

ANNUAL REPORT FY 2013-14



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.

...ONE CHILD AT A TIME.

Your support of CASA – as an Advocate, volunteer, donor or community supporter – has changed the lives of children in foster and dependency care in Santa Cruz County who have been abused or neglected. You are changing lives, one child at a time.

You helped CASA train 72 new volunteer Advocates last fiscal year, each of whom directly influences life-changing decisions for a child in foster care. **You** made it possible for CASA to help 208 children; these children received advocacy, support and hope as they moved toward caring, permanent homes. **You** were instrumental in ensuring that 87 out of 88 CASA children and youth found “forever homes.” **You** made it possible for Advocates and their children to make over 600 visits to CASA’s Richard and Mary Solari House, where they built strong bonds, enjoyed birthday and holiday parties, read books in our learning center, worked on homework, found their inner artist through arts and crafts, and baked some incredible snacks and desserts in the CASA kitchen!

Your belief in CASA’s commitment to our mission, and your faith in our careful stewardship of your donations, has strengthened our organization and helped us expand our services in so many ways. CASA plays a **leadership role in ensuring that our CASA children and youth receive the support necessary to be successful in school and pursue their secondary educations.** We have **expanded and enhanced our services to transition-aged youth, ages 18-21**, helping them connect with community resources, continue their education, and find employment. And we are poised to **train 85 new Advocates** in the coming fiscal year.

Every child in foster care has the right to a healthy, safe and happy life. Because of **you**, we are well on the way to making this a reality.

Thank you.



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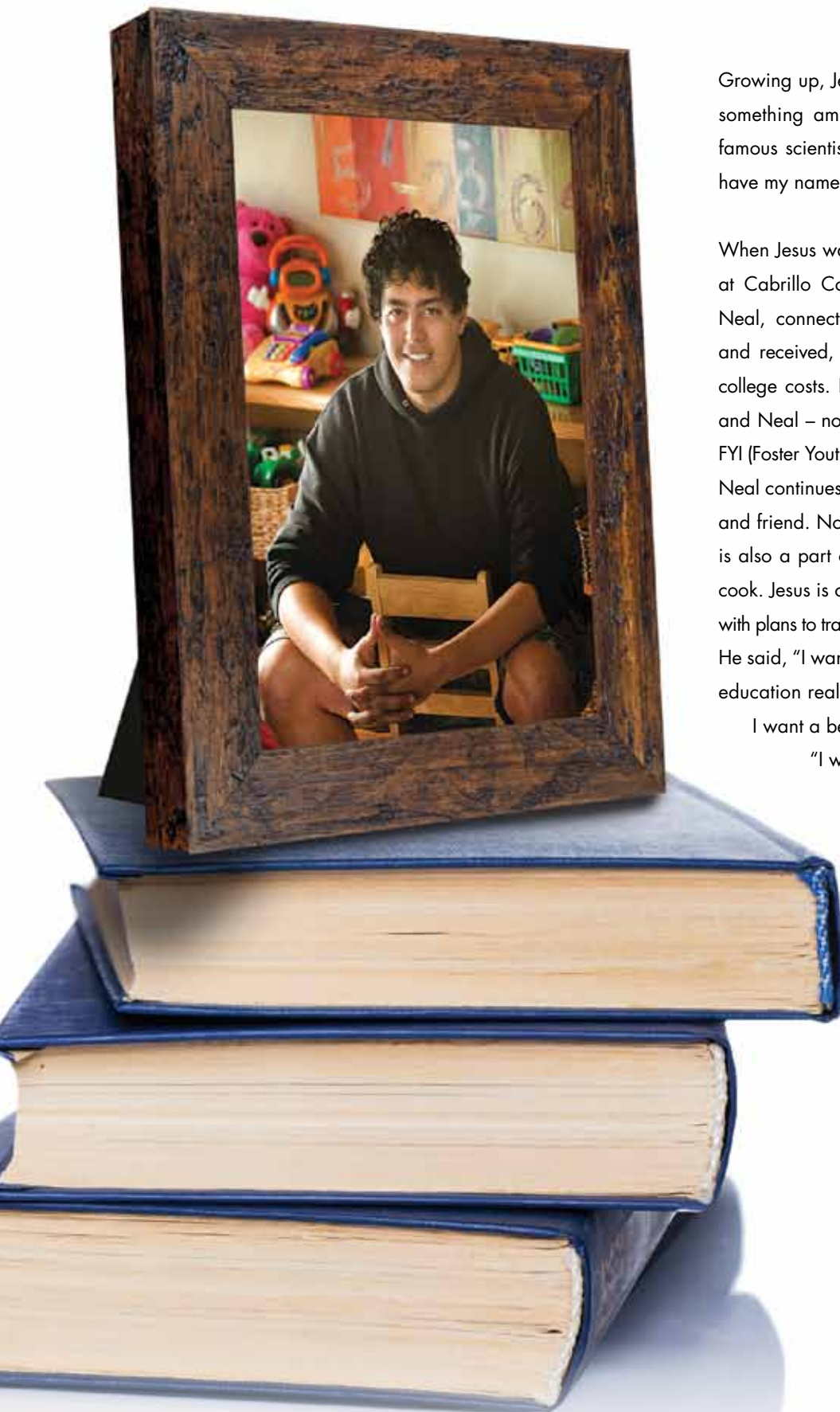
The CASA 2013-2014 Annual Report covers
July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014.

