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# Peer Assessment and Compliance Review (PACR) Innovative Strategies Report

California Court Appointed Special Advocates  
(CASA) Programs

May 2005

*Submitted to:*

**Judicial Council of California**

*Submitted by:*

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## Introduction

### What are CASAs?

The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program was created in 1977 to assist children who are subject to court proceedings due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment. In 2003, more than 90,000 of California's children were removed from their homes and placed in the state's care to protect them from further harm.<sup>1</sup> Many other children still live at home but are at risk of removal if conditions in the home do not improve. In 2003, approximately 10 percent of children coming under the protection of the state's child welfare system had CASA volunteers appointed to advocate on their behalf.

First implemented in Washington State, CASA programs have been providing services to children in California for more than twenty years.<sup>2</sup> There are currently forty local CASA programs providing services in forty-two of California's fifty-eight counties.<sup>3</sup> In 2004, over 4,500 CASA volunteers in California donated over 569,004 hours to support nearly 8,016 children.<sup>4</sup>

CASA volunteers<sup>5</sup> are trained community members who are appointed by a judge, commissioner, referee, or other judicial officer to provide one-on-one advocacy for a child who is under the jurisdiction of the court. The CASA volunteer is responsible for helping the court understand the needs of the child, ensuring that court-ordered services are being provided, and making child-focused recommendations to the court based on the best interests of the child.

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<sup>1</sup> Needell, B., Webster, D., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Brookhart, A., Lery, B., Shaw, T., Dawson, W., Piccus, W., Magruder, J., & Kim, H. (2003). *Child Welfare Services Reports for California*. Retrieved 12-28-04 from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>.

<sup>2</sup> Source: California Court Appointed Special Advocates (CalCASA) web site, [www.californiacasa.org](http://www.californiacasa.org). Accessed 12-31-04.

<sup>3</sup> Please see Appendix A for a list of all California CASA programs.

<sup>4</sup> Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children & the Courts, *California CASA Programs 2003 Report* (Sept. 2004).

<sup>5</sup> The terms "volunteers" and "advocates" are used interchangeably throughout the report.

## **The PACR Project**

In 1994, the Judicial Council adopted California Rules of Court, rule 1424, which serves as program guidelines for CASA programs. These guidelines implement the requirements of Welfare and Institutions Code section 100, which establishes a grant program administered by the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) to establish or expand CASA programs to assist children involved in juvenile dependency proceedings. The legislature requires the Judicial Council to report on the implementation of the CASA grants program and to make recommendations on continuation and expansion of funding. The Peer Assessment and Compliance Review (PACR) project was developed in response to these reporting requirements.

As part of its monitoring and evaluation responsibilities, the Judicial Council partnered with the California Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (CalCASA) to create a protocol for a statewide assessment of local CASA programs. In 1999, CalCASA, a not-for-profit charitable organization that supports and advocates for local CASA programs throughout California, created the PACR in partnership with the Judicial Council. PACR was designed to strengthen and support local CASA program efforts and was divided into two components: 1) a self-assessment of compliance with rule 1424, and 2) a field study of local CASA programs by an independent evaluation team. This report presents information collected as part of the second, field study component of the PACR.

### ***Field Study Methodology***

To implement the field study component of the PACR project, Berkeley Policy Associates (BPA), a California-based social policy research firm, was contracted to lead evaluation teams on site visits to six local CASA programs during Phase I, fourteen during Phase II, ten during Phase III, and five programs during the final phase of the project. The teams included a BPA evaluation expert, the Judicial Council CASA grants analyst, a Judicial Council attorney, and a CASA program executive director from another county.

A PACR team visited each of the thirty-five programs between October 1999 and February 2004. During each visit, the team collected data from several categories of respondents, including the local CASA program staff; CASA volunteers; former foster youth; foster parents; CASA board members; dependency and delinquency judicial officers, including the presiding juvenile judge; attorneys, including county counsel and those representing children and parents; county child welfare department supervisors and social workers; county probation officers; representatives from local school districts' special education programs; and other local program stakeholders. The PACR team used a variety of methods to collect data on-site, including individual interviews,

focus groups, and document reviews. In some cases, telephone interviews were utilized if difficulties with on-site scheduling arose.

The PACR project was organized around six primary study objectives. These field study objectives were to identify:

- Local CASA program accomplishments;
- Innovative strategies useful to other CASA programs;
- Areas requiring technical assistance;
- Capacity to track program-related outcomes;
- Appropriate outcome measures for future research; and
- Compliance with rule 1424.

The PACR team evaluated program sites according to these objectives and produced one report, separately bound in two distinct sections, for each CASA program visited. Section I of the reports described program accomplishments and contributions; innovative strategies useful for cross-program learning; the CASA program's data capacity, including the program's computer systems, the method in which staff enter and track data, and the site's capacity to produce reports; and suggested outcome measurements. Section II of the reports described technical assistance needs, including challenges within the CASA program and those relating to the dependency court system as a whole, and compliance with rule 1424. The reports were distributed to the CASA program's executive director, CalCASA, and the Judicial Council CASA grants analyst. Each CASA executive director had sole discretion as to the distribution of the program's PACR report beyond CalCASA and the grants analyst. Executive directors were encouraged to share their report with the president of their board of directors and the presiding juvenile court judge.

If a CASA program was found to be out of compliance with rule 1424, it was required to submit a corrective action plan to the Judicial Council grants analyst. Additionally, CalCASA offered its assistance to any local program attempting to develop and implement its corrective action plan. The local programs had one year to implement their corrective action plans and come into compliance with rule 1424. The Judicial Council requires an update on CASA program activity toward compliance in quarterly reports and in the yearly proposal for Judicial Council grant funding.

## CASA Programs' Innovative Strategies

This report focuses on the innovative strategies study component of the PACR project. California CASA programs have developed many innovative strategies to serve children in their communities. At each of the programs visited during the PACR project, the team identified at least one, and usually many more, inventive approaches the CASA program was implementing to better meet its needs and those of their volunteers, children, the dependency system, and the community in general. Although CASA program activities are governed by CRC 1424, each local program is managed by an independent organization and has developed according to local conditions. As a result, CASA programs in California demonstrate considerable variation in their operational practices. Additionally, many CASA programs face similar challenges but have developed different strategies for addressing them. This report focuses on program-specific strategies that may be useful to other CASA programs as they face similar circumstances or opportunities.

Many of the innovative practices developed by local CASA programs are in the following areas: services to children, program infrastructure, and collaboration. This report is organized by these categories, listing the various practices in use by CASA programs. It is important to note that many of these innovations were developed in direct response to the circumstances in a particular county and therefore may not be suitable for replication elsewhere. In some cases, the strategy highlighted is being implemented in more than one CASA program; however, we have included it for only one county due to space limitations. Where possible, we list those programs that have developed similar strategies so that they too may be consulted if desired. Additionally, although we identify these practices as examples of innovation, they are not all without obstacles or challenges. Individual counties will have more information about the current state of the practice as well as implementation issues faced.

In preparing this report, the individual program reports for each CASA program visited for PACR were consulted. Because a comprehensive review of each CASA program and their activities was not feasible for this study, some of the information presented in this report may not fully reflect current program innovation. Attempts were made to ensure that the information provided here is as up to date as possible, and all local programs were invited to comment on the report prior to its finalization.

During PACR visits, respondents were assured that the program's PACR report would not identify the source of information or comments made during the site visit. However, this report identifies the CASA program implementing each innovative strategy highlighted so that other



CASA programs may seek and share information on unique and creative practices. To aid in this effort, a list of all California CASA programs and their contact information is included at the end of this report.

## Services to Children

Across the board, CASA programs in California provide important services to children in the dependency system. Those programs that excel in their delivery of CASA services provide a rich patchwork of services that contain several integral components including: providing information to court officials, ensuring that children's service and emotional needs are being met, introducing the child's voice into the court process, and providing consistency in children's lives. CASA volunteers develop a relationship with each child, explain court proceedings, listen to their feelings about their circumstances, and spend more time with the child than any other system partner. Because of the information obtained through time spent with an assigned child, the CASA volunteer successfully gives a voice to the child by providing detailed and child-focused information to the court. This information helps to ensure that the child's needs are being met. Because CASA volunteers conduct their own investigations of the child's circumstances and spend consistent time with the child, they are also well-positioned and equipped to watch over the child's safety and well being. In addition, the longstanding relationships forged between CASA volunteers and their children enable the volunteers to play an important role in assisting and encouraging children to pursue personal goals and enrichment activities, and thus strive for more "normalcy" in their lives.

Welfare and Institutions Code, §102(c)(1-3) includes a list of the duties and responsibilities of CASA programs in California and, in general, these are the standard services programs provide dependent children:

1. Provide independent, factual information to the court regarding the cases to which he or she is appointed.
2. Represent the best interests of the children involved, and consider the best interests of the family, in the cases to which he or she is appointed.
3. At the request of the judge, monitor cases to which he or she has been appointed to assure that the court's orders have been fulfilled.

In addition to delivering these "standard" CASA services, many California CASA programs have also developed enhanced or innovative services for the children they serve. Some programs develop specialized programs to focus their services on particular populations or issues, such as infant, toddler, and teen populations or health and educational needs. Special funds and activities

to support enrichment activities are other common innovations of the services California programs offer. Some of these exemplary practices are described more fully below.

### ***Enhanced Services to Children***

#### **CASA Children Receive Birthday Cards and Gifts: Mendocino County**

CASA of Mendocino County operates a special fund to provide annual birthday gifts to each CASA child. The gift packages often include a birthday card, an age appropriate book, and a personal gift. CASA of Mendocino County also sends books to children residing in out-of-county placements during particularly difficult times in their cases and/or personal lives. Respondents indicate that this simple gesture by the CASA organization can mean a great deal to dependent children and can serve to add a sense of normalcy to their often unstable circumstances.

#### **Arts in the Court Project: El Dorado County**

At the request of the presiding judge, CASA in El Dorado's South Lake Tahoe initiated a project to decorate the courthouse, including the courtrooms in which child-related cases are heard, with children's artwork. Respondents explain that courtrooms can be very unwelcoming to children and that judicial officers and the CASA program were interested in making courtroom visits and the court process a less intimidating experience. With grants from a local community-based organization, CASA was able to sponsor and display artwork by CASA and area school children. The program has also recently commissioned one CASA teenager to produce more pieces for the project. Individuals interviewed report that the project has evolved over the last two years and that the CASA program will continue to support artistic projects with CASA children and the courts.

#### **“Kids Kamp”: Lassen County**

The CASA program in Lassen County, as part of its umbrella organization, participates in an annual camp for children who have been affected by violence in the home, including domestic violence or child abuse. The camp is a collaborative effort between Lassen Family Services (the CASA program umbrella organization), the sheriff's office, and the local city police department. Its goal is to give children who have witnessed or suffered traumatic events an opportunity to experience a normal “camping” encounter. Activities include nature and ecology workshops, arts and crafts, music, games, and team-building exercises. All camp staff and volunteers must submit to a background check prior to serving at the camp unless they had been previously screened by another agency.

### **Enrichment Boxes: Butte County**

In Butte County CASA volunteers working with children up to age five are provided age-appropriate “enrichment boxes” to give to their assigned child that include a variety of education and comfort items including a teddy bear, blanket, ball, books, puzzles, memory games, and flashcards.

- Child Advocates of **Santa Clara and San Mateo** Counties offers a “Backpacks Program” for children at the start of the school year. The backpacks are filled with age/grade appropriate items (e.g., pens, pencils, calculators, binders, notebooks, crayons, markers, rulers) so each child starts the school year on a level playing field.

