



BRIGHTER FUTURES FOSTER CARE CAMPAIGN 2021 REPORT

THE PROJECT

Focusing Philanthropy and Voices for Children launched the Brighter Futures Foster Care Campaign 2021 to meet the critical needs of children living in foster care in San Diego County. VFC committed to recruit, train, and supervise 240 CASAs for a year who, in turn, would support and advocate for at least that many children or sibling groups living in foster care during an extreme and unpredictable time. When considering the sibling sets supported by many of our CASA volunteers, we estimated that approximately 315 children in foster care would be supported through the 2021 campaign.

FOCUSING PHILANTHROPY 2021 CAMPAIGN FINANCIAL IMPACT

Focusing Philanthropy played an instrumental role in our ability to assign CASAs to 315 abused and neglected youth during Fiscal Year 2020-2021. Voices for Children and Focusing Philanthropy partnered with a goal to raise \$600,000 through the Brighter Futures Foster Care Campaign, in which \$400,000 of donations secured by Voices for Children were matched with a \$200,000 grant from Focusing Philanthropy. This year's campaign ran from February 1, 2021 - June 30, 2021. Three of VFC's objectives for the campaign were to re-engage lapsed donors; convince existing donors to increase their donation, and of course to secure new donors. When the campaign was completed on June 30th, VFC's San Diego office reported that 41 generous donors had contributed \$403,750. Of these donors, 6 were re-engaged donors who had been lapsed for two years or more; 4 were donors who increased their gift amount; 10 were brand new, and the remainder were loyal, repeat donors. Further, one of the new donors gave VFC \$100,000 as a first-time gift, specifically to address the needs of Transitional Age Youth who suddenly find themselves homeless, due to shifting home placements. Additionally, these 41 donors learned about the amazing support that Focusing Philanthropy provides to Voices for Children and many other nonprofit organizations. Voices for Children is incredibly grateful for the support of Focusing Philanthropy and your organization's belief in our mission.

FOCUSING PHILANTHROPY 2021 CAMPAIGN PROGRAM IMPACT

As a direct result of the gifts raised during this campaign, Voices for Children successfully supported 240 CASA volunteers and provided individualized CASA advocacy to 315 new and existing children in foster care in San Diego County. Through the gifts raised during this campaign, we also recruited 100 new CASA volunteers, and trained, screened, and matched 85 of the newly recruited CASA volunteers to children in the foster care system, enabling us to meet the demands of children entering the foster care system. The CASAs funded by this generous grant will continue to provide advocacy services for those children and youth in the year to come.

During the campaign this year, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to have a significant impact on the children that we serve. Some of the new challenges that children faced include the following:

Education. Children in foster care have fallen further behind in school than their peers, and they are

entering the 2021–22 school year with larger learning gaps. According to one study, 25% of marginalized youth—including students in foster care—had no access at all to in-person or distance education during the pandemic.

Mental Health. The impact of the pandemic on children’s mental health cannot be overstated. Children in foster care have experienced extreme loneliness, stress, and depression caused by isolation, the lack of regular visits with family and friends, and anxiety about an uncertain future.

Housing Placements. The pandemic has created increased housing instability for children in foster care. Some caregivers ended their commitment as a housing placement, while others are no longer a good fit for children whose mental health needs escalated during the pandemic.

More important than the numbers and challenges are the lives of children changed for the better as a result of the advocacy provided by their CASA volunteer. The following three stories demonstrate the impact that a CASA can have in the life of a child.

Araceli

CASA Jaimi was matched with 15-year-old Araceli in August 2020. When Araceli met Jaimi, she was initially distrustful. Seven years in the foster care system had taught her that adults come and go with very little warning. She was hesitant to open up to Jaimi, but Jaimi was persistent and over time, Araceli began to trust her.

Araceli has a history of mental health challenges. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, Araceli’s therapist began holding her sessions virtually. CASA Jaimi knew that Araceli had struggled with suicidal ideation and self-harming thoughts in the past. When Araceli confided in Jaimi that she was extremely anxious about her future, Jaimi was concerned that Araceli might need additional support. CASA Jaimi shared her concerns in a court report that was read by Araceli’s attorney. In her report, CASA Jaimi suggested that Araceli receive a psychiatric evaluation to determine whether medication or more intensive therapeutic services might be warranted. Araceli’s attorney immediately followed up with Jaimi for more information. The attorney supported Jaimi’s recommendations during Araceli’s next court hearing, where the judge ordered a psychiatric evaluation and in-person therapy sessions for Araceli.

CASA Jaimi’s presence in Araceli’s life provided critical insight to Araceli’s attorney and the judge. Because of her persistent communication with Araceli and the trust-based relationship that she built, she was able to alert the court when Araceli’s mental health declined during the pandemic. As a result, the court ensured that Araceli had access to the mental health services that she needs.

Dominique

CASA Gina was assigned to Dominique’s case in September 2020 when she reentered foster care at the age of 17 due to neglect and abuse. Meeting a new CASA was not Dominique’s top priority. Dominique and CASA Gina struggled initially to connect; Dominique was hesitant to let a stranger in and preferred to keep to herself. CASA Gina regularly tried to meet with Dominique or check in with her on the phone, but Dominique was keeping her new CASA at arm’s length. CASA Gina never gave up and continued to let Dominique know that she was there if she ever needed anything. In the meantime, the CASA made sure to connect with the social worker to see if there was anything else she could do.

CASA Gina and Dominique eventually met a couple of times, briefly, but their relationship really took off when Dominique called Gina in April 2021 knowing that she was the only person who could help. That

day, Dominique went to the hospital complaining of chest pains due to an anxiety attack. While at the hospital, Dominique disclosed other information that led to her being placed under a psychiatric hold. She was scared and confused, but worse was that Dominique had an upcoming exam for her Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) certificate, which added to her stress and anxiety. Dominique called CASA Gina to let her know what was happening. Gina quickly contacted the social worker and the attorney to update them. She also called Dominique's housing manager to ask if she could pick up the test-prep materials and take them to Dominique in the hospital knowing that she would be worrying about the exam. CASA Gina dropped everything to help Dominique through this rough time. Since that time, CASA Gina and Dominique connect more regularly and Dominique has expressed how much she appreciated all that Gina did for her. CASA Gina epitomizes the CASA commitment and support that can make all the difference in a child's life.

Dylan

Bill has been Dylan's CASA for only a short time. Dylan was brought into foster care after his elderly grandmother and legal guardian became too ill to care for him. The grandmother's caregiver transported Dylan to a local children's center without his knowledge and dropped him off. While at the children's center, Dylan was having some behavioral difficulties and was ultimately moved to a more restrictive housing placement. Despite it all, CASA Bill visits Dylan weekly and has regular video visits with him. Dylan has been placed on suicide watch several times while at his current housing due to the emotional toll of being abandoned. Dylan is not allowed to have visitors when he is on suicide watch, but CASA Bill still drops off comics and books to let Dylan know that he is there. CASA Bill has been such a strong support for Dylan during this time when he has felt abandoned and alone. John's grandmother has since passed away and CASA Bill continues to support Dylan through this difficult time. The presence of a consistent and caring adult who is not paid to be a part of a child's life, but wants to be of service, is the impact and power of the CASA program.

CONCLUSION

Our work at Voices for Children cannot be achieved without the support of organizations like Focusing Philanthropy. Focusing Philanthropy played an instrumental role in our ability to assign CASAs to 315 abused and neglected children. We are incredibly grateful for your support and your belief in our mission. Together, we have changed the lives the most vulnerable children in San Diego County. Thank you.