



CASA of Stanislaus County Newsletter

Thank You to all of our wonderful volunteers ... you do make a difference!

November - December 2009

COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES of STANISLAUS COUNTY

Volunteer advocates are needed to be the voice of dependent children during court hearings. They'll conduct case fact finding and produce court reports for all hearings based on what is in the best interest of the children.

CASA training includes the following topics: family dynamics; the court process; report writing; domestic violence; cultural diversity; and mental health. Advocates volunteer an average of 10 to 15 hours per month and commit themselves to being available until the end of the case assigned (usually 18 months). This commitment is essential so the volunteer can build and maintain trusting, stable relationships with the children they are appointed to in order to speak exclusively for those children in court.

Volunteers are provided training, supervision and support. 30 hours of in-house training and 10 hours of court observation is provided. Volunteer Requirements: Advocates must be at least 21 years of age; computer literate with access to e-mail; pass a fingerprint background check (paid for by CASA); possess a California driver's license; provide a DMV printout; and show proof of insurance.

Bilingual individuals and males are especially encouraged to apply.

If you are interested in joining us, please call:

(209) 567.4230

or e-mail Cindy Julsgard (casacm@stanct.org)

or Michelle Sales (casacm2@stanct.org). We will respond as soon as possible to your inquiry.



Our BOARD of DIRECTORS

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Our next orientation for potential NEW Advocates will be in February, 2010 (with a specific date to be announced) at our CASA offices ... with training for those new advocates beginning by February 24, 2010 also at our CASA offices.

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**As of October 21, 2009
there were over 500
children in need of an
CASA (advocate) in
Stanislaus County ...**

**Please help us secure a
safe future for a child in
need by sending your 100%
tax deductible donation
to:**

**CASA of Stanislaus
County
Post Office Box 3488
Modesto, California 95353**

**We are also happy to
speak directly with you
and will gladly accept your
credit card payment for
any donation you wish to
give.**

**CASA is a Non Profit
501 (c) 3
Our Tax ID is 91-2168629**

**Your generosity and
support is appreciated!**

THE NEED

More than 500,000 children live in foster care in the United States. These children were abused or neglected and then removed from their families and the place they called home. Sadly, many can become a victim a second time in an overwhelmed child welfare system that does not allow for close attention to each child and their needs or wants.

Each day in California, 70 children who have been abused or neglected join the state's population of nearly 80,000 children in foster care. California is home to nearly one-fifth of all foster children in the United States. In Stanislaus County, there are over 500 children in Foster Care at any given time. If you were to count the children in guardianship or kinship, the number would swell to over 1,200. As dependents of the juvenile court, these children pass through a court system which can leave them frightened, confused and alone.

CASA's PART OF THE SOLUTION

Across California, thousands of volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) build close relationships with and serve as one-on-one advocates for children in foster care. Over 40 CASA programs in California recruit and specially train these volunteers from the community, who are then appointed as advocates by a juvenile court.

CASA volunteers commit to spending at least one year: 1) establishing a strong, stable connection with a child in foster care, 2) gathering information and making recommendations to the court about the child's best interest, and 3) advocating to make sure the child receives needed services. Too often, a CASA volunteer is the only consistent adult in the life of the child.

OUR GOALS

Our goals for the CASA movement in Stanislaus County are:

- 1) To serve and improve outcomes for more children,
- 2) To continuously improve volunteer effectiveness,
- 3) To continuously increase program quality, and
- 4) To share our insights to improve child welfare laws and policies.

THE SUPPORT

CASA is funded through private and individual donations; corporate grants; Community organization donations (like Kiwanis and Rotary); the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and people like YOU!





FOSTER PARENT/KINSHIP CARE TRAINING

November 2009

The following listed classes (**No pre-registration necessary**) will be held at the Family Partnership Center, 421 E. Morris Avenue, Modesto from 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Note: Supervised child activities are ONLY available for ages 5 and older at the Center and is limited to six children....therefore supervised care activities is limited to first come first served.

Date: 2 Nov (Monday)

Topic: Understanding and Celebrating Diversity

Our children come from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds and this class will cover topics such as multicultural bias awareness

Trainer: Jennifer Johnson LCSW

Date: 9 Nov (Monday)

Topic: Memory Books

In this "hands on" creative class, you will learn what a Life Book is, why it is important for each child to have one and how to get started. **Please bring 5-6 pictures from a special event, Holidays, Birthdays, etc.**

Trainer: Kathleen Grundy MSW

Date: 16 Nov(Mon)

Topic: Rights of Foster Youth and Sexual Diversity: Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual and Transgendered

This class will provide caregivers with an understanding and awareness of one's sexual identity, including myths, stereotyping and personal biases.

