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we care news

Spring 2026

Aubrey's Story of Growth, Safety, and Connection

When Aubrey came into Surita and Peter's care, she was just 20 months old and already dealing with more than any child should.

Born with substance exposure and placed into foster care after a difficult start in life, Aubrey arrived with a history that raised many questions and very few answers.

"We didn't know what she had been through," Surita said. "And we didn't know how to help."

At home, the challenges showed up quickly. Bedtime was especially hard. Aubrey would cry inconsolably, unable to settle or feel safe. During the day, she struggled with connection—both clinging tightly and pushing away.

For Surita and Peter, it was heartbreaking.

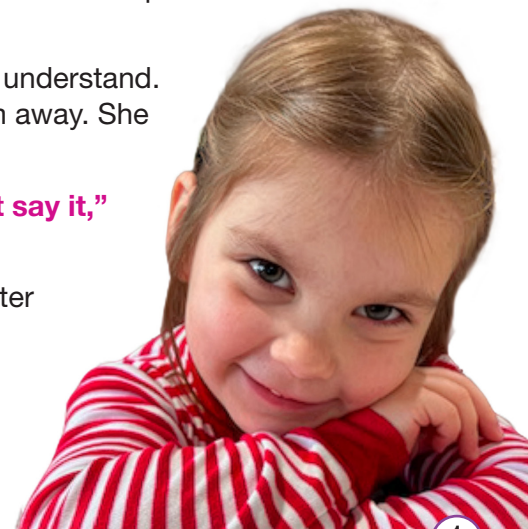
"You start to wonder, are we doing something wrong? Are we ever going to build that bond?"

That's when We Care stepped in. Through Child-Parent Psychotherapy, Aubrey and her new parents began working with their therapist Candice. At first, the sessions looked like simple play, but over time, something deeper began to take shape.

Candice helped translate Aubrey's behaviors into something her family could understand. What once felt confusing started to make sense. Aubrey wasn't pushing them away. She was protecting herself.

"She helped us see what Aubrey was feeling, even when Aubrey couldn't say it," Surita said.

With a deeper understanding of the root of Aubrey's behaviors, Surita and Peter were able to adapt their responses, and real change began. Slowly, Aubrey began to feel more secure. The long nights eased. The fear softened. Connection started to grow through small, meaningful moments. As the months went on, that connection deepened into a strong, secure bond.



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A message from:

Pete Caldwell, Executive Director



Dear We Care Family,

Happy Spring! I hope this finds you and your family well.

As the weather warms, it feels like the right time to again express my warmest gratitude to our donors and supporters. Your generosity and continued commitment to this work allow We Care and the families we serve to thrive. Because of you, countless young children in our community have received critical developmental and mental health support during the earliest and most formative years of life.

This spring has also brought two new leaders to our organization and you will learn more about them in the pages to follow.

We are very pleased to welcome Surita Sharma to the We Care Board of Directors.

Surita brings valuable professional experience and a strong commitment to community impact. We are grateful—and fortunate—that she has chosen to lend her perspective, smarts, and talents to our work.

We are equally excited to welcome Melissa Cesario as our new Director of Mental Health.

Melissa and I have been colleagues in Contra Costa for more than twenty years—working for separate agencies but always happy when our paths crossed. I’ve long respected her leadership, clinical expertise, and dedication to supporting children and families, and she is already making a significant impact with our team and the families they serve. We Care is lucky to have her.

And as always, our remarkable staff remains the core of We Care.

Across our developmental and mental health programs, our clinicians, therapists, teachers, specialists, and support staff bring skill, compassion, and dedication to their work every day. Much of what they do happens quietly—in homes, classrooms, our clinic, and playgroups—and the outcomes are phenomenal. Their work is what we exist for: helping children build emotional resilience and reaching developmental goals, and providing parents with vital skills and support.

But none of this work can happen without the continued partnership of our supporters.

