



FRIENDS of the CHILDREN

Coachella Valley

2025-2026 Gratitude Report



Together, We're Changing What's Possible

Dear Friends,

One year ago, we dreamed of moving 24 more children off our waitlist and pairing them with a Friend. Today, because of you, we've made that dream a reality. **All 48 children in our program now have a Friend walking beside them, inspiring hope.**

Many moments from this past year will stay with me forever. I've seen a child who once struggled to trust begin turning to their Friend when life feels confusing. I've watched caregivers who didn't always feel seen now feel heard, understood, and supported as our team walks alongside them. That kind of partnership is priceless.

Teachers and caregivers know that when they call on Friends of the Children, we show up. Together, we help ensure every child has the support they deserve. That trust changes lives.

At Friends of the Children – Coachella Valley, we make a rare and unwavering promise: to walk beside children facing the greatest obstacles for 12+ years, no matter what.



Because you believed in children whose futures once felt uncertain, every child in our program now has a professional mentor who shows up with encouragement, guidance, and unconditional support. They are learning they are worthy, capable, loved, and never alone.

Reaching 48 children is an extraordinary milestone, but our work is far from finished. Children in our community are still waiting for someone to believe in them. With your continued partnership, we can extend this promise to more children, helping them build futures filled with hope, resilience, and opportunity.

Your generosity changes the trajectory of a child's life. It strengthens families, builds a stronger community, and creates opportunities that will ripple across generations.

On behalf of the children who now believe in themselves, the caregivers who feel empowered, and the team privileged to walk beside them every step of the way - thank you.

Together, we are proving that when a child has a caring adult who never gives up, anything is possible. Thank you for making that promise a reality for 48 children today and for the many more whose stories are still waiting to be written.

With gratitude beyond words,

Karrie Schaaf

Karrie Schaaf
Executive Director
Friends of the Children Coachella Valley



Karrie and kiddos learning the peace of practicing yoga led by Flow at Center Stage in Downtown Indio

Building Strong

Friends of the Children is a national network of more than 45 chapters with over 33 years of experience and proven outcomes working with youth.

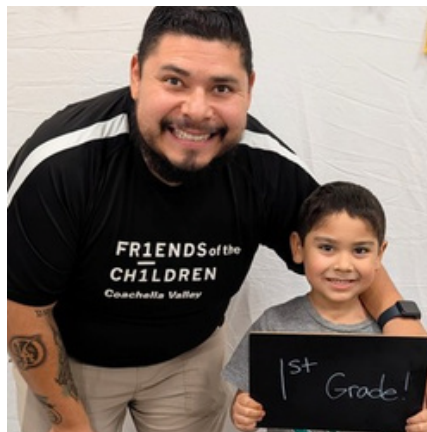
Friends of the Children – Coachella Valley was founded in 2024 as an independent 501c3 chapter of the national organization to address the significant barriers facing youth in our region. We identify children facing the greatest obstacles and provide them with a long-term, paid professional mentor—called a “Friend”—to help them build the skills, goals, and relationships they need to succeed in life. We support children starting in kindergarten through their high school graduation- 12+ years, no matter what.

- We engage children in recreational, cultural, and community service activities that enhance their talents and skills.
- We work with each child in school and provide support to their teachers.
- We build a relationship with the families and caregivers, and partner with them to equip children to thrive.

Serving Youth in Coachella Valley

Selecting youth for our 12+ year mentorship program is a thoughtful and intentional process which includes dedicated enrollment referral partners, needs assessments, school observation, and caregiver and child meetings to determine the right long-term fit.

As we expand **Friends of the Children – Coachella Valley** to empower generational change for children and their families across the region, we are excited to have partnered with **Coachella Valley Unified School District** (CVUSD), **Desert Sands Unified School District** (DSUSD), and the **County of Riverside Department of Public Social Services** (DPSS).



