

# ALLIANCE VOICE

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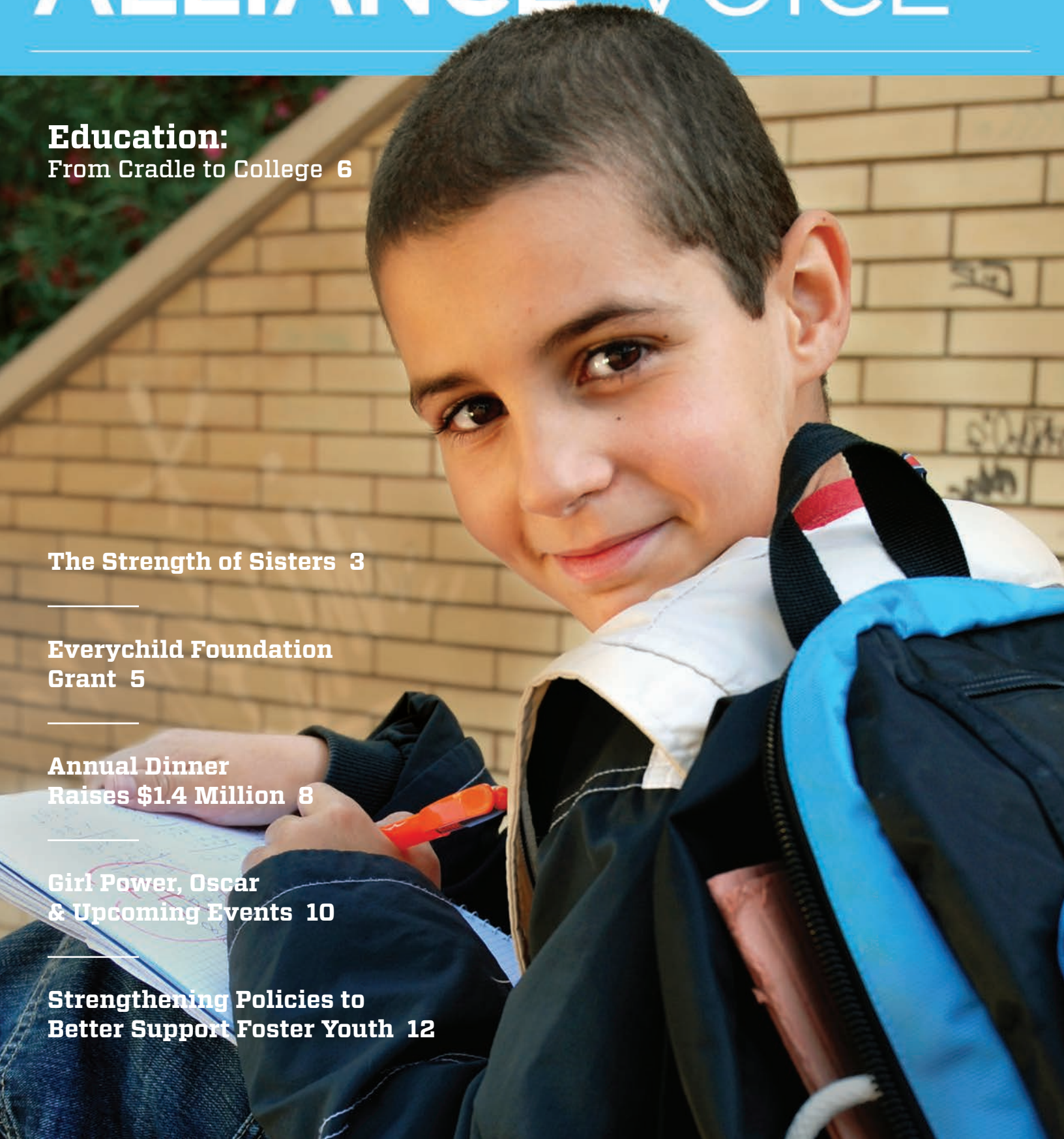
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## A MESSAGE FROM

CEO

# JANIS SPIRE & BART WILLIAMS

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*“There are so many children who get lost in the shuffle and the Alliance really advocates for these children and treats them like individuals. Kids need families and you keep pushing for all kids to have that.”*

-Tiiffany Soto, adoptive mother

Tiffany Soto spoke these words after adopting her nephew, Elijah, from foster care. When Elijah was first removed from his extremely abusive home, Tiffany agreed to take him in but wasn't confident she could provide for him long term. She soon realized that with the Alliance by her side, she could give him what all kids need: family, stability and education.

