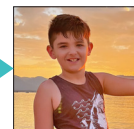




A Message from
Pete Caldwell



Juan and his Family



Advocacy Corner

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Fall 2022

We Care Wrapped Juan and his Family with Support

Daysi knew that something was going on with her young son Juan, but her concerns were falling on deaf ears. No matter how challenging his behavior became, people in her circle and experts she reached out to for help told her to just “wait it out” or “all kids have some behavioral issues.”

But Daysi knew it was much more than that.

And then a psychologist referred her to We Care. She met Marcela, Karen, and Melissa, who validated her feelings, and assured her there was a solution and that they were there to help. They made her feel as if she weren't alone anymore, and that her son was healthy and loved.

Daysi knew she had made a true connection with We Care and she was excited to begin working through Juan's behavioral issues as a family. But she also knew this was going to require immense change and she was nervous because Juan didn't handle change well.

But her nerves were settled as soon as she observed Melissa interact with Juan through play, and she began seeing a brand-new side to her son that brought her so much joy.

As Melissa continued to work with Juan, and Karen and Marcela assisted Daysi in connecting with available resources, it seemed to his family that sunshine was starting to brighten their days. The entire family felt supported as they began to understand that Juan just wanted to be seen and heard, but his way of expressing himself was different from other children.

Then Juan was diagnosed with autism.

After this diagnosis, We Care's Wraparound staff and the family sat down as a group to discuss goals for him. Although this was Daysi's first time navigating all that comes with a formal diagnosis, the experience and examples We Care shared were incredibly helpful in seeing where Juan's journey with autism could lead. We Care also helped highlight his amazing strengths that were beginning to emerge as the family learned how to support him in the way he needed.

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A message from:

Pete Caldwell, Executive Director



Dear We Care Family,

With hopefully the worst of Covid behind us, it's a good time to take a moment to thank you again for all your support these past few complicated years. And I want to emphasize why that support was so appreciated and so critical to the young children we serve.

We Care focuses its efforts on Early Intervention because it's simply the best way to effect real and lasting change in the children and families who need it most.

Research is clear that the first 3 years of life are the most critical developmental period.

This time offers a brief period of opportunity that never appears again. Neural circuits in the brain that create the foundation for learning, behavior, and health are at their most vulnerable as well as being most able to be "rewired."

Over time – starting as early as 5 years of age – these neural circuits become more and more difficult to change.

In terms of vulnerability, toxic stressors such as extreme poverty, abuse and neglect, or severe maternal depression can damage the developing brain, causing lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and physical and mental health.

This is why We Care addresses prevention.

In terms of opportunity, we know the brain is strengthened by positive early experiences, especially stable relationships with caring and responsive adults, as well as safe and supportive environments. This is why We Care focuses on strengthening the relationships of the families in our programs.

And we know that early social-emotional development provides the foundation upon which cognitive and language skills develop. This is why We Care helps young children learn healthy relationship skills.

We sometimes say we're helping 3-year-olds become wonderful grandparents!

That's how clearly we see the life-long benefits of early intervention. During the past years, you've helped to ensure that these future parents and grandparents have the best opportunity possible to fulfill that destiny.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you for all you do!

Pete



Join the We Care Community:

Email ewilliamson@wecarechildren.org to be added to our email or mailing lists

We Care Wrapped Juan and his Family with Support (continued from page 1)

After two years of working closely with We Care's clinicians and Wraparound staff, Juan was ready for graduation. But before that could happen, the staff guided Daysi as she sent letters to his doctor and advocated for her son with school staff for an Individual Education Program. The ongoing IEP would help ensure that his needs would continue to be met as he transitioned into a school environment.

Today, Juan is learning to code – and it may not be long before he's able to create his own online game! He also loves playing with his trains. But instead of each one living in its own world as they used to, now when Juan plays make-believe, his trains interact with each other. Just like he's learned to do with his family and friends.

Daysi and her family are enormously thankful for the support, empathy, and guidance they received during their time with We Care. Because of Marcela, Karen, and Melissa, Juan has a new trajectory. The family has become closer than ever through this experience, and they are all excited to watch Juan grow up to his full potential.



