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Child Advocates Awards 10 College Scholarships to Foster Youth at Annual Teen Event *Former Foster Youth and Recent College Graduate Encourages Teens to Attend College*

“Congratulations Graduate!” That phrase is often taken for granted by many teens, but for a youth in foster care, that salutation is a huge accomplishment.

That’s because only about 58% of foster youth in California complete high school. According to Karen Scussel, executive director of Child Advocates of Silicon Valley, having a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) makes all the difference.

“With the support of our CASA volunteers, our foster teens fare much better. For the past several years, over 80% of our youth have completed high school and the vast majority of them continue their education via college or vocational programs.”

Eighteen of Child Advocates’ high school seniors celebrated this rite of passage at the annual Teen Celebration event held May 20 at [Silver Creek Valley Country Club](#). As recognition of their accomplishment, each youth received a laptop computer and **10 youths received a \$1,000 scholarship** to assist them as they transition to college. The laptops were provided by donations from [Sleep Train](#) and the [Summit League](#). [Sathya Sai Baba Group](#) provided each youth with a gift bag that included a journal, flash drive and other school supplies to support their education.

“Having a caring, consistent adult in a foster teen’s life that encourages that teen to complete high school and help them develop a plan to attend college is really a life altering experience for our foster youth,” Scussel says. “Without someone helping them excel academically, many foster youth don’t see the importance of even finishing high school. When they turn 21 and no longer receive financial assistance from the state, some of these former foster youth end up living in poverty or become homeless. We help them see that education is the key to success.”

Rita, a former foster youth who recently graduated from San Jose State was the guest speaker at the event. She recounted her post-secondary educational experience, underscoring the importance of perseverance and resiliency.

“I was 19 and a single mother. I could have used the fact that I had a baby and needed to work as an excuse to not go to school but I started slowly with a photography class. When I had doubts and wanted to quit my CASA volunteer encouraged me to stay in school and just keep going. So my advice to you is to just start somewhere. Make college something you just do. It took me many years but I never gave up. You can do the same.”

The youth and their CASA volunteers also enjoyed a delicious dinner and dessert, portrait photographs courtesy of [Now and Forever Studios](#) and music provided by [DJ Lonzo](#). Several graduates enjoyed dancing with their peers, their CASAs and [Santa Clara County Superior Court Judge, Shawna Schwarz](#).

About Child Advocates of Silicon Valley

Child Advocates of Silicon Valley recruits, trains and supports Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) who serve the needs of children in the foster care system by providing a powerful, independent voice for the child. These dedicated community volunteers spend time with a child and become a trusted friend, mentor, and consistent adult presence. They work with foster parents, teachers, social workers, counselors, and others to build a complete picture of the child's life and needs. CASAs attend hearings in dependency court to advise the judge on the child's best interests when key decisions are being made. The CASA volunteers stay with their case until their child has a safe, loving home.

Child Advocates was founded in 1986 by a dependency court judge and a social worker. The agency was modeled after the original Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program, developed by a dependency court judge who recognized the need for children in court to be represented by an impartial advocate who could speak on behalf of the child.

Find out more about our CASA program at www.BeMyAdvocate.org.

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