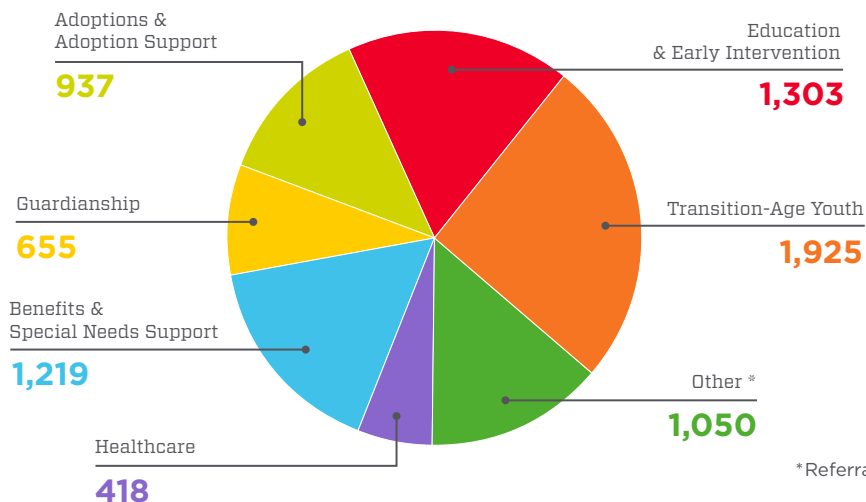
Like the circumstances that lead a child to enter foster care, the needs of kids aren't singular and these issues can tear families apart. As co-recipients of the Everychild Foundation grant, we will ensure that every adopted child, like Elijah, gets the education, mental health counseling and resources needed to help that family succeed.

Our work also brings to light issues that repeatedly prevent children from healing. This is why we are working on statewide policies to better support foster youth in our three focus areas: infants and toddlers, teens and relative caregivers (see page 12).

As we grow and strengthen our programs, we are giving ourselves a facelift. As you can see with this newsletter, we are rolling out a new and refreshed design that will carry us into the next decade as we work for the children who need us most.

We've come so far, but there's still so much work to do. Together we can help improve outcomes one child at a time while implementing systemic change to create a stronger foundation for tomorrow's children. Thank you for your continued support.

## 7,524 children served in 2012



\* Referrals for family law and immigration

# THE STRENGTH OF SISTERS

when their world was flipped upside down, Debra Simms kept her family together

Two years ago, Debra Simms stepped up to parent four children—all sisters ages 5 to 9. The Marshall girls entered the foster care system and came into Ms. Simms' care after experiencing horrific abuse and neglect.

This left Gabby, the youngest sister, with severe speech and language delays. Our Education Program successfully worked with the school district to increase services, which have greatly improved her communication. Our attorneys also worked to ensure Gabby remained at her school after the family moved, avoiding the disruption that often occurs when a child changes schools.

In December, all of our staff and board members came to know the Marshall girls when they attended our **Adopt-a-Family** event, hosted by Ernst & Young, wearing matching dresses. While this event should have been the beginning of a joyful holiday, tragedy struck one week before Christmas when their rental home accidentally caught fire. While the family escaped unscathed, they lost all of their belongings, including school uniforms, linens, clothing and their beloved Hello Kitty gifts from Adopt-a-Family. Unable to remain in their rental home, the family moved into a friend's small apartment.

When news of the fire broke, the Alliance rallied to support Ms. Simms in her mission to provide the girls with stability amid crisis. Many gave donations while others gave clothes and necessities.

Tragedy struck one week before Christmas when their home accidentally caught fire.

Our staff and an Ernst & Young employee even threw the girls a Hello Kitty party. As the family moves forward, they will have the love and support of their extended Alliance family to help them overcome the continued barriers that stand in their way.



The Marshall girls and Ms. Simms' granddaughter with Mr. and Mrs. Claus at Adopt-a-Family just weeks before their house caught fire

# GREENBERG GLUSKER TAKES ON BANK

now a young woman can start her life

**Thank you Brian,  
Megan and everyone  
from Greenberg  
Glusker!**

Megan Rivetti and Brian Berman ►  
of Greenberg Glusker



When she was 4 years old, Victoria M. was struck by a bus while crossing the street. She sustained extensive injuries, and was awarded more than \$100,000. Due to her age, the money was put in a trust that she could only access after she turned 18. All of this happened before Victoria entered foster care because of her mother's neglect. When she turned 18 and tried to access the funds for school, she hit a road block.

