 CASA volunteers this year. Our CASA volunteers navigate some of the most trying of circumstances, and by their side throughout their advocacy is a staff advocacy supervisor. In our featured article, we share with you the critical role played by our advocacy supervisors. Each advocacy supervisor carries a case load of CASA volunteers and collaborates closely with them to support their advocacy in Juvenile Court and the child welfare system, to connect them with resources, to problem-solve, and to provide encouragement. We are grateful for the many dedicated professionals on our team who have committed their careers to making a difference in the lives of the children we serve.

Our mission is premised on collaboration, relationship-building, and trust, and each of those values is reflected in how we work with our volunteers and community to serve children. In this edition of *The Voice*, we highlight several CASAs, community partners, and generous philanthropic partners whose dedication to our region's most vulnerable children is extraordinary. We hope their stories will inspire you.

In honor of National Foster Care Awareness Month, we thank you for your support of our special mission at Voices for Children and for partnering with us to provide children with hope for a brighter future.

With our gratitude,

Kelly Capen Douglas

Kelly Capen Douglas, Esq.
President & CEO



Open Mind, Open Heart

Originally from South Africa, Hilary Isakow moved to San Diego in 2009. She started looking for a meaningful, hands-on volunteer opportunity and found Voices for Children! In her decade as a CASA, Hilary has dedicated countless hours advocating for eight children who have all been able to achieve permanency under her unwavering guidance.

Hilary's most recent youth, "Alice," was adopted in 2017, but returned to the foster care system several months later after her new parents terminated the adoption. During her time in care, Alice lived in 15 different placements. CASA Hilary was determined to help the young teen find stability.

Last year, Alice reconnected with her biological mother and started traveling out of state to visit her. A few months later, the Court reinstated her mother's parental rights. Hilary was hesitant; everything was

moving so fast, and she didn't want Alice to be let down again. However, as time went on, Hilary saw how well Alice was doing during the visits and her perspective began to shift.

CASA Hilary worked closely with Alice's attorney and team as the discussion to place Alice with her mother began. Hilary worked to ensure the proper services were in place for both Alice and her mother, including therapy and regularly scheduled visits. Recently, Hilary was in the courtroom when the judge terminated jurisdiction and officially placed Alice back with her mother.

After the hearing, Alice's attorney called Hilary to thank her for the support and advocacy. The attorney shared Hilary's relationship with Alice was critical during the most challenging times in this young girl's life.



Above: CASA Hilary Isakow

I'LL BE THERE FOR YOU

La Quinta resident Rhonda Andrus started her journey as a CASA in San Diego County in 2008. Over the course of six years, she was assigned to eight children. After taking a short hiatus and relocating to the Coachella Valley, Rhonda became a CASA in Riverside County, where she served three more youth.

Rhonda's most recent case child, 11-year-old "Manny," has been moved to various homes throughout the county at no fault of his own. Fortunately, Rhonda was a constant in Manny's life and made those transitions less scary.

It was clear the two had bonded when Manny asked Rhonda to chaperone a school field trip. When he was placed in a group home, Rhonda made his birthday extra special by bringing him a cake and taking him to his favorite place, Chuck E. Cheese. She fondly remembers the big hug she received when she arrived that day and how Manny asked if she could come every week as she left. Rhonda also held Manny's educational rights, participating in every school meeting and helping ensure his academic needs were met. She even accompanied Manny to an adoption event in hopes of finding his "forever home."

After 14 years and 11 children served, Rhonda is concluding her service as a CASA. We are deeply grateful for her dedication to our program and know she will always be a special part of Voices for Children.



Above: CASA Rhonda Andrus

Rooted in Service

The Role of an Advocacy Supervisor

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers Niza and Sylvia, who together are assigned to five children in the same family, were concerned to learn the water in the mobile home park where the family lives was contaminated with arsenic and not suitable for drinking, washing, or bathing.

