

CASA Connection

Summer 2013

"Connecting our Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program to our community"



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Millie's Message:

Since our inception in 1977, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Programs have become one of the most significant services of its kind, collaborating with community partners to assure the well-being of children. CASA programs are cost-effective and many run as independent, private nonprofit organizations. Today, there are almost 1,000 CASA programs around the country. We are a unique blend of private support, public need and the kind of people power that comes from 70,000 volunteers, who are committed to the rights of every child in the Juvenile Court and Child Welfare System.

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Sonoma County CASA is one of 44 programs in the state of California. We were the 32nd program founded by the Presiding Juvenile Court at the time, honorable Judge Arnold Rosenfield, in 1997. We serve an average of 220 youths a year via the dedication of over 160 Sonoma County CASA volunteers, who dedicate over 20,000 hours of volunteer time annually. What is significant about these hours, is that they focus on the youth, overseeing their strengths and weaknesses, while keeping long-term vision alive. CASA volunteers are assigned to their youths to help them succeed, to help them stand proudly on their conviction to become independent, self sufficient members of our community. The journey can be long, there will be rewards as well as struggles, and CASA volunteers often provide the support necessary for a successful transition into adulthood.

One could not give a better example of our impact than the story provided in this newsletter by Karen Bushnell, who began her appointment as a CASA volunteer in 2008. The relationship began with the meeting between Karen and the youth she was assigned to. Some six years and 1,000 volunteer hours later, Karen has become a long-term significant adult to her youth, who has now left foster care, is living independently, is self-sufficient and has become a caring and sensitive mother. Currently, Karen stands in as an extended family member who never wavers from her availability to lend support. This relationship is one of many we have developed with our youth, but Karen is a CASA volunteer extraordinaire, and I love sharing her story.



With the Children at Heart

Millie Gilson

Founding Executive Director

[Read on and click on the logo above to learn more about Sonoma County CASA!](#)



Ready to Stand Up for a Child Who Needs You?

CASA Volunteers Give Time to Change a Child's Life.

Nobody longs for a safe and loving family more than a child in foster care. As a CASA Volunteer, you are empowered by the courts to help make this dream a reality. You will be the one consistent adult in these children's lives. You will vigilantly fight for and protect their fundamental right to be treated with the dignity and respect every child deserves. You will bring positive change, not only to the lives of these vulnerable children, but also to their children and to generations to come. And in doing so, you will enrich your life as well.

What Do CASA Volunteers Do?

CASA Volunteers listen first. Then they act.

A volunteer gets to know the child by spending time with the child weekly and by talking with everyone in that child's life: parents and relatives, foster parents, teachers, medical professionals, attorneys, social workers, and others. They use the information they gather to inform judges and others of what the child needs and what will be the best permanent home for them.

How Do CASA Volunteers Help Children?

CASA volunteers watch over and advocate for abused and neglected children, to make sure they don't get lost in the overburdened legal and social service system or languish in inappropriate group or foster homes. Volunteers stay with each case until it is closed and the child is placed in a safe, permanent home. For many abused children, their CASA volunteer will be the one constant adult presence in their lives.

Independent research has demonstrated that children with a CASA volunteer are substantially less likely to spend time in long-term foster care and less likely to reenter care.

Who Can Be A Volunteer?

You do not have to be a lawyer or a social worker to be a volunteer. We welcome people from all walks of life. We are simply looking for people who care about children and have common sense. As a volunteer, you will be thoroughly trained and well supported by professional staff to help you through each case.

You must pass a background check, participate in a 30-hour pre-service training course and agree to stay with a case until it is closed, dedicating at least two years of service.

Interested in helping children but not ready to commit to becoming a child advocate? [Learn about other volunteer opportunities and how to get involved!](#)

"Words mean more than what is
set down on paper. It takes the
human voice to infuse them with
shades of deeper meaning."