The bank insisted that her mother's signature was required. Victoria's mother had long been out of her life and obtaining her signature was impossible. That's when Victoria turned to the Alliance's NextSTEP Program.

NextSTEP staff enlisted the support of pro bono counsel from long-term supporter Greenberg Glusker. Associates Brian Berman and Megan Rivetti took the case and immediately

*"We understood how this would change Victoria's life completely," says Megan. "She didn't have much in the way of money and was about to be on her own. You could tell how happy and relieved she was."*

began tearing through the bank's extensive red tape. The two showed tremendous dedication to Victoria's case, negotiating with bank tellers, managers and the bank's legal department, during a 5-hour visit to the bank with Victoria at their side.

Brian and Megan were able to eliminate substantial transfer fees that the bank attempted to impose. They also tackled eight levels of state permission in order to secure the majority of the funds that had been tied up in the state comptroller's office as unclaimed money. Greenberg Glusker went above and beyond to achieve a great result for Victoria!



# EVERYCHILD FOUNDATION

\$1 million grant will reach 2,200 children

The Alliance for Children's Rights and Public Counsel will expand on their longstanding relationship and landmark adoption project thanks to a \$1 million grant from the Everychild Foundation.

The **Everychild Foundation Families Forever Project** will support families who adopt children from foster care, or become their legal guardians, with long-term free legal advocacy to access the mental health, education and developmental support their children may need. The Families Forever Project will be the first large-scale project in the nation to provide comprehensive legal and social services to adoptive and guardianship families.

*"It is our hope that it will be a national model showing how the appropriate services can help assure positive outcomes for families who adopt children from foster care."*

-Jackie Caster, Founder and President, Everychild Foundation



## MYTHS ABOUT TEEN ADOPTION DISPELLED

adopted teen explains the facts



Alliance client Cindy de la Torre speaks about getting adopted three days before her 18th birthday in 2010.

**MYTH: TEENS DON'T WANT TO BE ADOPTED.**

**FACT:** It's never too late to have a home and it's never too late to give or receive the love a family can provide.

**MYTH: TEENS ARE NEARLY ADULTS WHO MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS, THEY CAN'T BENEFIT FROM ADOPTION.**

**FACT:** I was adopted three days before my 18th birthday at a critical time as I applied to college. Even though I was technically an adult, I needed the support of a family as I made big decisions about my future.

**MYTH: THE BOND ISN'T THE SAME IF YOU ADOPT A TEENAGER INSTEAD OF A SMALL CHILD.**

**FACT:** I was a teenager when I was adopted, but I have just as strong a bond with my family as any other child. And I probably appreciate them more because I know what it's like to not have them.

The Alliance is part of a statewide committee charged with developing a protocol for youth to be adopted after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

**Upcoming Adoption Days:  
August 2 and November 22,  
National Adoption Day**

◀ (L-R): Public Counsel CEO Hernan Vera, Alliance CEO Janis Spire, Everychild Foundation Founder and President Jackie Caster, Judge Michael Nash, Judge Amy Pellman and actor Willie Garson

# EDUCATION: FROM CRADLE TO COLLEGE

supporting children of all ages and challenges in their academic pursuits

For many foster children, school is the one place they might find stability in a chaotic life. Nearly one half of foster kids have learning disabilities or developmental delays compared to 10-15 percent of children not in the system. Less than 3 percent will graduate from college. Yet, foster children are less likely to receive appropriate child development, mental health and special education services. The Alliance cuts through the red tape to get children what they need to be successful.

## The Earlier Reached the Better

The effects of trauma and abuse can significantly impact a child's healthy development. Research shows that children's brains are rapidly changing before age 5, making it critical to receive early intervention services as soon as possible. Attorneys in our **Saltz Family Early Intervention Advocacy Center** help secure services so young children can reach milestones like taking their first step and beginning to form words like "mama."

