

Welcome to our two new board members

The CASA Board of Directors welcomed two new board members in April.



Carolina Evangelo

Caroline Evangelo is the owner of Evangelo Marketing & PR, specializing in agriculture and non-profit communications. She co-chaired our Once Upon A Dream gala last fall.



Sarah Perry

Sarah Perry is a recent transplant to Tulare County and is employed by Kaweah Health as a physician contract manager. She was very involved with CASA in Gillette, Wyoming.

Exeter Mural Tour

The Exeter Chamber of Commerce has graciously extended an invitation to all CASA volunteers and their kiddos to enjoy a free, private walking tour of the amazing murals in downtown Exeter.

The docent-led tour will begin at 10 a.m. on Saturday, May 14, and will include a light lunch. Advocates can call the CASA office at 625-4007 to reserve their spot.

Long-time advocate celebrates 90th birthday

Pierre Gaston has been a volunteer at CASA for 24 years. As one of the longest — and certainly the oldest — volunteer, he was honored by CASA staff on his 90th birthday.

Pierre spent his career as a civil engineer in various parts of the West Coast, including 20 years at Synanon, the former drug rehabilitation program in Badger. Although Synanon sometimes had a negative reputation, Pierre was impressed by its non-violent, non-drug philosophy. He helped design the roads and power systems there.

After he retired, friends he knew at CASA asked him to help build a bird house for the Once Upon A Dream auction. Soon after that he became an advocate. He worked with children in 14 or 15 cases before moving to his present job, which is to make sure CASA kids without an advocate are getting all the education services they need.

Often kids in foster care are behind in school and have emotional problems that require special attention.

Six or seven years ago, Pierre learned from a board member how he affected one



Pierre Gaston (center) is feted on his 90th birthday by Melinda Morales Righi, Alberto Ramos, Linda Thomas and Dena Bettencourt.

child. It was his first case, a teen whom he helped get placed in the home the teen wanted, after bouncing from foster home to foster home.

The board member ran into the former foster teen in a store. The former teen saw the board member's CASA pin and told him, "CASA was good to me. My CASA saved my life."

Pierre also likes being

a storyteller for kids at the library and at ImagineU Children's Museum. He has helped his son, Andre, who volunteers with Happy Trails Riding Academy, which provides therapy for children and adults with disabilities.

"I just can't not do it," Pierre says simply. "The need is there, and I'm able."

Advocate moves toward permanency

There was a time in Carl Lockridge's life, almost 20 years ago, when he considered adopting a child. He was approved by Los Angeles County in Lancaster where he was living and was in the process of getting his house ready for a child.

But a divorce threw him into "survival mode." He moved to a new community and, as he says, "it all faded away."

About a year ago, on his way home from church services, he heard a CASA recruitment ad for volunteer advocates to train, and it all came rushing back. He called the CASA office, left a message and waited for the return call. It came the next day from Coordinator Michele Palermo, who worked quickly to enroll Carl in the advocate training series that began that day.

Within a few weeks he was assigned to his first case, an 11-year-old boy who had one older sibling placed in a group home, and another younger sibling living in a resource home, both in other cities. The boy really had almost no connection to his siblings.

In the beginning, Carl said he just wanted to build a friendship, give the boy the time and opportunity to talk, to get away from his normal routine, and try not to think beyond that.

Although other resource parents encouraged him to consider fostering, he said he only wanted to do the job CASA trained him for and to focus on the boy.

They developed a happy routine of weekly visits and getting to know one another until one day when it seems all the adults in the boy's life — his teacher, the principal, his counselor, even his resource parents — were fed up with the boy's negative behaviors. Without batting an eye, Carl added dinner to the weekly meet-up.



Carl and the son he is seeking guardianship of enjoy "fishing" in Carl's backyard koi fish pond.

During dinner, Carl gently talked about the changes that needed to happen. Later, the boy told Carl, "You would be a good foster parent," but Carl asked, "Who would I foster?" When the boy replied, "Me," Carl had to explain that fostering wasn't in his plan. But permanency was.

"He got all excited, because that's what he wanted, too," Carl said. In April, Carl resigned his role as advocate to pursue becoming the boy's guardian, a step closer to adoption.

