

Children's Center Current Highlights

Summer 2026



Barbara Sinatra
CHILDREN'S CENTER

Letter from Board President, Hal Gershowitz



Dear Friends,

It was 15 years ago when Helene Galen asked me to take a tour of the Barbara Sinatra Children's Center with John Thoresen. That tour included seeing a little girl, probably seven years old, just coming out of a forensic interview to gather evidence of alleged sexual abuse, and cemented my desire to be involved. I realized right then that the Center was needed and was a wonderful community asset. Little did I know that my journey would be so rewarding and that the Center would be so impactful not only here in the Coachella Valley, but also now globally.

I will be passing the board presidency to long-time Board Member Andy Gladstein this next fiscal year. Andy's passion for the work of the Center is exemplary and he will be a great asset. My involvement will not end as it is with great honor that I will continue to support and contribute to the work of the Center and the Barbara Sinatra Children's Center Foundation by following in the footsteps of both Barbara Sinatra and Helene Galen and accepting the position as the Chair of the Board. I look forward to working with Andy and the wonderful staff at the Center in helping where I can to further the operational and financial growth of this outstanding organization.

Barbara Sinatra would be so pleased with the success of the ***Passion to Prevent Campaign***. On behalf of the entire Board, I want to personally thank my wife Diane for her outstanding efforts in chairing the campaign that has now reached nearly \$13 million of a \$10 million goal. What a herculean effort this has been over the past couple years. We are awaiting the final construction cost estimate for the new A.C. and Shaughne Warnack Pavilion for Child and Adolescent Health and, once in hand, will decide on a final campaign goal. The other elements of the campaign are in the implementation stages and already making a positive impact.

As you read through our summer newsletter you will see stories of treatment and prevention of child abuse that illustrate the Center's work both here and throughout the country. Our events this past season have featured some of the world's leading advocates for the protection of children, and these women have become partners and evangelists for the work of the Barbara Sinatra Children's Center. Nobel Peace Prize winner Nadia Murad headlined the Champion Honors Luncheon, toured the Center, and has taken to social media to praise the work of the Center. Aly Raisman and Elizabeth Smart supported ***Passion to Prevent Campaign*** events and likewise supported the Center in media posts and other activities.

Finally, I want to thank our Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) partners with whom we work on a daily basis. These include law enforcement, child protective services, the District Attorney's office, and, of course, our forensic and clinical staff along with our Human Trafficking team. This MDT group of professionals works together, meets regularly, and is dedicated to ensuring every child's right to a normal, healthy, and secure childhood.

Wishing you all a safe and secure summer.

Sincerely,

Harold Gershowitz, Board President

Letter from Director/Executive Officer, John Thoresen

Dear Friends and Donors,

Your support extends far beyond the Coachella Valley to communities across the country and around the world. Your generosity helps extend critical safety education, touching lives in meaningful and lasting ways.

Today, I want to share with you a story that powerfully reflects the impact of your investment in our work.

At the Barbara Sinatra Children's Center, we are proud to provide the [Protect Yourself Rules](#), curriculum designed to help children understand personal safety and protect themselves from abuse. Through age-appropriate animated videos and guided discussions, children learn practical, memorable strategies to recognize unsafe situations and take action.

One of our valued partners, Scouting America, incorporates these tools into their required merit badge system. "Lion's Roar" is their kindergarten-aged safety training module. The animated "Shout, Run, Tell" video used in Cub Scouts and classrooms throughout the U.S. for grades K-3 encourages children to draw attention, remove themselves from danger, and seek help from a trusted adult.

Recently, this training made a life-changing difference.

A six-year-old girl in Ohio was shopping with her mother when she was left alone briefly in a store bathroom. She and her mother had a special knock to signal when it was safe to let someone in, but an offender overheard the signal and used it to gain access. When the situation quickly became unsafe, this young girl relied on what she had learned.



She used the Lion's Roar training.

She shouted "STOP." She resisted.
She acted.

Her response startled the offender
and stopped the abuse. She was able
to get to safety.

This child had been participating in Scouts for two years, where safety lessons are required annually, with encouragement to reinforce the lessons at home with conversations about safe and unsafe touch, helping her build the confidence to act decisively in a frightening moment.

This story is a powerful reminder that prevention works, and that empowering children with knowledge and tools can change outcomes in critical moments.

You are a vital part of this impact. Your support ensures that more children receive these life-saving lessons, more families have important conversations, and more communities are equipped to protect their youngest members.

