

CASA Notes

Volume 2, Issue 3 Fall 2014

A Member of the National CASA Association

CASA VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

There are over 500 abused and neglected children in the Merced County Foster Care System that need a CASA Volunteer.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CASA VOLUNTEER?

Becoming a CASA volunteer is an investment of time, energy and heart. But as many volunteers have said of the children they work with: "It wasn't about what I gave them, it was what they showed me."

HOW MUCH TIME DOES IT TAKE TO BE A CASA VOLUNTEER?

All volunteers must complete a 30 hour pre-service training. The time commitment to a case varies depending upon the stage of the case. Volunteers sometimes say that there is a greater amount of work in the beginning of the case, when they are conducting their initial research. On average, a volunteer can expect to spend about 8-10 hours a month on a case.

DO I NEED TO HAVE ANY SPECIAL SKILLS OR MEET ANY REQUIREMENTS?

No special background or education is required to become a CASA volunteer. We encourage people from all cultures and professions, and all ethnic and educational backgrounds. Once accepted into the training program, a volunteer will receive all necessary training in courtroom procedures, social services, the juvenile justice system and the special needs of abused and neglected children.

Requirements include:

- Be 21 years old
- Be willing to complete & pass background checks, provide references and participate in interview
- Complete pre-service training
- Be available for court appearances, with advance notice
- Be willing to commit to the CASA program until your case is closed.

WHAT DOES A CASA VOLUNTEER DO?

CASA volunteers are appointed by judges to advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children in court and other settings. The primary responsibilities of a CASA volunteer are to:

- Gather information: review

documents, interview the children, family and professionals in their lives.

- Document findings: provide written reports at court hearings.
- Appear in court: advocate for the child's best interests and keep the court informed.
- Explain what is going on: help the child understand.
- Recommend services: Ensure that the children and family are receiving appropriate services and advocate for those that are not being provided.
- Keep in contact with the child and professionals involved: Visit with the child at least 2 times a month.

WHAT SUPPORT WILL I RECEIVE?

You will be supported every step of the way. You will have opportunities for continuing education and have access to online resources provided by our local program and National CASA.

HOW DO I BECOME A CASA VOLUNTEER?

CASA of Merced County offers 4 trainings a year. Call our office (722-2272) to find out when our next **Information Meeting** will take place.

I am for the child®

A VOICE FOR A CHILD

BY DIANE JENKIN (Due to confidentiality, names have been changed.)

Kimberly was 5 when she was detained due to medical neglect. She and her mother, Tammy, had been living with her maternal grandparents at the time of detention. Tammy had not followed through with dental and eye appointments. Kimberly was placed with her grandparents who live out of town and a CASA was assigned.

Diane, the CASA assigned to this case, met Kimberly and her mother at a court-ordered visit. Tammy was lucky enough to be granted twice a week visits with Kimberly, and she was very motivated to reunify with her daughter. She was able to attend all but 2 visits during the time she was working her case plan. Part of Tammy's case plan included mental

health evaluations and drug testing. Tammy had been smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol as a way to cope with the mental health issues. As a result of her evaluations, Tammy had been diagnosed with PTSD and depression. She was then able to give up the pot, and drug tests showed the decline in usage. Throughout the year of Family Reunification Tammy was able to address her mental health and drug use issues.

As the CASA on the case, Diane was able to provide Tammy with encouragement and validation. She was able to attend all of Kimberly's medical appointments and work with her father and step-mother in making sure Kimberly's medical issues were ad-

dressed. Tammy was able to advocate for herself with the different agencies she was required to work with as a part of her case plan. CASA also provided transportation to appointments, and advocated for her with Mental Health and the court.

Kimberly was returned to her mother's care almost 18 months after detention. Tammy and Kimberly continue to do well.



SPOTLIGHT ON AN ADVOCATE:

BY KIM SCOTT

Reading to children at the library, serving as an Eucharist Minister, spending time with her grandchildren and volunteering as a CASA are some of the activities **Karolyn Alvarez** loves doing since retiring from the Superior Court in 2007.

Karolyn was born in Chicago and grew up in Champaign Illinois, the daughter of a radiologist who is now 95. She met her husband Bob (Roberto) in Champaign. He was a Cuban refugee at age 16 and placed with a foster family. He loved his foster parents and siblings and they loved him. After he and Karolyn were married, his foster family moved to California and in 1978, he and Karolyn decided to follow them.

One thing that sparked her interest in helping foster children was knowing a foster family who took in teenage girls.

She was really impressed with how they cared for these young women. They taught the girls how to live independently before there was actually a formal Independent Living Program.

Karolyn was in the fourth MercedCASA training class and over the past two years she has been appointed to 5 foster children. She believes the best thing about CASA is the fact that, "We are a stable force in a child's life. Our main concern is the child. We stay with them through the entire court process and therefore we know the child, the child trusts us, and we are able to assist the court and the child welfare system."

One of her favorite stories is about a six-year-old whom she enrolled in a bowling class. It turned out that he absolutely loved bowling! At six, he is already bowling a 120. He is also at the

top of his class at school, after repeating kindergarten. She is very proud of him!

