
Peer Assessment and Compliance Review (PACR) Aggregate Report

California Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Programs

July 2002

Submitted to:

Judicial Council of California

Submitted by:

Berkeley Policy Associates

440 Grand Avenue, Suite 500

Oakland, California, 94610

BPA #658

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Executive Summary: Peer Assessment and Compliance Review (PACR) Project, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Programs

What are CASAs?

The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program was created to assist children who are subject to court proceedings due to abuse, neglect or abandonment. CASAs are trained Volunteers who are appointed by a judicial officer to provide one-on-one advocacy for a child who is under the jurisdiction of the court. The CASA is responsible for conducting an independent investigation, 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.

First implemented in Washington State, CASA programs have been providing services to children in California for over 20 years. There are now 39 local CASA programs providing services in 40 of California's 58 counties. In 2000, over 4,000 CASA Volunteers in California donated more than 409,000 hours to support nearly 7,100 children in California's child welfare system.¹

The PACR Project

In 1994, the Judicial Council adopted California Rules of Court, rule 1424, which serves as program guidelines for Court Appointed Special Advocate (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.

PACR is designed to strengthen and support local CASA program efforts and is divided into two components: 1) program self-assessment of compliance with rule 1424, completed every

¹ Source: California CASA web site, www.californiacasa.org



three years by local CASA programs and submitted to the Judicial Council, and 2) a field study of local CASA programs by an independent evaluation team.

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 and 14 programs during Phase II. 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 20 programs between October 1999 and October 2001. 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 review.

The PACR project is organized around six primary study objectives. These field study objectives are 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 into two distinct sections, for each program visited.

If a program was found to be out of compliance with rule 1424, it is required to submit a corrective action plan to the Judicial Council Grants Analyst. Additionally, the California CASA Association offers its assistance to any program attempting to develop and implement its corrective action plan.



Aggregate Report Development

In preparing this aggregate report, the individual program reports for each of the 20 CASA program visited for PACR were used. We did not conduct any follow-up data collection, and as a result, some of the information presented in this report is more than two years old. The report is divided into five chapters. Chapter One documents the most common program accomplishments in the study sites. Chapter Two details the innovative strategies used by specific local programs to address what are often common challenges faced by CASA programs. Chapter Three describes the most common challenges faced by programs visited during the two first phases of PACR. Chapter Four looks at the CASA programs' ability to collect and use program-related data, as well as respondents' suggestions for future research and possible outcome measures. Chapter Five concludes with a report on the most prevalent compliance issues faced by programs. We include brief descriptions of each CASA program visited for PACR as Appendix A.

Chapter One: Program Accomplishments

CASA programs in California have accomplished a great deal since their inception over 20 years ago. Often facing significant hurdles, CASA programs have given a voice to thousands of children in the dependency court system. California CASA programs have mobilized thousands of Volunteers to advocate on behalf of children experiencing an intensely confusing and frightening time in their lives within a system that may be impersonal, slow, and lacking in the financial support needed to provide adequate care. CASA programs have raised awareness within the dependency system and their communities of children's unique needs, especially their need for services aimed at helping them live the healthiest life possible.

California CASA programs visited via the PACR project have accomplishments primarily in four areas:

- Services to children,
- CASA program infrastructure and support provided to Volunteers,
- Interaction and collaboration with the courts and other dependency system players, and
- Community collaboration.

Services to Children

Across the board, CASA programs in California provide necessary and important services to children in the dependency system as well as in other court systems such as delinquency,

family, and juvenile drug court. Children often have unmet needs for services, either because court-ordered services are not routinely being provided or the court is unaware of the child's needs. Advocates 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. As a result of the information obtained through time spent with assigned children, Advocates in programs visited for PACR are successfully giving a voice for children by providing detailed and child-focused information to the court. Respondents report that this information, obtained through the CASA's independent investigation and time spent with the assigned child, helps to ensure that each child's needs are being met. In addition to advocating for the appropriate provision of services, respondents explain that as a result of a Volunteer's investigation and the consistent time spent with the child, a child's safety and well-being are increased.

CASA Program Infrastructure and Support to Volunteers

CASA programs visited for PACR have made significant gains in developing program infrastructure, including systems for training, supervising, and supporting Volunteers. Many individuals interviewed for PACR believe that the CASA program's initial training course in their county is of exceptionally high quality, provides a comprehensive overview of the issues, and adequately prepares Volunteers for service. Respondents in several sites explain that an additional accomplishment of their local CASA program is providing consistent support and supervision to Advocates, ensuring they are providing the highest quality services to children. Additionally, many CASA programs have active Boards of Directors are an important component of the program, providing important support with program governance, overseeing program finances, strategic planning, fundraising, and increasing public awareness.

Interaction and Collaboration with the Court and other Dependency System Players

CASA programs function in a system that includes a variety of other players: 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 players in order to adequately represent children's best interests. CASA programs must maintain their independence, but many respondents report developing cooperative relationships that facilitate information gathering and sharing as a significant accomplishment of the CASA program in their community.



Chapter Two: Innovative Strategies

California CASA programs have developed a number of innovative strategies to serve children in their communities. At each of the programs visited thus far in the PACR project, the PACR Team identified at least one, and usually many more, inventive approaches the CASA organization was implementing to better meet the needs of the program, Volunteers, children, the dependency system, and the community in general. Although CASA program activities are governed by rule 1424, each program is managed by an independent organization and has developed according to local conditions. As a result, there is considerable variation in the operational practices of CASA programs. Additionally, many programs face similar challenges but have developed different strategies for addressing them.

Many of the innovative practices developed by local CASA programs are in the following areas: services to children, Volunteer training, Volunteer support, collaboration, program referrals, Volunteer recruitment, Volunteer screening, fundraising, and program evaluation.

Chapter Three: Program Challenges and Technical Assistance Needs

CASA programs are in large part functioning very well in spite of the many obstacles they face. Each program visited for the PACR project was facing challenges, some of which were internal issues and some that stemmed from historical practices of the dependency court system in that county. In most instances, CASA programs are not having difficulties with any particular issue to the extent that it prevents the normal functioning of the program; the issues noted are simply those that many CASA programs are facing as they strive to reach their full potential.

Collaboration with Dependency System Partners

Several CASA programs are experiencing difficulties when attempting to collaborate with various dependency system partners and work within established, traditional system mores. CASA programs are usually the newest system player and respondents often report that there is a great deal of initial resistance to the program. Many attorneys, social workers, and judicial officers are unsure of the role a CASA is supposed to play in the dependency system and are therefore unclear about how CASAs will fit into the existing structures.

Volunteer Supervision

Volunteer supervision is at the heart of the CASA concept, as programs were developed to utilize community volunteers to advocate on behalf of children rather than paid, professional staff. Yet in some CASA programs, supervisory protocols are not in use, Volunteers are inconsistently fulfilling their responsibility to attend regular supervisory meetings, and there are too few supervisory staff members.

Volunteer Training

Overall, respondents report that the Volunteer training offered to potential CASAs is of high quality and covers appropriate material. However, in every program visited, respondents made suggestions about additional topics that might be added to the initial training or via continuing education opportunities. These topics included:

- Boundary issues;
- Communicating with biological and foster parents;
- Constraints facing child welfare social workers (e.g., reunification, case timelines);
- Legal requirements in dependency cases; and
- Special education and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).

Board of Directors

Every CASA program visited has a Board of Directors. Many of these Boards are active and provide a high level of guidance, support, and oversight to the CASA program. Yet in more than a few programs, the Board is not as well-functioning as it needs to be to provide adequate oversight and support to the Executive Director and the program overall. There are three areas in which Boards appear to be struggling in the CASA programs visited for the PACR project: fiscal oversight, fundraising, and strategic planning.

Volunteer Recruitment

Volunteers are difficult to recruit regardless of the specific organization recruiting. Furthermore, CASA programs ask individuals to donate a huge amount of time to a potentially emotionally draining experience, making it even more difficult to recruit volunteers. There are additional inherent challenges, such as asking Volunteers to attend court hearings, which may be intimidating to many; requiring a large amount of training time, preventing many working individuals or those with high levels of family responsibilities; and asking them to work with vulnerable children who have experienced maltreatment, which is a very sensitive and difficult subject for many people to face. As a result of these challenges,



CASA programs are having a difficult time recruiting Volunteers. CASA programs are having a particularly difficult time recruiting individuals from ethnic minorities, men, and individuals willing or able to work with children with special needs.

Access to Legal Advice

Rule 1424(g)(1)(E) recommends that each CASA program retain legal counsel or obtain pro bono attorney services for its Volunteers. Yet in some counties, Volunteers and program staff periodically sought legal advice about a child's case from minors' attorneys, county counsel, or parents' attorneys in the system. Some counties have attorneys serving on their Boards. Programs are encouraged to recruit independent legal counsel to prevent conflicts of interest either with dependency participants or Board members.

Additional Factors that Affect Program Success

While the PACR Teams were able to analyze the programs according to the study objectives, the Teams also found that certain system or community factors, often beyond programs' control, can affect programs' success.

Frequent Rotation of Presiding Judges: The Judicial Council recommends that judges serve a minimum of two years as presiding juvenile judge. However, the recommended two-year term is not followed in every county. Even in those counties that do use a two-year rotation, it is often an inadequate amount of time for judges to familiarize themselves with CASA programs and develop strong working relationships.

Overburdened Dependency System: Dependency system partners universally suffer from high caseloads and minimal resources. Bench officers, attorneys, and social workers alike do not have the luxury to spend enough time focusing on the particulars of each dependent child's case. In fact, this is the reason why CASAs are a vital partner in the dependency system. However, because their partners are often stretched too thin, CASA programs can be challenged in their attempts to build collaborative relationships.

Inadequate Program Funding: Like many non-profit organizations, local CASA programs must often keep themselves afloat with minimal funds. For the most part, local CASA programs visited focus the resources they have on serving as many children as they can. While this emphasis on service delivery remains true to the mission of local programs, it often means that there are few resources left to hire an adequate number of staff and engage in sophisticated outreach and recruitment efforts.

Partner Opposition to CASA Involvement: Most CASA programs are well-respected institutions within the dependency community, however there are some instances where partners have strong, continued resistance to CASA involvement. CASAs' volunteer status and lack of formal training are common complaints from opponents of CASA. In addition, detractors often do not understand the formal role CASAs play in a dependent child's case.

Chapter Four: Capacity to Track Program Data and Possible Outcome Measures

In the current era of government 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. Tracking program data also provides the chance to discover programmatic areas that are not having the desired effect so that changes may be made to increase effectiveness.

Measuring Outcomes

Across the state, respondents universally agreed that it would be useful to survey or interview dependency system participants, such as bench officers, attorneys, foster parents, and especially the children involved to obtain their feedback about the impact of the CASA program. Additionally, in several sites respondents suggested that any study undertaken should include a random assignment or comparison design, comparing outcomes for children with a CASA and those without, in order to more accurately determine the impact of having a CASA in a child's life. Furthermore, respondents across the state emphasized the need to conduct longitudinal studies because they believe that so many of the effects of having a CASA in a child's life are not realized until adolescence or even adulthood.

Respondents routinely mentioned two types of indicators to measure. One relates to the functioning of the CASA program and the actual activities CASAs are involved in on behalf of a child. The most commonly suggested program indicators were the number of CASA Volunteers trained and assigned to a child and the number and type of contacts between an Advocate and his or her assigned child.

The second type of indicator mentioned by respondents relates to actual child-level outcomes. Individuals interviewed recommended tracking children's school performance (i.e.,



attendance, grades, scores on standardized tests, and graduation rates); children's mental health functioning and emotional well-being; the number of dependency system placements; and the length of time of child was in the system prior to a permanent placement.

Capacity to Track Program-Related Outcomes

Only one of the CASA programs visited for PACR does not regularly utilize a computerized database to track program data. The other 19 were using either COMET (10 programs), CASA Manager (eight programs), or database systems created specifically for the CASA program (one program). CASA programs normally track Volunteer and child demographics; information on court hearings, placements, schools, and CPS social worker changes; number and type of Volunteer hours; CASA assignments; and many other useful data. Many programs use the information tracked to monitor the program's activities and progress toward goals, as well as writing grants or supplying required information to funders or collaborating partners.

Although important program data is being tracked by programs, CASA staff are universally ill-equipped to fully utilize the data system being used in their program. Most had not received any formal training on either COMET or CASA Manager. An additional problem with data collection and reporting is that the database systems being used are difficult or impossible to customize to accurately reflect an individual program's information needs. Many CASA programs have specialized activities and COMET and CASA Manager are ill-equipped to store information unique to those activities. Furthermore, programs often have specialized reporting requirements for funders or collaborating partners, and would like to be able to generate standard reports for these purposes. CASA staff explain that both CASA databases are not easily programmed to produce customized, automated reports.

Chapter Five: Compliance with Rule 1424

Rule 1424 contains over 100 compliance requirements and recommendations. The CASA programs visited thus far were compliant in the vast majority of these. Yet there were a few areas of noncompliance noted in each of the programs visited, with many programs struggling with the same issues. By far, the most common areas of noncompliance were the lack of annual CASA Volunteer evaluations and the lack of a written recruitment plan focusing on minority communities and Volunteers able to work with children with special needs. Examples of other compliance issues noted, found in fewer than five programs, are Volunteers participating in 10 hours of annual continuing education hours, written protocols for notifying case parties that a CASA has been assigned, and a written procedure for reviewing grievances of CASA Volunteers.

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. More than 100,000 of California's children have been removed from their homes and placed in the state's care to protect them from further harm. Many other children still live at home but are at risk of removal if conditions in the home do not improve. Approximately 7 percent of children coming under the protection of the state's child welfare system have CASAs appointed to advocate on their behalf.

First implemented in Washington State, CASA programs have been providing services to children in California for more than 20 years. There are now 39 local CASA programs providing services in 40 of California's 58 counties. In 2000, more than 4,000 CASA Volunteers in California donated more than 409,000 hours to support nearly 7,100 children.²

CASAs are trained Volunteers³ 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 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.

The PACR Project

In 1994, the Judicial Council adopted California Rules of Court, rule 1424, which serves as program guidelines for Court Appointed Special Advocate (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

² Source: California CASA web site, www.californiacasa.org

³ The terms "Volunteers" and "Advocates" are used interchangeably throughout the report.

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 Advocates 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 is designed to strengthen and support local CASA program efforts and is divided into two components: 1) self-assessment of compliance with rule 1424, completed every three years by local CASA programs and submitted to the Judicial Council, and 2) a field study of local CASA programs by an independent evaluation team.

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 and fourteen programs during Phase II 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 20 programs between October 1999 and October 2001. 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 scheduling difficulties with on-site scheduling arose.

The PACR project is organized around six primary study objectives. These field study objectives are 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 program visited. Section I of the report 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 track and enter data, and the site's capacity to produce reports; and suggested outcome measurements. Section II of the report 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 Presiding Juvenile Court Judge.

If a 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 program attempting to develop and implement its corrective action plan. The programs have one year to implement their corrective action plans and come into compliance with rule 1424. The Judicial Council requires an update on program activity toward compliance in quarterly reports and in the yearly proposal for Judicial Council grant funding.

Aggregate Report Development

In preparing this aggregate report, the individual program reports for each CASA program visited for PACR were used. We did not conduct any follow-up data collection, and as a result, some of the information presented in this report is more than two years old.

During PACR visits, respondents were promised that the program's PACR report would not identify the source of information or comments made during the site visit. Therefore, in this report, we do not identify which CASA programs exhibit particular accomplishments, challenges, data collection capacities, or compliance issues. We do, however, identify the CASA program implementing each innovative strategy highlighted. This is done so that California CASA programs may seek and share information on unique and creative practices.

Table 1 below provides summary information for each CASA program visited for PACR thus far. There are a few caveats for this data that should be kept in mind when reviewing the information.

1. The information provided is from the time of the PACR visit and is therefore out-of-date.
2. The numbers of Volunteers and children being served provided in the Table are from the time of the PACR visit. Programs were asked how many Volunteers were assigned to cases and how many children were being served currently, which is usually a much smaller number than if we had asked data for the most recent calendar year.
3. During most of the Phase I and Phase II PACR visits, the Evaluation Teams were not asking programs for exact programmatic numbers but instead, if exact information was not readily available, for estimates. As a result, some of these data may not be a perfectly accurate picture of the program's activities.
4. We did not collect data on the number of children in dependency at the time of the PACR visit. As a result, there is no context for interpreting the data provided on the numbers of children being served by the CASA program. Some counties are serving almost 100 percent of the children in dependency even though their numbers may seem smaller than other counties. Others are serving only a small proportion of dependency cases.