With gratitude,

John Thoresen, Director/Executive Officer

Champion Honors Luncheon

On March 6, over 300 people joined us for an unforgettable luncheon featuring our honoree, Nobel Peace Prize recipient **Nadia Murad**. The luncheon was a special day, full of connection, inspiration, and shared passion for showing up for children. Whether you were able to join us or are experiencing it here through these photos, we are so glad you are part of this community.

Nadia's story is powerful, and her work advocating for survivors of trafficking and sexual violence closely reflects what we do here at the Barbara Sinatra Children's Center every day. This was particularly evident during her visit to the Center, where she spent time with our team and saw our work firsthand. She shared how inspired she was by the care and compassion behind everything we do.

Photos: Lani Garfield



CHL Sponsors SBEMP Attorneys



Nadia Murad and Diane Gershowitz



Nadia Murad and Kay Buck



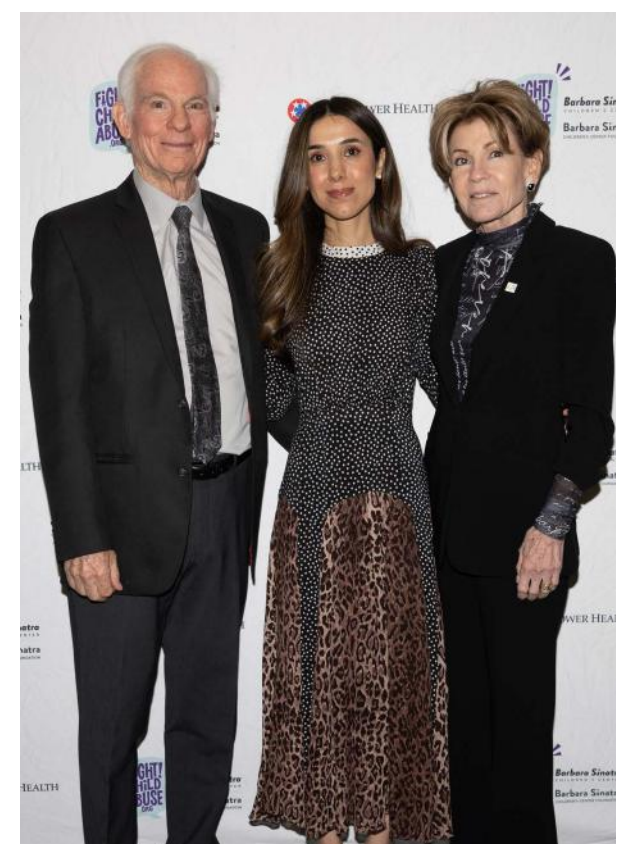
Jan & Brian Harnik



Lenny Eber & Diane Rubin



Nadia Murad with Stephanie and Michael Landes



Nadia Murad with Terri & Bart Ketover

We are grateful to everyone who joined us and helped make the luncheon such a meaningful success. And a heartfelt thank you to those who stepped forward as a **Champion for Children** that day. Your generosity directly strengthens our ability to provide prevention programs globally and therapy, advocacy, and healing services for children in our community, including those who are uninsured and underinsured and otherwise would not have access to care. Your commitment helps ensure that every child has a place to turn for safety, support, and hope.

Since her visit to the Valley, Nadia has continued to be recognized around the world, including receiving France's **Legion of Honour**, an incredible and well-deserved honor.



Champions for Children

Every child deserves the right to a normal, healthy, and secure childhood.

At the Barbara Sinatra Children's Center, children who have experienced abuse receive forensic services, compassionate care, therapy, and mental health support to help them heal. No child is ever turned away, regardless of a family's ability to pay.

Many of the children we serve are uninsured or underinsured. The average cost of care is \$5,000 per child each year. But because of supporters like you, healing is always within reach.

Through Champions for Children, your annual gift directly funds a child's care.

100% of every donation goes to services, never to administrative costs.

Be the reason a child's story doesn't end in trauma.

Become a Champion today.

Child Abuse Prevention Month Annual Appreciation Lunch

The Barbara Sinatra Children's Center held its annual appreciation lunch for our Multidisciplinary Team Members at Jackalope Ranch on April 16. The annual lunch is attended by our partners in law enforcement, the District Attorney's office, Riverside County CPS and social workers, and of course the BSCC Forensics Team and therapists. **Araceli Martinez** organized a wonderful afternoon to thank those partners who help investigate and prosecute child abuse crimes and counsel and assist victims of child abuse and their families. Board Members **Angie Gerber** and **Andy Gladstein** were in attendance to offer their thank you to the group on behalf of the Children's Center. This year's event was one of the largest in recent years.

