



Join the Superhero Run!

Sign up now for CASA's 5th Annual SuperHero Run from 8-noon on Saturday, Oct. 29 at Live Oak Park and the Santa Fe Trail in Tulare.

All ages and abilities are welcome. Besides the 5K and 1K walk/run, there will be carnival games, food, prizes and medals.

The course is flat and fast for runners. Bring the family and make a day of it.

If you'd like to place a booth at the event, contact Melinda Morales Righi at 559-625-4007.

Dinner & auction

Although the NGC Construction golf tournament benefitting CASA is full, there is still plenty of room for those who want to attend the dinner and dance with live band and auction.

Call Dena at the CASA office at 559 625-4007 to reserve your table.

'Magic happens' for youth at YMCA Camp

CASA youth got to spend a day mastering a ROPES (Repetitive Obstacle Performance Evaluation System) course, hiking, swimming and kayaking at the YMCA Camp at Lake Sequoia in July thanks to CASA's partnership with Sequoia Riverlands Trust.

The youth had a great time and didn't want to come home but, maybe more importantly, they made friends.

"When they can get together, that's when the magic happens," said Joe Iniguez, a CASA staff member who accompanied the youth. "They feel a sense of camaraderie, knowing the other kids are going through the same things they are."

Many of the 11-to 17-year-olds were scared to try balancing and zip lining on the ROPES course, but with encouragement all tried it.

"I'm afraid of heights," said one participant. "But all my friends were doing it, and I ended up doing it twice!"

The youth has attended several of the Sequoia



CASA youth brave the ROPES course during their trip to Lake Sequoia.

Riverlands Trust outings to Kaweah Oaks Preserve and Dry Creek.

"I've made a lot of good friends," he said. "I was very antisocial and kept to myself, but the kids there are so nice and help me be more social."

Two siblings who hadn't seen each other in a couple of months attended and went kayak-

ing together.

Trying out canoes and kayaks was a first experience for many, and several of them had to learn how to use the paddles.

Experiences like this help CASA youth open up and feel comfortable, said Rosa Rodriguez from CASA.

They all asked, "When are we doing this again!?"

CASA board member creates scholarship for former foster child

When CASA board member Dr. Preeti Verma said she would like to give a scholarship to a foster child going on to college, CASA began looking for the perfect candidate. It turned out to be Kim Arreola, who is pursuing her bachelor's degree in Sociology at Grand Canyon University.

"When I met her, I saw the determination to achieve something and give back to the community, so I told her that I will put her through as much school as she needs as long as she stays on task," said Dr. Verma.

Kim had a tough childhood. She lived in multiple foster homes, always changing schools and friends. She endured abuse and lived in survival mode.

"Despite these challenges, I graduated early with my high school diploma and understood the importance of education," Kim said. "I later earned my associate's degree, as well as completing my A.A. in Communication Studies, Elementary Teaching Preparation and Social Behavioral Science from College of the Sequoias."

Kim wrote in her scholarship application, "Only 3% of foster youth decide to pursue higher education. This staggeringly low statistic serves to motivate me to conquer my educational goals, which include not only my B.S. degree but also to earn my master's in social work to become a [licensed clinical social worker]."

Kim works part-time as a peer support specialist for Tulare County Office of Education/Foster Youth Services and Behavioral Health Services. She also provides training for



Dr. Preeti Verma presents a college scholarship to Kim Arreola.

foster parents to become licensed.

Dr. Verma said she and her family are happy to provide educational opportunities to Kim.

"We feel that by doing that we cannot only improve their life but also their next generations, and they can hopefully come out of the poverty line. I am glad that I have the ability to change her life for the better and help her achieve her goals," she said.

Message from our Executive Director Alberto Ramos

The saying "When one door closes, another one opens" was certainly true this summer here at CASA. Postponing our annual Once Upon A Dream gala meant that we could say "Yes!" to a proposal from our neighbors at NGC Construction.

Last year, NGC Construction owner Julio Mendoza launched a major golf tournament and invited all their building-industry buddies to join them on the course. The objective: Raise money for a worthy nonprofit. This year, CASA of Tulare County is the nonprofit that will benefit from the proceeds of the tournament play, and we are in awe of their generosity.

The two-day event — presented by NGC Construction, D.R. Horton Builders and CVC Concrete — includes a dinner/dance/auction at Rancho Espinoza on Badger Hill on Aug. 28 and tournament play at the Visalia Country Club on Aug. 29.

The golf tournament sold out quickly, and we are pretty



impressed at how quickly these builders are getting things done.

There is still time to register to attend the dinner dance at the beautiful Rancho Espinoza at Badger Hill. Liquid Blue, an indie band from San Diego, will play dance music. Silent and live auction items are impressive, including a weekend at a private residence in Palm Springs, Chargers and Dodgers tickets and an electric bike.

There is still time to buy tickets for the dinner and dance which are \$125 per person or \$1,000 for a table of eight. Contact Dena Bettencourt at the CASA office at 559-625-4007 to buy yours.

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Russell P. Burke, an attorney at Williams, Brodersen, Pritchett & Burke LLP in Visalia, was voted in as president of the Board of Directors of CASA on July 1. He succeeds Brian Albertoni, who now serves as immediate past president.

Other new officers are Dr. Preeti Verma, 1st vice president, and Enrique Benavides, 2nd vice president.

Family Connections finds aunt who is happy to reconnect and adopt

We know children do better when they have family connections. It is important to know there are relatives who care.

