



VOICES FOR CHILDREN

THE VOICE

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SPRING 2023

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“We make a living by
what we get. We make a
life by what we give.”

—WINSTON CHURCHILL

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 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.



LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CEO

Dear Friends,

Spring is a time of new beginnings, and this spring is certainly a new beginning for me. Although I have been part of the Voices for Children family since 2016, I have been very grateful for the warm welcome I have received from our volunteers, staff, board members, and supporters as I start my new role as President & CEO. I am truly honored to have this special opportunity to serve children in our community.

One of the things I love most about being part of Voices for Children is that no matter what introduces you to the work of Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers, we all remain connected to the mission for the same reason: our concern for our community's most vulnerable children and families. In the following pages, you will explore some of the profound ways CASAs have advocated for children in recent months. One example is the critical way CASA volunteers advocate for children with disabilities who have also experienced abuse or neglect. We appreciate the advocacy CASA volunteers provide and are grateful for all of our donors and partners who support their important work.

Spring also brings fun ways to engage with Voices for Children and to support our unique mission. April is National Volunteer Month. Be sure to follow us on social media as we highlight the contributions CASA volunteers make in the lives of children. As we approach May, which is National Foster Care Month, we will celebrate the completion of our inaugural *Your Voice, Their Future* CASA recruitment campaign. On Saturday, May 13, we hope you will join us at the Del Mar Plaza for the second annual Uplifting Voices event. Guests will hear from inspirational climber Stephen Wampler and his wife Elizabeth as they explore themes of perseverance and resilience. Finally, mark your calendars for the 30th Annual Fostering Hope Golf Classic on Monday, June 12. Golfers will enjoy an 18-hole tournament, followed by a cocktail reception and awards ceremony.

From all of us at Voices for Children, thank you for your role in enhancing the lives of children and families. Quite simply, we can't do this work without you.

With appreciation,

Jessica Muñoz, Esq., MFS
President & CEO



Your Voice, Their Future

As a supporter of Voices for Children, you know firsthand how important it is for children in foster care to have someone in their corner. You can make a life-changing impact on a child today by participating in Voices for Children's inaugural *Your Voice, Their Future* volunteer recruitment campaign. The campaign, taking place now through May 1 (May is National Foster Care Awareness Month), aims to recruit new Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) to serve 100 local youth in foster care currently on our waitlist who are in immediate need of a CASA volunteer. We are currently more than halfway to our goal and need your help!

We invite you to recommend a caring friend, family member, or co-worker who you think would make a great CASA. Multiple recommendations are welcome, and it only takes a few minutes to recommend someone.

Visit speakupnow.org/recommend to submit recommendations and for other simple ways that you can help.



YOUR VOICE, THEIR FUTURE

*Recommend a voice you know
to become a CASA volunteer!*



IN THE COMMUNITY

Top: Board Member and Marketing Chair Luisa Ayala organized an engaging community event to support Voices for Children at **Tejas Yoga & Wellness** in Chula Vista on February 4, 2023.

Bottom left: San Diego County Recruitment staff members Paul Ammons and Yana Aldridge attended the **Martin Luther King, Jr. Festival and Parade** on January 21, 2023, in Skyline and talked with folks about the critical need for CASA volunteers.

Bottom right: Riverside County Community Outreach Coordinator Kathi Shaner spoke with educational and mental health professionals about our CASA program at the **9th Annual Foster and Homeless Youth Summit** on March 6 in Riverside.



Fostering Hope

Youth with disabilities fare worse than their peers in foster care, but CASAs can fill in the gaps and advocate for crucial services.

In a lot of ways, 12-year-old “Grant” is just like any seventh-grade boy. He loves robotics, playing video games, and even dreams of being a professional gamer on YouTube. But Grant has a neuro-muscular disease. He uses a wheelchair, needs help using the restroom, and can’t participate in many of the same activities as his peers. On top of everything, Grant has spent the last two years in foster care.

