

FALL 2022



SidebySideYouth.org



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



## Board of Directors

- Dale Satake, *President*
- Ricki Syufy, *Vice President*
- Tim Myers, *Treasurer*
- Wendy Buscaglia, *Secretary*
- Danielle Adams
- Deanna Brock
- Barbara Carbone
- Juan Gonzalez III
- Jennifer L. Gotti
- Joy Phoenix
- Vamsey Palagummi
- Darwin Pangilinan
- Howard Schomer
- Ryan Stone

## Agency and Program Leadership

- Christine Isana Garcia, *Chief Executive Officer*
- Karen Bischoff, *Director of Property and Risk Management*
- Benjamin Edoukou, *Director of Finance*
- Denisse Mendoza, *Regional Director, North Bay Programs*
- Rebecca Hathorn, *Regional Director, East Bay Programs*
- Noelle R. Moss, *Director of Development & Communications*
- Tiffany Vigil, *Director of Human Resources*
- Jolene Yee, *Director, Irene M. Hunt School*
- Beatriz Behrens, *Program Director, Community Counseling North Bay*
- Jasmine Cervantes, *Program Manager, Our Space*
- Ahnjoliq Haskins, *Program Director, Real Alternatives*
- Vernon Pope-Banks, *Program Manger, YouThrive*
- Laura Taylor, *Program Director, TAY Space*

**Editor** Noelle R. Moss

**Writers** Jennifer Golbus, Noelle R. Moss

**Photographers** Paige Green, Andrew Hida and Martha Cruz

**Designer** And Them

*On the cover: Real Alternatives Housing Case Manager Suzanne Burns and a RA youth*



## LETTER FROM CHRISTINE

Dear Friends,

I hope this letter finds you well, and that the summer has been a good one for you and yours! Here we now are moving deep into Autumn and all that the busier days of school, sports, and upcoming holidays bring!

At Side by Side, we're coming off the heels of our Reach for the Stars Gala...and I can't begin to tell you what a fun and glorious time it was to see friends old and new! The event raised over \$250,000, a record-breaking total for our gala....so thank you to all of you that supported the evening! If you weren't able to make it this year, we do hope you'll be able to join us next fall.

Within our Side by Side "walls," we finally were able to gather all our employees together for an all-staff meeting since the beginning of the pandemic. It was wonderful to connect with each other in-person and laugh, share stories, celebrate each other, and join together in the work that we do across all our programs.

Our work continues here as the months march into the holidays. Since the beginning of the fiscal year, we've already seen a significant rise in our service delivery (and the first quarter has just ended). The youth and families we see are bringing in more complex and more serious behavioral, mental, and academic struggles. They need us – and you – now more than ever.

We look forward to continuing to connect with you as the year unfolds. There will be successes to toast and challenges to overcome in these complicated times. Thank you for walking side by side with us!

Warmly,

Christine

**Side by Side**  
 300 Sunny Hills Drive, Bldg. 5  
 San Anselmo, CA 94960  
 Tel: 415-457-3200  
 Fax: 415-456-4679

**SidebySideYouth.org**  
 sidebysideyouth  
 sidebysideyouth  
 @sidebyside4kids  
 Side by Side



## SBS'S NEWEST BOARD MEMBER – DANIELLE ADAMS

SBS is thrilled to welcome Danielle Adams as our newest board member. Danielle is passionate about helping youth achieve educational success. For more than eight years, she has actively devised strategies, policies and programs to inspire youth to achieve their educational and leadership goals. Director of Programming for Improve Your Tomorrow – a nonprofit focused on helping young men of color increase their attendance and graduation from college – she also has a wealth of experience designing strategic partnerships, raising funds, and working on DEI initiatives. Danielle resides in El Sobrante, CA.

## EDUCATIONALLY RELATED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AT HUNT SCHOOL

As a nonpublic school with a charter to address emotional and behavioral challenges that impede a student's ability to learn in a public-school environment, Side by Side's Irene M. Hunt School provides a variety of supports to address students' emotional and behavioral challenges and build on their core strengths. Educationally Related Mental Health Services (ERMHS) at Hunt include individual and group counseling for students and may also include broader family supports such as family counseling and parent consultations.



"We are really excited about our weekly social skills group counseling offered in each Hunt classroom," says newly promoted Lead Behavioral Health Clinician Gina Stiens. "During these ERMHS group sessions, students develop and improve their ability to communicate clearly, manage impulses, tolerate frustration, and other types of emotional regulation." Sean, father of Hunt student Nathan, says his son has been working on the skill of connecting with other students outside the classroom setting. "The weekly groups with Ms. Stiens have created that access point for Nathan. It's a safe space for him to be with his peers and talk about things openly."

