



# A System of Support

Court Appointed Special Advocates give years of their time and support to local foster youth

OCT 18, 2016 *By Jennifer von Geldern*

Family upheaval cast Jairus into foster care at age 5. Now almost 19, he's taking his first steps into adulthood. Even after a life in the foster care system, he's thriving, thanks to his resourcefulness and optimism and support from his Court Appointed Special Advocate — his CASA — Dennis Beasley.

Any child, from infant to young adult, in the foster care system needs a trusted advocate in the courtroom and in life. Since 1991, the nonprofit organization CASA Sacramento has been pairing devoted, trained adult volunteers with foster children to advance their best interests in the juvenile court, foster care system and many other facets of life.

Young adults can participate in the foster care system until age 21, receiving support toward housing, employment and schooling, so Beasley and Jairus are teamed up to make Jairus' future the best it can be.

CASAs get to know the child or young adult, and officially inform the juvenile courts of their needs. Advocates — who can become trusted friends — also speak up for the youth in school, with healthcare providers and in foster homes.

“Jairus has done tremendous things to be in college, have a 20-hour a week job, and work on overcoming his birth mother’s death,” Beasley says. “He’s a hard worker with a great attitude, which will take him far in life.” Beasley, who also works at an Elk Grove after-school center for teens, has been a CASA for five years, and Jairus is the third foster youth he’s advocated for and mentored. “I have more of an adult-to-adult relationship with Jairus,” Beasley says. “I make suggestions, and he decides what to do.”

Beasley had also been in the foster system from age 10 to 13, and when he heard a radio advertisement for CASA, he knew it was meant for him. He signed up for the 30-hour training course right away. “We’re in the trenches with the young person and know how to advocate for them,” he says. “I enjoy watching Jairus make good decisions and learn from bad decisions. It’s a pleasure to care about him as he makes his way in the world.”

Of CASA Sacramento’s 200 or so volunteers, only about 12 percent are men. As an officer of the court on behalf of the youth he serves, Beasley represents what the CASA program needs. “I’d like to challenge men to step into a CASA relationship with a young person — a relationship with impact that lasts a lifetime,” he says.

“High school would have been easier if I’d had a CASA,” Jairus says. “Dennis has made some things much easier — if I need anything or just need someone to talk to, he’s there. He’s a great mentor.”

With Beasley as his mentor, Jairus has earned his driver’s license and has been working for Compassion Planet, a program for aged-out foster youth and at-risk teens in Rocklin, building and delivering furniture and gaining retail and management experience. Compassion Planet also teaches participants life skills, and when Jairus graduates from the program, he’s moving on to a job with North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) in which he’ll travel the nation speaking on his foster care system experiences.

Jairus has just completed his first year at Sierra College, studying business. “I’d like to manage a business or own my own business in the future,” he says. Beasley concludes, “Jairus has a generous heart, an open mind, and is ready for all of life’s opportunities.”