

SUMMER 2022



SidebySideYouth.org



The mission of Side by Side is to walk with youth impacted by adversity toward a future with connection and meaning.



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*On the cover: YouThrive therapeutic rafting trip, June 2022*



## LETTER FROM CHRISTINE

Dear Friends,

As I write this, summer is fully upon us. After the darkness of winter, and the bloom of spring, so much becomes illuminated with the light of summer. It is a time to examine where we've come from, and also a time for new beginnings.

There is nothing better to shine a light on the work we do than the words of the clients that we serve. In this issue (pgs 5 and 6), you will find stories about some recent Irene M. Hunt School alumni and their accomplishments since transitioning back to their neighborhood schools. You'll be impressed by the breadth of their stories, as well as see the impact of the work we do. Those successes are mirrored in the journey of a client from our Real Alternatives transitional housing program that you'll find on page 7.

We are delighted to welcome new board members along with their energy, unique perspectives, and expertise to Side by Side, as well as the appointment of Dale Satake to the role of Board President. I am also pleased to tell you that we have named a new Regional Director of our North Bay programs, Denisse Mendoza. With Denisse at the helm, we expect our services in Sonoma, Napa, and Marin to continue to deepen and expand in the years to come. Please take a moment to get to know our new Board members and our new Regional Director!

I also invite you to reach out to us if you are interested in joining the cadre of Side by Side volunteers who do such important work with us. You'll meet new friends, get a peek at Side by Side "behind the scenes!" and serve as important ambassadors for our organization in the community.

Finally, just on the horizon, our Reach for the Stars Gala will be celebrated ultralounge style on Saturday, September 17, 2022. I do hope you'll join us...we have missed many of you! Until next time, I wish you the loveliest of summers, wherever you are spending it!

Warmly,

Christine Isana Garcia, Psy.D.

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# AGENCY UPDATES

## NEW RESPONSIBILITIES & NEW FACES AT SIDE BY SIDE

Side by Side continues to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion at all levels of the organization, so that the agency's leadership represent the diversity of our client base and regions in which we work, as well as have a passion for the work we do and/or lived experience that mirrors that of our clients.

## NEW BOARD MEMBERS



### **Dr. Juan Gonzalez III**

A long-time resident of San Leandro, CA, Juan is passionate about youth-related issues, be it education, childhood development

or youth safety. Juan brings deep financial acumen and experience volunteering for nonprofit organizations, including having served as a Board Member of Big Brothers Big Sisters of the East Bay and the San Leandro Education Foundation. He brings a wealth of corporate experience from his nearly 30-year tenure with KPMG, where he currently serves as a senior principal in the advisory services division. Juan is multilingual and commonly uses his foreign language skills to facilitate services for community members.



### **Jennifer Gotti**

Jennifer first joined Side by Side's board in 2008 as a result of the agency's merger with Children's Garden and remained on the board

until terming off in 2018. She has remained very active in SBS's Gala Committee and rejoined the Board of Directors in 2022. An HR professional, Jennifer is currently the Human Resources Manager at Ropers Majeski PC in Menlo Park and was previously employed at Brayton Purcell LLP. Jennifer has been involved with Marin County Personnel Commission since 2016 and served on Marin Workforce Development Board and Schools of the Sacred Heart Alumni Board. She lives in San Rafael and has a passion for community service, Bay Area sports, hiking, and dancing.



## NEW BOARD PRESIDENT — DALE SATAKE

**Dale Satake** has been a member of Side by Side's Board since 2017. She has served as Board Treasurer and Operations Committee chair. As a former business owner and entrepreneur, Dale brings experience in operations, marketing, project management, customer relations and finance. She currently serves on the national board of directors and as the national advancement committee chair

for AAUW, the oldest women's advocacy organization. Past volunteer positions include United Way Community Services of Central Maryland Board president, AAUW Marin Board president, Kappa Alpha Theta Marin board president, and Columbia Foundation Board Trustee. As a third generation Japanese American whose parents were sent to internment camps during WWII, Dale has experienced firsthand the power of a helping hand or two. For this reason, she is devoting her retirement time to "paying it forward" so others can navigate the challenges of life.



