



CASA of Los Angeles / 2009 Annual Report

Our mission

CASA of Los Angeles' mission is to improve the lives of children in the dependency court system through trained, dedicated, and effective volunteer advocates who are professionally supported by experienced staff.

Our vision

That one day, every child in the Los Angeles Juvenile Dependency Court system has a CASA volunteer.

Who will stand up for me?

This is the child's silent question CASA volunteers seek to answer. With 25,000 children in the Dependency Court system, children often get lost in the overburdened social service and legal systems of Los Angeles County. Each CASA volunteer is appointed by a Dependency Court Judge to assist one or more children by assessing the life circumstances of children who have been removed from their birth homes because they have been abused, neglected or abandoned. These volunteers visit each child, speak with all people involved with the child's case (social workers, therapists, teachers, foster parents, relatives, attorneys, doctors, etc.) and make recommendations to the court regarding decisions that are in the best interest of the child. These decisions influence the children's future – where they will live, who will be allowed to visit and under what circumstances, and what medical or educational assessments or treatments will be provided. By law, these reports must be reviewed by the court. Judges have come to rely on the accurate and individualized information related through a CASA volunteer's court reports and testimony at the time of hearing. CASA volunteers can help shape a positive future for kids so they can grow and develop to their full potential.





Today, more than half a million children in the United States are in foster care, placed there by public authorities because they could not live safely with their own families. The majority will remain in foster care for more than three years and live in at least three different homes. Some will stay

much longer and be placed in seven or more homes. Foster care is vital to protecting seriously abused and neglected children. But too many children languish for years in foster care, moving from one temporary home to another.

Appointed by a court, CASA volunteers work diligently to determine what is in the best interest of the child and then to ensure that positive outcomes are achieved. The volunteer stays with each case until the child is placed in a safe, permanent home.

Since 1978, CASA of Los Angeles has been serving in Los Angeles County, which has the highest population of foster children in the nation – currently 25,000 children are in the Dependency Court System in Los Angeles County. From our small start, with a handful of dedicated volunteers serving only a few foster children, we have grown and expanded both our size and services. In 2009, 361 CASA volunteers in Los Angeles County were assigned to 569 children aged birth to 21-years old.

But that's not enough and we won't – can't! – stop there. Beginning this year, we are launching exciting new plans aimed (1) to substantially increase the number of children we serve; (2) to enhance the quality, training and support we provide to our front-line CASA volunteers; and (3) to aggressively recruit new volunteers.

As we analyzed our mission and program over the past year, we came to understand that in order to serve substantially more children, we

must become a much more volunteer-powered organization, utilizing in many new and expanded ways the talents, skills, and dedication of our wonderful volunteer corps. This is the most cost-effective way for us to expand. Our staff and board have developed and approved a plan to make that happen.

The second part of our plan is to enhance the training and support we provide to our front-line volunteers. We are creating “specialized advocacy units” to focus our efforts and training so as to provide real expertise and knowledge to our staff and volunteers in the following areas:

- Education
- Physical and Mental Health
- Zero-to-Three aged children
- Transition-aged youth
- Antelope Valley youth

The central goal of each specialization unit is to cost-effectively bridge the gaps in the system and in the community that prevent children from accessing services critical to their stability and well-being.

I'm very proud to present this 2009 Annual Report for CASA of Los Angeles. We have accomplished many things this year, as you'll see in these pages. For all these accomplishments I want to extend a big “Thank-you!” to our volunteers, staff, donors and countless other supporters who have given of their talents, skills, resources and dedication to help CASA of Los Angeles fulfill its mission.

Patricia Trendacosta
President, Board of Directors

"If it weren't for my CASA, I would probably have dropped out of high school, but she was there to encourage me to think about my future."
- Former CASA child, now age 20



Our Stories

Getting to Know Ted

By Rosalie Cauley
CASA Volunteer since 2001

I accepted fourteen-year-old Ted's case in August 2007, when he had just been placed in a foster home after being removed from the home of his legal guardian due to physical abuse. I was appointed by the Court to gather information about Ted's academic difficulties and about possible injury he may have suffered at his new placement. Understandably apprehensive of this new person in his life, Ted was not very communicative with me for the first nine months I knew him. He mostly gave one or two word responses to my questions.

