



CASA of Santa Cruz County Strategic Plan 2026–2028

Advocating for Children, Youth, and Babies



Approved by the Board of Directors November 2025

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Letter from the Executive Director and Board President

For more than three decades, CASA of Santa Cruz County has achieved extraordinary milestones, transforming the lives of children and youth in our community. Together, with the vision and dedication of our past and present CASA community, we have accomplished the long-held goals of serving every child under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court system. This achievement is not just about numbers. It reflects something powerful: when a young person has someone who sees them, believes in them, and stands beside them with consistency and care, it can change the course of their life.

And it reminds us of what is possible when a community comes together.

With this strategic plan, we step boldly into the future. It is a roadmap for deepening the remarkable work we have begun. And furthering that work by offering support earlier in a young person's life and continuing that support as they grow, even beyond the time when court involvement ends. Advocates will walk alongside youth at the moments when connection matters most, and for as long as each young person feels they need us.

We look forward to continuing our journey together so that every child and youth connected to complex systems of care is surrounded by the people and resources that help them heal and thrive.

This plan is a celebration of what we have accomplished and a declaration of what the children still need. Together, we will continue to build a CASA that is strong, visionary, and responsive— one where every young person has someone in their corner at the time they need it most, and where every child who is system involved has the chance to grow into a future defined not by circumstance, but by belonging, support, and hope.

With gratitude,



Lynne Petrovic, Executive Director



Paz Padilla, Board President

Executive Summary

At the end of 2025, CASA of Santa Cruz County has achieved remarkable milestones, turning ambitious goals into tangible results, including:

- Every child under the jurisdiction of the court due to abuse or neglect and every eligible child under the court due to being justice-involved is offered an Advocate.
- Children, youth, and babies are matched with an Advocate in under 30 days.
- A vibrant work culture rooted in our mission, driven by growth and community connection, and centered on the lived experiences of the youth and families we serve.

As we look toward the future, we also recognize how our county, our state, and the lives of children and families have evolved—and how CASA must respond.

Two findings stood out as especially significant:

1. Decline in Court-Involved Youth

The number of youth in foster care and juvenile justice court has dramatically declined and now is only 25% of what it was a decade ago. This shift is driven by the federal Family First Prevention Services Act and local reform efforts focused on keeping families together and reducing court involvement whenever possible.

2. Persistent Need for Advocacy

Children are still experiencing trauma-inducing abuse and neglect. As Santa Cruz County builds systems of care outside of the courts, the children we have always served are still there—they are simply not in the court system. Now more than ever, they need someone to advocate for their best interest.

These realities shaped the three strategic priorities at the heart of this plan:

Strengthen — Enhance the quality, reach, and impact of our core programs and operations, ensuring every Advocate, every youth, and every family benefits from the highest standard of support.

Build — Grow the ecosystem of support so that youth and families can be connected to services earlier, supported during court involvement, and sustained after cases close.

Sustain — Ensure a resilient, equity-focused, and mission-driven organization with strong staffing, stable resources, and operations that last for generations to come.

This plan builds on a strong foundation and positions CASA to move from “serving every youth” to serving every youth deeply, consistently, and with meaningful impact.

CASA of Santa Cruz County's History

CASA of Santa Cruz County
founded

1992

The Richard and Mary Solari
CASA House opens

2010

Begin serving infants and
toddlers (0-5 year olds)