Organization of the Report

In addition to framing the individual program reports, the field study objectives serve as the blue print for this aggregate report. Chapter One documents the most common program accomplishments in the study sites. Chapter Two details the innovative strategies used by specific local programs to address what are often common challenges faced by CASA programs. Chapter Three describes the most common challenges faced by programs visited during the two first phases of PACR. Chapter Four looks at the CASA programs' ability to collect and use program-related data. Chapter Five reports respondents' suggestions for future research and possible outcome measures. Chapter Six concludes with a report on the most prevalent compliance issues faced by programs. We include brief descriptions of each CASA program visited for PACR as Appendix A.



Table 1
California CASA Programs: Snapshot at Time of Peer Assessment and Compliance Review (PACR) Visit

County	PACR Visit	Year Began	Number of Paid Staff ^a		Number of Volunteers with Cases at PACR Visit	Children Served at PACR Visit	CASAs in Dependency Cases	CASAs in Delinquency Cases ^b	CASAs in Other Cases
			FT	PT					
Alameda	January 2001	1987	5	1	203	235	X	X*	
Contra Costa	August 2000	1981	2	2	92	130	X	X	
Imperial	January 2000	1994	3	1	46	95	X	X*	
Kern	February 2000	1993	4	2	64	117	X		
Lassen	September 2001	1996	5	5	19	20	X		
Los Angeles	September 2000	1978	18	0	313	500	X		
Merced	May 2001	1996	2	0	43	49	X	X	
Monterey	November 2000	1995	1	2	62	82	X	X*	
Nevada	August 2001	1993	1	3	19	25	X		X (Family Court)
Orange	May 2001	1985	6	12	252	259	X		
Sacramento	October 2001	1991	2	2	68	75	X		
San Bernardino	February 2000	1989	7	0	48	75	X	X	
San Diego	June 2001	1982	17	2	326	2543	X		
San Francisco	January 2000	1991	6	3	135	155	X		
San Luis Obispo	October 1999	1991	6	1	62	146	X	X*	
Santa Cruz	February 2001	1993	5	0	95	100	X		
Siskiyou	February 2001	1988	4	2	28	100	X		
Tulare	July 2001	1984	8	0	81	189	X	X*	
Ventura	January 2000	1995	2	3	34 (35 waiting for assignment)	35	X		
Yolo	December 2000	1995	4	4	67	100	X		X (Juv. Drug Court and Family Court)

^a Some programs have volunteers who assist with program functions that are traditionally covered by paid staff.

^b In five of the eight CASA programs serving children in the delinquency system, only children who previously had a CASA in the dependency system are served. These are indicated by an asterisk "*" symbol.

Chapter One

Program Accomplishments

CASA programs in California have accomplished a great deal since their inception more than 20 years ago. Often facing significant hurdles, CASA programs have given a voice to thousands of children in the dependency court system. California CASA programs have mobilized thousands of Volunteers to advocate on behalf of children during an intensely confusing and frightening time in their lives within a system that may be impersonal, slow, and lacking in the financial support needed to provide adequate care. CASA programs also raise awareness within the dependency system and the community about dependent children's unique needs, especially their need for services aimed at helping them live the healthiest lives possible.

California CASA programs visited via the PACR project have accomplishments primarily in four areas:

- Services to children,
- CASA program infrastructure and support provided to Volunteers,
- Interaction and collaboration with the courts and other dependency system players, and
- Community collaboration.

In general, programs that excel in these four areas are strong organizations that provide quality services and enjoy widespread support from community and system partners. The following section highlights accomplishments in each of these areas. There are many accomplishments noted during site visits that are not included here; we have only highlighted the ones that are common to at least four of the 20 programs visited thus far.

Services to Children

Across the board, CASA programs in California provide necessary and important services to children in the dependency system, as well as other court systems such as delinquency, family, and juvenile drug court. CASA Volunteers are providing a voice for children in court, improving the information provided to court officials, ensuring that children's needs are being met, and providing consistency in children's lives. Although it would be impossible to

remove all the confusion and fear a child experiences during his or her time in the dependency system, a CASA's presence can go a long way toward making that time more bearable for the child.

Providing Consistency for Children

Respondents in almost all of the programs visited across the state identify the stability and consistency of the relationships between Volunteers and children as one of the most important contributions Advocates make to children in the dependency court system. These children are frequently moved from one living situation to another, resulting in changes in caregivers, neighborhoods, friends, and schools. In most counties, it is common for a child to have more than one social worker over the course of his or her involvement in the dependency system, and respondents observe that social workers spend very little time with any one child. Individuals interviewed indicate that attorneys also spend only a small amount of time with the children they represent. In fact, respondents in counties where children attend court report that attorneys often do not meet their assigned children until the day of the hearing. On the other hand, Volunteers develop a relationship with each child, explain court proceedings, listen to the child's feelings about his or her circumstances, and spend more time with the child than any other system partner. Furthermore, CASA Volunteers almost always remain on their child's case until its resolution.

In addition to the consistency and quantity of time spent with a child, many respondents assert that the fact that Volunteers do not get paid for their work serves to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of a CASA in the child's eyes. As a result, children are more willing to discuss their circumstances, needs, and feelings with a Volunteer. This may be especially true for older children who recognize that it is not an Advocate's "job" to care about them, and thus the child and CASA Volunteer can develop a mutually trusting and solid relationship.

Increasing Children's Safety and Well-Being

As a result of a Volunteer's investigation and the consistent time spent with the child, respondents believe a child's safety and well-being are increased. As stated above, respondents often report that children are more willing to openly discuss their lives with a Volunteer due to his or her position "outside the system." Furthermore, individuals interviewed report that CASA Volunteers usually speak with all relevant adults in a child's life such as teachers, therapists, foster parents, and often the biological parents. This information, along with other service provider reports, enables Volunteers to make well-informed assessments of whether or not the child's current placement is safe and healthy. It



also gives the Volunteer important insight into the child's service needs. Advocates can then make knowledgeable recommendations to the court regarding children's safety and well-being.

Ensuring Proper Provision of Services

Individuals interviewed report that having a CASA on a case ensures that the child is much more likely to receive necessary services in a timely manner. The court often orders specific services for each child to better meet educational, medical, or emotional needs. However, individuals commonly assert that children without a CASA often go without court-ordered services. Respondents indicate that there are a variety of reasons dependent children do not receive prescribed services, including large caseloads, the minimal time social workers and attorneys spend with children, the lack of adequate funding for children's services, and, in many communities, the lack of available service providers. However, CASAs are often described as "zealous advocates," who, because they are usually assigned to only one or two children, have the time to make multiple inquiries and follow up to ensure service provision.

Additionally, because CASAs have regular and frequent interactions with their children, many respondents say that the CASA provides a "second set of eyes" to assess the child's need for services. A CASA's assessment may help the court identify additional services for the child and ensure that these services are provided.

Ensuring Children's Voices Are Heard in Court

One of the basic tenets of the CASA program is to ensure that a child's voice is heard in court. According to individuals interviewed, most of the CASA programs visited for the PACR project are accomplishing this goal because Volunteers provide detailed, child-centered, unbiased information to the court by appearing in court and submitting written reports about the child for review hearings. As noted above, Advocates usually spend more time getting to know the child and his or her circumstances than the child's attorneys or social workers, and therefore gather more detailed and complete information that is focused entirely on the child's best interests. Respondents report that CASA reports provide an appropriate level of detail that individualizes the case and highlights the particular circumstances of the child.

Expansion of Services to Include Delinquency Referrals

Although the majority of children served by California CASA programs are in the dependency system, nine programs were working with children in the delinquency court system at the time of the PACR visit. Five of the eight programs have CASAs on delinquency

cases only when the child's case crosses over to the delinquency court system. Some respondents state that they like seeing CASAs involved in delinquency cases because the delinquency and dependency systems serve largely the same population. Children who are victims of abuse and neglect may commit offenses that move their cases from the dependency system to delinquency court, and many children whose cases originate in delinquency court show indications of having been abused in the past. Other respondents note, however, that the unmet needs of dependency system children are so great that CASA programs should focus the bulk of its efforts there. Although programs usually do not serve many delinquent youth, several respondents suggest that the Volunteers play a valuable role in the delinquency system.

Helping Children Thrive, Not Just Survive

Respondents report that CASA Volunteers' efforts go beyond ensuring that children's basic needs are met and court-ordered services are provided. Due to Volunteers' longstanding relationships with their CASA children, they are able to play an important role in assisting children to succeed in many aspects of their lives. Respondents note that CASA children often look to their CASAs for advice and guidance and commonly turn to their CASAs in times of crisis. Furthermore, many Advocates are involved in helping children access extracurricular activities, thereby enabling the children to lead a more "normal" life even while in the dependency system.

Some programs serve a large number of older youth, and respondents note that the role of CASA Volunteers working with teens is somewhat different from the role that Volunteers play when working with younger children. Respondents explain that Volunteers working with teens can help them with schoolwork, career exploration, hobbies, activities, and personal growth. For example, CASA Volunteers have helped teens find jobs, camps, and art classes and have helped them apply for scholarships and post-secondary education. Volunteers working with teens may also offer advice and support relating to peer and family relationships, puberty, and the exploration of personal values.

Attention to Educational Needs

Children in the dependency system often experience difficulties in school. Many CASA children have learning disabilities, are in need of special education services, do not have access to a complete set of their school records, or have simply moved from school to school so often that they have not had any consistency in their education. Respondents note that CASA Volunteers can make a major difference in ensuring that children are receiving the support they need to improve academic performance. Some CASA Volunteers play an



educational advocacy role by attending Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, meeting with teachers, becoming surrogate parents, investigating alternative schools, or by otherwise advocating for educational testing and services. Respondents state that this role is important because oftentimes no other adults are addressing the children's educational needs, and children in the dependency court system often have special needs that are not addressed.

CASA Program Infrastructure and Support to Volunteers

CASA programs visited for PACR have made significant gains in developing program infrastructure, including systems for training, supervising, and supporting Volunteers. Additionally, some programs have active Boards of Directors that provide support and oversight. Each of these accomplishments, described below, contributes to CASA program effectiveness.

High Quality CASA Training

According to rule 1424(c)(1), CASA Volunteers are required to attend a minimum of 24 hours of training prior to being sworn in, and the training must include information on a variety of relevant topics. These include:

- Child development and family systems,
- Dynamics of child abuse and neglect,
- Role of law enforcement,
- Role of the child welfare agency,
- Role of the juvenile court and its key participants,
- Dependency law and procedure,
- Introduction to discovery and evidence,
- Court appearances and testimony,
- Ethics, confidentiality of information, and mandated reporting,
- Community resources for children,
- Cross-cultural issues,
- CASA concept,
- Local CASA program,
- Role and responsibilities of the CASA Volunteer,
- Investigation,
- Interviewing,
- Report writing and verification, and
- Advocacy.

Individual CASA programs differ on their training agenda, training schedule, method of presenting information, and the training location. Many individuals interviewed for PACR believe that the CASA program's training in their county is of exceptionally high quality, provides a comprehensive overview of the issues, and adequately prepares Volunteers for service.

In these counties, much of the training material is presented by outside individuals with expertise in a variety of areas, including child development, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, substance abuse, the court process, Child Protective Services' roles and responsibilities, court reports, listening skills, special education issues and IEPs, mental health, and accessing community resources. Outside presenters often include representatives from a variety of community agencies, child welfare department staff, judicial officers, school district personnel, former foster youth involved with CASAs, attorneys, and experienced CASA Volunteers. Respondents note that having outside presenters is a positive aspect of the training as it allows trainees to hear from a variety of individuals throughout training. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for potential Volunteers to meet many of the individuals they will work with once assigned a case, increasing the potential for a positive partnership. Individuals interviewed in many counties believe that hearing from an active, experienced Advocate is a very beneficial aspect of training as it conveys the reality of the volunteer experience.

A few CASA programs are also experimenting with newer training formats, including the Advocate University and a National Training Curriculum developed by the National CASA organization. In some cases, local programs have adopted the entire National CASA curricula, adding only specifics about the local community and system procedures. In other locations, programs have incorporated only portions of the standardized format, picking and choosing those segments that best augment the established curriculum. The Advocate University offers the classes necessary to become a Volunteer in an ongoing, year-round basis with both evening and daytime classes. Every class is offered approximately every eight weeks and is designed to be a stand-alone session because students can take the classes in any order, with the exception of several advanced level classes that have prerequisites.

Rule 1424 requires that potential Volunteers have an opportunity to go to court to observe 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. In one county, after the hearings are completed, all relevant system players (e.g., judge, county counsel, minor's attorney, social worker) stay in the court for a debriefing with the trainees. This gives the potential Volunteers an opportunity to ask questions about the hearing, get to know the key figures, and increase their level of comfort in the courtroom. In one county,



trainees participate in a mock hearing with other dependency system players, and respondents report this is a positive way for trainees to get a clear picture of the court processes and their role within that system.

In addition to hearing from a variety of individuals and observing in court, individuals interviewed report that having ample opportunity to role-play, explore hypothetical situations, and freely ask questions are important aspects to a high quality training program. Experiential exercises are frequently mentioned as effective methods of imparting the training material. For example, one experiential exercise mentioned in many counties is writing a sample court report. Potential Volunteers are given information about a child, and asked to write a draft court report. Trainers then provide feedback on the report to help individuals understand what should be included in a report and therefore what information is important to seek out when performing the investigation. Another example, occurring in at least one county, is that trainees are given a real dependency case (without identifying information) during the first session. At each subsequent training session, the case is discussed in reference to the topics presented during that session, and a new piece of case information is added to the file. This process allows trainees to see the trajectory of a child's life as it unfolds over time and as the child faces different issues. In another county, potential Volunteers participate in the "string" exercise, which respondents report is a powerful way to illustrate the complex system a child faces when entering the dependency court system. The exercise begins with one person standing and holding the end of a string, then the string is handed to each new person or institution that may enter the child's life as he or she moves through the dependency system.

In counties serving children in courts other than dependency, individuals interviewed report that cross training is an important and beneficial aspect of preparing Volunteers as it enables trainees to take cases in any of the courts in which CASAs are assigned. For example, in counties where CASAs are assigned in family court, information is presented on guardianships and family dynamics during divorce. Respondents note that this cross-training is an effective method to prepare CASAs to serve children and youth in any court. Furthermore, respondents say that providing cross-training helps dispel some CASAs' fear of accepting cases in a court other than dependency (e.g., juvenile drug court) due to a lack of understanding about the court process and issues relevant to those children's experience (e.g., youth substance abuse).

Functioning and Supportive Board of Directors

In some of the CASA programs visited for PACR, respondents cite the Board of Directors as a significant accomplishment. In these counties, the Board is active and supportive in a

variety of areas: program governance, overseeing program finances, strategic planning, fundraising, and increasing public awareness of the CASA program.

Each CASA program is a not-for-profit organization and therefore is required to have a Board of Directors governing it and providing fiscal oversight. However, not-for-profit organizations often vary in the role a Board plays. However, a 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, partner requests). One part of providing program oversight is the development of a strategic plan. Many CASA programs have a plan developed, and for most of those, the Board was actively involved in that process. Respondents believe that a Board's involvement is an important component to the development of a strategic plan that reflects program priorities yet considers realistic circumstances facing the program.

In almost every CASA program visited Boards were active in overseeing the programs' finances. At most sites, a financial report is distributed and discussed at each monthly board meeting. There is some variety in the level of detail presented to Board members, but in general, respondents believe that Boards were aware of the program's financial situation. Additionally, most programs have checks and balances in place (e.g., requiring two signatures on checks for major purchases, external annual audits) to ensure appropriate expenditures.

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 alleviate the time and energy staff must expend. Individuals interviewed report that Board members select, plan, and implement fundraising events, preventing program staff from having to take time away from CASA activities to do so. A positive side effect of fundraising events is increased public awareness, and individuals interviewed explain that in counties where board members are active in fundraising, community awareness of CASA programs is improved. Board members in some counties are also very proactive in trying to increase their community's understanding of CASAs and the work they do in dependency court.

As with any organization, CASA programs experience personnel changes. In many counties, during a major personnel change usually with the Executive Director, the Board was reportedly very active in searching for a new Director and at the same time, adequately led the program's day-to-day operations to ensure program stability during the time of change.