Tribal Land Acknowledgement

Friends of the Children – Coachella Valley acknowledges the Cahuilla People who first lived in the Coachella Valley, who are the first stewards of the land and whose descendants reside here today. We occupy a space where Indigenous People gathered and built community. Friends of the Children – Coachella Valley hopes the intentional work we are doing in the Coachella Valley honors those who came before us.

Valley Realities

Children in the Coachella Valley face significant barriers to stability and opportunity.



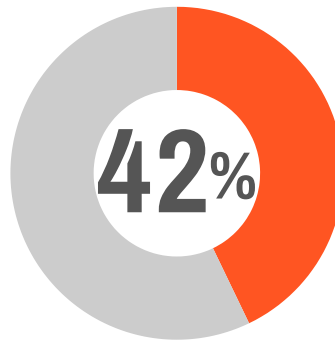
Only **58%** of students graduate high school

71%

Of children have experienced domestic violence

22%

Of children over age three have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder



Of children live below the poverty line



2 in 6

Children experience food insecurity



Families with children are the fastest-growing segment experiencing homelessness in the Coachella Valley

Sources: Census Data, HARC, CVRM

Our Families

The realities facing the youth we serve.

100%

qualify for free school meals

33%

experience extreme poverty

46%

live in single-caregiver households

13%

are unhoused

Local Impact in Action

Since launching in 2024, Friends of the Children – Coachella Valley has been building lasting impact through long-term, professional mentoring for children and families. In just two years, we've made significant progress while building a strong foundation for even greater impact across the Coachella Valley in the years ahead.

Friends – Coachella Valley by the Numbers

2024 - 2026

48

Children are enrolled in a 12+ year relationship with a professional Mentor

14,976

One-on-One Mentoring hours invested from 2024-2026

98%

Of Teachers and Caregivers report significant learning milestones achieved since being paired with a Mentor

”

Since working with the mentors, I have seen such great improvements in the classroom. They come ready to learn, participate, and finish homework.

Kindergarten Teacher

Where We're Headed

Our 10-Year Anniversary 2034 Vision

240

Children enrolled in a 12+ year relationship with a Mentor



Children from our 2024 cohort will be preparing to graduate from High School!

3

Campuses serving East Valley, Mid Valley, and West Valley

What's Possible with a Friend

33+ Years of Proven National Impact



95% avoid early parenting



95% avoid the juvenile justice system



90% graduate high school or earn a GED



92% enroll in post-secondary education, serve our country or enter the workforce.



Every \$1 invested in program youth returns \$7 to the community

Our Proven Model

Research has shown that the most important factor for overcoming childhood adversity and building resiliency in children who face the greatest challenges in life is a long-term, consistent relationship with a caring adult. The Friends of the Children model has six distinguishing features:

- We invite youth and caregivers to join us
- We hire and train full-time, paid, professional mentors
- We commit for the long-term
- Our work is relationship-based, individualized, and intentional
- We work with youth and caregivers in the community, at-home, and at-school
- We evaluate, measure, and improve

Friends

Friends are full-time, paid professionals. Each Friend supports eight youth and their caregivers. Friends teach valuable life skills, model healthy behaviors, and create pathways to more choices and opportunities for youth. Every week, every month, every year for 12+ years, Friends join youth in their classrooms, advancing learning objectives; in their homes, promoting protective capacities; and in their communities, supporting the discovery of their talents and passions. The Coachella Valley chapter's Friends have backgrounds in Education, Psychology, and Child Development as well as lived experience caring for and mentoring children.

Two-Generation Impact

Recognizing the power of our model to empower youth, Friends of the Children Coachella Valley uses a two-generation (2Gen) approach to meet the needs of both youth and caregivers. We take a whole-child approach because we understand that home environment, systems, community, and culture shape how a child develops and learns. In addition to providing a one-on-one, salaried, professional mentor (a Friend) to individual children, our 2Gen approach supports parents and caregivers in a holistic way.



