



CASA of Sonoma County  
PO Box 1418  
Kenwood, CA 95452

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## From the Director's Desk: **Making a difference...One child at a time!**

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). It is important that you review the information we have provided in this packet to orient yourself to the steps in becoming a CASA.

I also ask that you carefully think through your decision to become involved in our program. This is a very meaningful and important step you are about to take. Reliability and commitment are of the utmost importance in this extraordinary journey.

Included in this packet you will find a **job description** of the role of a child advocate, the **qualification requirements** for CASA volunteers and the **CASA program responsibilities** to the Juvenile Court and to the children we serve.

We start the process with a **pre-training orientation interview** where I will meet you personally to assist in your decision-making process. Then, you will attend a **volunteer training** which is offered quarterly. It includes 30 hours of classroom study (as described in the enclosed training schedule), courtroom and case review observations. You will also participate in **post-training site visits** to other organizations assisting foster youth.

Because the CASA Program serves foster children who are dependents of the Juvenile Court, we must ask that you participate in a **complete security clearance check**. A list of those requirements is also included in this packet.

The CASA program is a proud organization embracing all people of our community. We encourage individuals of diverse backgrounds to apply.

Thank you for your interest in CASA and for your cooperation in the screening process.

In Partnership for Children, Heloisa Heinen

CASA Executive Director

### ***Ordinary people doing extraordinary things:***

When a child is victim of abuse or neglect and becomes dependent of the Juvenile Court system, he/she enters a world of bewildering mazes. The child is at the mercy of the Court system which must decide where to place him/her and what services to provide the family.

The Court will hear from parents, social workers, and lawyers, each with their own bias. The Court usually does not hear from the child. Court Appointed Special Advocates of Sonoma County (CASA) was founded to be the VOICE for such children.

CASA is a non-profit, volunteer program dedicated to improving the lives of abused and neglected children. The trained CASA volunteer is a sworn officer of the Court, appointed by the judge to assess the circumstances, to report the findings and to speak on the child's behalf.

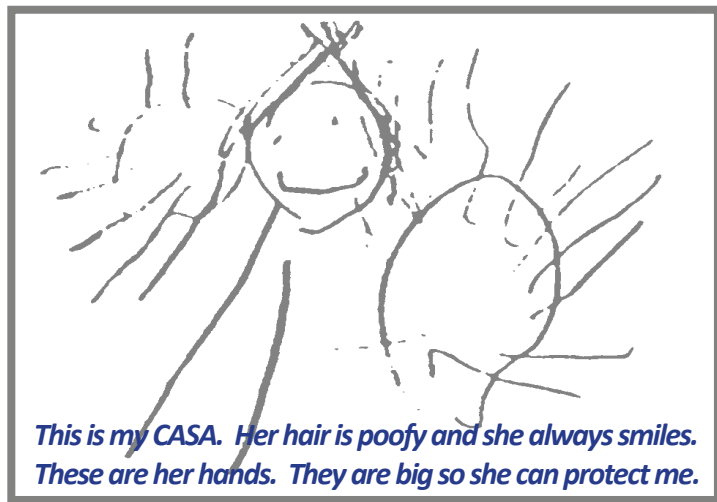
The CASA volunteer becomes a friend to the child, explaining what is happening and why, listening to the child's fears and helping to resolve any feelings. Through **weekly visits**, the CASA volunteer monitors the case and makes sure everything that can be done is being done. The CASA volunteers serves as an **advocate, role model**, and as the child emancipates and leaves the system, a **lifelong connection**.

The CASA volunteer works closely with social workers, therapists, attorneys, and other professionals to make certain the child's needs are met. The CASA's ultimate goal is to ensure that authorities provide a safe, permanent, loving family for the child as quickly as possible.

*CASA volunteers humanize the Juvenile Court system for children during what is probably the most traumatic period of their life."*

**Arnold Rosenfield**

**Founding Sonoma County Superior Court Judge**



## A CASA volunteer must:

- ♥ Demonstrate an interest in children and their welfare.
- ♥ Respect and relate to people from various backgrounds and cultures in a sensitive and caring manner.
- ♥ Be objective, open-minded and flexible.
- ♥ Gather and record accurately fact-based information related to the people and circumstances in a child's life.
- ♥ Communicate effectively, orally and in writing.
- ♥ Be willing to make presentations before the court.
- ♥ Understand and follow the rules of confidentiality.
- ♥ Be able to make a minimum of a two-year commitment.
- ♥ Provide a monthly volunteer log of hours to the agency.
- ♥ Attend mandatory case review sessions every 60 days.
- ♥ Accept supervision and seek feedback from CASA's trained professional staff.
- ♥ Pass a security check and screening including: National and State Child Abuse Index and Sexual Abuse Registry, DOJ and FBI fingerprints and First Advantage Social Security and full DMV record, in addition to supplying the CASA Program with three letters of recommendation.
- ♥ Provide one's own transportation, valid driver's license and proof of insurance.
- ♥ Be 21 years old or older.
- ♥ Understand that you will not be allowed to take child/youth to your home or engage them with your families and friends. All to assure confidentiality laws are observed.

