

ANNUAL REPORT
FY 2015-2016

**SHOWING UP,
CHANGING
LIVES...**



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

OUR MISSION: *CASA is a child's voice in dependency court, providing advocacy, stability, and hope to children who have been abused, neglected, or abandoned.*

...FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE.

This is a time of great excitement and growth at CASA. We welcome this opportunity to thank you for all you have done to support our children and our goal of providing a Court Appointed Special Advocate for every child in foster care who needs one.

Because of you and your support, this year we matched a record number of 254 children and youth with a consistent, caring adult – a 12% increase over last year. Although statistics are important, the most important thing was that 28 more children had an Advocate who made sure they received the physical, emotional, and educational support they needed. Through your support, CASA was also able to recruit, train and supervise over 250 volunteers this year who have a life-changing impact on these children and youth.

Your gifts were instrumental in enabling us to launch a program for children age birth to 5. These very young children represent those most at risk for abuse, and the most in need of intervention to ensure proper brain development and a safe, permanent home. Adding these infants and toddlers to those we serve ensures that we support the full spectrum of children in foster care, from birth to age 21.

An Advocacy Plan is developed for each and every child. Through this Plan, the Advocate supports the child or youth's developmental, social, emotional, and educational needs. Always at the forefront is finding an answer to the question – how can we best help this child or young person until they are reunified with their family or find a new, permanent, loving home?

We believe that every child in foster care has the right to a healthy, safe and happy life. We extend our profound gratitude to you for being a part of the CASA community that is making this a reality.



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The CASA 2015-2016 Annual Report covers July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016.

CASA – Court Appointed Special Advocates of Santa Cruz County

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Non-profit Tax ID # 77-0305354

www.casaofsantacruz.org
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By the time he was 13 years old, Joseph had experienced more loss and trauma than most people experience in a lifetime. With an absent father, the death of his mother and, very shortly afterward, the death of his aunt who was caring for him, Joseph entered a group home. With no parental support or guidance, he became involved in gangs. At that time in his life, it was hard for anyone – including Joseph himself – to imagine a better life.

However, in the summer of 2009 something positive did happen in Joseph's life. He met Larry Willis, the volunteer Advocate he was matched with. As Joseph's social worker said, "This was just what Joseph needed. Larry was matter-of-fact, and talked directly to Joseph. He always seemed to understand just what Joseph needed. They had a perfect balance."

That "perfect balance" was not always perfect, as Joseph and Larry can attest to. Joseph said, "I probably was in and out of high school 15 times. Sometimes I didn't last more than a week." Larry quipped, "A week? Sometimes you barely lasted a day!"

But Joseph persevered – and Larry stayed with him. Joseph eventually moved to Sacramento with his girlfriend, where he finished high school. Joseph would attend his court hearings over the phone when Judge Denine Guy was on the bench. Through it all, Joseph and

Larry stayed in touch. Larry would drive up to Sacramento once a month to spend time with Joseph, who began working full-time as a security guard.

Joseph aged out of the dependency care system in June of 2015, at the age of 21. Larry continues to be a solid support for him and, as Joseph moves forward in creating the life he always dreamed of, Larry remains by his side.

[To view a video of Joseph's story, in his own words, visit CASA's web site at www.casaofsantacruz.org.]

This was just what Joseph needed. Larry was matter-of-fact, and talked directly to Joseph. He always seemed to understand just what Joseph needed. They had a perfect balance.

Visiting Brian at his foster family's home gave me lots of opportunities to observe his progress for the reports I wrote for court.



Coming from a blended family, where she became an aunt when she was eight years old, Lani has always loved infants. "I believe in early intervention and assistance for families in crisis, especially for very young children," Lani said. "CASA's Birth to 5 program was the perfect match for me." It was no wonder, then, that she chose to be matched with "Brian," a 1½ year old who was removed from his home when he was just seven months old.

Brian's first days with his foster family were difficult. Accustomed to being hungry, he expressed his needs through pitched screaming. His foster mother taught Brian how to sign the words for "hungry," "more," and "all done." Lani knew right then that this family was completely engaged with Brian. "What they really needed was encouragement for all they had taken on, and that's what I was able to provide," Lani said. "Simple statements like, 'You're such a good mother,' and 'You're doing a good job,' are things caregivers really need to hear."

As an Advocate for a child under the age of three, Lani spent time with Brian at his foster family's home, rather than taking him out in the community. She provided the foster parents with information on programs for Brian, including Early Head Start, and became the "recorder" of Brian's development and the things he loves to do. "Brian's foster family lives in a little rural homestead, with lots of opportunity for Brian to run and play outside with his two foster sisters," Lani said. "It gives me lots of opportunities to observe and report his progress in the reports I write for the court, but in a nonintrusive way."

Brian is thriving, and has bonded with his entire foster family. If all continues to go well, he may have found his forever family. Asked if she would take another infant when Brian's case closes, Lani said, "In a heartbeat."



René remembers first meeting “Miguel” when the boy was just two years old. Miguel and his siblings had been removed from their home because of severe neglect, and placed with a foster family. As a bilingual Latino man, René was a good match for Miguel. Still, “Miguel was initially very timid” René said. “When we went out to places like the park, he never played with the other kids.”