Trainers: Jennifer Johnson LCSW



The following **6 hour** workshops will be held at the Community Services Agency, 251 E. Hackett Road, Modesto from 9:00 a.m. to approximately 3:30 p.m.

Note: Please pre-register not later than **4 Nov for the 7 Nov class** and by **10 Nov for the 14 Nov class** by calling one the phone number indicated below and leaving your name and phone number. **(Calls will not be returned). This is to contact you should a class be cancelled.**

BECAUSE OF BUDGETARY RESTRICTIONS AS A RESULT OF THE STATE'S FINANCIAL SITUATION, OUR PROGRAM WILL NOT BE ABLE TO PROVIDE LUNCHES AT WORKSHOPS. THEREFORE, ATTENDEES MUST MAKE THEIR OWN ARRANGEMENTS FOR FOOD AND DRINK.

Date: 7 Nov (Saturday Workshop)

Topic: Developing Positive Skills for Discipline

This workshop will provide the caregiver with the tools to develop good positive skills for discipline by building effective relationships and ways to deal with the child's behavior.

Trainer: Joan Mancini MA

Date: 14 Nov (Saturday Workshop)

Topic: Talking to Children and Youth about Sexuality

This session will provide information on communicating with your child about sexuality and will discuss stages of sexual development.

Trainer: Jennifer Johnson LCSW



Some of the many faces that make our program thrive. THANK YOU ADVOCATES!



CASA CONTACT INFORMATION

Our Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 3488
Modesto, CA 95353

Our Phone: (209) 567.4230

Our Fax: (209) 567.4231

Our Website:

www.casaofstanco.org

Our E-mails:

casaed@stanct.org

Steve Ashman, Executive Director

casacm@stanct.org

Cindy Julsgard, Case Manager I

casacm2@stanct.org

Michelle Sales, Case Manager II

Please note:

CASA offices WILL BE CLOSED on November 11; November 26 and 27; and December 25 due to Court Holidays.

CASA OFFICE HOURS

Monday thru Thursday

8:00am — 5:30pm

We are generally in our offices on Fridays, but we often reserve that day to address internal needs and training. If you call our offices on a Friday, you will likely get our answering machine, but if the call is urgent rest assured we will respond as soon as possible.

CASA Teams with Children's Crisis Center and the Society for Handicapped Children & Adults to Raise Funds to Meet the Needs of Children

Get on your dancing shoes! **CASA of Stanislaus County**, the **Children's Crisis Center** and the **Society for Handicapped Children & Adults** have joined forces to produce a benefit concert on **October 31, 2009** (Halloween) at the **State Theatre** in Modesto.

The concert will feature a 15-piece rhythm and blues band, the legendary **Zasu Pitts Memorial Orchestra** from San Francisco. The Pitts (as they are affectionately known), have sold out the State multiple times and this concert (as always) promises to be an evening of non-stop dancing and fun.

"In these times of shrinking revenues and resources, it only makes sense for community organizations to partner in new and exciting ways to reach the community" opined Steve Perry, SHCA Board President. "The Pitts are a great band, one that never disappoints. This truly is a win-win-win for our organizations, community AND the people we serve. We couldn't be more excited."

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*Steve Perry,
SHCA Board
President*

Tickets for the event are \$50.00, with 100% of the proceeds going to the organizations to help meet the needs of the Stanislaus County children (and adults) who benefit from their services.

Tickets are available on-line at the Society for Handicapped Children and Adults website:

<http://www.societyforhandicapped.org/special-events/zasu-pitts.php> or in person at Clayton's - located at 1016 H Street in Modesto.

Doors at the State Theatre will open at 8:30 with the concert scheduled to begin at 9:30. The Pitts are legendary for their inspired (and lengthy) performances. A typical concert last 3 hours. Vocalist Larry Batiste commented, "We promise that our audience always gets their monies worth. As a band, we truly love performing together and I think that translates to our audience. Once we get started, people are on their feet and dancing ... and it doesn't stop until we do ... we are expecting a few "surprise" guests to join us as well. It will be a great time."



Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

STANISLAUS COUNTY



Society for Handicapped Children & Adults
Over 60 years of Caring

THE BIGGEST HALLOWEEN BASH TO HIT MODESTO

TO BENEFIT THE SOCIETY FOR HANDICAPPED CHILDREN AND ADULTS, CHILDREN'S CRISIS CENTER & CASA

Z R M O

OCT. 31

ZASU PITTS MEMORIAL ORCHESTRA

THE BAY AREA'S MOST RENOWNED AND LEGENDARY
RHYTHM AND BLUES BAND

THAT INCLUDES ALL THE ELEMENTS OF THOSE
GREAT SOUL REVUE GROUPS IN THE 60'S

STATE THEATRE 8:30PM

1307 J ST. MODESTO CA

\$50.00 Tickets on sale now @

www.societyforhandicapped.org

& CLAYTON'S 1016 H St. in Modesto



POSTER BY ANGELO HUBMAN



My CASA Training Experience

by Kathi Schiffler, CASA Advocate

“We’re here for the little boy with learning disabilities who has been transferred to a dozen foster homes in as many months.”

The stories tug at our heartstrings. That’s why we’re all here. We’re here for the little boy with learning disabilities who has been transferred to a dozen foster homes in as many months. For the three little girls under the age of six left fend for themselves while their parents party on crack. For the pregnant teenager whose mother is incarcerated and who never knew her own father. For the baby whose mother who desperately wants him back but who is having trouble overcoming her addiction to alcohol. These people are hurting. These children have lived through heartache and trauma beyond their years and they often fall through the cracks when what they need most is for someone to look out for them. That’s why we’re all here. We want to look out for them.

The CASA trainees come from all walks of life. We are mothers, grandmothers, aunts, students, mentors, workers, caregivers. We come from the fields of education, childcare, homemaking, medicine, law, business and nonprofits; some of us are retired, and some are between jobs. Some trainees are foster parents, some have adopted, and a few of us don’t have any children at all. I suspect that I may not be the only one in the room who has been led here through a personal story of loss, trauma, or abuse. Although we have different backgrounds, on my first night of CASA training, I quickly learn we share a common vision: we all want to do something that counts – we want to make a positive difference in the life of a child who needs someone to do just that.

Through the ten week course of CASA training, we get to know each other as we learn about things such as our roles as CASA volunteers; child protection laws and the court system; cultural awareness; understanding families and children; substance abuse and recovery; the education system; children with special needs; county social services; communication; gathering information; and reporting and monitoring. I’ve learned that I need to suspend any knee-jerk reaction or judgmental attitudes toward parents who may have neglected or abused their

children. I need to be an open communicator – someone who listens and reaches to bridge gaps and facilitate understanding. I need to be aware of and sensitive to cultural differences. I need to listen to and communicate honestly with the child I’m serving, but I must also keep in mind that what the child wants may not always be in the child’s best interest. I’ve also learned that one of the most important things I can do as a CASA is to help a child learn how to become his or her own advocate. It can be a big, confusing world out there, and knowing how to ask questions, communicate desires, and track down answers are valuable skills that will serve children in foster care for the rest of their lives.

By the end of our training, I am encouraged, invigorated, and ready to tackle the world. I am also filled with a healthy balance of fear and trepidation. I know what I’m getting myself into. This is not a fun little hobby that I can pick up and put down when I choose: a child’s future is at stake. Not that it’s all up to me – there are many people involved in the process – but I realize that I have a weighty responsibility to make recommendations to the court on what I think are in the best interests of the child I’m serving. I am making a commitment to put the time and effort necessary into making responsible recommendations. It will be hard work, and there will probably be roadblocks and frustrations along the way. I am starkly aware of how much I still have to learn about the world of human interaction, social services, foster care, court systems, education, and so on.

But I have been trained well. I am prepared and armed with resources and skills in how to find what I need to do the work ahead. I’m a little nervous about taking my first case, but I know that I will have the full support of the CASA staff every step of the way, and that, like most people, I will learn more by doing. The next step in the training process is to complete ten hours of courtroom observation. I’ve already begun this process, and I’m anxious to complete it so I will be sworn in as an officer of the court and can roll up my sleeves and get to work on making a difference.

Editor’s Note: Kathi completed her observation hours and was sworn in as an Advocate on October 22, 2009.

Advocating for Mental Health Services for Children Placed Out-of-County

By Phil Ladew

One problem that has long plagued child advocates is the how the amount, speed, and quality of specialty mental health services can vary when children are placed out-of-county.

The nearly 15,000 California children who find themselves placed out-of their county of origin often find that mental health services come slowly, if at all. This is a real concern and can pose a serious detriment to the child's wellbeing.

As a CASA volunteer, you have an enormous opportunity to ensure that mental health services are delivered in the most appropriate way. So what, then, should you know about mental health services for children who are placed out-of-county?

The Problem

This problem is a result of the efforts to find ways to reduce the high costs of mental health services. Medi-Cal mental health services are "carved out" of the normal provision of Medi-Cal health care services and are paid for differently.

