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FACT SHEET

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Court Appointed Special Advocates

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) is a trained volunteer appointed by a judicial officer to provide advocacy for a child who is under the jurisdiction of the courts due to abuse or neglect. The CASA serves as the “eyes and ears” of the judge for children in foster care. Volunteers spend time with children, monitor needed services, and provide child-focused recommendations to the court based on the best interest of the children they serve.

CASA programs train and supervise CASA volunteers at the direction their local juvenile court. In 2013, there are 44 CASA programs providing services to the local superior courts in 49 of California’s 58 counties. One Tribal CASA program also provides services to four tribal courts. Another local program is formally recognized by the local tribal council to serve and provide advocacy to children on tribal court cases.

The Judicial Council’s CASA grants program provides funding, technical assistance, evaluation, and training for CASA programs and local courts in California.

CASA Funding

The Judicial Council provides funding to all CASA programs serving the superior courts. In California, most CASA programs are non-profit organizations and receive funding from a variety of other sources. The Judicial Council’s funding for CASA programs is determined by county population as required by Welfare and Institutions Code, section 100. For year Fiscal Year 2012-2013, 44 programs in 49 counties were awarded.

CASA Program Evaluation

The Judicial Council program evaluation process is conducted in tandem with the California CASA Association (CalCASA). CFCC and CalCASA staff members conduct each evaluation site review jointly to determine compliance with rule 5.655 of the California rules of court, Welfare and Institutions Code sections 100-109, and

National CASA Association Standards. Preparation for each site review includes a review of various program documentation submitted to CFCC staff during the year prior to the evaluation. In addition to interviewing CASA staff and volunteers, the site visit team meets with judicial officers, attorneys, and social workers to understand local CASA needs and challenges. The on-site evaluations confirm necessary compliance, and identify program challenges to determine appropriate technical support needs. CFCC and CalCASA staff provide follow up technical assistance. During these site visits, CFCC staff also gather information regarding program strengths and innovative strategies to share as best practices with other programs and courts.

CASA Annual Program Report

CFCC carefully monitors the number of volunteers and children served, and demographics of the children served. The numbers that CASA serves statewide has been growing for the past three years. These findings are available in the CASA Annual Reports (<http://www.courts.ca.gov/cfcc-dependency.htm>).

CASA Technical Assistance and Training

CFCC staff members provide technical assistance to local CASA programs for issues related to grant funding, compliance, and data collection. They also organize an annual program directors' meeting and a variety of opportunities for training and networking, including the Beyond the Bench Conference.

CASA Research

In 2004, CFCC staff conducted a statewide evaluation of data collection practices in each CASA program. Following this initial assessment, CFCC implemented a standard data collection procedure for California CASA programs. CFCC also provided necessary training, equipment, and technological services for implementation of this data collection project. On-going technical support is available to ensure that each program is able to track CASA services and child welfare outcomes. CFCC staff also utilize the CASA data collection project to monitor Judicial Council grant requirements and to collect statewide data on CASA services to local courts.

CASA and the Courts: An Assessment

In 2008, CFCC staff, in partnership with the SPHERE Institute and Ceres Research, conducted a study of the services provided by CASA to dependency courts statewide. This one-time assessment focused on what CASAs do to gather and present critical information about dependent children to the court. The study included the perspectives of CASA volunteers, CASA youth, program staff, judicial officers and

community_partners. In addition to highlighting current innovative and effective CASA practices, the study will be used to guide the Judicial Council in its CASA grants program and help make decisions about how to improve and expand CASA programs. (http://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/CASA_Assessment_Research_Summary_03-16-09_Final.pdf).

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