



# VOICES FOR THE VOICELESS

News & Updates from CASA of Tulare County

The state of the world at the moment has felt like a wild storm. If we've learned anything from 2020, it's that we're not fully in control of anything. We can only plan for possibilities, but as we've seen this year, sometimes our plans have to take a step back and spontaneous adaptations take place. We are working to adapt quickly, as the times quickly change. In the non-profit world, perseverance and quick responses make the world of a difference.

We've seen a lot of struggle all over the world. From COVID-19, Black-Lives-Matter, fires all over our state, and storms in the south, lives are being turned upside down. What many do not realize or take into account is this: our foster kids have been dealing with an upside down world, a chaotic upheaval, this entire time.

If anything, in times like these, our foster kids are more resilient than many of ourselves. They've already faced so many traumatic events and survived. The world as it is this year, is just inviting us to experience what it feels like to be tossed and turned in the storm. Foster children are survivors. From child abuse, neglect, domestic abuse, human trafficking, to loss, abandonment, and death, losing all that they've known and had is an unfortunate norm.

By no fault of their own, children are taken into foster care for their own safety, as a last resort option. It's not our goal to bring more kids into the system, tear them from their homes and families, or create this kind of traumatic frenzy. However, there are some circumstances that require this action to take place, and it's not their fault. Many times, even the parents in their difficult circumstances or addictions are victims themselves.

If we take anything from this year, aside from learning to adapt, it would be that a community that sticks together will thrive through any storm. It is the community that helps our kids beat the odds, defeat negative statistics, and come out of difficult circumstances successfully.

We have seen the power of a united, loving, and generous community. Tulare County is full of people who not only see a need, but work to create a better society, a happier atmosphere. We must take this time to grow both as individuals and as a community. While we are told to shelter-in-place, social distance, and spend less time out and about, we find ourselves with free-time we didn't have before.

CASA of Tulare County, in our adapting to circumstances, have found ways to train and bring in volunteers, from the safety and comfort of home. Online training is available, and with almost 250 kids on a waiting list for a CASA volunteer, the need has not depleted. We still need volunteers, and our kids still need us. Social distancing and sheltering-in-place does not place foster care on pause.

We are asking our community for one thing: spread the word. Don't stop talking about CASA. Don't become too distracted by the dark chaos of the world. Rather, take the hard circumstances and produce something beautiful, something that promotes the health and well-being of our community.

Perhaps you cannot volunteer, but you can donate. Perhaps you cannot donate, but you can spread the word. Simply talking about the need our kids have will contribute to changing a child's story. It takes many positions to fill the need, not just volunteers, but a community.

To be more CASA informed, sign up for our email subscription at: [www.CASATulareCo.org/subscribe](http://www.CASATulareCo.org/subscribe)

**CHANGE A CHILD'S STORY**



### Discussing Racism

Over the past few weeks, I have wrestled with what to say in the context of the death of George Floyd and the scourge of systemic racism. As an African American who grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio I quickly realized that I did not have the same experience that my parents had. As the Executive Director of CASA of Tulare County, I have struggled to separate my own pain from my responsibility as a leader. However, it is vital to allow some of the names of those who have died resonate:

- George Floyd. Breonna Taylor. Ahmaud Arbery.**
- Botham Jean. Trayvon Martin. Michael Brown.**
- Ezell Ford. Michelle Shirley. Eric Garner.**
- Redel Jones. Kenney Watkins. Stephon Clark.**
- Laquan McDonald. Tamir Rice. Sean Monterrosa.**
- Jamel Floyd. Dreasjon Read.**

The violent, vicious, and visual manifestations of racial oppression over the past few weeks have captured the nation’s attention. It has prompted millions of Americans to accept that there is something seriously wrong, and it has led to hundreds of thousands all around the world to engage in protest. These events have no doubt generated conflicting emotions and questions about how we should respond.

As a Non-Profit agency, CASA of Tulare County is prohibited from taking any political positions and actions. For example, we cannot encourage anyone to take any political action or to vote for a particular party. However, everyone, including CASA employees, have a right to participate in their beliefs. It is the right of all who live in this country to engage in any and all peaceful political actions in pursuit of a more just society.