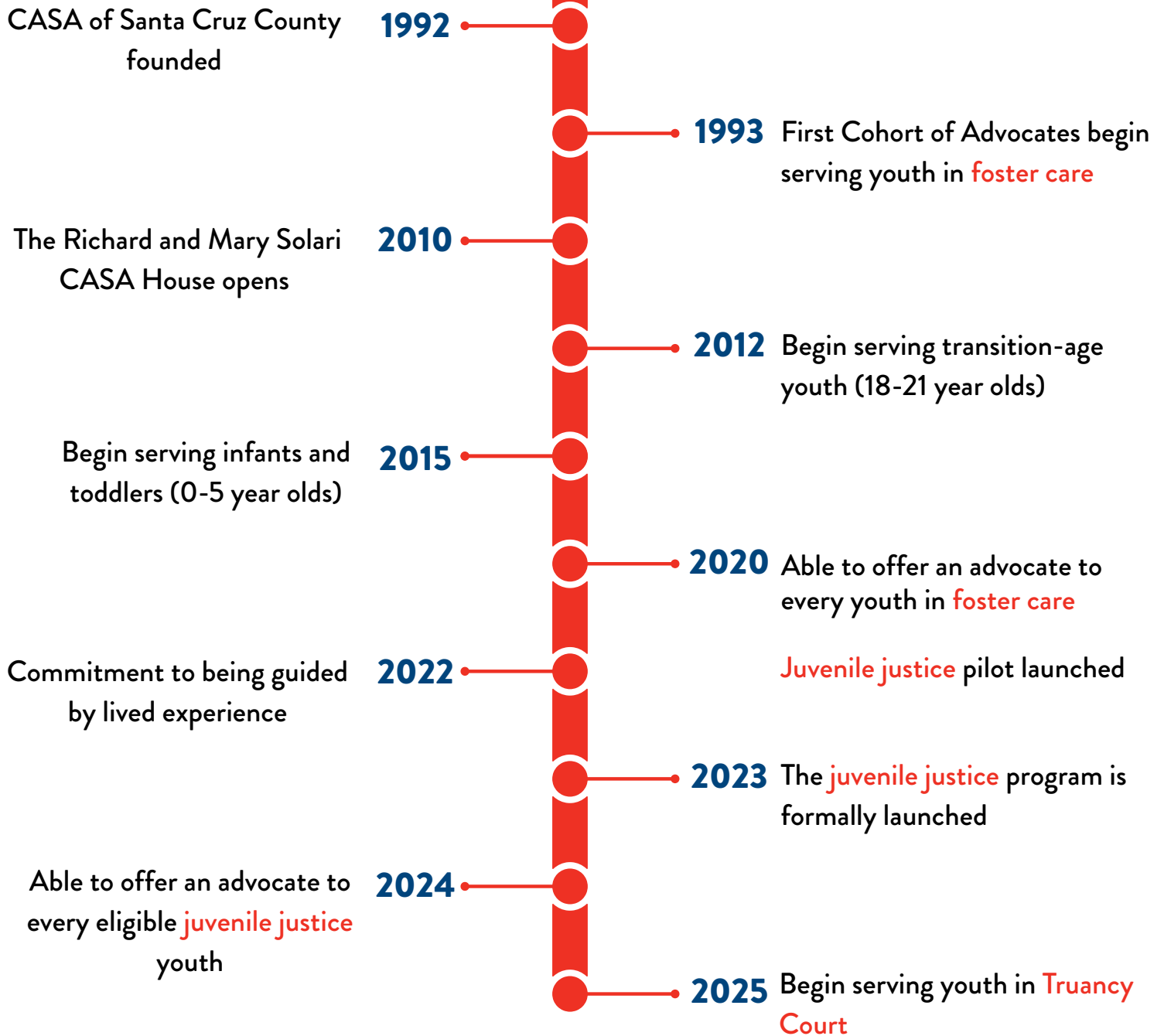
2015

Commitment to being guided
by lived experience

2022

Able to offer an advocate to
every eligible **juvenile justice**
youth

2024



All eligible youth offered an
advocate in under 30 days

Listening, Learning, and Co-Creating Our Plan

The Planning Process

In 2025, The Strategic Planning Steering Committee, predominantly composed of individuals with lived experience, led the strategic planning process. CASA of Santa Cruz County turned to the community for guidance, listening deeply in over 40 input opportunities with people who know the organization best.

The process was guided by a commitment to move further on our path to excellence—challenging ourselves, our assumptions, and existing models while advancing our intentional DEI journey.

True to CASA’s values of inclusion, early drafts were shared for additional feedback. We are deeply grateful to our Community Council, whose input strengthened every aspect of the plan, ensuring it reflects the wisdom, lived experience, and aspirations of the community.

Our Stakeholder Input

CASA’s Unique Role and Strengths

CASA is widely recognized as a trusted and consistent presence for children and families navigating the dependency and juvenile justice systems. Stakeholders described CASA Advocates as mentors, role models, and caring adults who offer youth dependable support, advocacy in court, and access to resources that go beyond what service providers can offer. CASA’s independence from other agencies allows it to serve as the “eyes and ears of the court” while remaining focused on the best interests of youth. The organization is respected for its strong reputation, commitment to equity, and dedication to centering lived experience in its work.

Priorities to Continue and Strengthen

Stakeholders celebrated CASA’s strong foundation in high-quality advocacy and mentorship and encouraged continued growth in building a diverse Advocate community that reflects the youth and families served. They highlighted CASA’s trusted partnerships with courts and community organizations as key strengths and saw opportunities to deepen DEI efforts, expand family and after-care supports, and elevate youth and family voices in storytelling, leadership, and decision-making.

