



BRIGHTER FUTURES FOSTER CARE CAMPAIGN 2023 REPORT

THE PROJECT

Focusing Philanthropy and Voices for Children launched the Brighter Futures Foster Care Campaign 2023 to meet the critical needs of children living in foster care in San Diego County. VFC committed to recruit, train, and supervise 225 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 360 children in foster care would be supported through the 2023 campaign. Voices for Children is excited to report that these goals were exceeded this year and many more children received the advocacy they needed to thrive.

FOCUSING PHILANTHROPY 2023 CAMPAIGN FINANCIAL IMPACT

Focusing Philanthropy played an instrumental role in our ability to assign CASAs to a total of 1,266 abused and neglected youth during Fiscal Year 2022-2023. Voices for Children and Focusing Philanthropy partnered with a goal to raise \$900,000 through the Brighter Futures Foster Care Campaign. Thanks to the generosity of Focusing Philanthropy, the Campaign raised a total of \$1,101,199.05. Three of VFC's objectives for the campaign were to re-engage lapsed donors; convince existing donors to increase their donations, and of course to secure new donors. Additionally, these 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 2023 CAMPAIGN PROGRAM IMPACT

As a direct result of the gifts raised during this campaign, Voices for Children successfully supported 300 CASA volunteers and provided individualized CASA advocacy to 440 new and existing children in foster care in San Diego County. During fiscal year (FY) 2022–23, Voices for Children (VFC) provided 1,266 San Diego County youth in foster care, with the consistent and comprehensive advocacy of a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). In addition, VFC staff members provided advocacy to 508 children with shorter-term needs, and another 112 received a CASA through our Juvenile Justice Program, bringing the total number of children served this year to 1,886. During the year, VFC staff members assessed every child entering foster care. VFC continued to monitor those children not provided with advocacy in case their needs rose to a level requiring either a CASA or staff advocate. During the year, 225 new CASAs graduated from Advocate University and were matched with individual children in foster care during the year.

Among our accomplishments during the year, we are particularly pleased to have earned the Innovative Inclusion Tier of Recognition, the highest recognition granted, from All Children—All Families, a project of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation. The All Children—All Families project promotes LGBTQ-inclusive policies and affirming practices among child welfare agencies and formally recognizes those agencies that are leading the field with innovative approaches to inclusion. This accomplishment is

especially important to us because LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in the foster care system, often due specifically to their sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

One challenge that we experienced was a decline in the number of new CASA volunteers recruited during the first half of our fiscal year. Community members shared that they wanted to make up for lost time with family and friends before giving back on a broader scale. To mitigate this decline, VFC increased our recruitment efforts. Our recruitment team has formed new connections with local community organizations and businesses, including the North County LGBTQ Resource Center, the Black American Political Association of California, Indian Voices, U.S. Bank, and the North County NAACP in order to expand our reach.

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 two stories demonstrate the impact that a CASA can have in the life of a child.

Omar

In spring 2017, CASA Marcus was assigned to 15-year-old Omar's case. Omar had been in foster care for four years due to domestic violence between his parents. Although Omar and his siblings were initially placed into foster care together, Omar's behavioral issues escalated. Eventually, he was placed in a group home apart from his siblings and diagnosed with depression. He began leaving the group home without permission and having altercations with staff. CASA Marcus says they did not talk much at first but played a lot of one-on-one basketball. Eventually, on and off the basketball court, the two talked more and more. CASA Marcus said Omar had a keen interest in business, finances, and investing. Marcus also helped Omar receive therapy services. Omar's therapist encouraged him to open himself up to people and relationships. Nearly seven years later, Omar graduated high school, is studying business in college, and is employed. CASA Marcus reports that Omar, who recently celebrated the birth of a baby girl, is a very loving and devoted father, deeply committed to creating a better life for his young family. No longer angry and guarded, Omar is now optimistic about his future and busy planning the next chapter of his life.

Tina

Tina entered foster care when she was six years old. At the age of 11, she was matched with CASA Lee, and Lee has advocated for Tina over the past four years. During her time in the foster care system, Tina has lived in 11 different placements, most of which only lasted a few months. However, her most recent home placement—a foster family agency (FFA) foster home—was the longest, stable home she had known since entering the foster care system. She had strong relationships with the foster family agency's social worker and therapist, and she was thriving at her school, a charter school with low teacher-to-student ratios. After living with her foster caregivers for five years, Tina's foster caregivers decided to adopt her. But before the adoption closed, they abruptly changed their minds. This devastated Tina and disrupted her stability.

In addition to losing her home and her relationship with her foster caregivers, Tina was also in danger of losing access to her social worker, therapist, and school community. CASA Lee was determined to ensure that this did not happen. CASA Lee worked tirelessly to identify a new home for Tina within the same FFA network so that Tina could keep the same social worker and therapist. Lee also worked with the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE)'s Foster Youth Liaison to arrange transportation for Tina so she could continue to attend the same school.

Although changing foster homes was heartbreaking for Tina, CASA Lee and Tina's social worker worked together to ensure that Tina retained as much stability within her broader support system as possible. Stability, which so many children in foster care lack, is a crucial ingredient to a child's ability to overcome past trauma, overcome obstacles, and have a chance and a hope for a brighter future.

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 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.