Knowledgeable and Dedicated Staff

In all 20 CASA programs visited thus far, CASA staff are visibly committed to the children they serve, the Volunteers they support, and the improvement of the dependency system in general. Program staff consistently receive high praise from respondents. CASA programs often face obstacles when hiring and retaining staff members due to a lack of funding, lack of training available to staff, and the highly emotional nature of the work.. These issues often contribute to a high level of staff turnover. Yet CASA staff members are often described as cornerstones of the program and one of the primary reasons for a program's success. Respondents in several counties specifically mention the Executive Director as being highly professional, visible, dedicated, and respected in the dependency system and the larger community.

Supervision and Support for Advocates

Respondents in several sites explain that an important accomplishment of their local CASA program is providing consistent support and supervision to CASA Volunteers. Individuals interviewed believe this is a crucial component of successful CASA programs, and explain a variety of ways in which programs provide this support.

- Regular contact between Supervisors and Volunteers was reported as the cornerstone of good supervision. In most programs, contact is required at least once a month and many individuals report that there is often more frequent contact, especially during high conflict times in a case. In programs where supervision was mentioned as a significant accomplishment, the monthly required contact is an in-person meeting rather than a phone call. Furthermore, in these CASA programs, Volunteers were fully aware of the requirements regarding regular supervision.
- Another frequently mentioned component to adequate supervision was 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 CASAs 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, in a few counties, Supervisors accompany CASAs to meetings with a child's social worker or attorney for the first time. Another supervisory facet is for Case Managers to sit down with Advocates when they accept new cases to devise a case plan that includes the initial activities the CASA will engage in for the case. This ensures that CASAs have a clear idea of the case priorities and how they should spend their time.

- Assistance with court reports was another supervisory function that respondents believe is very important both to supporting Volunteers and ensuring adequate advocacy on behalf of children. CASAs are frequently a little 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. Respondents note that this process ensures that reports are well-written and contain necessary and useful information about the cases.

In general, in CASA programs with successful supervisory systems, there was effective and regular communication between Case Supervisors and Volunteers, a welcoming atmosphere in the office, and accessibility of staff in emergency situations. Staff is available not only to help CASAs 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.

Interaction and Collaboration with the Court and Other Dependency System Players

CASA programs function in a system that includes a variety of other players: judicial officers; social workers; attorneys for children, parents, and the child welfare department; 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 players in order to adequately represent children's best interests. Although CASA programs must maintain their independence, many respondents report that developing cooperative relationships that facilitate information gathering and sharing is a significant accomplishment of the CASA program in their community. Specific accomplishments in this area are described below.

Court Reports Valued by Judicial Officers

In a majority of CASA programs visited during Phase I and II of PACR, judicial officers reported that CASA court reports are very helpful in making decisions on cases. Reports are



described as containing personal and child-focused information that is not usually available in other reports or court files. According to respondents, there is often more current, detailed, and useful information in CASA reports than social worker reports due to the amount of time Volunteers spend both with children and the relevant adults in children's lives. The CASA report is considered by some to be the court's primary source of objective and neutral information. Furthermore, individuals interviewed note that CASA reports are universally well written and include observation-based recommendations.

Positive Relationship with the County Child Welfare Department

Many CASA programs, at the outset of the program, experienced resistance from the county child welfare department. In some counties, this resistance was reportedly very strong and due to a misunderstanding of CASA Volunteers' roles; fear of being "monitored;" and the perception that Volunteers, as lay people, would not be able to contribute anything helpful to a case. Yet several CASA programs have been able to overcome this resistance and forge strong, positive relationships with the county child welfare unit.

In many of these locales, the CASA program is part of the introductory training for new social workers and county child welfare personnel train prospective CASAs. Social workers are also often invited to participate in CASA in-service trainings. Respondents report that these trainings give each party a much more realistic picture of the roles, rights, responsibilities, and constraints faced by social workers and CASAs alike.

Notification of CASA assignment was mentioned as an important aspect of positive relationships between CASAs and social workers. When a referral is made in open court, if the social worker is in attendance, he or she is aware that a CASA may be assigned. However, at this point, he or she does not know which specific CASA will serve on that case. It is for this reason that programs have protocols for notifying the social worker when an individual CASA has accepted a case, and individuals explain that this can be a crucial step in beginning a case on positive footing. In programs that have forged good relationships with the county child welfare department, notification usually goes a step further than simply sending notification or delivering an official court order naming the CASA assigned. Some programs require Supervisors to call the particular social worker and inform him/her who has been assigned, some require the Volunteer to call, and others recommend that the CASA make an appointment for an in-person meeting with the social worker. Regardless of the actual notification method used, these programs ensure that social workers are informed of every new assignment.

Respondents explain that ongoing communication between CASAs and social workers can help maintain an overall positive relationship between the two organizations, but can also make a difference in a child's case. Due to the limited amount of time most social workers spend with the children in their caseloads, they may be unaware of many details of the children's lives. On the other hand, CASA Volunteers are able to focus on one child at a time, and as mentioned earlier, are often trusted with more access to a child's feelings, thoughts, preferences, and needs. Sharing some of this information—without betraying the child's trust—with the child's social worker can potentially help in making appropriate decisions on behalf of the child. Furthermore, sharing information can further the impression that CASAs are there to help a child and will willingly share important information with relevant parties to ensure that appropriate decisions are being made. The communication between CASAs and social workers is especially beneficial when a case is particularly difficult when timely and accurate information may make an immediate difference in the actions taken.

Another important facet of positive relationships between CASA organizations and child welfare departments is the availability of CASA program staff when disagreements or misunderstandings occur. Respondents report that it is important for CASA staff to respond quickly, appropriately, and effectively when conflicts arise.

General Support for the CASA Program from Dependency System Players

Attorneys, child welfare department social workers, foster family agency personnel, judicial officers, foster parents, and other dependency system participants express support for CASA programs in numerous locales. Respondents often report that having a CASA program improves the functioning of the dependency system, particularly for those children with CASAs who benefit from increased advocacy for appropriate placements and services. CASAs are also credited with introducing system-based improvements resulting from the new perspectives, additional information, and neutrality they bring to the process.

Attorneys who represent children explain that they have little time to meet with individual children, and often only meet with them immediately preceding a court hearing. As a result, the attorneys are dependent upon others to gather information about the child's needs, interests, and circumstances. Furthermore, attorneys often comment on the lack of up-to-date information provided in a social worker's report, particularly in counties where the county child welfare caseloads are very high or where social workers commonly receive waivers from the requirement to see each child monthly. Attorneys representing biological parents are often supportive of the CASA program due to its practice of providing objective, unbiased information regarding the child's best interest. Advocates are encouraged by CASA programs to meet with biological parents to understand their point of view, and parent attorneys report



feeling that while some individual CASAs seemed to have an “anti-parent bias,” overall, in many counties, CASAs make objective assessments of the case.

Foster parents frequently mention that CASA Volunteers are usually very accessible to them, and as a result, they feel comfortable sharing information about the child for which they care. Foster parents commonly complain that although foster children spend most of their time with them, they are not often asked about how the child is functioning in school or at home. Yet Advocates, in many CASA programs, are consistently seeking feedback from foster parents as to the child’s current circumstances.

Collaboration with the Community

CASA programs in many counties enjoy a high level of support from other community organizations, as well as the general public. 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.

Partnerships with Community Agencies

CASA programs in some counties have developed a number of successful formal and informal partnerships with other community agencies and organizations. Respondents explain that these CASA programs are very adept at working with a variety of individuals and groups in the community, such as mental health professionals, education officials, health care providers, and legal professionals. These partnerships allow the CASA program to better meet the needs of children and youth as well as explore potential, nontraditional funding sources. Individuals interviewed assert that the CASA program in their county brings a unique perspective and knowledge base to the community’s attempts to improve conditions for children and youth, and the program’s active involvement is a very important component in community initiatives or programs. Additionally, respondents think that entering into formal partnerships with community agencies, particularly when the collaboration results in grant monies being awarded, is an effective way for the CASA program to diversify its funding base.

Strong Community Support

For many CASA organizations visited for PACR, community support is a significant achievement, affecting general program awareness, recruitment, and funding. Some CASA programs are part of larger umbrella organizations that have a long history of serving children and families in the community, and this association has given them a head start in making the community aware of CASA activities. As described earlier, some programs have been fortunate to have strong, active Boards that engage in numerous strategies to increase community awareness and support. Additionally, in some locales, CASA programs have employed a variety of strategies to garner support from the public. Recruitment and fundraising are often coordinated efforts. Respondents explain that, while CASA programs initiate some activities for the sole purpose of raising funds, these events often serve the added purpose of raising awareness about child abuse and neglect, the program, and volunteer opportunities. Similarly, recruitment activities can often lead to fund development, and all of these activities lead to greater community awareness and support.

Chapter Two

Innovative Strategies

California CASA programs have developed many innovative strategies to serve children in their communities. At each of the programs visited thus far in the PACR project, the PACR Team identified at least one, and usually many more, inventive approaches the CASA organization was implementing to better meet the needs of the program, Volunteers, children, the dependency system, and the community in general. Although CASA program activities are governed by rule 1424, each program is managed by an independent organization and has developed according to local conditions. As a result, there is considerable variation in the operational practices of CASA programs. Additionally, many programs face similar challenges but have developed different strategies for addressing them. This section focuses on program-specific strategies that may be useful to other 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, Volunteer training, Volunteer support, collaboration, program referrals, Volunteer recruitment, fundraising, and program evaluation. This section 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 in direct response to the circumstances at play in a particular county and therefore may not be suitable for replication elsewhere. Furthermore, 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.

Although these are cited as examples of innovative strategies, 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.

Services to 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 90

to 150 children awaiting 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. It also has small meeting rooms available for CASAs and attorneys to speak privately with children.

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 will explain the court process using a private interview room and visual aids for the younger children. Another role is to accompany the children up to their hearings and bring them back to shelter care after the hearing is complete. The third responsibility CASAs have is simply to be available to listen to children who are very anxious, emotionally distraught, or concerned about the hearings.

Respondents overwhelmingly feel 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 CASAs 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, but who are still interested in supporting children.

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 can be assigned. COC are recruited from the larger CASA population, and successful candidates are those with extensive experience, demonstrated good judgment, and fast assessment and perception skills.



Educational Surrogate Program: San Diego County

The Educational Surrogate Program was established to address children's educational needs. Volunteers for this program, while undergoing the same training as CASAs, are expected to make less of a time commitment to their children and are expected to focus specifically upon the children's educational needs. Educational Surrogates have the same rights as CASAs and the same rights as parents in the educational process and are expected to see their children at least every other month. These Volunteers ensure that the children eligible for special education have Individualized Education Plans, attend IEP and other school meetings, and ensure that schools are aware of—and address—the children's educational needs. Educational Surrogates typically work with two to three children. Individuals interviewed state that many children in the dependency system have unmet educational needs, and Educational Surrogates play a vital role in ensuring appropriate educational services.

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 12-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.

“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 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.

Suitcases for Kids and Gift Certificates for Youth: Merced County

Child Advocates of Merced County (CAMC) implemented a *Suitcases for Kids* initiative to give out suitcases to children in the dependency system who are in out-of-home placement. Many children do not have anything in which to put their clothes or other belongings when they are moved from placement to placement. Additionally, youths who are aging out of the foster care system often do not have access to a suitcase when moving out on their own. CAMC received funding from the Family Resource Council to purchase 250 suitcases for children. Socks and toothbrushes were placed in each suitcase and then distributed through the child welfare department, foster parents, and the Independent Living Program.

Child Advocates of Merced County also assists youth in the delinquency system who are living in an out-of-home placement. These youth are often moved to a new placement without an opportunity to pick up clothes or other personal belongings from home. As a result, placements must try to provide appropriate clothing and toiletries to the youth. To meet this need, CAMC obtained funding to purchase \$50 to \$100 gift certificates from a department store, which youths use to purchase clothing.

Institution of 0-5 Infant and Toddler Program: Tulare County

Starting in December 2000, CASA of Tulare County began its 0-5 Program, a specialized program to serve dependent children ages zero to five. Using state Prop 10 money, earmarked for community efforts to promote early childhood development, the program serves children at the onset of their contact with the dependency system. Emphasizing prevention over intervention, the program hopes that early involvement in a dependent child's life will minimize the number of placements, help address developmental needs, and have a greater impact on his or her life than later intervention. CASA collaborates to serve the Tulare infant and toddler population with the Family Resource Education and Empowerment (FREE) coalition, a group of 25 other community organizations that also receive Prop 10 funding. The 0-5 Program makes extensive use of FREE partners, who provide direct mental health and other child development services to CASA children through referrals. In addition to collaboration with community service organizations, the Infant and Toddler program has solicited donations, including strollers, car seats, clothes, and shoes from a local department store.

Juvenile Drug Court CASAs: Yolo County

The Yolo County CASA program has expanded into the newly established juvenile drug court. CASA has been involved since the beginning of the program and has a staff person



committed to this court. Youths may participate in drug court if it is their first offense and it did not involve violence; additionally, dependent youths are not eligible. Youths range in age from 14 to 18 years of age, and are in the drug court anywhere from six months to 1.5 years, depending on how long it takes them to successfully complete all of its components. The CASA Drug Court Case Manager is a standing member of the treatment team that meets prior to every court hearing to discuss each case appearing that day. It is during these discussions that decisions are usually made about appointing a CASA. The primary criteria for appointing a CASA to a drug court youth is the level of parental support, as treatment team members, including attorneys, judicial officers, CASAs, and treatment providers indicate that parental support is one of the most important predictors of success. Respondents assert that having a CASA on a case is often the difference between a youth's success and failure in the program, and express the wish that there were many more CASAs available to serve the youths. In addition to serving individual youths in the juvenile drug court, individuals interviewed explain that the CASA program has taken the lead on coordinating Family Fun Nights. These events, such as bowling, picnics, and a basketball tournament, are held monthly and are open to all drug court youths, their families and CASAs, and the treatment team members.

CASAs in Guardianship Cases: Yolo County

The family court in Yolo County has begun to assign CASAs in guardianship cases. Respondents report that CASA program staff and the primary family court judge met numerous times to plan for this expansion into family court to ensure a well thought-out protocol for appointments. A Volunteer Supervisor is responsible for overseeing CASAs appointed in family court. Individuals explain that the guidelines suggest that CASAs be appointed to children being cared for by very young guardians, often siblings or elderly guardians, usually grandparents. Additionally, CASAs may be assigned in cases where the judge or other parties to the case simply have an uneasy feeling about the guardian's ability to adequately care for the child, and CPS involvement might be necessary to ensure the child's safety and well-being. CASAs' primary responsibilities in guardianship cases are to ensure that court-ordered services are provided to the child, explore the safety of the guardianship placement, and report to the court about any issues that might arise with the child's living arrangements. CASAs make regular reports to the court just like those in dependency court and also appear, with the Volunteer Supervisor, in court during the case hearings. However, the CASA Volunteer is appointed only for a six-month period. Individuals interviewed suggest that many of the guardianship cases in family court are teetering on the edge of child welfare department involvement. Respondents also indicate that the CASA is often the only "outsider" who becomes a part of the child's life and can speak to the court on behalf of his or her best interests.

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 uses CalWORKS (TANF) monies. The CASA program and the Mental Health Association created a six-week supplemental program that emphasizes education, employment, and accessing community resources, and is open to individuals up to 21 years of age. A CASA program staff person developed a curriculum for the project that includes facilitator and youth workbooks. Transportation is provided for the youth participants via a limousine, as this was more economically efficient than renting a van, and respondents note that it might be an incentive for youths to enroll and continue participation in the program. The program plans to appoint a CASA to each participant who does not already have one assigned.

Partnership with the Learning Advantage: Yolo County

The Learning Advantage is a private practice with 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 have received assistance between one and four times a week. Individuals interviewed feel very positive about this partnership and believe it has improved the academic experiences for the children involved. Because of its success, respondents mention interest in continuing this partnership and seeking additional funding.

Services Provided to Children on CASA's 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. 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 needs flagged in the file with blue tags and educational needs flagged with yellow tags. If the child has special education needs, a pink form in the file summarizes his/her educational assessment and IEP. The medical screening looks for general health issues as well as whether



a child is on psychotropic medication. If follow-up is needed, CASA program staff monitor the case to ensure that the child's immediate needs are addressed.

