



CASA of Tulare County
Court Appointed Special Advocates **FOR CHILDREN**
www.CASATulareCo.org

VOICES FOR THE VOICELESS

News & Updates from CASA of Tulare County



As the year of 2019 came to an end, the community began to unite in powerful ways to support the children who need us most. The holiday season can be tough to walk through while families all over the world begin to gather and enjoy one-anothers company. We often think that about how sad it must be to be one of the only kids to not receive a gift from Santa or during holidays and birthdays... but really, the heart aches more as we recognize many of our kids don't have family and traditions either.

When we say it takes a village, a community, to raise a child, that means it takes people from all various walks of life, departments, and roles to play. We are proud to say that Tulare County is a community that truly cares, and as the awareness spreads we see it more and more.

The end of 2019 sparked a wave of RAISE-ing for CASA. Our kids had been covered by the community as they organized fundraisers, toy collections, and spread the word. With funds collected we're able to continue to thrive into 2020 working to ensure the kids who've been appointed to us receive a CASA volunteer by their side.

While seasons change, we still have over 200 children waiting for a CASA volunteer, some who may never receive one, at no fault of their own, but simply because we need more volunteers to fit the need. Since 2020 began, CASA of Tulare County was awarded a National CASA grant to help us fund our Marketing and promote the new branding campaign, "Change a Child's Story."

The funds allocated to us for this endeavor will be used to spread the importance of CASA in the lives of our foster kids to the more rural areas of Tulare County, as well as, maintaining our growth in our more populated cities. We hope you will hear us on the radio, find us loud on social media, and many more avenues that will plant the seed of hope for our kiddos.

Statistically, children in foster care who don't have a CASA volunteer are more likely to turn to substance abuse, repeat the abuse they experienced, drop out of or do poorly in school, and may even face homelessness if they stay in care until they're old enough to age out. The ingredient missing in their success is simple: one caring adult figure.

A CASA volunteer is more than just someone who advocates for the child's rights. They provide a stable relationship, a compassionate perspective, and a loving encouragement to prove that our kids are more than statistics. This is why, with our community united, we can change children's stories all over Tulare County.



Staff Updates

Please join us in congratulating/welcoming our new staff changes!



Lacey Howard
0-5 Advocate
Coordinator



Michele Palermo
6-21 Advocate
Coordinator



Message from the Executive Director

Happy New Year! The New Year always makes me reflect and think about what I want to do better; professionally and personally. The New Year is a chance to start fresh, a time to set goals, or to make significant

changes. Sure, we can set resolutions any time of year. This is the time of year more than any other when I think about how I can improve myself and CASA of Tulare County. Maybe it's because another year has gone by, or perhaps it's because I've had some time to reflect during the holidays, or maybe the date 1/1 gives me permission to wipe the slate clean.

Our staff and board of directors constantly set new goals for CASA of Tulare County. Here are a few of the changes you will notice after the New Year.

1. New staff. We recently hired Lacey Howard as the 0-5 Advocate Coordinator. This is a big step as our organization continues to grow and thrive. Lacey is from the Valley. She is a 4th generation citrus grower and continues to have a passion for agriculture. She received her undergraduate degree from the University of Arkansas.
2. New website. You have probably noticed that the new CASA of Tulare County website was launched. We made the website a priority with our Superhero Run registration opening in December as well as, registration for our Once Upon A Dream GALA getting set to open.
3. New Raise 4 CASA end of the year giving, which was created to challenge businesses/individuals to incorporate their support, by donating monetarily or with a raffle item, while being the story changer who helps support a CASA volunteer to advocate on behalf of an abused/neglected child.
4. New Location for the Superhero Run. The run will be on March 28, 2020 in Tulare, CA at Live Oak Park & Santa Fe Trail. It will be a 1k and 5k. There will be carnival games, breakfast and so much more. It will be fun for the whole family.
5. Once Upon A Dream GALA will be May 8, 2020 at the Convention Center. This year's theme will be a Masquerade: "UNMASK CHILD ABUSE" We are always looking for sponsorships as well as, raffle items for our live and silent auctions.

That wraps it up for what's in store for 2020—at least for now. As for personal goals, I'm going to make a better effort to monitor my time, and not over commit myself to things, that I will not be able to fulfill 100%.

What's your New Year's resolution? Post it on our Facebook page. I find that when I announce my goals or write them on paper, I'm more likely to stick with them. So, share your goals and we can work together to make 2020 the best year yet.

Blessings,
Eric Johnson, Executive Director.

