



VOICES FOR CHILDREN

# THE VOICE

Volume No. 34 | Issue I

FALL 2022

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“You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference YOU want to make.”

—JANE GOODALL

#### 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,

“A CASA is an angel.” That’s how one local Juvenile Court judge responded when he was asked to describe a Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteer — a “CASA.” With decades of experience overseeing thousands of cases of children who had experienced abuse and neglect and were living in foster care, that judge knows firsthand how a CASA’s advocacy in court, along with their consistent and caring presence, positively impacts the lives of vulnerable youth, providing them with hope for a brighter future.

When children enter the foster care system, a legal process begins that involves regular court hearings before Juvenile Court judges. The process is unfamiliar to most and can be intimidating for anyone – especially for a child who has experienced the trauma of abuse, neglect, and being removed from their home. At each hearing, the judge relies on information provided by social workers, attorneys, and others to make important decisions about the child and their future.

In 1976, a judge in Seattle was concerned that judges were making decisions about children living in the foster care system without having sufficient information. He came up with the idea to use specially-trained community volunteers to speak up for the best interests of children in court. With that innovative idea, the CASA model was created. In 1980, Voices for Children became one of the first CASA programs in the nation.

For 42 years, CASAs recruited, trained, and supported by Voices for Children have played a critical role in the legal process for local children in foster care. CASAs provide judges with a holistic view of the child, their progress, and their needs. Most importantly, they advocate to ensure the child’s voice is heard. We hope you will enjoy learning more about the powerful impact of a CASA’s court advocacy, highlighted in our featured article on page 4.

This year at Voices for Children, we will advocate on behalf of more than 2,500 children across San Diego and Riverside Counties. Our work is made possible thanks to the generosity of our community. In this edition of *The Voice*, we are pleased to recognize several of our dedicated volunteers, committed community partners, and generous philanthropic supporters who are true champions of our special mission. We hope their stories will inspire you.

From all of us at Voices for Children, thank you for supporting our CASA program and for choosing to make a difference in the lives of our community’s most vulnerable children.

With our gratitude,

Kelly Capen Douglas, Esq.  
President & CEO



## Welcome Home

This spring, Voices for Children's (VFC) Riverside County program moved into a new office in the city of Riverside. The program also has offices in Palm Desert and Murrieta. In June, more than 60 VFC staff, board members, Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers, juvenile court judges, community partners, and supporters helped celebrate the new space with an open house and ribbon-cutting ceremony hosted by the Greater Riverside Chambers of Commerce. VFC was honored to be presented with certificates from community leaders, including Riverside Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson, State Senator Richard Roth, Assemblymember Sabrina Cervantes, and Riverside County Supervisor Kevin Jeffries. The new office, located in the La Sierra community, features a reception area, multiple offices, a large conference room for CASA trainings and meetings, and a kitchen area.



VFC would like to express our sincere thanks to David Marino, Executive Vice President at Hughes Marino, for helping us find our perfect home in the city of Riverside.

## IN THE COMMUNITY



**Top:** Our Riverside County Outreach Team joined hundreds of vendors and more than 30,000 guests at the **39th Temecula Valley Balloon & Wine Festival** which took place June 3-5, 2022.



**Bottom:** Our San Diego County Recruitment & Outreach Team attended several LGBTQ+ events this summer, including Oceanside's **Pride by the Beach** on June 11, 2022.

## Take Us Out to the Ball Game!

On August 4, 2022, our San Diego County team gathered for a staff outing at PETCO Park to watch the San Diego Padres take on the Colorado Rockies. Thanks to the generosity of the San Diego Padres, everyone enjoyed a relaxing afternoon of fun and food outside the office.



# CASAs in Court

## How volunteers put advocacy into action

When Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Devina Pacheco was assigned to 13-year-old “Juliana’s” case, her mother’s parental rights had already been terminated. But as CASA Devina got to know Juliana and her mother, “Miranda,” she saw just how hard Miranda was working toward stability. She attended every child and family team (CFT) and individualized education program (IEP) meeting, actively participated in family therapy, and always returned CASA Devina’s phone calls. As time went on, it was clear to CASA Devina that Juliana would do best back home with her mom.

“Her mother was showing up every weekend, and Juliana was always really happy when she saw her,” CASA Devina said.