Institutionalizing the Youth Empowerment Program: San Bernardino County

Traditionally, the San Bernardino CASA program (SBCAPI) receives a majority of referrals for children with cases that are considered to be the most complex and problematic in the county. Nearly all are in permanent placements outside of the home, many in institutional settings. Most have severe behavioral problems and are older children in their teens.

To address the special needs of these children, SBCAPI instituted a special initiative called the Youth Empowerment Program (YEP). YEP is funded under the Multi-Disciplinary Child Abuse Prevention Project. It is designed for older children, ranging in age from 14 to 18 years, who must begin to address issues related to aging out of the dependency system. YEP is a 12-month program based on the 100-page *Life Plan* manual and four audiocassette series. Activity modules are interactive, involving the child and CASA 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, the youth receives a \$500 stipend for work clothes and other job-related expenses. As a part of the grant requirement, youths undergo pre- and post-testing to evaluate the program's impact. Tests include: Beck Depression (BDI-II), Anxiety (BAI), Suicide Scale (BSS), Career Occupational Preference System, Wide Range Achievement Test -3rd Edition, and an interview with a clinical psychologist. All SBCAPI's teenaged children and their CASAs must participate in YEP, although those already employed are excused.

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. SFCASA 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 CASAs 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 CASA training and organize continuing education sessions on dependent children's health to sensitize CASA Volunteers to these concerns.

Monitoring CASA Cases: Tulare County

In addition to standard CASA services for dependent children, Advocates and staff in Tulare County also monitor cases. Cases are considered to be on monitor status if the child's placement stabilizes, if the risk to the child is reduced in some other way, or if a new case requires some attention, but not the full range of CASA services. The Executive Director or the Program Manager must approve cases before they can be placed on monitor status. Face-to-face visits with children on monitor status are less regular than for normal cases. However, phone contact is required once a week. Unless a crisis occurs, at which point the case is changed to regular CASA status, monitor cases require less time and advocacy from the Advocate or staff member than normal cases. Respondents suggest that by offering the two levels of service, CASA of Tulare County is able to effectively use their Volunteer and staff resources to serve more dependent children.

Volunteer Training

CASA programs are required to train Volunteers a minimum of 24 hours prior to their assignment on cases. All CASA programs visited for PACR exceeded this requirement, and as was described in Chapter One, respondents explain that the initial training provided to Advocates is excellent. CASA Volunteers are also required to engage in an additional 10 hours of continuing education annually. To meet both of these requirements, programs have developed unique training mechanisms, including modifying the traditional training format, using creative role play techniques, and offering a variety of opportunities for continuing education.

Advocate University: San Diego County

In March 2001, Voices for Children began a new training model called Advocate University (AU). Previously the program used a more traditional, intensive training model five times a year. Advocate University offers the classes necessary to become a volunteer on an ongoing, year-round basis with both evening and daytime classes. Each course ranges from 1.5 to 4.5 hours, and every course is offered approximately every eight weeks. Volunteers can complete the training in as few as eight weeks or in as many as 24, although the program recommends completing the training in 16 weeks. Trainees sign-up for classes at registration sessions held every Monday. The agency has redesigned each class to be a stand-alone session (with the exception of several advanced level classes that have prerequisites), so that students can take the classes in any order.



Respondents report that under the previous training curriculum classes used to be as large as 50 people, but now classes are only 15 to 25 people. The smaller class size enables staff to get to know the potential Volunteers better and observe them more carefully. Voices for Children is also able to train more people because the schedule is more flexible for potential Volunteers. Furthermore, respondents note that the year-round schedule has evened out the workload for all staff. Volunteer recruitment and interviewing, training, and case assignment are conducted on a continual basis rather than concentrated in certain months.

Example Case and Mock Trial used for Volunteer Training: Siskiyou County

Siskiyou County uses two training strategies that are frequently mentioned by respondents as being particularly successful in preparing CASAs for service. These include a mock trial and the use of a hypothetical dependency case throughout the entire training course. During the first night of training all individuals are instructed to examine the a case that includes only a portion of the child's story. Throughout the course of training, additional information about the child's case is given to trainees. During each training session, the case is discussed openly in the class to highlight important issues and to provide an opportunity for trainees to explain their thoughts about what should happen in the case, as well as ask questions. Respondents report this is a highly effective technique for the following reasons: 1) it provides a concrete example for the entire class to discuss; 2) it allows potential CASAs to really see the "ups and downs" of a real-life case and therefore dispels myths and opens eyes; and 3) trainees apply the sometimes abstract and theoretical principles they have learned to a real child's case, giving them a practical understanding of the subject matter.

The culmination of the training is a mock trial, consisting of a contested hearing of the case, held on the last day of training. Respondents overwhelmingly report that the example case exercise is a crucial part of the training process and that they are highly supportive of its continuation. All dependency system partners participate in the exercise including the judge, county counsel, attorneys, child welfare department social workers, and the CASA program.

Annual CASA Conference: Orange County

CASA of Orange County holds an annual CASA Conference for Volunteers. The all day in-service training is aimed at addressing common issues faced by CASAs and their CASA 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. Breakfast and lunch are provided to conference participants by area restaurants.

Notification about Continuing Education Compliance: Orange County

Rule 1424 requires that all CASAs complete 10 hours of in-service training, or continuing education, each year. In Orange County, attending monthly in-service workshops, borrowing from the CASA library and video library, and attending the annual CASA conference are all activities that count towards the required 10 hours. In-service hours are tracked in the program's computer system. Halfway through the year an administrative assistant generates postcards that remind CASAs 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.

In-service Meeting with Referee: Los Angeles County

CASA Volunteers are required to complete 10 hours of continuing education each year. The satellite CASA office in Lancaster developed an innovative opportunity for CASAs to meet this requirement. The program invited the referee who hears dependency cases to meet with a group of CASAs for a question-and-answer session about the court process. The meeting was reportedly very open, with CASAs able to ask the referee any question about the legal system. Respondents report that this was an extremely useful meeting, and resulted in an increased understanding of the dependency court system among Volunteers. Respondents also explain that the meeting lessened CASA Volunteers' anxiety levels about appearing in court. Furthermore, individuals interviewed feel that it benefited the working relationship between the program and the court, as well as raised general awareness for both the referee and the CASAs.

Executive Director Participation in Management Course: Yolo County

The Executive Director of the Yolo County CASA Program attended a management course for executive directors of non-profit organizations in the Bay Area. The course, coordinated by the Sacramento Regional Foundation's Nonprofit Resource Center, runs for 11 months and focuses on the nuts and bolts of not-for-profit management. Each participant is assigned a mentor and a consultant who donates a specified number of hours to the participant's agency. The CASA program used the consultant to implement a program assessment and design a strategic plan with the Board. Respondents report that the management course not only



improved the functioning of the Executive Director, but also provided a no-cost avenue for specialized consulting services.

Supporting Volunteers

Providing support and supervision to CASAs is a crucial component of any CASA program. As explained in Chapter One, several programs have developed strong systems for Volunteer supervision. Some have been particularly innovative in creating systems to ensure that CASA Volunteers are conducting themselves in a manner consistent with their mandate. Examples of these strategies are highlighted in this section.

New Case Orientation Checklist: Kern County

Each time a new CASA is assigned a case, the Kern County CASA program's Case Manager utilizes an Orientation Checklist as a way to ensure all necessary information is covered in preparing that CASA for the assignment. Many respondents express confidence in this process because it gives Advocates a great deal of necessary information at the crucial first phase of case assignment. The Checklist covers items such as: the appointment order, transportation policies, monthly logs, the minute order, program personnel policies, and safety information. It also ensures that the Case Manager gives the new CASA business cards and CASA brochures, a Health and Education Passport binder, and a "Question of Balance" book that is used to help CASAs maintain appropriate boundaries.

Case Review System: Contra Costa County

The Contra Costa County CASA program designed a case review system to prepare Volunteers for court appearances, provide them with legal counsel and access to a therapist, and offer Volunteers an opportunity to gain support from fellow Volunteers. The program holds four case review meetings each month. Each case review meeting is jointly facilitated by the Case Supervisor, a pro-bono attorney, and a pro-bono therapist. 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 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.

Introductory Meetings with Social Workers: Monterey County

In Monterey County, once a CASA is appointed to a case, the Case Manager schedules a meeting between herself, the social worker, and the newly appointed CASA to meet one another and review the case. The social worker usually brings a copy of the child's file to this meeting and discusses the current status of the case. The Volunteer, the Case Manager, and the social worker also have the opportunity to strategize about how they can best meet the service and emotional needs of that particular child. Regular communication between the CASA and the social worker usually continues after this initial meeting.

Case Support Meetings: Nevada County

Three times each month, a pro-bono professional therapist facilitates a group meeting for CASA Volunteers. These meetings are an opportunity for Advocates to process their cases, identify potential boundary issues, and receive support from their peers and the therapist. Respondents report that common themes discussed include working with biological parents who are "acting out" and are difficult for Volunteers to work with, emotional reactivity, family systems, objectivity, and boundary issues. There are two local therapists who volunteer their time to alternate facilitation of the case support meetings. In addition, both are available via telephone for individual consultations if necessary. During the meetings, cases are discussed without using names or other identifying information so that confidentiality is preserved. Respondents report that there are approximately four to five CASA Volunteers who attend the sessions regularly, with others coming when difficult issues arise on their case. Either the CASA Program Manager or Case Manager are always in attendance at the meetings. Many individuals interviewed assert that these meetings are a crucial support mechanism for CASA Volunteers and are effective in helping them work more effectively on behalf of children.

Courthouse Satellite Offices: San Diego County

San Diego County hears dependency cases in four courthouses. In addition to Voices for Children's main administration office, the agency has an office in the central courthouse, smaller offices in two of the three satellite courthouses, and a table at the third satellite courthouse. At least one Program Supervisor works out of the central courthouse office each day, and Program Supervisors are present in the satellite courthouse offices on an as-needed basis when Volunteers have hearings in those courts. Volunteers check-in with the Program Supervisor on duty at the courthouse when they arrive for a hearing and turn in a summary afterwards. Program Supervisors can answer any questions or concerns and can accompany



the Volunteer to the hearing if the Volunteer wishes. Staff presence at the court helps staff keep abreast of case developments and provides Volunteers with support and supervision throughout the court process.

Mentor Program: San Diego County

In addition to other supports available to CASAs in San Diego County, individuals interviewed note that Volunteers receive support through the agency's mentor program. Program staff members assign experienced, exemplary Volunteers to serve as mentors to new Volunteers. Mentors contact their mentees once the new Volunteer completes training. Some new CASAs make extensive use of their mentors while others do not need this resource. Mentors sometimes accompany new CASAs to court for the first time or to meetings with other system players. 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.

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's next court report is due. The CASA's Supervisor documents this information so that the Advocate can concentrate on the hearing and participate as needed. The Supervisor gives a copy of the form to the Advocate 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.

Volunteer Recognition Efforts: Yolo County

The CASA program in Yolo County uses a number of activities to recognize Volunteers' work in service to children. As with many CASA programs, it has an annual Volunteer recognition dinner to express its appreciation to the Volunteers. Another recognition method is to buy a prominent space in both community newspapers to publicly thank Volunteers. The space is used to list each CASA's name who served a child in the past year. Respondents note that placing the ad is a unique way to ensure that everyone in the community knows who the

CASA Volunteers are and publicly recognize the hard work they do on behalf of children. Another strategy the program uses is to write an individualized letter to each CASA when his or her case is closed. The Executive Director, in collaboration with the CASA's Volunteer Supervisor, composes the letter and highlights the service the CASA provided.

Collaboration

Many CASA programs have engaged in collaboration efforts with system partners, including courts, attorneys, social workers, and foster parents. 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. Examples of these strategies are highlighted in the following section.

CASA Training for System Partners: Sacramento County

To better orientate dependency system partners with the CASA program, Sacramento CASA sponsored a luncheon for dependency system partners. The inaugural luncheon was held at the Department of Health and Human Services, in close proximity to both the courthouse and the county child welfare department, and drew 25 participants including judicial officers, attorneys, and social workers. CASA staff introduced attendees to the role of the CASA, the referral process, and the number of Volunteers and children served by the program. Many respondents indicate that the luncheon format educated partners about CASAs and their work, increased the program's visibility, and encouraged collaboration between partner agencies.

Weekly Meetings with Children's Attorney: Siskiyou County

In Siskiyou County, the CASA Program Manager instituted weekly meetings with the attorney who represents virtually all dependency children in the county. During each meeting, the Program Manager and the attorney discuss each case that will be heard in court the following week. The purpose of these meetings is to: 1) ensure open lines of communication about what will be presented in court, including the CASA's recommendations; and 2) try to resolve any differences or issues that may be present. Respondents indicate that these meetings have improved the relationship between the CASA program and the attorney. Additionally, individuals interviewed note that children's interests are more readily recognized as a result of this initiative.



Presentations to Foster Parents: Imperial County

CASA of Imperial County staff make presentations to potential foster parents during their initial training course. Staff provide information on the role and responsibilities of a CASA Advocate, including their duty to investigate, spend time with a 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 mediators 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 Voices for Children 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 Voices staff and Volunteers.

Cross-Training of CASA Volunteers and Social Workers: Ventura County

To build a better awareness of each other's roles, staff from the CASA program and the Child and Families Services Division (CFS) within Ventura County's Human Services Agency participate in each other's training sessions. The CASA program invites CFS social workers to present during the initial training of CASA Volunteers. Social workers describe their responsibilities to the child, the child's family, and the court. They also explain how the CASA can best work with social workers, emphasizing mode and frequency of contact, types of information useful to the social worker, and reasonable expectations of CFS' service provision.

In turn, CASA staff, typically the Case Manager, participates in the initial orientation and training of CFS social workers. The CASA program has been involved in these training sessions for more than 15 years. The CASA presentation lasts about two and a half to three hours and covers an overview of the CASA program, the role and responsibilities of the CASA, how the social worker and CASA can best work together, and avoiding potential points of conflict.

Managing Conflict with Ventura County's Human Services Agency: Ventura County

The Ventura County CASA leadership and management staff from the Human Services Agency (HSA) developed a four-step protocol for handling conflict between the two agencies: 1) direct communication between the CASA and social worker, 2) communication between the CASA and social worker facilitated by the CASA's supervising Case Manager and/or social worker's supervisor, 3) mediation of communication by a contracted third party, and 4) arbitration by the dependency court judge. Both the CASA program and HSA are committed to preventing conflicts from rising to the fourth level.

Referred to as the "troubleshooter," the mediator is one of two individuals that can provide conflict resolution services for an hourly fee, initially paid for by CASA-Ventura and then reimbursed by HSA. Two troubleshooters are available, both with licenses in counseling and social work (LCSW), past employment with HSA, and experience in mental health. CASA-Ventura and HSA formalized their agreement outlining use of the troubleshooter in a joint Memorandum of Understanding

Development of the "A-list": Tulare County

CASA of Tulare County and Child Welfare Services (CWS) established the "A-List," an informal effort by the Executive Director and CWS's Deputy Director, to elicit positive comments from social workers, CASAs, and foster parents about each other's performance. The "A-list" was developed to further strengthen the relationship between the CASA program, CWS, and the foster parent licensing agency and to publicly recognize the good service each agency provides to dependent children.



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.

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 CASA assignment, and follows the criteria carefully. Most individuals interviewed are able to explain the program's primary criteria for accepting cases, which is whether or not a CASA 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 CASAs 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 other major criteria, in addition to whether a CASA can make a difference on a case, are described in the CASA Program's Supervisor's Handbook and are listed below:

- Severe physical/sexual abuse cases where reunification is unlikely;
- Special needs cases (e.g., educational, developmental, medical, mental health) that involve complicated service plans or conflicting opinions as to assessment and/or treatment for the child;
- Cases involving multiple placements of a child 10 years of age or younger, who is legally freed for adoption or whose parents have consistently failed to show any progress or interest in meeting treatment goals for family reunification;
- Cases where a very young child's mother is a chronic substance abuser and the child has already had multiple placements or has siblings in the system where past reunification efforts have failed, and early attention to permanency planning is indicated; and
- Cases that require only short term CASA involvement to resolve or clarify issues by researching and information gathering.

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 parties, children who might benefit from a CASA

but for whom no CASA 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, using program priority assessment criteria, at the time of detention 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 CASAs. 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.

