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WHAT'S INSIDE:

# we care news

Summer 2026

## From Overwhelmed to Empowered: Alexander's Story

When Alexander was younger, his mom, Rosa, knew something wasn't right.

**"Your name is We Care, and that's exactly what Melissa and Joycelin showed us. They cared about our whole family."**

—Rosa, Alexander's Mom

She had raised two other children and recognized what typical behavior looked like. What she was seeing with Alexander felt different. The tantrums came quickly—crying, kicking, sometimes hitting himself—and at home, things could escalate within minutes.

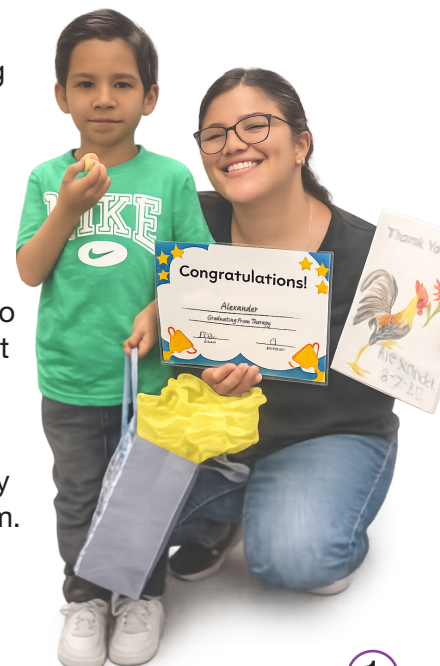
"I kept thinking maybe I was doing something wrong," Rosa said.

So she started asking questions, and seeking out resources. At First 5, she shared her concerns and was referred to We Care. She said making that call was the best thing she could have done for her family.

By the time services began, Alexander was struggling with intense behaviors, especially at home. He wasn't getting in trouble at school, but once he got home, everything would come out. The tension at home was constant.

Family Intervention Specialist, Melissa Cassem, and Bilingual Child and Family Therapist, Joycelin Umanzor, worked closely with Alexander and his family, helping them understand what they were seeing and giving them tools to respond. They also taught the family that Alexander wasn't choosing these behaviors and often couldn't control them. Over time, Rosa began to understand that he was holding it together all day and releasing those emotions at home, where he felt safe.

With We Care's guidance and support, the family was able to access resources they didn't know existed, and Alexander was ultimately diagnosed with ADHD and autism. Melissa and Joycelin also helped Rosa navigate the challenging IEP process to ensure he would continue receiving the support he needed.



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A message from:

# Pete Caldwell, Executive Director



Dear We Care Family,

With summer here, many of us are enjoying a little extra time with family and friends, longer days, and more opportunities to appreciate things. At the same time, it’s hard to ignore the uncertainty that many families are experiencing. From economic challenges, to changes in programs and services, there is a lot happening in the world—and right here in Contra Costa.

In times like these, I’m reminded how important it is to have organizations people can count on.

For 66 years, We Care Services for Children has been here for children and families in Contra Costa County. Through changing times and changing needs, our mission has stayed the same: helping young children thrive and supporting their families and caregivers. That commitment continues to guide everything we do.

Every day, our staff works alongside parents, caregivers, teachers, and community partners to help children get the developmental, educational, and mental health support they need. Sometimes that means helping a family through a difficult transition. Sometimes it means supporting a child’s growth and development, coaching a teacher, or providing specialized mental health services. No matter the program or service, our focus remains on helping children build a strong foundation for what lies ahead.

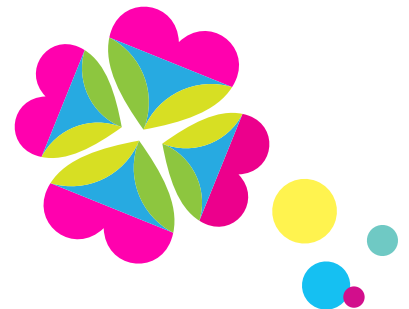
One of the things I appreciate most about We Care is the incredible community that makes this work possible. I am grateful to our staff for their dedication and compassion, to our Board of Directors for their leadership, and crucially, to our donors, funders, and community partners for their ongoing support. Most of all, I am grateful to the families who place their trust in us every day.