Some students learn to cooperate with a peer who they may not prefer, while others learn how to use pro-social communication such as using "I" statements, clearly stating their needs, using active listening, and responding appropriately to their peers. Still others work on regulating explosive behavior. They learn to take space or speak their frustrations instead of throwing a pencil, cursing, slamming a door or picking up a rock.

Nathan's most significant challenge had to do with maintaining composure during competitive games such as Four Square and group Jenga. "He used to show physical aggression such as knocking over furniture, slamming doors, and storming out of the room if the game was not going his way," said Stiens. His mother Sara agrees that prior to ERMHS, Nathan's go-to coping mechanism was fight/flight and complete shutdown. "Ms. Stien's caring approach helped Nathan take control of his emotions and reactions. He can now recognize when he is triggered and choose more productive coping strategies, like taking space." Sharing that Nathan just started the process of transitioning to a public middle school in San Francisco, Sara continued, "the groups and individual therapy motivated him to take control of the narrative and shift the path of his life in a positive direction. This has been a game changer for Nathan in a school setting and in life as a whole. We are so grateful."



## SUPPORT SIDE BY SIDE WITH A CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTION FROM YOUR IRA

After years of contributing to tax-deferred 401(k)s and IRAs, income tax is due on that money when you take withdrawals in retirement. Annual withdrawals from traditional retirement accounts are required after age 72, and the penalty for skipping a required minimum distribution is 50% of the amount that should have been withdrawn. However, if you are 70 and ½ or older and are in the fortunate position of not needing your distribution for living expenses and are charitably inclined, you can avoid income tax on your required withdrawal by donating your money to organizations like Side by Side instead.

Charitable contributions can only be made from IRAs, not 401(k)s or similar types of retirement accounts. So you might need to roll funds over from a 401(k) to an IRA if you want to make tax-free charitable contributions part of your retirement plan. Contact your retirement plan administrator to learn more or set up a distribution from an existing IRA by December 31st.

A photograph of two women in a kitchen. One woman, wearing a black t-shirt and white pants, is looking into an open refrigerator. The other woman, wearing a blue denim jacket over a white top and dark pants, is holding a white shopping bag with green accents and a small container. The kitchen has white cabinets and a black oven. A large orange-bordered box with white text is overlaid on the bottom half of the image.

# A DEEP DIVE INTO SIDE BY SIDE'S REAL ALTERNATIVES PROGRAM

Many of us, in thinking about what we want to offer young people, have robust ideas of what guidance and support we, as parents, might give kids on the cusp of adulthood. Young people transitioning out of foster care or probation rarely have that and need housing and specialized services so they can stabilize, grow, and establish the kind of safe, self-sufficient existence many of us take for granted. That's where Real Alternatives comes in. Currently housing 62 youth ages 18-25 throughout Alameda County, Real Alternatives offers safe apartments for youth to call home, along with individualized support as they prepare to navigate the world of adulthood.

Employing the "remote site model," Real Alternatives apartments are dispersed throughout the community. "This way, our youth learn how to live with and navigate real neighbors," says Real Alternatives Director Ahnjolique Haskins. "We feel it sets them up to be better neighbors and community members in the future."

## REFERRALS AND REQUIREMENTS

Youth are referred to Real Alternatives from many sources, including probation departments, child welfare, and self-referrals. When living in a Real Alternatives apartment, youth are expected to follow through with required meetings and commitments, have respect for roommates and neighbors, and be either working or attending school.

## MOVING IN

There are a ton of logistics and planning involved in welcoming a youth to the Real Alternatives program. First Haskins notifies the intake coordinator, mental health clinician, maintenance team, and housing services case manager. She then works with Facilities Manager Bonnie Meyer to identify which apartment the youth will move into and selects a move-in date. If there will be a roommate, the team working with the roommate is also notified. The youth has an introductory meeting with their assigned housing services case manager. And finally, the intake coordinator prepares for any special considerations such as a pet or a child, or mental health challenges that need to be addressed.