When we met 1 ½-year-old Kayla, she could barely walk, was only beginning to babble and was emotionally fragile—crying constantly. She was only receiving limited help with language and motor skills. With pro bono support from Gibson Dunn, the Alliance doubled her occupational, physical and speech therapies and got her enrolled in a specialized preschool. Now, at age 3, Kayla is walking, talking and playing like other kids her age.



▲ Given Kayla's high risk history, her turnaround demonstrates how impactful it is to intervene early





◀ Our case loads are filled with children like Edgar who have so much potential, and with advocacy, they can have a brighter future

## Tackling Learning Differences with Innovation

For many foster children, learning disabilities go undiagnosed throughout their time in school. Caregivers may know something is wrong, but don't know how to help. For children with severe disabilities like 14-year-old Edgar, who has Down Syndrome and is completely non-verbal, there is often little hope for a viable future without appropriate interventions.

When Edgar's parents died, his older sister stepped up to raise him, and with our help, obtained guardianship. When our education team suspected an undiagnosed hearing loss, an evaluation confirmed that suspicion. We helped ensure that Edgar received hearing aids and speech therapy, and got him an iPad with assistive technology. Edgar is thrilled and can now build sentences which the device then speaks for him.

## Special Education Over Criminalization

When a child's emotional and behavioral issues are not addressed at all, they are often considered "problem" youth. These teens are pushed out of school and into the juvenile justice system. If the underlying issues can be resolved by providing tutoring, remedial courses, mental health services and special education, these youth will avoid incarceration and homelessness down the road.

Youth like Sarah, whose childhood of sexual abuse and bullying made her at risk of dropping out of school and turning to a life on the streets. After reviewing Sarah's education records and getting to know her, the Alliance determined that a specialized therapeutic school could address Sarah's mental health needs, help her stay in school and keep her safe from those taunting her.

Through our advocacy with LAUSD, Sarah was enrolled in an appropriate school where she receives individualized attention and counseling to work through her depression and anxiety. Sarah is now excelling in school and on track to graduate.

## SKADDEN FELLOW UPHOLDS EDUCATION RIGHTS

2012 Skadden Fellow, Paige Fern, Esq. joined the Alliance team to ensure that Los Angeles youth have every opportunity to succeed in school and stay on track to graduate.

Paige met 16-year-old Stephanie through our program for pregnant and parenting teens. A high school junior, Stephanie is a single mother with above average grades and high SAT scores. Stephanie's high school counselor encouraged her to leave high school and get her diploma under a special law. Paige stepped in to help Stephanie weigh her options. Together, they decided the better decision for her and her child, was to stay in high school so she could apply to a four-year university. Stephanie is a smart and responsible youth who needed someone to help her make an informed decision and who will be there to advocate if and when she needs it.



Through her fellowship, Paige is also working with the First Star Academy at UCLA as an education advocate for 30 high school sophomores who are in foster care. She will provide guidance and advocacy as they hit obstacles on their path to higher education.

# A DINNER TO REMEMBER

\$1.4 million raised for kids

The Alliance's 21st Annual Dinner on Thursday, March 7, honored **Rick Rosen**, head of television at William Morris Endeavor, as the National Champion for Children. Conan O'Brien presented Rick with the award for his dedication to quality education for children in L.A.

Education reformer and philanthropist **Melanie Lundquist** was also recognized with the Francis M. Wheat Community Service Award for her unyielding commitment to improving Los Angeles public schools.

The personal stories told by our clients created a heartfelt atmosphere of compassion for our work. The support was overwhelming and additional funds were raised through a record-breaking Security Blanket Auction.

The dinner was co-chaired by Board Members **Susan Friedman, Leslie** and **Cliff Gilbert-Lurie, Sue Naegle, Sean Perry** and **Toni M. Schulman**. Honorary Co-Chairs **Les Moonves** and **Ari Emanuel** set the stage for a very successful event. The Alliance is forever grateful to all of the extraordinary sponsors for making this an evening everyone in attendance will remember.

