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## Voices for Children Riverside County Initiative Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

### What led to the closing of the CASA of Riverside County program?

Due to management and financial issues, CASA for Riverside County, Inc.'s contract with the Riverside County Courts ended as of August 31, 2014. The Judicial Council of California removed its funding from the program, and the California CASA Association and National CASA Association withdrew endorsement.

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### Are the foster children who were being served previously by CASAs in Riverside County still receiving advocacy?

Since the closing of CASA for Riverside County, Inc. in August 2014, Court Appointed Special Advocate, or CASA volunteers, have not been permitted to appear in court on behalf of their case children. However, in an effort to minimize the impact that the program's closing has had on foster children there, Riverside County Children's Services Division, Department of Public Social Services (CSD) generously agreed to help volunteers become identified as important persons, lifelong connections, or other designations that allowed continued contact with their case children. While volunteers did not have the same duties and authority of an official CASA volunteer, they did have the ability to maintain a relationship with the child.

### How did Voices for Children come to be involved with the CASA of Riverside County Initiative?

In August 2014, the Superior Court of California, Riverside County, and Judicial Council of California asked Voices for Children (VFC) to help rebuild the CASA program in Riverside County in order to continue to provide services for the many foster children who need support. This request came because Voices for Children is a model program, both regionally and nationally, and has the appropriate level of professional expertise, staff resources, and management acumen to help turn the program around. In addition, San Diego and Riverside Counties are geographically adjacent (one of the Riverside County courthouses where hearings will be held is only 50 minutes from San Diego).

### What is Voices for Children's background as the CASA Program for San Diego County?

California law allows the Juvenile Court to designate one organization per county as its official CASA Program. This designated CASA program gives volunteer advocates the ability to investigate an abused and/or neglected child's circumstances, develop a relationship with the child, and make best interest recommendations to the Juvenile Court. Voices for Children is and has been the only CASA Program for San Diego County since 1983. Voices for Children is one of the nation's premiere CASA programs, ranking in the top five of all 950 such programs in the U.S. in terms of budget size (\$5.4 million), number of children served (2,400), number of CASA volunteers (1,500), and size of staff (73). Since 1997, the President/CEO of Voices for Children has been Sharon M. Lawrence, Esq.; the current Chair of the 25-member VFC Board of Directors is David Bialis, Senior Vice President & General Manager of Cox Communications California.

**What is the agreement between Voices for Children and Superior Court of California, Riverside County, to continue CASA services in Riverside County?**

In November 2014, the Board of Directors of Voices for Children made the decision to launch this initiative in Riverside County. As of January 2015, Voices for Children, San Diego, entered into an agreement with the Superior Court of California, Riverside County, to recruit and train Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) and provide services to foster children in Riverside County. The agreement with the Superior Court extends to September 30, 2015, and is renewable annually. Voices for Children will oversee the CASA program in Riverside County, recruiting, training, and supervising volunteers who advocate and speak up for abused and neglected children living in Riverside County's foster care system.

**What are the differences between CASA of Riverside County's previous program model and Voices for Children's current program model?**

CASA for Riverside County, Inc. used a "peer mentor" model, in which CASA volunteers supervise other CASAs. When the organization closed in August 2014, there were approximately 60 CASAs serving 92 foster children. There are an estimated 5,400 children living in Riverside County foster care over the course of a year; 2% have been served by a CASA.

In San Diego, Voices for Children uses an Advocacy Supervisor model in which staff members are matched with volunteers to help them navigate the system and collaborate with them on their case. By June 30, 2015, 1,500 San Diego County-based volunteers will serve 2,400 local foster children.

It is anticipated that Riverside County CASAs will be reinstated and begin appearing in court on behalf of their case children by Spring 2015.

**How will Voices for Children operate in Riverside County?**

This new initiative in Riverside County will start modestly, with a goal of serving 50-100 foster children by September 30, 2015. The first few months of 2015 will encompass a top-to-bottom needs assessment and plan of action. VFC has hired two of the three full-time staff who will manage the program in Riverside County, led by VFC Vice President of Advocacy Cindy Charron. Charron will serve as a bridge between the San Diego and Riverside County programs, reporting to VFC President/CEO Sharon Lawrence. Both Riverside staff and volunteers will receive extensive training on the Voices for Children model of court advocacy, and use all VFC policies and procedures in their operation.

**How will the CASA Program in Riverside County be funded?**

The program will receive a grant from the Judicial Council of California, which has been matched \$1-for-\$1 by a private donor who is concerned about the welfare of Riverside's foster children. It is anticipated that government funders and foundations will also help rebuild the program to ensure that the foster children in Riverside County have CASAs by their side—in court, in school, and in the community.

**Is Voices for Children currently recruiting for new CASAs for Riverside County?**

Since the Riverside County Initiative is just getting underway, Voices for Children isn't yet recruiting for new CASA volunteers for Riverside County. However, we appreciate the interest of everyone in Riverside County who might want to be a CASA! We will hold our first Volunteer Information Session in the area this Spring, and those interested in being notified when sessions have been scheduled can submit a [Volunteer Interest Form](#). For more information about becoming a CASA volunteer, [click here](#).