



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

SACRAMENTO COUNTY

CASA Sacramento 2019/2020 Annual Report

Dear CASA Sacramento Friends and Family,

The 2019-2020 year has been unlike any other. There are reasons to be thankful and reasons to be uneasy.

Our staff packed up their offices and transitioned to working from home. Our new CASA Volunteer class #88 was moved online. Our active volunteers struggled to adapt to changes in public health and safety orders while trying to keep up with their youth's housing, education and health needs. Our board of directors transitioned to Zoom meetings, stayed connected and provided support and guidance to our team as we met these new challenges.

But we always knew that the stress we were feeling was small compared to what our youth were going through.

Youth in foster care experience health, racial, housing and educational inequities on a daily basis. As Dr. Bruce Perry, a leading expert in working with children recovering from trauma, notes: "What works best is anything that increases the quality and number of relationships in the child's life." CASA Volunteers make a minimum 18-month commitment because a trusting relationship makes intervention possible, even in the worst of circumstances.

Our CASA youth demographics reflect the disproportionate number of Black and brown children in the foster care system. Even before the start of the pandemic, youth in foster care were 6x more likely to go to jail than to college. We wouldn't accept those odds for our sons, daughters, nieces, nephews, grandsons and granddaughters and we don't accept them for the children in our community who have experienced abuse and neglect.

We envision a world where all youth in foster care graduate from high school and mature into adults with satisfying financially viable careers. CASA is the only program authorized in the Welfare and Institutions Code to transcend confidentiality barriers and provide profound and lengthy intervention.

An initial survey of local CASA volunteers revealed 79% of our children have been negatively impacted by school closures. They need CASA Volunteers to work with schools, caretakers, social workers and judges to address issues. Additionally, volunteers reported that 45% of our youth were at risk of losing their housing. The COVID-19 crisis brings additional patterns of instability to a new level of life-threatening. Older youth (18-20 year olds) are losing job opportunities and income and those who are working are on the front lines of the health risk.

Most concerning, the Child Abuse Prevention Center has reported that the calls to the child abuse hotline have gone down by half during Shelter-in-Place orders, due to fewer eyes and ears on the kids. The isolation and distance from teachers, coaches and all of the other mandated reporters has created a new barrier to children finding safety. We expect there will be a surge in referrals to the Court Appointed Special Advocate programs when we approach our post-pandemic lives.

Our greatest joy comes from the fact that volunteers and donors continue to step up, in spite of the distance.

We know that you and those you love have also been deeply affected by the events of 2020 and we are forever grateful that you have kept your hearts open to the needs of others. We would like to thank all of the individuals, corporations, foundations and organizations who have donated and volunteered to fulfill the CASA Sacramento mission this year and have stood by us as we continue into 2021.

With gratitude,

Alan Wolf
Board President



Carol Noreen, JD
Executive Director

The CASA Mission

Ensuring consistency and support for children in the foster care system through the use of volunteer advocates advancing the best interests of each child.

The CASA Vision

Every child in need is appointed a CASA to champion them in Court, without compromise, on the path to a safe and permanent home.

WELCOME TRAINING CLASSES 84, 85, 86, 87, AND 88



CASA Volunteers:

