Concern for the mental health and well-being of our children and teenagers is at a peak. The ongoing news of violence in our schools is shocking and deeply troubling. The number of children and young adults struggling today with anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders is staggering. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, more than three million adolescents aged 12-17 reported at least one major depressive episode in the past year, and more than two million reported severe depression that impeded their daily functioning. Anxiety and depression, when left untreated, dramatically affects behavior and ability to learn. The National Alliance for Mental Health has been working to get more school counselors trained to identify mental health disorders, but it’s not easy. Counselors are responsible for hundreds of students, not to mention carrying other responsibilities like administering state tests.
In the Words of Susie Huhn

Dear Friends,

The plan for our future started in 1973 with Sister Kathleen Clark’s vision to provide families with the tools they need to build strong foundations for well-being within themselves and for their children. This vision has not waivered over the last 44 years. This spring we will open the Cole and Jeannie Davis Family Center, a resource that honors our past, celebrates who we are today, and is a driving force for our future. This is also not the end of how our campus will evolve, but another beginning.

In my field, over the last four decades it has been amazing to see the work we do evolve and change. Where we once delivered services to families and children often in isolation of their community, now we partner with children and families and we learn and grow together. Our work no longer focuses just on the symptoms but on root causes. It is hard to be a good parent if you don’t have the most basic necessities and resources.

I myself have learned some of life’s greatest lessons from the children and families who have crossed my path. I have learned to be humble, for I have seen incredible strength and determination; to respect each and every person for who they are not what they do; and that I have never met a parent who did not want the best for their child.

I have also learned that our past has informed our present and will again inform our future. Science and research on trauma, brain development, and early childhood education has probably caused the greatest shift in how we do our work and the speed of change is on fast forward.

As a society, it is our job to ensure that the future is in good hands, and that means making sure all young people have access to a full range of opportunities throughout their childhood, so that they can take their place in a vibrant community.

Our richest resource is our people and our newly integrated campus, and the Cole & Jeannie Davis Family Center will help thousands of families and kids in Tucson. A new home built on hope for the future, and opportunity to grow in ways that assures every child has the ability to reach their full potential.

Sincerely,

Susie Huhn, MA
Chief Executive Officer
Local 6th Graders Coming Together to Help Families!

The 6th grade classes of Mary Belle McCorkle Academy of Excellence and the Calvary Chapel Christian School spent a lot of time to put together an incredibly thoughtful donation for kids and families! Both of these groups engaged in a Project Based Learning experience – a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging and complex question, problem, or challenge. It says a great deal about these young scholars that they focused in on child and family welfare and selected Casa de Los Niños to study and support. They came to us with thoughtful and probing questions regarding this important social cause. And, in the end, both groups made wonderful donations to directly help kids and families. They are smart, spirited, and thoughtful groups and we are deeply appreciative of their efforts!

There is evidence that suggests technology and social media is exacerbating this increase in mental health problems for kids. Young adults can experience extreme feelings of being an outcast or targeted. Several studies have found that depressive symptoms, such as low mood and feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, were linked to the quality of online interactions. Researchers found higher levels of depressive symptoms among those who reported having more negative interactions.

For budget-crunched schools in Arizona, it’s difficult to fund and deploy more mental health resources. But quantifying the problem is a significant step. To that end, the American Academy of Pediatrics is now recommending depression screening for all young people ages 11 through 21. Because symptoms of depression are often not recognizable by teachers, parents or even physicians, this move may be key to better identifying kids who are suffering and getting them treatment.

Casa de los Niños has launched a new partnership with Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) to bring “Youth Mental Health First Aid” to faculty and staff across the district. Our trained Behavioral Health specialists are teaching how to identify, understand and respond to a young adult who is experiencing a mental health challenge, crisis or substance abuse disorder. The program has been so well-received that we are working diligently to find new funding sources to expand this critical resource to other schools.

The signs and symptoms of depression and other mood disorders are varied, including drastic changes in behavior, severe mood swings, extreme difficulty concentrating, or feelings of fear or worthlessness. We all need to watch for these signs in our children. But let’s not forget about the need to pay attention to those around us. Encourage your child to sit with the lonely child in the cafeteria, say hello to a kid that is struggling, or include the student who is usually excluded. Sometimes the smallest gesture can make the biggest difference.

...Cover Story Continued

In Our Schools

...
When Does Trauma Happen, and What are its Effects?

Trauma is an emotional response that happens after a person experiences one or more stressful or scary events. Traumatic stress occurs when that trauma leads to harmful effects on physical and emotional health and well-being. The stressful or scary events can be real or perceived (felt to be real). Trauma may affect the person who experienced the event or someone else who cares about that person. Trauma in the lives of children and youth involved with child welfare often results from the following:

- Physical, sexual, or emotional abuse
- Neglect
- Chaotic and unpredictable parenting
- Parents with mental health, physical health, or substance abuse challenges
- Seeing or being around violence in the home or community
- Separation from or loss of a parent, caregiver, and/or other important relationships
- Placement in foster care and multiple changes in foster homes

These experiences can have negative effects on how children and youth develop physically, how they feel, how they learn, and how they relate to others. Sometimes, the symptoms of trauma may not appear right away but show up later, such as during adolescence.