Even at such a young age, Miguel was always on his guard. René said, “Miguel was very nervous whenever he heard sirens and would ask, ‘Are the cops coming to get me?’ It was clear he was really traumatized.” Slowly but surely, René began building a bond with Miguel. After hearing Miguel say that he was a “bad boy,” René made sure to praise him, and offer him positive reinforcement. He could see the change in Miguel. “Having

someone there that believed in him really changed Miguel’s outlook,” René said. “He had lost hope in the good in people; as his Advocate, I wanted to show him that some people really are good.”

With the help of a caring foster family, the Head Start program, and René’s consistent presence, Miguel – now four years old – is a different boy. His verbal skills, in both English and Spanish, have seen remarkable improvement. Miguel now gravitates towards other children, and loves making new friends. His future is bright; he and his sisters will soon be adopted by their foster family.

René said, “I found with Miguel that just 2 hours a week on my part made a huge difference in his life. As Advocates, we really are helping shape the future of our community.”

Having someone there that believed in him really changed Miguel’s outlook. He had lost hope in the good in people; as his Advocate, I wanted to show him that some people really are good.



In the 31 years Letty and Lane have been together, they've built a marriage, a family, financial success, and a spirit of giving that has benefited many different organizations, including CASA. As a current volunteer Advocate for a teenage girl, Letty said, "I'm all about the kids." She discovered how important it was to her CASA teen that Letty was a volunteer. "My girl was so taken by the fact that I wanted to volunteer my time to be with her," Letty said. "It's one of the many reasons we give to CASA; I've seen firsthand how important it is to support the volunteer concept of the organization."

Letty and Lane both have their passions when it comes to giving back to the community. However, Lane said, "I got excited about CASA because I saw Letty's passion for the organization, and the youth being served."

I've seen firsthand how important it is to support the volunteer concept of the organization.

The gifts Lane and Letty have made to CASA have made a profound impact on the lives of children and youth in foster care. "That's important to us," they said. "We want to make an impact." They both talk about how wonderful it is to be in a position to help others who need their support. "We have great empathy for the CASA children, and a great appreciation for our own good fortune," Lane said. "That's a combination that resonates with us, and guides our giving."

GIFTS TO CASA

CASA of Santa Cruz County is grateful to the following individuals, businesses, foundations and government agencies whose contributions from July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016 made our work possible.

\$100,000 +

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CASA'S LEGACY SOCIETY: OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE

Create your own CASA Legacy

Your gift can help future generations of children and youth in foster care receive the advocacy and support they need. There are many ways to make a legacy gift. A few simple options include designating CASA as a beneficiary in retirement accounts, bequests, and gifts that generate income for life. These are small changes that can make a significant difference for all the children we hope to serve in the future. Please call us for more information.



Thank you to our Legacy Donors

CASA's Legacy Society honors those who have provided for CASA of Santa Cruz County through an estate gift. Legacy supporters are diverse, and come from all walks of life. Yet they share a common interest – to ensure that capable, consistent, caring advocacy will be available for future generations of CASA children.

We would like to extend a very special thank you to the following generous individuals who have designated CASA in a bequest or as a beneficiary of their estate:

Dave and Kay Bartlett

Janet Bell

Susan & Kenneth Coale

Joan Cook (realized)

Darryl Dill (bequest)

Cynthia Druley

Wilma M. Gawthrop

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Nancy & Ray Sherrod

Kent Thompson

Lonnie Truax & Ian MacGregor

Have you already included CASA in your will or made another legacy gift? Please let us know so we may thank you for your thoughtfulness and your belief in our future. Your visibility encourages others to step forward.

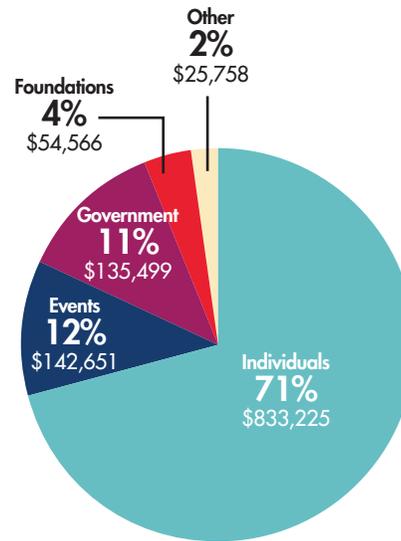
Statement of Activities July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016

Revenue.....\$1,191,707* Operating Income.....\$237,416
Expenses.....\$954,291

*includes a 3-year pledge

Your Support Makes a Difference

Government funding provided only 11% of our budget. We count on the continued support of our generous donors, foundations and corporations to be the backbone of our successful program. We allocate over 84% of our budget to services that directly support the advocacy needs of foster children in Santa Cruz County.



Financials

84 cents of every dollar donated goes to services that directly support the advocacy of foster children in Santa Cruz County.



