

Hello Heloisa,

I am proud of the cost-effective and efficient advocacy our CASA of Sonoma County has provided to children in foster care in the 2023-24 fiscal year.

We are very thrilled to report we have served over 256 children via the caring hands and dedication of over 165 CASA volunteers. There's still more work to be done as over 60 children and youth still await for their own child advocate at any given time. Your giving hearts can ensure that all children living in foster care have volunteers who will advocate for and protect their fundamental right to be safe, to be treated with dignity and respect, all in a safe and permanent home.

We are also thrilled to share the wonderful news that the CASA network in California has received the third year of the state appropriation, ensuring another $20 million in critical funding. With the state appropriation secured, $16,000,000 will be granted to 44 local programs to stabilize operations, expand staff, and encourage sustained growth. We hope this direct funding will accelerate the momentum created over the past two years. California CASA will receive $1,000,000 allocated directly to them for grants management and oversight. The remaining $2,900,000 will be used for centralized services to enhance support for the network's 44 programs, and $100,000 goes to the Judicial Council for their administration.

This is such a huge accomplishment for the CASA Movement! We are confident that, collectively, we will continue building momentum toward our vision of providing the transformative support of a CASA volunteer to every child in the California child welfare and juvenile justice systems who needs this advocacy.

Thank you for your concern and compassion for all those young people living in foster care, and for the CASA volunteers who are changing lives, every single day.

Please don't hesitate to call 707-565-6375 or **email** if you would like to speak with me about CASA matters.

This newsletter will report on our numbers and efforts supported by the steadfast work of the people working diligently to support foster youth: CASA volunteers, our staff, board of directors, office volunteers and interns.

With my warmest regards,

Heloisa Heinen
CASA Executive Director



During the last fiscal year 2023-24, Court Appointed Special Advocates – CASA volunteers supported abused and neglected children in navigating the foster care system and provided advocacy in the areas of permanency and placement, education and life skills, protective factors, wellbeing that improve quality of life, break the cycle of abuse, and prepare them for positive adult citizenship and a successful future.

In Sonoma County, approximately 650 children and teens live in the foster care system, taken from their homes due to abuse, abandonment, or neglect. Children in foster care need extra support during these trying times of uncertainty. It is critical that they feel they are cared about by their community. They need the support of trusted, caring adults to help them navigate changes in all aspects of their life: school, doctors, therapists, a new home, neighborhood, new foster parents and this new reality in our community. This is where CASA comes!

In fiscal year 2023-24, CASA strived to expand our impact by serving more foster youth with ongoing advocacy. To do this, we enhanced the training and volunteer specialization components of our program to further promote the goals of:

- Advocating for the youth to receive an education that meets their developmental and academic needs
- Improving conditions in a youth's life that supports success and mitigate the negative effects of trauma, stress, and other barriers to thriving
- Facilitating permanency through the development of meaningful adult relationships
- Encouraging placement with kinship care, other family members or through adoption
- Fostering connection among sibling groups

- Promoting enhanced well-being for children and youth which is a core indicator that a young person is holistically healthy, stable, and on track

"My CASA was the only one who would take me and my brother out. That played a big role in building trust and in being my only source of seeing my brother for those 4 years were in the system." - Former Foster Youth

These goals are fulfilled by the dedication and expertise of caring community members, who contribute their time, energy, resources, and experience to having a lasting impact on a young person's life.

The CASA program has also shown its economic impact through:

- Designating over $25,000 in funds for enrichment and scholarship services opportunities for the children and youth we serve via a partnership with the Sonoma County Office of Education.
- Providing over $725,000 in professional in kind services through 25,000 hours of volunteer child advocacy via CASA advisors and professionals who give their time during our pre-service training, Continuing Education seminars, Case Management sessions.
- Receiving over $25,000 in in kind donations including laptop computers, bikes, graduation, birthday and Christmas gifts - given straight to the youth we serve.

"The first thing I have to do is find something that they love to do. They get hooked and they've got control and they rarely have that kind of autonomy." - CASA Advocate

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CASA of Sonoma County served 263 children and youth in the year 2023-24. These children have entered the Sonoma County Juvenile Dependency System due to no fault of their own having fallen victims of abuse and neglect or for rehabilitation services.

They ranged in age from birth to 21, and currently reside in all parts of Sonoma County and all 100% of the children served are low income.

Of the children served in fiscal year 2023-24:

- 10% are birth to age 5
- 32% are age 6 to 11
- 46% are between 12 and 18 years old
- 12% are above 18 years old

Of children and youth served, 54% of them are male and 45% of them are female and their demographics breakdown is:

- 33% Hispanic/Latino
- 45% White/Non Latino
- 7% African American
- 13% Native American
- 2% Asian/Pacific Islander

Abused and neglected children need more help than the foster care system can provide. Without consistent support from volunteer mentor advocates to support judges and other child welfare-related professionals who have large caseloads, abused and neglected children who are dependents of the court become lost in the juvenile court system, resulting in a lack of adequate representation.