Photos: Lani Garfield



BSCC therapists



Indio detectives



Riverside County children's social workers



BSCC Forensics Team



Riverside County District Attorney's office

Heroes for Good

Every April, Child Abuse Awareness Month reminds us that protecting children is a shared responsibility, and that prevention often begins with one caring adult who chooses to act. At the Barbara Sinatra Children's Center, we see every day how early intervention, compassion, and community awareness can change a child's life.

Through a social media-based *Heroes for Good* campaign, we invited a national audience to nominate individuals who are making a difference: those who noticed something wasn't right, spoke up, stepped in to support a child in need, or worked toward awareness and prevention. These quiet acts of courage and care are prevention in action. Elizabeth Smart, Nadia Murad, and Internet personality Tank Sinatra shared numerous posts throughout April to encourage people to nominate a "Hero." Our winner will receive a \$2,000 honorarium to pay it forward to support a favorite child abuse prevention program.

We are honored to recognize one extraordinary individual. Their story is a powerful reminder that one person can make a difference and that each of us has a role to play in keeping children safe.

Ms. Risa Shaw, who herself is a child abuse survivor, nominated our *Heroes for Good* winner, **Maria Socolof of Port Washington, New York.**

Here is Risa's nomination statement. "Maria is a quiet, powerful force and model for survivors, parents, children, and those [who] work with those of us who have suffered trauma, especially as children. As a co-founder of 5WAVES she has and continues to provide survivors and family members with resources and connection as they deal with trauma, especially and specifically sibling sexual abuse (SSA). Her work here gave me a new perspective and sense of hope seeing how survivors and parents could collaborate, and after decades of speaking out about SSA I have found new community. She is one of the leaders of what will be the first ever U.S. conference on sibling sexual abuse, and all of the presenters have lived experience. This is an effort and gathering that is unparalleled and offers something that we have never had before—an in-person gathering of survivors, parents, other family members, researchers, service providers, and others who support us. We would not be having this conference without her. Her memoir, *The Invisible Key: Unlocking the Mystery of My Chronic Pain*, is a groundbreaking memoir that has led others to offer their story as well. I have no doubt that if you award this honor to Maria, the funds will go directly into supporting her prevention and healing efforts to keep all children safe from harm."

Congratulations to Maria Socolof, and thank you to Risa Shaw for nominating Maria.

Client Story

Barbara Sinatra Children's Center client "Jade" started services at BSCC at 16 years old. Her plight began at 7 years old when her biological parents divorced. Soon after, her father found a new partner with several children, and they married. Jade's father and stepmother expected to blend their children together and create a new family unit. Shortly after, an older stepbrother began to sexually abuse Jade. Jade was threatened to not tell. If she shared the secret of the abuse, she knew her stepbrother would make life difficult for her.

Initially, Jade fought to not visit her dad. Jade used behaviors such as temper tantrums, crying spells, defiance, and poor sleep to state what she could not verbalize. Jade recalls at one point telling her father she did not want to share a bedroom with her stepbrother, but this was denied. Jade also told her mother of her wish for a different room. The mother also requested the change, but the mother's parental input was unwanted. The sexual abuse persisted intermittently over a year during visits at the father's residence.