*"I get a lot of support from my housing services case manager and clinician. We're working on mental health, education goals, and education management. They also give me advice about how to deal with credit."*

– Jose\*, Real Alternatives client

Next, Meyer's team springs into action to get the apartment move-in ready, handling any cleaning or repairs that need to be made. Each youth is supplied with bedding, housewares, and furniture for their room. "By the time we get to move-in day, everyone is ready to greet our new resident!" says Meyer. The housing services case manager is there to help them get settled, and they grocery shop, go over paperwork, and have a roommate meeting. "It's a heavy lift, but we want to ensure as smooth a transition as possible so these youth can start on the right foot."

*"Right now, I'm studying criminal justice, and my goal is to become a private investigator to help find missing children. With the support of Side by Side, I know I can reach my goals!"*

– Alicia\*, Real Alternatives client

## INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS, SETTING GOALS & COPING WITH CHALLENGES

"It's important to remember that these youth did not grow up in a 'typical' home," says East Bay Regional Director Rebecca Hathorn. "Typical education and life skills such as attending class and showing up on time become long-term goals." More immediate topics include how to get along with roommates, basic hygiene, how to cook, clean, and do laundry, how to shop for groceries and how to stretch a food budget by utilizing food pantries and other government assistance programs. Roommate meetings cover topics such as visitors, splitting the refrigerator, eating each other's food, cleaning schedules, communications guidelines, and quiet hours. "I get a lot of support from my housing services case manager and clinician," says a 19-year-old Real Alternatives youth. "We're working on mental health, education goals, and education management. They also give me advice about how to deal with credit," she says.

Many Real Alternatives clients confront the challenge of finishing high school or getting into a college or trade school. "A lot of our youth have gone from school to school or were homeless," Hathorn explains. "Knowing how to do the work or that they can do the work are huge hurdles. Many of them actually believe they cannot even finish high school." Real Alternatives helps with overcoming the barrier of commuting to school, and also addresses tutoring, executive function, and time management skills.

Self-advocacy skills are also high on the list. "A lot of these youth have been told that their voice doesn't matter," says Suzie Burns, Housing Services Case Manager. "They don't speak about their interests and desires for fear that they will be told to be quiet." Finally, relationships with friends and families can be a challenge. "Our youth are often connected with others who are either un-housed or mentally unstable," says Burns. "We support them to learn how to communicate that these friends and family members cannot live with them or ask them for

money. Setting boundaries is an important life skill for them to learn as they continue on the path of making safe, supportive choices for themselves."

Once a month, youth meet with their housing services case manager to review their goals. Typical monthly goals include getting an ID card or driver's license, enrolling in school, and registering for food benefits. In addition to these monthly meetings, weekly meetings help youth stay on track. "Right now, I'm studying criminal justice, and my goal is to become a private investigator to help find missing children," says a Real Alternatives youth. "With the support of Side by Side, I know I can reach my goals!"

## SAFETY AND SECURITY

Real Alternatives staff perform monthly apartment checks to ensure the safety and security of all youth. "We make sure the smoke detectors are up and working, emergency contact sheets are up to date, and that everything looks in order," says Haskins. "In addition, the maintenance team can be our eyes and ears inside the apartments between our monthly checks. Let's say some windows get broken, and the youth says that the baby threw something that hit the window, but there are three broken windows so clearly that's not what happened," says Meyer. "Maintenance can assess what's really happening and alert us if there is extra support needed."



How many Real Alternative maintenance men does it take to change a light bulb?

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Real Alternatives partners with 14 properties in Alameda County to provide safe transitional apartments. Leslie Mouton, property manager of the Alderwood Apartments complex in San Leandro, has partnered with Real Alternatives since 2016. She says she feels a deep connection with Side by Side's mission and feels honored to do her part to help these youth. "Having my own biological children wasn't meant to be, but I realize now, I do have children. It's a blessing in my life. When I see the youth trying to make something out of their lives that they have never had before, and are working so hard for it, I'm going to do whatever I can to support them." Mouton says that Real Alternatives is a good partner "because they are responsive, responsible, kind, collaborative and helpful."

## THRIVING INTO THE FUTURE

So how are Real Alternative youth doing out in the world? Burns and Mouton both say that youth often come back to visit them after they age out of the program. "One youth had a passion for swimming, and I always encouraged him to follow his passion and get a lifeguard certification," says Burns. "He is a swimming instructor now! Another youth was very college minded. She is now studying at Stanford University and hopes to go into social work." Mouton says that when she hears from youth years after they graduate from Real Alternatives and hears how well they are doing, it makes her feel like she's doing her part to make the world a better place. "We get to see these youth thriving as adults despite their challenges during their teenage years. It just doesn't get any better than that."