**Above:** CASA Devina joined the San Diego County CASA program in 2018.

With Juliana’s blessing and support from Voices for Children (VFC), CASA Devina started advocating for reunification services to resume. Everyone knew this would be a tough battle; parental rights aren’t usually reinstated after being terminated once. Still, CASA Devina worked closely with the minor’s attorney to make it happen.

### Who is the Minor’s Attorney?

The minor’s attorney is both attorney and Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) for a child in foster care. Their main roles are to listen to the child’s wishes and represent them in court, and, as GAL, to make decisions in their best interest.

At a recent court hearing, the judge reviewed their request and ruled there was enough evidence to move forward! Had CASA Devina not fiercely advocated for what she felt was in Juliana’s best interest, this family may not be on the path to reunifying.

“I felt really happy that they got a second chance,” CASA Devina said.

### PREPARING TO ADVOCATE

This is just one example of how CASA volunteers help dependency court judges make decisions about the futures of children in foster care. However, most CASAs come to VFC with no legal experience. How do they prepare for the important and often daunting task of going before a judge? It all starts with Advocate University (AU), a 35-hour intensive training course for all new volunteers. During AU, volunteers watch simulations of court proceedings to understand the legal process and hear from long-time CASAs about their experiences. They also learn how to write court reports, which cover a child’s history, current situation, and any unmet needs.

CASAs typically write court reports every six months, which coincide with status review and permanency planning hearings required for all youth in foster care. (Youth may also have additional or special hearings in between.) Judges receive generalized reports from social workers and lawyers, but a CASA’s court report is what brings the child’s personality to life.

“Because CASAs usually serve only one child or sibling group at a time, they develop a special rapport with the children. As a result, their court reports often detail needs or concerns the child may have that they haven’t shared with anyone else,” explained Jessica Muñoz, Esq., MFS, VFC Executive Vice President & Executive Director, Riverside County.

### INSIDE THE COURTHOUSE

Each CASA works with their advocacy supervisor, a program staff member at VFC, to prepare for court appearances. An advocacy supervisor accompanies the CASA to court if it’s their first time or if there are special concerns on a case.

“Once at the courthouse, I will introduce the CASA to the attorneys on the case since, often times, they have only interacted on the phone or over email,” said Amanda Reynolds,

Senior Advocacy Supervisor at VFC, who supports CASA Devina. “This way, they can discuss any remaining questions or concerns in-person.”

While waiting for the hearing to begin, the advocacy supervisor prepares the CASA for what’s about to happen. They explain where to sit, how to address the judge, who the judge might call on, and what the judge might ask. Afterward, the CASA and advocacy supervisor will discuss the judge’s ruling and any next steps.

**Below:** This illustration shows who is typically present for juvenile court hearings. Individual courtroom layouts may vary. CASA volunteers work closely with many of these professionals on their assigned case, including the social worker, minor’s attorney, and parents’ attorneys.