A Different Foster Care Experience

Grant isn’t alone. **An estimated 32 percent of youth in foster care have a physical or intellectual disability***, double that of the general population.* There are several reasons why. Children with disabilities are three to four times more likely to suffer abuse and neglect.* If they have difficulty communicating, they are even more likely to

About 1 in 3 youth in foster care has a disability

become victims because abusers see them as easy targets.* Further, parents of children with disabilities experience more stress*, and some have a hard time taking appropriate care of their children. Grant came into

foster care because of neglect and reports of substance abuse at home. His family wasn’t meeting his needs; he repeatedly missed school and vital medical appointments necessary for his health and well-being.

Once they enter the child welfare system, these children often face more trauma and worse outcomes than other youth in foster care:

- On average, children with disabilities stay in foster care longer.*
- Their parents are more likely to have their parental rights terminated.*
- Children with disabilities are 40 percent less likely to be placed with relatives in kinship care.*
- They wait longer to be adopted.*

Fortunately, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) can help ensure youth with disabilities don’t fall through the cracks and help them lead happier, healthier lives. When Riverside County CASA Robin was offered Grant’s case, she admits she was hesitant. Since becoming a volunteer in 2018, she had advocated for several youth in foster care, but never one with a physical disability. After some reflection, CASA Robin accepted and immersed herself in the case, learning everything she could about Grant’s condition.

A CASA’s Role

No matter the child, a CASA’s job is the same: **to ensure their physical, emotional, medical, and educational needs are met.**

However, CASAs who advocate for youth with special needs face additional challenges, such as understanding complex medical diagnoses and cutting through red tape in the healthcare system. They may have a tough time communicating with or visiting their case youth.



Above: CASA Robin

“Sometimes, the child’s caregiver is inundated with appointments and other professionals, so it can be hard coordinating schedules to get access,” said Megan Marashlian, Director of Advocacy for Voices for Children’s (VFC) San Diego County program.

“With so many people involved in a case, it can be challenging to know whom to go to for what,” she added.

As Grant’s advocate, CASA Robin has a lot to monitor. For instance, she has to make sure he attends physical therapy and his annual cardiology appointment, in addition to the yearly check-up and twice-a-year dental visits required for all children.

“I’ve been in contact with the school more than I would in other cases to make sure he’s in the best situation,” CASA Robin said.

CASA Robin also has special considerations when planning outings with Grant. Locations must be wheelchair accessible, and activities can’t be too frustrating or strenuous. CASA Robin often brings paint and canvases to Grant’s foster home where they’ll chat about his life while creating art. Gradually, she noticed Grant go from depressed and disruptive to bright and hopeful.



“Every kid is just wanting someone to care about them.” –CASA ROBIN

Support for CASAs

VFC trains and supports all volunteers, including those assigned to youth with disabilities, so they feel confident in their role. Each CASA is assigned their own dedicated Advocacy Supervisor, a staff member at VFC with expert knowledge of the court system, the foster care system, and the resources available to youth in foster care.

“You don’t have to be afraid of taking on a case because you aren’t going to be doing it alone,” CASA Robin explained. “Anytime I have a question, the first thing I do is contact my supervisor.”

VFC also provides continuing education for CASAs and staff to better understand disabilities and the resources available. Recent topics included Medical Disabilities and Psychotropic Medication, Disability Rights and Resources, and Special Education.

