

Welcome!

**Thank you for your interest in  
making a difference in the life of a child.**



If you have any questions that aren't answered during this Information meeting or you need more information, please contact Outreach and Recruitment Manager, Cita Rasul (831) 761-2956, ext. 102 or [cita@casaofsantacruz.org](mailto:cita@casaofsantacruz.org)

Your next step toward becoming a Court Appointed Special Advocate is to schedule your screening interview at CASA.

A sign-up sheet will be available at the end of this information session or you may sign up for your interview at [casaofsantacruz.org/application](http://casaofsantacruz.org/application).

**The interview takes place in-person at the CASA Office,  
located at 813 Freedom Blvd. in Watsonville.**

***CASA empowers volunteers to directly influence  
life-changing decisions affecting children in foster care.***

# Requirements to become a Court Appointed Special Advocate

## An applicant must:

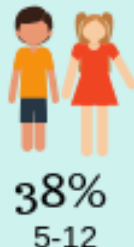
- Be at least 21 years of age
- Be able to commit to visiting with child weekly for up to two years – The average time an Advocate is on a case is 12-18 months.
- Not abuse alcohol or any other substance.
- Not use illegal drugs
- Have a valid driver's license and car insurance, if candidate drives
- Not be on probation
- Not have any serious health concerns that could affect ability to volunteer
- **Individuals who have been convicted of a DWI or DUI within the last seven years are not allowed to serve as volunteer Advocates.**
- Any applicant found to have been convicted of, or to have current charges pending for a felony or misdemeanor involving a sex offense, child abuse, or child neglect will not be accepted as a CASA volunteer.
- If an applicant is found to have committed a misdemeanor or felony that is unrelated to, or would not pose a risk to children and would not negatively impact the credibility of the CASA program, the CASA program will consider the extent of the rehabilitation since the misdemeanor or felony was committed as well as other factors that may influence the decision to accept the applicant as a CASA volunteer.

## CASA Volunteers are:



75% Female  
25% Male  
**Age Ranges:**  
21-29 = 16%  
30-39 = 14%  
40-49 = 12%  
50-59 = 20 %  
60 and over = 38%

## CASA Children are:



**AGE:**

53% Female  
47% Male  
  
51% Latinx  
39% White  
10% Other Non-White

### **Before entering training an applicant must:**

- Attend an information session
- Submit a completed application online ([casaofsantacruz.org/application](http://casaofsantacruz.org/application))
- Complete a personal interview with CASA staff at Watsonville office

### **Screening includes:**

- Criminal Background check – Fingerprinting is at trainee cost approx. \$65 (scholarships are available)
- Copy of Driver's License
- Driver's History from Department of Motor Vehicles
- Written Declaration of Auto Insurance
- Three references: a current or previous employer; a person who has seen the individual interact with children; and a personal reference. Reference checks do not begin until trainee has attended their first class.

**The screening process generally begins after the applicant has completed their pre-training interview and has been invited to join training.**

### **During Training:**

Trainees will be expected to ask thoughtful and relevant questions and actively participate in training.

Training totals 35 hours - 10 sessions of 3 hours each, plus court observation and a mock hearing. The training covers topics including domestic violence, child development, court proceedings and familial issues contributing to abuse and neglect, as well as, the role of a CASA volunteer.

### **Following training:**

Advocates will complete a post-training interview and will understand their role, have an opportunity to ask any follow-up questions and be ready to take a case.