### **Fund to Support Enrichment Opportunities: Santa Cruz County**

Several CASA volunteers established the “For the Love of Children” fund to address children’s unmet needs. CASA volunteers can request that the fund pay for things such as raincoats and Little League registration fees for their CASA children. Respondents state that CASA children rarely have an opportunity to participate in activities such as music lessons or sports teams. This fund allows CASA children to explore their interests, build talents, and participate in healthy activities with other children and adults. The Santa Cruz CASA program has established an annual \$200 cap per child, but the program will spend more than this amount if necessary. CASA staff members manage the account, and volunteers and interns solicit money and donations for the fund from individuals, businesses, and recreational clubs.

- Other programs that raise and manage specific funds for enrichment purposes include: **EI Dorado, Napa, and Orange** counties.

### **Program Sponsored Activities: San Diego County**

Voices for Children sponsors monthly social events for volunteers, children, and foster parents. These events include picnics, parties at the office, and roller skating parties. Many respondents comment that these events provide an opportunity for staff to get to know volunteers and their children, and provide volunteers with free recreational activities for their children. Respondents note that these events are very well attended and that staff, volunteers, children, and foster parents enjoy and value the gatherings.

The CASA program also provides volunteers with tickets to events such as ball games, plays, and movies. Respondents note that these tickets allow volunteers to take their children to events without placing an undue financial burden on the volunteers. Furthermore, volunteers come in to

the office to pick up the tickets, thus creating another avenue for volunteers to interact with and gain support from Voices staff.

- Other programs that regularly organize CASA child and volunteer activities include: **Santa Clara/San Mateo, Napa, Riverside, and Santa Cruz** counties.
- CASA of **Mendocino County** sponsors an annual “Make a Memory Day,” a summer picnic for dependent children and their siblings.

### *Variations on the “Standard” CASA Role*

#### **CASAs on Call (COC): Orange County**

The CASAs on Call (COC) program in Orange County was started about five years ago to serve abused children on an emergency basis by providing triage services. In general, COC are assigned to children placed in Orangewood Children’s Home, the county’s emergency shelter for abused, neglected, and abandoned children. COC ensure that children receive needed services and that placement considerations are handled appropriately during this time of crisis. COC are assigned to children on a short-term basis, usually three to six months, until their placements are resolved or another permanent CASA volunteer can be assigned. COC are recruited from the larger CASA volunteer population, and successful candidates are those with extensive experience, demonstrated good judgment, and fast assessment and perception skills. Respondents report that COC is a highly successful program, reaching children in great need of immediate CASA services. Individuals indicate that the COC program offers seasoned advocates a new and different opportunity to serve dependent children.

#### **Serving Children Waiting for Court Hearing: Los Angeles County**

In Los Angeles County, children over the age of four are required to attend their court hearings. As such, a special activity area, called the “shelter care area,” was created for the ninety to 150 children waiting their turn in court each day. The area is staffed by Department of Children and Family Service (DCFS) employees, and has arts and crafts, games, educational toys and activities, donated video equipment and videos, a playground, and a small, outdoor basketball court.

Five or six CASA volunteers, acting as “Children’s Court Assistants,” serve children in shelter care each day. The volunteers have three primary responsibilities in their role as Children’s Court Assistants. First, when children come to court for the first time, a CASA volunteer will explain the court process using a private interview room and visual aids for the younger children. Another role is to accompany the children to their hearings and bring them back to shelter care after the

hearing is complete. The third responsibility CASA volunteers have is simply to be available to listen to children who are very anxious, emotionally distraught, or concerned about the hearings.

Respondents overwhelmingly report that the Children's Court Assistant component is a vital service for children in the dependency court system. They indicate that it is a way to make a child's court experience much less frightening. An additional benefit mentioned is that CASA volunteers are often able to obtain information for the court during their conversations with children, and this information can make an important difference in the child's case. A few respondents mention that this component is an important way to increase positive awareness of the CASA program within the dependency system. Furthermore, it is a potential strategy for retaining experienced volunteers who are "taking a break" from assignment as a traditional CASA volunteer, but who are still interested in supporting children.

### **Visiting CASA Program: Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties**

The Visiting CASA program was developed to serve children from Santa Clara and San Mateo who are placed with caregivers outside of their home county. The visiting CASA concept was aimed at giving these children individualized attention and case oversight to ensure that they do not fall through the cracks. Because some of the out-of-county children are in placements hundreds of miles from Santa Clara and San Mateo, the program is structured so that it utilizes advocates who have limited time and who already travel out of the county for various reasons. All Visiting CASA volunteers must complete the basic initial advocate training and complete a short specialized training for their monitoring role. The program requires less of a time commitment than the standard advocate program.

- **Modoc** County also has a Visiting CASA Program geared toward serving the large number of children in the dependency system placed in other counties.

### **"IEP-only" Cases: Riverside County**

The CASA program in Riverside County has a system in place whereby children who have not been assigned a CASA volunteer are able to have someone work on the case as an educational surrogate. This typically occurs on cases where there are immediate educational needs but where there are not enough volunteers to take new CASA cases. These cases are referred to as "IEP-only cases."

- Other counties that have developed educational advocates include: **San Diego** and **San Luis Obispo** counties.

### **Case Assessment Program: San Diego County**

The Case Assessment Program (CAP) is designed for volunteers who cannot or do not want direct interaction with children. These volunteers go through a twelve-hour training, review the case files for all referrals to the program, and provide summary information to the staff about the case, its status, and its appropriateness for the agency. These volunteers also periodically review court files of the children on the waiting list to check for any changes or developments. In addition, the program supervisor in charge of the CAP program periodically selects cases off of the court docket. Volunteers review these case files and bring any concerns to the attention of the program supervisor who then contacts the social worker or other appropriate party. Volunteers make note of court-ordered services that have not yet been provided, and the program supervisor then calls the appropriate party to discuss the issue.

### **Court Appointed Special Monitor (CASM) Program: Napa County**

The Court Appointed Special Monitor program began in 1999 to address the needs of children in long term foster care who are in more stable placements than children not yet in permanent plans. CASMs monitor a child's status and ensure that his or her needs continue to be met in the permanent placement. The primary differences between a traditional CASA volunteer and a CASM are the following: 1) less frequent in-person visits with child; 2) court reports are shorter and less detailed; and 3) relatively less intense case activity due to the child's stable placement. Respondents mention that the CASM program is a good way to meet the needs of children that in other counties would not be served by the CASA program at all. Additionally, it provides an alternative volunteer opportunity for those CASA volunteers who need a break, have less time available, or have a traditional CASA case that is very intense.

- **San Diego** County operates a similar Court Appointed Special Monitor Program.
- **Tulare** County also monitors some cases.

### **Services Provided to Children on the CASA Program Waiting List: San Luis Obispo County**

In San Luis Obispo County, CASA/Voices for Children has developed a strategy for providing at least minimal support to children who are waiting for a CASA volunteer. This support is provided by program staff members and program volunteers who review every case file referred to the program and screen the child for immediate needs in two areas: medical and educational needs are flagged in the file with color coded tags. The medical screening looks for general health issues as well as whether a child is on psychotropic medication. Special education needs are noted on a separate form summarizing the child's educational assessment and IEP. If follow-up is

needed, CASA program staff monitor the case to ensure that the child's immediate needs are addressed.

### **Non-Advocate Volunteers Lend Strong Support: Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties**

The CASA program of Santa Clara and San Mateo counties has a corps of approximately 150 volunteers who do not carry cases but provide other program support. This group is comprised of advocates who are taking a break from working with children and individuals who are not trained CASA volunteers. These volunteers help organize picnics, write articles for the program newsletter, update the waiting list, participate in their speaker's bureau, manage the program website and intranet, and develop child/advocate events such as a story hour and arts and crafts projects.

- Other programs that use a similar group of non-advocate volunteers include: **El Dorado, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, and Santa Cruz** counties.

### ***Focus on Infants and Toddlers***

#### **Infant and Toddler Demonstration Project: Fresno County**

Individuals interviewed for PACR explain that the Fresno County CASA program was one of four sites participating in the statewide Infant and Toddler Demonstration Project, a special project administered by the AOC and funded by the Stuart Foundation. CASA volunteers and staff who worked with young children as part of this project received extensive training on the special needs of dependent children in this early and important developmental stage. The CASA program obtained specific funding to conduct targeted training sessions presented by experts in the field of infant and toddler mental health. CASA staff and volunteers, local dependency partners, and other area CASA programs and volunteers were all invited to participate in the trainings. Although the demonstration project has officially ended, CASA of Fresno County has secured additional funding from the local Proposition 10 Commission to continue serving this specialized population.

- Other Infant and Toddler Demonstration Project sites: **Imperial** County CASA program, **San Francisco** County CASA program, and the CASA program serving **Santa Clara and San Mateo** counties.
- Other CASA programs that focus on the infant and toddler population: **Butte, Tulare, Butte,** and **San Luis Obispo** (*described more fully below*) counties.



### **BASYC Early Assessment Program: Fresno County**

CASA of Fresno County's Baseline Assessment and Screening for Youth and Children (BASYC) is a unique program that serves infants and toddlers in the dependency system within days of entering the system. BASYC provides immediate assessment of children zero to five years old to facilitate access to mental health, CASA program, and other services. Respondents indicate that the program model was based on research that suggests that young children have a more immediate need for services that can be critical to the child's overall emotional and physical development.

The BASYC program began in 2001 and is a collaboration between the CASA program and the Fresno County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). Prior to BASYC's existence, detained infants and toddlers were placed on a waiting list for a mental health assessment, often waiting months to receive services. In response to the CASA program's frustration at assessment delays, CASA of Fresno County approached DCFS with the idea for the BASYC program. BASYC staff includes employees from both CASA and DCFS.

When a child age zero to five enters the dependency system he or she is immediately identified for assessment. BASYC staff members interview relevant adults in the child's life after the detention hearing. BASYC schedules a mental health assessment to be conducted by a professional clinician within ten to twenty-five days of entering the system to determine the child's immediate emotional, physiological, and physical needs. After collecting all relevant information, BASYC staff members write a report, providing current and relevant information about the child. The BASYC program also provides follow-up visits to the child's foster home to ensure the placement works best for all involved.

- **San Luis Obispo** County established an Infant/Toddler Special Needs Program whereby each infant or toddler referred to the CASA program receives a health and developmental delay assessment conducted by a Registered Nurse so that cases with significant health issues are referred to the county's Public Health Nurse for further monitoring.

### ***Focus on Emancipation***

#### **The Youth Empowerment Program: San Bernardino County**

San Bernardino's CASA program designed and initiated a program for older children, ranging in age from fourteen to eighteen years, who must begin to address issues related to aging out of the dependency system. Youth Empowerment Program (YEP) is a twelve-month program based on the 100-page *Life Plan* manual and four audiocassette series. Activity modules are interactive,



involving the youth and the CASA volunteer in joint discussion and participation. The program guides the youth toward a career, military service, technical school, or further education. Topics covered include life skills (conflict resolution, personal health and hygiene, civic duties, work ethics, finding housing, food preparation and nutrition, car ownership, budgeting, insurance, credit and banking, and taxes) and career development (interest inventory, interviewing skills, post-secondary education, job search and application processes, and maintaining employment). Upon completion of the program, youth receive a \$500 stipend for work clothes and other job-related expenses. All of the teenaged children and their advocates in the San Bernardino CASA program must participate in YEP, although those already employed are excused.

- Other counties that have developed specialized training for CASA volunteers and/or programs for youth include: **Napa, Orange, San Diego, and Santa Clara/San Mateo** counties.