### **Vamsey Palagummi, JD**

An attorney and nonprofit consultant, Vamsey has a particular passion for working with youth who have personally

been impacted by adversity. Through his consulting career, he has worked with numerous high performing nonprofits throughout the Bay Area, providing interim executive support, Theory of Change articulation and implementation, and evaluation support. He is currently the Managing Director of Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice (CURYJ, pronounced "courage"), an Oakland-based nonprofit focused on uplifting the political consciousness of systems impacted youth of color. Vamsey resides in Dublin, CA.



### **Darwin Pangilinan**

Darwin is an active foster parent with a passion for helping underprivileged youth find success and understands the value

that inspired mentorship provides to young people who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Darwin is an assurance partner serving life sciences companies at WithumSmith & Brown. He currently lives in South San Francisco with his family and two rescue dogs.



### **Ryan Stone**

Ryan has worked with and advised a number of non-profits on legal matters over the past fifteen

years, including Mind Matters SF, the Earth Institute and Sanctuary for Families. He has a passion for volunteering with education-related organizations. A United States Marine Corps Veteran, attorney, and pilot, he currently works as a Senior Corporate Counsel for Cadence Design Systems, Inc. Ryan resides in Portola Valley, CA with his wife, son, and dog.

## NEW REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF NORTH BAY PROGRAMS



With her promotion to Regional Director for the North Bay, **Denisse Mendoza** will now oversee Side by Side's Community Counseling North Bay, TAY Space, and YouThrive programs.

Denisse has a B.S. in Criminal Justice with an emphasis in Juvenile Delinquency from CSU Sacramento, her M.A. in Counseling Psychology with a concentration in Marriage and Family Therapy from USF, and is dually licensed in Marriage and Family Therapy and Professional Clinical Counseling. Denisse became the Program Director for Community Services in Sonoma and Marin in 2021 and has significantly raised the profile of SBS's Community Counseling program in Sonoma over the past two years and co-led the creation of SBS's *Raíces Unidas* initiative for Latinx immigrant families in Sonoma and Marin Counties. Denisse is a trainer for Crisis Prevention Intervention and is a member of the California Latinx Psychological Association.

# WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

## HUNT SCHOOL GRADUATES – THEN AND NOW

The Irene M. Hunt School provides special education in a therapeutic environment where students develop the capability to regulate their behavior as well as continue their academic instruction. The overall goal of the school is to transition students back to their mainstream public schools and a future full of possibilities.

When students begin their transition back to their home schools, typically after an average stay of 3 years, “they usually ease back in with only a few mainstream classes at a time,” says Jolene Yee, Hunt School Director. “We develop a comprehensive re-integration plan together with the school that features introductory classes that take advantage of the students’ strengths so that they can experience success and build from there.”

How do students do academically and behaviorally after their transition? “The feedback from the schools, especially high school administrators, is that our graduates are performing very well,” comments Yee. Youth work with Hunt staff to understand their personal triggers so they can successfully regulate peer interactions in addition to academic ones. “Our goal is to help students gain awareness around what might upset them and how to advocate for themselves in a positive way, to find and use their own strengths,” says Yee. “They want to succeed and they do!”

Yee says she especially loves hearing from graduates who reach out to her to share successes.

*“We develop a comprehensive re-integration plan together with the school that features introductory classes that take advantage of the students’ strengths so that they can experience success and build from there.”*

– Jolene Yee, Hunt School Director



Ford stands in front of the Kensington fire protection district engine 65 – the engine he hopes to serve on someday.

**FORD WHITEFIELD-BREWER** graduated from the Hunt School in 2020 and is now pursuing his passion to be a firefighter. Severe ADHD made it challenging for Ford to keep his impulses under control in regular classroom settings, but the staff at Hunt worked with him to develop an individual set of tools to regulate his behavior. Ford describes a turning point when he felt frustrated and felt he had to remove himself from the situation. “I almost AWOL’d off campus but staff followed me and explained to me that if I left, I would be truant. I realized that having that on my record might affect my chances of becoming a firefighter, so I turned around and went back. It was the first time I was able to think about the consequences of my actions and control my impulses. And I believe it changed the course of my life.”