“We Care was there to walk me through the first part of the journey. They helped advocate for a diagnosis, held my hand through getting an IEP, and taught me how to be an advocate for my son. It will continue to take work, but thanks to We Care, I now see that with our family's support, Juan can do anything he wants.” — Daysi

“I miss Melissa very much. We would play board games and she would play my favorite - Silly Street. I miss making playdoh with her and playing with Orbeez.” — Juan

Supporting Children's Mental Health Is More Critical Than Ever

According to an article by John Woolfolk in The Mercury News, anxiety and depression in California children is up 70% since 2016. With everything the world has gone through over the past few years, that shouldn't be shocking, but it is incredibly concerning.

And as shared in this article, according to Ted Lempert, president of Children Now, California's member of the Kids Count network, *65% of California youth with major depression are not receiving any mental health treatment due to a lack of access to services.* This lack of access and resources for our most vulnerable population is unacceptable.

In Contra Costa County, We Care is striving to combat this by increasing our reach to support even more at-risk children through our mental health services.

By intervening early, We Care improves the outcomes for children who face the possibility of lifelong problems. Research shows that early positive experiences and any needed intervention not only shape the structure of the developing brain, they also create the foundations of healthy socio-emotional development.

Any interruptions to healthy development can impair a child's capacities for learning, as well as their relationships with others. This process has a lifelong impact.

Providing a positive impact is needed now more than ever as children absorb the stress of their families, all while feeling isolated and confused. We Care's clinicians provide critical intervention to the child and their family by addressing behavioral



Supporting Children's Mental Health Is More Critical Than Ever (continued from page 3)

challenges, poor parenting skills, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and more. Through our work, child removals due to abuse or neglect may be avoided, school expulsions circumvented, and domestic violence reduced.

Through our interventions, We Care is supporting not only the child and their family but the community as a whole. Improving children's early experiences and learning opportunities can help avoid troublesome future issues, including juvenile adjudication, house insecurities, entrenched mental health issues, and educational failures.

As we emerge into a new normal with continuing uncertainty on the horizon, We Care is unwaveringly dedicated to increasing awareness about the importance of early intervention for childhood mental health, continuing to provide a safety net to at risk-children from birth to age 5 and their families, and being a resource to our community.

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“Every child deserves a life free from the impact of devastating circumstances over which they have no control” — *Christie, whose son Tyler's life trajectory was changed due to We Care's intervention*

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Advocacy Corner

It is a positive sign that our nation is beginning to take notice that our community's most vulnerable population – its children – has been profoundly affected by the pandemic, but we are nowhere near where we need to be.

Rather than “waiting out” behavioral issues that stem from a child's anxiety, depression, or stress, it is vital that we as a community intervene and speak on their behalf. It is our responsibility to be a voice for those who cannot speak for themselves by increasing awareness around this issue and advocating for greater mental health services for children.



Can one person make a difference?

There's an African proverb that says, “If you think you're too small to make a difference, then you've never spent the night with a mosquito.” One person can effect change! By making a decision today to take action, you can help create a ripple that will build into a wave of positive change that crashes over the entire community.

But how?

Write a letter or email, call your local congressperson, or, if possible, make a personal visit. If you would like to reach out to the representative in We Care Services for Children's District, please contact Mark DeSaulnier, 11th District Congressman. Mr. DeSaulnier's local office is at 3100 Oak Road, Suite 110, Walnut Creek, CA 94597, (925) 933-2660. You can also email through his website at <https://desaulnier.house.gov/>

What should I say?

Speak (or write) from the heart. Let your representative know that early childhood mental health matters to you, and why. Has a friend or family member needed help but wasn't able to access it? Explain how that negatively affected their life and the lives of those who love them. It doesn't matter if you don't have a solution, what matters is that you recognize the issue and speak up about it.

You will never know if your call, email, or visit will be the catalyst for change unless you try.

We Can't do it Alone

For over 60 years, We Care has been changing the lives of at-risk children from birth to age 5 and their families, and it wouldn't be possible without the support of our incredible community.

On behalf of our staff, board, and every child and family we serve, thank you!