INVESTIGATE barriers to success in foster care

ADVOCATE to improve current services

MENTOR youth

REPORT progress to the dependency judge

MONITOR the case



Average number of days on waitlist: 128.5

2019/2020 PROGRAM IMPACT



310 foster children served

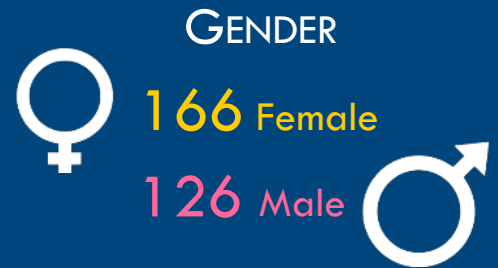
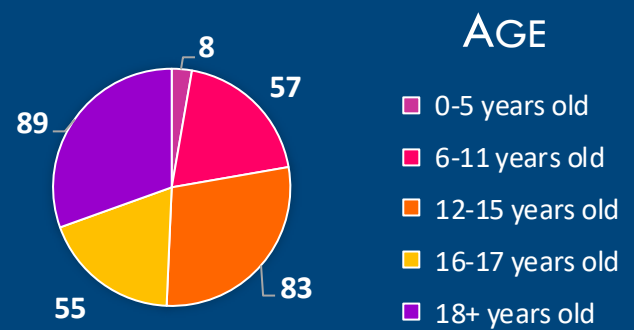
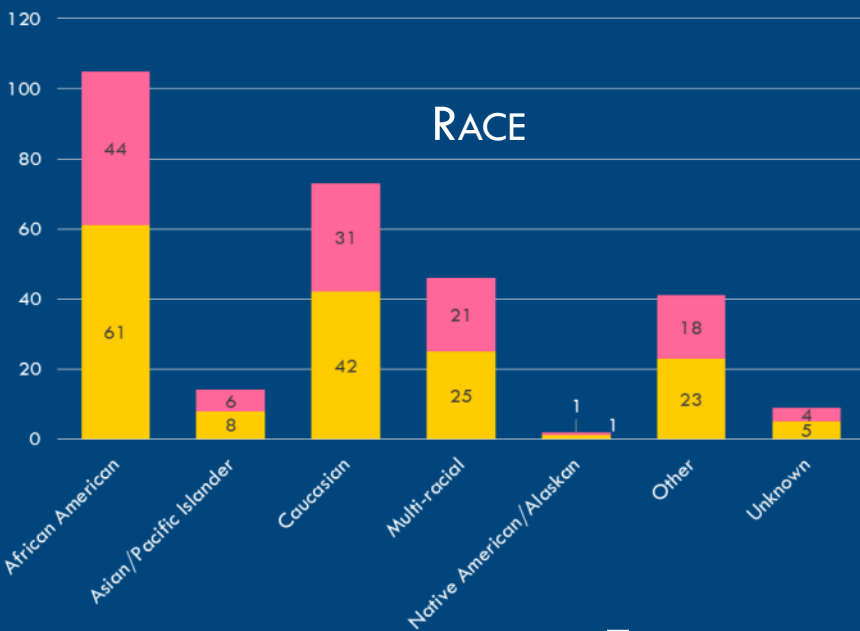
16,688 volunteer hours contributed*

101 new volunteers trained

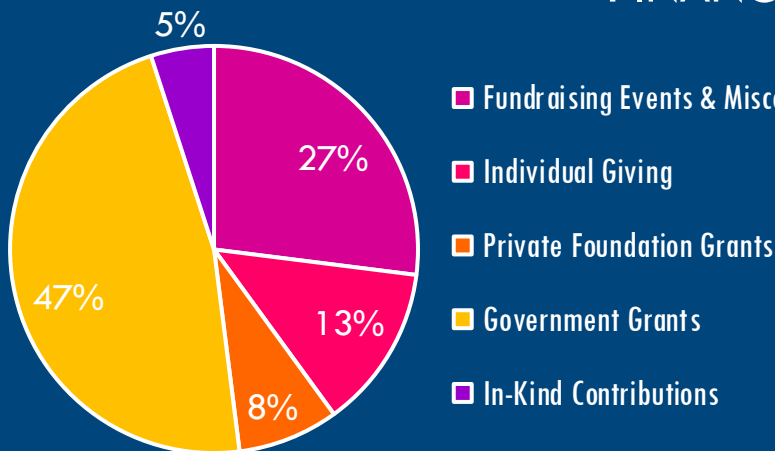
261 active volunteers

* This is a value of \$481,900 in service at the current volunteer rate of \$29.09/hr

