



## FOSTERING GROWTH CAMPAIGN

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### **THE PROJECT:**

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Focusing Philanthropy and Voices for Children launched the 2021 Fostering Growth Campaign to provide individualized advocacy services for 90 youth in foster care in Riverside County. Voices for Children is one of nearly 1,000 county-based Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) programs throughout the country serving youth in foster care. CASA programs recruit, train, support, and supervise community volunteers to serve as individual advocates for children until permanency is achieved. The CASA volunteer is often the only consistent, caring adult in the 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 2021 CAMPAIGN IMPACT:**

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Voices for Children and Focusing Philanthropy set a goal to raise \$180,000 through the Fostering Growth Campaign, of which \$120,000 of donations secured by Voices for Children would be matched with a \$60,000 grant from Focusing Philanthropy. The campaign ran from May 1, 2021, until December 31, 2021. During that time, Voices for Children exceeded its goal of \$120,000, raising \$124,640.82. Focusing Philanthropy generously agreed to match the full amount, resulting in a total amount raised of \$186,961.82.

The total number of donors who contributed to the campaign was 21. Of those, five donors were new to our organization and made their first gift to Voices for Children through Focusing Philanthropy. As a direct result of the \$186,961.82 we raised during this campaign, 93 children benefited from the life-changing advocacy of a CASA volunteer. Focusing Philanthropy played an instrumental role in our ability to assign CASAs to abused and neglected youth during Voices for Children's fiscal year 2021–22. Voices for Children is deeply grateful for the support of Focusing Philanthropy as we aim to serve even more children in the coming fiscal year.

### **IMPORTANCE OF THE CASA PROGRAM:**

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CASAs have a tremendously beneficial impact on the lives of the children they serve. The following stories illustrate just how important CASAs can be. The names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

#### **Naomi**

CASA Melanie has been assigned to 16-year-old Naomi since April 2018. During that time, Naomi has lived in six different homes and changed schools multiple times. After Naomi was unable to reunify with her biological parents, the Court designated "long-term foster care" as her permanent plan. This means that Naomi is unlikely to find a permanent home before she exits the foster care system. Instead, she lives in a group home where rotating staff members are responsible for her care rather than a consistent parent or other caregiver. As a result, the Court asked Melanie to hold Naomi's educational rights.

When Naomi changed schools in October 2020, Melanie noticed that a 30-day transitional individualized education program (IEP) meeting had not been scheduled. Melanie contacted the school and learned that

Naomi's IEP case manager was unaware that Naomi was on his caseload. He acknowledged that the meeting had "slipped through the cracks" and scheduled it so that Naomi's IEP could be updated and implemented. Without Melanie's critical advocacy, Naomi could have gone without the support she needed at school, which could have caused her to fall behind. Melanie's dedication ensured Naomi the opportunity to reach her full academic potential.

### **Dayton**

CASA Sue is matched with Dayton, a 19-year-old young man who has lived in more than 30 placements during his childhood in foster care. Now, as a young adult, he continues to experience housing instability and transitions. Like many other young adults in foster care, Dayton experienced homelessness this year. When Sue, who has been Dayton's CASA for the last five years, learned that Dayton was homeless, she called VFC's emergency phone line to identify emergency services available in Dayton's area. CASA Sue also connected Dayton with his attorney and his social services practitioner, and she encouraged him to fill out transitional housing program applications.

Within a short period, Dayton successfully entered a new housing program, attained a new job, and was enrolled in school for the fall. Although food and employment insecurity continue to be a challenge, Dayton always communicates with CASA Sue when something comes up. Sue helps Dayton to connect to local resources and is focused on his long-term stability. With her support, Dayton is staying housed and connected to the resources and supports that he needs to prevent future homelessness and to achieve his goals.

### **Kora**

Dawn has served as CASA to 16-year-old Kora since March 2019. Like many survivors of trauma, Kora has been known to exaggerate and make up stories as a coping mechanism. Over the past three years, Dawn and Kora have created a trust-based relationship, and Kora knows that Dawn will always take her seriously.

A few months ago, Kora confided in Dawn that her male caregiver had touched her inappropriately. Dawn listened to Kora before fulfilling her responsibility as a mandated reporter by calling child protective services (CPS). Dawn immediately received backlash from others involved in Kora's life—they doubted the truth of Kora's allegation because of her history of telling stories. However, after child welfare professionals investigated more fully, the allegations were substantiated.

Kora and the other children in the foster home were removed and taken to a temporary shelter. CASA Dawn frequently checked in with Kora to provide her with support during this emotional and confusing time. After five days in the temporary shelter, Kora was placed with a new foster family. Because of Dawn's consistent presence in Kora's life and the trust that Kora established with Dawn, Kora and the other children were protected from further abuse. Kora is now in a safe, nurturing home where she can continue to recover and heal from past trauma.

Voices for Children truly appreciates the incredible support of Focusing Philanthropy and your investment in our Riverside County CASA program. Together, we have improved the lives of 93 children like Naomi, Dayton, and Kora. Thank you for your monumental partnership.