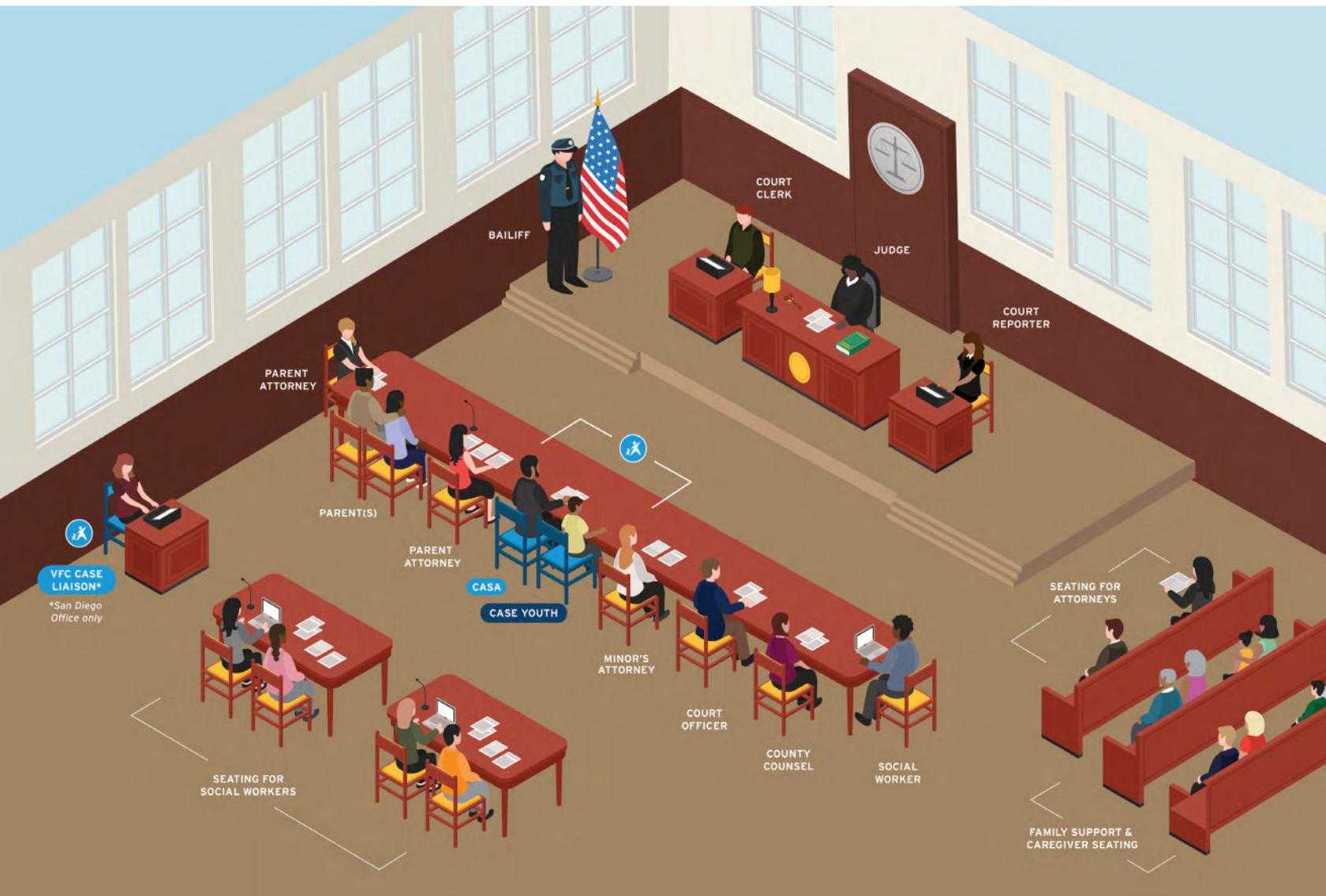
## HERE TO SUPPORT YOUTH

Appearing in court is an essential part of the CASA role. As illustrated in the diagram, the CASA sits right next to the child, providing comfort, support, and encouragement.

“The courtroom can be an intimidating place, even for youth who may have been to court many times,” Muñoz said. “CASAs encourage youth to advocate for themselves and to be candid with the judge about their needs and wishes for their case.”

“CASAs can also let the court know if the child’s circumstances have changed since the court report was submitted,” she added.

From standing by a child’s side as they face their alleged abuser to sharing in the joy of a family reunification or adoption, CASAs play a crucial role in the courtroom.



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## Survivor | Advocate

# *Justice Department Recognizes Former Youth Served by Voices for Children with Special Courage Award*

### **Suamhirs Piraino-Guzman Uses His Voice to Help Others**

The Office for Victims of Crime, a component of the Justice Department's Office of Justice Programs (OJP), has presented the Special Courage Award to Suamhirs Piraino-Guzman. Suamhirs is a human trafficking survivor, advocate, and former youth in foster care who was supported by a Voices for Children volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) as he was transitioning out of the foster care system at age 18.

The Special Courage Award category honors a victim or survivor who has shown exceptional perseverance or determination. It may also acknowledge one who has acted bravely to aid a victim or to prevent victimization.

"After enduring a terrifying and traumatic ordeal at a young age, Suamhirs became a courageous advocate who has used his personal tragedy to help community leaders better understand the atrocities of human trafficking," said Amy L. Solomon, Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General for OJP. "Through his experience and advocacy, he has brought international attention to the critical importance of trauma-informed counseling and services at the onset of recovery, taking his message to communities throughout America and to nations across the globe. He is a remarkable man whose courage is an example to all who know him."