Visible Waiting List: Tulare County

The Tulare County CASA program maintains two waiting lists, one for the Infant and Toddler program and one for older children, which are maintained on the program's databases as well as on large erasable boards in the CASA program offices. To ensure confidentiality, the program lists on the public board only the child's first or last name, 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 CASAs 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 would benefit the child. Sometimes parties will oppose the appointment of a CASA, 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.

Volunteer Recruitment

Because CASA programs rely on unpaid community advocates, Volunteer recruitment is a necessary and on-going task for most California CASA programs. Building a solid volunteer base is only the beginning. Programs must also strive to recruit minority and male Volunteers, as well as those able to work with children with special needs. CASA programs across the state have developed a variety of strategies to attract appropriate Volunteers. Examples of these strategies are described below.

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 youths 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 a quarter 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 CASAs trained in the issues of emancipation.

Latino Outreach Coordinator Position: Santa Cruz County

In 1999, the 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, Santa Cruz, Latino staff organization. She also gives presentations about CASA 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.

Classified Ads: Imperial County

The Imperial County CASA program places advertisements in the classified employment section of the newspaper. Respondents report that this mechanism has been the most successful in reaching potential Volunteers. The program also utilizes television and radio advertisements, but still feels that placing a want ad in the newspaper is their most successful recruitment strategy.

Utilizing a Clipping Service to Monitor Publicity: San Bernardino County

San Bernardino's CASA program's Volunteer Recruiter/Screeners/Trainer manages the program's public relations activities. On average, she releases ads for Volunteer recruitment to more than 20 local papers each week. She believes 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 led 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.

Recruiting CASAs 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 the last training class learned about the program through the Internet. Internet recruitment is conducted through two main mechanisms. The first is SFCASA's Web site, 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 CASA 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 site to learn about various volunteer opportunities in their geographic area. The site then matches individual interests with volunteer opportunities.



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 burden of being able to articulate to potential funders the goals and workings of CASA 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.

“Point of Entry” POE Strategy to Raise Funds and Awareness: Alameda County

The Point of Entry (POE) fundraising strategy aims to educate people about the CASA program and secure ongoing financial commitments from donors. Board members and all Alameda CASA program staff participate in the POE. In Alameda County, the POE consists of an introduction, in which statistics about the number of children in the dependency system at the national and local level are read to the audience, a screening of a video produced by National CASA program describing the role of the CASA, and a demonstration of the dependency court proceedings.

The demonstration portion of the POE is the focus of the event. Staff and Board members role-play a mock dependency hearing. Through the course of the presentation, staff are able to illustrate the competing demands on system partners. A Board member, who is also a CASA Volunteer, plays the part of the CASA, and explains that the Volunteer is the only system participant whose main concern is for the child. Audience members are constantly reminded that there are children in need of support even in their own backyard. Each audience member is given a plaster mold of a hand of a child who is currently in the Alameda dependency system. They are then asked to imagine that the hand they are holding is real, and that they are responsible for helping that child navigate through the frightening and confusing system.

Holiday See’s Candy Sales: Nevada County

During the Easter and Christmas holidays, the Child Advocates of Nevada County program rents a storefront from which to sell 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 a CASA. Furthermore, individuals interviewed believe that the

fundraiser is an effective way of raising community awareness about the Child Advocates program.

Highly Developed Fundraising Activities: Orange County

CASA of Orange County has a strong focus on fundraising, with two staff members, the Board's Fund Development Committee, the Advisory Board, and two auxiliary volunteer groups (Friends of CASA-CAST and CASA Kids Team) all dedicated to raising funds for the organization. One local organization also donates to CASA by organizing events for Volunteers and their CASA children. CASA of Orange County utilizes fundraising events, individual and corporate donations, grants, and in-kind contributions to sustain program operations. Respondents report that the program does a good job of fundraising, that it is not reliant on only one source of income, and that certain fundraisers are established community events. Major fund raising projects include:

- *Celebration of Children*: An annual black-tie event that typically generates more than \$300,000 for CASA of Orange County. It includes a cocktail party; travel auction; honorary ceremony celebrating the work of a corporate Children's Champion, Judicial and Corporate Honorees, and a CASA Volunteer of the Year; a prize drawing; and live entertainment.
- *Friends of CASA-CAST*: An auxiliary group of Volunteers, who donate their time to CASA by raising funds through two annual events. Friends of CASA-CAST also sponsors Volunteer and child events.
- *CASA Kids Team*: A group of volunteers that raises funds to support monthly outings and activities for CASA Volunteers and their CASA children. Some of these events include: spaghetti and bingo nights, pizza and bowling, baseball games, and luncheons. The largest activity sponsored by this group is the Back-to-School event. The local shopping mall plays host to CASAs and their children, each of whom is supplied with a backpack filled with school supplies, a \$100 gift certificate to spend on items they need for the coming school year, and vouchers for lunch in the food court.
- *Junior League*: This local women's organization has sponsored a number of events for CASAs and their children.
- *Tina's Fund*: A fund that was developed by a CASA in honor of her CASA child Tina, who died at the age of 16 after a long illness. Tina's Fund is described as "a way to meet the needs of abused children and help restore some of the magic they've lost." CASA



Volunteers can request money from this account to provide for special items, services, or activities that are not routinely available to children in the dependency system.

“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 Volunteers, and other interested individuals. The group organizes fundraisers for the CASA program and volunteers at other fundraisers where CASA 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 CASA program. The “Friends” raised \$20,000 during its first year and has plans to continue its fundraising efforts this year. Respondents note that, in addition to the Board of Directors, this group can raise funds, thus providing the organization with additional fundraising support.

Thrift Store Provides CASA Funds: Siskiyou County

The CASA program in Siskiyou County operates the Broadway Flea, a large thrift store, and is largest source of funding for the program. Clothes, furniture, and other household items are donated by community members and are then sold to the general public. With the exception of a full-time manager, the store is staffed entirely by volunteers. Most of the store volunteers are not CASAs. Respondents note that the store is a unique way to involve individuals with the Choices for Children program without becoming regular CASA Volunteers. Additionally, the store is used to post information about the CASA program, including upcoming trainings. In 2000, the store raised more than \$100,000.

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, many are not traditionally involved in children’s organizations, 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 CASA 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.

Evaluation

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

Case Closure Evaluations: Nevada County

Child Advocates of Nevada County has a standardized form that it uses 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 a survey of dependency partners that it plans to conduct annually. The survey was sent to judges, attorneys, social workers, Advocates, therapy organizations, and other agencies with which the program collaborates. Survey questions are aimed at gauging Volunteer and dependency partner satisfaction with the program and its services, as well as identifying areas in which the program could improve.

Outcome Evaluation: San Diego County

Voices for Children hired a research firm to conduct an outcome evaluation of its CASA program. The evaluation will include a review of the court files for a sample of CASA clients and a comparison of children not yet assigned a CASA; interviews and focus groups with judges, attorneys, Volunteers, social workers, foster parents, and foster youth; and surveys of Volunteers, social workers, and foster parents. The study will examine interim outcomes including the formation of a beneficial relationship between the CASA and child; emotional, knowledge and/or life enrichment benefits for the child; and provision of relevant information for the court to make their decisions. The study also will begin 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 Scale⁴. 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 is entered into an Excel spreadsheet, and staff can track changes over time for particular children.

⁴ 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.

Chapter Three

Program Challenges and Technical Assistance Needs

As evidenced by the long list of accomplishments and the numerous innovative strategies employed by CASA programs across California, programs are in large part functioning well in spite of the many obstacles they face. However, each program visited for the PACR project was facing challenges, some of which were internal issues and others that stemmed from historical practices of the dependency court system. This section highlights challenges found to be common across many CASA programs. Not every program was struggling with each of these issues, and many have successfully overcome the issues listed below. Furthermore, in most instances, CASA programs are not having difficulties with any particular issue that prevents the normal functioning of the program; the challenges listed in this section are simply those that many CASA programs are facing as they strive to reach their full potential.

As mentioned in the Introduction, once a PACR visit has been completed, a report is written and distributed to the CASA program. To assist with overcoming challenges, the California CASA Association works closely with the program to develop a plan for addressing the technical assistance needs described in the PACR report.

Collaboration with Dependency System Partners

Although many local programs have built strong relationships with system partners, as described in Chapter One, many others across the state are experiencing difficulties in collaborating with partners and working within established, traditional system mores. CASA programs are usually the newest system player and respondents often report that there is a great deal of initial resistance to the program. Many attorneys, social workers, and judicial officers are unsure of the role a CASA is supposed to play in the dependency system and are therefore unclear about how CASAs will fit into the existing structures. In fact, respondents explain that in many counties, dependency players sometimes feel threatened by the CASA program because it brings an extra set of eyes to each case, thereby increasing the level of scrutiny. Some county programs have not clearly established processes and procedures that could improve the working relationships with partners, particularly around issues of program referrals, notification of a CASA appointment, and the dissemination of court reports. Each of these issues is discussed in more detail below.

Clarification of CASA Role

Individuals interviewed during PACR visits are often confused about what CASA Volunteers' roles and responsibilities are, as well as what rights they have as defined by rule 1424 and local rules of court. Rule 1424 states that the duties and responsibilities of a CASA are as follows:

- (1) CASA volunteers serve at the discretion of the court having jurisdiction over the proceeding in which the volunteer has been appointed. A CASA volunteer is an officer of the court and is bound by all court rules.

- (2) A CASA program shall develop and adopt a written description of duties and responsibilities, consistent with local court rules, which shall address at least the following:
 - (A) Supporting the child throughout the court proceedings;
 - (B) Explaining the court proceedings to the child;
 - (C) Establishing a relationship with the child to better understand the child's needs and desires;
 - (D) Reviewing available records regarding the child's family history, school behavior, medical or mental health history, etc.;
 - (E) Identifying and exploring potential resources that will facilitate family preservation, early family reunification, or alternative permanency planning;
 - (F) Explaining the CASA volunteer's role, duties, and responsibilities to all parties associated with a case;
 - (G) Communicating the child's needs to the court in written reports and recommendations;
 - (H) Ensuring that the court-approved plans for the child are being implemented;
 - (I) Investigating the interests of the child in judicial or administrative proceedings outside of juvenile court;
 - (J) Communicating and coordinating efforts with the child's social worker, probation officer, and attorney; and
 - (K) Other duties and responsibilities as determined by the presiding juvenile court judge or a designee.

In most cases, dependency system partners (e.g., attorneys and social workers) were the most confused about what a CASA really is, although in some instances, there was confusion even among the program staff and Volunteers. One major area of misunderstanding is the Advocate's role in conducting an independent investigation of a case. Respondents often viewed the Advocate as someone who simply acted as a mentor to a child and therefore had



no reason to interview others in the case or access the child's records. As a result, when a CASA makes efforts to investigate the case, others involved in the case may feel uneasy about the Advocate's access to information, or feel as if the CASA is "stepping on their toes."

Another significant area of misunderstanding relates to the types of recommendations a CASA includes in her or his court report. It is an Advocate's responsibility to present the court with accurate, objective information about the child's circumstances, needs, and preferences as well as present recommendations as to the best interest of the child. Respondents explain that as a result of Advocates' duty to tell the court what they believe would be in the best interest of children, their recommendations are sometimes inconsistent with what the law would allow. For example, if an Advocate believes that it would be in a child's best interest to remain in a relative's home permanently rather than reunify with the biological parent, it is the Advocate's duty to convey that opinion to the court. However, if the biological parent is meeting his/her responsibilities regarding the reunification plan, the court must reunify the family. Individuals interviewed during PACR explain that dependency system players are often unaware of or confused about a CASA's duty to present what they believe is in the child's best interest, regardless of whether or not it follows normal protocols for case progression.

Relationship with Child Welfare Departments

As mentioned earlier, CASA programs are usually the newest organizational participants in the dependency system and as a result, other participants are often reluctant to include them in the process. In the majority of CASA programs visited for PACR, there was initial resistance to the CASA concept by the county child welfare department. People interviewed explain that child welfare personnel are resistant for a variety of reasons, including a lack of clarity about the CASA's role on a case; misinterpreting the CASA concept as something instituted to monitor child welfare personnel's activities; a feeling that a CASA is "just one more person to deal with;" and the belief that CASAs, as lay people, do not have the training to make a positive contribution to the court process. Child welfare personnel in many counties across the state, when interviewed for PACR, convey this lack of understanding and confidence in the CASA program. As a result of these attitudes, the relationship between CASA programs and child welfare departments is often strained.

Child welfare personnel are often unclear about the actual role an Advocate plays in the dependency system. Although establishing a relationship with a child is one of the primary responsibilities of a CASA Volunteer, building the relationship is part of a larger process, which includes investigating the child's circumstances, advocating for court-ordered services, and informing the court of the child's wishes and what is in his or her best interest. In those

counties where CASAs have traditionally focused on the relational and mentoring aspect of being a CASA, there is usually little resistance from the child welfare department. The situation is reversed when a county CASA program emphasizes the investigative or advocacy role of a Volunteer.

Resistance to the CASA's involvement in a case can manifest itself in a variety of ways. There is often a lack of ongoing communication between Advocates and social workers assigned to a particular case. Individuals interviewed during PACR explain that CASA Volunteers and social workers may be unwilling to share information about the case with each other, and that in some instances, social workers are unwilling to return CASA phone calls. In a few counties, the child welfare department is unwilling to participate in the initial CASA training process or share court reports with the CASA program.

In some counties the conflict rests at a program management level, and individual CASA Volunteers and social workers are able to work well together. In other programs, the reverse is true—front line workers are unable to work together productively even while management believes there is adequate collaboration.

Clarification of CASA Program and Referral Priorities

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. In a few counties visited for PACR, respondents were not aware of or supportive of the program's priorities for the types of cases it takes, resulting in confusion and occasional resentment about CASAs being assigned to particular cases. This was a particular problem when the program's staff and Volunteers were unaware themselves of the program's priorities.

Notification of CASA Appointment

Rule 1424(f)(7) requires that all parties to a case be notified in writing when a CASA Volunteer is assigned to a case. However, many CASA programs have not developed a process for ensuring this occurs and as a result, relevant individuals are not always notified about CASA assignment. In a few programs, this responsibility is informally transferred to Volunteers rather than program staff, resulting in inconsistent notification. Some programs have a policy of only notifying certain parties or are not routinely notifying all parties (e.g., child's attorney, social worker, parent's attorney). An additional problem occurs when CASA programs do not notify partners of the specific individual assigned on the case as the



Advocate but instead only distribute the court order assigning the CASA program overall. This can lead to problems when Volunteers try to access records and do not have a court order with his/her name on it, or when Volunteers try to communicate with attorneys or social workers and they are unaware of that Volunteer's right to discuss the case.

Volunteer Supervision

During the PACR visits, inadequate supervision of Volunteers was repeatedly identified as a program challenge. Indeed, Volunteer supervision is at the heart of the CASA concept, as programs were developed to utilize community volunteers to advocate on behalf of children rather than paid, professional staff. Yet in some CASA programs, supervisory protocols have not been designed, Volunteers are inconsistently fulfilling their responsibilities regarding supervision, and there are too few supervisory staff positions. Inadequate supervision has led to a number of respondents indicating that dependency system partners can begin to doubt the quality or quantity of supervision, and therefore the competency of CASAs.

Policies Regarding Frequency and Mode of Supervisory Meetings

Most CASA programs have written policies regarding how often Volunteers and Case Managers/Volunteer Supervisors are required to meet. At a minimum, rule 1424(g)(1)(C) requires that a face-to-face meeting occur at least every 60 days, and most CASA programs require more frequent contact. However, a few programs have not established a policy requiring regular supervisory contact. In addition, many CASA organizations have not specified whether or not supervision must occur in person or may be done via telephone or email contact. In counties that lack a program supervisory protocol, CASAs do not have a clear understanding of the importance or usefulness of supervision.

Inconsistent Fulfillment of Supervisory Requirements

Even in programs where there is a written policy regarding supervision, there is often wide variation in the level of compliance with the policy. In several counties, Case Managers depend on the Volunteers to contact them with questions and concerns rather than having a proactive approach to supervision. As a result, if a Volunteer does not initiate contact with the program, supervision does not occur. In other counties, it is up to the Volunteer to keep track of time spent in supervision; if she/he does not submit monthly tracking logs, the program may not be aware of whether or not supervisory requirements have actually been met.