But I persisted.

As county social workers sought to find Ted's family of origin, the picture

slowly began to change. Some of his distant relatives had lost track of Ted but now wanted to be involved in his life. When I informed Ted about this, he remembered them and said that he too wanted to reconnect. As quickly as I could I contacted the family to clarify their intentions and worked with the Court and county workers to get Ted placed with them.

After many months of working to build trust with Ted, he finally began speaking a little more with me about his past but he was still guarded. Finally, one day over lunch Ted let down his guard and we spent two hours in wonderful conversation together. Now we can talk about school, his future plans, and his thoughts about family.

It has been my privilege and honor to meet Ted and to work on his behalf in the community and in court.



“Being a CASA is by far the most important work I’ve ever done. It has some of the most heartbreaking moments and also some of the most rewarding and satisfying moments.”

Program Statistics for 2009

361	CASA volunteers in Los Angeles County
569	children received ongoing individual advocacy
1,777	children were comforted prior to their first court appearance and given an orientation about courts and the dependency system
5,142	children were accompanied to their follow-up court appearances

Who are CASA volunteers?

- 83% are women
- 62% are white, 13% African-American, 10% Hispanic
- 44% are over age 60, 18% are younger than age 40
- 56% are employed, 29% retired

Foster Children who receive ongoing advocacy are:

- 39% African-American, 29% Hispanic, 19% white
- 60% age 6-15, 26% over age 15, 14% under age 6

TOTAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN DEPENDENCY COURT SYSTEM IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY: 25,000.



In Need of a Voice

By Judith Sweet
CASA Volunteer since 2002

My life journey took a surprising and very rewarding turn when I volunteered to be a CASA – a Court Appointed Special Advocate for children in foster care. Because of abuse and neglect these children are removed from their homes and are often placed with strangers. They have done nothing wrong, but at a very young age find themselves in a bewildering system with courts and government agencies deciding their fate – including with whom they will live, where they will go to school, if and when they will be able to visit family, and many other decisions that parents normally make. These children desperately need a voice. They need to be heard. They need to be respected.

CASA volunteers are voices for the children's needs and are the dedicated eyes and ears for Dependency Court judges. My recommendations for the children,

made directly to the judge, are respected because I am knowledgeable about the children's history, family dynamics, and current situation.

As a CASA I am currently working one-on-one with two truly wonderful boys. It is so important that these boys realize their self-worth, grow in self-confidence, and have a good education. These skills will provide them the tools for a future of freedom and independence. There are so many critical needs and issues being juggled by their social worker, attorneys, and caregivers that education and their inner strength and spirit sometimes are not in the forefront. As their CASA, I can take the time to listen to their fears, hopes and dreams, and provide positive support.

These beautiful children, so full of potential, have rewarded me in more ways than I could ever count. My work with them has made me realize how much we sometimes take for granted and how easy it is not to see the needs of these vulnerable children.



"I'll never be able to express the overwhelming significance you've had on my life. Thank you! Take care and pray for us." - Letter from a former CASA child informing his CASA that he had named his first daughter after her

The Value of CASA Volunteers – One Judge's Perspective

One of the areas in which a CASA Volunteer is most helpful to a judge is adoption.

Every child is entitled to grow up in a healthy, safe, loving and permanent home, and one way to ensure this is through adoption. In Los Angeles, we have completed 25,000 adoptions for children from our foster care system since 1998.

Over the years, I have seen CASA Volunteers impact adoptions in five key areas:

They review case files thoroughly. Taking the time and effort to review court files as thoroughly as possible helps judges ensure the best possible outcome for the child.

They get to know everyone involved in the child's life. When you know everyone who touches the life of the child it often opens doors to adoption.

They improve a child's stability. By advocating for the child a CASA Volunteer builds their trust and over time,

that child might be amenable to services such as counseling. These services will not only help the child's well-being but may also help the child's emotional state, rendering a child considered "unadoptable" into someone a family would welcome into their home.

