



FOSTERING GROWTH CAMPAIGN 2023 REPORT

THE PROJECT:

Focusing Philanthropy and Voices for Children launched the 2023 Fostering Growth Campaign to provide individualized advocacy services for 150 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 a child's life. CASAs are assigned to a single child or sibling group, providing a level of individualized attention and support that is unparalleled elsewhere in the foster care system.

FOCUSING PHILANTHROPY 2023 CAMPAIGN IMPACT:

Voices for Children and Focusing Philanthropy set a goal to raise \$300,000 through the Fostering Growth Campaign, of which \$200,000 of donations secured by Voices for Children would be matched with a \$100,000 grant from Focusing Philanthropy. The campaign ran from May 1, 2023, until December 31, 2023. Voices for Children nearly met its goal, raising \$179,683.86, approximately \$15,000 more than the previous year's campaign. Focusing Philanthropy generously provided \$89,841.93 in matching funds, resulting in a total amount raised of \$269,525.79, more than \$20,000 more than the previous campaign. Unfortunately, one donor, who had pledged \$25,000, has not paid yet. We hope to capture their generous funding in our next Riverside County Fostering Growth Campaign launching in May 2024.

As a direct result of the \$269,526 we raised during this campaign, 135 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 2023–24. 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.

Your support has not only helped us to serve more children, but also to enhance our program and organization in many ways. For example, we continued to make progress on our diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. Our efforts included Fostering Ideas, a bi-monthly DEI training program for all staff members, to provide a deeper awareness of DEI-related topics. VFC also launched the new VFC Bilingual Team, which aims to equitably compensate staff members who use their Spanish and English language skills to support Spanish-speaking families. Bilingual employees, after being assessed and approved for the program, began receiving increased compensation in July 2023. In addition, VFC took concrete measures to improve our ability to recruit and retain talented staff. We are especially pleased to provide an employer contribution to our staff's 403(b) retirement plans for the first time. Retaining talented staff is extremely beneficial to the children we serve, as their institutional knowledge and real-world experience is invaluable as they support and guide CASA volunteers.

IMPORTANCE OF THE CASA PROGRAM:

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

Emily

Emily's life took a devastating turn when she lost her father to cancer in 2020, causing her mother to struggle with her mental health. Two years later, her mother experienced a mental breakdown that led to Emily's neglect and eventual foster care placement. Emily was placed with her paternal aunt and uncle, where she found herself caught in the middle of family disputes. CASA Kenyon served as a powerful advocate for Emily's well-being and eventual reunification with her mother, who had made significant strides in addressing her mental health issues. CASA Kenyon advocated for Emily to be able to finish the school year at her current elementary school, recognizing the strong connections she had formed there. CASA Kenyon's dedication to Emily's well-being kept the family and the child welfare team focused on Emily's best interests.

Marni and Matt

Twins Marni and Matt entered foster care after experiencing abuse and homelessness. For Marni, the trauma caused post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD), which became challenging to manage as she matured. CASA Teresa was assigned to Marni when she was 12 and quickly recognized Marni's desire to live with Matt, even though the twins occasionally engaged in violent conflict that their caregivers were not trained to manage. CASA Teresa advocated for keeping the siblings housed together and began seeking services to alleviate their conflicts with Matt's CASA, even though Marni had not been open to therapy before. CASA Teresa suggested equine therapy. Marni said she trusted CASA Teresa and, with CASA Teresa's encouragement, was open to trying equine therapy, which is now helping Marni and Matt learn conflict resolution and coping skills. Today, the siblings live in the same foster home and attend the same school. CASA Teresa has played a critical role in making sure that they could stay together.

Kevin

CASA Brian was assigned to 11-year-old Kevin shortly after Kevin entered foster care because his parents abandoned him. Kevin was shy and defensive with new people, and CASA Brian noted that Kevin was reserved and preferred to stay inside his foster home. CASA Brian kept trying and Kevin eventually let his guard down and began to show his sweet personality. CASA Brian slowly began to introduce different ideas for outings. Kevin was uncertain but trusted CASA Brian and gradually gained the courage to try new things. The two share the same cultural background, so CASA Brian started by introducing Kevin to traditional foods from their culture. CASA Brian also helped Kevin branch out and experience outdoor activities. Kevin is now excited to try new things outside of his comfort zone. Through these experiences, CASA Brian is helping Kevin gain confidence, which is helping him in school and with his peers. Kevin is more open-minded when it comes to making new friends and is more engaged in class. Kevin's growth is truly impressive and would not be possible without a consistent and caring CASA like Brian.

Voices for Children greatly appreciates the incredible support of Focusing Philanthropy and your continued investment in our Riverside County CASA program. Together, we have improved the lives of 135 children like Emily, Marni, Matt, and Kevin this year alone. Thank you again for your sustaining partnership.