Research has shown that upon aging out of the foster care system, many young adults struggle during their transition to independence. Youth who age out are less likely than their peers in the general population to achieve academic success, including high school graduation and post-secondary education. These youth are more likely to be unemployed or work at jobs that do not provide them with financial security. They are more likely than their peers to experience violence, victimization, homelessness or unstable housing, mental illness, and other poor health outcomes. They are also at an increased risk for incarceration, substance abuse, and early parenthood; and they are more likely to lose their children to the foster care system. It is critical to identify and support resources for these young people that empower them and promote resiliency.

Cole & Jeannie Davis
Family Center
Opening in April!

The Cole & Jeannie Davis Family Center is opening in April, bringing all of the Casa de los Niños programs of support and resources for families onto our one campus! We will hold open houses throughout the year to welcome families and involve new community partners!

Empowering Kids!

The short version of the mission statement for Wheels for Kids is “To put a smile on the faces of kids who thought they’d never get the chance to experience the joy of riding their own bike.” The more detailed version is “To collect used bikes, completely overhaul them, ensure they work well, look good and are safe to operate, and then, through our partner charitable organizations, give them to low income, distressed, or under privileged kids, teens and adults in Tucson.”

Casa de los Niños is here to report that they are not only doing all of the above, they are truly empowering kids and young adults to live happier and healthier lives! When we receive these bikes, it is literally a matter of minutes before they are spoken for by our wonderful staff who have lists of teenagers eagerly hoping for a bike of their own. And a bike for a teen can be life-changing. The ability to move around on their own, get themselves to appointments and friends houses…and just being outside!

We have many clients who work hard to avoid taking medication, and they are committed to a healthy routine of exercise and being outdoors. Our friends at Wheels for Kids also understand the importance of parents taking care of themselves….and we have been able to provide bikes to so many adults that are working hard to be good parents and find ways to spend positive time with their kids. This is an organization truly making a wonderful difference in the lives of kids and families!

www.azwfk.org
How Can You Volunteer to Help Kids and Families?

Would you be willing to do a donation drive to help a child with basic needs? Put together some of these Care Packages to provide immediate help:

- **BACKPACKS** with new school supplies
- **GOOD NIGHT BAG** Fleece blanket, cozy socks, small pillow, books
- **FAMILY SUPPORT BAG** Gift cards to buy groceries, toiletries, basic household supplies from places such as Walmart, Target, CVS, Walgreens, Safeway
- **BAG OF FUN** Developmental toys, books, family friendly games, board games
- **NEW MOM SUPPORT PACKAGE** A diaper bag with baby blankets, infant toys, diapers, wipes, diaper ointment
- **SELF CARE FOR TEENS** Hair products, toiletries, skincare, journals, pens, art supplies

Families are also in need of diapers, sizes newborn – 6.

For more information on ways to do a drive, contact Amada Mendoza at amendoza@casadelosninos.org.

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**Access to High-Quality Childcare Can Change Lives**

**Opportunity on our Campus for Early Care and Childhood Education Center**

Access to quality childcare and early education helps the whole community thrive, yet Arizona ranks 44th in school achievement. So many kids are struggling in school because they started without the basic skills needed to succeed. Among preschool-aged children in Pima County, 83.5% do not have the fundamental skills needed to succeed in kindergarten. Less than half of 3rd graders throughout the state are ready to advance in school, with children from low-income neighborhoods disproportionally failing to meet Arizona’s standards. For parents living in poverty the cost of childcare can be more than 30% of their income, adding financial strain for the whole household. The alternatives force families to find substandard care from unlicensed groups, unqualified to teach children the skills necessary to succeed in school. If care cannot be provided, a parent will need to miss work and add further stress on their daily expenses, and increases the risk for child neglect to occur in their home. We are moving forward to create a high-quality childcare center on our campus as we continue to find ways to best help families. When a child can excel in school, they are able to lead healthy, stable lives!

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**There is still time to make a Tax Credit gift!**

Donations made up to April 17, 2018 can be used on your 2017 tax filing. It’s a great way to give to a good cause and meet your financial goals as well.

As a Qualifying Foster Care Charitable Organization, gifts to Casa de los Niños qualify for a dollar-for-dollar tax credit of $500 for an individual and $1,000 for a couple.

To make a gift, visit casadelosninos.org.
Questions? Call 520-624-5600

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**Casa de los niños**

HELPING KIDS. HEALING FAMILIES.
Thank You to Our Partners

Casa de los Niños has been incredibly fortunate to have a strong network of community partners. Thank you to our phenomenal partners who have committed to helping children and families build healthy, stable lives!