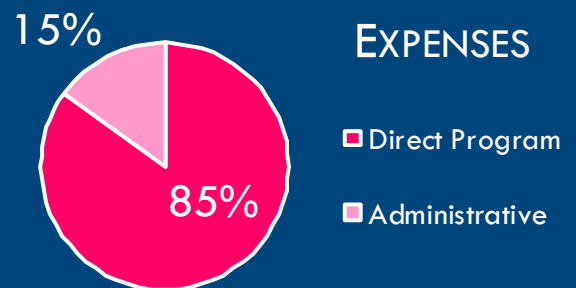
DEMOGRAPHICS OF CHILDREN SERVED:



FINANCIALS*:



REVENUE: \$1,245,499



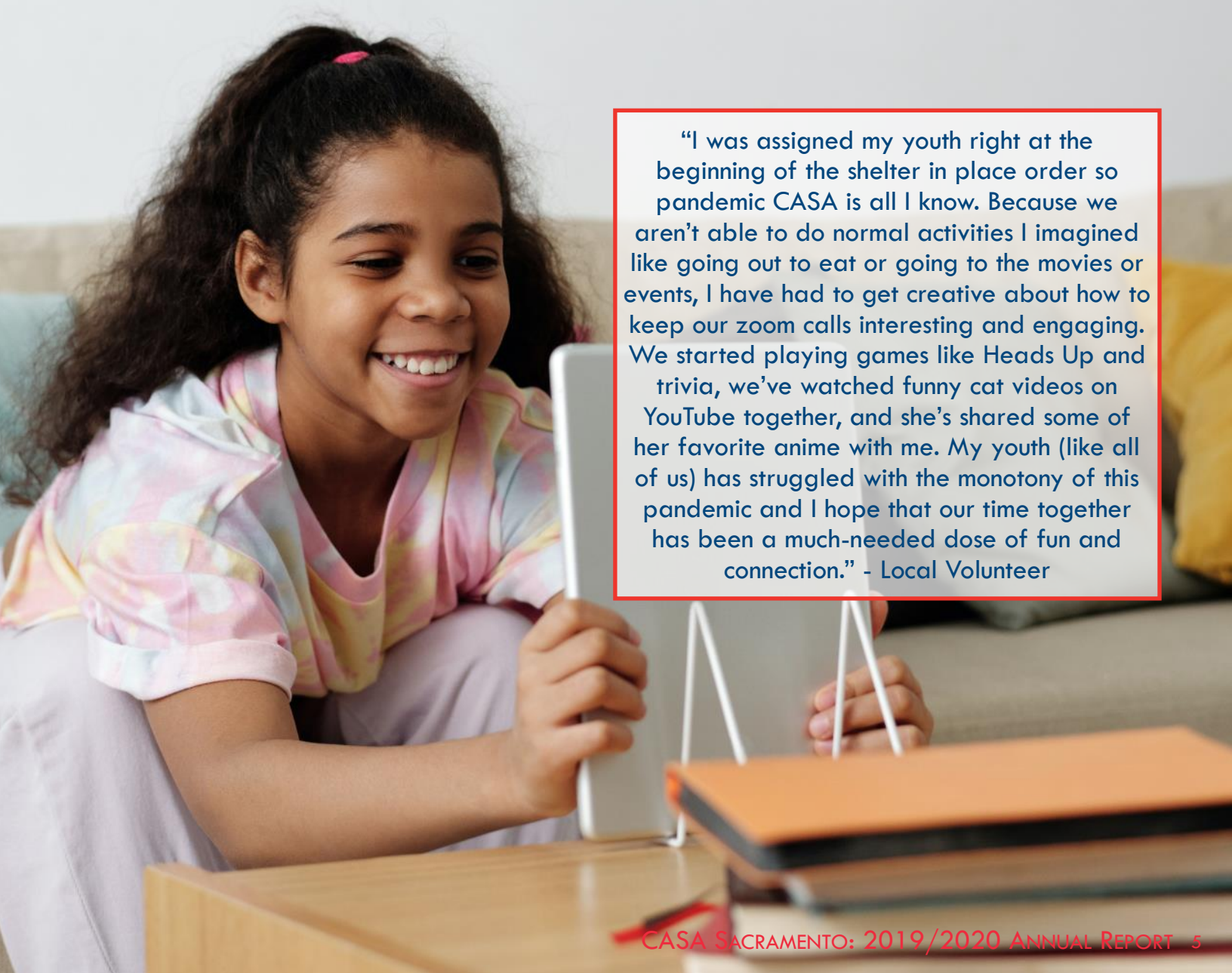
IMPACT SINCE 1991: 3,367 foster children served by 1,673 volunteers, with over 225,000 volunteer hours contributed

