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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Judge Shawna Schwarz Awarded National CASA “Judge of the Year” Award *Child Advocates of Silicon Valley Presents VR Project at National CASA Conference*



MILPITAS, CA, June 3, 2019 – The National CASA Association has presented Judge Shawna Schwarz with the Honorable David W. Soukup Judge of the year award for her work on behalf of children in the Santa Clara County dependency system. Judge Schwarz received the award Monday at the National CASA Conference in Atlanta, GA. As the Supervising Judge for the Juvenile Dependency Court of Santa Clara County Superior Court, National CASA noted that Judge Schwarz has positively impacted the lives of thousands of children and their families from both inside and outside the court room by going above and beyond her duties as a judicial officer. The theme of this year’s conference focuses on building stronger families to achieve better outcomes for

children in the child welfare system.

In a letter to National CASA supporting Judge Schwarz’s nomination for Judge of the Year, Santa Clara County Supervisor Cindy Chavez stated that Judge Schwarz is the consummate advocate for the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer program operated by Child Advocates of Silicon Valley.

Judge Schwarz has worked tirelessly as an advocate for children in foster care over her 18 years of service on the bench. She has volunteered her time to help train volunteers at Child Advocates’ training classes and attend numerous swearing-in ceremonies for graduating CASAs. Judge Schwarz is well known for her detailed yet accessible trainings that she personally developed and delivers.

“Recently, Judge Schwarz co-hosted an event at my home to recruit CASA volunteers, recognizing their value to the court and to the clients for whom they advocate,” Chavez remarked. “She uses her platform to educate, train and inform. Santa Clara County is known for its innovation and advocacy in improving outcomes for youth and their families. This is due to the leadership exemplified by Judge Schwarz.”

Judge Schwarz has received numerous accolades for her work enhancing the lives and wellbeing of Santa Clara County families. She has been named Juvenile Dependency Judger of the year by her colleagues and recognized as Woman Judge of the Year by the Santa Clara County Bar Association.

Child Advocates of Silicon Valley's CEO Frederick J. Ferrer was at the ceremony when Judge Schwarz was presented the award.

"Santa Clara County is known for its innovation and advocacy in improving outcomes for youth and their families. This is due to the leadership exemplified by Judge Schwarz," explained Ferrer. Ferrer said Judge Schwarz lent her court room to Child Advocates' when the agency filmed a virtual reality video this past year to help funders and potential volunteers better understand the issues facing foster youth in our community.

Ferrer presented the VR project and an accompanying board game called "FosterLand" at the National CASA conference on Monday, June 2. The VR video "A Walk in My Shoes" and FosterLand board game--where a role of the dice can determine a foster youth's fate--provides participants with an appreciation of the challenges many children face in foster care.

"By creating a virtual experience and board game that shows potential funders and volunteers a typical day in the life of a foster child, we can generate empathy and interest in one of our community's most vulnerable populations that largely goes unnoticed in affluent Silicon Valley," Ferrer explained. "Moving forward, our goal is to develop a product that can be shared and leveraged with partners and other CASA agencies."

The VR project was made possible by a grant from the David and Lucile Packard and Heising-Simons foundations. In Santa Clara County, there are approximately 1,500 children in the dependency care. In fiscal year 2018, Child Advocates provided CASAs to 905 dependent children and youth. Child Advocates has a three-year strategic plan to serve 1,200 children with a CASA by 2022.

About Child Advocates of Silicon Valley

Child Advocates was founded in 1986 and has served more than 16,000 foster children with a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). Child Advocates is the only agency in Santa Clara County that provides CASAs to foster youth. Because our volunteers are court-appointed, they can thoroughly research every aspect of a child's case, including meeting teachers, doctors, social workers, counselors, biological family members and foster parents, thereby gaining a comprehensive perspective on what the child needs in order to thrive. CASAs assist their child in accessing needed resources, follow their school progress, and speak up for their child's best interests in court. They maintain records about the case, submit reports and attend court hearings. CASA volunteers stay with their case until their child has a safe, loving home. Find out more about our CASA program at www.BeMyAdvocate.org.

About National CASA

The National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association, together with its state and local member programs, supports and promotes court-appointed volunteer advocacy so every abused or neglected child in the United States can be safe, have a permanent home and have the opportunity to thrive. There are nearly 950 programs in 49 states with more than 85,000 dedicated volunteers serving more than 260,000 children annually. More information can be found at www.casaforchildren.org.

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