Last year CASA’s Board of Directors brought me in as Executive Director, to direct and incorporate into our mission the necessity of “ change”, observing that abuse and neglect amongst our children has been at the center of our counties efforts to “change a child’s story”. Over the past year, we have begun to follow through on this directive in the following ways:

- Having training opportunities for staff as well as volunteers, concerning diversity, equality, and inclusion
- By the end of 2023, the diversity of our Board of Directors will reflect the communities that we serve, with the goal of having 1 representative from each community serving on our board.
- We are following through on our commitment to hire more diverse staff at all levels of the organization and provide advancement and training opportunities for staff of color, resulting in more a diverse team
- We will practice the principle of inclusion in our decision-making by authentically engaging all staff to get input on several matters

Undoing systemic racism will take a long-term commitment. We are at the beginning of building the muscle

of our organization for the long-term battle for racial equality. This will happen if we are focused, organized, and strategic.

If and when the protests and reports about racist incidents disappear from the news, racism and oppression will not disappear, and CASA of Tulare County will continue its efforts to become a non-racist organization by pursuing our mission. As an African American leading this agency, I am proud to be associated with CASA of Tulare County’s stellar service to the people who are in need and particularly our pursuit of racial equality and justice.

Blessings,  
Eric D. Johnson, Executive Director

### 0-5 CASAs

As the world continues to juggle the pandemic crisis, our 0-5 team continues to press forward with as much normalcy as safely possible. Our team has continued to check on the well-being of our kiddos and their resource families via phone and video visits. We have been successful in continuously providing reports and making recommendations to the courts and to the social workers regarding medical, dental, developmental, and mental health needs for our 0-5-year-old children.

We also continue to work with CWS by attending and participating in Team Decision Making meetings and Child and Family Team meetings. The 0-5 team normally works closely with Central Valley Regional Center and has continued to do so during this time by attending meetings and child assessments via telephone. We are able to provide updates and advocate for what is in the best interest of our most vulnerable children.

While we are finally able to be in the office if maintaining social distancing guidelines, wearing masks, and maintaining a level of cleanliness, our team is eager to continue to work for our kids. Our CASA work has not stopped and we will continue to stay connected to and advocate for our children!

We wouldn’t be able to do the work we do in the circumstances we are in without the help of our amazing volunteer advocates, staff, community members, and agencies. When we are a community that comes together, we can thrive through any storm!

Please continue to spread the word, letting your friends and neighbors know that becoming a CASA is still an option, even in the middle of a pandemic. We have a lot of kiddos waiting for a CASA volunteer, and it could be you!



## Family Connections

Some people hope things will go back to normal soon. Unfortunately, normal is no longer normal. Things have been very different for everyone, that is especially true for kids in foster care. The majority have already experienced what it is like to be separated from their loved ones. The ones that are too young to understand will more than likely experience separation issues even more.

The affect the pandemic will have on everyone will vary and will have lasting effects. Fortunately for the children who have an open Family Connections cases, it's been a little different. The Family Connections team has improvised as time passes. Part of the Family Connections Process has been to introduce extended family to the resource parents. This step doesn't come until the team has identified and screened each member to protect the safety of the children and resource family.

Through continued efforts the in-person contacts became three-way calls, FaceTime, and zoom meetings. Some even resorted to mailing post cards, pictures, and letters. Whichever the case, the contact continued. The children felt the support and the resource parents understood the importance of continuing contact. Such is the case for a sibling set ages 8 and 4. They had already started contact with paternal aunt. Although the contact was twice a month the children adapted quickly and looked forward to seeing their aunt. Two months after re-connection COVID-19 caused the stay home order and interrupted those visits.

The paternal aunt was determined to offer support. She started by mailing greeting cards. The greeting cards continued after being able to connect via phone. The resource parent and paternal aunt came to an agreement that one week the children could use FaceTime and the next they could talk on the phone. The children are beginning to understand that this will be part of their routine moving forward. They enjoy speaking to their paternal aunt and look forward to each phone visit.

