



Sunny Hills
SERVICESSM

Better and Brighter Futures

Spring 2016



SOKHOM MAO

*A FORMER CLIENT RETURNS AS SUNNY HILLS'
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OFFICER*

Photo credit: Paul Asper

**SUNNY HILLS RECEIVES
GOLD SEAL OF APPROVAL FROM
THE JOINT COMMISSION**





CEO MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

One of the greatest challenges foster youth face as they transition out of the foster care system and into adulthood is finding safe, stable, affordable housing. Sokhom Mao, who is featured in our cover story, made the transition successfully with help from our East Bay supportive housing program, Real Alternatives for Adolescents (RAFA), and the Guardian Scholars program at his alma mater, San Francisco State University.

Each year RAFA provides housing and support services for more than 50 foster youth ages 16-21 who are learning to live independently, take responsibility for their lives, and develop goals for the future, like Sokhom did. We look forward to sharing future success stories with you.

May is National Foster Care month, a time to recognize that we each can help change the lives of children and youth in foster care. One way you can do so is by making a gift to RAFA. Your donation will help youth in setting up their first apartment with the most basic of essentials, such as a bed or simple kitchen supplies. Keep in mind that, when they come to RAFA, many foster youth don't even have a toothbrush, let alone a suitcase in which to bring what few clothes or belongings they may have.

PLEASE HELP FOSTER YOUTH transitioning to independence by using the enclosed envelope to make your gift, by giving on-line at <http://bit.ly/1lvOcur> or by participating in "East Bay Gives" as part of the National Day of Giving on May 3rd.

Sample Items Needed by Youth in RAFA	Estimated Cost
Mattress, box spring and bed frame	\$250
Night Stand or Dresser	\$75
Dishes and flatware	\$50
Mop and bucket or broom and dust pan	\$25
Can opener, dish towels or dish rack	\$10

We appreciate all you do to help us create better and brighter futures for the children and youth we serve!

Thank you for your support,

Mary Denton
CEO

JOSEPH VALENTINE ELECTED TO HONORARY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Joe Valentine, whose support of non-profit organizations spans more than six decades, was unanimously elected to the Honorary Board of Sunny Hills Services in recognition of his many years of service to the organization.

Joe served as a volunteer on the Sunny Hills Board for two terms; in 1990, and again in 2012. During his tenure, he generously imparted his expertise in strategic planning, board development, fundraising and executive management to others, bringing compassion and deep wisdom to every interaction.

degree from Springfield College, and staying true to his childhood dreams, Joe's first job was as Youth Director at the Waterbury, Connecticut YMCA.

Joe devoted 30 years of his career to the United Way movement, becoming the executive director of United Ways in Bridgeport, Cincinnati, and San Francisco. In 1978 Joe accepted the role of President and Executive Director of United Way of the Bay Area, a position he held for 12 years. As testament to his extraordinary leadership and his ability to rally support, the

Sunny Hills has 83 foster youth in its exceptional programs—it's been wonderful to help strengthen support for those youth.

When asked what originally drew him to Sunny Hills, Joe said "I have special concerns for youth who are in foster care—especially for when they leave the system due to age limits. Sunny Hills has 83 foster youth in its exceptional programs—it's been wonderful to help strengthen support for those youth."

Born in Brooklyn, N.Y., Joe knew by age ten that he would follow in the footsteps of his childhood hero, René Kern, the Physical Fitness Director at the YMCA, whose career involved helping local youth develop in spirit, mind and body. After earning his undergraduate

United Way of the Bay Area's budget grew from \$22 million in 1978 to \$56 million in 1990, when Joe retired.

Joe's "retirement" didn't last long. In recent years, Joe has been a sought-after consultant and provider of management services to colleges and many nonprofits while he continued to be an active volunteer with nonprofit organizations. He and his wife Eunice, live in Santa Rosa. Joe's six children, 12 grandchildren, and 12 great-grandchildren live primarily on the east coast.



SUNNY HILLS RECEIVES JOINT COMMISSION'S GOLD SEAL OF APPROVAL

Sunny Hills recently earned accreditation by The Joint Commission, an independent, not-for-profit organization that accredits more than 20,000 health care organizations and programs in the United States. Sunny Hills earned The Joint Commission's Gold Seal of Approval for Behavioral Health Care by demonstrating continuous compliance with high performance standards, after undergoing a rigorous on-site survey. Sunny Hills is among only 31 organizations providing services in the Bay Area to receive the Behavioral Health accreditation — a huge accomplishment indeed!



