

Foster Care Charity Honors Volunteers for Giving Back to Children

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Actress Alison Arngrim was the Guest Speaker at Charity's Awards Ceremony

(PASADENA, CA)—During Child Abuse Prevention Month, Hillsides, a foster care children's charity, honored several volunteers at Hillsides Annual Angel Award Ceremony. For its commitment to giving back to the community in San Gabriel Valley, including Pasadena, Rusnak Auto Group was selected by the local charity to receive the Hillsides Community Angel Award.

With support from the company's leadership, Paul Rusnak, to generous time and commitment given by his daughter, Elizabeth Rusnak Arizmendi, Rusnak's vice president of public relations, Rusnak Auto Group is truly devoted to many community organizations including Hillsides mission to create safe places for foster care children and children at risk, as well as their families.

From donating soap box derby cars, to collecting holiday gifts and toys for the children, Rusnak Auto Group is a loyal friend to Hillsides. With over a decade on record as a generous donor, Rusnak Auto Group through Rusnak Arizmendi's involvement has been represented on Hillsides Annual Benefit Board Committee, generated and distributed press releases, gained media exposure for Hillsides, donated toys, sponsored numerous annual benefits, and has remained a Rainbow Society member.

"Bringing a bit of joy to others is very rewarding," said Rusnak Arizmendi. "To be able to give and raise money to children at Hillsides for a free life of violence is a responsibility of the fortunate." Rusnak Arizmendi added that to give to Hillsides is "simply quite easy."

"Rusnak Auto Group brings so much joy to the lives of many individuals served through the numerous organizations it reaches out to in the community, including Hillsides," said Hillsides Executive Director John Hitchcock.

Other volunteers received awards for helping foster care children in Los Angeles. Jacob Maarse Floral Design, Jacob Maarse, and Hank Maarse were honored with the Hillsides Angel Award. As generous supporters of Hillsides Annual Benefit, Jacob Maarse Floral Design established a connection with Hillsides through a mutual friend, Pasadena resident Margaret Campbell. As Hillsides Ambassador, Campbell ignited the interest of Maarse and, his son, Hank, which continues today.

Donating impeccable floral arrangements for Hillsides Annual Benefit, Jacob Maarse Floral Design truly makes our benefit standout, bringing style and class. With beautifully arranged floral creations, the selected vibrant and aromatic blooms always reflect the benefit's theme. Maarse is also a longtime benefit guest, who frequently becomes a winning bidder of many wonderful auction packages. Jacob Maarse Floral Design continues to support Hillsides through its contribution to Hillsides Guild's Parkway Grill Holiday Celebration opportunity drawing. For its ongoing support of Hillsides, Jacob Maarse Floral Design has received membership in Hillsides Rainbow Society.

Special Recognition Angel Awards were presented to: Pasadena resident Barbara Robison, Hillsides Board and Guild Member; Tokio Marine Management, Inc. in Pasadena; and Hillsides Volunteer Network members Stephen and Susan Wittmer.

Through her membership at Church of the Angels Episcopal Church, Hillsides neighbor, Robison learned about the charity's mission. The idea that she could help make a difference in the life of a child other than her own excited her.

"I realized how much love, care, and understanding my own son had received from his parents, and I wanted to help provide some that same support and security to less fortunate children," said Robison.

Looking for a local charity to partner with for a toy drive, Tokio Marine Management googled Pasadena charities. After reading numerous missions, Hillsides met their qualifications and seemed like a good match. Since 2000, employees at Tokio Marine have sponsored toy drives and school supply drives. With backpacks and supplies at hand, Tokio Marine representatives came to outfit our children in preparation for the classroom.

“The depth of the services Hillsides provides, including all their outreach programs, fills a real need in the community,” said Don Diamond, manager of Enterprise Risk Management/Administration for Tokio Marine Management. “They offered the ability for Tokio Marine to participate in different events over the course of the year.”

Through membership in Friends of Foster Children, Stephen and Susan Wittmer first heard about Hillsides, a beneficiary of many Friends Of Foster Children projects. Having established relationships with current and former Hillsides staff members through these projects, the Wittmer’s feel emotionally connected and drawn to the mission of creating safe places for foster care children and other youngsters in need.

“Volunteers bring a unique ability to contribute to Hillsides mission, and celebrating their volunteerism during Child Abuse Prevention Month in April helps to also address the issues that brought a majority of children to live at Hillsides,” said Hitchcock.

Raising additional awareness of these issues was actress Alison Arngrim, who is best known to viewers for her portrayal of the incredibly unpleasant "Nellie Oleson" on the beloved television show, "Little House On The Prairie." Arngrim was the keynote speaker at the Annual Angel Awards Ceremony for the 95-year foster care children’s charity.

After touring the charity’s campus, Arngrim expressed to the guests how much she wished to have lived at Hillsides, in a safe place, while growing up. She shared her personal experience having been a survivor of child abuse in her early childhood.

Arngrim’s advocacy work includes being the spokesperson for the National Association to Protect Children, bringing awareness, education, and legislative changes to child abuse and molestation.

“As a past candidate who could have lived at Hillsides, I thank you for not turning away from this human rights issue,” Arngrim said.

To learn more about Hillsides and how you can support the foster care charity’s advocacy efforts, visit www.Hillsides.org.

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About Hillsides: As a Pasadena foster care charity celebrating its 95th Anniversary, Hillsides creates safe places for children at risk and their families by providing residential care, mental health services to break the cycle of domestic violence, special education, and advocacy. To learn more about Hillsides, visit www.Hillsides.org.

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Pasadena California Foster Care Children's Charity

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