Karolyn has learned that the best way to engage these children is to take it slow, make sure they know that you are a friend, and find out what interests them as soon as possible. "Going on a walk to start is often a good idea," she says, "because sometimes it's easier for children to talk to a new person when you aren't sitting across from them expecting them to talk." Her best advice for a new CASA: go with the flow and don't get upset about trailing court dates.

We are so happy to have Karolyn as an advocate who has been a friend, a listening ear, a positive role model and so much more to these children.

Thank you, Karolyn!



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I am for the child®

SAVE THE DATE

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OUR NEXT CASA EVENT IS COMING SOON! APRIL 18, 2015 MERCED FAIRGROUNDS

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

BY SHAR HERRERA



*“Every child deserves a champion,
An adult who will never give up on them,
Who understands the power of connection,
and insists that they become the best
that they can possibly be.”*

Rita F. Pierson

positive change to the lives of these vulnerable children, but also to their children and generations to come.

CASA of Merced County has only begun to scratch the surface of meeting the needs of the foster children in Merced County. Currently we are able to provide a CASA volunteer for only 12% of the children in foster care. We need more volunteers. We need to be able to touch the lives of each and every foster child. Our goal is to recruit and train at least 40 volunteers a year. We need your help.

Our next training class will begin on Monday, January 26. We would like to invite you to attend one of our Information Meetings that will be occurring over the next 6 weeks. We will share more information about the training and commitment. Please call our office to reserve your spot.

Lift up a child’s voice...

A child’s life!

Become a **CASA Volunteer.**

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

BY MARY MILLER

Wow! What fun was had by all in Los Banos at the CASA-blanca Casino Night. Even professed non-gamblers were throwing their chips in the pot and raking in some “winnings” (non-monetary of course). Over 100 Los Banos residents attended, along with about half as many from Merced and other communities. The event was a great success! There have already been requests to repeat the casino theme at next year’s Los Banos event.

Stay tuned for information about our major annual spring event in Merced, with attendance of 400-500 supporters. It is always fun! This year’s event will be held April 18, at the Merced Fairground Pavilion. We will roll out the surprise theme soon.

The proceeds from these events are put to good use to support the training and development of new Advocates. A training session has just ended, and another will begin in January.

Equally important with raising funds is acquiring more Advocates each year. Each fundraiser and the many presentations made

to community organizations have resulted in individuals stepping forward to attend training to become an Advocate. This is very heartening – and absolutely crucial, since it is the volunteers who actually do the work of CASA. The rest of us support their efforts.

The foster children of Merced County who have Advocates benefit greatly and are appreciative of the care and guidance they receive. But we have hundreds more who need this help. So if you can be an Advocate, please let us know. If not, we understand and appreciate your support in other ways.

Voices4CASA, a new program for supporters of CASA, is closing in on the end of its Charter Year. Many individuals & families have joined as Charter Members and will be recognized permanently as such. There is still time for those wishing to join – until December 31, 2014. Please join the Voices4CASA by completing the information in the box and mail to CASA.

**YOU can make a difference
for a child!**

Yes, I want to join

I would like to become a **VOICES4CASA** partner at the level below :

- \$200 / month or \$2,400 /year
- \$150 / month or \$1,800 / year
- \$100 / month or \$1,200 / year
- \$50 / month or \$600 / year
- \$25 / month or \$300 / year
- \$10 month or \$120 / year
- Other, specify \$ _____ / _____
- One time gift of \$ _____

Check made payable to **CASA Of Merced County**

Please charge my credit card.

Visa _____ Mastercard _____ Am Ex _____ Expiration: _____.

Cardholder Name: _____

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CASA of Merced County PO Box 2362 Merced, CA 95344

FAMILY CONNECTIONS

BY COLBY ALVARADO (Names have been changed.)

One of the difficult issues encountered when connecting foster children with family is that sometimes the connection can cause trauma and a feeling of loss. This is true of a case I was working on with two young sisters, Samantha and Jenny. Although the attempt to connect them with adult family members was not successful, we worked towards developing a plan for permanency. Because their needs are so different, their plans began to look very different.

Samantha and Jenny have been through many homes, sometimes together and sometimes in separate placements. When placed together the girls weren’t able to be themselves and show their true colors. But they have always maintained a connection with each other through regular visits and phone calls. Currently they are in two different homes and both seem to be thriving.

The permanency plan for Jenny is to be adoption

by her foster mom, with whom she has lived for about 2 years off and on. Samantha, who struggles with explosive behavior issues, will remain in a foster care placement and work towards building a consistent and permanent connection with her foster family and her newly appointed Court Appointed Special Advocate. The girls will continue frequent visits to maintain their relationship.

THANK YOU ADVOCATES AND VOLUNTEERS!

Paula Albertson
Karolyn Alvarez
Mary Anderson
Debbie Bier
Jan Bradley
Diane Butts
Jalisa Chambers
Moua Chang
Youa Chang
Marcie Correa

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