

April, 2016

Dear CASA Friends,

When children are not safe or well-cared for in their own homes, they enter foster care so they can heal from trauma and either return home or find a safe and permanent home. But the foster care system fails some children who are shuttled from home to home. Often social workers, therapists and teachers change with each move.

When a child is struggling with loneliness and repeated rejection, a CASA Volunteer's consistent and caring support is a critical source of comfort and hope. We are writing to share the story of Alison, a compassionate and tenacious CASA volunteer who dedicated five years to helping a child, Mia, find her forever home.

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When Mia was removed from her home, the social worker described her as an affectionate preschooler who wore dirty clothes and whose face was covered with bug bites. Mia reported that she ate popcorn for breakfast and dinner and that her Mom's boyfriend choked her mother, "I fight him back, but not all the time." Mia had a handprint on her back from a beating but the emotional scars were far more devastating.

As a result of her trauma, Mia had adopted some challenging behaviors, including bed wetting and compulsive eating. Foster family after foster family would tire of her tantrums and give up on her, leaving Mia feeling sad and unwanted.

It seemed people came into Mia's life only to say good-bye until she met her CASA volunteer. Alison took the time to discover an intelligent little girl who loved books, animals and making dinner. Most importantly, Alison was not put off by Mia's tantrums. When others saw an irreversibly damaged child, Alison saw a little girl who wanted to please others and was capable of great love and affection.

Alison taught Mia appropriate coping skills, like squeezing a soft teddy bear whenever she was upset. With each weekly visit from Alison, Mia's tantrums decreased and her zest for life increased. A former teacher, Alison fought to get Mia special services at school to address her speech delays and rewarded Mia with stickers for completing extra worksheets. Alison opened up Mia's world with trips to museums and the theater and introduced her to equine therapy which Mia found calming.

For the past five tumultuous years, Alison has been a constant, serving tirelessly as mentor, advocate and friend as Mia changed foster homes nine times. Recently, Alison told Mia that she would be placed in a "forever home" but Mia was skeptical. "I'm afraid that they won't keep me," the ten-year-old told her CASA. But Mia's social worker reported that Mia and her family have already created a healthy bond. Mia is enjoying her new family, new school and new big dog.

*"Now Mia can get that strong foundation in her life that has been eluding her since she was toddler,"* Alison wrote in her Court Report. *"Once she digests the fact that this is really her home, she will become more grounded and able to find success in life."*

The goal of our Annual Campaign is \$120,000 which will give 48 foster children the gift of a Court Appointed Special Advocate. We have raised \$15,000 to date from the leadership contributions of 100% of our Board. We have also received a generous matching gift of \$10,000 from Colleen and Geoff Tate. This gift will be available through the end of our campaign, which culminates in a day of giving -- Silicon Valley Gives on **May 3<sup>rd</sup>**.

A donation of any amount is appreciated. But, if you can support a child for 6 months with a gift of \$1,250, you will become part of a special circle as a **Heartfelt Friend**. Benefits include an invitation to the Annual Heartfelt Friends Appreciation Event and recognition as a Heartfelt Friend on the CASA website and at CASA events.

Please make your fully tax-deductible gift to the Annual Campaign today by returning the enclosed envelope or donating online at: [www.CASAofSanMateo.org/donate](http://www.CASAofSanMateo.org/donate).

Children who have had endured trauma and experienced significant loss need someone special to help them heal and thrive. By helping us recruit and train more CASA Volunteers, we can ensure that other children like Mia will not feel alone -- ***Because every child needs someone who cares.***

Sincerely,



Patricia Miljanich, JD  
Executive Director



Anne Steiner  
Board President