Ms. Tiffany, one of our professional mentors, meets with Faith and her Mom as they explore books to read at the Indio Library*

Core Assets

Friends of the Children's nine Core Assets are the essential skills, strengths, and supports we help children build over time to navigate challenges, make healthy choices, and thrive in school, relationships, and life.



Growth Mindset

I love learning and know that my abilities will improve through dedication and effort.



Belonging

I understand who I am, have a place where I feel accepted and know that my contributions count.



Hope

When I have tough times, I believe it can get better.



Problem Solving

I know how to weigh the pros and cons and make a decision.



Perseverance & Grit

I work hard through challenges and finish what I start.



Self Management

I know how to manage my feelings and take care of myself in a healthy way.



Self Determination

I believe in myself and am able to set goals and achieve them.



Find Your Spark

I use creativity to explore my passions.



Positive Relationship Building

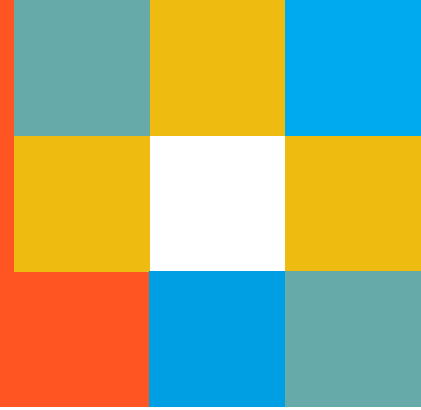
I get along well with others and am able to find people to support me.

There is never a cost for families to be a part of Friends of the Children – Coachella Valley.

We are fully committed to the child and their family. A child will never be removed from our program because of behavior issues or challenges in school. We will remain a partner even if the family moves to a different neighborhood or school within our service area. **Your support makes this possible.**

Isabella's Story

Partnering with families so young people can thrive



We know that mentorship is most powerful when we work hand in hand with families. Professional mentors build long-term relationships not only with youth, but also with the parents and caregivers who are essential to their success. Isabella's* story is about how working closely with one youth and her family has created meaningful change.

When Belinda first met Isabella's caregivers, the whole family—her parents and siblings—gathered to share their concerns about Isabella's struggles in school. They were worried about her reluctance to attend classes and about the bullying she had been facing. "Please let us know if there is anything we can do," her father said, placing trust in Belinda to help support their daughter.

At school, Belinda noticed Isabella's quiet, withdrawn demeanor. Over time, she earned Isabella's trust during recess, drawing her into games and activities. Other kids began joining in, and soon Isabella was making friends and finding her voice. Her confidence grew so much that she began raising her hand in class.

Isabella's parents played a critical role in her progress. They communicate openly, prioritize their children despite busy work schedules, and regularly welcome Belinda into their home for visits. Around their kitchen table, they come together to stay engaged in Isabella's growth. When distractions arise, they help refocus her and keep her on track with her lessons and goals.

This partnership has helped Isabella flourish. Isabella is now attending Ballet Folklórico classes and proudly sharing videos of her performances.

Stories like Isabella's reflect that partnering with parents and caregivers is central to our work. When youth, families, and mentors work together, we can create the stability, encouragement, and opportunities every child needs to thrive.

**Name changed for privacy*



Monthly Literacy Fair



Each month, our clubhouse transforms into a lively marketplace of learning for our program youth. The Literacy Fair is more than a chance to pick out fun prizes; it is an opportunity to build confidence, strengthen reading and math skills, and celebrate growth.



Throughout the month, youth earn Shining Star Bucks by reading books, finishing assignments, and practicing new skills with their mentors. At the fair, they decide how to spend their earnings, weighing options and practicing math as they count, add, and subtract. Mentors guide them through each choice, turning every transaction into a lesson in budgeting and goal setting.