These days, Ford is focusing on becoming a firefighter. “Other firefighters and first responders have been so supportive and have told me what I need to do to reach my goal. Thanks to Hunt, I know



*“Some days will be good, some days will be bad, but it’s going to be OK, and the staff at Hunt will help you all the way through”*

– Alu Mikaio, Recent Hunt School Graduate

how to follow advice and put a plan into action, and someday I will pay it forward!” Ford says that if he could impart any words of wisdom to future Hunt students, “I would tell them to believe in yourself. When you believe you can do something, then you can do it. I started believing in myself and I realized I can accomplish my goal. When I do become a firefighter, I’ll be realizing a lifelong dream, and I have Hunt to thank for helping me to become the person I always hoped I could be.”



*Ben Freeman running cross country in Fall 2021*

**BEN FREEMAN** was at the Hunt School from fourth through eighth grade. Ben’s mother, Deanna Brock, says the consistency and predictability interwoven throughout the Hunt curriculum helped Ben tremendously. Knowing things like what to expect for lunch each day, or exactly what the consequence would be for a specific action, he was able to settle down and release his “fight or flight” mindset. “Having trained staff there to immediately process with Ben was so helpful. Before Hunt, I was being called down to his school daily. Now, the time Ben spends in trigger mode is much shorter.”

Ben just completed his freshman year of high school, ran cross country in the fall, and doubled up on sports in the spring with track and the mountain bike team, all while earning a 3.57 GPA. Outside of sports and school, Ben is also thriving socially. “He learned how to have a two-way conversation and some of the social norms,” says Brock. “He is doing so great and living his best life.”

What does the future hold? “I want to be a civil engineer!” says Ben.

**ALU MIKAI**O is a recent Hunt graduate who spent seven years at Hunt. Now a rising 8th grader back in the public school system, Alu says he just knew in his gut when he was ready to transition back to his public school. “Hunt helped me grow as a person. My emotions, my behavior, my attitude – all of it is different now.” His mother Faanape says Alu is a poster boy for Hunt success. “Before Hunt, Alu was agitated, aggressive, and isolated. He would yell at anyone who tried to approach him. Now, he’s mellow, open, he thinks before he acts, and he’s the one approaching others to say hello or interact. It’s a total transformation.”

Yee remembers a turning point for Alu, who yearned to use the Hunt school swimming pool. “We empowered Alu by reminding him that we could not allow him in the pool until he could learn to be safe on land. This motivated him to follow his prompts when he was triggered, take deep breaths, and make safer choices. Soon, he earned the privilege of swimming, and that success led to more successes.”

Alu plans to spend the summer playing basketball and attending summer camp. For high school, Alu has plans to join ROTC, a family tradition modeled by his uncle, a U.S. Airforce operator. “When I graduate, I want to get a sports scholarship to Louisiana State University or SFSU.” Alu’s words of advice for future students: “Some days will be good, some days will be bad, but it’s going to be OK, and the staff at Hunt will help you all the way through!”



*Alu Mikaio smiles for the camera*



## LEND A HAND

Michelle Salow and Jaime Ortiz volunteering at SBS's 2022 Golf Tournament

Side by Side offers several ways for others to give back. Through our programs, events, and fundraising efforts, we actively encourage a community where people can give of their time, effort, and skills.

Side by Side board and Glenwood Guild Member, Joy Phoenix, began her journey with Side by Side (then Sunny Hills) more than 51 years ago. She believes that "everyone should give back in their communities in whatever capacity is best for them." Phoenix says her greatest reward has been seeing clients make progress, watching programs expand to serve more people, and seeing the community come together to help in so many different ways.

Evan Sjostrom says he has been supporting Side by Side's events for almost a decade because it "gives me a better sense of purpose,

opportunities to network, and the ability to show my expertise." He has a love for generating dollars for organizations in need. Sjostrom knows his impact is helping to positively impact the lives of the youth served by Side by Side by providing them with opportunities they may not have access to otherwise.