That is the goal of the Family Connections program at CASA. They search to find relatives so that our CASA kids can have some kind of relationship with them. When relatives are found, usually the connections are visits, phone calls or birthday celebrations. It's very unusual when a relative wants to take in the child.

But that is what happened for Elly (not her real name). Elly is the oldest of six siblings. They had all stayed with their Aunt Maria at one time when they were still with their mother. Now they were in two resource (foster) homes.

Because the mother and Maria had a falling out, the mother didn't list Maria as a relative the kids might want to connect with. Leyhai Pineda from Family Connections contacted the maternal grandmother in southern California who said there were no family members in Tulare County. Leyhai later learned the mother and Maria did not get along well while she was growing up.

But Elly told her CASA, Erin Rohner, that she wanted to go live with her aunt again. She knew her aunt's maiden name and what pizza parlor she worked at. Elly and Maria had an emotional reunion. Maria and her husband have five children themselves and own and operate the pizza parlor,



Maria, Elly and Maria's daughter play games at the CASA office.

but Maria has a big heart. She had a tough upbringing and has always reached out to help people.

She went through the process of becoming qualified as a resource home and will be adopting Elly. Maria says in perfect circumstances she would like to adopt all six children, but the other children are in caring homes, and the resource families want to adopt the other children.

Happily, all the resource families have met and understand how important it is for the children to stay in touch, so now all the children can visit each other and will have a "family connection."

Profile of an advocate

Former foster child becomes a CASA volunteer to make a positive impact

Lisa Aguirre teaches third grade at Ivanhoe Elementary School and has done what many other teachers do when they come across a student whose needs are great: they buy the shoes or share a lunch, whatever it takes to help.

But Lisa says, "It never seemed like I was doing enough."

Lisa had spent 10 years in the foster care system in various counties in California, ending up as a teenager in Tulare County when she was emancipated at age 18. She was separated from some of her siblings and moved a lot, and her experience was "very negative." But one of her siblings had a CASA that she spoke very highly of, and Lisa never forgot.

When COVID-19 hit and she found herself teaching



from home, Lisa started thinking again about CASA. "I knew the work they did and seeing how adults could make a positive impact was the kind of memory that I always held on to."

She made the call and is assigned to a case with a child who identifies as a male. The journey for this child is not an easy one, but Lisa believes her role is to accept and support in any way she can.

"I'm trying to learn along with him as he is on this path to really figure out who he is. It's been neat to learn."

Lisa recently brought her two young sons with her when she donated 20 "Sweet Cases" (duffel bags) to help CASA foster youth in transition. When children in foster care are moved to a new home, the move often comes with very little notice, and personal belongings are usually stuffed into trash bags with little regard.

With the help of nonprofit Together We Rise, Lisa and her boys are determined to make "No More Trash Bags" a reality for children in foster care. We think she makes a wonderful role model for her children and our kiddos.



Advocate Coordinator Lacey Howard helps advocate Tonya Pollard gather gifts for Tonya's CASA child.

Advocates go 'shopping' for donated presents to give to their CASA kids

You could say that “Christmas in June” met “Back to School” in the conference room at CASA, because the shopping day we held on June 24 gave our volunteer advocates the opportunity to select items for their kiddos for both occasions.

CASA staff created a “shoppers paradise” of sorts by moving donated items out into the open and giving advocates shopping bags and instructions to choose needed items, whether it was backpacks and school supplies or teddy bears and warm pajamas.

CASA pulled out all the stops, arranging toys and gifts by interest level and age, then provided carry-out service and even served coffee and doughnuts to shoppers. The only thing lacking was Christmas Muzak or perhaps Santa. But there's always next year...

As always, our donors make fun days like this possible, so thank you to our supporters!

“Our advocates told us they were really glad to be able to get a head start on their gift giving this year,” said Advocate Coordinator Lacey Howard.

What's new at CASA

Advocate news

CASA has welcomed two new advocates to the team. Karri Tandy and Citlalli Santiago were sworn in June 29 by The Honorable Hugo Loza.



Karri Tandy

Karri is a Human Resources specialist with a local staffing firm and has two adult children.

Citlalli recently graduated college with a bachelor's degree in Sociology.

Please make them feel welcome the next time you see them.



Citalli Santiago

We are just about to wrap up another successful training class and swear in some new advocates in September, and we are pretty impressed with the caliber of volunteers CASA attracts. If you know someone who might be a good advocate, our next training class begins Oct. 17 and will wrap up before the holidays get into full swing. Refer them to www.casatulareco.org to learn more.

These dolls need a home

Our CASA advocates know a thing or two about the value of good homes, so we're hoping one of you can help us find good homes for a large donation of dolls we recently received from the Tulare Historical Museum.

These dolls, about five dozen Cabbage Patch Kids, are in need of a bit of TLC. Mostly, however, they could use an advocate with a creative heart to help us match them up with kiddos. If you've got a great idea, please contact Melinda Morales Righi at 625-4007.



Several of Adventist Health's newest residents provided services at the Wellness Day on July 23. Here they get ready to welcome patients.

Wellness Day at Adventist Health Tulare

CASA of Tulare County partnered with Adventist Health Tulare for Wellness Day on July 23 at its newest Tulare clinic on Hillman Street. The event was an opportunity for medical residents at Adventist Health to meet the community they serve by providing basic services and wellness checks.

Slumber Academy In-Service

Learn ways to help your kids fall asleep and stay asleep at the next advocate in-service scheduled for 6 p.m. on Wednesday, Sept. 7 at the CASA office in Visalia.

Call Outreach Coordinator Araceli Espinoza at 559-625-4007 to register to attend.