They help obtain missing documents. Because CASA Volunteers have small caseloads they are able to navigate the maze of paperwork that often holds up adoption proceedings. CASA volunteers help fill in the gaps in a system fraught with cracks.

They serve as an extra set of eyes. A CASA volunteer is a huge asset on a case as they add an extra set of eyes and ears observing how a child is doing and reporting that to the court. They continually provide feedback and serve in enabling the best possible placement for the child.

The above is adapted from an article by the Hon. Michael Nash of the Los Angeles Superior Court Juvenile Division, written for CASA's national magazine, The Connection (Winter 2010). Reprinted with permission.



Our Stories

Communicating Patience

By Judy Weinstein
CASA Volunteer since 1994

At age seven Susie was one of the lucky foster children whose foster mother wanted to adopt her, and Susie in turn wanted to be adopted. The biological mother, however, vacillated between accepting the adoption plan and wanting to challenge it, and one of the mother's relatives in another state came forward also requesting that Susie live with her. After several months of delay and legal limbo, the Court and Susie's attorney requested that I serve as Susie's CASA to investigate and report to the Court what was in Susie's best interest.

I visited the relatives and presented my information to the Court, recommending that Susie be adopted by her

foster mother. The Court accepted my findings and my recommendation but further delays ensued for various reasons, which caused Susie to become frustrated about the entire process. I worked hard to communicate with Susie about the delays and to comfort her in her frustration and impatience. I understood and shared her desire to move forward with her life and become permanently placed in a home.

After several months of delay, Susie was finally adopted. I still maintain contact with Susie – celebrating her last eight birthdays with her and attending her middle school graduation.

I have been honored to have had this young girl in my life.



The
Event!

Glamour Gowns 2009

CASA of Los Angeles hosted its eighth annual Glamour Gowns event on March 28, 2009, handing out dresses, shoes, purses, and jewelry to more than 500 young women in foster care as they prepared for that special high school prom or party. It was a day of special fashion pampering for these young ladies – for many a first experience in this kind of event.

And for all volunteers who assisted them, it was an unforgettable, joyful time. We extend a special thank-you to those volunteers, and to local organizations such as Share, Inc., Chinese Laundry, and David's Bridal for their generous support of the Glamour Gowns program.

From L to R: CASAs and Board Members Bruce Herron, Joanne Solov, Board Member Pat Trendacosta, Marketing/PR for Chinese Laundry Sally Gonzales, Liz Benavidez for David's Bridal, Councilwoman Jan Perry and Board Member Sue Marshall

Awards and Honors

CASA of Los Angeles is pleased to report that on May 1, 2009, our organization was awarded the **Quinton James Award** for "Making a Difference" by the Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic. A beautiful crystal and marble sculpture was presented to CASA of Los Angeles and is on display in the entry of our Monterey Park office.

We also are proud of the following CASA volunteers and staff who were honored in 2009:

CASA volunteer **Delores Judge** was named **Volunteer of the Year** at CASA's 2009 Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon.

In May 2009, CASA Director of Volunteer Recruitment and Training **Sue Thompson** was proclaimed a "**Foster Care Hero**" by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors as part of National Foster Care Awareness Month.

CASA volunteer and board member **Cathy Cobb** received the **Ignatian Award** from Santa Clara University for demonstrating "competence, conscience, and compassion ... through outstanding achievement in service to humanity."

CASA volunteers **Susan & Jonathon Brandler** received the **Anita & Stanley Hirsh Award** for Outstanding Community Leadership from Jewish Family Services.

CASA volunteer **Shizuko Akasaki** was recognized by the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) and awarded the regional **Robert E. Kelly Award**, presented to educators/administrators who have exhibited excellence in education after they have retired.



“Helping the children in our foster care system has been the most rewarding thing I have ever done.”