## OUR SPACE CLIENT PROFILE

*Our Space creates a safe place for LGBTQIA+ youth ages 13-24 to express their authentic selves and feel seen, accepted, and celebrated. Nancy is a 17-year-old from Hayward. After suffering abuse, bullying, and suicidal ideation, she began to find love and acceptance in a mental health facility where she finalized her decision to transition to a female identity. The road to acceptance with Nancy's family has been rocky, but Our Space youth advocate Jackie has been supporting Nancy, helping her to step into her identity as a trans woman, learning how to set boundaries and self-advocate, and become a mentor to other trans and foster youth.*

### WITH JACKIE (PROVIDER)

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

**Jackie:** When I first met Nancy, she had a lot of challenges and negative things happening in her life. But I never saw that when I looked at Nancy. Instead I saw someone who's very strong and really funny. She has such a good, positive energy and is just very fun-spirited.

**SBS:** Why is working with Nancy so meaningful for you?

**Jackie:** When I was younger I did not speak, due to some trauma I had experienced. I had a teacher who told me that I had a right to use my voice. She was so encouraging and I'll never forget how it felt to be seen and supported. She believed in me before I believed in myself. And now I hope I am doing the same for Nancy.

**SBS:** How do you and Nancy work together as a team to help her reach her goals?

**Jackie:** She's the one who's saying, 'this is what I want to do for myself. And this is how I want to improve.' I'm there to provide that little bit of extra support. She just needs to feel confident and motivated and believe that she can do it.

**SBS:** What impresses you about Nancy?

**Jackie:** Every week I talk to her, I feel like, 'Wow. You're just so resilient. You're just so brave.' I can't imagine going through even half the things she's had to go through in her life and still being able to smile every week and be so kind, even when the world hasn't been so kind back. The fact that she shows up here every week, no matter what's happened, with a smile on her face and ready to work on things is inspiring.

### WITH NANCY (CLIENT)

**SBS:** How did it feel when you found a safe community?

**Nancy:** Before I found Our Space, I attended some meetings at my church for LGBTQIA+ support. But those groups made me feel uncomfortable and ashamed. Like they don't want you to be who you are. Then I found Our Space. When I came here, it was just, the space was so accepting. It was beautiful. I feel very welcomed by every individual here. It even feels like family.

**SBS:** How has the clothing closet at Our Space helped you during your transition?

**Nancy:** I had a really supportive teacher who used to help me by giving me feminine clothes. But I felt sort of like a grandma in those clothes, so I would come to Our Space and they would give me accents to modernize the outfits, like a belt or a scarf, and that's just what I loved. I love to express myself with fashion but I don't have the budget to buy clothes. Thanks to Our Space I've been able to step into my feminine identity and express myself.

**SBS:** What have you learned about the power of being accepted and loved?

**Nancy:** I was always chasing acceptance, and when I was finally accepted and seen at Our Space, they made me feel proud of who I was. I'm always looking out for other kids, telling them to never be ashamed of who they are. If there's someone that isn't accepting, just call me and I'll be there. People think that trans kids need better, or that they need to be taught better. Or that they should know better. But what they really need is love. And a space for them to be themselves.



## IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

### SIDE BY SIDE WAS FORTUNATE TO PREMIER THREE SHORT FILMS AT OUR SEPTEMBER GALA

that tell the moving and impactful story of our work with clients in three programs: the Irene M. Hunt School, Our Space and YouThrive. If you haven't yet seen the videos, please take a few moments to enjoy them. All three can be found on our Vimeo channel at [Vimeo.com/sidebysideyouth](https://vimeo.com/sidebysideyouth).



## DONOR PROFILE: SHANNON MATTHIESEN

Now serving as both our Reach for the Stars Gala Co-Chair and a member of Side by Side's Development & Communications Committee, Shannon Matthiesen has been a staunch advocate for the agency's programs. We sat down with her just before the Gala to learn what inspires her to give back.

**SBS:** Tell me about your introduction to our agency...what brought you to Side by Side?

**Shannon:** Six years ago, Shelley Cahan invited me to be part of the Reach for the Stars Gala Committee. Each meeting included a dedicated introduction to one of Side by Side's programs and, most importantly, to the individuals running them. The dedication and passion of those staff members was really what convinced me that Side by Side was a truly unique and worthwhile organization.

**SBS:** I know they're all great! But do you have a "favorite" Side by Side program and why?

**Shannon:** That's nearly an impossible question for me to answer because each program is so valuable! If I were pressed; however, I would say that I am most intrigued by the Real Alternatives program.