Former Side by Side Board Member Rich Walcoff has volunteered with Side by Side for more than 12 years as the emcee of our annual Bank of Marin Golf Tournament. He has a special affinity for working directly with youth from diverse backgrounds, and has been able to accompany youth on YouThrive's therapeutic wilderness trips as a chaperone/mentor. Walcoff says "it's always about the kids. Knowing the money I help raise is going into the program and infrastructure is what drives me to continue donating my time to Side by Side."

Whether it's volunteering at our annual gala, baking cookies for our TAY Space drop-in center, or mentoring young people through YouThrive, we'd love to have YOUR help!

**INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING AT ONE OF OUR UPCOMING EVENTS OR SUPPORTING A SBS PROGRAM?**

Contact Tamika Williams-Clark for more information.  
[twilliamsclark@sidebysideyouth.org](mailto:twilliamsclark@sidebysideyouth.org)

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**THE EVENT RAISED OVER \$125,000 FOR SIDE BY SIDE!**

**THANKS FOR A GREAT DAY ON THE LINKS!**





## CLIENT & PROVIDER PROFILE: REAL ALTERNATIVES

*Real Alternatives offers transitional housing and a safety net environment for transitional age youth (ages 18-24) exiting the foster care or the criminal justice system to find their footing, take responsibility for their lives and develop goals for their future. We sat down with Youth Specialist Ralph Hall and Real Alternatives client Michael to learn about their experience.*

### WITH RALPH (PROVIDER)

**SBS:** What were your first impressions of Michael?

**Ralph:** Michael came to Real Alternatives in 2020, when he turned 18 and was exited from the foster care system. I could tell right away that Michael was outgoing and kind, but also struggling with social anxiety. He had lived through quite a bit of trauma early on, but I could see his openness and desire to learn and grow. He has impressed me with his willingness to show up and do the hard work even when it was challenging.

**SBS:** How have you seen him grow as a Real Alternatives client?

**Ralph:** Michael has grown in so many ways. He had pretty severe social anxiety due to his early challenges and when he first got here, he struggled with doing things by himself, from transportation to grocery shopping to advocating for himself. Now, he has no issue with doing those things at all. Michael is also working on building his relationship with his biological sister, which is a long-term goal he set for himself.

**SBS:** How has Real Alternatives helped Michael reach his goals?

**Ralph:** We develop large goals with our youth, then chunk them down into smaller monthly goals to help them make progress and succeed. Every month, Michael attains his goals. He is motivated and wants to do well, so he perseveres even when he is struggling. He's graduated from high school, gotten his driver's permit and a job, and continues to improve his relationship with his family. Two years later, Michael has grown into a confident, happy well-adjusted young man. It's impressive!

### WITH MICHAEL (CLIENT)

**SBS:** What have you learned from Ralph?

**Michael:** I could relate to Ralph because he grew up in the system too, so that made me comfortable. He taught me how to be responsible, complete tasks, and take care of business. I learned that you can achieve your goals without having to give up the fun stuff! Taking little steps to get toward a goal has helped me so much.

**SBS:** What challenge have you overcome with the help of Real Alternatives? What are you most proud of?

**Michael:** The biggest challenge was graduating high school. That is a big moment in your life that you will always remember. Last year, I was struggling with turning in my homework, so I made a plan with Ralph and my clinical case manager. They worked with the school to allow me to transition to online classes due to my anxiety. They kept me organized and I was able to get back into a good groove, complete my studies, and graduate. I am proud of graduating, getting a job, and being healthy! Every part of me is complete.

**SBS:** What do you want others to know about Real Alternatives?

**Michael:** It's not just housing – it has changed my whole life. Side by Side will make anything possible for you. They will lead you and teach you how to accomplish your goals – and they will push you forward until you reach them. It feels like family. They have helped me become the real me.

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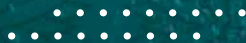
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