



# Meeting Challenges, Leading Change

*When a child experiences neglect or abuse and then is placed in foster care, who speaks up for that child? CASAs do.*

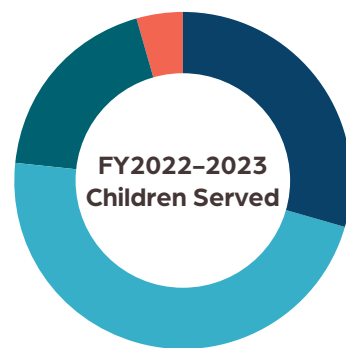
A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) comes into a child's life and provides individualized advocacy, a trusting relationship, and the personalized, caring attention they deserve. Our CASA volunteers make a difference, creating the opportunity for each child to thrive in a safe, nurturing environment.

CASA volunteers bring a unique dedication to children, families, and the San Diego community that has a lasting impact on current and future generations. That's why Voices for Children (VFC) is honored to have connected more than 1,800 youth in San Diego County foster care with CASAs and staff advocates this year alone. The one-on-one attention and advocacy only a CASA can provide offers children and families a consistent presence through challenging times. They facilitate nurturing relationships and help create a support network to keep families connected and together when safe and possible.

We ended the fiscal year on a strong note, celebrating the progress made to enhance our services as part of our Strategic Plan. We have augmented the diversity of our CASAs and staff members to reflect the identities of the children we serve and better meet their needs. We leveraged our partnerships to address specific challenges like the rise in youth mental health cases and a shortage of foster homes. Our evolving CASA model surpassed our goal to serve more justice-involved youth and is regarded as a promising example of how to apply a CASA program to the juvenile justice system throughout the country.

In the following pages, you will see the ripple effects of our work serving the most vulnerable children in San Diego County. You will read inspiring stories of advocacy that show how our dedicated CASAs and community partners continue to step up and go above and beyond to ensure children in foster care have their needs met and voices heard.

## THIS YEAR IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023



- **796** children entered foster care this year and received a thorough needs assessment by VFC staff
- **1,266** children received a CASA volunteer
- **508** children in foster care received a VFC staff advocate
- **112** children received a CASA through Voices for Children's Juvenile Justice Program

**916** community members  
served as CASA volunteers

# BY YOUR SIDE

*“We rise by lifting others.”* – ROBERT INGERSOLL



In 2021, the child abuse hotline received a referral for “Keri\*,” a 10-year-old girl who had been abandoned at a local hospital. She had multiple developmental disabilities and mental health needs. Her mother refused to pick her up, sought to terminate her parental rights, and denied knowing the father’s whereabouts. Having no other options, caseworkers moved Keri to Polinsky Children’s Center (PCC), an emergency short-term residential facility.

Shortly thereafter, CASA Renee, who had just been sworn in as a CASA, accepted Keri’s case without hesitation. CASA Renee quickly learned that, due to Keri’s high level of need, there were tremendous barriers to identifying placement options. Keri’s support team went through exhaustive efforts to locate a suitable long-term home for her. At the same time, CASA Renee focused on acquainting herself with the PCC staff who knew Keri best. Thanks to CASA Renee’s patience and persistence, Keri eventually warmed up to her. CASA Renee took the time to get to know Keri, learning that she had specific Barbies and snacks she liked and that she loved to sing and swim. She also got to see the charming and loving side of Keri, which few reports mentioned.

After months of countless phone calls and interviews, Keri’s team finally found a suitable placement. This placement would provide Keri with the longer-term level of care she required. However, Keri feared being in a car, so on the day she moved to her new out-of-county placement, CASA Renee was there to comfort and help her stay calm while in the car. Together, her social worker and CASA Renee had a playlist of songs they knew Keri enjoyed, a ton of snacks, and, of course, her favorite Barbies all ready to go. The car ride went safely and smoothly because of CASA Renee’s profound awareness and familiarity with Keri.

Today, Keri is thriving in many ways beyond what most thought possible. The past few months have been incredibly optimistic, with CASA Renee sticking by Keri’s side throughout the journey. CASA Renee has advocated for Keri during transition plans for special school education programs and served as Keri’s educational rights holder for the past two years.