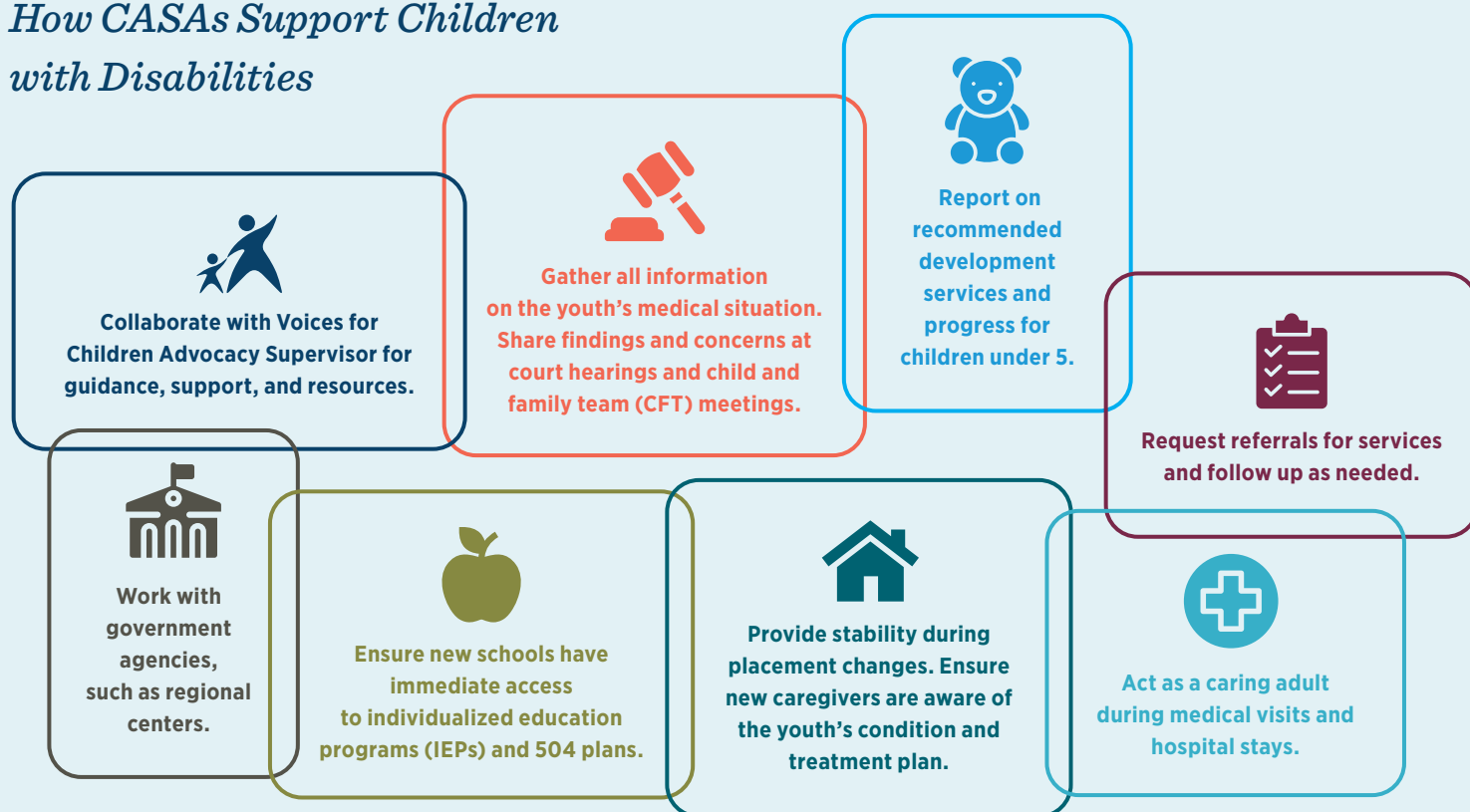
A Brighter Future

Today, Grant has a new outlook on life. He is thriving in a supportive foster home with a foster parent who is a retired nurse and equipped to meet his needs. His principal and teachers say he’s interacting more with other students. Also, CASA Robin is receiving fewer phone calls about disruptive behavior. Next fall, Grant will start the new school year requiring fewer special education services than ever.

With a supportive foster parent and CASA by his side, Grant finally sees a future for himself. “Every kid is just wanting someone to care about them,” CASA Robin said.

Names and details have been changed to protect privacy.

