

VOLUNTEER NOTES

FAST on the Air

Marin's all-volunteer Financial Abuse Specialist Team (FAST) was featured recently on West Marin radio station KWMR. Interviewees included MarinShares volunteers **Oak Dowling**, **Beth Fernbacher**, **Susan O'Brien**, **Stan Green**, **Sylvia Roye**, and their staff supervisors, Marin Public Guardian **Mark Vanderscoff** and Senior Program Coordinator **Mandy Reyes** of Health and Human Services.

In opening remarks, Mark explained that Marin's FAST is unique among similar groups because it consists of all volunteers. Members give dozens of free scam-avoidance presentations a year, both in person and online. Meanwhile, FAST members with professional backgrounds cooperate closely with the District Attorney's office, doing forensic accounting and conducting research in cases of alleged financial elder abuse. The program also serves as a model to agencies in other states and counties.

Holidays

County offices will be closed Christmas Day, Thursday, December 25, and New Year's Day, Thursday, January 1, 2026.



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Marintern Moves from Writing to Law

By Calla McBride

From chronicling county stories to serving with public defenders, Marintern **Max Gehm** has carried his passion for communication and empathy into every chapter of his personal journey.

Max wrote for *MarinfoNOW* from February 2023 to April 2025 before joining the Marin County Public Defender's Office in May as a post-college intern.

As a writer, Max focused on the County of Marin's volunteers, interns, and leaders.

"Joining the newsletter gave me the chance to meet incredible people and tell their stories," Max said. "It showed me how much impact you can have just by listening and putting someone's experiences into words."



PHOTO BY DOUG KAYE

Max Gehm

Initially drawn to journalism, Max discovered the role offered more than writing experience. One of his favorite

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Marin Mom Finds 'Perfect Fit' with Foster Families

By Natalie Dybeck

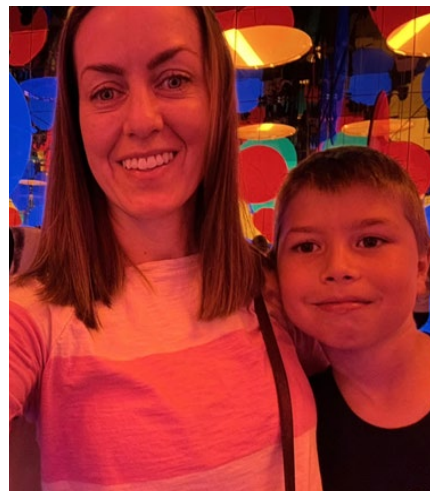


PHOTO BY KATIE RANSOM

Katie Ransom and her older son smile during a fun outing with a foster child (not pictured to protect privacy) to the Yayoi Kusama exhibit at SFMOMA.

MarinShares participant **Katherine 'Katie' Ransom** is a Friends of the Family volunteer. Her title reflects the meaningful bond that volunteers like her form with foster youth in Marin County.

The Friends of the Family program links community members to Marin County foster families in need of extra support, providing the "village" it takes to raise a child.

"The moment children enter the [foster] home, we are there to provide meals and help with laundry, rides, babysitting, and more," Katie said. "Once a volunteer establishes a relationship with a resource family and child, they are free

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to communicate directly about continued support.”

Katie, who has two children in elementary school, has a variety of duties depending on the needs of the foster family. These range from securing meals to serving as a temporary parent for up to two weeks.

Katie volunteers up to four hours a week providing after-school care.

She got involved in August of 2024 after discovering the Marin Foster Care Agency.

“I started to be interested in foster care several years prior, after my second child was born,” Katie said. “The more I learned, the more I longed to help children and families who really needed it. When I found the Friends of the Family

program, I knew it would be the perfect fit for someone like me.”

The role has challenges and rewards. “The most challenging part is learning about the difficult experiences children have had and feeling a lot of empathy for them,” she said.

“The most rewarding part is getting to know a child and family on a longer-term basis and seeing how that child changes over time with the support and loving care from the resource parent(s),” she said.

“Katie stands out as a volunteer because of her enthusiasm from her initial application to her jumping right in and responding to requests for support,” said her staff supervisor, Child Welfare Worker **Leslie Fields** of the Health and

Human Services Department. “Katie has made an impact on five youths she has supported over the past year and has been able to build connections by provide ongoing support.”