Left to Right:
Sonja Lenz-Rashid, Co-Founder, SFSU GSP • Former SF Mayor,
Willie Brown • Xochitl V. Sanchez,
Executive Director & Co-Founder
SFSU GSP • Sokhom Mao

COMING HOME

Sunny Hills' Former Client Returns as Agency's Community Engagement Officer

Sokhom Mao credits Sunny Hills' Real Alternatives for Adolescents (RAFA) program with helping him earn a college degree, which at one time seemed unlikely, given his very tough childhood.

When Sokhom was nine his mother died, and his five brothers and sisters entered California's foster care system after his father proved unable to care for them. "My father would leave us home alone without food and sometimes without water and electricity. Once social services got involved we were placed in foster care, sometimes together, but sometimes apart."

He spent years bouncing between group and foster homes, but Sokhom was resilient and had a strong will to succeed. During high school he learned of Sunny Hills' RAFA program, which provides case management and housing to foster and former foster youth. Through RAFA he learned independent living skills and found support in reaching his goals, which included going to college.

He was in the first cohort at San Francisco State University's Guardian Scholars program, and in 2005 he earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. From then on, he has focused on advocating for marginalized youth.

"Working at Sunny Hills' feels like coming home. The help I got from RAFA made it possible for me to attend college, which changed the

course of my life. Now I want to help programs like RAFA continue to support the thousands of youth who currently face extreme challenges," he said.

In the past, Sokhom has been honored with: The Community Hero Award from the Alameda County Foster Youth Alliance; National Foster Care Month, Changing a Lifetime Award; Commendation from the Alameda County Board of Supervisors; and the California State Senate Certificate of Recognition. In May 2015 Sokhom was invited to the White House where he received a "Champion of Change Award" for his "courage, resilience, and contributions and his commitment to furthering his education."

—
Being at Sunny Hills is like coming home.
—

He was just named a 2016 CHANGE MAKER by California State University (CSU). From a pool of 3 million CSU alumni, he was selected by the CSU Chancellor as a "Change Maker" and his portrait, along with seven other 2016 Honorees, will be displayed outside Governor Brown's office.

"We're extremely proud of Sokhom's continued growth, and we're honored to have him on the Sunny Hills team!" said Mary Denton, CEO.

STEPHANIE CASENZA JOINS THE SUNNY HILLS TEAM

Stephanie Casenza, a leader with 13 years of success in development and 20 years in public relations, communications and nonprofit marketing, has joined Sunny Hills as Director of Development and Communications, responsible for development, communications and community engagement in the five counties the agency serves.

Stephanie was particularly drawn to Sunny Hills because of her commitment to helping

marginalized young people—she has worked with foster and at-risk youth and their families as a volunteer mentor for many years.

Most recently Stephanie was the Associate Director of Development at the Chabot Space & Science Center in Oakland. Previously she was the Executive Director at Peralta Colleges Foundation.

She is active in the Rotary Club of Oakland #3 and also on the board

of the Development Executives Roundtable, a professional development association that serves the entire Bay Area. She lives in Oakland with her husband, Kevin McGourty, and their two dogs.

Stephanie earned a Bachelor of Arts degree at San Diego State University and a Masters in Executive Leadership from University of San Diego.



Stephanie Casenza





Sunny Hills Services
 300 Sunny Hills Drive
 San Anselmo, CA 94960
 (415) 457-3200
www.sunnyhillsservices.org

The mission of Sunny Hills Services is to help vulnerable children, youth and their families use their strengths to develop healthy relationships and fulfilling lives.

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*Sunny Hills' Transition Age Youth
Thank You for your Support!*

**22nd Annual Bank of Marin /
 Sunny Hills Golf Tournament
 Monday, June 20TH
 Meadow Club, Fairfax**

For information & to buy tickets:
 415-457-3200 ext. 118 or
 email events@sunnyhillsservices.org

WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU!

TO DONATE ONLINE, PLEASE GO TO:
<https://www.charity-pay.com/d/donation.asp?CID=6>

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 call 415.457.3200 x113 with questions!



Your support of East Bay Gives will benefit Sunny Hills' RAFA supportive housing program, for current and former foster youth.

Thank you for giving!

<https://eastbaygives.org/npo/bay-area-youth-center-a-division-of-sunny-hills-services>