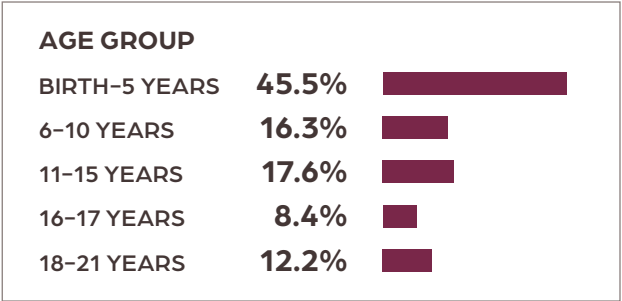
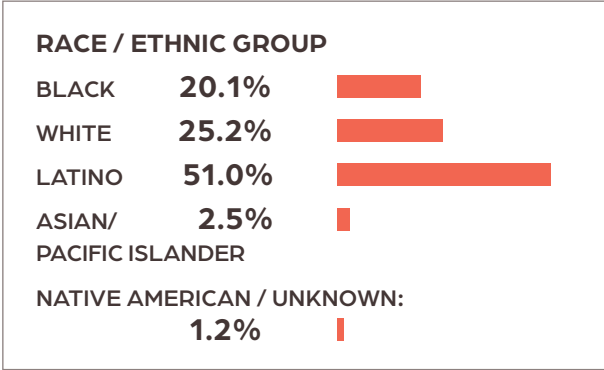
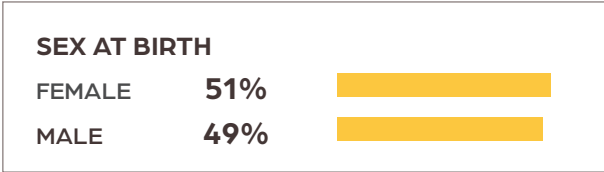
**CASA Renee’s consistency has proven tremendous, and while other professionals have transitioned off the case, CASA Renee remains by Keri’s side.**

Keri will be transitioning to a new supportive housing institute to cater to her unique developmental needs in the coming weeks. CASA Renee has been involved in every step, ensuring that Keri will continue to receive the care she deserves and progress in her abilities.

*\*Names and identifying details have been changed to protect confidentiality*

# OUR COMMUNITY'S CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

## CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY on July 1, 2022



Source: Webster, D., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Wiegmann, W., Saika, G., Chambers, J., Hammond, I., Ayat, N., Gomez, A., Misirli, E., Hoerl, C., Yee, H., Flamson, T., Gonzalez, A., & Ensele, P. (2021). CCWIP reports. Retrieved July. 27, 2023, from University of California at Berkeley California Child Welfare Indicators Project website. URL: <https://ccwip.berkeley.edu>



# THE GIFT OF A SECOND CHANCE

*“You can’t go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.” – ANONYMOUS*



## STEPPING UP



**Through the nation’s largest Juvenile Justice Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program, Voices for Children has served 240 at-risk**

**and justice-involved youth since the program’s inception in 2018.** Our innovative approach has seen positive outcomes, including improved access to prosocial activities and trauma-informed services and interventions. Even more inspiring is our youth participants’ high rate of successful probation compliance and completion. This story showcases the powerful ripple effect of one CASA volunteer on the life of a justice-involved youth in our community.

After a difficult upbringing battling mental health issues and volatile relationships at home, “Paul\*” made some poor decisions that resulted in interactions with the juvenile justice system and his detention in a custodial rehabilitative program for youth on probation.

CASA Bruce was assigned to Paul’s case for more than two years, showing unwavering dedication and refusing to give up on Paul, even when others seemed to have lost hope. Paul is a bright young man with a talent for drawing and

design. CASA Bruce continually encouraged his artistic interests, always asking to see his latest drawings during visits. At the suggestion of CASA Bruce, Paul’s therapist also engaged him through his art. CASA Bruce even advocated for Paul to participate in a graphic design course through the rehabilitative program.

Throughout Paul’s time in juvenile detention, CASA Bruce visited him weekly and built a trusting bond. He is the most consistent support Paul has had while being detained. Throughout their time together, CASA Bruce stressed the importance of earning a high school diploma, and, over time, Paul began to exhibit a genuine motivation to earn his high school degree. Encouraging this, CASA Bruce was in constant communication with Paul’s teachers and counselors about graduation planning.

Last year, CASA Bruce and Paul’s therapist attended his hearing, passionately advocating for his early release from the program. The judge, deeply moved by CASA Bruce’s report, granted Paul’s release with the requisite that he complete his school work to successfully finish high school.

