



CASA

Informed

Change a Child's Story™

TULARE COUNTY

CASA of Tulare County Newsletter Winter 2022

March on Main is back!

CASA hasn't had a March on Main to kick off Child Abuse Prevention Month since 2015. But now it's back in partnership with the Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC).

We'll gather at 9 a.m. at Wells Fargo Bank on Main Street and walk east to Garden Street Plaza for a morning of entertainment, kids' activities, speakers and local food vendors.

The Lisa Project will be set up in the Main Street Theatre adjacent to the plaza. For those who haven't walked through the project, it is a multi-sensory experience allowing the visitor to hear, see and experience the reality of child abuse.

Adventist Health will provide a free vaccination clinic. The first 100 to receive the vaccine will receive a \$25 gift card from a local merchant.

Master Drummer Keio Ogawa will invite children to participate in her drum circle.

Local dignitaries will read a proclamation about the importance of protecting children from abuse and neglect.

Following the event, volunteers will wrap blue ribbons around trees on Main Street to symbolize the community support of Child Abuse Prevention Month.



March on Main

Saturday, March 26, 9-12

Starting at Wells Fargo Bank

Downtown Main Street, Visalia

Wear blue shirts and blue ribbons to help kick off Child Abuse Prevention Month



Save the Dates: Keep the buzz going!

Looking for a fun way to support CASA? We're partnering with Rawhide for two events this spring.

Rawhide baseball--Saturday, April 23

Come out to the ballpark to enjoy a Rawhide game. CASA is the featured Community Organization of the Game. Volunteers are needed to sell 50/50 tickets to benefit CASA.

Casino Night--Saturday, May 7

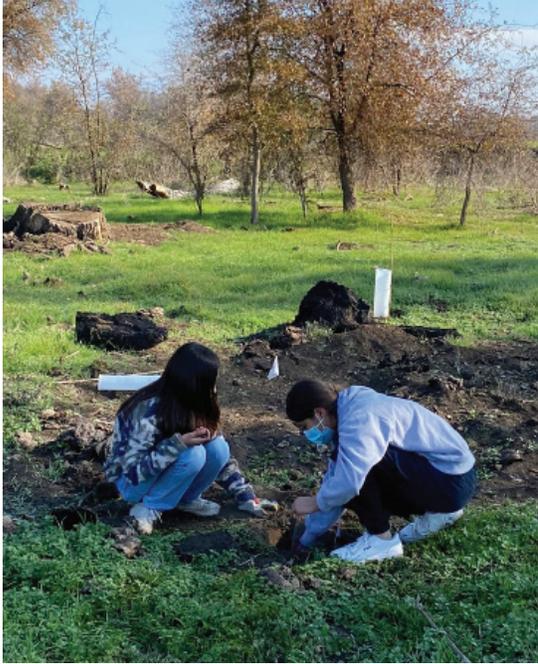
Gather in the stadium's Hall of Fame where you can gamble the night away and benefit CASA at the same time.

Call Melinda at the CASA office if you can help.

Special friendships created during visits to Kaweah Oaks Preserve

CASA's partnership with Sequoia Riverlands Trust has turned out to be much more than providing outings for advocates and their CASA kids. Groups have visited Kaweah Oaks Preserve two times now. They have hiked, learned about preservation efforts and planted acorns (which turned out to be more complicated than just putting an acorn in the ground).

But the extra benefit for some of the children has been that they have created special friendships with each other. And from those friendships, the advocates have gotten together to plan other outings, such as fishing and bowling.



Advocates Denise Schroeder and Carl Lockridge planned a fishing trip at Plaza Park with their CASA kids and included the CASA child of advocate Nancy Gularte who sadly died in December.

"The kids were very excited," said Denise. "After fishing, we grilled hotdogs on a portable grill. They all took part in preparing the meal"

Group outings give the kids a chance to bond with others who know what it's like to be in foster care.

Thanks to a City of Visalia grant, CASA will be able to host four more outings with Riverlands Trust and a trip this summer to the YMCA camp at Sequoia Lake.

The next two outings will be April 9 to Dry Creek Preserve and April 30 to Kaweah Oaks. Advocates wanting to take their CASA kids can sign up with their supervisors.



Message from our Executive Director Alberto Ramos

If 2021 was the year for challenges, 2022 shows signs of being the year for hope and promise.

Most of our advocates are doing their visits with kids in person again, after almost two years of creative virtual visits.

The CASA classroom hasn't held an in-person advocate training in two years, and it was with pure joy that we set about preparing the room to welcome aboard a big cohort of 12 students from around the county, including three in Porterville.

Grant funding that CASA received at the end of 2019 was timed perfectly to allow us to purchase new tech equipment so that we could meet virtually, if we ever needed to. Who could have known that a pandemic lurked around the corner?

We made good use of that technology over the past two



years and continue to use it to make it easier for our south county students to skip the long drive to Visalia.

CASA takes pride in attracting sharp and compassionate people to its volunteer corps, and this class is no exception. We look forward to their swearing-in ceremony in March! The next class begins April 19. Do you know someone who might want to join?

Because we did not publish an annual report in 2021, our end-of-year letter was sent with updates from the previous fiscal year and how we fared during the pandemic.

Dozens of letters flowed back to us with over \$10,000 in donations from ardent CASA supporters, setting a new giving record and warming our hearts! Thank you to everyone who kept CASA on their "good list" this year.

As you can read in this newsletter, we have a number of events where we can gather with our supporters. We hope you will come out to support these activities and spread the good work of CASA.

Story from an advocate

Going beyond the call of duty

Carl Lockridge and his CASA kid “Wes” (not his real name) have a special bond. They meet very Thursday and always end the visit by going to the Visalia mall where they have a ritual.

First they go to See’s Candy to get a sample.