Some of Katie’s favorite memories as a volunteer include watching her kids immediately accept a foster child into their home. “It makes me happy to see a child who has experienced so many hard things in their young life absorbed in the joy of play and being a kid for a little while,” she said.

“These small acts can add up to a considerable impact and contribute to the stability of the placement and a better outcome for the child,” Katie said. “I would encourage anyone who is interested in helping foster children to consider the program.” ■

MarinShares Volunteers Boost Annual Fair



PHOTO BY ANNE STARR

Artist **Amanda Tomlin**, right, of the Novato Library staff, chats with visitors during the 2025 Marin County Employee Arts & Crafts Fair at the Marin Civic Center cafeteria. The two-day fair in November had valuable support from MarinShares volunteers. Event Aides **Marie Fitzgerald**, **Deborah Fox**, and **Deborah Gregor** registered vendors and tracked attendance, counting nearly 300 guests in the first two hours. Artist **Annet Katan** designed the fair poster, and Coordinator **Phyllis Gray** led the HR & Friends Bake Sale, which raised over \$600 for three Marin charities serving foster children, hungry people, and injured animals. Live music was contributed by the County Crows employee band, the San Jose Middle School Choir, Ukulele Friends Ohana, and staff members in The Placemakers. Vendors from across the county organization displayed their skills in painting, photography, ceramics, jewelry-making, lamp design, fabric arts, and more. This year marked the pop-up fair’s 25th anniversary. As always, employee crafters, artists, and musicians participated on their own time. County volunteers have helped coordinate and support the fair since 2012.

School's First 25 Years Include County Connections



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MORALES

County of Marin youth volunteers and interns who attend [Oak Hill School](#) in San Anselmo continue to serve as their school celebrates its 25th anniversary. **Angie**, pictured at left, has an on-campus role. She assembles packets that Marin Health and Human Services Department (HHS) staff will later share with Marin residents who need services. The county's [Marinterns](#) program has partnered with Oak Hill since 2018, tailoring assignments that neurodivergent students can use to expand skills and make community connections.

Three county departments welcome these teens and young adults: HHS, the Marin County Free Library, and the Community Development Agency. Oak Hill is a non-public, special education school approved by the California Department of Education. The school accepts students with public school district funding as well as private tuition. "It's satisfying to see how meaningful these county roles are for Oak Hill students," said Marinterns Coordinator **Joy Fossett**.

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PHOTO BY DOUG KAYE

Max Gehm studies legal documents at the Public Defender's Office.

pieces featured MarinShares volunteers **Bebe** and **Mark Birnbaum**, a retired couple recognized as Volunteers of the Year for improving and maintaining a busy cycling path. He cherished the interviews and the storytelling process.

"I got to sit down with them in Novato," Max said. "Those in-person interviews

were my favorite part—hearing people's stories directly and translating them into something meaningful."

"Max is curious, smart, fair, and writes clearly—great qualities in a reporter," said *MarinfoNOW* Editor **Anne Starr** of the Human Resources Department (HR). "As part of his HR internship, he

had MarinShares volunteer **Ed Remitz** as a writing coach and soon was crafting complicated articles that required multiple interviews with interns and volunteers."

Max realized his skills in writing, analysis, and empathy could serve an even deeper purpose.

"I've always been a strong reader and writer, and I try to keep an open mind and treat everyone equally," he said. "Those values naturally led me toward public defense."

His current legal internship with the Public Defender's Office is preparation for law school.

Max is learning about "everything from Racial Justice Act claims and conservatorship filings to providing emotional support for clients," he said. "It's hands-on and has been profoundly eye opening."

His internship supervisors are Public Defenders **Gina Vanni** and **Dominik Taylor**. "Max goes above and beyond," they wrote in a joint statement. "He's polite, curious, and approaches every

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task with care and humility. Everything he's asked to do, he comes back with more. He's so thorough and thoughtful, and truly part of the team."

Born in Marin, Max was raised in Mill Valley and San Anselmo, graduating from Archie Williams High School and San Diego State University. He enjoys

films by Paul Thomas Anderson; playing soccer, chess, and spikeball; and reading Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Max plans to travel to Nicaragua to improve his Spanish and gain new perspectives.