Prizes include books, toys, and special school supplies, and every youth automatically takes home a book to continue fostering a love of reading at home. These moments of learning and laughter remind us that education happens anywhere curiosity and encouragement come together.



Exploring Together

Throughout the year, we connect youth and their families to the broader community through outings that integrate learning, cultural engagement, and relationship-building. These experiences are designed to expand horizons, strengthen mentor-youth relationships, and support positive developmental outcomes for children and caregivers.

A key highlight was a visit to [The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens](#), made possible through the zoo's generosity. More than fifty youth and family members explored desert ecosystems, engaged with wildlife, and participated in hands-on learning experiences. Time spent together at the Oasis Splash Pad further reinforced our two-generation approach, creating shared experiences that strengthen family bonds and deepen mentor connections.

We also advanced cultural connection and community engagement by participating in the [St. John's Community Health](#) Hispanic Heritage Month Block Party. Youth and families engaged with culturally responsive performances, including [Danza Azteca](#), interactive activities, and community resources designed to support families facing the greatest barriers.

Our participation reflects a broader strategy to build coordinated networks of support around children and caregivers. When community organizations and local leaders collaborate, they create environments where families feel connected, supported, and better positioned to thrive.



Community Outings Expand Horizons



As the seasons shifted into fall, we joined [About Families, Inc.'s](#) Fall Festival at SilverRock Park. This multi-partner community event provided youth with opportunities for play and exploration while connecting families to resources that support health, learning, and overall well-being.

Educational outings continued at the [Palm Springs Air Museum](#), one of our most frequently visited community partners and a favorite destination among youth. There, youth engaged with history, science, and innovation through immersive, hands-on exhibits, often experiencing a museum setting for the first time. Interacting with knowledgeable volunteers and exploring exhibits such as Women in Aviation encouraged curiosity, reinforced classroom learning, and helped youth envision future possibilities in fields they may not have previously considered.

These community outings are intentional components of our long-term mentoring model, offering opportunities for learning beyond the classroom, reinforcing stability through mentor presence, and strengthening family and community connections.



Staying Connected Through Change

12+ years, no matter what

At the start of the 2025–2026 school year, Aria* and Alejandra*, two girls from different families, were each preparing to start at a new school because of changes in their family lives. Each girl's parents worried that the transition might mean losing the support of her Friend. We assured both families that their Friends would be there every step of the way.

Before school started, we connected with the school district, principals, and first-grade teachers at [Harry Truman Elementary](#) and [John F. Kennedy Elementary](#), the girls' new schools. When the mentors were welcomed into the classrooms, it made the transition feel a little more familiar for Aria and Alejandra. Together with their families, we worked out transportation and after-school plans and connected them with the resources they needed to settle in smoothly.

On the first day, mentors Ms. Bella and Ms. Belinda were there alongside the girls, helping calm nerves and build confidence in an unfamiliar environment. They shared photos and updates with the parents and provided extra support to the whole family during this period of change.

We're proud to continue offering consistent care and guidance for our families, including building relationships with new schools and demonstrating that our 12+ year commitment to youth remains strong, no matter what.

**Names changed for privacy*



Summer Open House

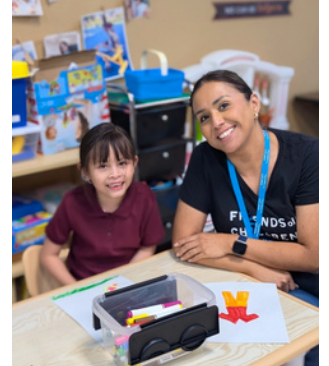
Building Community for Long-Term Impact

In August 2025 we welcomed community leaders and partners into our clubhouse for our Summer Open House. It was inspiring to see so many supporters come together to learn about the work we've begun in our first year and the vision we're carrying forward.

Guests heard directly from our mentors, who shared stories of the children and families they walk alongside every day. These firsthand perspectives underscored the heart of our model: building lasting, one-on-one relationships that help children navigate challenges at school, at home, and in the community.