0-5 CASAs

We are able to make visits to the resource homes of each of the children assigned to CASA, complete a Developmental Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) and a Social-Emotional ASQ on each child, then report our findings and recommendations to the Court. Our reports are an additional tool for the Judge to use as he or she determines what services to order for each child. Our reports include a photograph of each child and use the child(ren)'s names so that the judge can know, a little better, each young child who is now "in the system" through no fault of their own.

It is easy to forget because a child doesn't have a specific memory of trauma, or because they were too young to understand, that they are still experiencing effects of trauma. In a more specific story, Johnny (name changed for confidentiality) is now around 7-years-old. In years prior to foster care, he had carried more of a parental role in the house. He would help take care of his siblings and ensured they were always okay.

Being removed from this environment has been difficult for Johnny as his resource parents are now in that parental role, where his biological parents were once unable to be. When the resource mom would tell him to take a shower or other parental instruction, he'd become defiant and confrontational. When this was mentioned to CASA Linda, she suggested that the resource parents avoid this by offering Johnny the ability to choose what and when he'd like to take his shower or help around the house.

According to ChildWelfare.gov, "Children who have trouble with the unexpected may respond by trying to control every situation or by showing extreme reactions to change. In some cases, these behaviors may be labeled ODD (oppositional defiant disorder) or intermittent explosive disorder (IED)." Reasonable, age-appropriate choices encourage a sense of having control in their lives. By offering Johnny a chance to have a sense of control over his situation, he's being given the purpose he once felt he had and is more likely to listen and behave appropriately.

While Johnny is older than 5-years-old today, much of his defiance is a result of things that happened in his earliest years of childhood. The first 5 years of our lives are some of the most important, foundational experiences. We, as an organization and as individual advocates for our kids have the ability to steer a child away from results of trauma towards a healed, healthy future. This is made possible by organizations like CASA of Tulare County & First 5 Tulare County.



Family Connections

Family Connections works tirelessly to connect children in care to long-lasting relationships for the betterment of their future adulthood. It's statistically proven that children thrive more when they know where they come from, have at least one stable adult to look up to and lean on, and don't feel entirely alone in this world.

Whether we find siblings, previous neighbors, or long-lost relatives, we build meaningful connections. While we are focused on a number of cases, one of the highlights of last quarter involves a sibling set of five children ages one, two, seven, eleven, and twelve-years-old. They had been separated from one another at no fault of their own after taken into foster care. The two youngest girls, ages one and two years-old, were placed in the same resource home, while their brother, age seven-years-old, was placed by himself and the two eldest sisters were placed together in a third home.

Often when children enter foster care, they are not placed together because of the lack of space in a single resource home; not at random or for inconsiderate purposes. We'd come to a point where the parents were not engaged in services and even stopped visiting with their children which gave reason for the court to terminate services allocated to the parents. As a result, the children's permanency plan changed.

As with many of our younger kids, the two youngest were adopted by their resource family, the seven-year-old was offered guardianship, but the two eldest sisters continued to struggle in their placement; especially the eleven-year-old. After hearing about the children's circumstances, the social worker realized that Family Connections would benefit these children. Being familiar with the program, the social worker contacted our Family Connections team to work on building a plan for the sibling set to reconnect/maintain their connection.



Our team was able to reconnect the siblings to a paternal aunt who had been in contact through the life of the case. We also found a request from the parents' attorney showing they'd filed a 388 petition which allows parents who've gone through major life changes to request to have their case and services re-opened, which was approved in this case. The Family connections team continues to help prevent the children from losing contact with one another for the rest of their lives.

Financial

2019 was a beautiful year of generosity for much of our community. We launched the RAISE campaign and watched the community of Tulare County launch ways to RAISE for CASA in their own way. From Toy Drives, Auction Events, to Year-End donations & individual fundraisers on social media, we are honored to be supported by such a strong, giving community.

We were also awarded a Marketing Grant to begin this quarter to help spread awareness and build up our community to target areas outside of Visalia to reach the entirety of Tulare County. Everything that our financial sponsors do and have done contributes greatly to training and deploying awesome volunteers to serve the 200+ kids waiting for an adult to advocate for them.

MAJOR FUNDERS OF CASA OF TULARE COUNTY

First 5 Tulare County
Cal OES VOCA

Tulare County Health and Human
Services

Judicial Council of California

Carpenter Family Children's
Foundation

Anne B. Reimers Charitable
Educational Foundation

Winkler Trust Foundation

In n Out Burger Foundation

Groppetti Automotive

Provident / Salierno Family
Foundation

The Sence Foundation

V F Outdoor, LLC

Spencer Anderson, DDS

Bueno Beverage Company

Steve & Trish Chrisman

Correia Family Foundation

Mendes Calf Ranch

Jim & Tammy Valov

National CASA Association

HOW CAN YOU RAISE FOR CASA?