Carl says he's excited, but not nervous about his future with the boy, because of his faith in God. Carl's hope is that the boy can one day share his story with others to inspire kids in foster care that life can be wonderful if you persevere.

"He says I rescued him, but he rescued me," said Carl.

Message from our Executive Director Alberto Ramos

As we near the end of our fiscal year, I find myself reflecting on everything that goes into making sure that CASA of Tulare County fulfills its mission of serving those children who are the innocent victims of abuse and neglect. And I'm so grateful for all the support we get from you, our community.



Our volunteers do the sometimes challenging but always rewarding work of connecting with the children we serve, by meeting them where they are and listening to their needs — then making sure their voices are heard in court. It's the personal interactions with the children that keep our volunteers motivated and inspired.

Our staff does so much to support our volunteers, orga-

nizing events for them to share with their kiddos, helping them navigate the child welfare system, listening when they just need an ear. Their daily presence in court ensures we are aware of those children with the greatest need, and that we find the right volunteer to help.

Finding the resources to keep it all moving forward is a challenge for any nonprofit, but we are fortunate at CASA to have supporters like you who share our vision of seeing that our kids' basic physical and emotional needs are met. We are inspired by your generosity and commitment to our kids, and we do our best to be worthy of your support, by recruiting trusted volunteers and delivering our message across the county.

Thank you for all you do to support CASA of Tulare County. Your generosity truly makes it possible for all of us, together, to "Change a Child's Story."

Story from an advocate

CASA coordinator wins an ‘Oscar’ from advocate and her ‘boys’

The volunteer advocates under CASA Coordinator Leyhai Pineda’s supervision often request an appointment with her to ask for guidance, or to offer thanks for support she has provided. So when advocate Noelle Lanpher telephoned recently asking for time to meet with her, Leyhai made an appointment and thought no more about it. All Noelle had said was that the boys assigned to her had something they wanted to give her.

The boys, ages 5 and 7, had been assigned to Noelle for about a year. They had been removed from their home and placed together in a resource home that was doing a good

job of helping them work through some disruptive behaviors. Despite some occasional setbacks, the boys were making slow, steady gains.

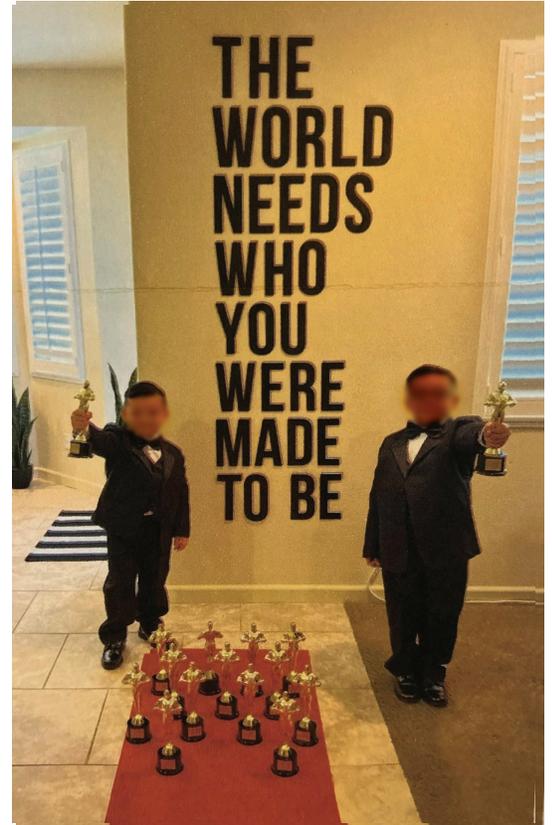
The two had recently received a pair of bicycles assembled and donated by the Tulare County Association of Realtors (see bike building story below). Leyhai thought perhaps a thank-you card was on its way.

Instead, when Noelle arrived at the CASA office in Visalia, she delivered a personalized letter and photo on behalf of Amber Turner, the boys’ resource mom. Included was an Oscar-style statuette from the “Turner Academy of Awesomeness” for “Best Advocate Everrr” because, after all, it is awards season. Oscar, Emmy, Webb — and CASA!