Their initial thought was to call the news, contact a politician, or otherwise bring the issue to the public's attention. Instead, they contacted their Advocacy Supervisor, Brianna Miller, who validated their feelings but reminded them of their responsibility to protect the family's privacy. Brianna shifted their focus to helping the family find more suitable housing and provided the CASAs with contact information for a housing specialist with the county. The CASAs then facilitated contact between the children's mother and this resource. After working together for nearly a year, the family of nine is moving into their new home with more space and, most importantly, healthy drinking water.

This story is just one example of many illustrating the support provided to CASA volunteers by their Advocacy Supervisors at Voices for Children (VFC).

The role of a CASA is a unique opportunity, one in which volunteers work alongside professionals in the child welfare system, including attorneys, social workers, and dependency law judges. One of the amazing things about the CASA program is it is open to just about any member of the community who has a heart to help children.

Because serving in the child welfare arena is an unfamiliar venture for the majority of CASAs, VFC provides ongoing support to volunteers in the form of a dedicated Advocacy Supervisor, a paid VFC staff member with expert knowledge of the court system, the child welfare system, and resources available to youth in foster care.

Advocacy Supervisors act as roots to keep CASAs grounded but also provide support, knowledge, and resources that nurture growth in their advocacy role.

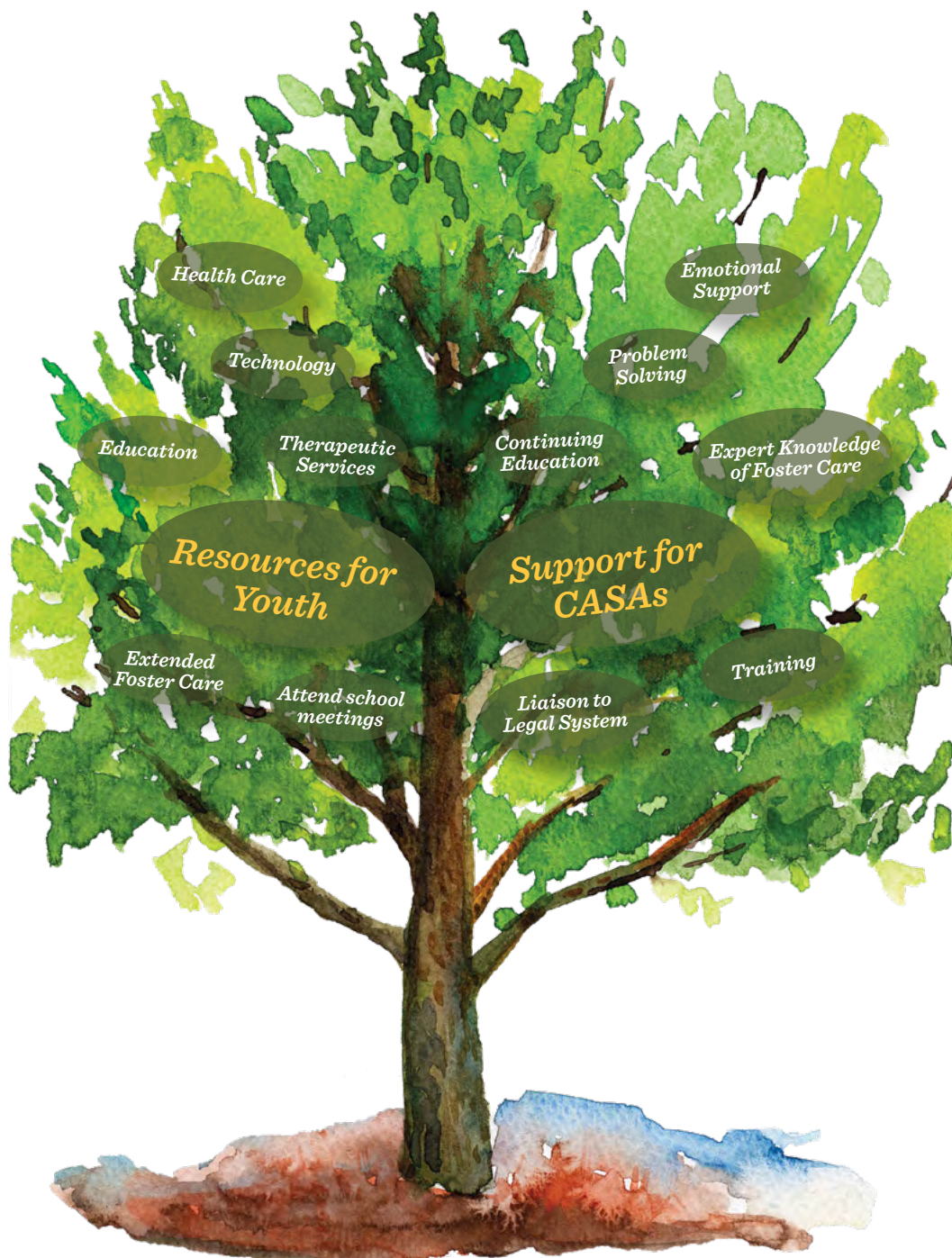
After completing Advocate University and starting their first case, it's natural for a CASA to have a lot of questions. Their Advocacy Supervisor gives them all the information they need and helps