#### **Casey Life Skills Program: Humboldt County**

Respondents report that the CASA of Humboldt County Program works to spearhead county use of the Casey Life Skills Program is innovative and exciting and has the potential to help older youth realize their dreams as they transition into adulthood. In 2003, CASA of Humboldt arranged for trainers to come to the county to train CASA staff and other community partners on the program and its web-based tools. The program provides life skills assessments and planning tools to help children prepare for living on their own and developing their own dreams for the future. Respondents indicate that the CASA program initiated a service to engage other practitioners, care givers, and relatives in emancipation planning, and ultimately get them more involved in the child's life. Community agencies that participated in the training included the Probation Department, Independent Living Skills (ILS), Kinship Care, and College of the Redwoods. Respondents indicate that these trainings were well received in the community and have led to increased collaboration and planning for emancipation.

***Passport to Achieve Independent Living Program: Yolo County***

The Yolo County CASA program, in partnership with the Mental Health Association, received a grant from the Department of Employment and Social Services to create and implement an Independent Living Program (ILP) in the county. The grant used CalWORKS (TANF) monies. The CASA program and the Mental Health Association created a six-week supplemental program that emphasized education, employment, and accessing community resources, and was open to individuals up to twenty-one years of age. A CASA program staff person developed a curriculum for the project that included facilitator and youth workbooks. Transportation was provided for the youth participants via a limousine, as this was more economically efficient than renting a van, and respondents noted that the limousine transport was an incentive for youths to enroll and continue participation in the program. The program appointed a CASA volunteer to each participant who did not already have one assigned.

**A Post-Emancipation Program: Sonoma County**

In 1998, CASA of Sonoma became involved in the Successful Transitions program that provides financial support to emancipated foster youth while they pursue their post-secondary or vocational degree. The program is privately funded by an anonymous donor and administered by the Sonoma County Department of Health Services, Family Youth and Children Division.

Successful Transitions became involved with CASA of Sonoma County after realizing that the program's success depended on a mentor or support component. CASA of Sonoma County allows the Successful Transitions program to use its volunteer resources to provide program participants with adult mentoring. Although CASA volunteers in the Successful Transitions are trained as regular CASA volunteers, their role is unlike the regular advocate role in two ways. First, Successful Transition CASAs are not appointed by the court because the youth they mentor have already emancipated from the dependency system; and second, Successful Transitions CASAs provide these youth guidance on real-world living issues such as housing, transportation, financial aid and moral support, rather than taking on the role of advocating for the child in court. Now in its seventh year, Successful Transitions is currently serving between six and nine young adults per year and provides a stipend of \$600 per month per emancipated youth participant. The stipend pays for living expenses such as rent and food or clothing.

## *Focus on Health and Education*

### **Development of a Community Education Center: San Luis Obispo County**

The CASA program in San Luis Obispo has developed several strategies for addressing the educational needs of children in the dependency and delinquency systems and of non-system families throughout the community. These educational advocacy activities are housed in the program's Community Awareness, Advocacy and Resources for Education (CAARE) Center. The CAARE Center provides reference materials on educational and health-related issues, including learning disabilities, behavioral and emotional problems in children, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) development, and special education resources. The Rotary Club donated many of the books and audiotapes available at the CAARE Center. The Center also develops and provides training in education-related topic areas. Training is provided for CASA volunteers, County Department of Social Services personnel, and interested community members. Sessions cover identifying children's educational needs and advocating for receipt of appropriate services.

The CAARE Center is funded, in part, through the CASA program's MOU with the San Luis Obispo Probation Department. According to its obligations under the MOU, the CASA program focuses on children's learning disabilities, behavioral problems, and any issues affecting academic performance. Staff assist parents in participating in the development of their child's IEP and can represent the child in IEP meetings if a parent is not already involved.

Because of their strategic planning process, Child Advocates of Santa Clara and San Mateo counties is developing a specific educational advocacy function for the agency, whereby current and new advocates will focus primarily on ensuring that the educational needs of children in foster care are met. Child Advocates has developed specialized training that will be implemented, and activities will range from ensuring the transfer of educational information/folders are completed when a child is moved to a new school, tracking required educational assessment, to any other activities or issues that might be affecting a child's academic performance.

- Other programs that have developed specialized training and resources on educational issues include: **Alameda, Humboldt, and Los Angeles** counties.

### **Health and Education Passport Program: Tulare County**

Recognizing that the county had no mechanism to ensure the systematic documentation of health and education information on dependent children, CASA of Tulare County developed a Health and Education Passport for CASA children. The passport program, instituted three years ago, collects information from care providers and instructs them about the important needs of their

dependent child. The Health and Education passport contains a picture of the child; a standard wellness exam schedule; demographic, social worker, and parent information; family, medical, and dental histories, including specific medications, illnesses, immunizations, and allergies; and education level and special needs. The court and the local child welfare agency have access to the passport information should they request it. Since the inception of the Health and Education Passport program, the county child welfare agency has instituted its own policies to document this information. Some respondents report that the passport program has helped dependent children maintain important histories of themselves as they move through the dependency system.

- Other counties that have instituted similar Health and Education Passport efforts include: **Kern** and **Plumas** counties.

### **Meeting Medical Needs of CASA Children: San Francisco County**

Children in the dependency system often have medical needs that go unaddressed simply because they do not have the daily, focused attention of a responsible parent. San Francisco's CASA program has developed close working relationships with three public health nurses. They are available to program staff and CASA volunteers for consultation on individual cases for health care needs. These consultations assist CASA volunteers in identifying medical-related concerns for their child and developing appropriate requests for services to the child's social worker. The public health nurses are present at the initial advocate training and organize continuing education sessions on dependent children's health to sensitize CASA volunteers to these concerns.

### **CASA Program Infrastructure**

CASA program internal programming, such as systems for recruiting, training, supervising, and supporting volunteers can be integral to producing and retaining strong advocates. Solid mechanisms for raising funds, evaluating, and governing the organization are additional cornerstones of a strong program. Many individuals interviewed for PACR report that when these basic components of a program's infrastructure are well-developed and reliable, programs can focus on fine-tuning their organization, planning for long-term goals, developing innovative programming, or expanding their services. Many CASA programs in California have, through the years, developed robust strategies for operating some of their most basic program components. These strategies are discussed more fully under the corresponding subheadings below.

## ***Volunteer Recruitment***

Because CASA programs rely on unpaid community advocates, volunteer recruitment is a necessary and ongoing task for most California CASA programs. Volunteers are difficult to recruit regardless of the specific organization recruiting. Compounding this challenge for CASA programs are the inherent demands placed on their advocates. Specifically, CASA volunteers must donate a large amount of time to a potentially emotionally draining experience. Other challenges may be intimidating to many, such as attending court hearings and working with vulnerable children who have experienced maltreatment. Furthermore, the large amount of training time required might prevent many working individuals or those with high levels of family responsibilities from participating. Yet building a solid volunteer base is only the beginning. Programs must also strive to recruit people of color and male volunteers, as well as those able to work with children with special needs. Because of these challenges, many CASA programs struggle with recruitment efforts. However, many other programs have developed methods to overcome some of the challenges recruitment often presents. These strategies are described below.

### **Comprehensive Recruitment Strategies: Orange County**

CASA of Orange County employs two staff, a Community Outreach Director and a Community Outreach Assistant, whose main responsibilities are recruitment and community relations. Respondents indicate that the program's recruitment strategy is "diversified" and uses creativity to reach a variety of audiences. Most recently, CASA of Orange County has recruited volunteers through the following methods:

- Display of plaster masks of CASA children along with program brochures in art exhibits at local libraries, bookstores, and schools;
- Slide advertisements shown during the previews at a local movie theater;
- 20,000 bookmarks advertising the program distributed to area bookstores;
- Paid advertisements in local publications, including seven newspapers;
- CASA posters unique to Orange County designed, produced, and exhibited around the community;
- Flyer advertisements geared towards recruiting male volunteers posted in community car washes;
- E-mail volunteer solicitations sent to 700 community firefighters;
- Presentations on the CASA program made to volunteer orientations for other community organizations;
- CASA program representatives at the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce;

- CASA speakers' bureau speaks at corporate luncheons, schools, and civic groups throughout the community; and
- Information about CASA program included in local church mailings and weekly bulletins.

CASA of Orange County conducts ongoing analysis of its recruitment efforts by surveying potential volunteers about how they heard of the CASA organization and its volunteer opportunities.

#### **Partnership with Casey Great Start Foundation: Sacramento County**

The CASA program in Sacramento County (SCASA) partnered with Casey Great Start Foundation, a direct service organization that provides an array of services for children and youth in the dependency system, to help recruit CASA volunteers. SCASA has an agreement with Casey to share the time of one of their staff members. This staff person will spend 25 percent of his time in the CASA office, helping to recruit Volunteers. In return, Casey's goal of easing the transition from the dependency system to independent living will be furthered by matching CASA volunteers trained in the issues of emancipation with emancipating youth.

#### **Latino Outreach Coordinator Position: Santa Cruz County**

In 1999, Santa Cruz' CASA program received funding from the Packard Foundation for a half-time Latino Outreach Coordinator position. After that funding expired, the program received county funding through a competitive bidding process to continue the half-time position. The current Latino Outreach Coordinator, who is bilingual and bicultural, also serves as a half-time Case Supervisor.

This person's outreach activities are focused on increasing the number of bicultural and bilingual volunteers. She places advertisements in Spanish-language newspapers and radio stations and is networking with Latino community groups, churches, and the University of California at Santa Cruz Latino staff organization. She also gives presentations about the CASA program at a church in Watsonville, a predominantly Latino community in the eastern section of the county where many of the dependency system children live. She plans to visit additional churches and hold an orientation meeting in the town as well. Respondents note that since the establishment of this staff position the number of Latino volunteers has increased.

### **Utilizing a Clipping Service to Monitor Publicity: San Bernardino County**

San Bernardino's CASA program's volunteer recruiter manages the program's public relations activities. On average, she releases ads for volunteer recruitment to more than twenty local papers each week. She notes that the program has experienced a 600 percent increase in inquiries since starting to run the newspaper advertisements. As part of this increased distribution strategy, she hired a clipping service to track actual ad placement. She was able to obtain a 50 percent discount on this service, paying only \$35 a month. The service not only informs the program which ads actually end up being published, it also provides the actual text and layout showing how the press release may have been modified in print. The San Bernardino CASA program can then compare this information with data on which sources lead to the most frequent inquiries. With this service, the program has been able to develop a more effective advertising campaign, finding that large paid ads have a greater impact than smaller, free public service announcements.

- **Riverside** County also successfully utilizes advertisements as well as feature articles in local newspapers as a volunteer recruitment tool.
- **Imperial** County reports that classified advertisements in the employment sections of local newspapers are its most successful recruitment strategy.

### **Recruiting CASA volunteers through the Internet: San Francisco County**

In San Francisco, the CASA program found the Internet to be a very successful tool for recruiting potential CASA volunteers. Respondents claim that 70 percent of the participants in one training class learned about the program through the Internet. Internet recruitment is conducted through two main mechanisms. The first is San Francisco CASA's website, which provides an online application that can be downloaded, printed, and submitted to the program. The site also addresses many of the potential volunteers' initial questions concerning advocate responsibilities, time commitment, and training requirements. Visitors to the site can then request more information via e-mail or by calling the program directly. The second mechanism is through Volunteer Match, which is an online service provided by the Volunteer Center of San Francisco. Individuals interested in volunteering for a not-for-profit browse the Volunteer Match website to learn about various volunteer opportunities in their geographic area; individuals are matched with volunteer opportunities based on their interests.

