

### Program Visited

- Riverside County Voices for Children CASA program

### Focusing Philanthropy Staff

- Teresa Burton

### Staff

- Jessica Munoz, VP – Riverside County
- Sharon Morris - Recruitment and Training Manager
- Jennifer Richard – Director of Philanthropy

### Executive Summary

Teresa Burton of Focusing Philanthropy visited the Voices for Children CASA program in Riverside County on July 20, 2018. This was the second site visit conducted by Focusing Philanthropy to meet the management team and learn about the progress of the Riverside program for the purpose of assessing the feasibility of a first-time grant.

### Background

In June 2015, Voices for Children (VFC) launched the CASA program in Riverside County under the supervision of the San Diego office and Board of Directors. (A previous CASA program closed its doors in 2014.) In 2015, the Judicial Council of the State of California and the Superior Court of Riverside County asked VFC to step in and establish a new CASA program. The State and Court of Riverside felt that VFC was uniquely positioned to rebuild the CASA program in Riverside County, because of its organizational capacity and track record of program and fundraising success. After careful consideration, VFC's Board of Directors decided to expand operations to Riverside.

There are approximately 4,800 children in foster care in Riverside County which is more than San Diego County despite having a million fewer people. Many factors account for this discrepancy including higher levels of poverty, fewer resources for families, larger geographical areas and fewer local service providers that vary in terms of capacity and quality.

### Institutional Updates

Voices for Children inherited no infrastructure for the CASA program and built the program from the "ground up," while simultaneously working to rehabilitate the perception of the CASA model among professional partners and community stakeholders.

The Riverside County program has effectively leveraged operational resources in the San Diego corporate headquarters such as human resources, accounting, database management, and IT, so that Riverside County staff can be freed to focus on programmatic and philanthropic development and management.

VFC has been able to establish three small offices (the locations are: Riverside, Murrieta, and Palm Desert), two of which are located in donated space. Spreading out geographically is critical because of the size of Riverside County, which stretches from the state border with Arizona on the east, and Orange County and Los Angeles County on the west.

### Courtrooms and Offices

- Riverside
  - 2 courtrooms
  - 2 staff members in office space donated by the Housing Authority
- Murrieta
  - 2 courtrooms
  - 2 staff members in office space donated by the Probation Department
- Coachella Valley
  - 1 courtroom
  - 1 staff member sharing offices with other nonprofits at subsidized rent
- Management Team Jessica Munoz, Sharon Morris and Jennifer Richard
  - The Management team works from home and drives to all 3 offices on a regular basis

### Staffing

Jessica Muñoz, Executive Director joined the team in 2016. She holds a J.D. from Creighton Law School, a Masters in Forensic Science from National University, and a Bachelor of Arts from the University of San Diego. She also has a certificate in nonprofit management from USD. Jessica practiced as an attorney for over seven years, including four years in the dependency court system. She held staff attorney positions at Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers, Inc. and Dependency Legal Group in San Diego, where she was recognized as the Conflicts Counsel Office Attorney of the Year in 2012. In her most recent position as the coordinator for the UCSD Undocumented Student Services Center, Jessica served as UCSD's first subject matter expert on undocumented students and on relevant legislation and campus policies.

### Current Stats

- 277 volunteers
- 356 children served
- 8 staff members, hiring 9<sup>th</sup> person soon
- Waiting pool is 200-250 children

### Goals

- FY 2018-2019 – reach 410 children
- FY 2019-2020 – reach 500 children and increase budget to \$1million

### Expenses

- \$2,000/child
- Largest budget expenses: 1) Staff, 2) Mileage reimbursements for staff and CASA's, 3) Children's Assistance Fund for holiday and birthday gift cards

### Current Fundraising

- 51% Gov't sources (10-12 sources, see below)
- 25% Individuals
- 18% Foundations



- 6% Corporations

### Fundraising Efforts

- VFC's has been funded mostly by local governments and smaller, local foundations up to now. (The program is currently 50% funded through multiple government entities)
- VFC is now shifting its efforts to serving more children by accelerating fundraising among corporations, with a strong emphasis on corporations and individuals.
- Jessica and Jennifer are putting together a Community Advisory Council and have identified 6 or 7 people, 2 or 3 from each region, who will make up the Council. The first meeting is planned for November 2018. They would also like 1 member to become an Ad Hoc member of the San Diego Board to represent Riverside.
- Jessica and Jennifer have built strong relationships with local corporations and a few wealthy individuals. Jennifer began work with VFC in Sept. 2017 bringing 20 years of experience in fundraising. Her previous work included the arts, healthcare, and museums.