### **Survival and Finding a Purpose**

In 2004, Suamhirs, who was 14 at the time, was abducted from his native country of Honduras and smuggled into the United States where he was abused, exploited, and trafficked in California until he was identified during a police raid. He was held by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, then placed in a mental health

facility, then a group home, and subsequently with a caregiver who took him to a border station and left him with Customs and Border Protection officers to be deported.

When he was identified as a trafficking victim and returned to foster care, he assisted in the prosecution of the traffickers without receiving any trauma-informed medical care or services. He survived, but the experience instilled in him a need to help other children, immigrants, and trafficking survivors obtain the services he was denied.

### **Stability, Consistency, and Hope**

In foster care, Suamhirs moved from group home to group home countless times. Two days before Suamhirs' 18th birthday, his CASA, Marcos Mares, arrived to meet him for the first time. Skeptical but optimistic, Suamhirs sat down with Marcos and was surprised he showed a genuine interest in who Suamhirs was as a person.



**Above:** Suamhirs (left) and CASA Marcos

Marcos advocated for Suamhirs by emphasizing the importance of education. Suamhirs obtained his GED and for once had hope for a brighter future. As Suamhirs thrived, he was asked to become a member of the U.S. Advisory Council of Human Trafficking. He was also given the opportunity of a lifetime to visit the White House as a guest of honor among other council members.

### The Ripple Effect

The positive influence of CASA Marcos helped create a life Suamhirs never thought possible, all because CASA Marcos believed in him and was there for him as a stable, consistent presence. CASA Marcos helped Suamhirs see that he indeed had a powerful voice, a voice he now uses to advocate for others in need. Marcos continues to play an important part in Suamhirs' life as one of the longest-standing, positive relationships he has ever had.

Suamhirs generously gives back to Voices for Children by serving as a long-time speaker on Voices for Children's Real Word Speakers Panel. The panel, the first of its kind in the nation, is composed of individuals who have spent time in foster care after experiencing abuse, neglect, or abandonment by their parents or caregivers. During these engaging conversations, participants share how they think the system could change to better support children and the positive impact the CASA program has on the lives of youth.

"I am so incredibly proud of Suamhirs for the recent Courage Award he received from the Office for Victims of Crime," said Sabrina Goosby, Vice President of Programs, Voices for Children. "I can't think of anyone more deserving than Suamhirs. I have watched him overcome every obstacle he has faced and at every turn, it has pushed him further in improving the lives of others. Once he found his voice through his work on the Real Word panel, he has been unstoppable in his advocacy for others."

**The entire Voices for Children team would like to extend their heartfelt congratulations to Suamhirs on this extraordinary honor!**

Scan the QR code  
to learn more about Suamhirs'  
inspirational story.



**Above:** VFC leadership and the Juvenile Justice team visit the new Youth Transition Campus in Kearny Mesa. The campus, opened in early 2022, replaced the old correctional facility originally built in the 1950s.

## Voices for Children's Juvenile Justice CASA Program a Model for the Nation

Voices for Children's (VFC) Juvenile Justice program recently marked a major milestone: its 200th youth matched with a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer. Since the program began in 2018, it has served a total of 215 youth in San Diego County's juvenile justice system and has become the **largest program of its kind in the country.**

A youth involved in juvenile justice can benefit from having a CASA for many of the same reasons as a child in foster care. In fact, more than 98 percent of the youth served by VFC's Juvenile Justice program have been the subject of a child welfare referral, suggesting the vast majority of them also have a history of trauma. Just like in dependency cases, the CASA ensures the youth's case stays on track and that all their physical, emotional, educational, and medical needs are being met. Youth in both the juvenile justice and foster care systems often feel scared, frustrated, or hopeless. Having a CASA lets them know they aren't alone and that there is someone they can rely on for help. Some of the youth VFC serves are involved in both systems.

There are some unique aspects to advocating for youth involved in juvenile justice. If the youth is on probation, a CASA may attend meetings with a probation officer, help their youth find opportunities to complete court-mandated community service hours, or drive them to required therapy appointments. If the youth is in custody, the CASA visits them at the detention facility and is sometimes their only visitor.

"[Youth in detention] have such limited outside contact that I think they're more willing to open up just to get out and see a different face," said CASA Kristina Lese Herbert, who has advocated for two girls involved in juvenile justice during her 10 years as a CASA.

