



WHAT IS CASA?

A BRIEF SUMMARY

The mission of CASA of Los Angeles is to improve the lives of foster children with trained volunteer advocates. A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) is appointed by a judge **to advocate for the best interests of a foster child.**

CASA seeks to reduce and reverse the effects of child abuse and neglect. Nowhere in the nation is the problem greater than in Los Angeles County, where 28,000 children who have been abused or neglected are under the jurisdiction of the Dependency Court. CASA will serve over 6,000 children in FY2014, including 1,000 with intensive advocacy services.

CASA alleviates the feelings of abandonment and alienation that scar these young lives by **harnessing the compassion and generosity of caring adults** who can and do have an enormous impact on the development of the child at all ages. The ingenuity of the CASA model is that it effectively capitalizes on a huge reservoir of caring by mobilizing it in service to children. **CASA makes the most immediate connection—one caring adult to one child in need—that can be the turning point in a life that has been interrupted and shaken.** Our most significant **accomplishments** happen every day—when an overlooked opportunity is found, a service is secured or an adult connection is made that will help to keep a child safe and give him or her an opportunity to succeed in life.

The volunteers get to know the children and their circumstances, show them that someone cares, advocate for their best interests (including making recommendations to the Court), encourage them to grow to their fullest potential, and become involved in key issues in their life, especially permanent placement, and school, health, and mental health issues.

A CASA volunteer is often **the sole consistent adult anchor** for foster children. Children frequently remark how important it is to them that these tireless advocates are the only people in “the system” who are not paid to assist them. CASA volunteers give a voice to a child who cannot speak up for herself or himself and are frequently viewed as mentors or guides.

Judges typically assign CASA volunteers their **most difficult and complex cases**: children with prior maltreatment or contact with child welfare, cases of extreme abuse or neglect, or those where there is a great level of risk of further abuse and neglect. Many children assigned to CASA have learning disabilities, physical disabilities, and significant emotional and mental health problems.

Foster children in the Dependency Court system face **substantial obstacles** in receiving the basic care that all children need: emotional support, parental guidance, and a stable and loving caregiver. More than that, they often lack appropriate education and vocational training, medical care, and the counseling they need to grow into productive adults.

Many children **remain in foster care for years**, and are moved around to **many different placements**. Studies have demonstrated that children who are abused and neglected are at significantly higher risk for academic failure, chronic delinquency, homelessness, adult criminal behavior, antisocial personality, and addictions. Moreover, as a child’s length of time in out-of-home care increases, the probability of such negative outcome increases. CASA volunteers are instrumental in shortening the time that the child is in the dependency system (achieving either re-unification or adoption), while simultaneously assuring that the child’s needs are met.

The CASA program is a proven, reliable and economic model of support that has meant the difference between success and failure in thousands of children. Many more children would thrive if they had the intensive intervention of a CASA volunteer.