While the world around us continues to change, our commitment to children and families remains solid. We will continue showing up, adapting when needed, and doing everything we can to help the young children in our community grow, learn, and thrive.

Thank you for picking up our newsletter - and for being part of the We Care family.

Best,

Pete



## join

the We Care Community:

Email: [ewilliamson@wecarechildren.org](mailto:ewilliamson@wecarechildren.org)  
to be added to our email or mailing lists

[wecare.services.for.children](https://www.facebook.com/wecare.services.for.children)

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As Melissa shared, “They were always receptive to the strategies and interventions, which made such a difference in supporting Alexander’s progress.”

Alexander loves art, and that became an important part of his time with Melissa. It gave him a way to slow down and focus. One of his favorite memories was when she painted his face like a rooster—something he still talks about.

Today, that creativity is still a big part of who he is. He enjoys being outside, collecting sticks, rocks, and other objects and turning them into something of his own. And as Alexander’s creativity grows, so does Rosa’s confidence. She now knows how to support him by helping him use the techniques he’s learned to better express himself and manage his emotions.

“This was part of her closing process—becoming an advocate for Alexander and feeling confident in the tools she gained to support him,” Joycelin shared.

Now, Rosa sees her son differently. With the confusion and worry cleared away, she has a deeper understanding of who he is and what he is capable of becoming. And she feels a sense of relief she hadn’t felt before.

Alexander now has the support he needs to grow in his own way and at his own pace.



## Advocacy Corner: Protecting Early Intervention Services



As you read more in this newsletter about our Beyond Boundaries program, we hope it offers a glimpse into why early intervention services matter so deeply—not just for children, but for entire families.

Right now, programs across California like Beyond Boundaries that support infants and toddlers with developmental delays and autism are facing serious funding challenges. Reimbursement cuts, staffing shortages, and shifting policies are making it harder for providers to sustain high-quality early intervention services, and many programs are warning they may have to reduce services or close altogether.

At We Care, we see every day what happens when children receive support early—and what happens when families cannot access the help they need.



We encourage our community to speak up. Please consider contacting your state representatives and urging them to protect funding for early intervention and developmental services for young children. Together, we can help ensure programs like Beyond Boundaries continue serving children and families during some of the most important years of development.

## A Closer Look at Beyond Boundaries

At We Care, all of our work centers around the earliest years of a child's life—because we know those years matter deeply.

One program that truly reflects the heart of that mission is **Beyond Boundaries**, our developmental toddler classroom for children ages 18 months to 3 years with autism or at risk for autism. The program incorporates components of the Early Start Denver Model (ESDM), an evidence-based approach that uses relationships, play, and everyday routines to support learning and development.

Parents come to We Care carrying fear and uncertainty. They may be wondering why their child struggles to communicate, connect, or feel comfortable in the world around them. Some are overwhelmed by the process of navigating diagnoses, evaluations, and long waitlists. Others simply want to know how to help their child feel understood.



But inside Beyond Boundaries, those worries begin to ease. The classroom is filled with music, movement, sensory play, books, and routines that help children feel safe and connected. Teachers follow each child's lead, using everyday moments to build confidence, communication, and connection. During snack time, children practice asking for what they need. In circle time, they learn how to engage with peers and feel comfortable being part of a group. Through play, encouragement, and lots of patience, children slowly begin expressing themselves, trying new experiences, and connecting with the world around them in ways that may have once felt difficult or overwhelming.

For parents, those small shifts are life-changing.

A child who once avoided group activities begins reaching for another child's hand during play. A toddler who used to melt down in frustration starts finding ways to ask for help instead. Bedtime becomes less overwhelming. Playdates go more smoothly. A child proudly does something independently for the first time.

The future feels hopeful.



**“We get to nurture and shape each child's development. I am happy to say that we helped the child, the parent, and their families.”**

—Maria Campoverde,  
Early Intervention Specialist

