



**For Immediate Release**

**Giving Wings to Children with Disabilities at Camp Mariposas  
Speech and Occupational Therapy Program Funded by CenCal Health**

**Santa Barbara, CA** – August 6, 2019 – Every week day this Summer, in a small nondescript office building on Santa Barbara’s Westside, young lives are transformed. [Camp Mariposas](#) provides speech, language and occupational therapies to children, primarily between the ages of 3 and 8 years, who have been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or other conditions that would benefit from early and continuous intervention. A team of professional speech and language pathologists, movement and motor skill therapists and behavioral specialists work closely with children to foster communication, as well as physical and social development. The positive effect of being able to communicate and to accomplish physical tasks previously thought too difficult, helps create a happy, more motivated child.

Camp Mariposas was founded by Speech and Language Pathologist **Silvia Wasjutin** in 2013 as an adjunct program to [Mariposas Project/MP Health](#), a private health services agency. The camp’s primary purpose is to bridge the gap in services for local children with disabilities during the summer when school is not in session. Wasjutin has over 30 years of experience, spending 15 years as a speech and language pathologist in the Santa Barbara Unified School District and at the Santa Barbara County Department of Education. Wasjutin was also the parent of a special needs child. “I saw firsthand the need for kids to receive special individualized services and counseling year-round by pediatric therapy professionals, in an inclusive and loving environment.”

In 2018, Camp Mariposas added a second location, in Atascadero, to accommodate the needs of families in Nipomo, Paso Robles and San Luis Obispo. Camp Mariposas is funded by [CenCal Health](#), the local health plan in both Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties. Eligible children attend the therapeutic summer program at no cost. “We are pleased to continue to provide funding for this important program for the last several years,” said **Bob Freeman**, Chief Executive Officer at CenCal Health. “Camp Mariposas provides a critical service outside of the walls of doctors’ offices for our members and other children during the summer months.”

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Not only do children benefit from the program, but their families do as well. **Claudia Cervantes** is the mother of 8-year-old Josue who has Down Syndrome and has attended Camp Mariposas every summer since he was a baby. “Josue has experienced so many victories at Camp Mariposas. The therapists here have helped him to learn to crawl, then walk and to talk. When Josue learned to put on his own socks it was an early victory for our whole family,” said Cervantes. “The program has also taught me valuable parenting skills – methods to motivate Josue so that he is always learning and developing.”

This summer, Camp Mariposas provided nearly 2,000 hours of speech and occupational therapies over 7 weeks. Eighty-nine children were served by 10 therapists, 6 volunteers, two high school students earning community credit and one college intern. For 2019, Camp Mariposas added a “handwriting camp” to help accommodate children with specific fine motor and handwriting needs. “Each year we increase camp enrollment and yet we still have a waiting list of kids who want and need these services during the summer,” said Wasjutin.

Wasjutin gives credit for the success of Camp Mariposas to “our incredible therapists and staff.” **Diana DiMauro** is another an example of the transformative power of Camp Mariposas. Starting seven years ago while a student at San Marcos High School, DiMauro began working in the summers as a young assistant at the therapy camp. She became so enamored of the children and the work of the professional therapists that she decided to make Speech and Language Pathology her education goal. Recently graduated with a BA from University of the Pacific, DiMauro is now enrolled in graduate school and on her way to becoming a professional Speech Therapist.

To help maintain the therapy program’s high degree of training and professionalism, Wasjutin maintains a recruiting relationship with several colleges and universities with speech pathology and occupational therapy programs including New York University (NYU), Dominican University in San Francisco, and West Coast University in Los Angeles.

Camp Mariposas also has ongoing relationships with local service organizations like the **Santa Barbara Neighborhood Clinic (SBNC)** and **Alpha Resource Center of Santa Barbara**.

Physicians at SBNC often refer children to Camp Mariposas, and Camp Mariposas will call upon Alpha Resource Center if they see a family that needs additional services for their disabled child. Local therapists from all the area school districts work at the camp in the summer, some since the camp was founded.

“Josue loves Camp Mariposas. Before he could speak, he would ask us about camp by making the butterfly gesture with his hands - entwining his thumbs and waving his fingers,” said Cervantes. “All his life he will remember the experience he had these summers at Camp Mariposas.”

### **About Mariposas Project**

MP Health of Santa Barbara is a healthcare organization with a two-fold mission of providing both a multitude of therapy services to children as well as an international residency/internship program to therapists from South America. Providing Physical, Occupational, Speech-Language Pathology Therapy and Comprehensive Psycho-educational and Neurological Evaluations for children year-round, as well as through our summer camps. We are the first and ONLY full-service assessment and therapy facility in the tri-county area that provides therapeutic interventions for young and school age children. You can always be sure that your child will receive the highest level of therapeutic intervention from our group of more than 30 therapists. With a strong foundation of family, parent and caregiver education, your child will benefit from our wide-range of therapies, specialists, community classes and resources available to you and your family. <http://mphealthsb.com/>

### **About CenCal Health**

CenCal Health’s mission is to improve the health and well-being of the communities we serve by providing access to high quality health services, along with education and outreach, for our membership. As a public entity, CenCal Health is a community-accountable health plan partnering with over 1,500 local physicians, hospitals and other providers in delivering exceptional patient care to more than 175,000 members – about one in four residents of Santa Barbara County and one in five residents of San Luis Obispo County. Established in 1983, it is the oldest managed Medicaid plan of its kind in the nation. CenCal Health employs close to 250 people at offices in both Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo, and contributes approximately \$50 million a month into the local economy, primarily through payments to healthcare providers who serve our membership. <https://www.cencalhealth.org/>

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