COVID-19 Response

The CASA Sacramento program has been fully operational during COVID-19. CASA Volunteers have written court reports throughout shelter in place orders. Case Supervision staff have established a practice of virtual “Office Hours” for Volunteers. Volunteers have been asked to make phone or video contact at least weekly to ensure that children were safe, cared for, receiving educational resources and emotional support. We have promoted both public safety and the critical safety net that we provide for our youth.

Newer volunteers were challenged with try to establish a relationship at a distance and experienced CASAs were challenged with needing to adapt their routines for distance mentoring and advocacy.

CASA Sacramento has established effective work from home policies and procedures, which are a benefit to the staff moving forward.



“I was assigned my youth right at the beginning of the shelter in place order so pandemic CASA is all I know. Because we aren’t able to do normal activities I imagined like going out to eat or going to the movies or events, I have had to get creative about how to keep our zoom calls interesting and engaging. We started playing games like Heads Up and trivia, we’ve watched funny cat videos on YouTube together, and she’s shared some of her favorite anime with me. My youth (like all of us) has struggled with the monotony of this pandemic and I hope that our time together has been a much-needed dose of fun and connection.” - Local Volunteer

Diversity & Inclusion Committee

In June, Recruitment & Training Manager Danielle Keys took the initiative to form a Diversity & Inclusion Committee. In her words:

“We are in a pivotal moment in history that can be scary and confusing for the youth we serve and for their caretakers as well. In our ongoing effort to create and maintain a space where our children feel safe, respected, and loved, CASA Sacramento is creating a Diversity and Inclusion Committee to examine how we can create stronger and more collaborative ways to address the systemic oppression of others based on their ethnicity, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, country of origin, age, or disability. This committee will include staff members, board members, and CASA volunteers, and will be tasked with promoting training and events to bring awareness



to diversity and inclusion in all aspects of the program; engaging staff, board members, and volunteers in diversity and inclusion conversations and training; establishing an ongoing youth-led forum to empower youth; and reviewing and developing policies and procedures that promote diversity and inclusion.”

2020 Diversity & Inclusion Committee Members

Michael Butler - CASA Volunteer

Xuan Chung - CASA Volunteer

Kelley Donato - CASA Staff, Senior Case Supervisor

Erik Harrell - CASA Staff, Transition Age Youth Team

Danielle Keys - CASA Staff, Training & Recruitment Manager

Dani Wogulis - CASA Staff, Development Coordinator



LGBTQ youth are over-represented in the child welfare system, and disproportionately likely to leave foster care without a permanent family. Many of these youth experience neglect, abuse, and/or abandonment specifically because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

All Children – All Families (ACAF), a project of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, promotes LGBTQ inclusive policies and affirming practices among child welfare agencies, and formally recognizes those agencies that are leading the field with innovative approaches to inclusion. In May 2020, CASA Sacramento was recognized in the ACAF Annual Report for achieving the **Tier of Recognition: Building Foundation for Inclusion** for participation in the project.



The CASA Beehive

The CASA Beehive is a peer-led community group of CASA Volunteers, here to support each other in the important work of youth advocacy. The Beehive has restarted Caring for CASAs, holding their first meeting in September. Many CASAs attended to share their stories, seek advice, and share wisdom with the group.