### **Strategic Plan for Recruitment: Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties**

In Santa Clara and San Mateo counties, the Community Relations Manager and the agency's diversity committee developed a written and detailed plan outlining their strategy. Recruitment activities include a speakers' bureau of volunteers and staff who speak at fraternal and faith-based organizations, teachers and health care organizations, corporations, and volunteer fairs.

Corporations that have made monetary donations over the years are also targeted for presentations. Child Advocates has also used the media, in the form of feature articles and advertisements placed in multi-language newspapers and magazines, to reach potential volunteers.

To fill scheduled trainings, the Community Relations Associate holds three to four orientations prior to each training session. The orientations are held in different locations throughout the two counties. Each orientation is two hours long and includes testimonials from advocates, the courts and district attorney's office, an overview of advocate roles and responsibilities, and a question and answer period. Child Advocates also uses the orientations as a means of learning more about their recruitment efforts. At the end of each orientation the volunteer recruiter conducts a focus group of participants to learn why attendees who chose not to apply made that decision. Individuals who actually apply are also asked where they heard about Child Advocates. In addition, all new trainees are given a form that asks them to provide information about their friends, other community organizations, and potential workplaces to contact, in the hopes that Child Advocates can target these individuals and organizations for recruitment.

Child Advocates has also worked to build a more diverse volunteer corps by specifically recruiting minority and male advocates. To this end, the program has developed special Father's Day advertisements, encouraged women to recruit husbands and partners, sent program staff to present at multicultural festivals, advertised in Latino professional periodicals, and presented to trade unions, Rotary, and fraternal organizations. In addition, at the time of the site visit, the program was in the midst of developing a multimedia presentation that targets Latinos and African Americans that has since been completed and is widely utilized.

### ***Volunteer Screening***

PACR respondents indicate that a thorough screening process is the first step in building a group of high quality volunteers. Rigorous evaluation of applicants can also help CASA programs establish their credibility within and build the confidence of their partners in the dependency system. Strong screening procedures commonly comprise numerous components, including: an orientation to the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of the volunteer; multiple interviews with more than one staff person; verification and proof of California driver's license and insurance; personal references; various background and security checks; and completion of a training course that is at least twenty-four hours in length. California CASA programs have developed additional means for gauging the appropriateness of prospective volunteers. These innovations are discussed below.



### **Panel Interviews Applicants: Kern County**

CASA of Kern County developed an intense screening protocol that utilizes a three-person panel of interviewers to assess the appropriateness of each CASA volunteer. A panel that includes one staff member and two community professionals interviews each applicant. The non-staff interviewers might include a local child welfare agency supervisor, board member, or a therapist or counselor. The screening interview takes approximately thirty minutes, and approximately one-third of the applicants are not accepted into the training course after completing the screening interview.

### ***Volunteer Training***

According to Rule 1424, CASA volunteers are required to attend a minimum of thirty hours of training prior to being sworn in, and, according to the Welfare and Institutions Code, §102(d)(1-9), the training must include information on a variety of relevant topics. These include:

- Dynamics of child abuse and neglect;
- Court structure, including juvenile court laws regarding dependency;
- Social service systems;
- Child development;
- Interviewing techniques;
- Report writing;
- Roles and responsibilities of a CASA volunteer;
- Rules of evidence and discovery procedures; and
- Problems associated with verifying reports.

Rule 1424 also requires that potential volunteers observe court proceedings before being sworn in. Respondents assert that courtroom observation is a very beneficial part of the training, as it provides trainees an opportunity to see the court process in action and gives potential volunteers an opportunity to ask staff questions about the hearing, become familiar with key figures, and increase their level of comfort in the courtroom.

To fulfill initial training requirements CASA programs have developed unique training mechanisms, including modifying the traditional training format, using creative role-play techniques, and offering other observational activities. These specific methods are described in more detail below.

### **Mock Hearings: Santa Cruz County**

The Santa Cruz CASA program has an innovative training curriculum that combines aspects of the National CASA Association (NCASAA) volunteer training curriculum with their local curriculum. In the fall of 2000, the Santa Cruz CASA program was selected by NCASAA to be one of seven pilot sites for their new training curriculum. During the pilot of the training, the Santa Cruz CASA program was instructed to follow the NCASAA model precisely. However, for their winter 2001 training, the program was able to modify the training to fit their local needs by combining the positive aspects of the NCASAA training (emphasis on investigation, communication skills, and report writing) with several successful aspects of the local training (including guest speakers; CASA Volunteer presentations; mock hearings; and in-depth coverage of mental illness, substance abuse, and domestic violence). The program's training now combines what staff members consider the best of both the NCASAA and local curricula.

One aspect of the local curriculum that many respondents find particularly innovative is the mock hearing. Trainees participate in a mock hearing at the end of the training in which the judge, attorneys, and social workers participate. The participants in the mock hearing play their respective roles for a hypothetical case. In addition to attending an actual court hearing, the mock hearing allows trainees to become familiar with court proceedings and the various players and allows them to practice their role as advocates. Several respondents comment that they appreciate being able to participate in the mock hearing and report that it is a valuable learning tool.

### **“Shadow” Training with Social Workers: Butte County**

Each CASA trainee, before being sworn in, must complete a half-day training with a social worker. The trainee spends the time “shadowing” the social worker in his or her official duties, including conducting 1) home visits, 2) emergency response visits, and 3) other additional “standard” activities. Respondents explain that this training component is very beneficial as it allows the CASA volunteers to see the reality of the situations social workers experience. There are several social workers that volunteer to provide this opportunity for the CASA trainees. A side benefit is that it helps build bridges between the two organizations, laying the groundwork for working together cooperatively in the future.

- **Sacramento** also organizes “shadowing” opportunities with social workers for volunteer trainees and a tour of the local Multi-Disciplinary Interview Center (MDIC) where child victims of sexual abuse are interviewed as well as a tour the temporary shelter for children that have been removed from the home.

### **Investigation of Community Organizations: Marin County**

During the initial volunteer training, each trainee investigates a different organization or agency in the community to find out what it offers, its eligibility requirements, where it is located and how to access services. During a training session, each person verbally reports to the rest of the training class on the information he or she obtained about that particular agency. The CASA program has a list of community agencies from which trainees choose. The goals of this activity are to increase volunteers' understanding of the resources available in the community and to improve interviewing and investigation skills. It also helps CASA program staff stay up-to-date on available resources.

### **Five-Minute Facts: Fresno County**

CASA of Fresno County publishes short but comprehensive essays, called Five Minute Facts, on important and relevant issues in the dependency system. Written by a variety of experts in the child welfare arena, these essays are accessible to all CASA volunteers via the CASA of Fresno County web site. Issues addressed in these essays include: how to make the most of a doctor's visit, what an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is, and the difference between bonding and attachment.

### **Distance Learning Training: Mendocino County**

CASA of Mendocino County has developed a distance learning training module for individuals living on the coast or other remote areas of the county. These potential volunteers often face difficulty traveling to the trainings or have to wait months for a training to be offered in their area. To help address these issues, CASA staff members have compiled a distance-learning curriculum that consists of a binder of course materials, videos, and homework lessons all based on the NCASAA curriculum. Because there is necessarily less interaction between participating trainees and staff, the CASA program plans to develop more intensive screening protocols for those trainees who use this model. The development of the distance-learning curriculum is an attempt to address at least some of the initial obstacles to participation for individuals who might otherwise be unable to become CASAs.

NCASAA developed a distance learning mechanism for programs in large geographic and rural areas that they distributed to all CASA programs last year.

### ***Continuing Education***

After the initial training is successfully completed and CASA volunteers are sworn in, rule 1424 requires CASA volunteers to engage in an additional twelve hours of continuing education annually. Continuing education activities are meant to help CASA volunteers stay up-to-date on program policies and issues relevant to the children they serve. Numerous CASA programs experience difficulty encouraging volunteers to participate in these activities. Programs that excel in this area have often developed a variety of ways for volunteers to fulfill the requirement. Additionally, programs are most successful when they offer opportunities that reflect the areas of interest of their volunteers. Some of these strategies are described below.

#### **Annual CASA Conference: Orange County**

CASA of Orange County holds an annual CASA Conference for its volunteers. The all day in-service training is aimed at addressing common issues faced by advocates and their assigned children. Volunteers are also given an opportunity to ask questions about and discuss the topics presented. Recent conference topics included presentations on the effects of abuse on sexual development and behavior, the Independent Living Program (ILP), the benefits and limitations of therapy, issues surrounding the mentorship of boys, and an emancipated youth panel. Participation in the conference earns volunteers eight of their continuing education hours required each year. Respondents indicate that the intensive training is an easy way for volunteers to earn credit for continuing education and imparts important information in a format that facilitates volunteers' understanding.

#### **Notification of Continuing Education Compliance: Orange County**

In Orange County, attending monthly in-service workshops, borrowing from the CASA library and video library, and attending the annual NCASAA Conference are all activities that count toward the required twelve hours. In-service hours are tracked in the program's computer system. Halfway through the year an administrative assistant generates postcards that remind CASA volunteers of the number of hours they still need to complete. Respondents indicate that the tracking system helps both case supervisors and volunteers keep on top of the continuing education requirement.

### **Book Club: Marin County**

To fulfill the continuing education requirement, CASA volunteers are encouraged to attend periodic workshops on a variety of topics or attend initial training sessions to refresh their memory about particular topics. In addition to these opportunities, program staff started a Book Club to help individuals keep up with their continuing education requirements. Every four to six weeks, program staff members select a book with content relevant to the CASA volunteers' work. Advocates can get credit just for reading the book, but staff also schedule a time for people to informally discuss the book as a group. These meetings are often held at a volunteer's house. Respondents express gratitude for the convenient and interesting mechanism for fulfilling continuing education requirements.

### ***Volunteer Support and Supervision***

Volunteer supervision is at the heart of the CASA concept, as programs were developed to utilize community volunteers rather than paid, professional staff to advocate on behalf of children. Therefore, ensuring that a program provides consistent support and supervision to CASA volunteers is a crucial component of any successful CASA program. Programs that have mastered this aspect of their programming indicate that there are several key components to strong supervision, including:

- **Regular contact between supervisors and volunteers.** In most strong programs, contact is required at least once a month and is often more frequent, especially during high conflict times in a case. Preferably the monthly required contact is an in-person meeting rather than a phone call, as face-to-face contact can build further trust between supervisor and volunteer and aids the supervisor in picking up on non-verbal cues that may reveal areas for exploration. However, contact by phone and e-mail is acceptable given that most volunteers work and many live some distance from the CASA program. Volunteers participating in strong programs understand and are fully aware of the requirements regarding regular supervision. Most importantly, communication with volunteers is most effective when supervisors are easily accessible and the program has established a comfortable atmosphere of support and appreciation for volunteers' work.
- **Extra assistance to volunteers during the initial phases of a case.** In many CASA programs, case supervisors accompany advocates to court hearings, especially when it is the advocate's first time in court. This is an opportunity for the supervisor to explain court procedures, introduce the CASA volunteer to the relevant dependency partners, help them prepare in the event that they are asked to speak about the case, and answer questions as they arise. Additionally, supervisors sometimes accompany CASA

volunteers to meetings with a child's social worker or attorney for the first time. Case managers can also help the advocate devise a case plan that includes the initial activities the advocate will engage in for the new case. This ensures that CASA volunteers have a clear idea of the case priorities and how they should spend their time.