Now in its fifth year, VFC's Juvenile Justice CASA program is seeing positive outcomes. Youth with a CASA have increased access to prosocial activities and trauma-informed services, as well as higher rates of probation compliance and completion. The program sets up youth to succeed and thrive in the future.

"I'm glad Voices for Children is stepping up and creating a separate avenue just for those youth. I think it's a smart thing to do," CASA Kristina said.

"Personally, it has made me realize how resilient kids can be and how they can succeed if they just have the right support," she added.

# Spotlights

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## A Life of Service

Karen Bush relocated from Ft. Lauderdale to San Diego to spend more time with her family. Karen, who holds a degree in Psychology from NYU and an M.S. in Counseling Psychology from Nova University, wanted to utilize her skills as a counseling psychologist to volunteer. From helping recent refugees seek jobs and educational opportunities to counseling at-risk youth and single mothers on educational advancement, parenting, and life skills, Karen has dedicated her life to helping others.

Karen had the opportunity to meet a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) through one of her son's professional connections. The volunteer's positivity and enthusiasm immediately sparked Karen's interest as she had always gravitated toward helping young children, admiring their resilience. This conversation led Karen on a journey to learn more about Voices for Children (VFC). Karen was excited to discover she could use her professional skills as a psychologist combined with her experiences as a mother and grandmother to help children in foster care in our local community.

Karen is now approaching seven years as a CASA with VFC. Her cases vary depending on where she is needed most, but she has spent most of her time with medically fragile children under the age of five. Some of the ways she has helped advocate for her case youth include accompanying them to medical appointments, sitting with families during surgeries, and just being there to hold a hand to provide much-needed comfort in frightening moments during serious procedures.

As a CASA, Karen understands advocating for her case children's interests, safety, and well-being is vital in ensuring they are afforded every opportunity for a full and productive life. Her philosophy as a CASA volunteer can be summed up by Magic Johnson best, "All kids need is a little help, a little hope, and someone who believes in them."

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Above: Karen Bush



Above: Liz Jones

## Finding Joy in Giving

Liz Jones is the lead agent of the Jones Realty Group, a top producing team in the Southern California real estate market. She gives back to her community through her involvement in a variety of organizations, including Rotary, Professional Women's Roundtable, 100 Women Who Care, STAT Horse Sanctuary, Global Ministries, and since 2019, Voices for Children (VFC). In reference to her philanthropic efforts, Liz described herself as "blessed" explaining, "To those who receive much, comes an outpour. It brings me great joy to give."

After hearing a VFC representative speak at a community event, she wanted to support the mission. Liz observed while most people want to help youth in foster care, not everyone can be a foster parent, so the idea of sharing the opportunity to serve as a CASA was really exciting to her. Liz began to donate and promote awareness of VFC through her business. In 2020, Liz joined the Riverside County program's Community Advisory Council and also serves on the Marketing Committee.

"Liz is compassionate, creative, and generous. Her desire to serve her community and amplify VFC's mission is evident to everyone she meets," said Jessica Muñoz, Executive Vice President and Executive Director, Riverside County. Liz says everyone has a talent and using those to help others is what makes them valuable. We are grateful that Liz chooses to share her talents, time, and treasure with VFC and the children we serve.

# The New Children's Museum

The New Children's Museum has been a valued and committed community partner to Voices for Children's (VFC) San Diego County program since 2017. The museum, which has locations in downtown San Diego and Del Mar, features hands-on programming and interactive art installations to provide multisensory play and educational experiences for children. The museum features room-sized art installations and creative experiences designed by local contemporary artists to provide fresh and innovative themes, ideas, and hands-on play and learning opportunities.

The New Children's Museum generously offers CASAs and their case youth free admission to both locations, and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, hosted two themed art days at the VFC's office and their downtown museum. During art days, museum educators worked with our children and CASAs on art projects and provided hands-on support to maximize their opportunity to learn, play, and create using art concepts and imagination. When schools closed during the pandemic, the museum thoughtfully and generously provided VFC with themed art kits each quarter to distribute to our case children to keep them engaged, entertained, and enriched. We are thankful to the New Children's Museum and its dedicated staff and educators and look forward to many future collaborations!



**Above:** VFC Vice President of Programs Sabrina Goosby (left) presents a certificate of appreciation to the New Children's Museum.