Percentage of CASA High School Seniors

who completed their high school requirements (compared to less than 58% of all foster youth in California)

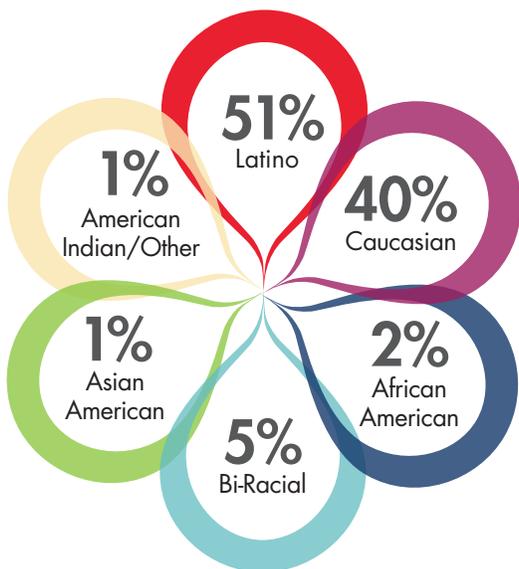


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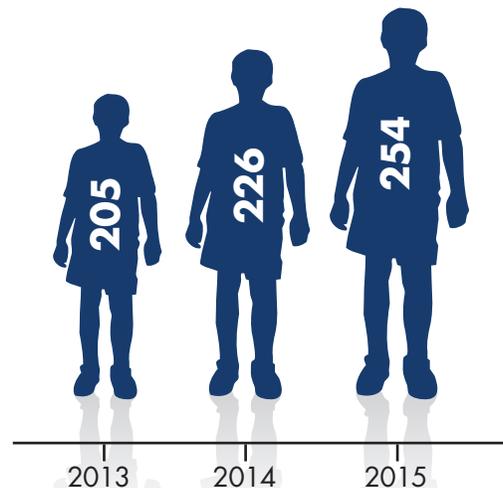
Volunteer hours ... **22,897**
Inkind Value.. **\$603,000**

Total Children Served **254**

Active CASA Volunteers **243**



Ethnicity of Children Served



For three years we have increased the number of children we serve.

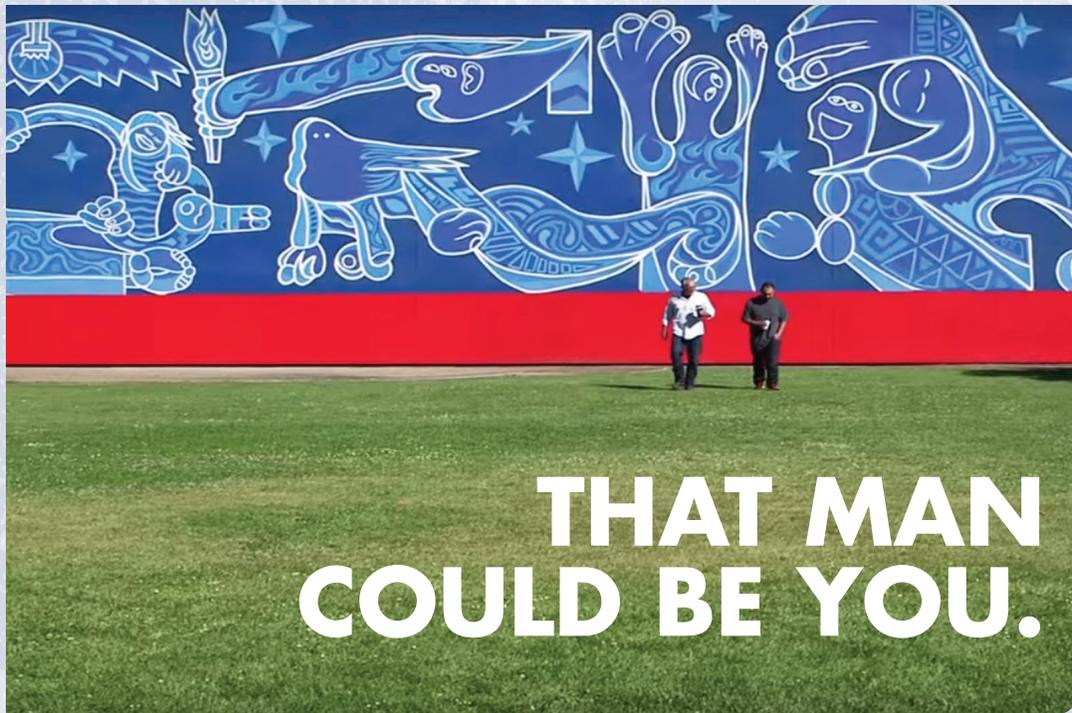
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CASA faces an ongoing challenge. Over 50% of those we serve are boys or young men, but only 20% of our volunteers are male. Our boys and young men often come from homes where stable and meaningful male role models have been absent. For a boy to have a male CASA makes all the difference in the world.

We're not looking for men with special skills. We're looking for men that have the time and the ability to step in a room, and be there for a child.

That man could be you.

Watch Joseph's story at
www.casaofsantacruz.org
and contact CASA today.
cita@casaofsantacruz.org
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