Les Moonves, Julie Chen, Jodi Harris and Rick Rosen



Rick Rosen and Conan O'Brien



Angie Harmon



Cliff Gilbert-Lurie and Sue Naegle



Les Moonves and Bruce Rosenblum



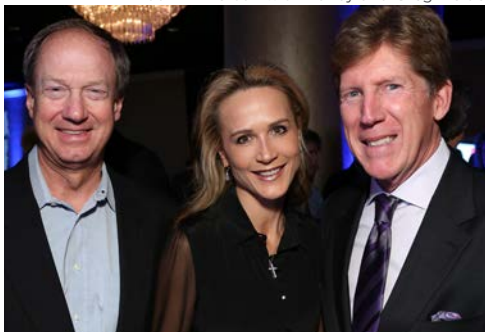
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Billy Gardell and Kevin Reilly



Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Rick Rosen and Sean Perry



Nancy de Brier



Alliance clients Jasmine Torres and Steve Williams



Richard and Melanie Lundquist with Wendy Greuel



Willie Garson and Eric Garcetti



Selena Gomez



Dinner Co-Chairs Cliff & Leslie Gilbert-Lurie and Sean Perry, Board Chair Bart Williams, Dinner Co-Chair Susan Friedman, Honoree Rick Rosen, CEO Janis Spire and Dinner Co-Chairs Sue Naegle and Toni Schulman



Sue Naegle and Michael Lombardo



David Nevins and Chris Silbermann



# PAST EVENTS

thank you to everyone who supported our youth through these events

## Friends of the Alliance Step up for Kids

Sunday, February 24



The Alliance auxiliary group Friends of the Alliance (FOA) kicked off 2013 with a bang hosting **Dinner with Friends & OSCAR** events at individual homes across the city.

More than a dozen Alliance supporters hosted parties raising over \$20,000 for our programs. The FOA are having fun while raising awareness and support for Los Angeles' most vulnerable children.

## Thank you Friends of the Alliance!

## Girl Power Proves Powerful

Saturday, February 2

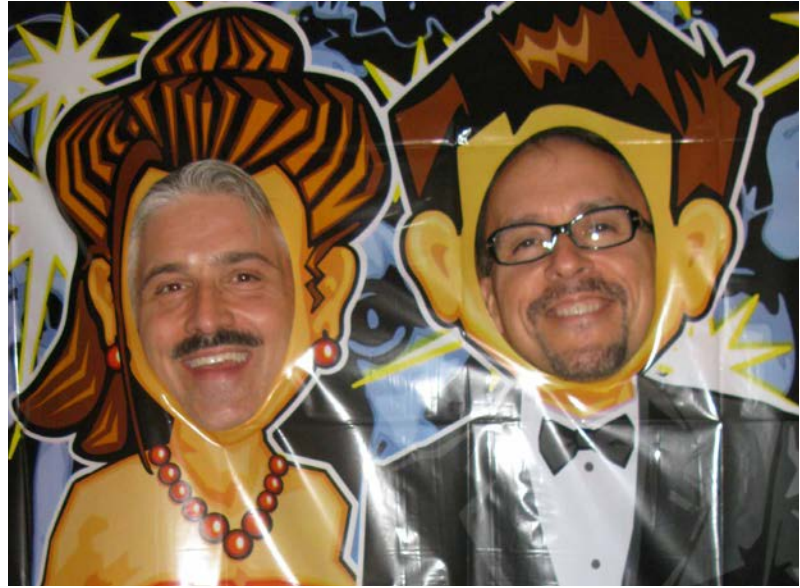
As part of the Alliance's Survival Saturday series, the Alliance, Children's Law Center, and Friends of the Alliance hosted a **Girl Power** event for teenage girls in foster care. The young women gained valuable information on health, beauty, self esteem and important tools to be successful in life and love.

## Thank you to all of the companies and individuals who made this event happen!



*"I learned that someone actually cares about me. I felt so alone in the world before today."*

-Youth who attended Girl Power



▲ Jim Maresca and Jeff King have fun with an Oscar cut out at FOA Council Chair Pamela Soper's party



# UPCOMING EVENTS

support our kids by participating in these upcoming opportunities

## 4th Annual the RIGHT to LAUGH

Thursday, May 30



with the TALENTED COMEDY LINEUP of...

**GEORGE LOPEZ • WANDA SYKES  
CRAIG FERGUSON • BILLY GARDELL  
BOB ODENKIRK • BOB SAGET • NICK KROLL**

**HOSTED BY NICOLE SULLIVAN**



**AVALON** IN HOLLYWOOD  
1735 VINE STREET  
HOLLYWOOD, CA 90028



Join the Alliance and some of the best in comedy for a night of laughs that will give our kids a reason to laugh again. The red carpet event includes a cocktail reception, a live standup show and an auction all benefitting abused and neglected children.