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- Jim Steere
- Hector Zatarain
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## FUN WITHOUT FACES:

Snapshots of our CASA kids making memories

**Clockwise from top left:** Brothers celebrating their first-ever birthday party; Looking sharp at prom in a tuxedo rental provided by VFC's Academic Attainment Fund; Thumbs up for a brand-new bike that his CASA obtained through VFC; Floating through the Fairy Tale Brook at LEGOLAND California.



### All In for Youth in Foster Care



One of Voices for Children's (VFC) most loyal philanthropic partners is the In-N-Out Burger Foundation! Since 1984, In-N-Out Burger has been helping children who have experienced abuse and neglect. They made their first gift to VFC in 1997 and have continued to support our organization every year since.



Over the last 25 years, the In-N-Out Burger Foundation has impacted the lives of hundreds of children in foster care in San Diego and Riverside Counties. Esther Snyder and her son, Rich, established the In-N-Out Burger Foundation to give children hope. Inspired by Esther's belief that every child deserves a chance and a future, and driven by the family's own encounter with child abuse, the Foundation supports programs of prevention and assistance to make that future a reality. Today, Owner Lynsi Snyder Ellingson has continued this mission to support children in need and Executive Director, Howard Booker, is connecting philanthropy and programs to make an impact. We are grateful for the In-N-Out Burger Foundation's unwavering support and commitment to restoring hope so every child has a chance at childhood.

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Together we give.

**GIVING  
TUESDAY**

Real change starts with  
the decision to act.

SAVE THE DATE

November 29, 2022



From left: J.D. Douglas and Kelly Capen Douglas, VFC President & CEO; Dan and Annette Bradbury, VFC Board Chair; Hanna and Mark Gleiberman, Event Chairs



Marisa Varond



VFC Board Member Luisa and Jimmy Ayala

.....  
See the full photo gallery at [voicesforchildrenSSN.org](https://www.voicesforchildrenSSN.org)  
.....



CASA of the Year Tim Riley with two of his former youth, Emmanuel Park (left) and Josh Bringham (right)



Sean and Luis Green, featured in the evening's impact video

## Starry Starry Night

On Thursday, October 20, Voices for Children hosted more than 500 guests for a spectacular evening at The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park. The 2022 gala included performances from the talented Mainly Mozart Youth Orchestra and San Diego Children's Choir, a celebration of our CASA of the Year, a competitive Live Auction, impactful stories from several inspiring young adults who were formally in foster care, and generous commitments from supporters to invest in our CASA program. In total, sponsors and guests contributed more than \$1.85 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* MG Properties; *Presenting Sponsors* Annette & Dan Bradbury, Joan & Irwin Jacobs, Maravai LifeSciences Foundation, Darlene Marcos Shiley, and Molly's Angels Foundation; *Impact Sponsors* Capstone Advisors, Farrell Family Foundation, George Lai, Qualcomm, Sempra, and Katie & Dan Sullivan; *Advocate Sponsors* Berkadia, Dale & Julie Yahnke with Dowling & Yahnke Wealth Advisors, Jennifer Adams, Genentech, KPBS, and San Diego Padres; *Hope Sponsors* AlphaCore Wealth Advisory, Finch, Thornton, Baird LLP, Paradeigm Films, and Procopio; *Starry Sponsors* California Bank & Trust, City National Bank, Higgs Fletcher Mack, Hughes Marino, Intercontinental Hotels & Resorts, JP Morgan Chase & Co., Kaiser Permanente, KeyBank Real Estate Capital, Alexis MacMillan, Moss Adams LLP, Perkins Coie LLP, Ranch & Coast Magazine, Whitney & Adam Robinson, The JEM Project; *Inspirational Sponsors* Wanda & Scott Aurich, Gensler, Klinedinst, and San Diego Foundation; and *In-Kind Sponsors* Callaway, Crossover Print Management, Giving Back Magazine, Loews Coronado Bay Resort, OGIO, Push Play, and San Diego Symphony.



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

### *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**

- Saturday, December 3
- Saturday, January 7
- Wednesday, January 18
- Wednesday, February 1

**Riverside County**

- Tuesday, November 29
- Thursday, December 1
- Monday, December 5
- Thursday, December 8

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

**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.