them feel more confident. CASA volunteers experience a range of emotions while working with their assigned youth, who are in foster care because they have experienced abuse, neglect, and other forms of trauma. Advocacy Supervisors provide a listening ear for CASAs as they work through their own feelings of frustration, sadness, or joy. This is especially helpful because CASAs are not allowed to talk about their cases with friends or family because of confidentiality. As CASAs navigate the child welfare system and difficult situations arise, Advocacy Supervisors act as a sounding board, assisting CASAs to plan their next steps. Advocacy Supervisors also facilitate continuing education opportunities for CASAs, including small group meetings that provide CASAs a platform to share case successes and concerns with their peers, reminding them they are part of team. As one Advocacy Supervisor described, the Advocacy Supervisor is the CASA's "biggest fan and cheerleader."

With expertise in the child welfare system, Advocacy Supervisors accompany CASAs to many case-related meetings and court hearings. These can be intimidating experiences for a layperson who likely has never stepped foot in a courtroom or sat at a table full of professionals as they develop a student's individualized education program (IEP). The Advocacy Supervisor prepares the CASA for the purpose and format of each meeting, provides support during the meeting, and debriefs the CASA about what took place after the meeting.

Over time, CASAs become more engaged and comfortable in their role, and their questions become more specific and technical. For example, an assigned child may move from a group home to a foster home or be returned to the care of their biological parents. A child may be approaching their 18th birthday or moving to a home outside of the county. Advocacy Supervisors prepare CASAs for how their role will evolve and what they can anticipate in various scenarios. Each child's case is unique and brings a new challenge, so Advocacy Supervisors often liaise between a CASA and the legal and child welfare systems and help to identify from whom and to whom they can obtain and provide information, as appropriate.

Advocacy Supervisors are in regular contact with their CASAs. During these conversations, CASAs share any unmet needs of their children. Advocacy Supervisors are well informed of the services available for youth in foster care. They provide CASAs with fun outing ideas, valuable resources for parenting youth, housing options for young adults in extended foster care, and nonprofit partners who provide items to enrich the children's lives. CASAs most commonly turn to their Advocacy Supervisors to identify resources to support their youth in the following areas:



Advocacy Supervisor

- **HEALTH CARE:** Mental health services, orthodontia programs, developmental services, help navigating Medi-Cal and Medicaid, and substance abuse treatment
- **EDUCATION:** Tutoring services, help with IEPs, and connections to school district liaisons for foster youth
- **TECHNOLOGY:** Access to cell phones, computers, and iPads
- **TRANSITIONAL AGED YOUTH (TAY):** Employment and community service opportunities, job programs, and independent living program services

Voices for Children is structured to support its volunteers so they can best advocate for children in foster care. Whenever a CASA has a question, concern, or feeling, they go to their Advocacy Supervisor. If they need assistance in contacting a professional or obtaining information for their court report, they go to their Advocacy Supervisor. If an order of the Court has not been fulfilled or their child is not receiving the appropriate services, they go to their Advocacy Supervisor. This partnership between CASAs and their Advocacy Supervisors keeps CASAs anchored and strong and enables them to provide the best possible advocacy and support for the children they serve.