Visitors also toured our clubhouse, a safe space where youth have access to the stability they need to focus on growth. For many of the young people we serve, this kind of consistent environment makes all the difference.

We are deeply grateful to the [City of Indio](#), Congressman Raul Ruiz's office, Senator Padilla's office, Assemblymember Jeff Gonzalez's office, and our local nonprofit and business partners who joined us.



Thanks to [Painted Dough](#) for donating donuts and to **Board President Kenneth Churchill** for sponsoring refreshments. Everyone's presence reaffirmed the importance of standing together in support of children and families across the Coachella Valley.

This is only the beginning. As we grow, we remain committed to providing 12+ years of professional mentorship to every child we serve—and to extending that support to their families as well. With the continued partnership of our community, we can ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive.



Philanthropy with Friends

Food, Fashion, & Fun with Friends — June 2025

Our first Friendraiser brought community members together on El Paseo for an afternoon of connection, style, and shared purpose. Guests enjoyed stops at [Maison Leveque Boutique](#) and [Artin Jewels](#), followed by lunch at [Porta Via](#) and a conversation about the impact of Friends of the Children Coachella Valley.

We're grateful to Porta Via, [Harcourts Desert Homes](#), and everyone who helped make the day so meaningful.



The Shag House hosts Dexter and Brandon, along with Willie from 849, and Karrie at our Inaugural fundraiser



Jorja and Brent Hicks, Inaugural Friend for Life Legacy Award Recipients



Karrie with Platinum Sponsor Augustine Band of Cahuilla Indians Chairperson Amanda Augustine and guests

For the Love of Children — February 2026

Our inaugural For the Love of Children fundraiser brought our community together at the iconic [The Shag House](#) and raised more than \$150,000 for our mission through the evening's auction to sustain and grow our mentoring program.

We were honored to present the inaugural Friend for Life Legacy Award to Brent and Jorja Hicks, recognizing their extraordinary commitment to Friends of the Children – Coachella Valley and their belief in changing the trajectory of children's lives.

We are deeply grateful to Platinum Sponsor [Augustine Band of Cahuilla Indians](#); partners [The Auen Foundation](#), Brand Mingle Marketing, Marionberry Pie Fund, and [H.N. and Frances C. Berger Foundation](#); [EIGHT4NINE](#) for catering; [Costco](#) and [Sloan's](#) for sponsoring the bar; and The Shag House for its hospitality.

Most of all, we thank everyone who attended, gave, and continues to champion our mission. **We can't wait to celebrate with you in 2027!**

Building Momentum at Desert Fast Pitch

Our team was proud to participate in this year's **Desert Fast Pitch**, hosted by the **RAP Foundation** and **NPO Centric**. The event brought together twelve local nonprofits to share their bold ideas and innovative approaches to community impact.

We were thrilled when our **Executive Director, Karrie Schaaf**, was selected as one of six finalists. On event day, she took the stage to share how long-term, professional mentoring is changing lives for children and families across the Coachella Valley.

Her heartfelt presentation and the passion behind our mission earned Friends of the Children – Coachella Valley \$4,000 in total awards, including recognition for Best Portfolio and Most Improved.

We're deeply grateful to the RAP Foundation, NPO Centric, the judges, the coaches, and to keynote speaker **Elizabeth Smart**, whose words on hope and child safety left a lasting impression.

Congratulations to our fellow finalists— **We Can Fish**, **HARC Inc**, **The Exception**, **The Greater Palm Springs Tourism Foundation**, and **4ShayJ** — for their inspiring work and dedication to our community. The connections we've built have been invaluable.

We left the event with renewed pride in what we're building together and deep gratitude for the partnerships that make it possible. Thank you to Desert Fast Pitch for creating a space where nonprofit leaders feel supported, inspired, and empowered.