- **Assistance with court reports.** To both support volunteers and ensure adequate advocacy on behalf of children, supervisors review court reports prior to their submission. CASA volunteers can be intimidated by the thought of writing an official court report. Additionally, although most programs provide a great deal of training related to court report writing, some advocates need extra guidance regarding which case details should be included, correct grammar and punctuation, and the appropriateness of recommendations. In many programs, a month or so before the court hearing, case supervisors remind volunteers of the approaching hearing date so that there will be adequate time to submit, review, and revise court reports. This process ensures that reports are well written and contain necessary and useful information about the cases.
- **Supervisor accessible to dependency system partners.** Supervision is also strengthened when outside partners in the dependency system know that they can contact a supervisor if they have concerns about a CASA volunteer's conduct. Strong programs encourage their advocates and dependency partners to resolve conflicts as they arise with the individuals involved, however sometimes this approach is inadequate. Dependency partners perceive a program to be more professional when there are clear lines of supervision that they can access freely. In addition, CASA volunteers know that their supervisor can help them mediate conflicts if they become escalated.

In general, in CASA programs with successful supervisory systems, there is effective and regular communication between case supervisors and volunteers, a welcoming atmosphere in the office, and accessibility of staff in emergencies. Staff are available not only to help CASA volunteers problem solve, but also to facilitate communication with other parties, including school personnel, social workers, care givers, and service providers. These activities are seen as positive because they provide ongoing quality control assurances and prevent CASA volunteers from feeling isolated.

Because CASA programs serve dependent children, staff members are primarily focused on ensuring that their volunteers are attending to the child's needs. Yet volunteer support also entails efforts to celebrate and recognize the important work that the volunteers are doing. PACR respondents universally report that even the smallest recognition efforts, like personalized thank you notes, advertisements documenting volunteer work, and simple thank you calls can help CASA volunteers feel appreciated for their hard work.

Some programs have been particularly innovative in creating systems to ensure that CASA volunteers are conducting themselves in a manner consistent with their mandate. Additionally, programs have also developed creative ways to acknowledge their volunteers. Examples of these strategies are highlighted in this section.

#### **Assignment Packet for Volunteers: Butte County**

When a CASA volunteer is assigned a new case, he or she is given an assignment packet to aid in getting started on the case. The assignment packet includes the following documents: the referral form; current case information from Children’s Services Division (recent social worker report, detention report, and current placement information); current contact information for child and other parties; signed CASA Statement of Commitment; signed Case Assignment Agreement; contact log forms and examples; court report format and examples; name tag; CASA program business cards; signed Oath of Appointment; appointment order; notice of assignment form; list of community agencies and phone numbers; and an information sheet for foster parents. CASA program staff review all of these documents with the volunteer upon his or her acceptance of a case.

- Other programs that provide assignment or start-up packets for new cases include: **Butte, Kern, Monterey, Napa, Placer, and Santa Clara/San Mateo** counties.

#### **Development of the Case Plan: Orange County**

Respondents report that the Orange County program has an established and deliberate technique for developing and monitoring a well-tailored case plan for each child served. During the first month on a case, the volunteer engages in research and interviews the relevant parties to get acquainted with the child’s situation. During the second month, the case supervisor discusses the case with the CASA volunteer. By the third month after assignment, the advocate, with help from the case supervisor, has developed a six-month plan for the child. The case supervisor and CASA volunteer revisit the six-month plan every three months to ensure that it remains current and appropriate for the child.

### **Electronic Forms and Enhanced Monthly Report: Fresno County**

CASA volunteers' access to electronic copies of all program forms allows them easy access to required documentation and streamlines the completion and submission process. CASA of Fresno County issues its volunteers diskettes for use on a home or office computer. Not only does this strategy help save CASA volunteers time by providing them ready access to every form they might need, it also allows volunteers to easily duplicate information, especially when forms require much of the same information multiple times.

The program modified one of these forms, the monthly report form, and prompts volunteers to report on important case progress or milestones. The questions on the form ask volunteers what happened on the case during the previous month, the volunteer's concerns, and any assistance or support the volunteer needs. Respondents note that the act of completing this form helps the CASA volunteer better understand what has happened on the case and what should happen in the future. Additionally, the completed form helps the supervisor monitor the volunteer's work within the system and on the case.

- Other programs that make forms available electronically include: **Sonoma** and **Santa Clara/San Mateo** counties (see description of this program's "intranet" described below)
- **Napa** also utilizes a unique monthly report form.

### **Supervisors Accompany Advocates on All First Meetings: Tulare County**

Supervisory staff accompany CASA volunteers on all their first meetings with their newly assigned child, social workers, foster or group homes, and any other meetings on behalf of the child, such as individualized education program (IEP) meetings. Respondents report that having the supervisor escort the advocate on the first visits with the child and dependency partners facilitates the building of professional relationships, lends moral support to the CASA volunteers, and ensures that all parties are familiar with the CASA program and its supervisory structure. In addition, supervisors always accompany CASA volunteers to court. Supervisors are there to explain court procedures, introduce volunteers to the relevant dependency partners, help them prepare in the event that they are asked to speak about the case, and answer questions as needed. Several respondents comment that having a CASA staff member present in court with volunteers is a great source of support and allows the advocate to fully participate in the hearing.

- Other counties that accompany advocates on their first meetings with system partners and others include: **Fresno**, **Humboldt**, **Monterey**, **Orange**, and **Sacramento**.



### **Case Review/Support Group Meetings: Contra Costa County**

The Contra Costa County CASA program uses a case review system to prepare its volunteers for court appearances, provide them with legal counsel and access to a therapist, and offer them an opportunity to gain support from fellow volunteers. The program holds four case review meetings each month. The case supervisor, a pro-bono attorney, and a pro-bono therapist jointly facilitate each case review meeting. CASA volunteers are required to attend a case-review session six to eight weeks before they have a court hearing and may attend others if they wish. At these sessions, CASA volunteers discuss their cases, get feedback on legal issues from the attorney, and discuss boundary issues and the child's well being with the therapist. The case supervisor also reviews the volunteers' court report drafts, either during the case review or at a later time, to ensure that they are acceptable for court. The case supervisor has a calendar that includes all case court dates so she can check to make sure that volunteers are coming in for a case review before court. The case supervisor also encourages volunteers to come to a case review after the first one or two times they have met with their child in order to discuss the child's situation.

- Other programs that facilitate peer support groups for volunteers include: **Kern, Marin, Nevada, Orange, Plumas, Sacramento, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara/San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Sonoma, and Tulare** counties.

### **Lunch Bunch Supervisory Meetings: El Dorado County**

A case manager in El Dorado County developed a new approach for staying in touch with volunteers who had difficulty maintaining regular contact with the program and fulfilling the continuing education requirement. During the month of July, the case manager is available to have lunch with CASA volunteers every Thursday. Respondents note that this was a successful tactic for connecting with volunteers who had been out of contact with the case manager.

### **24-hour Emergency Support: Santa Clara/San Mateo Counties**

The CASA program that serves these two counties – Child Advocates of Santa Clara and San Mateo counties – maintains an on-call program that rotates advocate supervisors to ensure that CASA volunteers can always reach a supervisor. If an emergency arises, volunteers call the on-call line number that is provided to every advocate volunteer and will be immediately connected to the on-call supervisor. In addition, some supervisors also give advocates their home phone numbers. The number to the support line is included in all information distributed to new advocates and is listed on the program's website.

### **Supervision, Support, and Training for Case Supervisors: Orange County**

Case supervisors in Orange County are supervised by program managers with whom they meet individually each month to review each case, including the case notes, volunteer contact and continuing education compliance, and case plans. Case supervisors also use the program managers to advise them on program policies and difficult cases. Case supervisors must undergo the thirty-hour volunteer and new employee trainings as well as specific case supervisor training that includes visiting and observing dependency partners and proceedings and shadowing experienced peers. They are also furnished with a policy and procedures manual targeted to their responsibilities.

- **Tulare** County has also developed a supervisor handbook for supervisory staff.

### **Intranet for Advocates, Staff, and Board Members: Santa Clara/San Mateo Counties**

The intranet is the CASA program's private, password-protected web site, which is restricted to volunteers, trainees, staff, and board members. Users can find program information, such as continuing education opportunities, forms and report formats, training materials, activities for volunteers and children such as free tickets to the symphony or a database of summer camps, age-specific information on children and developmental issues, educational resources, book and video recommendations, a calendar of events, links to helpful web sites, back-dated newsletters, and emergency telephone numbers. Site members can also send questions or ideas to the site for other users to see and answer. Staff members are responsible for maintaining their own sites or calendars and can enter and edit their information as needed. Respondents note that this tool is a quick and easy way to communicate with everyone involved with the organization and that it is used by Advocates, staff, and board members alike.

- **Sonoma** County has also developed a web site with volunteer support components.

### **Managing Provision of Services in Geographically Large Counties: San Luis Obispo County**

Respondents emphasize that San Luis Obispo County, like many of California's counties, is geographically large. Children in the dependency system are placed throughout the county, often outside of the county center. Most of the foster home placements are located in North County, which is on the other side of a mountainous pass from the town of San Luis Obispo, where the program office is located.

Although regional offices would help to better support children and CASA volunteers in outlying areas, sustaining additional offices is not financially feasible for the CASA program. As an alternative, the program locates support meetings every other month with CASAs in North County as well as South County. This provides CASA volunteers who live further away from the office to receive in-person support without requiring them to drive long distances. These meetings take place in a staff member's home and are regularly scheduled throughout the year.

- Other counties that travel to other locations in the county to offer support include: **Mendocino** and **Plumas** counties.

### **Two (or more) Office Programs: El Dorado County**

CASA El Dorado has established two offices to provide CASA services in the eastern and western parts of the county. South Lake Tahoe (western part of county) and Placerville (eastern part of county) are separated by sixty miles of mountain road that cuts through the Sierra Nevada mountain range. During the winter months, heavy snowfall often makes travel between the two towns impossible. Respondents indicate that establishing the two-office program has ensured that the program can adequately serve both children and volunteers across the county.

Differences in judicial preferences and court procedures have led to some variation in the types of cases to which CASA volunteers are assigned and the format of court reports in the two locations. However, the program has made increased coordination and operating uniformity a program priority. To this end, Placerville and South Lake Tahoe have instituted consistent screening, training curricula, and supervisory requirements. The program has also initiated highly successful joint fundraising efforts. Monthly staff meetings are held with staff from both offices to encourage more communication and further standardize practices. Every two weeks the executive director visits the South Lake Tahoe office to be available to and acquaint herself with staff, volunteers, judicial officers, and court staff. In addition, the program holds some of the monthly board meetings in South Lake Tahoe as three of its members are from the area and respondents note that holding the meetings there gives the other board members exposure to this part of the organization.

- Other counties that have established more than one office to meet the needs of a geographically large county include: **Los Angeles**, **Riverside**, **Santa Barbara**, and **San Diego** counties.

### **Mentor and Companion Programs: San Diego County**

Volunteers working in the CASA program in San Diego County receive support through the agency's mentor and companion programs. As part of the mentor program, staff assign experienced, exemplary volunteers to serve as mentors to new volunteers. Mentors contact their mentees once the new volunteer completes training. Some new CASA volunteers make extensive use of their mentors while others do not need this resource. Mentors sometimes accompany new advocates to court for the first time or to meetings with other system partners. New volunteers can talk to their mentors about their feelings and frustrations with a case and can get support from a more experienced advocate who may have coping strategies to share. Because both the mentor and mentee are trained volunteers who sign statements of confidentiality, they are allowed to share information about their cases.