**CASA Bruce was instrumental in ensuring Paul was able to complete his remaining credits. Within a few weeks, Paul graduated from high school. CASA Bruce, Paul’s parents, and even the judge overseeing his case attended the ceremony. In his speech, Paul expressed gratitude to CASA Bruce and the judge, leaving an emotional impact on everyone present, including the judge, whose eyes welled up with tears.**

Paul’s long-term goal is to build on his experiences and work with at-risk youth.

*\*Names and identifying details have been changed to protect confidentiality*

# Our Volunteers

Our CASA volunteers are the heart and soul of our mission. Coming from all backgrounds and walks of life, they share a commitment to speaking up for our community’s most vulnerable children. The following individuals served during Fiscal Year 2022–2023 and have been dedicated Voices for Children volunteers for five or more years.

## 40+ YEARS

Kathryn Ashworth

## 20+ YEARS

Stacy Bond  
Kim Neilson  
Christie Ranney  
Cissy Wolfe

## 15+ YEARS

Holly Elwell  
Raquel Juarez  
Genevieve Knych–Rohan  
Jere McInerney  
Kathy Myers  
Jenny Sharratt  
Amanda Stroud

## 10+ YEARS

Cindy Aaronson–Davis  
Paul Arenson  
John Baker  
Patricia J. Billins  
Jessica Blankemeier  
Robert Borthwick  
Charity H. Bracy  
Jennifer Burrell  
Sally Cohenour

Sarah Cooper  
Barbara Eikner  
Cindy M. Ellison  
Clarence Flowers  
Nynke Fortuin  
Philip Grondin  
Kristina Herbert  
Valerie Herrera  
Jane Herrick  
Sara Holmes  
Jenna Hough  
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Kathe Klare  
Debby Lyons  
Ramona Mason  
Sonya McMahon  
Phyllis Meredith  
Judy E. Miller  
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Laura Muschamp  
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Brent V. Reyes  
Tara Richards  
Tim Riley  
Marcia Sachs  
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Kim Stewart  
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Michelle Vollrath  
Jennifer Wilbur  
Shirley Williams  
Barbara Winicki  
Kathy Wiskur  
Don Wood  
Doug Woods  
Diane Zeiger

## 5+ YEARS

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Susan Acquista  
Cynthia Adams  
Kavita Agarwal  
Brenda Aguas  
Melanie Allen  
Ted Anderson  
Lois Andrews  
CoraTena B. Ayala–Blackburn  
Aneesa Baker  
Dewain Baker  
Monica Balch  
Rosario Ballew  
Alisa Barba  
Nigel Barker



### CASA ART | Became a CASA in 2020

At the age of 15, “Mason” entered the foster care system without any reliable adult support. However, his life took a positive turn when he met his CASA, Art, who provided unwavering support and a consistent presence in his life. CASA Art and Mason developed a strong bond,

# Our Volunteers

Janet Bergland	Kelly Eherenfeldt	Joshua Jones
Cheryl Berkey	Cindy Espineli	Lyle Kafader
Rachel Bilodeau	Cecilia Fernandez	Janet Katz
Emma Bloom	Lisa Fess	Carl Kloss, Jr.
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Dave Braggs	Ian Foster	Stephanie Kramer
Dave Broad	Beth Galloway	Sagary Krulce
Zoe Browne	Andrea Gandelman	Jen Kuklenski
Bonnie Burke	Anne “Ashley” Gardner	Ben Kunkel
Rita Burke	Kate Gibson	Regina Kurtz
Margret Burroughs	Joe Gieda	Pete Lagasse
Amber Burrows	Kelly Gilliland	Eva Lagudi–Devereux
Karen Bush	Mariana Giraldez	Katie Laird
Kelly Cantine	Kevin Goike	Marc Lawrence
Ginger Chasteene	Cindy Gomez	Vi Le
Yi-Liang Chen	Amelia Grattan	Brandee Leath
Arielle Clagett	Bonnie Grossman	Dottie Ledesma
Susan Clark	Ewan Gudmundson	Alison Lee
Patrick Cohen	Sue Gwizdak	Myra Lerma
Gus Colachis	Sandy Hagen–Ansert	Mark Lewis
Daniel Contreras	Patsy Hartman	Simon Lynn
Rebecca Cosford	Chris Haupt	Kristina Manvelian
Sheri Cowie	Ronnie Hee	Danielle Mayo
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Maggie DuRoss	Karen Johnson	Theresa Panish

with CASA Art encouraging him to pursue his passions and overcome challenges. Now, at 19, Mason is a high school senior on track to graduate at the end of this year. Thanks to the invaluable assistance and guidance of CASA Art, Mason plans to pursue further education after high school with the ultimate goal to become a police officer.