The letter read, in part, “here in the Turner house, we... want to roll out the red carpet and honor all those who have been working and serving these precious boys.”

Amber Turner included a photo of the boys, wearing mini tuxedos, standing on the red carpet and waving to the camera.

Did Leyhai cry? “Oh, yes,” she said. “I just had this feeling of ‘wow.’”



The boys, with Amber’s assistance, had assembled a trove of statuettes for all the people who are working with them and supporting them in foster care, including their social workers, therapists, teachers, doctors and nurses, and others.



Realtors compete to earn ‘parts’ to build bicycles for CASA kids



Realtors are probably among the most competitive business professionals and, judging by the recent team-building retreat for the Tulare County Association of Realtors, competition is not only a way for them to have fun, it also serves a purpose.

CASA of Tulare County was honored to receive the fruits of their team-building efforts — a bike-building event for kids in foster care — and five new bikes!

A group of TCAOR board members and leaders gathered at the Avila Resort Golf Course in San Luis Obispo the weekend of Feb. 25-27 and competed in teams to “earn” the parts to assemble five bikes — such as building a marshmallow structure and carrying a tennis ball with strings. They built some awesome bikes and some pretty great memories for some lucky CASA kids!

Thanks to the fun-loving and competitive team at TCAOR for putting kids first and making a difference in their lives!

March on Main kicks off Child Abuse Prevention Month

Garden Street Plaza was a sea of blue on the morning of Saturday, March 26, as dozens of supporters — wearing blue shirts and carrying blue balloons — walked Visalia’s Main Street to kick off Child Abuse Prevention Month.

The event partnered CASA with the Tulare County Child Abuse Prevention Council and featured community booths, food vendors, an interactive drum circle and lots of information about how to spot and prevent child abuse in the community.

“We were so glad to be able to work with the team at CAPC to bring back this event,” CASA’s executive director Alberto Ramos said. “It’s important that people are able to recognize child abuse and know that it can happen at all economic levels.”

Tulare County Supervisor Eddie Valero was among the featured speakers to formally proclaim April as Child Abuse Prevention Month.

The kick-off event put the spotlight on child abuse pre-



vention which includes The Lisa Project going on the road to inform and educate the public.

The Lisa Project, a 10-minute walk-through interactive experience that tells child abuse experiences, was available for the public to view at Woodlake High School and the Tulare County Office of Education Resource Fair.

What’s new at CASA

Give a gift

The CASA offices in Visalia and Porterville are great resources for advocates who may need to give a gift or an item of clothing to a child assigned to them. Birthdays and other special occasions occur, but sometimes a child just needs a mood lift — like the rest of us! Most recently, thank you to Project Linus for donating beautiful knitted and quilted blankets.

Advocates are encouraged to take these items to their CASA kids.

New advocates

Congratulations and welcome to our newest advocates who were sworn in March 9. This class was our return to in-person training, and it was a pleasure to see their faces every week! The next time you see one of them, offer a handshake or a pat on the

back. They deserve it! Pictured below left are Marcie Martorana, Kerry Orozco, Crystal Molina, Ariana Martin, Nathan Richmond, Teri Lewis, Laura Ruiz, Elle Farias, Ruth Marquez, Florinda Herrera and Luis Sanchez. Not pictured: Sylvie Robillard.

Newest staff member

Joe Iniguez became an intern at CASA last July. He had always wanted to become a CASA but hadn’t had time with school and work. In December he received his bachelor’s degree in social work from Fresno Pacific University.

By January, he was the newly-hired 0-5 advocate coordinator. Welcome, Joe!

Advocate training begins May 9

There has been a change in our training schedule, which now takes place from 5:30-7:30 p.m. on Mondays and Thursdays, in person at the Visalia office. The next class begins Monday, May 9. If you know someone who would make a great CASA, please let them know. More information on becoming a CASA is at [https:// www.castatulareco.org/what-is-a-casa](https://www.castatulareco.org/what-is-a-casa).

Wellness Fair

Just in time for back to school, CASA is partnering with Adventist Health in Tulare to host a Wellness Fair on July 23 at their newest clinic at 2059 N. Hillman St. Come check out their new clinic and see what services they offer.