How CASAs Support Children with Disabilities



*SOURCES:

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News & Updates

A NEW CHAPTER AT VOICES FOR CHILDREN

Get to know our new President and CEO, Jessica Muñoz



Jessica Muñoz, Esq., MFS is the new President & Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Voices for Children. Muñoz has been with the organization since January 2016 as the Executive Director for the Riverside County program and more recently as the Executive Vice President for the entire organization.

Above: VFC President & CEO Jessica Muñoz, along with CASA volunteer Matt Morscheck, was recently interviewed by anchor Eric Kahnert on CBS 8 about the life-changing impact CASAs make, the critical need for new volunteers, and the *Your Voice, Their Future* campaign.

Muñoz is an attorney and practiced for more than seven years, including four years as a trial attorney in juvenile dependency courts in both Los Angeles and San Diego Counties. Prior to joining Voices for Children, she developed and coordinated a program at UC San Diego to provide support services to students who are undocumented. In addition to her law degree, she holds a Master of Forensic Science degree and a professional certificate in nonprofit management. Muñoz is a past chair of the County of San Diego Juvenile Justice Commission and served on the board of the San Diego Civic Youth Ballet. Her professional affiliations include the State Bar of California, the Riverside County Bar Association, Leadership Riverside, and the Fieldstone Leadership Network. Muñoz was named the 2022 Juvenile Law Attorney of the Year by the Riverside County Bar Association.

“Jessica has dedicated her career to protecting children within the dependency system,” said the Hon. Susan D. Huguenor (Ret.), a member of Voices for Children’s Board of Directors. “She has done an amazing job of building a CASA program in Riverside County. She believes in the mission of Voices for Children and is ready to be its next president and CEO. I can’t wait to see what she will accomplish.”

Scan the QR code
to watch the full
segment



VFC Juvenile Justice Program Recognized

For the last eight years, the San Diego County Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC) has recognized and honored those who have collaborated with the juvenile justice system to create positive and lasting change.

Voices for Children was honored to be named a 2022 award recipient at the JJC’s annual Community Awards Ceremony.

As the largest Juvenile Justice Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program in the country, we are proud to work alongside the individuals and organizations dedicated to making a difference for these youth.

RIVERSIDE COUNTY SPOTLIGHT

CASA Julie Dawson



Julie Dawson, a Beaumont resident, became a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) in 2017. Her love of children and helping them learn and grow, coupled with the fervent advocacy she provides to her patients as a registered nurse, made advocating for a child in foster care a natural decision. CASA Julie

has been assigned to four teenagers, three girls and a boy, throughout her six years with Voices for Children. Her happiest CASA moment was attending the high school graduation of “Kasey,” Julie’s first case child to whom she was assigned for three years. In addition to many medical issues and the typical challenges children in foster care face, Kasey also questioned her gender identity. Despite these struggles, Kasey beat the odds by completing her high school education, enrolling in college, gaining employment, and even obtaining her driver’s license and purchasing a car. “When she walked across that stage, I was so proud of her and excited for her future,” Julie recalled of that happy day.

The proverb “It takes a village to raise a child” has never rang as true for Julie as it has in her CASA role. She has observed firsthand the care and supports that the social workers, judges, attorneys, and other professionals involved in the child welfare system provide daily to help children successfully navigate the foster care system. She also understands how the information included in her court reports helps judges make the best decisions for the children’s futures.

Being a CASA has led to Julie making friends all over the world. While on a medical mission in Guinea, Africa, a local guide for their group inquired about her Voices for Children business card on her luggage tag. He was very impressed that such an organization existed, using volunteers to advocate for children. When not caring for patients, both abroad and at a local hospital, and volunteering as a CASA, Julie can most often be found outdoors, hiking or golfing. She also enjoys spending time with her family. She loves to spoil her five grandchildren and explore the country on the road with her husband.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY SPOTLIGHT

Grossmont Healthcare District

Voices for Children is the grateful recipient of first-time funding from the Grossmont Healthcare District! Through our new partnership with Grossmont Healthcare District, we have deepened our understanding of healthcare districts and the unique ways they respond to local needs. Healthcare districts are public entities that provide community healthcare services to residents in defined geographical areas throughout the state.