Community Partner Spotlight

Rachel Cousyn, County of Riverside

Rachel Cousyn is an Administrative Services Analyst II with the Riverside County Department of Public Social Services – Children’s Services Division. She works on a variety of projects and special initiatives and serves as a liaison to some of the Department’s child welfare partners, including Voices for Children. Rachel says she is a “big supporter” of the CASA program and that it has been “heartwarming” to see what CASA volunteers can accomplish.

Rachel is the first person VFC’s Riverside County team will call with a question or to understand how a facet of the Department operates. “Rachel is a consummate professional,” said Director of Programs Sharon Morris. “She responds to our needs in record time.”

Rachel joined the Department 16 years ago, after taking some time away from her career to raise her daughter. She decided to pursue public service instead of returning to the private sector. Since that time, she has devoted her analytical skills and project management acumen to improving the lives of children in the child welfare system. Rachel’s important role is a reminder that there are many dedicated professionals who work alongside social workers at Riverside County’s social services agency and who are integral to the work they do every day.

Rachel speaks with passion and admiration for her child welfare colleagues. She says she wishes the public at large had more opportunities to see how deeply they want families to be together and children in foster care to return home when it is safe to do so.



Above: Rachel Cousyn

Fred Finch Youth & Family Services

Every child in foster care has regular child and family team (CFT) meetings. The important adults in a child’s life (biological parents, caregivers, social workers, therapists, lawyers, school personnel, CASAs, and more) come together to ensure decisions are made to keep the child on track and to meet all of their needs. In San Diego County, these meetings are facilitated by Fred Finch Youth & Family Services.

The dedicated team at Fred Finch conducts thousands of CFT meetings each year. Before every meeting, the facilitator invites the participants and conducts pre-meeting interviews with each one. Since Fred Finch became the county’s CFT meeting provider in 2018, Voices for Children has been impressed by their staff’s commitment to including CASAs in CFT meetings and making sure CASA input is heard and considered.

The CASA is a critical part of a child’s support team, according to Laura McClarin, LMFT, Senior Director at Fred Finch Youth & Family Services. Because a CASA has a special bond with the child and knows the intricacies of the family, they can provide insight no one else on the case can.

“They (CASAs) have a huge weight in the system. We need them there,” McClarin said. “Both Fred Finch and Voices for Children value giving youth the supports they need to be successful in their lives, and CASAs are a definite piece of that.”