~ Maya Angelou



Summer Fun:

Not A Fish Story

CASAs and their youths had a fun-filled day on May 18th. They spent the day at Hagemann Ranch Trout Farm, enjoying lots of fishing, games, and fun.

CASA wants to sincerely thank our Board Member Tresa Headrick from Redwood Credit Union for connecting our CASA kids with the excitement that the Hagemann's farm had to offer!

Community Connections:

CASA Executive Director Millie Gilson joins V.O.I.C.E.S Steering Committee

Created and run by former foster youth, Voices brings together over 40 agencies to provide transitioning youths with local resources and benefits that will help them successfully transition into adulthood.

[Learn more about V.O.I.C.E.S. Sonoma County.](#)



Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk

Through a generous donation brought to us by Sonoma Raceway, CASAs and their youths were able to enjoy all the excitement of the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk.

Our kids went on amazing rides, had tasty food, and spent an adventurous day with their advocates!



Fun at the YMCA

The YMCA promotes youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. A special thanks to the generosity of the Sonoma County YMCA for providing CASA



Dress for Success

Allyson Ahlstrom, Founder of Threads for Teens, strives to provide less fortunate teen girls with an opportunity to experience the joy of shopping and a well-deserved confidence boost.

Many of our teen girls never get to enjoy the simple pleasure of picking out a new outfit. Through CASA's connection with Threads for Teens, our girls get the chance to feel like any other girl, and that feeling is priceless.

[Learn more about Threads for Teens.](#)

with tickets for our youths to enjoy the great environment and many activities the Y has to offer.

[Learn more about Sonoma County YMCA.](#)



Dr. Phil continues his support for local CASA Programs across the Nation

As spokespeople for National CASA since 2008, psychologist Dr. Phil McGraw and his wife, Robin McGraw, have worked to make CASA a household word by repeatedly featuring the CASA cause on their television show and website. Their support has generated record numbers of volunteer inquiries and informed millions of people about the work of CASA programs.

[Dr. Phil Connects to CASA](#)



Worth Our Weight - WOW

Worth our Weight is a culinary internship program dedicated to assisting youth in tuition-free culinary and food service training.

Evelyn Cheatham is the passionate founder and executive director who seeks to help our community by providing young people, who have faced extreme difficulties in their lives, with an opportunity to find their own path.

Stop by Worth our Weight, located in Santa Rosa, to show your community support and to enjoy a delicious brunch prepared by our local youth.

[Learn more about Worth Our Weight.](#)



If you have a creative idea or would like to contribute with donations or resources to enhance our extra-curricular programs, please contact Millie or check our website!

[Visit our website!](#)



CASA Story: Karen Bushnell

I met Jane in March of 2008 when she was 17 years old. Her mother was incarcerated. She is estranged from her father and has no other siblings. She was basically alone. Jane had a history of missing school and being unhappy at her aunt's home, her foster home and her group home. In May of 2009 she ran away. It worried all of us, but fortunately she had CASA's 24-hour hotline number. She contacted me from time to time to let me know she was okay.

Eventually she called to inform me that she had thought about our talks and now she wanted to return to the foster system. We were able to find her a home that allowed her to practice her independent living skills. As she emancipated, my role changed but my

commitment stood solid. I continue our CASA relationship, and this means I am making a long-term commitment to her for as long as she needs me.

The journey has not always been easy, but Jane and I have developed a trusting, loving, comfortable relationship that I cherish. She lives independently in a one-bedroom apartment (that CASA helped furnish) and works as a clerk in a clothing store. She is attending Santa Rosa Junior College. She hopes to obtain an AA degree or certificate so she can find a better job. She even has a boyfriend now. We talk a lot about her future and, yes, planned parenthood.

I am a 61-year old woman who worried that I wouldn't make much of a difference in the life of a foster youth. I was wrong: Jane has made my life a better one. I believe Jane's life is better too. I know I have planted seeds that will grow a lifetime.



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