A few counties offer Advocates monthly mandatory support meetings that fulfill supervisory requirements. Yet respondents report that attendance at these meetings is often inconsistent, implying that some Volunteers are not fulfilling mandatory requirements.

Respondents interviewed for PACR explain there are several consequences of inadequate supervision. The most severe is that Advocates may not be fulfilling their responsibilities to children. In one or two counties, Case Managers are not even sure that Volunteers are actually meeting with their assigned children on a regular basis. There are a few cases where a CASA has stopped performing her duties but has not informed the CASA staff, yet due to the lack of supervision, program staff are unaware of this and are also unaware that the child has stopped receiving services. Another consequence of inadequate supervision is that Volunteers report feeling unsupported and “on their own” in working on a case. This may lead to high Volunteer turnover.

An additional issue with inadequate supervision is that if a Volunteer is acting outside of the bounds of his or her mandate as a CASA, it may exacerbate a child’s already difficult situation, particularly concerning placement. Respondents in a number of counties explain that sometimes CASAs can get too emotionally involved in their cases, resulting in compromised objectivity. In these cases, foster parents, group home personnel, or a child’s biological parents may become resistant to working with a Volunteer due to their inability to maintain appropriate boundaries. In programs that have sufficient supervision, Case Managers are aware of these issues and can take the necessary steps to help the Volunteers maintain objectivity.

Lack of Adequate Staffing Levels

CASA programs, like most not-for-profit organizations, are frequently in need of more financial support. As a result, staffing levels are often less than ideal, and this can lead to inadequate supervision of Volunteers. Case Managers are often tasked with supervising Volunteers as well as handling many other program tasks such as recruitment, screening, training, database management, and community networking. Additionally, in some counties, CASA program staff are responsible for acting as Advocates for specific children when there is a referral and no Volunteers are available. This practice not only cuts into the time a Case Manager has for supervising Volunteers, but may also confuse dependency system partners’ understanding of the unique roles of a Case Manager and CASA Volunteer.



Volunteer Training

Overall, respondents report that the Volunteer training offered to potential CASAs is of high quality and covers appropriate material (see Chapter One). However, in every program visited, respondents made suggestions about additional topics that might be added to the initial training or via continuing education opportunities. These topics included:

- Boundary issues;
- Communicating with birth and foster parents;
- Constraints facing child welfare social workers (e.g., reunification, case timelines);
- Legal requirements in dependency cases; and
- Special education and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).

Board of Directors

Every CASA program visited has an official Board of Directors. As mentioned previously, many of these Boards are active and provide a high level of guidance, support, and oversight to the CASA program. Yet in more than a few programs, the Board is not as well-functioning as it needs to be to provide adequate oversight and support to the Executive Director and the program overall. There are four areas in which Boards appear to be struggling in the CASA programs visited for the PACR project, and each of these is discussed in more detail below. One issue that is important to note is that in some cases, the Board is well aware of the challenges it is facing, and in other cases, the Board appears to be unaware of its responsibilities to the program. In these cases, there is often a historical precedent for the Board not engaging in certain activities, such as fundraising or strategic planning. One of the primary consequences of this lack of involvement is that many Executive Directors report feeling unsupported and overburdened, and are therefore at high risk of burnout.

Fiscal Oversight

Rule 1424(i)(4) requires that CASA Boards provide fiscal oversight to the CASA program. 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. In many counties, the Board of Directors is not aware of the financial status of the program. This may be due to the lack of adequate reporting systems or simply that the Board has traditionally left all financial decisions to the Executive Director. Most programs require at least two signatures on any check/expenditure

more than \$500, but in some cases, this is the only method used to oversee the financial dealings of the CASA organization.

Fundraising

Unfortunately, in many counties, the CASA program staff undertake the bulk of fundraising efforts while members of the Board of Directors are relatively uninvolved. In these programs, the Executive Director and other program staff often are responsible for developing, planning, and executing the events. These activities are undertaken in addition to their regular program responsibilities, and often results in a huge amount of time spent on fundraising efforts. In a few counties, the Board develops an idea for a fundraising event, but the staff are the ones who carry out the plan. In a handful of counties, the Board's only involvement is attendance at the event or selling tickets to it. Both of these situations result in staff spending a great deal of time and energy on raising money instead of serving children and supporting Volunteers.

Strategic Planning

Many CASA Boards have not yet developed a strategic plan for the organization. Others have simply signed off on a plan developed by staff or the Executive Director. Although that is not necessarily a problem in and of itself, in some cases, it indicates that the Board is not fully engaged in the organization's plans for the future. Additionally, it is a Board's responsibility to provide strategic vision and guidance to the organization and if the Board is not involved in the development of a strategic vision, it is not fulfilling this responsibility.

Volunteer Recruitment

Volunteers are difficult to recruit regardless of the specific recruiting organization. Furthermore, CASA programs ask individuals to donate a huge amount of time to a potentially emotionally draining experience, making it even more difficult to recruit volunteers. There are additional inherent challenges, such as asking Volunteers to attend court hearings, which may be intimidating to many; requiring a large amount of training time, preventing many working individuals or those with high levels of family responsibilities from participating; and asking them to work with vulnerable children who have experienced maltreatment, which is a very sensitive and difficult subject for many people to face. As a result of these challenges, CASA programs are universally having a difficult time recruiting Volunteers. CASA programs are having particular difficulty recruiting individuals from ethnic minorities, men, and individuals willing or able to work with children with special needs.



Rule 1424(b)(1)(D) and (E) require that programs develop a written plan to attract these hard-to-recruit individuals. Although many programs recognize the importance of recruiting from these groups, most do not have a written plan for it. The lack of a written plan hinders staff's ability to effectively recruit minorities, men, and individuals who can work with children with special needs. Developing a written plan may enable a the program to more clearly articulate its goals and outline realistic steps necessary to achieve the recruitment of minorities, men, and people willing and able to work with children with special needs.

Continuing Education

CASA Volunteers are required to complete 10 hours of continuing education annually to remain up-to-date on program policies and issues relevant to the children they serve. However, numerous CASA programs have a difficult time encouraging Volunteers to fulfill this requirement. Several are experiencing problems because Volunteers do not complete the monthly logs that enable the program to track continuing education hours (at least those hours fulfilled in activities not held at the CASA offices or with CASA staff present).

In some counties, respondents indicate that there is a lack of adequate continuing education opportunities. In these locations, individuals interviewed report that CASAs are required to attend CASA-sponsored workshops once a month, regardless of the topic, to fulfill their requirements. In these counties, the program has not developed a mechanism for Volunteers to meet the continuing education requirement via other training opportunities such as attending workshops offered by other agencies, watching videos, or reading issue-relevant books.

Volunteer Recognition

Because CASA programs are established in service to dependent children, staff are primarily focused on ensuring that their Volunteers are attending to the child's needs. As mentioned above, CASA programs are also often operating with minimal staff and have difficulty covering essential programmatic areas such as supervision and recruitment. In addition, programs struggle in recognizing the contributions of their Volunteers. 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 Volunteers feel appreciated for their hard work.

Access to Legal Advice

Rule 1424(g)(1)(E) recommends that each CASA program retain legal counsel or obtain pro bono attorney services for its Volunteers. Yet in some counties, Volunteers and program staff periodically sought legal advice about a child's case from minors' attorneys, county counsel, or parents' attorneys in the system. Some counties have attorneys serving on their Boards. Programs are encouraged to recruit independent legal counsel to prevent conflicts of interest either with dependency participants or Board members.

Additional Factors that Affect Program Success

While the PACR Teams were able to analyze the programs according to the study objectives, the Teams also found that certain system or community factors, often beyond programs' control, can affect programs' success. A number of these issues were common challenges to local programs and are described more fully below.

Frequent Rotation of Presiding Judges: The Judicial Council recommends that judges serve a minimum of two years as presiding juvenile judge. The two-year term is advised as it allows judges adequate time to establish themselves in the role and provide meaningful guidance to the juvenile court. However, the recommended two-year term is not followed in every county. Even in those counties that do use a two-year rotation, it is often an inadequate amount of time for judges to familiarize themselves with CASA programs and develop strong working relationships.

Overburdened Dependency System: Dependency system partners universally suffer from high caseloads and minimal resources. Judicial officers, attorneys, and social workers alike do not have the luxury to spend enough time focusing on the particulars of each dependent child's case. In fact, this is the reason why CASAs are a vital partner in the dependency system. However, because their partners are often stretched too thin, CASA programs can be challenged in their attempts to build collaborative relationships. Scheduling regular meetings, trainings, and staffings with dependency partners is a daunting task for many programs.

Inadequate Program Funding: Like many not-for-profit organizations, local CASA programs must often keep themselves afloat with minimal funds. For the most part, local CASA programs visited focus the resources they have on serving as many children as they can. While this emphasis on service delivery remains true to the mission of local programs, it



often means that there are few resources left to hire an adequate number of staff and engage in sophisticated outreach and recruitment efforts.

Partner Opposition to CASA Involvement: Most CASA programs are well-respected institutions within the dependency community; however there are some instances where partners have strong resistance to CASA involvement. CASAs' volunteer status and lack of formal training are common complaints from opponents of CASA. In addition, other detractors do not understand the formal role CASAs play in a dependent child's case. While CASA programs can address opposition by engaging in education and training of partner organizations, this approach can take many years to build trust and capacity, and many more to establish solid working relationships.

Lack of Volunteers: As described earlier, recruitment is a challenge for many CASA programs. Building a solid volunteer base, let alone a diverse one, is a constant struggle. While developing and implementing clear, articulated plans for recruitment can help focus a program's outreach efforts, the realities of contemporary volunteerism make CASA recruitment particularly difficult. A number of factors contribute to the lack of potential Volunteers: CASA roles and responsibilities are many, and require a significant time and emotional commitment by unique and talented individuals; a decline in non-working women has meant a significant decrease in the pool of likely CASA Volunteers; and a myriad of other volunteer opportunities and outreach efforts vie for people's time and create stiff competition for volunteers.

Conflicting Assignment Priorities: In some cases, the local CASA program's internal priority for case assignment may conflict with court or other partner preferences. For example, a court system may only assign CASAs to long-term placements, leaving Volunteers with a primarily mentorship role to play with the child, while the CASA program focuses on advocacy. CASA programs can work with partners to establish a mutually beneficial assignment protocol for the county, however, in the end, programs are obliged to provide their services as prescribed by the local courts.

Geographic Size: CASA Volunteers are often required to travel long distances to fulfill their responsibilities. Hearings, child visits, school meetings, IEPs, mediations, doctor's appointments, supervisor check-ins, continuing education classes, and partner staffings all require CASAs to be physically present. In large counties, the time spent getting to these engagements can discourage volunteering, or even worse, discourage the fulfillment of Volunteer responsibilities.

Chapter Four

Capacity to Track Program Data and Possible Outcome Measures

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.

While on site, the PACR team asked respondents to identify potential outcome measures, data collection methods, and types of respondents most able to gauge program performance. Across sites, numerous respondents express reluctance to place too much emphasis on outcome measures for dependent children due to the numerous factors that shape a child's life and because isolating the effect of a CASA is viewed as a nearly impossible task. Furthermore, individuals interviewed indicate that it would be very difficult to identify the impact a CASA program has on the dependency system in general.

Across the state, respondents universally agree that it would be useful to survey or interview dependency system participants, such as judicial officers, attorneys, foster parents, and especially the children involved to obtain their feedback about the impact of the CASA program. Additionally, in several sites respondents suggest that any study undertaken should include a random assignment or comparison design, comparing outcomes for children with a CASA and those without, to more accurately determine the impact of having a CASA in a child's life. Furthermore, respondents across the state emphasize the need to conduct longitudinal studies because so many of the effects of having a CASA in a child's life are not realized until adolescence or even adulthood. In one site, a few respondents suggest conducting a cost-benefit analysis to examine the program costs and financial savings to the county, court system, and children and families when CASAs are involved in children's lives.

Respondents routinely mention two types of indicators to measure. One relates to the functioning of the CASA program and the actual activities CASAs are involved in on behalf of a child. As seen in Table 2 below, the most commonly suggested program indicators are the number of CASA Volunteers trained and assigned to a child and the number and type of contacts between an Advocate and his or her assigned child (both mentioned in nine sites).

The second type of indicator mentioned by respondents relates to actual child-level outcomes. In 14 out of the 21 programs visited, individuals interviewed recommend tracking children's school performance (i.e., attendance, grades, scores on standardized tests, and graduation rates). Another child outcome frequently mentioned is children's mental health functioning and emotional well-being, as well as their general level of adjustment to life. The number of dependency system placements, as well as the length of time of child is in the system prior to a permanent placement, are frequently cited as an important outcomes to track when gauging a CASA program's impact. Many respondents report that having an Advocate assigned to a child often results in more appropriate placements and therefore fewer placement disruptions.

Table 2
Performance Indicators

Program Indicators	Counties Suggesting
Number of CASA Volunteers trained and assigned to a child	9
Number and type of CASA contact with each child	9
Number of children served	4
Number of times CASA recommendations are adopted by the court	4
Number of CASA Volunteers resigning prior to case closure	3
Number and nature of meetings with caretakers/adults in child's life	3
Timeliness of court reports (number of days submitted prior to hearing)	3
Child's case plan goals are met	3
Length of time children stay on the wait list	2
Number and nature of correspondence with social workers	2
Change in timing of referrals, shifting to early assignment	2
Number of times a court report is submitted	1
Number of times the CASA assigned to a child changes	1
Number of CASA appearances in court on the child's behalf	1
Number of CASA Volunteer hours dedicated to advocating for the child	1
Number of ethnically diverse and male Volunteers	1
Number of referrals to CASA program	1
Length of CASA Volunteer service to the program	1
Length of time CASA is on a case	1

Table 2 (continued)

Program Indicators	Counties Suggesting
Child-level Indicators	
School performance (grades, graduation rates, attendance)	14
Number of placements	12
Child's mental health and emotional well-being, including self-esteem and social adjustment, depression, assertiveness	12
Number of children crossing over into delinquency	9
Number of permanent placements (length of time until permanency achieved)	8
Number of case-related services the child receives	7
Length of time in foster care	6
Number of appropriate reunifications	5
Number of re-entries into the dependency system	4
Number of sibling visitations when child placed separately	3
Post-emancipation homeless rates/housing	3
Substance use	3
Child's attitude toward future, school, family	3
Child's physical health	2
Employment	2
Pregnancy rates	2
Peer relationships	2
Child involvement in extra-curricular activities	2
Gang membership	2
Frequency of running away	1
Child hygiene practices	1
Anxiety level of child in court	1
School disruptions (changes in school)	1
College attendance rates	1
Family functioning	1
Number of CPS report(s)	1

Although measuring outcomes has many potential benefits, program staff and stakeholders often view it as a difficult, time-consuming, and expensive process. The PACR field study should be viewed as a first step in beginning the discussion of outcome measures that can be used by local programs. Identifying appropriate indicators is difficult when many of the factors influencing the program's effectiveness are out of the program's control. Additionally, stakeholders' opinions on appropriateness of indicators will vary according to CASA program priorities, local conditions, agency affiliation, and personal experience. The field study provides a framework for understanding the various perspectives and conditions to be considered in developing outcome measures. More investigation is required in order to identify the most appropriate and feasible indicators measuring CASA programs' contributions statewide. Furthermore, CASA programs vary in their ability to collect data, as discussed in the following section.

Capacity to Track Program-Related Outcomes

Only one of the 20 CASA programs visited for PACR does not regularly utilize a computerized database to track program data. The other 19 were using either COMET (10 programs), CASA Manager (eight programs), or database systems created specifically for the CASA program (one program). Programs vary in:

- Types of information kept electronically;
- Method of data entry (frequency, how current it is, who enters it);
- Ability to retrieve information or print reports for various purposes;
- Use of the data collected to review program activities and make program decisions; and
- Comfort level using data management systems.

Eight CASA programs were just beginning the process of using a computerized database system at the time of their PACR visit, and 11 were using their systems consistently. In most programs, a variety of personnel enter and access data stored in the database, including Case Managers, Volunteer Coordinators, Executive Directors, Volunteer Recruiters, clerical staff, and interns. Twelve programs report that they use the information to monitor the program's activities and progress toward goals as well as for writing grants or supplying required information to funders or collaborating partners. On the other hand, three of the programs visited thus far indicate that they use the information collected for grant-writing purposes only rather than internal program monitoring.