The combination of dedicated professionals and a committed community is what allows We Care to make a meaningful difference in the lives of young children and families. As we head into the summer months, I remain deeply grateful for the community that surrounds this work and confident in the progress we will continue to make together.

So, as always, sincerest thanks to each of you!

Best,

Pete



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Today, Aubrey is thriving. She is curious, happy, and engaged. Most importantly, she feels loved, protected, and deeply connected to her family.

Looking back, Surita is clear about the impact. “We were so lost in the beginning,” she said. “I don’t know where we would be without that support.”

With We Care’s help, Aubrey was able to build trust and form the kind of profound connection every child deserves. And her parents could finally breathe a sigh of relief, knowing they were equipped to meet her needs in a way that works for her.



Welcome Our Newest Board Member: Surita Sharma



We just introduced you to Aubrey and her family. Now, we want to share more about how that experience inspired her mom, Surita Sharma—a healthcare leader, parent, and passionate advocate for children and families—to join We Care’s Board of Directors in order to help more families access that same support.

Surita has more than 20 years of experience in healthcare, beginning as an Emergency Department nurse and now serving as an Associate Chief Administrator Officer at Kaiser Permanente. Throughout her career, she has worked across clinical operations, patient experience, and system-level strategy—but her focus has remained the same: supporting people through some of life’s most vulnerable moments.

That commitment is what first connected her to We Care.

As a foster and adoptive parent, Surita experienced firsthand how overwhelming it can feel when a child is struggling and you don’t yet understand why. Even with her clinical background, there were moments filled with uncertainty, questions, and self-doubt.

“You want to help your child,” she shared, “but sometimes you don’t know how.”

With the support of We Care, Surita began to better understand what her child was experiencing and how to respond in ways that built connection, trust, and confidence. That experience left a lasting impression on her—as a parent and as someone who has spent her career in healthcare.

“I saw the impact personally and professionally,” she said.

Now, as a board member, Surita is focused on helping more families access the same level of care earlier and creating greater awareness. Too often, she notes, families don’t know these services exist until they are already in crisis. She hopes to help change that by strengthening outreach, expanding access, and ensuring We Care can continue to meet the growing need in the community.

Outside of her professional life, Surita enjoys staying active, spending time with her family and caring for their two dogs.

We’re very grateful to have her insight, her leadership, and her lived experience helping guide We Care forward.

Welcome Melissa Cesario, Our New Director of Mental Health Services



We are excited to welcome Melissa Cesario—a licensed marriage and family therapist—as We Care’s new Director of Mental Health Services.

Melissa brings more than 20 years of leadership and clinical experience serving children and families in community mental health settings. Most recently, she served as Program Director of School and Community-Based Services at Fred Finch Youth & Family Services, where she oversaw programs across multiple school sites, strengthened partnerships with local and county stakeholders, and supported the delivery of trauma-informed, culturally responsive care.

Throughout her career, Melissa has built strong teams and developed thoughtful programming, while always remaining focused on the family being served.

What drew Melissa to We Care at this point in her career was our emphasis on early childhood. “The priority of earlier intervention really resonated with me,” she shared. “If we can support children and families early, we can help set them on a path that decreases the need for more intensive services later on.” She also loved the concept of a smaller, community-based organization that is accessible and connected to the families we serve.

Melissa brings both a big-picture perspective and a strong clinical background to her role. She is thoughtful about how programs are structured and how they grow and change over time, while always coming back to what matters most, providing quality care. She is also deeply committed to working with complex families, and understands the lasting impact that support can have for families and our community.

Outside of her work, Melissa enjoys spending time with her family, traveling to Tahoe and the coast, and reading psychological thrillers. She and her husband have two grown children and two big rescue dogs.

We are delighted to have Melissa’s leadership, experience, and heart at We Care.

“Being part of a family’s journey is a real privilege,” she shared. “And as a leader, it’s about helping others do that work in a meaningful way.”