The five-year longitudinal study (conducted by Side by Side in 2018) demonstrated how critical it is for foster youth to receive supportive transitional housing and related services as they grow beyond their pasts and enter the wider world of adulthood.

**SBS:** What do you find most inspiring about Side by Side's work with young people?

**Shannon:** What stands out again and again about Side by Side's programs is that they find and support young people who would otherwise fall through the cracks of the existing systems—whether those are educational, mental, or other social services.

**SBS:** How does being a mom, especially during the worst of the pandemic, impact your appreciation of the agency and the work that takes place?

**Shannon:** When the pandemic hit, I was lucky enough to be in a secure financial situation that allowed me to stop working and focus entirely on the education and mental well-being of my two boys as they navigated the challenges of remote school. Through my involvement with Side by Side, I knew how unique my situation was and it deepened my appreciation for the agency's many counseling and support services.

**SBS:** Reach for the Stars, this year's nightclub-themed Gala, was quite the party! As Co-Chair, what are you most proud of and what's your hope for future events?

**Shannon:** Our goal this year was to shake things up a bit! Coming out of the pandemic, we really wanted to give our guests the chance to re-imagine what a gala event needed to look like, so we flipped just about every logistical element of our previous gala around, from spaceplanning at the venue to the sound (courtesy of notable Bay Area DJ Malachi, aka Uncle Snax), to the food (catered by the incredibly innovative Fork Full of Earth). As to future events, I'd say with our amazingly fun and supportive base of guests, sponsors, and benefactors, anything is possible!



## GIVE A HOLIDAY GIFT TO A SIDE BY SIDE YOUTH



As the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to ripple through our communities and into our holiday season, we hope to have your support for our Holiday Wishes program. Many of our clients and their families have been hit hard by the pandemic and its continued economic ramifications – and holiday gifts will put an additional strain on the family budget. Side by Side endeavors to brighten our young people's holiday season by ensuring that each has a present to unwrap.

**Want to make a holiday wish come true?** The following businesses have generously offered to showcase our clients' holiday wish lists – stop in during the indicated time frames to pick up a tag and fulfill one or more wishes!

### Book Passage

51 Tamal Vista Blvd,  
Corte Madera  
Available in-store or visit their  
online Giving Tree:  
[bookpassage.com/giving-tree](http://bookpassage.com/giving-tree)  
Available 11/1 – 12/13

### Marin Country Mart

Holiday Tree at the  
Trading Post  
2003 Larkspur Landing Circle, Larkspur  
Available 12/1 – 12/24

### Sonoma County Secret Santa

Visit [seceretsantanow.org](http://seceretsantanow.org) to see a  
list of participating Sonoma County  
businesses or "Adopt a Heart" online  
Available 11/1 – 12/24

### Amazon Wishlist

Supports SBS's  
Real Alternatives  
transitional housing program  
[bit.ly/AmazonRealAlternatives](http://bit.ly/AmazonRealAlternatives)  
Available 11/11 – 12/13

We are grateful to Mill Valley Middle School, Temple Beth Sholom in San Leandro, and Kids Bike Lane for privately supporting our holiday giving program.

Learn more at [SidebySideYouth.org/holiday-giving](http://SidebySideYouth.org/holiday-giving) or contact Bruno de Sousa at [bdesousa@sidebysideyouth.org](mailto:bdesousa@sidebysideyouth.org) or 415-871-1475.

*\*Please return the gifts by 12/13 to ensure that we can get them to our clients in time.*



300 Sunny Hills Drive, Bldg. 5  
San Anselmo, CA 94960

Return Service Requested

POSTAGE  
PAID



..... *Reach FOR THE Stars* .....

COLLECTIVELY WE REACHED FOR THE STARS  
THIS YEAR AND RAISED OVER **\$250,000!**

MANY THANKS TO OUR GUESTS, SPONSORS AND  
DONORS FOR SUPPORTING THE EVENT!



Mr. & Mrs. J. Patrick Hunt • Ricki & Ray Syufy



Deanna Brock & Daniel Freeman • The Mattaja Families • Emily Morris & Javier Soltero • Jacqueline & David Spielberg

First Republic Bank • The Grateful Dog • Harrington Group • Marin Roto-Rooter • Neurobehavioral Clinic & Counseling Center  
North Bay Business Journal • North Bay Candleworks • Tri Counties Bank

Jennifer L. Gotti • Dale Satake • The Carol & Robert Jackson Foundation/Wendy & John Buscaglia • Howard Schomer & Kimberly Rochat