



MISSION AND VISION

- Mission: Voices for Children transforms the lives of abused, abandoned, or neglected children by providing them with trained, volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs).
- Vision: We believe that every child deserves a safe and permanent home, and to that end, will provide a trained CASA volunteer to every abused, abandoned, or neglected child who needs one, and advocate to improve the lives of children in the foster care system.

NOTABLE FACTS

- Voices for Children is one of the largest and most successful CASA organizations in the United States – ranked in the Top 3 out of nearly 1,000 programs nationally and larger than the CASA programs in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago.
- In the state of California, Voices for Children is by far largest of the 49 CASA programs in the state. Approximately 25% of all California children who have CASAs are served by Voices for Children.
- Voices for Children won the highly competitive Kaleidoscope Award for Excellence in Board Governance from the University of San Diego 2014 in recognition of its organizational excellence.

ORGANIZATION

- President & CEO: Kelly Capen Douglas
- Annual Operating Budget: \$5.8 million
- Number of staff: 75
- Number of CASA volunteers in FY2019-2020: 1,380
- Number of San Diego County foster children served in FY2019-2020:
 - Children who received an advocate: 2,231
 - Children whose cases were assessed and / or monitored: 3,790 (100% of children in San Diego County's foster care system)

- Number of Riverside County foster children served in FY2019-2020:
 - Children who received a CASA: 434
- Board of Directors: 27 members; Chaired by AnneElise Goetz, Esq.; 100% of the Board are donors to Voices for Children
- Judicial Oversight: Voices for Children operates under a contract with the State of California Judicial Council, enabling it to provide CASA services in San Diego and Riverside Counties.
- National & State Affiliation: Voices for Children is a member in good standing of the National CASA Association and the California CASA Association

WHAT IS A CASA VOLUNTEER?

- CASAs are Court Appointed Special Advocates. To be a CASA requires no special prior experience, and our CASAs are men and women of all ages, and from every walk of life.
- Individuals apply to become a CASA and, if accepted into training, attend “Advocate University”—a free, specialized training program of Voices for Children. Training encompasses approximately 35 hours—half in a classroom, half on-line. If training is successfully completed, the new CASA is sworn in by a Superior Court Judge, and becomes an “officer of the court.”
- Voices for Children matches the CASA volunteer with a child or sibling group, and the advocacy begins. The court authorizes them to become involved in all aspects of the child’s case and gain access to their records. They also have access to schools, school records, medical professionals, and anyone else involved in the child’s life. As the Juvenile Court’s eyes and ears for children in foster care, these volunteer advocates speak up on their child’s behalf and help them through what is often a confusing and scary time.

WHY DO FOSTER CHILDREN NEED CASA VOLUNTEERS?

- Foster children have been removed from their homes due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment. Many feel very much alone – until they meet their CASA. While the foster care system comprises many talented and passionate professionals, it is also overburdened.
 - A social worker may juggle a caseload of 25 – 35 families
 - A lawyer supports 100 – 250 children
 - Judges oversee 500 – 700 cases

These individuals all want to make the best decisions they can for a child’s well being, but often don’t have the time needed to gather all the information necessary to see the complete picture.
- CASA volunteers devote their attention to one child or a sibling group at a time, closely monitoring the child’s situation and ensuring their needs are met. CASAs are often the only consistent adult presence in a child’s life—the one person a child can truly count on who is not paid to oversee their welfare.
- Foster children with CASAs are healthier and happier than those without CASAs. Foster children with CASAs do better in school, are more likely to graduate than those without CASAs, and are less likely to become delinquent or abuse drugs. Studies show that:
 - Foster children with CASAs are more likely to be adopted.
 - Children with CASAs are less likely to re-enter the child welfare system.
 - Children with CASAs tend to receive necessary services sooner, for a longer duration, and more consistently.

- 20% more children with CASAs passed all school courses and were significantly less likely to be expelled.
- Children with CASAs scored significantly higher than other foster children on protective factors scales such as sense of acceptance, controls against deviant behavior, positive attitude for the future, and ability to work with others.

WHAT DO CASAs DO?

CASAs advocate for a child or siblings in Court, school, and other aspects of their lives. The CASA's role is to consider what is in the child's best interest and to make sure that their individual needs are met.

CASAs monitor their child's case and do the following:

- Act as fact-finders and provide the court with information about the child
- Gather information from court documents, social workers' files, and educational, medical and therapy records.
- Assist the social worker in identifying issues important to the child
- Speak with the child, family members, school officials, health care providers, and other professionals involved in the child's life.
- Facilitate visits between siblings
- Maintain a consistent and supportive relationship with the child
- Participate in the child's education and contribute to educational decisions, often holding educational rights
- Make recommendations regarding the child's best interests in a written court report, which is completed with the support of their VFC staff supervisor.

CASAs visit with their case children at least once a month, but often more frequently. This provides the children with stability and consistency, and allows the CASAs to better understand the needs of the children, as well as their hopes and dreams. Some CASAs build and maintain positive, trusting relationships with their case children, much like mentors. With just 10-15 hours a month, a CASA can make a real difference in the life of a child.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Be at least 21 years of age
- Commit to seeing their case child(ren) at least once per month
- Have a valid driver's license
- Clear a criminal background check and DMV record check
- Be willing to drive to a variety of locations throughout San Diego County
- For the protection of the children, be able to maintain confidentiality and professional boundaries

HOW IS VOICES FOR CHILDREN FUNDED?

- Even though Voices for Children works closely with the Court system, almost all of its operations are funded by private individuals, foundations, corporations, service groups, and special events. Currently, the organization is 80% privately funded.