Meet the “Builder Bees”, the leadership team behind making the Beehive and restarting Caring for CASAs:

Claire Fishburn Jones

I have always felt a calling to be a CASA. I was a member of the last in-person training of 2020 and was sworn in this March. After years in the market research industry, I started an interior design firm 6 years ago and I've never been happier career-wise. I live with my husband, my sons Reid (4) & Remy (2), and the two naughtiest kittens in all of the land, Coconut & Poppy. My not-so-guilty pleasure is reality TV and I am on a quest to find the best nachos in Sacramento.



Kai Koumatos

I became a CASA this year, after being sworn in last March. I am a social worker and an ordained interfaith chaplain. As a queer transman, I am passionate about supporting LGBTQ youth. I live with my two cats, Koshka and Jack, and enjoy painting, reading, cooking, and writing.

Jackie Simon

I found CASA Sacramento after looking to volunteer for an organization when my 2 children started full day elementary school several years ago. As a former Victim Advocate, CASA was a perfect fit for my interests and passion. I was matched with my first youth in 2012 and worked with her until she graduated from AB12 in 2016. My current youth and I were matched in 2017 and have weathered some interesting times over the years, but the best is yet to come! I am grateful to be a part of the amazing team of staff and volunteers at CASA Sacramento!

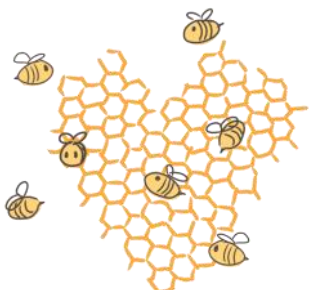


Sandra Ali

When my husband and I moved to Sacramento, we decided to attend a CASA volunteer meeting. We soon signed up for training and have now been CASAs for over 6 years. We were paired with an elementary school age youth and would like to see our youth through to her emancipation from the foster system and beyond! Helping children and young adults who may get lost in a sometimes bewildering experience is my way of contributing to our future...and I have found volunteering with our youth to be so rewarding!

Polly Huntsinger

I went through my CASA training in 2013 and have advocated for three foster children since that time. Even though the cases were challenging, the fulfillment I felt with each little success was immeasurable. Because I have such an affection for the work CASA does, I also did a year-long AmeriCorps term as a CASA case supervisor where I learned so much from the amazing staff. In addition, I received specialized training with another staff member on the subject of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) and we delivered a hands-on 10-week program to at-risk girls in group homes. I am currently working on my PhD in Public Policy and my dissertation topic is on sex trafficking prevention education in middle schools.



Recruiting Volunteers/Education of Public



CASA Sacramento actively recruits volunteers from all backgrounds in an effort to adequately represent the demographics of the youth population that we serve. In order to reach diverse populations including African American, Latinx, and LGBTQ communities, CASA attended events sponsored by My Brother's Keeper, CSUS, and the United Way Our Promise Campaign. We also participated at the Black History Month Family Festival, the Children of Promise Symposium, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church street faire, the LGBTQ Collaborative, the Black Community Fair, and the Break Free Run. These past 6 months, our recruiting efforts have been hampered due to COVID-19, but we continue to look for resourceful ways to remain present in the community, such as participating in the statewide California CASA advertising campaign and running an 8-week ad campaign on community radio station KDEE, which has a majority African American audience.

303 people attended a volunteer orientation
Over 1,000 people reached at community events

Peer Coordinator Program

CASA Sacramento recently re-launched a volunteer opportunity for our experienced CASAs. The Peer Coordinator Program is designed to use seasoned volunteers to support, coach and supervise a small group of newer advocate volunteers. Mutually beneficial goals of this program include allowing our experienced volunteers the opportunity for further professional development in the area of volunteer advocacy while simultaneously growing the program overall. This program was originally launched on a trial basis in 2014 and we have renewed our commitment to utilizing this model in the coming years. We trained a class of four Peer Coordinators this fall and look forward to training another class in the spring of 2021. For additional information regarding this program, please reach out to Laurie Eschrich at laurie@sacramentocasa.org or Kelley Donato at kelley@sacramentocasa.org.