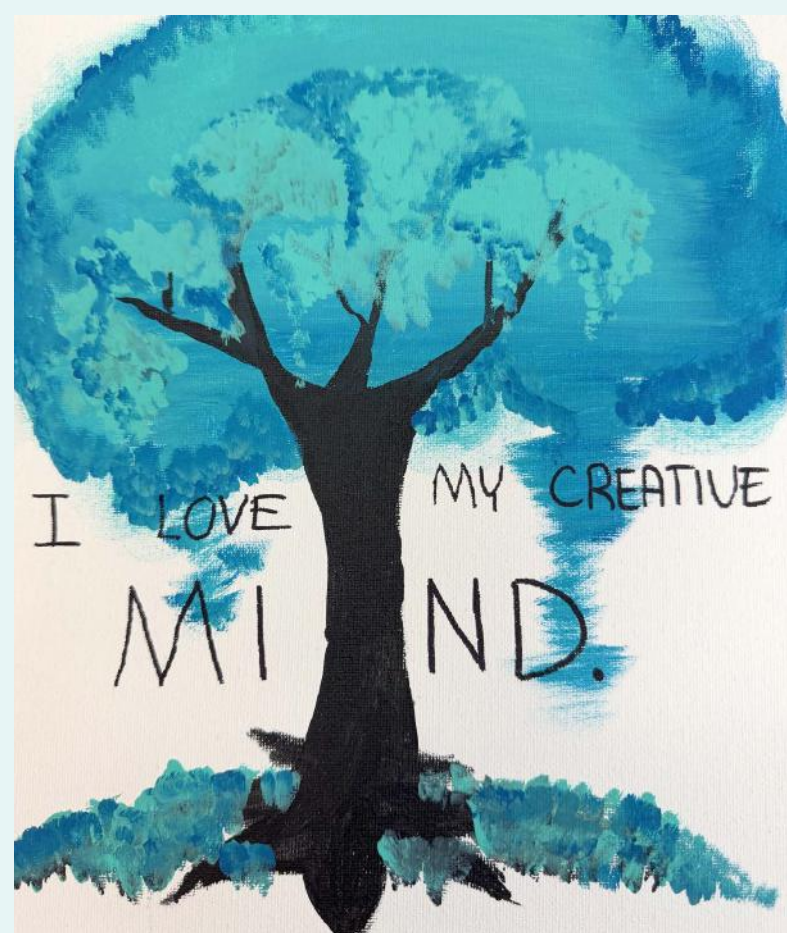
Time passed by and one day during an appointment at her pediatrician's office, Jade was asked to complete a questionnaire which included an item about abuse. Jade answered the question honestly. The doctor met with Jade and discussed what happened. A child abuse report was made. Although the sexual abuse had stopped, Child Protective Services intervened and ended all visits by Jade to the father's residence. Jade was also referred for a forensic interview followed by therapy at the Center.

Initially Jade presented with anxiety. She had no eye contact and refused to look at anyone. Her attachment to her mother was anxious as she experienced significant anxiety with separation. Socially, small gestures like saying "hi" and engaging with others felt impossible for her. She wished to hide. It was painful for Jade to talk about what had happened. Moreover, Jade's father and stepmother did not believe that the stepbrother abused Jade. This disbelief and abandonment by her father was nearly as detrimental as the abuse itself. The desertion by her father crumbled her sense of worth. There is solid research that shows one of the best predictors of recovery

from abuse is how the adults respond afterward. When a parent or guardian believes the child, supports the child, and is protective, many curative steps take place. Safety and supportive relationships and validation are fundamental to recovery. The therapist recognized the secondary trauma from the abandonment by the father and enlisted the love and support of Jade's mother and younger brother.

Additionally, Jade's therapist recognized her natural artistic ability. Art was used to facilitate self-expression. Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) model was used to treat the sexual abuse and abandonment.

Through the course of treatment, Jade began to feel her worth and slowly her confidence followed.



Shown here is a sketch of beginning and after treatment. Jade in the beginning is enclosed, trapped, and sad with stuffed animals surrounding her and a spider lurking behind. The after portion of the sketch reflects Jade's freedom outside the container—wide eyed, engaged, enjoying a drink, and taking in the joy of In-N-Out. Also shown is a beautiful painting of a tree where she embraces herself, with the text "I LOVE MY CREATIVE MIND."

Jade has nearly completed her services at BSCC. Her psychological growth has been amazing and an honor to witness. Today Jade has a role in a school play. Thus, not only does she engage with others through eye contact, but she also looks out to an audience casting her voice clearly, the words and emotions there for all to see.

We share this story with permission and deep respect for the children and families we serve. To protect privacy and dignity, names and identifying details have been changed

Out and About in the Desert

Photos: Lani Garfield



Perry & Kim Shwachman, Toni Ackermann,
Diane & Hal Gershowitz



Araceli Martinez, Cheryl Thoresen,
Cristina Gregorio



Mary Ann Graffeo,
Leslie Usow



Kim & Perry Shwachman



Diane Gershowitz, John Thoresen,
Elizabeth Smart



Diane Gershowitz,
Phyllis Washington



Leisa Austin, Mary Ann Graffeo,
Toni Ackermann



Diane & Hal Gershowitz,
Cristina Gregorio



Jane Emison,
John Thoresen



Aly Raisman, Connie Lurie



John Thoresen, Shaughne Warnack



Angie Gerber, Arthur & Debbie Jacobson



Mary Ann Graffeo, Nadia Murad, Cheryl Thoresen



Nadia Murad, Abid Shamdeen, Angie Gerber



Abid Shamdeen and Hal Gershowitz



Angie Gerber, Diane & Hal Gershowitz, Diane Rubin

Who We Are

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* 1 YEAR REQUIRED EMERITUS STATUS



Barbara Sinatra
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