Fun Without Faces



Sunset Cliffs



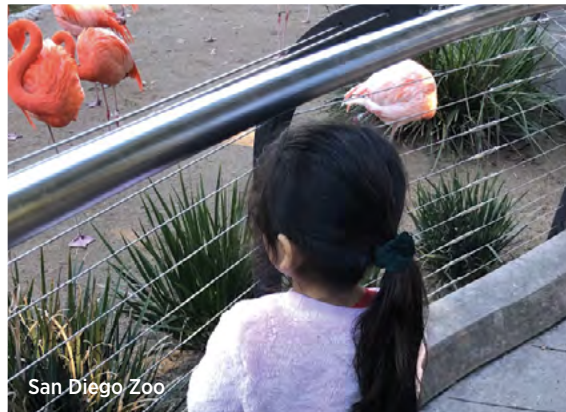
Fleet Science Center



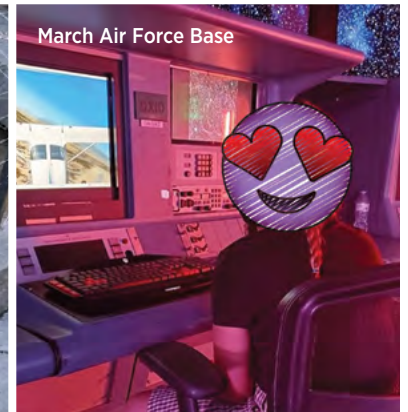
Museum of Ancient Wonders



SeaWorld



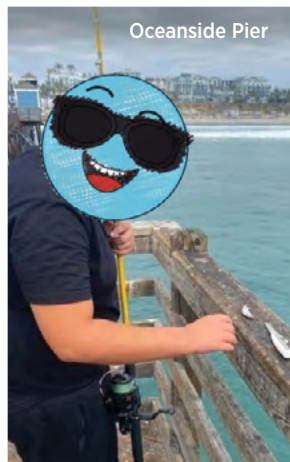
San Diego Zoo



March Air Force Base



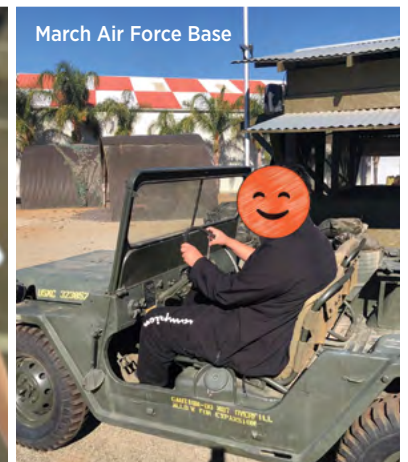
LEGOLAND



Oceanside Pier



Farmers Market



March Air Force Base



Museum of Making Music

Out and About

From a trip to the museum to an afternoon of fishing, CASA volunteers provide children in foster care with experiences they may not have otherwise. As COVID restrictions lift in San Diego and Riverside Counties, our CASAs and their CASA kids have more opportunities to share adventures and make memories. Thank you to our many community partners who provide complimentary tickets and make these excursions possible.

Supporter Spotlight

COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Voices for Children recently received the news that Cox Charities Foundation made a grant in support of our efforts to recruit new Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) to advocate on behalf of children in foster care. VFC was awarded the grant through Cox's Diversity and Inclusion priority area, which helps those organizations whose missions and goals support civil rights, disadvantaged youth seeking equality, and educational and economic opportunities for diverse populations, including race, gender, and sexual orientation.

At VFC, we are committed to providing outstanding advocacy and support to a diverse population of children in the foster care system. To that end, we are especially committed to diversity and inclusion as we train and equip our CASAs to support their CASA children. Each year, we recruit more than 200 new community members to train as CASA volunteers. With Cox Charities' support, we are expanding our outreach and recruitment so our CASA volunteers increasingly represent the diversity of our region, with a special focus on encouraging more men, Spanish-speakers, and African-Americans to consider becoming CASA volunteers.

COX Charities

Building RAPport

The Regional Access Project (RAP) Foundation addresses unmet needs in physical health, mental health, and juvenile intervention for residents of eastern Riverside County through grants and technical assistance to not-for-profit service providers.

Voices for Children's partnership with the RAP Foundation began when VFC opened its doors in Riverside County in 2015. Before securing an office in the Coachella Valley, the RAP Foundation allowed VFC to use their offices and conference rooms to interview and train new CASAs. When the RAP Foundation purchased a building, VFC was honored to rent an office located in its building alongside dozens of other local nonprofits.

Over the years, VFC staff members have benefited from many technical trainings and resources the RAP Foundation offers, including Desert Fast Pitch. Riverside County's Executive Director, Jessica Muñoz, participated in the 2016 competition for area nonprofits, resulting in a \$3,000 grant. More recently, VFC was awarded a \$16,700 grant through the RAP Foundation's mental health initiative, which funded CASAs for Coachella Valley youth who receive mental health services. Our Riverside County team is grateful for the RAP Foundation's ongoing support!