The Grossmont Healthcare District is a community hub and mobilizing force for health and wellness in East County San Diego. They fund local nonprofits addressing local health needs and offer scholarships to young people who are pursuing education and training in the health sector. They also offer free wellness programming, health information, and education to the public through the Herrick Health Library.

In East County San Diego, Voices for Children supports children in foster care by providing them with CASAs who monitor and address their health needs. Grossmont Healthcare District is helping us ensure these children have access to necessary mental and behavioral health services and a consistent and caring adult as they heal from trauma. We are so pleased that the \$25,000 grant will make a difference in the lives of 10 deserving children. Grossmont Healthcare District has even made its office and facility available to its partners! Voices for Children will soon be hosting an in-person information session at Grossmont Healthcare District’s James G. Stieringer Conference Center for interested community members to learn more about becoming a CASA volunteer.





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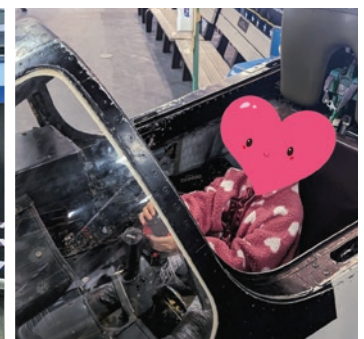
Hector Zatarain

The USS Midway Museum

The USS Midway Museum has been a generous community partner to Voices for Children since 2013. The museum, located on the USS Midway aircraft carrier, is permanently docked in downtown San Diego. The museum offers multiple educational tours and 60 multifaceted exhibits for all ages. Children and CASAs are able to learn the history of the aircraft, view 30 restored historical aircraft, walk the bridge, tour the engine rooms, and even sit in actual cockpits! From the hangar to the flight deck, gallery, and poignant Remembrance Wall, the Midway provides hours of education, inspiration, and hands-on entertainment. The museum admits CASAs and their case children for free during the months of March, May, July, and December, and visiting the Midway is a favorite outing of many! We thank the USS Midway Museum and its amazing staff, especially Guest Services Director Mark Berlin, for their consistent kindness, spirit of giving, and partnership over the past 10 years. We look forward to future collaborations together!



Left: VFC Vice President of Programs Sabrina Goosby (left) presents a certificate of appreciation to the USS Midway Museum Guest Services Director Mark Berlin; **Right:** A child sits in the cockpit of a World War II-era aircraft during a visit with her CASA.



FUN WITHOUT FACES:

Snapshots of our CASA kids making memories

Top left: As a young woman celebrates her 21st birthday and prepares to leave the foster care system, she knows her CASA will always be in her life; **Bottom left:** Best day ever! Thanks to Voices for Children, Promises2Kids, and SeaWorld San Diego, a young girl achieves her dream of swimming with dolphins; **Bottom right:** A child in foster care celebrates his first day of preschool!



Cross-County Support

Voices for Children (VFC) could not achieve our mission without the tremendous support of the S. Mark Taper Foundation. The S. Mark Taper Foundation, founded in 1989, is a private family foundation dedicated to enhancing the quality of people's lives by supporting nonprofit organizations and their work in our communities. Our recent grant from the S. Mark Taper Foundation supported the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program in both San Diego and Riverside Counties.