During one conversation the resource mother shared that she provided the children with a visual calendar which helps them process time. They cross off the days as they pass and when they see a star, they know that they have a phone call with their aunt at 10:30. When they see a heart that means

they have FaceTime at 10:30 that day. This is an example of the support children need during these times.

The paternal aunt recently shared through a conversation with the team, "I can tell when they are having a rough day. My instinct as an aunt allows me to see past their smiles. I wish I can hold them and tell them everything is going to be alright, but I can't. For now, I get to express that I will be there for them no matter what. I miss them so much. I haven't been able to hold them for over three months now, but when I do it'll be worth it. I will appreciate every moment I get to spend with them".

It is stories like these that the Family Connections team enjoys sharing. The team appreciates the opportunity to be able to find ways to make things work for the children and their extended family. It's the little things that give children hope during these difficult times in their life. It's the children's well-being and continued support that will always be the focus of the Family Connections Program.



## Financial

Financial Support goes a long way in keeping us afloat in our endeavors to effectively advocate, support, and stand with the children/youth we serve in foster care. You're financial support big or small, helps us to keep staff available to support & train volunteers, gather assets and resources to train and recruit volunteers, and keeps our program alive during one of the roughest seasons we've encountered. Thank you, for being a part of changing a child's story!

### 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

Betty Treaster

The Ryan Evans Foundation

Provident / Salierno Family Foundation

The Sence Foundation

V F Outdoor, LLC

Nichols Farms

Bueno Beverage Company

### HOW CAN YOU RAISE FOR CASA?

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

Become a monthly sponsor!

Sponsor one of our annual events!

[www.CASATulareCo.org](http://www.CASATulareCo.org)

Curti Terra

Blush Boutique

Carolyn S. Kruse Foundation

Core Business Interiors

National CASA Association

United Way

Jim & Tammy Valov



**STAFF DRIVE-BY GOODBYE TO LONG TIME VOLUNTEER ADVOCATE BARBARA BYNUM**

## 6-21 CASAs

While a global pandemic sprouted this past spring shook our lives and sense of normalcy, our community hasn't stopped persevering and adapting for the sake of our kids. Just because the world has changed, doesn't mean we can't celebrate victories, advocate for our most vulnerable, and unite together as a community.

As our foster kiddos are already in troubling circumstances, we all want to make sure that they know that even in the midst of COVID-19, they're not forgotten. The community came together, preparing 50 baskets to celebrate our 2020 High School graduates! We then organized a drive-by celebration in which many of us from various agencies came together to celebrate their success.

Statistics show that the majority of foster kids don't graduate High School. While these kids had beat the statistics, the community made sure they knew that they were major successes!

Even though advocacy looks different, CASA volunteers have been making strides to come up with creative solutions. CASA Aspen, understood the need for privacy for her 3 CASA kiddos who didn't have space for their own desks, so she created a privacy divider for each kid, decorated to fit their personalities and age (pictured below).

The 6-21 program is focused on ensuring that our kids have the support they need during these incredibly difficult times. As schools are becoming all digital, having eyes and ears on our kids is becoming more difficult. Regardless of the difficulty level, our minds and hearts are set on our cause. We will get through this, together, and we will find ways to adapt while still fighting for our cause.

We'd like to thank our community and volunteers for standing with us during this time! We need all the support we can get!



## Outreach

Our outreach team has been affected by COVID with in-person events but has not stopped them to continue spreading the word. They have done Facebook lives, zoom presentations, phone interviews and so much more to let people know that we are still working hard to get more volunteers to advocate for these children.

We are very happy to inform you that the virtual trainings have been a success! We had 16 new volunteers sworn-in in July and our current training class that started August 18th has 27 new CASAs in training! We are very excited to see that our community is still very interested and moved to continue to give hope to these children.

Our outreach team is planning to have more virtual training before the year ends with the hopes to have the same results as the previous ones.

**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.**

Visalia Location:  
1146 N Chinoweth Street  
Visalia, CA 93291

[www.CASATulareCo.org](http://www.CASATulareCo.org) | [info@CASATulareCo.org](mailto:info@CASATulareCo.org) | 559-625-4007

Porterville Location:  
93 N Main Street, Ste C  
Porterville, CA 93257