Maximize Your Impact

Voices for Children is excited to partner with Focusing Philanthropy for the eighth year in a row to benefit children living in foster care in San Diego County! Join us in this unique matching campaign to support children in foster care. From February 1, 2022, to June 30, 2022, every \$2 raised by Voices for Children will be matched with \$1 from Focusing Philanthropy until the campaign goal of \$750,000 is reached.

This is an incredible opportunity to maximize the impact of your gift to Voices for Children. The minimum donation is \$1,000. To qualify for the match, donations must be directed to and received by Focusing Philanthropy. Donations are tax deductible, and 100 percent of funds contributed will go directly to Voices for Children. Thank you for making your gift today! **Contact Chief Philanthropy Officer, Rebecca Rader, at rebeccar@speakupnow.org for more information.**

For those wishing to participate in a Focusing Philanthropy campaign to benefit children in foster care in Riverside County, a separate campaign will commence in May and run through December. **For more information, please contact Jessica Muñoz at JessicaM@speakupnow.org.**



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Events

FOSTERING HOPE GOLF CLASSIC

On Monday, June 13, 2022, Voices for Children will hold its 29th annual Fostering Hope Golf Classic to support our CASA program. We are grateful to our presenting sponsors George Lai and Dale Yahnke and to Co-Chairs David Bialis, Jenny Kropko, Mike Kropko, and Bill Sailer, for helping make this event possible. Hosted at a private country club in La Jolla, players will tee off for an 18-hole tournament, followed by a cocktail reception and awards ceremony where guests will learn more about our program and support the children we serve. **For more information about individual tickets and sponsorship opportunities, please contact Samantha Daum at events@speakupnow.org or 858-598-2261.**

THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS SPONSORS!

Presenting Sponsors

George Lai
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Uplifting Voices

On Saturday, May 7, 2022, Voices for Children hosted more than 150 guests at its inaugural Uplifting Voices event on the Del Mar Plaza's Ocean View Deck. Combining inspiring stories, philanthropy, and fun, this event lifted up the voices of our community's most vulnerable children.

During the program, NBC San Diego's Mark Mullen facilitated a conversation with award-winning journalist and 5th generation beekeeper Meredith May, author of "The Honey Bus", her personal memoir of a young girl's loss and courage. Guests also heard from CASA Alice Brewer about her experience advocating for children in foster care and the critical role of a CASA.

In total, sponsors and guests contributed more than \$380,000 to support our CASA program.

Special thanks to event Co-Chairs, Patricia Brutton and Marina Marrelli, and our generous sponsors, including Uplifting Sponsors Annette & Daniel Bradbury and Nancy & Mike Pfeiffer; Hope Sponsors Kim & Andrew Busch, Kim & Keith Shores, and Katie & Dan Sullivan; Inspirational Sponsor Schor Vogelzang & Chung LLP; Voice Sponsors Jan Barstow, Gigi Cramer, and Virginia C. Nelson; In-Kind Sponsors Coola, Dr. Bronner's, Primally Pure, and Warick's.

STARRY STARRY NIGHT



Thursday, October 20, 2022
The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park

Save the date to join Voices for Children and Event Chairs Hanna and Mark Gleiberman for a spectacular evening under the stars to support children living in foster care and the life-changing advocacy of our CASA volunteers.

To secure your sponsorship or Honorary Committee membership, contact Samantha Daum at events@speakupnow.org or **858-598-2261**. Registration will open on August 1, 2022. For more information, please visit us at voicesforchildrenSSN.org.

All net proceeds from Starry Starry Night 2022 will support Voices for Children's CASA program in San Diego County.



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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, June 8
Saturday, June 25
Thursday, July 7
Saturday, July 23

Riverside County

Tuesday, May 31
Thursday, June 2
Monday, June 6
Tuesday, June 14

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

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Sign up today!

Visit
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.