“But we don’t taste it until we get into the massage chairs. Then we taste it. This is royalty,” said Carl. “The See’s people know us now; they expect us. So now Wes has some people who know him.”

They go to Red Robin or another restaurant and play chess or Uno. Wes has tried sushi for the first time.

“I’m making sure he is picking up new experiences,” said Carl.

They’ve also taken advantage of CASA-sponsored events, such as paint night and visits to Kaweah Oaks Preserve.

Wes made friends with other CASA kids while planting acorns at Kaweah Oaks. So now those advocates and CASA kids have gone fishing and bowling together.

“Wes says it’s good to be with people in the same predicament he is. They can have fun together.”

Carl became a CASA by chance. He happened to hear an ad on the radio while he was driving home. The next day he called for information, and CASA told him there was an advocate class starting that night. He joined.

“I was curious. I didn’t know what to expect,” Carl said.



“It has been a God-bless trail from the beginning. We’ve adapted together and had some good conversations.”

Carl says Wes has “heart.” Wes got a food coupon and gave it to a homeless man.

“He does care about others. He knows others are in worse situations than he is.”

Judge Loza discusses CASA’s importance to court during forum at 210

When CASA hosted a panel on foster care during a Tulare County Voices at 210 forum on Jan. 13, Judge Hugo Loza had some very positive things to say about CASA.

Judge Loza, who presides over many of the court cases involving CASA children, said, “CASA volunteers have become as important as attorneys and social workers. They’re not paid. Their only loyalty is to the children. I give a great deal of weight to the CASA reports.”

He also said that when the judge who brought CASA to California visited CASAs throughout the state, he said that the Tulare County CASA is one of the best.

When Executive Director Alberto Ramos was asked about that later, he said he thought much of the reason is because of the collaborative spirit in the county.

“We have finite resources, and we work together to make it work with those resources, so we can focus on helping the children.”

He credited former E.D. Marilyn Barr for networking with the different agencies and removing any barriers



Judge Loza

He also praised the volunteers and staff.

“We have a great team who value what we do and give their all. There’s no other opportunity to volunteer and have such an impact on the justice system, families and children.”

Also on the panel were Alberto Ramos; Courtney Sallam, deputy director of Child Welfare Services; former foster child Kim Arreola; and Rich Bailey, founding member of CASA Tulare County.

Courtney said that CASA is one of CWS’ strongest partners. “CASA does so much for our youth. They’re another set of eyes and ears and a voice for the child. CASA is the constant if the child goes from home to home and has different social workers.”

Kim, who now works for CWS, said her goal is to improve the system, having experienced some negative aspects while she was in foster care.

Rich, an attorney, said he brought CASA to Tulare County because he saw how kids were damaged at home and then in the system.

“CASA takes the system and puts humans into it,” he said.

Watch the forum recording at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bitzTcoQrrg&t=389s>.

'I've never touched snow'

Advocate Sandra Reimer has taught her three CASA siblings that those mountains in the distance are the Sierra Nevadas. After Christmas, when they were talking about the mountains, one of the boys said he'd never been to the snow.

Sandra decided it was time he went. But she didn't have enough boots for them all. She put out an SOS for boots, and CASA executive director Alberto Ramos said they could borrow boots from his two sons.

When they went to pick them up, the older CASA boy told Alberto, "I've never touched snow."

Sandra lent her boots to the girl sibling and donned her husband's size 10 boots, and they headed to the snow during winter break.

"They wanted to pull over to touch the snow," said Sandra, who suggested they wait until they got past the dirty, slushy snow on the side of the road.

It was a beautiful sunny day, and when they got to the snow, they reveled in it and built a snowman named Bob—or Jack, depending on which child you asked. (They had brought along a carrot for the nose.)

Sandra has taken her charges on other fun outings—to the zoo, to ImagineU Children's Museum and often to the park. One time at the park they saw an acrobat practicing, and he gave the kids a demonstration.

But the snow trip was a special treat. The older boy told them, "This is the best day of my life. I have such a wonderful life!"



What's new at CASA

Two new advocates sworn in

CASA is pleased to welcome its two newest advocates, Kristi Blatner and Monica Rast.

The two were sworn in Dec. 8 by the Honorable Hugo Loza.



Monica

Kristi is a retired elementary school vice principal, and Monica is a newly minted attorney.

The two have been assigned their first case and are actively working with their children.

Please join us in welcoming them to the CASA family!



Kristi

Superhero recap

Our annual Superhero Run, held for the first time at Live Oak Park in Tulare, attracted more than 125 runners and an equal number of spectators to cheer them on.

Connor Machano was the fastest runner in the men's division, and Renee Denolf was the women's winner.

This was a new date for the event, and runners enjoyed cooler weather along the Santa Fe Trail. The 2022 Superhero Run will be held on Saturday, Oct. 29.

Christmas donors

Thank you to all the wonderful groups who donated bikes, gift cards, clothing, toys, books and toiletries to CASA to give as Christmas gifts to the children we work with:

Ruiz Foods, Tulare County Association of Realtors, Medical Society of Tulare & Kings Counties, World Wide Sires, St. Paul's School, Robert Half International, Shannon Ranch Elementary, PetSmart, Tulare County Sheriff's Office, ARPAC Financial Solutions, Freedom Worship Center, Together We Rise, Visalia Vapor Trailers.

Books from Read for Life

Read for Life, which is committed to breaking the cycle of illiteracy in Tulare County, donated books to CASA that advocates are now giving to their kids.

Many of the books are for ages 0-5, and CASA is able to give them to babies and toddlers on the waiting list that staff visit to do assessments.

Passes to ImagineU

Thank you to ImagineU Children's Museum, who has provided passes for CASA advocates good for an adult and child to use on their weekly visits.