Faith Galati

Breakthrough Executive Director Faith Galati has more than 20 years of experience serving youth in the Sacramento community as a board member for Stanford Home for Children, advocate for CASA of Sacramento, fundraiser for Shriners' Hospital, Save Vernazza, International Bridges to Justice, Global Medical Foundation, and more. Faith is also an operations and development professional with 16 years of experience as an executive in the financial industry. Faith has a deep sense of commitment to the success of Sacramento's under-resourced, under-represented, and marginalized youth and is dedicated

Jennifer Galehouse

Jennifer comes to Sacramento CASA with over 30 years of legislative and government experience. She began her legislative career as an Assembly Fellow in 1990 and in 2000 was appointed to the Resources Agency as the Assistant Secretary for Legislation by Governor Davis. Jennifer served as Deputy State Controller from 2004-2006. She became a fiscal analyst for the Assembly Appropriations Committee in 2013, where she continues to work as the Deputy Chief Consultant. Her policy areas of jurisdiction are Elections, Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials, Water, Parks and Wildlife, Natural Resources, Climate and Renewable Energy.

Jennifer became a CASA in April of 2017 and had the joy of seeing her first youth adopted last year.



Barbara Kronick

Barbara has been a CASA since May 2017 during which time she has advocated for 2 youth. She is a licensed clinical social worker who recently retired as an education and mental health administrator where she worked with and for youth. She feels fortunate to have found a home at CASA which enables her to continue to advocate and support youth. She is excited to take on new responsibilities as a peer coordinator. In her spare time, she volunteers on various boards and committees helping to increase mental health support and services in the schools. She enjoys hiking, biking, golfing, knitting, drawing, cooking, baking and traveling with her husband. She has two adult daughters and is the proud grandmother of two beautiful grandchildren, Isobel and Isaac.

Mehran Tahoori

Mehran has been involved with Sacramento CASA since 2017. By day he works as an employment/labor attorney representing public employees and private workers throughout California. Mehran is dependable, professional, and committed to all his case assignments. He has also willingly stepped up to perform the duties of both a CASA and a GAL. The CASA organization is very fortunate and thankful to have Mehran on our team!



Transition Age Youth Program



The Transition Age Youth Coordinator at CASA Sacramento to provide comprehensive support services to youth ages 16-20 who are in the foster care system. These are youth unlikely to find a permanent placement and forced to face adulthood on their own. Aging out of foster care without a permanent home is the highest-risk outcome for foster youth. One of our key strategies for expanding and improving services to transition age foster youth and young adults is to build upon our experience using the National CASA Association's *Fostering Futures* Curriculum. The curriculum provides 12 hours of additional training to CASA Volunteers to assist teens and young adults with transitional skills and planning. This

program provides training for advocates on relationship building with older youth, the "possible selves" concept and working with youth as partners in transition and independent living planning.

62 youth over the age of 16 attended workshops.

41 CASA Volunteers of teens have completed the 12 hour Fostering Futures training.

45 CASA Volunteers were matched with Transition Age Youth.

Making Memories

Making Memories is a program of CASA Sacramento which provides special experiences to children in foster care who otherwise would not have the resources to pay for them. For children who have moved many times through many homes, basketball or theater camp has typically never been an option. Making Memories funds extracurricular activities to help children and young adults learn social skills, build confidence and provide the relief of getting to be a young person among peers.



Making Memories provided funds for young boy to join Sacramento United U12 Boys Soccer Team.

He told us "I used to not believe in myself, and when I played soccer on other teams, I'd just give up if the team was losing. **Now, I do believe in myself and that I'm good in soccer, and I'm not giving up anymore.**"

His caregiver added: "These funds allowed me to provide [him] with an opportunity that will likely **change the trajectory of the rest of his life** and possibly support him in reaching his dream of becoming "a famous soccer player" as he tells me repeatedly.



Crab Dinner 2020

On January 11, 2020, CASA Sacramento's Night in Paris Crab Dinner grossed over \$230,000 for foster youth. Thank you to everyone who made this magical night possible!