This means that a child whose foster care case is in Alameda County courts would need to have Alameda County arrange, and pay for, mental health services regardless of where the child lives. This would be the "county of origin." Conversely, the county where the child is living, or the "host county," has no responsibility to arrange or provide mental health services for the child.

This required counties to 1) find mental health service providers in a county they might be unfamiliar with, and 2) engage in some contractual negotiations to arrange for payment and provision of services to the child. This, as you might imagine did not always happen as quickly as one might hope. The result could be months, or even years of delays.

New Solutions

Determining Who Does What

New law went into effect on January 1, 2008 that revolutionized the way counties arrange for specialty mental health services for foster youth who are placed out-of-county. Over the past 19 months

the implementation of Senate Bill 785 (2007), has been building steam, and as of July 2009 its effects are being felt. (SB 785 of 2007 is codified in Welf. & Inst. Code section 5777.7.)

Standardized Contracts and Forms

As of July 2009, the Department of Mental Health is now requiring that counties and providers use standardized forms when contracting with each other. This should streamline the process and make it easier and faster to connect an out-of-county provider with the child that needs the services. It should also reduce confusion and facilitate the flow of needed information. Technically though, counties can still hire services however they like, but if they do so by contracting with a provider, then the new standardized forms (and only the new forms) must be used. (Also, note, that old contracts can remain, the standardized forms apply to any new contracts for services.)

Strict Timelines

The other wonderful thing to note is that now there are new timelines for arranging mental health services for children who are placed out-of-county. See 9 CCR § 1830.220(b)(4).

First, it should never take more that 14 days to approve or deny a request for mental health services for the child, and in many cases it should happen faster than that. When services are requested, the county must approve or deny the request within 3 days of receiving any new information, but never more than 14 calendar days from the date of the original request – whichever is sooner.

"The nearly 15,000 California children who find themselves placed out-of their county of origin often find that mental health services come slowly, if at all. This is a real concern and can pose a serious detriment to the child's wellbeing."

Advocating for Mental Health Services for Children Placed Out-of-County ... continued

Second, once the authorization is received, it should never take more than 30 days to set up the method of payment for a service provider.

Therefore, if you have a child who is living in an out-of-county foster home and needs mental health services, the longest it should ever take to arrange for those services – from start to finish – is 42 days. Any longer than this, and you know something is wrong. This is the time to make sure the judge knows that the child needs mental health services, and that some procedural snafu needs attention.

Permanency Planning

If you are advocating for a child and their permanent plans call for adoption or legal guardianship with relatives, then there is more to know. Namely, the law now says that for children whose cases are dismissed to either an adoption with Adoption Assistance Payment (AAP) or relative guardianships under KinGAP, the provision of specialty mental health services are to be arranged by the host county (i.e. where the adoptive parents reside or where the child lives under the KinGAP guardianship). However, the county of origin (where the child's court case was) is still responsible for authorizing the service and arranging for payment.

This should make it easier for these children to receive mental health services as the standard of care will be what the host county provides – and the county will have to provide mental health services as they would any other child living in the host county.

The bottom line is that the children, and their relatives and adoptive families can be assured that, just because the child is placed out-of-county, any mental health services that might be needed will be arranged for, and provided by, their local agency – not the county that is farther away and perhaps lacks the knowledge, connections, and processes to arrange for nearby mental health services. The host county cannot just send families back to the county of origin when they need services. This is definite reassurance

for some families – as well as the CASA – when mental health services are essential for maintaining the placement.

AB 3632

For those of you who are wondering (someone always asks), the new law does not affect the provision of AB 3632 services for children in special education who require mental health services.

Things to Remember

This is not a cure-all. While 1) making clear who arranges and provides mental health services versus who pays, and 2) standardizing the forms, and 3) instituting timelines will help, there will still be children who need your advocacy to access needed services.

For example, this does not remedy the fact that some counties have a severe shortage of appropriate mental health services. Therefore, there may need to be some good old fashioned CASA advocacy to ensure that services are received. The court should always be aware of what the child needs and what barriers exist – it is a CASA's duty to ensure that the child comes first.

What if a requested mental health service is denied by the county of origin? This is not necessarily where your advocacy should stop. If the mental health service is needed, look closely at the reason for the denial. County Mental Health Plans are required to authorize out-of-plan services for out-of-county children even if they don't ordinarily provide that service. See 9 CCR § 1830.220(b)(4). Also, denials are improper when they are done solely on the basis of a higher cost (compared to the county of origin) or pure administrative inconvenience. See National Center for Youth Law Comment Letter dated 1/9/2009 found at: <http://cmhda.org/go/Portals/0/CMHDA%20Files/Committees/Medi-Cal%20Policy/Handouts/NCYL%20Comments%20on%20Draft%20DMH%20Information%20Notice%20Re%20SB%20785.pdf>

Be on the lookout for more information. Soon, the California Department of Social Services will be dis-

CASA of Stanislaus County receives National CASA Grant for \$40,000.00

CASA of Stanislaus County has been named as a recipient of a \$40,000.00 grant funded by the National CASA Association. The grant is funded by federal funds from the Department of Justice and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.