# Our Volunteers



Sean Patrick	Teri Sharp	Lisa Tizon
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Liz Serrano	Lina Thomas	Wendy Zwicker
Janet Shanberge	Jen Tipton	

# Inspirational Volunteerism



- 0-4 YEARS: 651 CASAS (71%)
- 5-9 YEARS: 201 CASAS (22%)
- 10-19 YEARS: 59 CASAS (6%)
- 20+ YEARS: 5 CASAS (1%)

## THE GIFT OF TIME

98,000 HOURS VOLUNTEERED

## STEPPING UP

208 dedicated community members became CASAs this year, completing Advocate University, Voices for Children’s comprehensive training program for new CASA volunteers.



# Our Supporters

Our work is made possible thanks to the generosity and support of many individuals, companies, foundations, government agencies, and other community partners. We are grateful to the following donors who made financial gifts of \$1,000 or more between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2023.

## \$400,000+

California CASA Association  
California Governor’s Office of  
Emergency Services

## \$200,000+

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## \$100,000+

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## \$50,000+

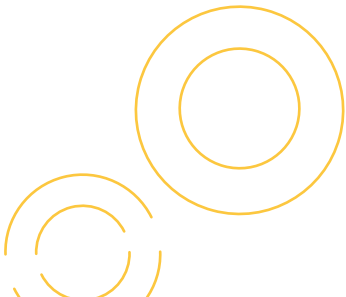
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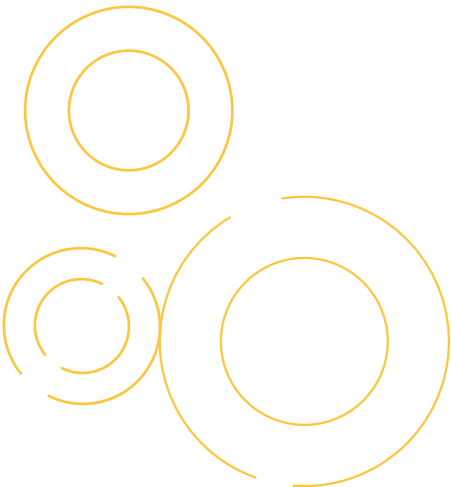
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We are grateful to the following donors who made in-kind contributions between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2023.

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The Amicus Circle at Voices for Children is composed of law firms, law schools, legal associations, and other legal support service organizations that support our mission. We are grateful for our Fiscal Year 2022–2023 members.

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The following individuals were honored by their loved ones with gifts between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2023.

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Aurora Behavioral Health Care San Diego  
California Youth Connection  
Child Abuse Prevention Coordinating Council  
Children’s Initiative  
Child Welfare Services – County of San Diego  
Children’s Legal Services of San Diego  
Computers 2 San Diego Kids  
County of San Diego, Probation Department  
David’s Harp Foundation  
Dependency Legal Services of San Diego  
Fred Finch Youth & Family Services  
Junior League of San Diego  
Just in Time for Foster Youth  
Lifeline Community Services  
National Conflict Resolution Center  
One Safe Place  
One Simple Wish  
Promises2Kids  
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Rady Children’s Hospital, San Diego –  
    Chadwick Center for Children and Families  
Rady Children’s Hospital, San Diego –  
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San Diego County Sheriff’s Department  
San Diego Regional Center (SDRC)  
San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program  
San Diego Women’s Resource Center  
San Diego Youth Services  
South Bay Community Services  
Trans Family Support Services



### CASA SONYA

Became a CASA in 2010

CASA Sonya has been an unwavering advocate for 13 years. For the last seven years, she has positively impacted “Michael,” a young man who experienced a rebellious phase as a teen. Through her efforts, 19-year-old Michael is excelling academically in college. He is also the proud father of a healthy baby boy. CASA Sonya continues to stand by him as he transitions into this next chapter of his life.



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

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