John Allen
 Brian Austin
 Lauren Barton
 CJ Davis Biesanz
 Rick & Mary Bixler
 Ahamadou Alainchar Bocar
 Honorable Jerilyn Borack
 Carlyle & Suzie Brakensiek
 Heather Brandt
 Nora Brazil
 Tara Brennan
 Carol Brummerstedt
 Michelle Callejas
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 Debra Young
 Catherine Zepp
 Lindsay & Adam Zettel



Jackie's Advocacy Journey



Jackie (pictured left, with Development Director Crystal Burns, right) took her oath as a CASA Volunteer on July 26, 2012. Her first youth, we'll call her Sarah, was a 16-year-old girl who needed help graduating from high school, finding a place to live, and choosing an education and career path.

Three years ago, in her final hearing at the age of 21, Sarah said "I think that the court needs to mandate that the AB12 kids do some of these Independent Living Program classes. Not everyone has a CASA to nag them to do it." Since there are a great many things the court cannot mandate, it takes an adult who cares about a child's future to push them to do things that are good for them. Sarah, now 24 years old, maintains contact with Jackie to this day.

In a recent text, Jackie said that she would be giving an interview on television to promote the CASA program. Her youth replied, "Wow that is so amazing! I hope that more people reach out to volunteer. I wouldn't be where I am if I didn't have you so hopefully with more volunteers, children actually get someone who has time to care about them in the system."

Jackie, with a tear in her actual eye and her emoji eye, thanked Sarah for sharing. The moments in which a youth is able to reflect on their time with a CASA are rare and three years after the last hearing, Jackie had moved from the adolescent concept of a caring "nag" to something much more profound.

Sarah replied: "Of course Jackie! You are a big inspiration honestly. You helped me keep moving forward which I try to do no matter what."

Big Day of Giving 2020



On May 7, 2020, over 300 donors came together to raise a record-breaking \$78,000 for CASA Sacramento—over **double** our BDOG 2019 total. Our volunteers led the charge to create individual fundraising pages and encourage other CASA Volunteers, board members, and staff to do so as well. Individual fundraising pages greatly expanded our donor pool and added the crucial element of personal connection to the cause to our fundraising efforts.

Thank You to Our Donors

Tony Albano	Jeffrey Dwyer	Colleen Hutchison	Anita Marth	Sandra Smoley
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Become a Recurring Donor

By joining one of CASA Sacramento's recurring donor circles, you become a partner in a child's success. As a volunteer-driven organization, supporting CASA is one of the most effective ways to invest in the lives of local foster children, and ultimately improve the communities in which we live and work. Your commitment will ensure the good work of CASA Sacramento will continue in our community long into the future.

Giving Circle

\$210 per month – train a **new** CASA Volunteer and match them with a youth for a year

\$125 per month – support an existing CASA Volunteer and their youth for a year

\$50 per month - give a youth an advocate for 5 months

\$25 per month - give a youth an advocate for 10 weeks

or **Set your own level**

Monthly Gift

Annual Gift

Champion of Hope

\$25,000 and above

Support a new CASA for ten or more youth

Voice of Hope

\$5,000 - \$9,999

Support a new CASA for up to four youth

Sustainer of Hope

\$10,000 - \$24,999

Support a new CASA for up to ten youth

Advocate of Hope

\$2,500 - \$4,999

Support a new CASA for one or two youth

Circle of Hope

For more information please contact Crystal Burns at 916-875-4443 or Crystal@sacramentocasa.org



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Anonymous Donor
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Odette Crawford
Gregory Geeting
Dee Hartzog
Eric Jones
Brochton Kaveny

John Kennedy
Law Offices of Dale S. Wilson
Beth Mullen
Shannon O'Donnell
Mark Sawyer
Nate & Jackie Simon
Tim Sires



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Thank you to all of CASA Sacramento's generous supporters!

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JUNIOR LEAGUE OF
SACRAMENTO

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