



BRIGHTER FUTURES FOSTER CARE CAMPAIGN

THE PROJECT:

Focusing Philanthropy and Voices for Children launched the Brighter Futures Foster Care Campaign to provide individualized advocacy services for more than 180 foster youth in San Diego County. Voices for Children is one of nearly 1,000 county-based Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) programs throughout the country serving foster youth. CASA programs recruit, train, support, and supervise community volunteers to serve as individual advocates for foster children until permanency is achieved, or the case has been closed. They are often the only consistent, caring adult in a foster child's life. CASAs are assigned to a single child or sibling group, providing a level of individual attention and support that is unparalleled elsewhere in the foster care system.

FOCUSING PHILANTHROPY 2019 CAMPAIGN IMPACT:

Focusing Philanthropy played an instrumental role in our ability to assign CASAs to 301 abused and neglected youth during Fiscal Year 2018-2019. Initially, Voices for Children and Focusing Philanthropy set out to raise \$300,000 through the Brighter Futures Foster Care Campaign, in which \$200,000 of donations secured by Voices for Children would be matched with a \$100,000 grant from Focusing Philanthropy. This goal was quickly surpassed, and Focusing Philanthropy generously offered to increase their matching funds to \$150,000, for a total of \$450,000 of funding raised. The campaign ran from April 1, 2019 - June 28, 2019. In the end, five major donors in San Diego responded, with gifts ranging from \$10,000 to \$100,000; totaling \$313,394. Each of these donors had previously given to Voices for Children, but they were persuaded to increase their giving to support the campaign.

As a direct result of the \$463,394 we raised during this campaign, Voices for Children has been able to cover the cost of recruiting, training, and supervising 231 new CASA volunteers for an entire year. The CASAs funded by this grant are providing advocacy services for 301 foster youth. Voices for Children is incredibly grateful for the support of Focusing Philanthropy and your organization's belief in our mission.

IMPORTANCE OF THE CASA PROGRAM:

The impact CASAs have on the lives of the foster youth they serve is immeasurable. With the intervention and support of a CASA volunteer like Dave, foster youth like Ryan* are able to achieve incredible milestones:

Ryan is a 16-year-old boy who loves playing soccer and listening to music. Ryan also has a long history with the Child Welfare system. He was in and out of foster care as a child due to his parents' opioid addictions. Ryan lived in a variety of foster home placements before a family friend agreed to become his legal guardian. Just when Ryan thought he finally had a consistent place to call home, the family friend decided to dissolve his guardianship, and Ryan re-entered the foster care system at the age of thirteen.

In just one year, Ryan lived in three different group homes, and his longest period of stability was at a temporary emergency shelter not equipped to provide children with long-term care. Ryan ran away several times, and he spent one night at the children’s hospital receiving emergency psychiatric care. After being arrested in connection with a vandalism incident, Ryan was transported to a residential treatment program out of state. CASA Dave was assigned to Ryan’s case in the midst of this tumultuous time in Ryan’s life.

Some people might be daunted by the challenging behaviors Ryan exhibited and the challenges of his case, but Dave took his commitment to Ryan seriously. During the 14 months Ryan spent in an out-of-state residential program, Dave spoke with him on the phone two to three times a week. Dave also followed up with Ryan’s teachers, therapist, and social worker, and medical providers to ensure that he had access to the services that he needed. When Ryan’s biological parents’ educational rights were limited by the court, Dave was assigned to be Ryan’s educational rights holder and key decision maker.

Ryan has consistently struggled with academics, but his lack of access to a consistent school has made it difficult to determine the source of his struggle. When Ryan transferred to his out-of-state program, Dave initiated requests for a special education assessment for Ryan on multiple occasions. The onsite education director repeatedly declined to proceed with the assessment, which is in direct violation of educational law. Dave shared his concern about Ryan’s need for an assessment with judge in court. The judge held a private chambers conference with Dave to listen to his concerns, and the judge followed-up on Dave’s request.

When Ryan graduated from his residential program and was approved for placement in a group home, Dave was ready to support him with the transition back to San Diego. Dave has continued to advocate for Ryan at school by attending student study team (SST) meetings and maintaining close communication with Ryan’s teachers. Ryan is currently receiving interventions from his teachers and the school has agreed to complete a special education assessment if the current interventions are not successful.

Ryan told Dave that he would like to get a job, so Dave has helped Ryan to create a resume and is accompanying him to retail stores to ask about job opportunities. Dave is also helping Ryan to obtain a California ID and social security card. During this reporting period, Dave helped Ryan open a checking account so he can begin saving money.

With Dave’s support, Ryan has achieved an incredible amount of stability. He is doing well in his current placement, and his social worker is evaluating less restrictive home environments for Ryan. We are grateful that Dave will continue to advocate for Ryan and provide him with a consistent, caring adult presence. With the support of CASAs like Dave, we have hope that children like Ryan will have a brighter future.

*Name has been changed for confidentiality.

Voices for Children is so grateful for the support of Focusing Philanthropy and your investment in our CASA program. Together, we have changed the lives of 301 of the most vulnerable youth in San Diego County. Thank you.