### Regarding Government Funding

- Jessica Munoz feels that as a result of being invited to take over the Riverside program, VFC has the benefit of widespread support and engagement with local judges and officials.
  - They receive small grants from CDBG, the City and County of Riverside, the City of Temecula, the Mayor of Temecula, as well as 3 out of 5 County supervisors.
  - Government grants range from \$1,000 to \$102,000. The largest is the Transportation Dept. for mileage reimbursements which creates stability for this big budget item.
  - Moreno Valley grant is also helpful because the area has a large number of foster children in need of CASA's.

### Relationship with Judges

- Dependency judicial dockets are busy with 1,000 cases/year. Despite being busy, judges regularly attend CASA graduations.
- Riverside County cycles judges through all departments every 3-5 years to give them diverse experience and as respite from the busiest courtrooms.
- VFC meets with all 5 judges quarterly. Feedback has been positive. Judges report a high level of trust in CASA's information and the quality of reports.
- Judges allow CASA's the use of court conference rooms and welcome CASA's into their courtrooms for observation during training.
- Judges also give 30-minute lecture to each group. There are several groups per training class as courtrooms are small and only fit a few CASA trainees at a time.
- Judges have also given VFC access to all dependency files. However, unlike San Diego, the Riverside program does not have enough staff or volunteers to initiate reviews of each file. The current focus in Riverside is to build trust in the community and grow the program each year.

### Caseload

- 45% of cases in Riverside, Moreno Valley, Corona, and Perris
- 35% of cases in Temecula, Murrieta, and Hemet
- 20% of cases in the Coachella Valley

### Triage of Cases



#### Order of Priority for cases:

- First priority is given to children who request a CASA and cases where a judge requests a CASA to meet a child's urgent needs.
- Other factors include:
  - time constraints (age of child, age of case)
  - more than one referral
  - impact potential of CASA
  - level of abuse
- Largest group of children served are 11-16 year-olds. The primary focus for them is on paths to independence as they are unlikely to be adopted. CASA's are helpful securing benefits and services as well as advocating in schools and encouraging higher education for this group of children.

#### Factors for matching CASA's with children

- Child has needs that a CASA can address
- Lack of adults in the child's life
- Multiple placements – the need for a relationship with a stable adult
- Child needs an adult to hold educational rights – CASA's hold educational rights in approximately 25% of cases. Some parents still hold the rights and in other cases, relatives or adoptive parents hold the rights.

#### Discussion about voluntary family services

- Jessica described judges' concerns about an uptick in the number of social welfare contacts with families as well as higher levels of trauma experienced by children at the time of court hearings
- Jessica does not feel that Riverside lends itself to effective family interventions for the following reasons:
  - Lack of public transportation for parents to travel to service programs
  - Lack of service programs in the county which leads to very few practical ways to meet parents' needs
  - Poor follow-through on the part of parents using services
  - Difficulty for CASA's to support children with more serious abuse cases after voluntary services have failed

#### Program difference with San Diego

- Riverside will match babies and toddlers with CASA's and are educating judges and attorneys about the ways CASA's can help nonverbal children (e.g. placements, services).

#### Volunteer Retention

- Attrition rate this year was 29% - most of those volunteers left after completing a case or 18-month commitment
- Plans are in the works to improve retention by creating a Recognition Award for CASA's in their 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year
- Notably, in the last 2 years, 2 CASA's have won local awards. One from the Association of Fundraising Professionals Inland Empire Volunteer of the Year Award and a second, from the interagency HOPE Collaborative's Child and Family Advocate of the Year Award.

#### Key Observations



I was very impressed by the dedication of the management team. Each is strong, confident, and enthusiastic about their work. They each spend time traveling to the three offices to maintain relationships with the community and local judges. They are also very focused on ensuring regional parity in the number of children served and volunteers recruited and trained.

The team's fundraising efforts are quite strong for a third-year program. They have secured several large grants from local governments and foundations. They are excited about the potential for cultivating individual donors through a matching campaign with FP.

The relationship with San Diego is positive and has enabled them to focus on program priorities such as increasing volunteers and children served. They are proud of their volunteers' awards and achievements so far.

Lastly, Jessica Munoz is impressive as a leader. She speaks proudly about the program, with a strong working knowledge of program details, statistics, and demographics. She is focused on the goals of increasing the numbers of children served, recruiting and retaining volunteers. She is also comfortable talking through the limitations of a small program. Her team described her as a collaborative leader who empowers them to excel in their work.