CASA – Court Appointed Special Advocates of Santa Cruz County

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www.casaofsantacruz.org
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Photos courtesy of Steve DiBartolomeo,
Westside Studio Images



Growing up, Jesus always dreamed of becoming famous for something amazing. "I grew up reading textbooks about famous scientists and thinking to myself, One day I want to have my name in those books."

When Jesus was struggling with the cost of attending classes at Cabrillo College and paying for books, his Advocate, Neal, connected Jesus with CASA where he applied for, and received, a scholarship to help underwrite some of his college costs. Even after Jesus left dependency care, CASA and Neal – now Jesus's mentor – helped him connect with the FYI (Foster Youth Independence) program at Cabrillo College. Neal continues to be a part of Jesus's life, acting as a mentor and friend. Now that Jesus is no longer a minor, Neal's wife is also a part of Jesus's life and is currently teaching him to cook. Jesus is carrying a full course load at Cabrillo College, with plans to transfer to San Jose State and major in engineering. He said, "I want to make my family proud. I want to show that education really can pay off. I want a job that is satisfying.

I want a better quality of life." But most of all, Jesus said, "I want to change the world."

I grew up reading textbooks about famous scientists and thinking to myself, One day I want to have my name in those books.

“I just love this boy. I plan on staying with him as long as he needs my advocacy and support.”

Betsie saw something very special tucked away in the heart of the 10-year old boy, “Ethan,” for whom she chose to advocate. He had been removed from his home because of neglect and was living with a foster family. “Ethan was completely disengaged from the world around him,” Betsie said. “I wanted to help him re-engage.” Betsie spent time building a bond with Ethan. Because he was behind in virtually every subject in school, (mainly due to poor attendance) Betsie concentrated on getting Ethan back on track at school.

With Betsie’s tireless advocacy, Ethan – now 12 years old – is a changed boy. In addition to Ethan’s love of baseball, Betsie discovered that Ethan had a love of, and a talent for, art. Betsie connected Ethan with Jamie an artist who volunteers at the CASA house. Ethan is now taking pottery classes with Jamie. At the end of the last school year, Ethan received two school awards: one for Perfect Attendance for the entire school year, and a Presidential Award for Educational Achievement, in recognition of the huge academic leap he had made that year. “I just love this boy,” Betsie said. “I plan on staying with him as long as he needs my advocacy and support.”



“When I think back on my youth, it’s like visualizing a stationary object but with all of its surroundings rotating around it. I was that object.” That is how Melissa describes her experience growing up in foster care. Even in the most caring of foster homes, Melissa said, “The one thing that remained consistent throughout my experience in foster care was a feeling that I didn’t belong.”