## 10th Annual "All-In" for Kids Celebrity Poker Tournament

Sunday, October 27



## 15th Annual Tennis for Tots

Saturday, September 21



Yuyu Myinttun of Mementous Insurance playing center court at the 14th Annual Tennis for Tots

Save the date for an afternoon of tennis, delicious barbeque and fun at the Los Angeles Tennis Club. Tennis for Tots is held in memory of David and Lynn Angell and is generously hosted every year by Alliance Board Member Mitch Kaplan of the Kaplan Stahler Agency and his agency partner, Elliot Stahler.

Give Los Angeles children the upper hand and play in the 10th Annual "All-In" for Kids Celebrity Poker Tournament hosted by Commerce Casino. Play poker alongside celebrity participants and bid on awesome auction prizes!

Jason Alexander went "all-in" for kids at Commerce Casino's 2012 event

# STRENGTHENING POLICIES

support for foster youth and their caregivers



*“No child should be deprived of the services they need to grow and thrive. I am pleased to introduce this important legislation that will protect our foster children from losing critical services and suffering developmental setbacks.”*

-Assemblymember Ian C. Calderon

## Disabled Children Can't Afford to Wait

Many children in foster care face serious developmental delays and disabilities as a result of abuse, neglect and prenatal exposure to drugs and alcohol. California's Regional Centers provide specialized services and support to improve and overcome these conditions. Under existing law, however, there are no required time frames within which to transfer these services if a child moves, which often happens. As a result, foster children not only find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings, but they are also deprived of imperative services for an indefinite period. Consequently, children regress and their instability intensifies.

Assemblymember Ian C. Calderon has introduced legislation (AB 1089), supported by the Alliance, that would create clear timelines for the transfer process and would ensure that foster children are protected from the negative impact of delays in therapeutic services.

## Relative Caregivers Get Short End of the Stick

Relative caregivers are the lynchpin holding the child welfare system together. Placements with relatives mitigate trauma and provide children with connections to family and permanency. Federal law requires states to provide preference to relative caregivers when finding a home for children in foster care. In California, however, relatives who become guardians or adoptive parents receive less support for children than non-relatives. These policies put burdens on the very individuals most likely to provide a secure and familiar environment for their kin.

Assemblymember Ken Cooley has introduced legislation (AB 985), sponsored by the Alliance, to address this disparity and ensure that relative guardians and adoptive parents receive the same level of support as non-relatives so they can provide for the children in their care. Placing children with relatives is a primary goal of our child welfare system and this legislation seeks to establish equity for all caregivers raising foster children.


## Increasing Support for Pregnant and Parenting Foster Youth

Foster youth who are pregnant or parenting face dual challenges of being in foster care as well as being young, usually single, parents. Studies of both groups have found that these youth will experience higher than average rates of poverty, unemployment and low educational attainment.

Senator Leland Yee has introduced legislation (SB 528), sponsored by the Alliance, to ensure these vulnerable young people have priority access to subsidized child care so they can attend school and get jobs.

*“It is imperative that we provide basic resources for pregnant and parenting teens in foster care. SB 528 will assist these foster youth and their children at the most critical time in their lives, and will save taxpayer dollars in the long run.”*

-Senator Leland Yee



*“Nobody’s born to be nobody.  
You help us be somebody.”*

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your generosity and commitment enable us to protect the health and well-being of children

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### FOREVER Project

The Alliance launched the FOREVER Project in late 2012 to put a national spotlight on the **400,500 children in foster care across the country**. Selena Gomez, Rascal Flatts, Conan O'Brien, Willie Garson, Nia Vardalos, Ian Gomez, Melissa Etheridge, Jeff Probst and Phillip Phillips are among those supporting the movement through social media. Celebrities have spread the message of forever families and the need for permanence for children in foster care.

The FOREVER Project was created by Annie Goldsmith, a high school sophomore. "Apparel lines are a great way to raise awareness for important causes," said Annie. "Children in foster care deserve a voice and the FOREVER hoodie seeks to create one through a fun and timeless brand."

We invite you to join the FOREVER movement. Donate \$75+ for a hoodie at [kids-alliance.org](http://kids-alliance.org), take a photo and share it with the world!

### SAVE THE DATE



Thursday,  
May 30, 2013



Saturday,  
September 21, 2013



Sunday,  
October 27, 2013