While Max waits to hear back from law schools, his dream school remains UC Berkeley Law.

"Each of these internships was necessary in the exploration of my future career," Max said. "Along the way I learned how to be a better writer, a more efficient communicator, and a more responsible person." ■

Student Ambassador Delivers



PHOTO BY ELIZABETH IWAMIYA

Marintern **Hanna Yusuda**, a Student Elections Ambassador from Tamalpais High School, delivers more than 250 voter registration forms to Elections Technician **Megan Stone** at the Marin County Elections Department, continuing the school's tradition of student participation in helping peers register and pre-register to vote. Research shows that students who register at 18 or pre-register beginning at age 16 are more likely to become lifelong voters. The Election Department's Student Elections Ambassador Program provides students with training and materials to lead voter registration drives at schools and community events. Learn more at MarinCounty.gov/SEAP.

Happy Anniversary

We congratulate these volunteers who celebrate their anniversaries this month and thank them for their ongoing involvement.

31 YEARS

Ray Peterson (Petaluma), Air Patrol Volunteer, Marin County Sheriff's Office

23 YEARS

Gregory Felton (Stateline, NV), Air Patrol Volunteer, Marin County Sheriff's Office

13 YEARS

Tim Graves (Tomas), Volunteer Firefighter, Marin County Fire

12 YEARS

Louise Berto (San Anselmo), Patrol Volunteer, Marin County Parks

10 YEARS

John Pierremont (Santa Rosa), Event Aide, Human Resources

9 YEARS

Michael Warner (Redwood City), Marin Search & Rescue Volunteer, Marin County Sheriff's Office

4 YEARS

Elizabeth Fernbacher (Corte Madera), Financial Abuse Specialist Team Volunteer, Health & Human Services

3 YEARS

Nancy Mackle (San Anselmo), Marin Center Usher, Cultural Services

Sean Peisert (San Rafael), Radio Communications Volunteer, Department of Public Works

Ryan Robinett (Marshall), Volunteer Firefighter, Marin County Fire

2 YEARS

Maddy Kearney (San Anselmo), Student Service Intern, Fairfax Library

1 YEAR

Liam McDermott (San Rafael), Homework Helpers Intern, Civic Center Library

Joselin Ordonez (Novato), Library Ambassador Youth Volunteer, South Novato Library

Who's New & Welcome!

Kelly Anderson (Larkspur), Marin Civic Center Tour Docent, Cultural Services

Zoli Bassoff (San Rafael), Patrol Volunteer, Marin County Parks

Carter Cain (Kentfield), Parks Intern, Marin County Parks

Janeen Castner (Novato), Conversation Club Volunteer, Novato Library

Emeli Gonzalez (Novato), Homework Helpers Intern and Teen Volunteer, Novato Library

Renee Hamilton (Novato), Fire Lookout, Marin County Fire

Matt Herrmann (San Rafael), Marin Civic Center Tour Docent, Cultural Services

Zoe Hess (Fairfax), Homework Helpers Intern, Fairfax Library

Andrea Hirsig (Pinole), Marin Wildlife Watch Volunteer, Marin County Parks

Nicolas Jimenez (San Rafael), Teen Volunteer, South Novato Library

Robert Lutolf (Sonoma), Marin Wildlife Watch Volunteer, Marin County Parks

Ann Maddox (Fairfax), Marin Wildlife Watch Volunteer, Marin County Parks

Rosie McAllister (Larkspur), Student Elections Ambassador, Elections Department

Sophia McLane (Larkspur), Marin Civic Center Tour Docent, Cultural Services

Maria McVarish (Point Reyes Station), Senior Peer Counselor, Health & Human Services

Derick Morgan (Oakland), Certified Law Clerk, Public Defender's Office

Mary Nicolini (Novato), Marin Wildlife Watch Volunteer, Marin County Parks

Dean Powell (Mill Valley), Marin Wildlife Watch Volunteer, Marin County Parks

Rich Rusdorf (San Rafael), Patrol Volunteer, Marin County Parks

Emilie Strunsky (San Rafael), Homework Helpers Intern, Corte Madera Library