## Security Clearance Requirements:

- ♥ One-page letter outlining your motivations and feelings regarding becoming an advocate
- ♥ DMV Record printout (please request full record printout)
- ♥ Three letters of recommendation (employer, personal, family, past volunteer experience)
- ♥ Fingerprinting including the following:
  - National and State Child Abuse Index Registry
  - National and State Sexual Abuse Registry
  - DOJ screening
  - FBI screening
  - Social Security screening
- ♥ Completed application filled out and current photo
- ♥ Completed orientation/interview meeting
- ♥ Copy of driver's license and proof of insurance

### Give of Yourself - Give to Yourself

According to a 30-year study that looked at the health effects of family, work, and volunteer activities, **volunteering was the most important factor in determining who was the healthiest and live the longest.** Phyllis Moen, PhD., Professor of Human Development and Sociology at Cornell University, who conducted the study says, "Volunteering gives us a sense of ourselves."

## Recommended Reading List:

### Somebody Else's Children

by John Hubner and Jill Wolfson

### A Child Called "It" and the sequel The Lost Boy

by David Pelzer

### I Speak for This Child

by Gay Courter

### No such thing as a bad kid - Understanding and Responding to the Challenging Behavior of Troubled Children and Youth

by Charles D. Appelstein

### On Their Own: What happens to Kids When They Age Out of the Foster Care System

by Gary Stangler

### For further recommendations and information:

CASA of Sonoma at [www.sonomacasa.org](http://www.sonomacasa.org)

Callifornia CASA at [www.californiacasa.org](http://www.californiacasa.org)

National CASA at [www.casaforchildren.org](http://www.casaforchildren.org)

## ***CASA Volunteer Training Program:***

Once accepted into the CASA program, the child advocate will participate in a **30-hour comprehensive training program** taught by the CASA Advisory Committee. Additional hours of training include courtroom observation, tours of facilities, and other community-based programs, along with **12 hours continuing education per year**.

Upon completion of the CASA program training the advocate will have:

- ♡ Gained practical knowledge of their role and responsibilities as a child advocate.
- ♡ Examined several major issues related to their work as a CASA.
- ♡ Had the opportunity to have practiced many of the skills required of CASAs.



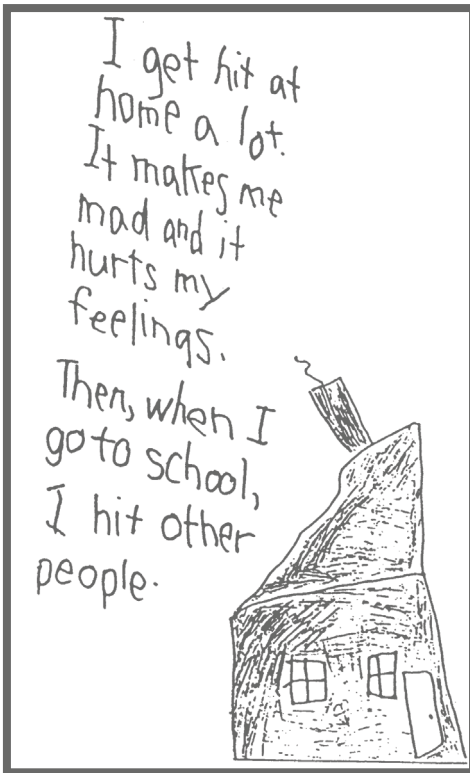
## ***Mission Statement & Program Description:***

The Sonoma County Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Program is committed to serving abused and neglected children coming before the Juvenile Court for protection and rehabilitation services.

The purpose of the CASA program is to humanize the complex child welfare system for the child victim by providing a trained volunteer who will act as a consistent role model, advocate, and potential life connection.

The goal of the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program is to prevent abused and neglected children from becoming lost in the Juvenile Court system. The objective of matching a CASA Volunteer, a trained advocate from the community is to ensure that the child's best interest is represented.

In addition to our services to abused and neglected children, the CASA program works to provide community education and awareness concerning the issues of child abuse, neglect and child welfare policy. We are also committed to working towards public policies that promote child abuse prevention and addressing reforms in the Juvenile Dependency/Foster Care system.



## ***CASA Volunteer three essential roles as a child advocate:***

- ♡ To be the child's voice in court, representing their needs, concerns, and best interests.
- ♡ To complement the Juvenile Court/Child Welfare system by researching and assessing the circumstances of each case and reporting their recommendations and findings.
- ♡ To continue to support the child and the progress of the case as it moves.

**CASA - ca sà, (noun)**  
a common person with an uncommon commitment;  
a child's voice in court; a volunteer citizen working to make a difference in ending child abuse.

**CASA volunteers are in a unique position because they provide information not usually available to the Juvenile Court. Because of the growing number of cases filed in Juvenile Court and dwindling resources to adequately monitor the cases, judges find the CASA volunteers to be positive complements to providing the information necessary to make better-informed decisions.**