Thank you **Wells Fargo** for your support of Behavioral Health Services with a $5,000 grant!

We are grateful to have received a $10,000 grant from **In-N-Out Burger** to support kids through Behavioral Health Services. Their gift will help so many kids and young adults as they work to build a brighter and healthier future!

Thank you **Arizona Cardinals** for your gift of $5,000 to support children and families in Arizona!

**The Steele Foundation** has generously awarded us $70,000 for Community Education and Outreach. Their contributions have touched the lives of thousands of children and families, producing tremendous results that benefit the whole community! Their gift will be used to support new classes, and help us reach even more families this year. The need is incredible right now, with nearly 3,000 families participating in parenting classes last year, and families are asking for even more classes! We are incredibly honored to have their support in 2018, as we reach out to communities throughout Tucson, and continue to support families and their children in leading happy, healthy lives!

**The O’Reilly Family Foundation** has been an incredible partner to us for many years. Their generous gift of $12,000 for Behavioral Health Services will help so many children working to heal trauma, and to build healthier lives for themselves and their family!
The team at Casa de los Niños brings an incredible depth of experience to this work. Here is one staff perspective: Lizbeth Canez-Pompa

It was my 9th birthday when my mother took me to a shoe store in downtown of my birth city in Sonora, Mexico. I remember that day like it was yesterday. For weeks, I had been picturing in my mind the black dress shiny shoes that I was going to buy. I was walking with my mother in the busy streets of downtown, about to enter the shoe store, when I saw this man; he was sitting on the sidewalk begging for money, wearing dirty ragged clothes, wrapped in a dirty old blanket, had a long beard, disheveled hair, and was barefoot. That moment marked my life forever. I remember that I went inside the store without saying a word to my mother; I tried on different shoes until I found the perfect pair. We paid for the shoes and left the store. On our way back to our car, I was holding the box with my new shoes when I saw the man again. Just the thought of me going home with two pairs of shoes and leaving this man barefoot was making my heart shrink. So I stopped and handed him the box. I remember the look on my mother’s face. She knew that the shoes were not going to fit him so she asked the man for his shoe size and we went back inside the store to buy him a pair of tennis shoes.

I remember the happiness that I was feeling on my way back home. It was the best birthday present ever. It was not because I had gotten back my black dress shiny shoes, but because I knew that that man was not going to be barefoot any more. It was at that moment that I understood that for me, happiness does not come from material things but rather from a deep and genuine concern for others’ happiness and wellbeing.

Fast-forward in time, I received my Bachelors Degree in Clinical Psychology, got married, moved to the United States, and became the mother of two wonderful boys. It was in 2014 that I started working at Casa De Los Niños. I started working as part-time Primary Care Worker at the shelter. I worked at the shelter for 3 years. During the first year I was given the opportunity to become an overnight Shift Manager and after that I accepted a day position as a Child Guidance Specialist.

When I first started working at the shelter, I had the idea of giving back. I wanted to care and nurture children in need. And yes, by working at the Shelter I was able to do all that and much more. I gave them all my love and care, I rocked many of them to sleep, I patted their backs and held their little hands at night when they were scared and sad asking for their parents, I took care of them when they were sick, I hugged them and made them laugh on their rough days, I gave them a bath before bedtime, I read many bedtime stories, I prepared many bottles and changed many diapers. But the best part of my job was what the children gave me in return. Every day after work I went back home feeling that I had made a difference in their lives.

During the time that I worked at the shelter I was able to obtain a Masters Degree in Psychology. My goal was to transition to our Behavioral Health program. It was on September of 2017 that I accepted the position of Behavioral Health Care Coordinator. I can honestly say that at the beginning the transition was not easy, not working with the children on the caregiver side definitely took some adjustment, but I soon realized the broadness of the Care Coordination position. I now have the wonderful opportunity to work not only with the children but also with their family.

It is true that I am not patting the children’s backs at night or holding their hands anymore... now I am encouraging and holding the hands of their parents; this new position allows me to assist parents with guidance, support, and encouragement to help the family thrive, and to provide the children an opportunity to live in a safe and stable environment.

Being a Behavioral Health Care Coordinator gives me the opportunity not only to continue providing children with love, compassion, trust, and understanding, but it also allows me to work with their parents to help them provide family stability. I strongly believe that these factors can positively impact a child’s mental health status so that they can build on these stepping-stones to have a productive lifestyle.

I do not know what the future holds for me, but one thing I am sure of, I will continue to dedicate my life to helping children and their families because I will always feel like that little girl who wanted to give her shoes to a barefoot man. I will always believe that helping connects us to others, creates stronger communities, and can help us build a happier society for everyone.
The mission of Casa de los Niños is to promote child well-being and family stability in our community.

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