Research on youth in foster care consistently demonstrates they are among the most underserved, at-risk and high-risk in our county. Given the specific needs of at-risk children and youth in foster care, there is a significant need to provide children before the court with best-interest advocacy that addresses the risk factors and negative outcomes they experience.

"My CASA taught me respect, loyalty, trust and tools with mental health. She was the one person I felt safe with and felt welcomed and loved. When I was pregnant with my first child, she helped me advocate to leave my boyfriend who was abusive, and she really shaped me into the woman I am today. Never felt judgement, treated my daughter with love. I was so closed off with so many people and she opened my eyes to another way."

- Former Foster Youth

Children who have experienced abuse or neglect fare better with a CASA volunteer by their side. Studies have shown that children with a CASA volunteer:

- Have better educational outcomes
- Are more likely to be enrolled in school
- Get more educational, therapeutic and medical services
- Are more likely to be re-united with their families
- Are administered fewer Psychotropic medications
- Spend less time in foster care

"My advocate asked me a lot of questions and really listened to my answers. She would take notes at team meetings and before court to make sure my feelings were known, and she advocated for me like no one else did."

- Former Foster Youth



"I'm sure that all of us would like the system to change and look differently. But the fact is that we have to work with the system that we have, and CASA is really essential as that kind of stopgap to make sure that these kids get connected to the services that are already there. - CASA Advocate

CASA of Sonoma County has recruited, screened, trained and supervised 165 CASAs who advocated for abused and neglected children and youth in the courtroom, classroom and community.

There are key factors that are unique contributions that set up advocates to impact the lives of foster youth. Aside from being a voice for them in all areas of their lives, they have been mentors, champions, long-term connections, and that constant presence in the midst of an ever changing environment.

- Advocates develop reliable, caring relationships with children and youth that build trust and safety.
- They show up as champions in a complex system and encourage them to dream and plan for a bright future, in addition to self-advocacy.
- Advocates contribute to youth's needs in the development and modification of a permanent plan, which is a long-term plan that aims to provide youth with a stable, secure, and loving family while engaging with a range of support systems.
- Advocates play a critical role in supporting youth to get the best education possible which match developmental and academic needs, checking on attendance concerns and advancement.
- CASA volunteers also identify and monitor youth's progress in key developmental milestones, including social and emotional, language, cognitive and physical to assure they are receiving consistent and appropriate physical and mental healthcare.

In support of the child welfare goals of safety, permanency and well-being, CASA volunteers have:

- Made over 620 court appearances
- Provided over 2,480 recommendations to the Juvenile Court in areas such as health and mental health, extra-curricular activities, education and shelter
- Written over 500 court reports representing the best interests of children
- Provided over 23,640 hours of volunteer time that total to over $918,000 in pro-bono service provided via child advocacy

We continued our efforts to recruit a diversified pool of applicants, seeking press and social media coverage in diverse communities, participating in events that target different groups such as the Sonoma County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, North Bay Black Chamber of Commerce, La Voz and Los Cien Sonoma County.





Between outreach booths at local events, community partnerships with other local organizations, and inviting supporters and volunteers to our Bi-Annual open house...CASA has had a busy year of interacting with Sonoma County OUTSIDE of the courtroom, classroom, and office.

Here are a few highlights:

- Over $10,000 raised thanks to a strong presence at the human race by our CASA volunteers, staff, board members!
- $2,000 raised by our volunteers at the Napa2Sonoma Rose 5k & Half Marathon!
- Informational booths at local community events, fairs, & festivals
- $500 raised by The Healdsburg School in partnership with CASA of Sonoma County during the months of April and May for Child abuse Prevention Awareness!



Pinwheels for Prevention at The Healdsburg School



Victim's Rights Resource Fair 2024



Porsches on the Plaza 2024


Human Race 2024



We could not be more proud to share with you the success of the CASA Hearts FORE Children Golf Tournament that took place on August 29th at Windsor Golf Club.

Because of a very generous community of corporations and individuals sponsoring the event, golfers, donors, and vendors we raised over $65,000 to support Sonoma County's most vulnerable youth! We cannot thank you enough!

Your support changes lives, a positive dividend for your dollars invested. All proceeds benefit our vital mission of providing Court Appointed Special Advocates to speak up for children in foster care so they get the support and services in the areas of education, healthcare and safety.















In addition to all the in-kind supporters below, we would like to thank the several individuals, corporations and foundations who have supported our CASA Program over the years. Our funders are the reason we are able to keep growing to get closer to reaching every foster child who needs our help.

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CASA is donor dependent and relies on the generosity of our community to continue to change lives of those in the local foster system. Every donation, large and small, makes a difference. Thanks for your concern and compassion for all those young people living in foster care, and for the CASA volunteers who are changing lives, every single day. Please consider making a difference for our community's most vulnerable children and youth in the following ways.



Make a Monetary Donation

Click here to give online. A gift of any size makes a difference! We gladly accept checks sent to:
CASA Of Sonoma County
PO Box 1418
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