Donate your birthday,
anniversary, or other
celebration on Facebook!

Gather supplies for
our CASA kiddos,
call us for info!

Become a monthly sponsor!

Sponsor one of our
annual events!

www.CASATulareCo.org

While it would be seemingly impossible to list every single individual who decided to RAISE at the end of 2019, we hope that you each feel the gratitude we feel for all that was done during the ending months of 2019. Members of our community did small parts to make a huge, successful impact. Not just because of staff and volunteers, but because Tulare County's community saw value in the 1200+ children who experience foster care at no fault of their own.

Together, we're changing the stories of children and encouraging a healthier, more successful future for both them as individuals and us as a society, a community.

**Not available to volunteer as an advocate?
Supporting CASA can come in many forms.
Consider donating financially to help train
those who can volunteer!**

Outreach

To kick off a new year full of new opportunities, Tulare County's CASA program was awarded a grant that will help us reach our goals of serving more kids this year. We plan to spread the word loudly, vastly, and hope that the more who know about the kids who need us, the more volunteers will rise up to the job.

With over 200 children on a waiting list and the same amount of cases closing monthly as are opening, the only way to decrease the wait is to find more volunteers. We don't ask for an arm or a leg, just 1-2 hours a week will change a child's story when the right heart is aligned.

Tell your friends, family, co-workers, and everyone... 200 children are waiting for a CASA to be their eyes and ears in court and we need YOU!

Our outreach efforts take us to events county wide, but it can be quite a financial strain on our organization to be a part of everything. The support of donors like you helps us to get out into the community and spread awareness about the children who need a community!

We attend Chamber meetings and events in various parts of our county, host continuing educational services, put together mixers and information booths, and do our very best to partner alongside community members who align with our cause.

For more details on events or to get involved contact us at info@casatulareco.org or visit our website calendar!

REGISTER YOUR INNER SUPERHERO
REGISTER TO RUN:
RUNSIGNUP.COM/CASARUN2020

MARCH 28TH, 2020
7:00AM - 12:00PM
LIVE OAK PARK &
SANTA FE TRAILS
TULARE, CA

SPECIAL FEATURE: *The Lisa Project*
Some secrets should be told...

EXPERIENCE THE LISA PROJECT FOR FREE

ONCE UPON A DREAM
Unmask Child Abuse
MAY 8TH, 2020 | 5:30PM
VISALIA CONVENTION CENTER

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6-21 CASAs

Our CASA's work hard to ensure that kids in foster care have opportunities to experience some of the joys in life that many of us take for granted. Unfortunately, children in foster care often do not have access to privileges such as nice & clean clothes, toys, bikes, game consoles; in general positive life experiences.

CASA Rodney, while getting to know his CASA kid, listened as Jacob (name changed for confidentiality) told him that he was being made fun of for not being able to ride a bike at his age, 11-years-old. Rodney didn't just see a kid complaining about materialistic things he doesn't have... he saw a child without a parental figure to teach him a simple joy of childhood.

Since this was something that truly touched the heart of CASA Rodney, he wanted to do something for Jacob. Rodney worked with CASA staff to connect with a resource that donated a bike for Jacob. Rodney took Jacob to an empty parking lot and taught him how to ride a bike. Afterward, Jacob said, "... kids made fun of me because I didn't know how to ride a bike at my age.... BUT NOW I CAN!"

It is the efforts of CASAs like Rodney who take small acts of kindness and in turn, change stories of hurting, broken hearted children in Tulare County, and everywhere a CASA organization exists.

Children in foster care have been removed from home, through no fault of their own, because of concerns for their well-being and safety. The traumatic experiences that our kids go through, usually cause them to shut down, stay silent, and trust no one. However, having a CASA volunteer on their side can give them a little peace of mind and belief that at least one individual truly cares.

Another recent example of the power of being a CASA volunteer was when CASA Jamie was spending time with one of her CASA kids, 10-year-old Rebecca (name changed for confidentiality) on her birthday. Rebecca made a comment to CASA Jamie that she'd been unable to voice to anyone else stating she wasn't happy it was her birthday, because now she was old enough to "be sold." Naturally, this concerned CASA Jamie and resulted in her reporting this information that was previously unknown to Child Welfare Services. Because of this information, support services were offered to a teenaged female sibling in the foster care system.

These are just two reasons we do what we do, and even though they are small moments, they move big mountains for the children we serve. Thank you, all of you, who participate in changing a child's story--no matter your role.

**Newsletter organized by Marketing Coordinator,
Melissa Murphy | February 2020 | CASA of Tulare County**

YOU can change a child's story too. Support CASA of Tulare County in your own way. Contact us for more information and ways you can make a difference, right here, in your community, your county, your city.

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