The companion program was developed to help support volunteers who work with sibling groups. Some volunteers work with five, or even more, siblings. Respondents report that planning and supervising outings for this large number of children can be daunting or even prohibitive. The program has instituted a companion program to provide extra support and supervision for CASA volunteers during outings with their children. Companions are trained, sworn-in volunteers (many are "retired" volunteers). CASA volunteers can request a companion to help them chaperone outings. This allows CASA volunteers serving large sibling groups to take all the children together to an outing such as a picnic or a baseball game.

- **Kern County** has also developed a similar "Co-CASA" program.
- **Riverside** and **Napa** counties often assign two volunteers to work collaboratively with sibling groups.

### **Supervisors Take Minutes of Court Proceedings: Tulare County**

CASA supervisory staff in Tulare County attend court and take minutes at each hearing. They use a court minute form, which documents the minor's name; the parties present in court; the type of hearing; its outcome; the hearing activity, including the current status and court discussion; the court order and recommendations; the next court date; and the date the CASA volunteer's next court report is due. The CASA volunteer's supervisor documents this information so that the volunteer can concentrate on the hearing and participate as needed. The supervisor gives a copy of the form to the volunteer and enters the information into the program's data tracking system when she returns to the office. The supervisor also marks the next court date on the program's master calendar, so that all staff are aware of upcoming hearings. Respondents indicate that this system works well because volunteers are able to focus on their in-court duties and staff are able to maintain an accurate account of the cases.

- **Butte** County also complete similar post-hearing reports on all hearings involving CASA children.

#### **Fund to Support CASA Volunteer Travel: Plumas County**

The CASA program in Plumas County has solicited funding to help support volunteers in visiting their assigned children. Respondents indicate that due to size and geographic characteristics of the county, a CASA volunteer can spend a lot of time and money simply driving to visit his or her assigned child. In some cases, the costs associated with the visits can be a barrier to seeing the child or from participating in the program at all. To address this issue, the CASA program has raised money from the local court and through fundraising events to reimburse volunteers for mileage and accommodations. Although the program can not yet defray all costs for its volunteers, respondents indicate that the availability of these funds makes a significant difference in whether an individual will be able to assume the advocate role or continue serving as a CASA volunteer.

#### **Advisory Board Thank-a-Thon: Butte County**

The Butte County program’s advisory board held a “thank-a-thon” to express appreciation for the time and money donated to its programs by community members. Advisory board members called individual CASA volunteers and donors to thank them for their support of the organization. The agency depends a great deal on the time donated by volunteers as well as financial support from the community, and saw this as one way to express gratitude more adequately for that support.

#### ***Board of Directors***

Most California CASA programs are not-for-profit organizations and therefore are required by law to have governing boards of directors to provide fiscal oversight. This may include reviewing regular financial reports for the organization, ensuring there are checks and balances in place to prevent inappropriate spending, conducting long-range financial planning, and monitoring expenditures. CASA programs with strong fiscal oversight from the board are engaged in all of these activities.

Not-for-profit organizations often vary in the role a board plays; however, another common characteristic of well-functioning CASA programs in California is a board of directors that provides policy and procedural oversight. Respondents explain that when boards are active in this arena, program staff, especially executive directors, are given sufficient support in making program decisions. This can lead to decisions being made carefully, thoughtfully, and according

to program goals rather than in haste and in reaction to outside forces (funding, community needs, and partner requests). One part of providing program oversight is the development of a strategic plan. PACR respondents indicated that a board's involvement is an important component of the development of a strategic plan that reflects program priorities yet considers realistic circumstances facing the program.

Respondents universally agree that when boards are active in fundraising, they can make a significant difference in the amount of money raised, as well as alleviating the time and energy staff must expend. Board members can take on significant responsibility for fundraising activities, such as selecting, planning, and implementing fundraising events and thus free CASA staff to focus on programmatic responsibilities. A positive side effect of fundraising events is increased public awareness, and individuals interviewed explained that in counties where board members are active in fundraising, community awareness of CASA programs is improved.

During a major personnel change, such as a change in executive directors, a board can also play an integral role in searching for a new director and leading the program's day-to-day operations to ensure program stability during the time of change. Boards that have further distinguished themselves in service to their CASA program are listed below.

#### **Formal Liaison between Advisory Bodies: Butte County**

Many CASA programs that are housed within umbrella agencies often struggle with a lack of communication between the umbrella agency's board of directors and the CASA advisory body. The CASA program in Butte County has an advisory council that was very active during the planning and early phases of the program. It is now less active, but it continues to serve as a group of people available to assist the CASA program with programmatic decisions. The umbrella agency in Butte County also has an advisory board that meets monthly to assist the executive director with agency decisions. The two boards decided that it would be useful to have a formal liaison to increase communication and understanding between the overall agency and the CASA program. One member is elected to serve in this role. He or she reports to each body on the issues, successes, challenges, and plans of the other programs.

### **Development of a Fundraising Board: Los Angeles County**

The CASA program in Los Angeles County has a unique system of program governance and fundraising. The program is operated under the superior court for the county, and most CASA staff members, including the executive director, are employees of the court. In order for the court to continue funding the CASA program, it stipulated that the program must raise matching funds. The Friends of Child Advocates was created to fulfill this mission in 1983. Its sole responsibility is to raise money for the program, and it does not engage in policy decisions or program oversight. The current Friends' chairperson is a professional fundraiser, and individuals interviewed speak highly of her success on behalf of the CASA program. Although the board is not involved in setting policy or overseeing the programmatic side of the organization, it develops a strategic plan that is updated annually in collaboration with the executive director.

### **Board Retreat Strengthens Planning Efforts: Nevada County**

In Nevada County, the board meets annually for a one day retreat to re-examine the organization's mission and goals and to set policy. It also reviews the individual commitments of board members, including their financial and committee commitments. Staff members are also asked to come and give presentations regarding the individual program components. This meeting results in a one-year strategic plan for the CASA program.

### **New Board Member Orientation: Marin County**

When an individual becomes a board member, the Marin Advocates for Children (the umbrella organization for the CASA program) executive director orients him or her to the organization. In addition, the program asks each new board member to meet with a CASA program director and the Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC) program director, which each give the person much more detail about the programs. This enables the new member to have a more comprehensive understanding of each program. Respondents indicate that this results in board members feeling more comfortable in publicizing CASA and CAPC as well as asking the community for money.

### ***Evaluation***

In the current era of government and organizational accountability, it has become increasingly important for programs to document their effectiveness at meeting program goals. Measuring outcomes gives CASA programs an opportunity to identify the impact they are having on children and the dependency system in general. This information may then be shared with the community as well as with current and potential funding sources, thereby increasing visibility and support for the program. By tracking program data, programs are able to identify areas of poor program performance and engage in meaningful strategic planning for program improvement. CASA

programs utilize a variety of methods to assess and evaluate their performance, and some of these strategies are highlighted below.

#### **Case Closure Evaluations: Nevada County**

Child Advocates of Nevada County has a standardized form used to solicit feedback from relevant individuals at the end of a CASA case. The questionnaires are distributed to judges, attorneys, foster parents, and social workers to determine the effectiveness of the CASA volunteer on a specific case. The program reports about a 60 percent return rate on the questionnaires.

#### **Annual Survey of Advocates and Dependency Partners: Tulare County**

CASA of Tulare County developed and implemented an annual survey of dependency partners. The survey is sent to judges, attorneys, social workers, advocates, therapy organizations, and other agencies with which the program collaborates. Survey questions are aimed at gauging CASA volunteer and dependency partner satisfaction with the program and its services, as well as identifying areas in which the program could improve.

- Other CASA programs that conduct surveys of volunteers and others include: **Modoc, Nevada, Orange, Sacramento, and Sonoma** counties.

#### **Outcome Evaluation: San Diego County**

San Diego's Voices for Children hired a research firm to conduct an outcome evaluation of its CASA program. The evaluation includes a review of the court files for a sample of CASA clients and a comparison of children not yet assigned a CASA volunteer; interviews and focus groups with judges, attorneys, CASA volunteers, social workers, foster parents, and foster youth; and surveys of CASA volunteers, social workers, and foster parents. The study examined interim outcomes including the formation of a beneficial relationship between the CASA volunteer and child; emotional, knowledge and/or life enrichment benefits for the child; and provision of relevant information for the court to make its decisions. The study also began an examination of long-term outcomes, including more appropriate educational and foster care placements and improved coping skills and resiliency among the children.



### **Tracking Children’s Well-Being Using the Family Development Matrix: Santa Cruz County**

CASA of Santa Cruz County tracks data on child outcomes using a family development matrix that it developed based on ongoing research conducted by the California State University Monterey Bay’s Institute for Community Collaborative Studies (ICCS). ICCS developed the California Matrix Model, which consists of three scales, including a Family Development Scale.<sup>6</sup> ICCS developed these scales in response to the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 and has worked closely with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Community Services, Monitoring and Assessment Task Force. The ICCS Family Development Scale is a tool for case managers to assess outcomes for the families they serve.

The Santa Cruz CASA program has modified the tool so that it measures children in three aspects of their lives: placement stability, interpersonal assessment, and educational assessment. Case supervisors complete the scale on a quarterly basis for each CASA child. The data are entered into an Excel spreadsheet, and staff can track changes over time for particular children.

- The program serving **Santa Clara/San Mateo** counties has also implemented an effort to assess each child’s outcomes including educational achievements, placement satisfaction, and social skills using a worksheet that is completed by volunteers every six months.

### **In-House Data Management Expertise: Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties**

Child Advocates of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties is highly sophisticated in its data tracking and reporting efforts. The program’s computer specialist is the creator of CASA Manager, the FileMaker Pro-based database used by 178 CASA programs across the country. Having the in-house database programming expertise means that the program has been able to easily customize the database according to the program’s specific needs. Child Advocates tracks extensive data, including volunteer recruitment activities, child and volunteer information (including demographics), continuing education opportunities and attendance, and wait list information. Child Advocates also tracks case-specific information including court hearing dates, system partner contacts, IEP meetings, number of placements, system re-entry, sibling information, supportive services, and case notes. The program also maintains a donor database.

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the California Matrix scales, including an investigation of their reliability and validity, see Endres, J, Richardson, B., and Sherman, J. *Testing the Reliability/Validity of the California Matrix*, submitted to the Packard Foundation, October 1999.

Child Advocates uses CASA Manager for both case management and evaluation purposes. The program is constantly analyzing progress toward increasing the number of children served, assessing the populations served and their needs, strategizing how best to reach new volunteers, and evaluating the performance of special programs.

### **Regular Data Monitoring: San Diego County**

Program staff members collect extensive data and generate many reports to monitor progress in several areas. Each program supervisor submits “Weekly Program Supervisor Statistics,” which include the number of contacts they have had with volunteers and other system partners, the number of court reports they have proofed, and other activities. The program assistant in charge of data produces two weekly reports. One report contains information on the number of children and volunteers matched that week and the number of volunteers and children waiting for matches. The other weekly report is called the “Key Operational Indicator” and contains information about the number of active volunteers, resignations, children, and closed cases for each program supervisor. It also contains the number of referrals received, the number of children on the wait list, and the number of court reports due in the next week. This report is given to the executive director, the director of operations, and the director of programs to keep them abreast of program operations. The program also generates a monthly report that summarizes the number of each type of case and total number of children served. In addition to these programmatic reports, the recruitment staff produce a bi-monthly recruitment and training report that tallies the number of inquiries, applications received, interviews, and acceptances along with speakers’ bureau and publicity activities. All of these reports are used for internal management as well as for external publicity and funding requests.