That changed when Kathy, a volunteer Advocate, came into Melissa’s life. Their relationship began with simple outings: roller-skating, movies, lunch. Their relationship continued to grow and Melissa said, “I developed a sense of security when I was with Kathy. With her, I was safe.”

Melissa was reintroduced to CASA fifteen years later, but this time as a parent. When her two children were removed from her care she said, “I had so many fears; those fears were amplified by my first-hand knowledge of the system, and the many ways in which it had let me down as a child. When each of my kids was matched with a CASA Advocate, a huge weight was lifted from my shoulders.”

Today, both of Melissa’s children have been returned to her care, she is working full-time, planning to go to college, and her dependency case is closed. However, the bonds that were built between her children and their Advocates remain. Melissa said, “They are no longer Advocates – they have become an extended part of our family.”



When each of my kids was matched with a CASA Advocate, a huge weight was lifted from my shoulders.

Donors **GERRY & ESTHER** **LEVANDOSKI**



Gerry and Esther met in 1978, during their Peace Corps service in Nicaragua. Their commitment to strengthening communities continues in their volunteerism and their philanthropy.

The Levandoskis volunteer their time with a wide variety of organizations, from assisting with disaster relief at the Red Cross, to acting as docents at Ano Nuevo State Park, and building homes with Habitat for Humanity. They share the philosophy that a solid community is good for everyone. "If everyone does what they can," Esther said, "then everybody profits."

The Levandoskis began giving to CASA in 2009. "The draw of giving to CASA," Esther said, "is that our gifts help children that haven't been as lucky as most children. We know our support is going to children who really need additional assistance." As former teachers, Esther and Gerry have a life-long commitment to education. Gerry said, "Education has become more and more important. To make a good living, you have to have marketable skills." The Levandoski's investment in the CASA house funded the Learning Center. This special room in the house is a place where children can study, use the computer, and choose from hundreds of books in the Learning Center library.

Esther and Gerry hope that by giving to CASA each year, they will do more than support children in foster care: "We hope to inspire others to help."

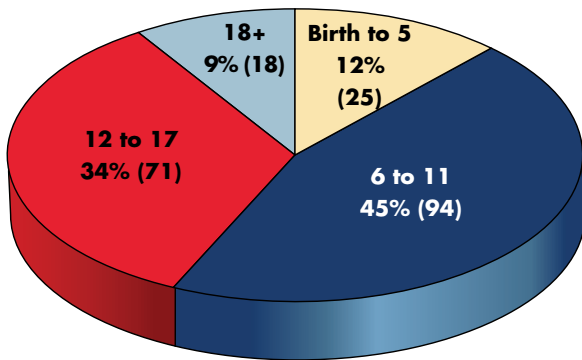
The draw of giving to CASA is that our gifts help children that haven't been as lucky as most. We know our support is going to children who really need additional assistance.

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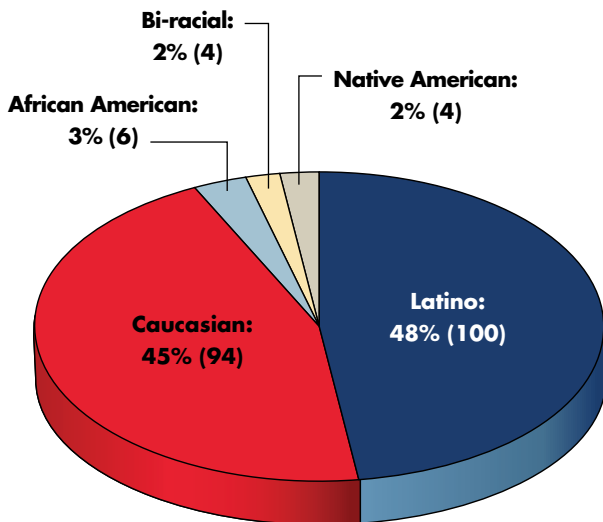
CHILDREN SERVED