Desert Fast Pitch is more than a competition. It is a celebration of collaboration, vision, and the collective power of local nonprofits.



Eight weeks of practice



Jan Pye, Karrie & Leticia De Lara



Book signing with Elizabeth Smart



Three-minute pitch on stage

Dollars and Sense

Every achievement highlighted in our Gratitude Report was made possible by the generosity of our supporters. Thank you for believing in the children and families we serve and for investing in a future where every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Financial Snapshot

Fiscal Year 2025/2026 (September 1 - August 31)

Revenue \$790,821

100% of funds raised make an impact with children and families in our Coachella Valley

58% *Individual Giving*

37% *Foundation Grants*

2% *Corporate*

2% *Civic*

1% *In Kind*

Expenses \$787,258

Finances independently audited in 2025

Program 70%

Administration 30%

EVIDENCE

It makes economic sense.

\$1 = \$7

The Harvard Business School Association of Oregon showed that for every \$1 invested in Friends of the Children, the Community benefits over \$7 in saved social costs. Helping one child saves the community \$900,000.

[Read more about our Return on Investment](#)

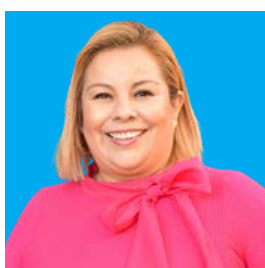
Meet the Team

Founding Executive Director

Karrie Schaaf is a builder, connector, and lifelong champion for children and families. She has a knack for bringing people together, turning challenges into opportunities, and creating lasting change — one relationship, one partnership, and one child at a time. Hometown: Minneapolis, MN



Our Friends are full-time paid Professional Mentors who build consistent, caring relationships with children and families — showing up for 12+ years, no matter what.



Belinda Olvera
Professional Mentor
Hometown: Puebla, MX



Dominique Love
Professional Mentor
Hometown: Minneapolis, MN



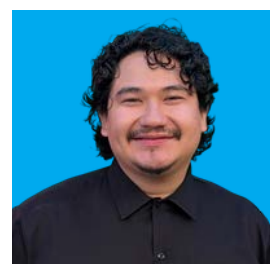
Marbella Oseguera
Professional Mentor
Hometown: Coachella Valley



Sebastian Ramirez
Professional Mentor
Hometown: Coachella Valley



Tiffany Galvan
Professional Mentor
Hometown: Coachella Valley

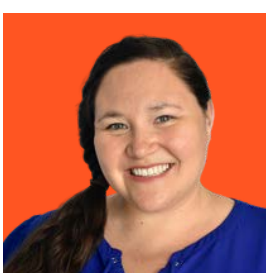


Norman Lucero-Hellebuyck
Professional Mentor
Hometown: Tarzana, CA

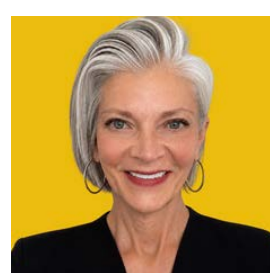
Our Leadership works to strengthen our organization, support our Friends, and nurture partnerships that amplify our impact for the families and community we serve.



Cecelia Paniagua
Program Director
Hometown: Coachella Valley



Rebecca Ruffing
Operations Director
Hometown: Hanford, CA



Vicki Bowen Hewes
Advancement Manager
Hometown: Pittsburgh, PA

Leadership and Legacy

Board of Directors

Kenneth Churchill, Board Chair

CEO, West Coast Cannabis Club
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Director of State and Federal Programs, Desert Sands
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Joe Smith

