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## **CHILD ADVOCATES OF SILICON VALLEY CELEBRATES 2015 NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK**

*Four Volunteers Recognized for their Outstanding Work on Behalf of Foster Children*

Milpitas, CA – April 6, 2015 –Volunteers who dedicate their time, talents and energy to improve the lives of foster children in Santa Clara County will be honored by Child Advocates of Silicon Valley during National Volunteer Week (April 12-18, 2015). The weeklong celebration pays special tribute to volunteers across the country that give of themselves to better their communities and the lives of others.

Child Advocates recruits, trains and supports Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) to work one-on-one with foster children ensuring that their lives are filled with guidance, support and hope. In 2014, more than 480 CASA volunteers donated 52,000 hours of time to serve more than 630 foster children.

“CASAs are a powerful voice for children in foster care, ensuring that a child’s emotional and educational needs are met,” says Karen Scussel, executive director of Child Advocates of Silicon Valley. “Less than 60% of children in foster care in California graduate from high school. But with a CASA in their life, 83% of our foster youth complete high school and a majority of those graduates continue or plan to continue their education after high school.”

### Four volunteers recognized for their outstanding work

#### Shirley Cantu, Board Secretary

Shirley is being recognized by the Junior League of San Jose on April 24<sup>th</sup> for her outstanding board participation. She has been a board member for nine years and the board secretary for the past three years. She serves on the board executive and HR committees and brings wisdom, experience and leadership to the discussions and decisions. Shirley states, “Child Advocates is an excellent evidence based program that makes a difference in a child’s life. I’m honored to support and guide the organization and its amazing CASA volunteers.”

#### Dawn Pratt, CASA Volunteer

Dawn was honored by the Los Altos Community Foundation on March 26<sup>th</sup> for her tireless commitment to foster children. She has advocated for six boys over the four years she’s been a CASA, providing nearly 1,500 hours of service. Dawn does an amazing job of ensuring each child receives the emotional and educational services they need to thrive. She makes sure that each child's voice is heard as they navigate the chaos of the dependency court system. "I enjoy being a CASA; this privilege makes me feel truly blessed. The CASA children equally make my life much richer and rewarding." Dawn says of her CASA experience.



Dan Ela, CASA Volunteer

Dan is being recognized by the Junior League of San Jose on April 24<sup>th</sup> for his dedicated and zealous work with foster youth. He is simultaneously guiding the activities of four young men in foster care as they transition from their teens into adulthood. Dan closely monitors their progress and relentlessly pursues each and every resource available to these young adults for their career and personal development. "I think what has been the most rewarding for me is the sense of security that having a CASA has given to the kids. It's someone to clear a path for them when they don't see a way around an obstacle or someone to call late at night when they need to talk," Dan says of his CASA experience.

Douglas Heath, Case Assessment Program (CAP) Volunteer

Douglas is being recognized by the Junior League of San Jose on April 24<sup>th</sup> for his dedication to serving youth in the community. After two years as a CASA working with two boys, Douglas transitioned to assisting in the CASA office. Douglas is one of our original Case Assessment Program (CAP) volunteers, reviewing new dependency cases to determine whether a child will benefit from a CASA. Rain or shine, Douglas rides the bus for an hour, and then walks a mile to reach our office on his volunteer days. Douglas states of his time volunteering, "Baha'u'llah said our purpose is to be of service to others. Having had a good life and being retired, it only seems right to give back to society. The children are all of our responsibility. I hope that in some small way my service at the Child Advocates' office helps improve their lives."

[View our slideshow](#) honoring our many dedicated volunteers.

Persons interested in becoming a CASA volunteer can find more information at [www.BeMyAdvocate.org](http://www.BeMyAdvocate.org)

#### *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.

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