CASA served 208 children this fiscal year

Ages of Children Served



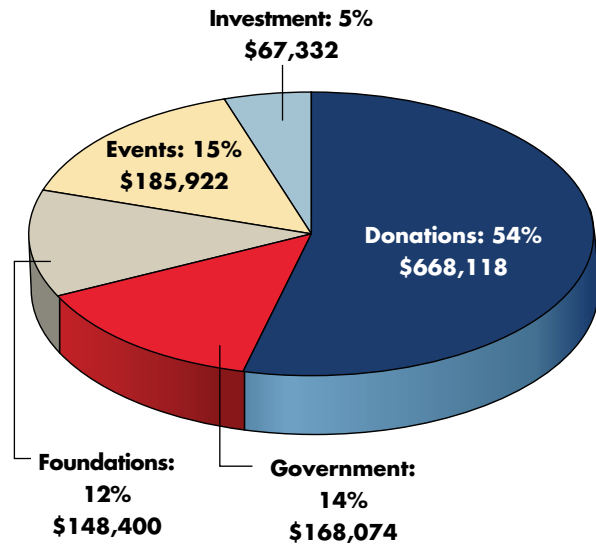
Ethnicity of Children Served



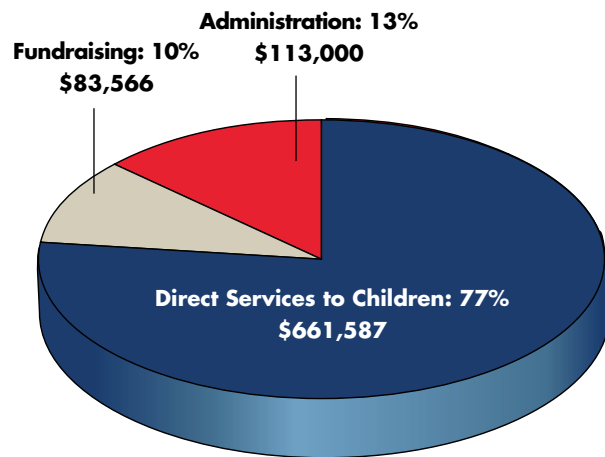
FINANCIALS

July 1, 2013 - June 30, 2014

Income: \$1,237,846*



Expenditures: \$717,640



*Includes a large multi-year gift that will be received through 2015.

GIFTS TO CASA

CASA of Santa Cruz County is grateful to the following individuals, businesses, foundations and jurisdictions whose contributions from July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014 made our work possible.

\$50,000 - \$100,000+

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We would like to extend a special thank you to these generous individuals who have helped ensure our children's future by including CASA in their estate plans:

Dave and Kay Bartlett
 Janet Bell
 Susan and Kenneth Coale
 Joan Cook (bequest)
 Darryl Dill
 Cynthia Druley
 Wilma M. Gawthrop
 Margaret Gordon
 Amy and David Harrington
 Dale Johnson and Isebill Gruhn
 Leola Lapidés and Bob Katz
 Lynda Leigh
 Cindy Margolin
 Nancy and Ray Sherrod
 Kent Thompson
 Lonnie Truax and Ian MacGregor

If you have included CASA in your estate plan, please let us know so that we can thank you and acknowledge your support.



A FEW HOURS A WEEK

A lifetime of impact



With just a few hours a week, you can make a difference for a child in foster care right here in your community.

CASA volunteer Advocates are everyday people, trained by CASA and then appointed by the dependency court judge to advocate for the safety of children who have been removed from their homes because they have been abused or neglected.

Advocates develop a one-on-one relationship with their child, building a bond of trust. The Advocates also get to know other people in

the child's life: parents and relatives, foster parents, teachers, medical professionals, attorneys and social workers. Advocates then use the information they gather to inform the court and others on what is in the child's best interest.

Nobody longs for a safe and loving family more than a child in foster care. As a CASA volunteer Advocate, you are empowered by the court to help make this dream a reality. You will not only bring positive change to the lives of these vulnerable children, but also their children and generations to come.

For more information on how you can help change the life of a child in foster care, please contact CASA's Outreach Coordinator at (831) 761-2956, ext. 102. To sign up for an information session, please visit www.tinyurl.com/CASAorientation



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