Financial Data

(Fiscal year ending June 30, 2009)

ASSETS:	\$383,647
LIABILITIES:	\$25,666
FUNDING:	
Foundations	\$313,068
Government	190,825
Individuals	201,494
Donated Services	95,455
Corporations	82,122
Interest & Other	2,626
TOTAL FUNDING:	\$877,944
EXPENSES:	
Salaries & Benefits	\$698,047
Professional Services	152,049
Support to Children	72,154
Rent & Storage	31,550
Insurance	16,088
Training, Travel & Volunteer Recognition	14,914
Office Supplies & Phone	10,344
All Other Expenses	10,403
TOTAL EXPENSES:	\$1,005,549

Source: Independent audit report prepared by accounting firm of Clumeck, Stern, Schenkleber & Getzoff, dated November 2, 2009.

CASA of Los Angeles is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization formed in 1983 as “Friends of Child Advocates.”



Thank you

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CASA of Los Angeles gratefully
acknowledges the support and expertise of
its state and national organizations:

CALIFORNIA CASA supports foster youth and volunteers in the state by strengthening, sustaining, and growing the California CASA network. In addition to technical assistance provided to local staff and volunteers, California CASA's work in promoting child welfare legislation creates positive change on a state-wide level. California CASA aims to bring the CASA perspective to lawmakers and policy analysts. For more about California CASA, see www.californiacasa.org.

NATIONAL CASA ASSOCIATION is a network of over 1,000 local community program offices like CASA of Los Angeles. National CASA provides critical leadership, support and training so that each of these programs can provide quality advocacy and lead the continued growth of the CASA network. National CASA also works to raise public awareness of foster children and the role of CASA volunteers through national media advertising and other programs. And finally, National CASA supports its network of community program offices through resource development efforts and direct grants. To learn more about National CASA, see www.casaforchildren.org.

"Being a CASA Volunteer
has made me grateful
for my blessings in life
and has renewed my
passion to give back."



Ways to Support the Work of CASA of Los Angeles

Volunteer to be a CASA

Support our Outreach Efforts

Donate Financially

- Memorial/Tribute Gifts
- Employer Matching Gifts
- Planned Giving

Support Glamour Gowns

Donate In-Kind Services and Supplies

- Pro Bono professional services – medical, dental, legal
- Books and toys for children's birthdays
- Items for auction
- Items for Glamour Gowns event

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Hal Brown

IN MEMORY

CASA volunteer Aaron Ruben, a gifted comedy writer, television producer and director, most notably for "The Andy Griffith Show," devoted much of his later life to serving foster children. Aaron served as a CASA Volunteer for many years and was named Volunteer of the Year in 1999. He and wife Maureen Ruben established the Aaron Ruben Scholarship Fund to provide support and assistance to foster children pursuing post-high school education. We honor and celebrate Aaron's life and devotion to CASA of Los Angeles and to foster children in Los Angeles County.

A CASA volunteer since 1984, Iris Shaw served countless foster children, many with complex medical or psychological needs. As one of the first Children's Court Assistants she provided care and comfort to newly detained foster children. Iris gave unstintingly of her time to CASA staff members and other volunteers to assess the advocacy needs and goals of children served. Iris was named CASA Volunteer of the Year in 1994 and was also chosen that year as the Los Angeles County Volunteer of the Year, the county's most prestigious award for community service. We thank Iris for her years of service and devotion to our program.

A CASA volunteer since 1992, Hal Brown served foster children in many ways. In 1983 he joined forces with Jacquie Dolan to establish Friends of Child Advocates, which has grown into the organization we now call CASA of Los Angeles. Hal was a member of the Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families, serving as Chair of its Emancipation Planning Task Force, which resulted in mandatory transition planning for youth leaving foster care. His wife Jerrie Brown has been a CASA volunteer since 1982.

Monterey Park

CASA of Los Angeles
Edmund D Edelman Children's Court
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Monterey Park, CA 91754-2142
Phone: 323.526.6666

For more information about CASA volunteering
in Los Angeles e-mail volunteer@casala.org

Antelope Valley

CASA of Los Angeles
Alfred J. McCourtney Juvenile Justice Center
1040 West Avenue J Room 1130
Lancaster, CA 93534-3329
Phone: 661.945.6483

For more information about CASA
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