### ***Miscellaneous Infrastructure Innovations***

#### **“Concept Papers” to Expand and Improve Services: Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties**

In 2001, in response to the three-year growth initiative endorsed by the board of directors, the executive director encouraged staff to develop “concept papers” to expand and improve services. Staff submissions focused on new ideas, including creating new programs and enhancing internal processes. A number of innovative new projects were generated from this process.

#### **Program Start-Up Planning: Plumas County**

Over its first two years, Plumas CASA has developed into a strong program with a solid standing within the dependency system and broader community. Individuals interviewed consistently report that the program has quickly matured into a well-respected and established partner within

the dependency system. Respondents suggest that part of the program's success may be due to the deliberate and thorough planning efforts it engaged in prior to the start of the program.

Specifically, the advisory board consisted of diverse community groups that contributed to the program design and protocols. As part of its county planning efforts, the advisory board hired a former CASA executive director from a neighboring county to help develop policies and protocols and the volunteer training curriculum. It also consulted with the California CASA Association and other newly formed CASA programs in other parts of the state. Respondents indicate that these efforts helped to jump-start the program while avoiding common mistakes made by new programs.

- **Butte** County's program was developed similarly, with extensive consultation with community and other CASA organizations.

### ***Fundraising***

Fundraising is a perennial issue for not-for-profit organizations that rely on contributions from a variety of sources. In the case of CASA programs, there is also the added difficulty of articulating to potential funders the goals and workings of CASA programs and its role in the dependency system. Often constrained by the complexity of the issues CASA programs deal with and the need to maintain the confidentiality of the children they serve, many programs have difficulty "selling" the CASA concept through public relations efforts. Below are examples of some successful fundraising strategies.

#### **Holiday See's Candy Sales: Nevada County**

During the Easter and Christmas holidays, the CASA program in Nevada County rents a storefront where it sells See's Candy to raise money for the organization. The fundraiser is very successful in raising approximately one-third of the organization's budget each year. In addition, respondents report that it is an excellent way for community members to volunteer their time with the organization, especially for those who cannot make a commitment to volunteer as an advocate. Furthermore, the fundraiser is an effective way of raising community awareness about the CASA program.

#### **"Friends of CASA" Provides Fundraising Support: Santa Cruz County**

A Santa Cruz CASA board member established the "Friends of CASA" group, a 501(c)(3)-membership organization, to provide fundraising support to the CASA program. Members of this group include CASA Board members, volunteers, individuals who are unable to be case-carrying advocates, and other interested individuals. The group organizes fundraisers for the CASA

program and volunteers at other fundraisers where the CASA program is a beneficiary. For example, the group provided volunteer services at the Silicon Valley Ball, and part of the Ball's proceeds were given to the Santa Cruz program. The "Friends" raised \$20,000 during its first year and has plans to continue its fundraising efforts this year. Respondents note that this group provides the organization with fundraising support in addition to the efforts of the board of directors.

- Other programs that have established special fundraising groups include: **Riverside, Los Angeles, Orange, Sonoma, and Alameda** counties.

#### **CASAs for CASA Fundraiser: Yolo County**

As one of its primary fundraising events, CASA of Yolo County crafts a children's playhouse and raffles it off to be placed in the winner's backyard. The CASA program has solicited assistance from various sectors of the community to make the event a success. The playhouse materials are donated by a local business. Local high school shop students actually build the house. The Kappa Alpha Theta sorority at University of California, Davis, decorates the playhouse and other community volunteers help paint it. Additionally, local businesses that are associated with housing buy advertising space on the playhouse during parades when it is displayed for public view, creating a partnership between the CASA program and companies that might not normally associate themselves with abused and neglected children. Respondents state that the community has responded positively to the event, and it has resulted in increased community awareness and program funds.

- **San Diego's** CASA program conducts a similar "Playhouse Fantasy" fundraiser.

#### **Sustaining Fund: Napa County**

In order to raise money and community awareness of the CASA program, all active CASA volunteers in Napa County were asked to submit the names of people who might be willing to give \$100 to the program each year for five years. The program then sent a letter to those individuals describing the CASA program and explaining the important work it does. To personalize the letter, it is signed by the volunteer who submitted that person's name. In 2001, the program sent out approximately 300 letters, and approximately eighty individuals responded with commitments. The program plans to ask advocates to submit different names each year so that the sustaining fund can grow.

### **“Kid Walk” Fund Raiser: Humboldt County**

CASA of Humboldt’s “Kid Walk” is a successful fundraising strategy. The concept is based on a walk-a-thon model, in which participants solicit sponsors to underwrite their involvement in the event. Teams from local businesses, schools and higher education institutions, agencies, service groups, and families collected \$10 donations from contributors. On the day of the event, hundreds of people participated in the walk and forty-two teams donated money. The day-long event began with live music and face painting, along with the registration of teams and contributions. Participants then walked with banners and team t-shirts along a half-mile route running through the center of Old Town Eureka. The walk led to and ended at a fair with booths providing information about children’s services available in Humboldt county, carnival amusements, a raffle, food donated by a local restaurant, live musical entertainment by area groups, and an educational speaker, who spoke about his experience as a former foster child. The event finale was an awards presentation for top fundraising teams and individuals. Respondents indicate that the event was very successful in raising money, but was also a good means of raising awareness about dependent children and their needs. The Kid Walk was also a good vehicle for publicity and respondents note that CASA of Humboldt and other agencies were able to recruit new volunteers. In 2003, the first year of the event, the program raised almost \$40,000.

### **Hoops for Children Annual Fundraiser: Marin County**

The *Hoops for Children* basketball tournament, held in Marin County, is a well-regarded fundraiser and public relations vehicle for the program. The tournament lasts two weeks and a maximum of thirty-two adult teams compete. Teams pay a \$500 fee to play in the tournament and are seeded according to skill. The fee can be paid by team members or through corporate or individual sponsors. Games take place in a variety of county schools that usually donate their space for the tournament. The tournament was started as a way to raise money as well as awareness among community sectors that are not usually involved in more traditional fundraisers. For example, guards at the state San Quentin prison formed a team to participate, and prison inmates donated money toward the team’s entry fee. *Hoops for Children* has a dedicated website ([www.hoopsforchildren.org](http://www.hoopsforchildren.org)) that has information about both the tournament and the CASA organization.

### **Membership Drive: El Dorado County**

Starting in 2002, CASA El Dorado began a new fundraising effort to build membership in the organization. A solicitation letter asking for members and describing the work of the organization was sent to the program’s mailing list. Members receive the program’s newsletter and annual report. This effort raised close to \$10,000 in its first attempt. CASA El Dorado plans to continue with this fundraising strategy in the coming years.

## **Collaboration with Dependency System and other Community Partners**

PACR respondents indicate that programs that develop collaborative relationships with dependency system and other community partners can benefit from myriad shared resources and increased community awareness. In the dependency community, CASA programs function in a system that includes a variety of other stakeholders: judicial officers; social workers; attorneys for minors, parents, and CPS; foster and biological parents; siblings; relatives; and other personnel involved in a child's life such as teachers, doctors, and therapists. Many of the programs visited for PACR have forged successful relationships with the various stakeholders in order to adequately represent children's best interests. Developing strong and trusting working relationships with these different partners can often take time and deliberate efforts by CASA programs. CASA programs are usually the newest system partner and, as such, can often be met with skepticism by traditional system partners. Attorneys, social workers, and judicial officers can be unsure of the role of a CASA volunteer in the dependency system and therefore unclear about how CASA programs fit into the existing structures. CASA programs must maintain their independence, but many respondents report that developing cooperative relationships that facilitate information gathering and sharing is crucial to establishing a strong, effective program.

In counties where the CASA program has developed strong relationships with dependency system partners, individuals interviewed indicate that CASA program reports are often considered the court's primary source of objective and neutral information containing personal and child-focused information that is not usually available in other reports or court files. Additionally, these system participants often report that having a CASA program can improve the functioning of the dependency system, particularly for those children with CASA volunteers who benefit from increased advocacy for appropriate placements and services. CASA volunteers are also credited with introducing system-based improvements resulting from the new perspectives, additional information, and the neutrality they bring to the process.

CASA programs in many counties enjoy a high level of support from other community organizations in addition to their more immediate dependency system partners. This support has resulted in increased opportunities for funding and volunteer recruitment. In addition, collaborative activities provide CASA programs with access to important community resources, including issue expertise and technical assistance, referrals for supportive services, and cooperative advocacy and planning efforts.

Many CASA programs have engaged in collaboration efforts with system partners and community agencies alike. Programs used different methods to forge collaborative relationships, such as convening regular meetings, forming advisory bodies, providing training, giving

presentations, and holding various appreciation events. Additionally, a number of programs have also developed highly specialized referral systems to manage this often controversial aspect of their collaboration with outside organizations. Examples of these strategies are highlighted in the following section, with a separate subsection on referral strategies.

### **Collaboration with the Local Community College: El Dorado County**

In 1996, El Dorado's South Lake Tahoe location began collaborating with the Lake Tahoe Community College to offer CASA training. Training sessions are advertised in the college's course catalogue, in addition to other community advertising, and are held at the local campus. Students who enroll in training receive criminal justice course credit at the college and are eligible to become CASA volunteers. The case manager in South Lake Tahoe conducts the training and in this role holds the position of adjunct professor at the college. Respondents report many advantages to CASA's association with the college including increased recruiting opportunities, specifically through listings in the course catalogue, and increased community visibility and credibility.

- **Napa** County also collaborates with the local community college and a local private university to offer internship credit for students. After students complete all training and background check requirements, they are required to make an eighteen to twenty-four month commitment to the CASA program.

### **Caretaker Review Form: El Dorado County**

In this county, CASA volunteers are often able to facilitate the submission of caretaker review forms by attaching them to their court reports. These forms are completed by a child's caretaker and include information on the child and the placement. Caretaker review forms are made available to CASA volunteers in the program office and volunteers often take the forms with them on their visits with the child. Advocates deliver the forms, encourage caretakers to complete them, and collect the finished reports. One respondent notes that this practice ensures that foster parents and other caregivers are participating in the court process and that their unique perspectives are being relayed to the court.



### **Bench Officer Orientation: Napa County**

When a dependency bench officer began hearing cases, she received an afternoon of orientation to the CASA program, at the program office. Program staff spent a few hours explaining the CASA program's history, operations, services, referral and assignment process, and court reports. Respondents report this was a very effective way of introducing the CASA concept to the new bench officer as well as a first step in building a positive relationship between staff members and the bench officer.

### **Monthly CASA/CPS Staffing Meetings: Plumas County**

Monthly meetings of the local child welfare agency's program manager, social workers, the CASA program coordinator, and CASA volunteers give participants opportunities to discuss cases to which advocates are assigned. The meetings allow volunteers to discuss their cases face-to-face with social workers who may be difficult to contact on the phone. Respondents note that the intent of these meetings is not necessarily to reach consensus, but rather to share information, bounce ideas off each other, address misunderstandings, and discuss possible solutions to issues as they arise. Indeed, there are some cases in which the CASA volunteers and social workers have differing opinions; however, participants "agree to disagree" in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Respondents also report that the regular meetings have helped build trust and professional relationships between social workers and CASA volunteers.

- **El Dorado** County CASA volunteers attend weekly "meet and confer" meetings with other dependency system partners including county counsel and parents and children's attorneys to review cases on the docket and facilitate communication about each entity's position on the case.