### **What does a CASA volunteer do?**

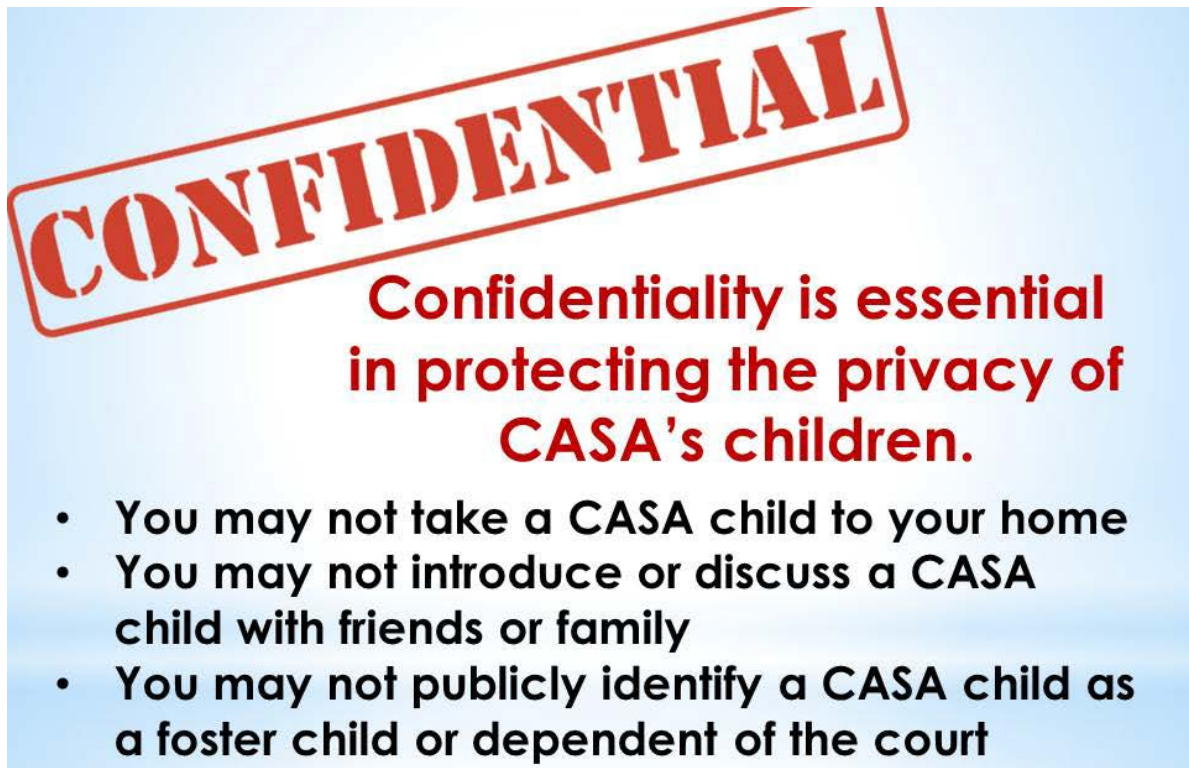
Volunteers get to know the child by talking with everyone in that child's life: parents and relatives, foster parents, teachers, medical professionals, attorneys, social workers and others. They use the information they gather to inform judges and others of what the child needs and what will be the best permanent home for them.

**The Advocate will also:**

- **Determine** the needs of the child; read the child's case file, connect with teachers, foster parents, social workers, mental health professionals, relatives, parents, attorneys and other significant people involved in the child's life.
- **Facilitate** services and community resources to meet the needs of the child.
- **Advocate** for the child's needs to be met promptly and thoroughly. In collaboration with CASA staff, write court reports to keep the judge informed and make recommendations to the court.
- **Monitor** to ensure team members follow through on commitments to the child.
- **Be a caring, consistent support for the child.** For many children in foster care, their CASA volunteer is the one consistent adult presence while they are in foster care.

**Additional Requirements:**

- Update assigned Advocate Supervisor regularly
- Complete 12 hours of continuing education annually.



**CONFIDENTIAL**

**Confidentiality is essential  
in protecting the privacy of  
CASA's children.**

- **You may not take a CASA child to your home**
- **You may not introduce or discuss a CASA child with friends or family**
- **You may not publicly identify a CASA child as a foster child or dependent of the court**

## Frequently Asked Questions for Potential Volunteers

### **IS CASA OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY THE ONLY ONE OF ITS KIND?**

No, CASA of Santa Cruz County is one of more than 900 independent programs nationwide.

### **HOW DID CASA PROGRAMS GET STARTED?**

In 1977, a Seattle judge, concerned about not having sufficient evidence with which to make decisions involving children victimized by abuse and neglect, conceived the idea of using trained community volunteers to speak for the best interests of these children in court.