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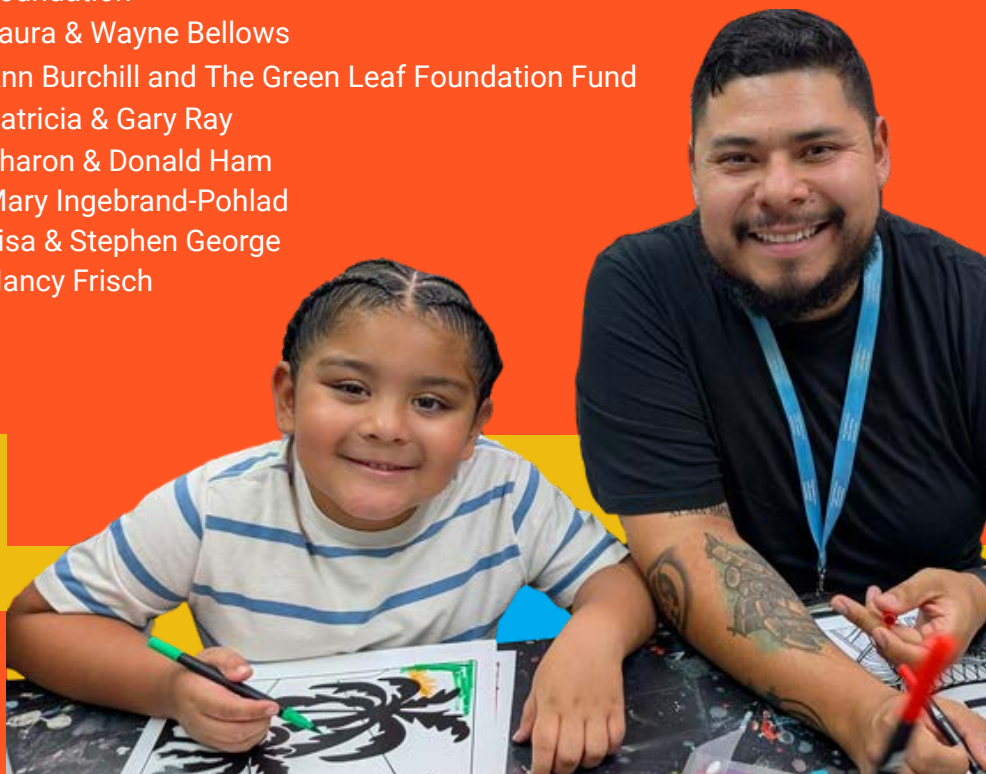
Chief Operations Officer/Chief Finance Officer,
Friends of the Children National

DJ Wilson

Founding Board Chair | National Board Chair
President and CEO, DJ Wilson Consulting

Founding Donors Circle

- Jorja & Brent Hicks
- Cindy & Duncan Campbell
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- Marcia & Gary Beutler
- Pam Strickfaden & Mike Pittman and the Santa Barbara Foundation
- Laura & Wayne Bellows
- Ann Burchill and The Green Leaf Foundation Fund
- Patricia & Gary Ray
- Sharon & Donald Ham
- Mary Ingebrand-Pohlad
- Lisa & Stephen George
- Nancy Frisch



Invest in What's Possible

Our Valley. Our Children. Our Future.

FR1ENDS of the
CH1LDREN
Coachella Valley

” *The children working with mentors have increased confidence, engagement, and excitement for learning. Having a ‘Friend’ makes a real difference for our students.*

First Grade Teacher

GIVE TODAY

Your generosity helps provide children with a professional mentor starting in Kindergarten and staying through high school graduation – 12+ years, no matter what.