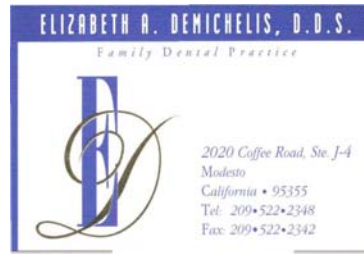
The grant was designed to provide funding for CASA programs whose revenue had declined in the period from 2007-2009. It is also to assist programs whose growth had outweighed its resources.

“CASA of Stanislaus County’s program has grown over 600% since April 1, 2008 to it’s present capacity. These funds will help us to support the wonderful work our advocates provide and to help ensure positive outcomes for the children we serve” stated CASA Executive Director Steve Ashman. “We operate on a minimal budget, with only 2.5 paid staff. These funds will allow us to expand our ability to provide our advocates expanded training and support.”

THANK YOU TO OUR ADVOCATES!

John Arnold ... Steve Ashman ... Cynthia Barstad ... Alice Bechard ... Jamie Bertolotti ... Sherry Bertolotti ... Linda Bush ... Tammera Carson ... Angie Cherry ... Sharon Clark ... Danni Demateo ... Holly Feebeck ... Veronica Fernandez ... Linda Fruge ... Carol Gipson ... Rob Gleeson ... Amanda Hall ... Char Hernandez ... Cynthia Hurt ... Laurie Jamison ... Cindy Julsgard ... Donnajeane Kabella ... Michelle Keener ... Sherrie Keener ... Susan Linville ... Synthia Lofton ... Linda Martelli ... Navidad Martinez ... Brenda Mueller ... Veronica Napier ... Jessica Nunes ... Nancy O’Reilly ... Bill Parks ... Carol Perry ... Angela Poling-Perez ... Jerry Rhine ... Lisa Rose ... Michelle Sales ... Kathi Schiffler ... Kathy Schmitt ... Karen Sederquist ... Darlene Soares ... Stacy Spieller ... Donna Marie Strickler ... Beverly Swanson ... Angela Timpone ... Vivian Valentine ... Joanne Wallace ... Carolyn Whited ... Lloyd Wiley ... Lois Wilson.

Without YOUR commitment and efforts, we would not be here ...



Thank you to Elizabeth Demichelis, DDS for her unwavering commitment and support.

Current Available & Active Advocates : 41

Current Advocates on Leave : 11

Current Advocates by Gender:
 Female - 46
 Male - 6

Current Children Being Served : 55

Current Advocates in Training : 19
 Advocates in Training by Gender:
 Female - 16
 Male - 3

All Statistics as of October 28, 2009

The CASA of STANISLAUS COUNTY Mission:

To provide quality advocacy services for all abused and neglected children in the dependency system through the use of trained volunteers.

The CASA of STANISLAUS COUNTY Vision:

CASA of Stanislaus County is a passionate community organization the provides every child received through the court system with personalized advocacy and support. Our goal is to provide a safe, permanent, nurturing environment for every child served.

Advocating for Mental Health Services for Children Placed Out-of-County ... continued

tributing 1) a Caregiver's Guide, a 2) Wallet Card, and 3) a Social Worker Checklist to help ensure that children who are placed out-of-county receive timely and appropriate mental health services.

Think Outside the Box. If your child is having difficulty getting appropriate mental health services, don't give up! But also look for other avenues. For example, victims of child abuse (and other crimes) are often eligible for Victims of Crime Compensation (VOC). VOC can increase access to mental health services, and usually has an expanded selection of mental health providers. For more information ask a social worker and/or go to <http://www.victimcompensation.ca.gov/victims/default.aspx> Research the issue and discuss the options with the social worker. He or she can apply for VOC and you might just remove the need for Medi-Cal provided services altogether.

Also, some communities have therapist and other providers who are willing to provide pro bono services – it's always good to investigate and ask.

Children who are placed out-of-county need even more help and as you know, having a CASA on your side can make all the difference.

SAVE THE DATE !!!

Please mark your calendars -

The 6th annual

CASA of Stanislaus County

'Light of Hope' **Spring Fundraiser** will be held at the

Gallo Center for the Arts on **May 4, 2010.**

Sponsorship opportunities available!

SAVE THE DATE !!!