Most CASA programs keep the following Volunteer information electronically: demographics, Volunteer status (in training, active, inactive), current assignment, and training completion date. Additionally, the majority of CASA programs keep the following information on children in a database: demographics, current placement, current child welfare department social worker, CASA assigned to case, and court hearing dates.

Universally, CASA staff are ill-equipped to fully utilize the program's data system. Most had not received any formal training on either COMET or CASA Manager. Several staff members comment that participating in an initial formal training on the particular system in use would have been extremely helpful and also want to see more ongoing training opportunities so that they are equipped to take full advantage of the system's capabilities.



An additional problem with data collection and reporting is that the database systems being used are difficult or impossible to customize to accurately reflect an individual program's information needs. Many CASA programs have specialized activities and COMET and CASA Manager are ill-equipped to store information unique to those activities. Furthermore, programs often have specialized reporting requirements for funders or collaborating partners, and would like to be able to generate standard reports for these purposes. CASA staff explain that both CASA databases are not easily programmed to produce customized, automated reports.

Chapter Five

Compliance with Rule 1424

One of the objectives of the PACR field study is to document instances where CASA programs are out of compliance with rule 1424.⁵ Once a PACR visit and subsequent reports are completed, the program is required to modify its policies and practices to bring it into compliance with the rule. To assist programs with reaching compliance, CalCASA offers programs technical assistance in the specific areas documented in the PACR reports.

Rule 1424 contains more than 100 compliance requirements and recommendations. The CASA programs visited thus far are compliant in the vast majority of these. Yet there are a few areas of noncompliance noted in each of the programs visited, with many programs struggling with the same issues. Table 3 displays the compliance issues for the 14 programs visited in Phase II of the PACR project. As seen in the table, the most common areas of noncompliance are the lack of annual CASA Volunteer evaluations and the lack of a written recruitment plan focusing on minority communities and Volunteers able to work with children with special needs. Regarding recruitment, most of the programs out of compliance are well aware of the need to recruit a more racially and ethnically diverse group of Advocates and are making efforts toward that end. However, most of these same programs do not prioritize the recruitment of individuals willing or able to work with special needs children, even though a disproportionate number of children in the dependency system statewide have special needs.

⁵ Although documenting compliance with rule 1424 was an original tenet of the PACR project, it was not a focus during the initial six site visits. Therefore, these six programs are not included in the analysis for this section.

Table 3
Rule 1424 Compliance Issues (for 14 Phase II CASA Programs)

Rule 1424 Requirement	Programs out of Compliance
Annual evaluation of each CASA Volunteer.	11
Written, focused recruitment plan targeting all racial, ethnic, linguistic, and economic sub-groups, as well as individuals who are competent to work with special needs children.	10
Supervisors personally meet with Volunteers during regularly scheduled case conferences (recommended to occur at least every 60 days).	5
CASA Volunteers should participate in at least 10 hours of continuing education each year, and programs are required to track compliance.	5*
A written plan for effective and efficient fiscal control.	4
A written plan for effective and efficient program management.	4
A procedure for written notification that a CASA has been appointed to a case, and that all persons entitled to notice of the hearings are notified in writing of the CASA's appointment.	4
A custodian of records maintains the Volunteers' and children's case files in a confidential and secure area on the program premises (programs allowing CASAs to retain confidential case file information in their home).	3
Screening procedure for prospective Volunteers include a personal interview.	1
The development of a procedure for reviewing grievances of CASA Volunteers	1
A written plan for the removal, resignation, or involuntary termination of a CASA Volunteer.	1
A CASA program under the umbrella of a larger agency develop an Advisory Council.	1
Collaborate with the presiding juvenile court judge to establish local rules of court pertaining to the CASA program.	1
A written plan for Volunteer supervision.	1

* Two programs were not offering enough opportunities and 3 were not tracking hours

In addition to the compliance issues noted in Table 3, nine of the 14 programs visited during Phase II had problems with their Volunteer and child case files. Rule 1424 requires inclusion of certain information in the files. To document that programs were keeping this information, during the site visit, the PACR Team reviewed at least five Volunteer files and five child files. The following information was missing from several of the files reviewed:

Table 4
Case File Issues

File Issue	Programs out of Compliance
Volunteer Files	
Proof of continuing education compliance	7
Proof of updated car insurance	4
Copy of current driver's license	2
Fingerprint information	1
Copy of annual Volunteer evaluations	1*
Child Files	
Contact logs	4
Minute orders	3
60-day review form	3
Social worker reports	2
Case plan	1

* Only two CASA programs consistently conduct annual Volunteer evaluations and one of these does not place a copy in the Volunteer's file.

Appendix A

CASA Program Descriptions

Alameda County CASA Program

The Alameda County CASA program became an official program of the Alameda County Superior Court in the late 1980's. It was established through the combined efforts of a county attorney, who was in search of a mentoring program for a client in the dependency system, and the presiding judge at that time. The CASA program remained under the jurisdiction of the Superior Court until 1995, when it moved to the Department of Probation. In 1998 the Social Service Agency took over responsibility for the program. Shortly after the completion of the PACR Team site visit, the Alameda County CASA program moved under the organizational umbrella of the Department of Health Care Services.

At the time of the PACR visit in January 2001, Alameda County CASA was serving 235 children in the dependency and delinquency systems using 203 active Volunteers. There were 275 children on the waiting list. The CASA program serves mostly school-age and older children: 1 percent was zero to five years of age, 22 percent were six to 10 years old, 54 percent were between the ages of 11 and 15, and 23 percent were between 16 to 18 years old.

CASAs in Alameda County serve children in the delinquency system, but generally only those that cross over from the dependency system. From time to time a judicial officer will refer a child from the delinquency system to the program, however, in the recent past this has been rare. Delinquency cases account for between 5 and 10 percent of Alameda County CASA's caseload.

In January 2001, the Alameda County CASA program had a total of one part-time and five full-time staff members. The full-time staff members included: the Executive Director, Case Manager/Special Assistant, Program Developer/Trainer, Volunteer Recruiter, and Program Manager/Case Coordinator. The Data Management Assistant was part-time.

Alameda County CASA has two advisory bodies: the Advisory Board, which establishes governing policies and procedures and ensures that the program remains on track programmatically and fiscally, and the Friends of CASA Board of Directors, which assists with fundraising and community awareness.

Contra Costa County CASA Program

The Contra Costa County CASA program began in 1978 as a mentoring organization and was established as a not-for-profit organization called CASR (Court Appointed Special Representatives) in 1981. At the time of the site visit (August 2000), the program was serving approximately 130 children with 92 CASA Volunteers. Most children served by the program were teens: 56 percent of current CASA children were 12 to 18 years old, 32 percent were six to 11 years old, and 12 percent were zero to five years of age. The program does not serve infants and serves very few toddlers. The program maintains a wait list of approximately 40 children who have been referred to the CASA program by the juvenile court. CASA of Contra Costa County is focused primarily on providing high quality CASA services to children in the dependency court system, and to a lesser extent, to providing services to children in the delinquency system.

The Contra Costa County CASA program has four staff members: an Executive Director, a Training Coordinator, a Case Supervisor, and an Office Manager. The Board of Directors consists of nine people. The Board's responsibilities are typical of nonprofit boards: it has fiscal oversight; makes broad policies; oversees program operation; hires, fires, and evaluates the Executive Director; and participates in fundraising and community awareness efforts.

Court Appointed Special Advocates of Imperial County

Court Appointed Special Advocates of Imperial County was founded in 1994 as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation. It had its first CASA training in June 1994 and accepted its first assignment in July 1994. Since that time, the program has trained 136 Volunteers and has served approximately 285 children. In January 2000, the time of the PACR visit, there were 46 active Advocates serving 94 children in the dependency court system and one child who had transferred into the delinquency court system. CASA serves children of all ages, from newborn infants to 17 years.

In addition to the basic CASA services being provided to children, the Imperial County CASA program engages in three specialized activities. These services include: a surrogate parent program to support children's educational needs, serving children who cross-over into the delinquency court system, and an Infant/Toddler Demonstration Grant that focuses on moving infants and toddlers into permanent placements within 18 months of entry into the system.



Imperial County has three paid full-time staff members and one part-time staff member. The full-time staff members include: the Executive Director, the Infant and Toddler Demonstration Supervisor, and one Case Supervisor. The Administrative Assistant works part-time. There is a nine member Board of Directors that establishes governing policies and procedures, provides fiscal oversight and fund-raising assistance, and develops the program's five-year strategic plan.

Court Appointed Special Advocates of Kern County

Court Appointed Special Advocates of Kern County was founded in 1993 as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation. It had its first Volunteer training in June 1994 and accepted its first assignment in September 1994. Since that time, the program has trained 138 Volunteers and has served approximately 325 children. At the time of the site visit (February 2000), there were 64 active Advocates serving 117 children in the dependency court system. CASA of Kern County maintains a waiting list of Advocates who have completed training and are waiting for case assignment. At the time of the site visit there were 14 Volunteers on this list.

CASA of Kern County serves children in the dependency court system, although there has been some discussion about serving children in family court and the juvenile delinquency system. CASAs were rarely assigned on cases involving infants and toddlers.

Kern County has four paid full-time and two paid part-time staff members. The full-time staff members include: the Executive Director, two Case Managers, and an Office Manager. The Volunteer Coordinator works part-time, as does the Data Manager who maintains the CASA Manager database. There is a 15 member Board of Directors that establishes governing policies and procedures, provides fiscal oversight and fund-raising assistance, and develops an annual strategic plan.

Lassen County CASA Program

The Lassen County CASA Program was incorporated as a registered 501(c)(3) in the early 1990's. After approximately four years in existence, organizational and personnel problems led to the program's dissolution. However, the presiding judge of juvenile court, as well as a few other dependency system players, remained committed to the CASA concept and approached Lassen Family Services (LFS) about restarting the CASA program. Lassen Family Services has been providing services in the community since 1979 and operates a

variety of programs, including a crisis line, domestic violence and sexual assault prevention and shelter, parenting education classes, youth violence prevention, and substance abuse prevention. In June 1996, the CASA program restarted as a component of LFS. In September 1996, LFS held a CASA training for 15 CASA volunteers.

During 2000, 21 CASAs served 42 children in the dependency system. At the time of the site visit in September 2001, 20 children were being served by 19 CASAs. The Lassen County CASA program provides traditional CASA services to children in the dependency system.

Three Lassen Family Services (LFS) staff members work primarily on the CASA program and two staff members work with the program on an as-needed basis. The regular CASA staff include a Program Coordinator and two Assistant Coordinators. Providing support on an as-needed basis are the LFS Executive Director and the Finance Manager. Lassen Family Services has an eight member Board of Directors that oversees program functions and finances and supervises the Executive Director.

Los Angeles County CASA Program

The Los Angeles County CASA program began 20 years ago, and is located in the Children's Court Building in Monterey Park. It was started when the presiding juvenile court judge and the administrator of the Los Angeles County Courts applied for grant money to set up a Guardian Ad Litem program in the county. The CASA program opened a satellite office in Lancaster, a community located approximately 75 miles northwest of Monterey Park, in 1997. A Program Specialist under the leadership of the Monterey Park office staffs this office.

The Los Angeles County CASA program served 831 children in the dependency system in 1999. The program serves children primarily in the dependency system, although if a child moves into the delinquency system, the CASA will remain on the case until the child's dependency jurisdiction is dismissed. At the time of the site visit (September 2000), there were approximately 313 Volunteers assigned to 500 cases. More than a quarter of children with CASAs were zero to 5 years old, half were between the ages of six and 12, and the remaining quarter were 13 years and older.

In addition to basic advocacy services, the Monterey Park office has added specialized programs to support children in the dependency system. One is the Children's Court Assistant (CCA) program. In Los Angeles County, children over the age of four attend each of their court hearings. In the special area where children wait for their hearing, CASA Volunteers meet with children to support them during the process. Another special program is placing



Volunteers at the MacClaren Children's Shelter, the emergency shelter for children, where approximately 160 children reside. CASAs meet with children there to determine what happened at the previous placement and whether any of the child's belongings were still at that placement. In addition to these programs, both Los Angeles County offices have put a special emphasis on meeting the educational needs of children in the system.

The Los Angeles County CASA program has a total of 18 full time staff members in the Monterey Park and Lancaster offices: an Executive Director, Assistant Director, Recruitment and Training Coordinator, ten Program Specialists (who are also known as Case Supervisors), and five administrative staff.

The staffing structure in Los Angeles County is different from those in most California CASA programs. Most of the program's staff members are employees of the Superior Court of Los Angeles County. However, three Case Supervisors, the Recruitment and Training Coordinator, and one administrative position are funded through the Friends of Child Advocates, the fundraising Board for the program. Friends of Child Advocates was created in 1983 specifically to raise matching funds for the Superior Court in order to keep the CASA program operating. It currently has 14 members and is chaired by a professional fundraiser. The Board is not involved in setting policy or program oversight, but has developed a strategic plan that is updated annually in collaboration with the Executive Director.

Child Advocates of Merced County

The Child Advocates of Merced County (CAMC) program began in May 1996 and accepted its first assignment in October of that year. There had previously been a CASA program in the county, but it stopped receiving referrals due to difficulties with its Executive Director. After that program ended, a judicial officer asked the new and current Executive Director if she would be willing to start a new program, and several previous Board members as well as judicial officers were supportive of the new effort.

Since CAMC's inception, it has served 209 children with 88 Volunteers; 101 of these were in the dependency court and 108 were in the delinquency system (including 53 youth in the delinquency system served under a Targeted Truancy Pilot grant). During 2000, 34 Volunteers served 56 children. In 2000, CAMC program served a variety of age groups, although the majority were older children: 9 percent were zero to five years of age, 30 percent were ages six to 11, and 61 percent were 12 to 17 years old. This concentration of older children is likely due to the fact that the program serves the delinquency as well as dependency court.

In addition to basic services, CAMC has added a supervised visitation program called the Children's Access to Parents (CAP) program. It provides a safe location for families to spend time together and exchange children between custodial and non-custodial parents.

The Child Advocates of Merced County program has two full-time staff members, the Executive Director and a Case Manager. In addition to these staff members, there are two part-time staff working in the CAP program. At the time of the PACR visit in May 2001, CAMC program had recently received funding to hire an additional Case Manager to supervise Volunteers serving children in the delinquency system. There is a seven member Board of Directors that reviews monthly financial statements, assists with fundraisers, evaluates the Executive Director's performance, and assists with public relations.

Monterey County CASA Program

The Monterey County CASA program was started by two foster parents and other concerned community members. A steering committee gathered in 1995 and received its 501(c)(3) status later that year. CASAs were first assigned to cases in Monterey County in 1997.

During the PACR visit in November 2000, Monterey County CASA's 62 active Volunteers were serving 82 children living in out-of-home care in the county. The program serves children primarily in the dependency court, although if a child moves into the delinquency system, the CASA will remain on the case. The Monterey program was serving eight children in the delinquency system at the time of the site visit. The court does not assign CASAs to infants or children 5 years old and younger. Monterey County CASA primarily serves teens: 65 percent were 12 to 18 years old, and 35 percent were six to 11 years old. Children not immediately assigned a CASA are placed on a waiting list. In November 2000, there were ten children waiting to be assigned CASAs in Monterey County.

The Monterey County CASA program had one full time staff person, an Executive Director. Two Volunteer Case Managers work approximately 20 hours a week assigning CASAs to cases, maintaining the waiting list, and assisting with Volunteer supervision. Two part-time staff work on an as-needed basis assisting with data entry, answering phones, and general administrative tasks. The Board of Directors consists of seven members and meets ten times a year. The Board's responsibilities are primarily fiscal, providing oversight and initiating fundraising activities. In addition, the Board helps screen potential Volunteers when needed and supervises the Executive Director.



Child Advocates of Nevada County

In December of 1993, Nevada County Court Appointed Special Advocates, Inc., was incorporated as a registered 501(c)(3). The program was organized through the efforts of two local attorneys and the juvenile court judge who brought together individuals for an Advisory Committee that later evolved into the program's first Board of Directors. The first CASA training was held in May 1994 and the first Advocate was assigned three months later. In addition to serving children in dependency court, Nevada County CASAs were also assigned in family court.

During 2000, 32 Advocates served 53 children in dependency or family court. At the time of the PACR site visit in August 2001, 19 Volunteers were serving 25 children in dependency court and approximately six Volunteers were serving six children in family court.

