



**Court Appointed Special Advocates of Kern
County**

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The goal of the Court Appointed Special Advocates of Kern County (CASA) is to protect and insure each child's right to a safe, permanent home. These children have come into the Juvenile Dependency Court system as the victims of abuse, neglect and/or abandonment. Their caretakers have been unable to keep them safe, so social services and the legal systems have entered their lives.

The CASA volunteer is a sworn officer of the court whose job is to provide the juvenile court judge or referee with an independent assessment of the circumstances of the child. The CASA's report is drawn from their evaluation of interviews they conduct with the key parties in the child's life. The CASA makes recommendations for the disposition of the case based on the child's total circumstances. In addition, the CASA attends all court hearings pertaining to the child. With the support of the Program staff, they represent the interests of the child in the proceedings, which are normally scheduled every six months.

The CASA volunteer has many roles:

- . to support the child throughout the court proceedings.*
- . to establish a relationship with the child to better understand his or her particular needs and desires.*
- . to communicate the child's needs and explore potential resources which will facilitate early family reunification or alternative permanency planning.*
- . to provide continuous attention to the child's situation to insure that the court's plans for the child are being implemented.*

In addition to these responsibilities, the CASA speaks with his/her child weekly, either in person or by telephone. This one-on-one contact promotes a trusting relationship for the child who often has no other consistent relationship during the period of involvement with the Dependency Court.

After 34 to 36 hours of training, the CASA commits to spending 12 to 15 hours per month on a case for the 12 to 18 months the child may be a dependent of the court. Knowing there is a caring adult available can help a child through an extremely difficult situation. The CASA remains objective in their involvement with the child. The ultimate goal is to reunite the child with their family or placement with new parents or guardians. The Court Appointed Special Advocate's duty is to facilitate that course of action, which will lead to a safe, permanent home.