friendscoachellavalley.org



JOIN US



Join our Champion
for Children Circle



Join our Board or a
Board Committee

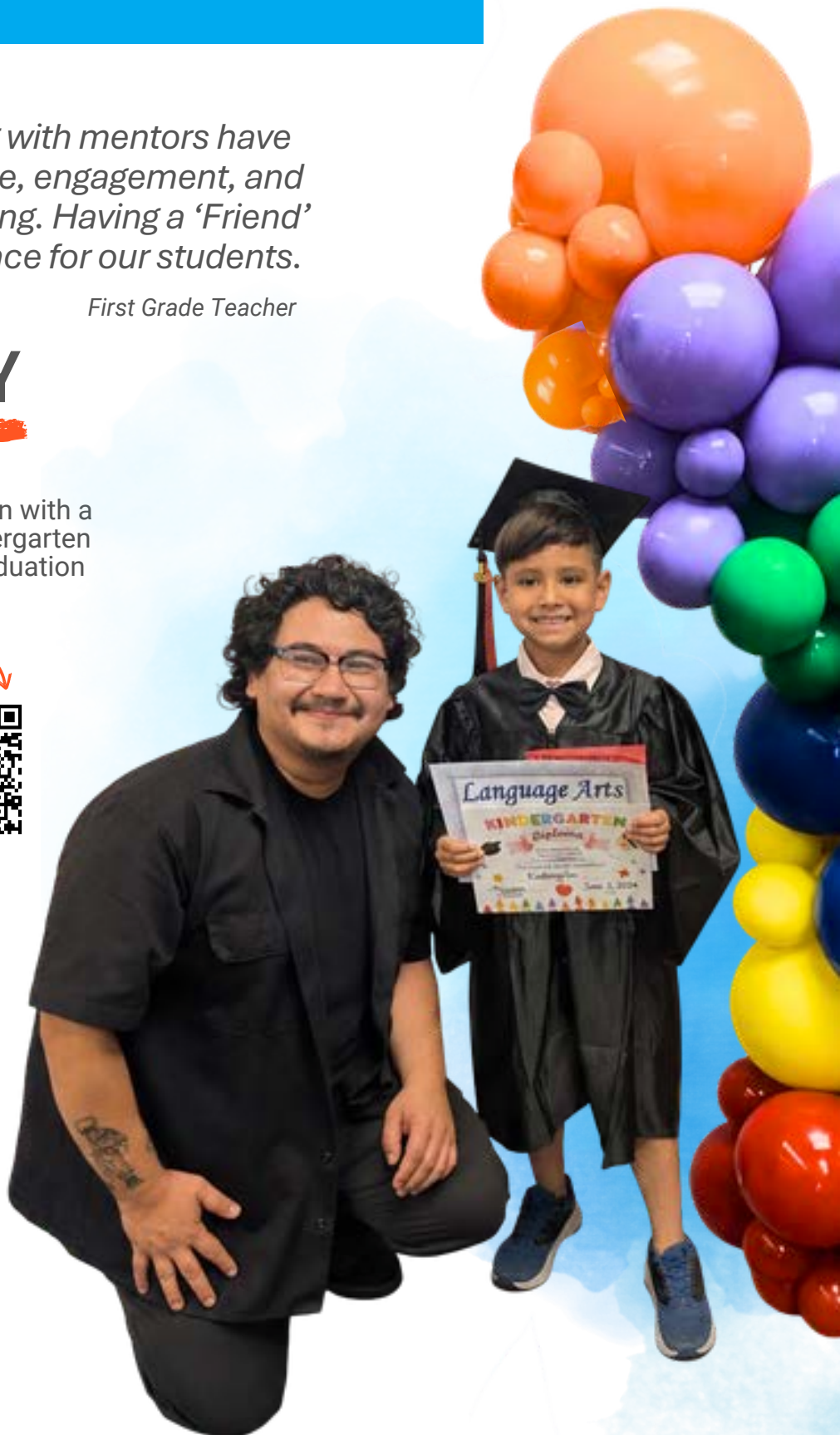


Join us in a search
for a new Clubhouse



Sign up for our
newsletter

Contact Vicki Bowen Hewes
vhewes@friendscoachellavalley.org
760-227-6204





Nuestra Vida / Our Life Mural by Adam Enrique Rodriguez

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Partners in Empowerment

We're grateful for our sponsors who invest in breaking the cycle of poverty, one child at a time, 12+ years, no matter what.

