

CASA receives surprise donation to bolster coffers hurt by pandemic

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Christine Slette figures the COVID-19 pandemic has really hurt operating funds for Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Del Norte this year, especially when trying to find a steady volunteers.

“Us doing outreach and being able to keep doing that in the community is only based off us having money to do that,” said Slette, now in her 12th year as executive director with the non profit. “We’ve worked really hard to do branding and outreach because we have funds. Then like one or two years we have no money.”

This is one of the years they’ve gone without. Slette said due to the pandemic, all of their fundraisers for 2020 had to be cancelled, including the Annual Chip in for Kids Golf Tournament, The Chrystal Ball black tie event, the Labor Day Bash at SeaQuake and the Del Norte County Fair Concert.

“That’s a good \$50,000 to \$80,000 that we are not going to be getting this year,” Slette said.

Plus she's unable to go out and host outreach booths, such as the Family Fair or the Health Fair. But not all is lost in their coffers.

"What's cool is we keep getting random checks, like from Rumiano Cheese or Beth Wilds who was on our board, but now lives in Texas and sent us \$200," Slette said.

Then she learned the Pelican Bay Athletic Organization chose CASA as it's charity of choice to assist this year.

The Pelican Bay Athletic Organization is a grassroots organization of Pelican Bay employees, officers and staff with the main goal to give back to youth athletics in the community.

Pelican Bay inmates contribute by being allowed to order items they wouldn't normally be able to purchase, mostly from Fred Meyer stores. Food sales for the drive last year raised between \$30,000 and \$40,000, with the Pelican Bay Athletic Organization receiving a portion of the money for its charity donations.

"I'm just really happy that they think so highly of the program and want to help support foster kids," Slette said.

However, organizers kept secret until the day of the check presentation how much they supported the program. Jim Holt, PBAO president, said this year was the most the organization had ever raised. Rather than split it between two causes as in the past, this year it was donated all to one worthy group. The giant check they presented to Slette and her staff read \$21,976.

When she finally got her first look at the amount, Slette was shocked.

"Oh my God! I didn't expect anything like that!" she exclaimed. "I think the last one was five or seven (thousand). This is really awesome. This is way cool. Whoo!"

After catching her breath, she continued.

"This couldn't have been at a better time because we can't fundraise right now," she told the group of presenters, which included Pelican Bay State Prison Warden James Robertson and Chief Deputy Warden Rodney Bell. "My recommendation to the board will be to keep it in a reserve account to when COVID is done, we can use this to keep the doors open."

Between April and June this year, about 140 cases of child abuse are brought before Del Norte Superior with CASA serving 27 of those children, Slette said.

"It's a lot in Del Norte County. When I first started with CASA, we were second worst in in state of California for percent of substantiated allegations of child abuse per capita. We've dropped down to eighth, but we're still pretty high," she said.

Slette said ultimately CASA wants to see an advocate assigned to every child, she said.

“But we’re upside down. Getting volunteers to commit, they have to go through training, then assigned to a case,” Slette explained. “The general population doesn’t like to think about child abuse. It’s a hard thing to get involved with.”

To get involved, go to www.casadn.org and click on the “volunteer” tab.