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Festival of Children Foundation Kicks Off 25th Festival of Children® at South Coast Plaza with \$25,000 in Youth-Led Grants and KARA Award
Five Orange County non-profits receive grants selected by county supervisors as Festival of Children Foundation honors two young healthcare advocates with the KARA Award

COSTA MESA, Calif. (Sept. 2, 2026) – Festival of Children Foundation celebrated the kickoff of 25th Festival of Children® at South Coast Plaza Wednesday, September 2, by awarding a total of \$25,000 to five youth-led projects selected by members of the Orange County Board of Supervisors and presenting its KARA Award to two young leaders who are making a difference in their community.

The opening night celebration marked the beginning of the month-long Festival of Children, a celebration of childhood that spotlights local organizations working to improve the lives of children during National Child Awareness Month.

To celebrate 25 years at South Coast Plaza, the foundation awarded a total of \$25,000 in grants - \$5,000 each to five youth-led, district-specific projects selected by each member of the Orange County Board of Supervisors:

District 1 — Supervisor Janet Nguyen

We Care Orange County

The We Care Youth Media Corps and Leadership Academy empowers students to explore local issues, learn ethical journalism and produce media showcasing community impact.

District 2 — Supervisor Vicente Sarmiento

KidWorks Community Development Corporation

The KidWorks Youth Leadership Development Model guides K–12 students through a five-stage pathway designed to build leadership skills, mentor peers and drive positive change in their neighborhoods.

District 3 — Supervisor Donald Wagner

Pretend City Children's Museum

TeensTeach and TeensTable engage high school students in leading hands-on learning, storytelling and cultural experiences for young children and families.

District 4 — Supervisor Doug Chaffee

No Limits Creative Arts

The project mentors youth to support children with disabilities through accessible arts, theater, dance and music programs that foster inclusion and confidence.

District 5 — Supervisor Katrina Foley

Project3R

Led by youth environmentalist Ryan Hickman, the initiative engages young leaders through a Youth Leadership Board that leads community cleanups, promotes recycling and advocates for sustainability.

Recognizing Exceptional Youth: The KARA Award

Additionally, Kara Nguyen and 2025 winner Ace Christopherson-Bilbruck presented the prestigious KARA Award, which honors young individuals exemplifying the spirit of “Karing And Really Achieving,” to Sophie Martin and Akshay Sherma. With support from the Dragon Kim Foundation, the duo founded Project FairCare Health, hosting four health fairs that connected over 1,200 Orange County residents to free healthcare screenings, services and educational resources.

“Twenty-five years ago, we created Festival of Children to bring together the community and shine a light on the incredible organizations dedicated to improving the lives of children,” said Sandy Segerstrom Daniels, founder and executive director of Festival of Children Foundation. “It is incredibly meaningful that we can celebrate this milestone by investing in young people themselves. Through ‘25 for 25,’ we are giving youth the resources and recognition to make a difference today while helping shape the future of children’s charities for the next 25 years.”

A Month-Long Celebration at South Coast Plaza

Originating in 2002 when the Orange County Board of Supervisors first declared September as Child Awareness Month, an initiative that expanded into a federally recognized National Child Awareness Month (NCAM) in 2008, Festival of Children® provides free display space for local nonprofits to connect with South Coast Plaza’s millions of visitors over the month.

Over 25 years, the Festival has educated more than 48 million people on the missions of 213 charities. The 2026 event features approximately 70 local organizations alongside free, family-friendly events, performances, and activities throughout September.

Upcoming Highlights:

- Saturday, September 5 (12:00 PM - Carousel Court): Kickoff performances by America’s Got Talent Season 14 winner Kodi Lee and five-year-old signing sensation Angelica Nero.
- Featured Performances Throughout September: The Rollettes, Orange County Aerial Arts, Ruby Karen Project, and Bob Baker Marionette Theater.

- [Complete Schedule of Events](#)

Festival of Children® 2026 sponsors include co-lead sponsors Hyundai Hope On Wheels and Rady Children's Health Orange County plus sponsors Alliant Insurance Services, Chubb, Mesa Water, Mitsubishi Electric, CableMasters, Visible Intellect, Hurst & Siebert, JRM Construction West, Briggs Electric, The Raymond Group, Evans Roofing Co., Gothic Landscape Maintenance, and RM Dalton Corporation, South Coast Plaza, Todd Halbrook at RBC Wealth Management. LAist is the media sponsor.

For more information, visit www.festivalofchildren.org.

About Festival of Children Foundation

Festival of Children Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that serves to bring together and coordinate the efforts of charities, companies and individuals who work to improve the lives of children. One hundred percent of administrative costs are covered by designated funding, allowing donations to go further in direct support of programs and services that improve the lives of children nationwide. For more information, visit www.festivalofchildren.org.

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