### **Memo to Hear CASA Cases Early in the Day: Riverside County**

Riverside's CASA program faces challenges due to the length of time its volunteers wait for their child's cases to come up on the docket on court hearing days. Some respondents note that they have waited for six or more hours for cases to be heard. To speed up the court hearing process, the presiding judge wrote a memo to all juvenile judges instructing them to see CASA cases before ten o'clock each morning. Volunteers are instructed to alert the bailiff that they are a CASA volunteer so that the court hears the case in a timely manner. Although it is not clear that all commissioners and judges are utilizing this protocol, it is clear that where it is being implemented it is a great help in ensuring that the court is able to consistently hear from volunteers.



### **Partnership with the Learning Advantage: Yolo County**

The Learning Advantage is a private practice offering learning assessment by four practitioners: two are speech and language pathologists and two are learning specialists. The practice serves children of all ages who have issues in speech, learning, language, and educational processes. The practice received an anonymous donation to serve disadvantaged children and chose to partner with the CASA program. The Learning Advantage and CASA staff jointly made decisions on how to utilize the funds and decided to focus intensive services on a limited number of children with the aim of making a significant impact on their learning. For a child to be eligible, he or she must be in a placement that is considered stable and have a parent or foster parent willing to transport that child to and from appointments on a regular basis. As a result, four children received assistance between one and four times a week. Individuals interviewed reported feeling very positive about this partnership and noted that it improved the academic experiences for the children involved. Because of its success, respondents mentioned interest in continuing this partnership and seeking additional funding.

### **Proof of Service Forms: Lassen County**

The Lassen CASA program developed a form to show proof of who received a copy of the CASA court report prior to each hearing. The form records who each recipient is and when the report was delivered. Respondents assert that the use of this form ensures each party to the case receives a copy of the CASA report prior to the court hearing.

### **Presentations to Foster Parents: Imperial County**

CASA of Imperial County staff members make presentations to potential foster parents during the initial foster parent training course. Staff members provide information on the role and responsibilities of a CASA volunteer, including the duty to investigate, spend time with the child, represent the child in court, and explain court processes to the child. Respondents report that these presentations facilitate positive interactions between foster parents and advocates.

### **Connecting with System Partners Through an Advisory Council: San Francisco County**

Since the San Francisco CASA Program's inception, it has facilitated problem-solving and direct communication through its Advisory Council. San Francisco's supervising judge of Unified Family Court and the CASA executive director serve as Advisory Council co-chairs. Also on the council are representatives from the court clerk's office, court-appointed mediator's office, DHS (including the staff member responsible for social worker training), various attorney groups and the city attorney's office, community child welfare organizations, and CASA staff and board members. Respondents credit the council with the CASA program's ability to maintain access to

influential decision makers in the dependency system. The Advisory Council is charged with promoting optimal inter-agency cooperation, case management, and communication on issues affecting all dependent children.

### **Courthouse Employee Appreciation Events: San Diego County**

San Diego County's CASA program hosts annual appreciation events in each of the county courthouses. At these breakfasts and lunches, the agency thanks court employees who have been supportive of and helpful to the program, its staff, and its volunteers. Respondents note that these events allow the agency to acknowledge the support of others and provide an opportunity for court personnel to interact with CASA volunteers and staff.

### **Grant Collaboration Allows CASA Volunteers to Participate in Innovative Projects: Mendocino County**

CASA of Mendocino County has collaborated with the local Big Brothers/Big Sisters organization on two grants, and at the time of the site visit was waiting to hear about funding for a third project. The first collaborative grant, "Court to Community" or "C2C," and the second, ongoing California Department of Community Services grant both focus on providing a continuity of advocacy and mentoring services to children and families once their cases are dismissed or terminated from juvenile proceedings. These projects specifically aim to ensure that participating families and children have access to appropriate health and mental health services. The outstanding proposal is to provide mentoring and advocacy services to children of incarcerated parents. This project also includes the county Department of Education as a co-collaborator. Respondents indicate that CASA of Mendocino's collaborative efforts have helped secure additional and much-needed funds, while also broadening county awareness of the CASA program. Most importantly however, respondents indicate that these grants have helped the organizations deliver high-quality services to families and children.

### **Outreach to Local Native American Reservations, Rancherias, and Community Groups: Humboldt County**

For the past several years, CASA of Humboldt has worked to develop relationships with Humboldt County's large Native American community. Although Native Americans make up only 8 percent of the total county population, they are over-represented in the dependency population. CASA of Humboldt's board of directors has consistently identified as a priority the need to expand services to Native Americans, particularly as part of their strategic planning. In particular, the program has been dissatisfied with its ability to recruit Native American volunteers and thus to match Native American children with a CASA volunteer who has a similar background. As a result, CASA of Humboldt has engaged in various outreach efforts to

strengthen relationships with local Native American communities in the hopes of boosting recruitment, gaining trust, and expanding the organization's cultural competency with this important population. Some of these efforts are described below:

- **MOUs with local tribes, rancherias, and service agencies:** As part of their efforts the CASA program has entered into signed MOUs with five surrounding tribes, rancherias, and Native American social service agencies. These agreements articulate and formalize a commitment to work together and share expertise in support of dependent children and families.
- **Work with Two Feathers:** CASA volunteers and case supervisors work very closely with Two Feathers, a community-based organization that specializes in providing social services to Native American children and families in the dependency and delinquency systems. Respondents indicate that CASA volunteers and program staff work together with Two Feathers social workers to ensure the safety of their assigned children, represent the children's best interests in court, and make joint visits to the children when introducing a CASA volunteer or when the caregiver is apprehensive of advocate involvement in the case. The two organizations share resources and are often able to cobble together other resources to help get children needed services.
- **Development of an Advisory Board:** CASA staff and board members are in the process of developing a Native American Advisory Board to advise the organization on case management and planning for Native American cases and to provide cultural competency training for CASA volunteers.
- **Training Manual Focused on Native American Cases:** Staff are also in the process of developing a training manual focused on helping CASA volunteers to work more effectively with Native American children, families, and communities.

### **Bridging Challenges in Working with Foster Parents: Modoc County**

Respondents explain that when the Modoc CASA program first began there was tension between the program and some foster parents, as some wrongly assumed that the CASA volunteers' role was to "watch" them. In the past couple of years, the CASA program has made a concerted effort to develop a better relationship with foster parents and has implemented several strategies to this end. The coordinator/case supervisor always makes a personal contact with the foster parent prior to the CASA volunteer contacting the family. During this call, the coordinator/case supervisor explains the purpose of the CASA volunteer, who the advocate is, and how they will contact the

foster parent. After the initial conversation, the coordinator/case supervisor provides a packet of information to all new foster parents who have a volunteer assigned, which includes a copy of the Roles & Responsibilities of the CASA volunteer, a program brochure, contact information for the program, and a copy of the court order appointing the CASA volunteer. The goal for dissemination of the packet is twofold: 1) to provide information to the foster parents about the roles and responsibilities of the advocate, and 2) to provide the foster parents with information so that they can help prepare the child for having a CASA volunteer involved in their life. Several respondents indicate that these processes have greatly assisted the CASA program in developing less divisive, better rapport with foster parents.

### ***Referrals to the Program***

CASA programs have developed innovative mechanisms for managing referrals from the court. These come in response to a variety of circumstances, including the need to prioritize cases due to high demand for CASA appointments, as well as overcoming resistance to the CASA program. CASA programs vary across the state in their priorities for serving children. Some programs focus on younger children and some serve a higher proportion of teens. In some counties, CASA volunteers are requested for more complex cases while in other counties, dependency system partners ask for a volunteer for children who are in stable, long-term placements. Regardless of their priorities, CASA programs can mitigate confusion and conflict within the dependency system by clearly defining and disseminating their criteria for referral and assignment. The following are some examples of how some counties have addressed the issue of referrals.

#### **Selection Criteria for Accepting Referrals: Los Angeles County**

The CASA program in Los Angeles County has a very specific set of criteria for accepting a referral for advocate assignment, and follows the criteria carefully. Most individuals interviewed are able to explain the program's primary criteria for accepting cases, which is whether a CASA volunteer can make a difference in the case. Furthermore, almost all respondents agree that the program must carefully select cases for assignment due to the limited number of CASA volunteers available for the large population of children in the county's dependency court system. In the satellite office (Lancaster), the list of criteria for assignment is posted in the waiting room utilized by attorneys prior to hearings, thus ensuring that attorneys are all aware of the CASA program's case eligibility standards.

The program also lists cases it will not accept, and these include cases with children who are chronic runaways or have a history of violent behavior, children in appropriate placements and for whom court orders are followed by all parties, children who might benefit from a CASA volunteer but for whom no advocate is available (often due to language barriers), and cases where the primary need is for a mentor.

### **Reviewing Cases at Detention: Tulare County**

CASA of Tulare County’s program manager, the program’s court liaison, performs an initial review of all detention reports—pre-jurisdictional—to determine which cases are appropriate for CASA services. The CASA court liaison goes to court every morning to review each petition at the time of detention, using program priority assessment criteria, and determines which cases will be accepted for appointment to the waiting list. This process was instituted when the program’s waiting list was getting too large and unwieldy to serve all the children waiting for CASA volunteers. Respondents familiar with the procedure agree that the screening process works very well and is an improvement on the standard CASA appointment practice because the CASA program has the best understanding of its own capacity to serve the dependency population.

### **Matching with the Child Welfare Agency: Santa Barbara County**

The CASA of Santa Barbara program collaborates with Child Protective Services (CPS) to discuss CASA cases. Approximately once a month, CPS staff and a CASA case manager meet to discuss the cases on the waiting list and prioritize them by those most in need of a CASA volunteer. Although all children in the dependency system living in South County are placed with a CASA volunteer, this monthly matching is important for children in North County because the waiting list is large and increasing. Respondents note that the process is innovative because discussing matching with CPS creates a sense of system collaboration. The process also helps to “heal” any strained working relationships that may develop between a CASA volunteer and social worker.

### **Child Advocates and Judicial Officers Review Waitlist: Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties**

In Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties, judicial officers are presented with a copy of the waiting list every month. The list includes a paragraph description of each child and recommendations as to whether he or she should remain on the list. Respondents indicate that this process keeps judicial officers apprised of which children have been waiting for a CASA volunteer and how long they have been waiting. In San Mateo counties, all cases are provided to Child Advocates staff by the court before they are forwarded to social services. Agency staff “triage” the cases to identify those children in greatest need of an advocate. A similar approach is currently under development in Santa Clara County.

### **Visible Waiting List: Tulare County**

The Tulare County CASA program maintains two waiting lists, one for its infant and toddler program and one for older children, which are maintained in the program's databases as well as on large erasable boards in the CASA program offices. To ensure confidentiality, the program lists only the child's first or last name on the public board, along with internal identifying information such as geographic location, gender, or special needs. Some respondents report that the very visible, physical presence of the waiting list is a constant reminder of the many children in need of CASA services and keeps the program staff constantly focused on serving more children.

### **Increasing Referrals to the CASA Program: San Luis Obispo County**

Respondents explained that in the past, judicial officers in San Luis Obispo County were hesitant to assign CASA volunteers unless requested to do so by the Department of Social Services (DSS). Because DSS was not overly supportive of the program and few requests were being made, the CASA program developed two strategies to address the lack of referrals. One was to make a deliberate and concerted effort to improve the relationship with DSS. The second strategy was a proactive attempt to prompt referrals from the bench. Staff began attending all jurisdictional hearings. When a child is brought under the jurisdiction of the court, the CASA staff member asks the judicial officer if a CASA volunteer would benefit the child. Sometimes parties will oppose the appointment of a CASA volunteer, typically because they believe an excessive number of individuals are already involved with the child. But often the lack of a request for a referral to the program is now seen as an oversight and the parties to the case appreciate the reminder. This strategy has led to about half of the cases being referred to the CASA program.

## Appendix A California CASA Programs

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