### **HOW AND WHEN DID CASA OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY GET STARTED?**

CASA of Santa Cruz County was founded in February 1992, as our community's response to a tragic case of severe neglect that occurred here in 1991.

### **CAN I VOLUNTEER WITHOUT TAKING ON A CASA CASE/CHILD?**

Yes. Friends of CASA seek members to help with fundraising and occasional office support. Other ways to help can be ongoing or with special projects.

### **CAN I WORK FULL TIME AND STILL BE A CASA?**

Yes. 40% of our CASA volunteers work full time.

### **HOW MANY HOURS A WEEK DOES IT TAKE TO BE A CASA VOLUNTEER?**

CASA volunteers spend on average 2-4 hours a week on their case.

### **WHAT IS THE LENGTH OF THE CASA VOLUNTEER'S COMMITMENT?**

CASA volunteers commit to their child for up to two years, or until the case is resolved. The average assignment for a volunteer is approximately 12-18 months.

### **I TRAVEL OCCASSIONALLY. CAN I CONTINUE TO DO THAT AS A CASA?**

Yes. Although consistency is one of the prime functions of a volunteer, most volunteers take vacations. We ask that you communicate with your Advocate Supervisor well in advance of travel dates.

### **WHAT AGE DO YOU HAVE TO BE IN ORDER TO BE A CASA?**

You must be at least 21 years of age to be a CASA volunteer.

### **DO YOU HAVE TO HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF THE LEGAL SYSTEM TO BE A CASA?**

No. CASA volunteers come from all professions and educational backgrounds. CASA provides the training you will need.

### **TO WHOM DOES A CASA VOLUNTEER TURN WITH QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?**

Every volunteer has an Advocate Supervisor. He or she is available to answer all questions and concerns. Our job is to support CASA volunteers!

## **CAN I BRING MY OWN CHILDREN OR OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS WITH ME WHEN I'M VOLUNTEERING AS A CASA?**

No. CASA children need one-on-one time with their adult volunteer. Dogs and cats ok. ☺

## **CAN I TAKE MY CASA CHILD TO MY HOME WITH ME FOR VISITS?**

No. Volunteers are not allowed to take children to their home.

## **"I'M WORRIED THAT MY GOOD INTENTIONS TO HELP A CHILD MIGHT BE MISINTERPRETED. DOES THIS HAPPEN TO MALE CASA ADVOCATES? AM I PROTECTED?"**

Some men are afraid that if they volunteer to work with a child, their good intentions might be misinterpreted by others. Yet many at-risk children in the foster care system, especially boys, are desperately in need of a male Advocate or mentor to make a positive difference in their lives. 50% of the children we serve are boys, and about 25% of our volunteers are men. CASA works hard to ensure all volunteers are rigorously background-checked, thoroughly trained, and continuously supported to achieve compliance with our best practices, for the protection of our Advocates as well as our children.

## **DO CASA VOLUNTEERS HAVE TO GO TO COURT?**

Yes. Typically volunteers go to court 2-3 times a year. One of the most important and rewarding aspects of being an Advocate is making recommendations to the court for your CASA child. Judges rely heavily on the Advocate's court report when making decisions about the welfare and future of a CASA child.

## **DO CASA VOLUNTEERS MEET THE PARENTS OF THEIR CASA CHILD?**

Yes. CASA volunteers speak with everyone involved in the child's life, including parents, teachers, social workers, mental health and medical providers. The goal for all children involved in Dependency Court is to reunify to a safe, loving home with their birth family. Most of the children we serve return to their parent's care.

## **HOW LONG IS THE CASA TRAINING?**

Training totals 35 hours: 10 sessions of 3 hours each, plus a weekday (usually Tuesday) 5 hour court observation and a mock hearing.

## **HOW WILL I BE MATCHED WITH A CHILD?**

Before and after training, CASA staff review the trainee's stated preferences and capabilities. A great deal of analysis and care go into matching Advocates and children. Advocates ultimately choose their own case from several proposed by CASA staff.

**Any other questions? Contact [Cita@casaofsantacruz.org](mailto:Cita@casaofsantacruz.org) or call (831) 761-2956.**