## Child Advocates Of Contra Costa CountyNon-Profit Organization: CASA

## 2019 Impact Grant Award: $108,000

## Project Title: CASA Therapy Project

## Focus Area: Health & Wellness

## Description: The CASA Therapy Project addressed the problem of inadequate mental health care for Contra Costa County foster youth. The project aimed to overcome critical barriers that youth in foster care face in accessing mental health care, including long wait times, frequent relocations, transportation challenges, and eligibility limitations under Medi-Cal. Child Advocates of Contra Costa (CACCC) partnered with licensed mental health professionals, who offered their services, free of charge,  to offer teletherapy that ensures foster youth can access timely, high-quality, and consistent therapeutic support.Previously, youth could wait a year or more for therapy unless it was deemed “medically necessary.” Now,every youth in foster care and those who have exited the system over age 12 can begin therapy within three weeks (our demand has increased greatly since we were funded by Impact 100)—and continue with the same therapist even if they move or have no transportation to an office visit, thanks to the online format. A significant advantage was the program's existing teletherapy infrastructure when the COVID-19 pandemic struck. This ensured zero disruption in services, with youth continuing therapy regardless of lockdowns or relocations.

**Results:** This “proof of concept” project allowed Child Advocates of Contra Costa County (CACCC) to implement its mental health delivery model; identify and enroll licensed therapists who provided their services pro bono; secure funding for a gold-standard, Randomized Controlled Trial evaluation; and attract more than $1 million in support to continue and expand services. During the grant period, CACCC enrolled more than 60 licensed therapists and matched them to more than 60 youth in foster care. Both the number of therapists and the number of youth served were almost three times the figures originally targeted by the project.
Project leaders also learned an important lesson that will further advance their work on this and other projects. They concluded that hiring highly experienced project managers to run projects is more important than hiring or assigning individuals with specific content knowledge. Other talented team members can
supply needed content knowledge, thereby supporting an accomplished project manager.

## Quote/Testimony: One story that exemplifies the transformation achieved through timely mental health support is “Miguel,” a 17-year-old foster youth who fell into depression during the pandemic. Within 24 hours of being referred, Miguel was matched with a therapist. The ongoing therapy enabled him to graduate high school, find work, and enroll in college—all while continuing care with the same therapist through extended foster care.

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