One remarkable aspect of the S. Mark Taper Foundation is its general operating support grants and its willingness to provide funding to all geographic areas of Southern California. VFC is grateful for this type of foundation support, which is flexible and enables us to

fund immediate needs. Thanks to the grant, Voices for Children was able to continue our trajectory of growth in Riverside County by supporting those expenses that are specific to growth. In San Diego County, the S. Mark Taper Foundation provided critical financial support to meet the needs of our organization in a post-pandemic world. With the foundation's support, our organization was able to attract and hire highly qualified new team members to provide supervision to each and every CASA volunteer. All of this resulted in improved services to the 2,390 children in foster care that we served last year. **Thank you to the S. Mark Taper Foundation!**

S. MARK TAPER FOUNDATION



PROTECT YOUR LOVED ONES AND CREATE YOUR LEGACY

Include Voices for Children in your estate plan today and improve the lives of children in foster care for years to come.

To get started, please contact:
Rebecca Rader
858-598-2211
RebeccaR@speakupnow.org



Events

Fostering Hope Golf Classic

On Monday, June 12, 2023, Voices for Children will hold its 30th annual Fostering Hope Golf Classic to support our Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program. We are grateful to our presenting sponsor George Lai and to Co-Chairs Jenny Kropko, Mike Kropko, Bill Sailer, and Dale Yahnke for helping make this event possible. Hosted at a private country club in La Jolla, golfers will enjoy an 18-hole tournament, followed by a cocktail reception and awards ceremony where guests will learn more about our CASA program and support the children we serve in San Diego County. For more information about individual tickets and sponsorship opportunities, please visit speakupnow.org/golf.



THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS SPONSORS!

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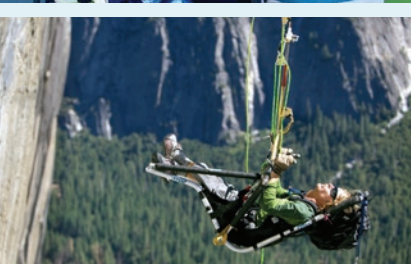
Bill Sailer

Kim Shores

Tee Sponsor



Commitments as of April 7, 2023



Uplifting Voices

Join Event Committee Members Andrea Moser, Kristi Pfister, Lauree Sahba, and Michelle Weinger on Saturday, May 13, 2023, at the Del Mar Plaza for the second annual Uplifting Voices event. Combining inspiring stories from our CASA program, light bites, and fun, this event is sure to lift up the voices of our community's most vulnerable children in foster care.

The program will feature a dynamic conversation with special guests Elizabeth and Stephen Wampler. The nationally and internationally acclaimed film, "Wampler's Ascent," documents Stephen's amazing accomplishment of being the first person with cerebral palsy to climb El Capitan in Yosemite National Park. Stephen and Elizabeth now lead the Stephen J. Wampler Foundation, inspiring children with disabilities to achieve their dreams and lead fulfilling lives.

The Wampers' work is particularly relevant to Voices for Children's mission. As mentioned in the article on pages 4 and 5, nearly one-third of children in foster care live with physical or intellectual disabilities, and CASAs play a crucial role in advocating to ensure their needs are met.

Special thanks to our generous sponsors, including Uplifting Sponsors: Nancy & Mike Pfeiffer and Katie & Dan Sullivan; Hope Sponsors: Annette & Dan Bradbury; Inspirational Sponsors North County Supply and Schor Vogelzang & Chung LLP; Voices Sponsors: Gigi Cramer and Kelly & J.D. Douglas.

For more information on the event, visit speakupnow.org/uplifting-voices.

STARRY STARRY NIGHT



Thursday, September 28, 2023 The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park

Save the date to join Voices for Children and Event Chairs Patricia Brutton and Marina Marrelli 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 July 1, 2023. For more information, please visit us at voicesforchildrenSSN.org.

All net proceeds from Starry Starry Night 2023 will support Voices for Children's CASA program in San Diego County.



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Riverside County
P.O. Box 7219
Riverside, CA 92513
Phone: 951-472-9301

.....
Sign up today!

Visit
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

Thursday, May 4
Saturday, May 13*
Wednesday, May 24
Thursday, June 1

Riverside County

Wednesday, May 3
Saturday, May 6
Tuesday, May 9
Thursday, May 11

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

**In-person event (location TBD)*

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.