In response to requests from judicial officers and individuals at Child Protective Services, the CASA program began offering additional services to families in the community including, Foothills Healthy Babies (a home visitation program for new parents), in-home support for at-risk families, Child Abuse Prevention in Nevada County Schools (CAPINCS), and violence prevention programs. To reflect this expansion, the program name was changed in February 1998 to Child Advocates of Nevada County.

In August 2001, the CASA component of Child Advocates of Nevada County had one full-time and three part-time staff members. The Program Manager was full-time, and part-time staff members include the Interim Executive Director, Case Manager, and Administrative Assistant. At the time of the site visit, the program was searching for a new Executive Director. Child Advocates of Nevada County has a 12-member Board of Directors that raises funds for the program, establishes policies and procedures, oversees the program's finances, assists with personnel issues, and develops an annual strategic plan.

Orange County CASA Program

Planning for the Orange County CASA program began in 1984, and it became a registered 501(c)(3) the following year. The local Junior League was integral in establishing the Orange County program, and provided early financial support. CASA received its first referral in 1985 and during this first year of operation, 45 CASA Volunteers served 50 children. During 2000, 336 CASAs served 489 children in Orange County's dependency system. The majority of CASA cases were older youth: 59 percent were 13 years or older, 33 percent between the

ages of nine and 12, 8 percent were between ages of five and eight. The program serves no children younger than four years of age. A PACR Team conducted a site visit with the Orange County CASA Program in May 2001.

In addition to basic advocacy services, CASA of Orange County operates a number of specialized programs. One is the CASAs on Call (COC) program, which assigns specially trained CASAs to emergency cases on a temporary basis. The Independent Living Program (ILP), which operates services and training programs in partnership with the Orangewood Children's Foundation, concentrates on helping teens transition into adulthood. A pilot monitoring program was being planned to serve some of these difficult-to-match youth, and will focus on monitoring the teen's placement, services, and emancipation preparation. Another specialized program is the CASA Child Abuse Services Team (CASA-CAST), which uses CASA Volunteers to aid child victims in criminal court proceedings. The CASA program also operates Tina's Fund, which provides for special items, services, or activities not routinely available to children in the dependency system.

The Orange County CASA program has a total of six full-time and 12 part-time staff members. Full-time staff members include: the Executive Director, one Program Manager, the Director of Development, and three Case Supervisors. Part-time staff members include: one Program Manager, the Community Outreach Coordinator, the Community Outreach Assistant, the Development Assistant, five Case Supervisors, the Office Manager, and two administrative assistants.

A 17-member Board of Directors establishes governing policies and procedures, monitors programmatic and fiscal concerns, assists with personnel issues, and develops short- and long-term strategic plans. CASA of Orange County also has a 25-member Advisory Board, which focuses solely on fundraising. This is a self-selected group of concerned business people from throughout Orange County.

Sacramento County CASA Program

In 1991, the Sacramento CASA program was established as a 501(c)(3), non-profit organization. The Presiding Juvenile Judge at the time, along with the Child Abuse Prevention Council and Junior League of Sacramento, were instrumental in founding the program. SCASA focuses its services on children in the dependency system. During the 2000 program year, 111 CASAs served 126 children in Sacramento County's dependency system. The program serves children of all ages; however, the majority were pre-teen and teen: 8



percent were ages zero to five, 23 percent were ages six to 11, and 69 percent were 12 to 17 years of age.

In addition to basic CASA services, SCASA operates an Access to Visitation program. Through this program, SCASA provides supervised visitation services to non-custodial parents and children engaged in family court proceedings. Two CASA staff and three interns staff the program.

SCASA employs two full-time staff: the Executive Director and the Case Supervisor. Two part-time staff, the Volunteer Recruiter/Trainer and the Administrative Assistant, are also employed by the program. A 13-member Board of Directors establishes governing policies and procedures, monitors programmatic and fiscal concerns, plans and implements fundraising efforts, and develops strategic plans.

San Bernardino County Child Advocacy Program, Inc.

San Bernardino Child Advocacy Program, Inc. (SBCAPI) was first incorporated in 1989 as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization as an initiative of several Juvenile Court Judges in the county. At the time of the PACR visit in February 2000, there were 48 Volunteers serving 75 children, 56 of whom were in the dependency system and 19 of whom were in the delinquency system. Children ranged in age from eight to 18 years of age, with most being teenagers. SBCAPI maintains a waiting list of children that have been referred to the program by the court but have not been matched with a CASA Volunteer; in February 2000, 60 children were on the waiting for a CASA.

SBCAPI provides basic CASA services for children in both the dependency and delinquency systems. It also instituted a Youth Empowerment Program (YEP), designed for children between the ages of 14 and 18, to address issues related to aging out of the dependency system that is required for CASAs and their assigned children.

SBCAPI has a staff of seven full-time employees: Executive Director, Volunteer Recruiter/Screenener/Trainer, three Case Managers, Development Director, Administrative Assistant, and Clerical Assistant. SBCAPI has a Board of Directors comprised of 12 members. The Board has fiduciary and governance responsibility over the CASA program and meets monthly. The SBCAPI's Advisory Board facilitates communication with other important system partners, and consists of the presiding juvenile judge, the CASA Executive Director, and representatives from the Department of Children's Services, Probation

Department, Department of Mental Health, dependency and delinquency attorneys, county school districts, and the County Manager's Office.

San Diego County Voices for Children

Voices for Children, San Diego's CASA program, was established in 1982 and received its first case assignment in 1983. Approximately 50 percent of the children served were between the ages of 12 and 18, and the other 50 percent were under 12 years of age. The program has served approximately 20,000 children since it was formed and has had more than 1,000 Volunteers since 1997. Over the course of the 2000 program year, 393 Volunteers provided services to 2,343 children. In June 2001, the time of the site visit, there were 326 Volunteers serving a total of 2,543 children. Some of these children receive traditional CASA Volunteers while other children benefit from several different services provided by Voices for Children.

In addition to the traditional CASA services, Voices for Children offers three additional Volunteer opportunities: Court Appointed Special Monitor Program (CASM), the Educational Surrogate Program, and the Case Assessment Program. Court Appointed Special Monitors provide less intensive advocacy services than traditional CASAs to children who are in permanent placements. Educational Surrogates provide educational advocacy to dependency children whose educational needs were of heightened concern. Unlike CASA, CASM, and Educational Surrogate Volunteers, Case Assessment Program Volunteers do not work directly with children, but rather review and summarize case files for Voices for Children staff.

Voices for Children has 17 full-time and two part-time staff. A management team consists of the Executive Director, Director of Programs, Director of Operations, and Director of Volunteers. Two staff members are responsible for volunteer recruitment: the Volunteer Recruiter and Trainer and the Assistant Volunteer Recruiter and Trainer. The program also employs seven Program Supervisors, an Associate Director of Development, three Program Associates (one receptionist, one data manager, and one half-time court report typist), an Executive Assistant, and a Special Events Coordinator who is part-time. A 15 member Board plays a policy and oversight role for the program.



San Francisco County Court Appointed Special Advocates Program (SFCASA)

In 1991, SFCASA was reinstated as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization following several years when the program was defunct. At the time of the site visit (January 2000), the CASA program was serving approximately 155 children and overseeing nearly 135 trained CASA Volunteers. Most of these children are in the dependency court system, however a few children continue in the program after transferring to the delinquency court system. The children served range in age from newborn infants to 18 years of age, with most in the 15 to 18-year-old age bracket. SFCASA maintains a waiting list of children that have been referred to the program by the court but have not been matched with a CASA Volunteer; in January 2000, 50 children were on the waiting list.

In addition to basic CASA services, SFCASA assigns CASAs to children involved with mediated cases in dependency court and provides added support to dependency system children younger than 36 months as part of the Infant and Toddler Demonstration Project.

SFCASA has a staff of six full-time and three part-time employees. Full-time staff include an Executive Director, Program Manager, Volunteer Training Coordinator, two Case Supervisors, Infant and Toddler Program Supervisor, and Office Manager. The program employs a three-quarters time Director of Development. Three volunteers work with the program regularly. For the past several years, a Management Information System (MIS) Specialist has volunteered 16 hours weekly to manage the COMET database. Another volunteer just began in January as an intern, providing general office support and another volunteer created and maintains SFCASA's web site.

SFCASA has a Board of Directors comprised of 13 members. The Board has fiduciary and governance responsibility over the CASA program and meets monthly. The SFCASA's Advisory Council facilitates communication with other important system partners. The group is co-chaired by the supervising judge of unified family court and the CASA Executive Director, and includes representatives from the court clerk's office, court-appointed mediator's office, DHS, various attorney groups and the city attorney's office, community child welfare organizations, and SFCASA staff and board members.

San Luis Obispo County CASA/Voices for Children

CASA/Voices for Children was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation in 1991 and accepted its first case in 1993. Since that time, it has served approximately 650 children.

At the time of the site visit (October 1999), the CASA program had 62 CASAs advocating for 146 children. Most of these children were in the dependency court system. Two were children whose cases had been transferred to the delinquency court system. The children served range in age from newborn infants to 18 years of age. CASA/Voices for Children maintains a waiting list of children that have been referred to the program by the court but have not been matched with a CASA volunteer; in October 1999, 108 children were on the waiting list.

In addition to basic CASA services, CASA/Voices for Children has added several specialized activities to support the children referred to its program. These activities focus on educational needs, infant and toddler developmental health, assessments of children on the waiting list, supervised visitations for children and non-custodial parents, and educational advocacy for children in the delinquency system.

CASA/Voices for Children relies on both paid and volunteer staff. It has six paid full-time staff members: the Executive Director, two Case Managers, the CAARE Center Coordinator who manages educational advocacy activities, the Supervised Visitation Coordinator, and one administrative assistant. Additionally, the CASA program works with one part-time contractor to provide educational advocacy services and two part-time volunteers to oversee the infant/toddler activities. Up to 13 volunteer board members are responsible for program oversight and policy development

Santa Cruz County CASA Program

In 1992 a severe case of child neglect was highly publicized in Santa Cruz. As a result of this case, the county's grand jury undertook an investigation of child welfare services in the county and recommended that the county establish a CASA program. The presiding juvenile court judge and several members of the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors were enthusiastic about the idea, and along with community volunteers established the program. The first Volunteers began taking cases in 1993. The program serves children in the dependency court only; in 2000 the program served 175 children out of the approximately 400 children in the dependency system. At the time of the PACR site visit (February 2001) the program had 95 active Volunteers.

Almost three quarters of the children served by the program in 2000 were between the ages of 11 and 18, and the program served few children under the age of five. The program maintains a waiting list of referred children. At any given time there are approximately 40 children on the waiting list. Children remain on the waiting list for approximately three months.



The Santa Cruz County CASA program has five staff members: the Executive Director, a Public Relations and Outreach Coordinator, a Case Supervisor, a Latino Outreach Coordinator/Case Supervisor, and an Office Manager. In addition to the program's Board of Directors, Santa Cruz CASA also has a 15-member Advisory Board.

Choices for Children of Siskiyou County

The vision for the Siskiyou County CASA program began in the mid 1980's when two employees of the Probation Department started discussing the need for a program to help prevent delinquency by serving children in the dependency system. The two were working with children and youth who had either been in the dependency system or should have been in the dependency system. In their opinion, many of the youth had "fallen through the cracks" and had not received appropriate services or placed in healthy environments. As a result of this discussion, the CASA program model was identified and Choices for Children was incorporated as a 501 (c)(3) in 1988, accepting its first assignment in April of 1991. One of those initial planners is the current Executive Director and the other is the President of the Choices for Children Board of Directors.

During 2000, 30 CASAs served 112 children in dependency court, representing approximately 71 percent of the children in dependency in the county. The program serves children of any age, although in the past, it has served a higher proportion of older children (ages 13-18).

The Choices for Children program resides in a 19,000 square foot building that the program owns in downtown Yreka. CASA program offices are located on the second floor and the first floor is primarily devoted to the Broadway Flea, the thrift store run by Choices for Children.

At the time of the PACR visit (February 2001), Choices for Children has a total of six staff. The full-time staff members include: the Executive Director, Program Manager, Outreach Coordinator, and Family Resource Coordinator. The program also employs two Americorps members. One is a Family Advocate and the other is housed in the family maintenance unit of CPS and provides in-home visitation to families in that voluntary program. At the time of the PACR visit, the program was looking for a full-time Case Manager.

A six-member Board of Directors establishes governing policies and procedures, ensures the program remains on track programmatically and fiscally, assists with fundraising, and develops the strategic plan.

CASA of Tulare County

Planning for the CASA of Tulare County program began in 1983. A Juvenile Court Referee, along with a retired nurse, a volunteer from the Visalia Volunteer Bureau, an attorney, and a county administrator participated in this initial planning. The program was incorporated in 1984. On May 3, 1984 the program swore in its first four Volunteers. CASA of Tulare County became a 501(c)(3) in 1991.

During the 2000 program year, 145 CASAs served 380 children in Tulare County's dependency system. CASA of Tulare County was serving 189 children in July 2001 during the PACR visit. The program serves children of all ages, however more are pre-teen and teen: 13 percent are ages zero to two, 16 percent are three to five years of age, 20 percent are six to nine years old, 29 percent are ages 10 to 13, and 22 percent are 14 to 17 years of age. The CASA program also maintains a waiting list of children referred to the program.

The overwhelming majority of children served by CASA of Tulare County are in the dependency system, however, the program does serve some children who crossover to the delinquency system. In addition to basic advocacy services, CASA of Tulare County has added specialized programs. One is the 0-5 Program, which serves dependent children ages zero to five. The second program is the monitor program, which focuses on monitoring a child's placement and services. Because these cases are less volatile, Advocates are not required to maintain as much face-to-face contact as with regular cases.

CASA of Tulare County employs eight full time staff: the Executive Director, Program Manager, Case Coordinator, two Case Supervisors, Training and Outreach Coordinator, Office Manager, and one Administrative Assistant. A 10-member Board of Directors establishes governing policies and procedures, monitors programmatic and fiscal concerns, assists with personnel issues, and develops short- and long-range strategic plans.

Court Appointed Special Advocates of Ventura County

The Court Appointed Special Advocates of Ventura County program has gone through many institutional changes since its initial inception as a project of the National Council of Jewish Women in 1985. After a brief association with the Children's Home Society it became an independent 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization and then joined with Child Abuse and Neglect, Inc. (C.A.A.N.). In 1997, C.A.A.N. merged its programs with Interface Children Family Services (Interface). Interface is the largest private 501(c)(3) not-for-profit social



services agency in Ventura County. It provides prevention, intervention, counseling, education, shelter, and treatment services to abused children, battered women and their children, high-risk and homeless youth, and individuals and families in crisis. Interface offers 32 programs operated by 175 staff members and more than 1,000 volunteers at nine sites throughout Ventura County.

Once establishing itself as one of Interface's programs, the CASA program was transferred yet one more time across Interface's divisions. Initially the program was located in Interface's Child Abuse Division. In order to provide the program with more institutional attention, Interface relocated the CASA program in September 1998 to its Youth Mentoring Division.

Since July 1997, the CASA program has served approximately 135 children. At the time of the site visit in January 2000, the CASA program oversaw 79 trained CASA Volunteers, 69 of whom were considered to be active. In spite of this availability, 34 Volunteers were serving 35 children. All of these children were in the dependency court system. The children served ranged in age from three to 18 years of age.

In addition to basic CASA services, the CASA program in Ventura County has access to other Interface programs, which can support the children referred to the CASA program. Additional supports include: crisis intervention services and emergency shelters, 24-hour information and referral hotline, the Children's Resource Program providing free medical services for high-risk children, Independent Living Program teaching life skills to older foster youth, conflict management training and services, Big Brother/Big Sister program mentoring children from single-parent families, and a variety of services for parents. Additionally, Interface provides many training and skill development workshops available to CASA Volunteers.

The CASA program has a staff of five, which includes: the CASA Program Director, Program Manager, two part-time Case Managers, an Administrative Assistant, and a volunteer Case Manager. The Interface Board of Directors governs the program.

Yolo County CASA Program

Planning for the Yolo County CASA program began in 1995. The program became a registered 501 (c)(3) that year and accepted its first assignment in December 1996. Four individuals were the driving force behind starting the CASA program in Yolo County: a former Contra Costa CASA Volunteer, a local attorney, a community activist, and a judicial officer. During 2000, 104 CASAs served 118 children in dependency court, 13 in the juvenile