Areas for Growth and Improvement

Stakeholders encouraged continued investment in streamlined systems including communications. Strengthening training—particularly in juvenile justice, age-specific needs, and cultural responsiveness—was seen as an opportunity to deepen impact. Participants also envisioned CASA’s house and community spaces as vibrant hubs for youth programs, skill-building, and family engagement.

Community Challenges and Opportunities

The most pressing community issues identified were housing insecurity, immigration-related fears, limited access to mental health and education supports, and systemic inequities facing system-involved youth. Stakeholders saw CASA as uniquely positioned to play a role in advocacy on these issues while continuing its core mission of providing individualized support. Opportunities also exist for CASA to deepen prevention efforts, expand partnerships with schools and community programs, and build pathways for youth into education, employment, and independent living.

Vision for the Future

Looking ahead, stakeholders envisioned a CASA that continues to adapt to changing community needs, grows its pool of diverse advocates, and expands prevention and post-case supports. They hope CASA will remain a strong, healing presence for youth and families, influence systemic change, and sustain its reputation as a trusted and flexible partner. Above all, they see CASA as a vital community resource whose voice and advocacy help ensure that every young person has the support and opportunities they need to thrive.



Our Vision

All children are nurtured in the hearts and homes of safe and loving families

Our Mission

CASA of Santa Cruz County advocates for children and youth, providing court-appointed volunteers so each child in the dependency and juvenile court system feels cared for and connected with the people, families, and resources they need to heal and flourish into adulthood.

How We Work

Data-Driven: Use outcome data, surveys, and community input to guide decisions.

Equity-Focused: Ensure services and staffing reflect the lived experience of the communities we serve.

Collaborative: Partner with families, youth, and community and court partners.

Accountable: Clear roles, timelines, and measures for success.

Our Values

- Opportunity
- Community
- Compassion
- Justice

Strategic Plan Summary

CASA Santa Cruz County 2026-2028



STRENGTHEN

ENHANCE THE QUALITY, REACH, AND IMPACT OF OUR CORE PROGRAMS AND OPERATIONS



BUILD

GROW THE ECOSYSTEM OF SUPPORT TO ADVOCATE FOR THE BEST INTERESTS OF SYSTEM-INVOLVED YOUTH AND FAMILIES



SUSTAIN

ENSURE A RESILIENT, EQUITY-FOCUSED, AND MISSION-DRIVEN ORGANIZATION THROUGH STRONG INTERNAL OPERATIONS



STRENGTHEN



ENHANCE THE QUALITY, REACH, AND IMPACT OF OUR CORE PROGRAMS AND OPERATIONS

- Provide more concrete support for youth in need.
- Recruit, train, and retain a diverse, skilled advocate community that reflects those we serve.
- Use outcome data and feedback to continually improve services.
- Standardize procedures across all programs for consistency and quality.
- Create culturally affirming activities to reduce isolation and build natural supports.



BUILD



GROW THE ECOSYSTEM OF SUPPORT TO ADVOCATE FOR THE BEST INTERESTS OF SYSTEM-INVOLVED YOUTH AND FAMILIES

- Launch and grow the Enhanced Care Management program.
- Ensure every youth and family is offered an advocate in truancy court.
- Build aftercare programs for youth in the Juvenile Court system.
- Co-create early care initiatives with youth and families that design support and care plans that reduce or eliminate juvenile court intervention.



SUSTAIN



ENSURE A RESILIENT, EQUITY-FOCUSED, AND MISSION-DRIVEN ORGANIZATION THROUGH STRONG INTERNAL OPERATIONS

- Support staff and board growth and well-being; plan for leadership succession.
- Strengthen financial sustainability and stability.
- Evolve communications and branding to reflect our expanded role.
- Increase CASA's voice in local and state advocacy for youth and family rights.

Acknowledgments

We extend heartfelt appreciation to everyone who contributed to this plan, especially the youth, families, Advocates, staff, board members, donors, our auxiliary and partners who shared their experiences, insight, and hopes for the future. Your voices guide this work. With Special thanks to:

- **The Strategic Plan Steering Committee**
 - Paz Padilla, Board President
 - Kayla Raymond, Board Member
 - Ben Slyder, Board Member
 - Ana Menera, Administrative Assistant
 - Lynne Petrovic, Executive Director
 - Gustavo Rodriguez, Advocate Supervisor
 - Angie Redlich, Advocate Supervisor
 - Reyna Ruiz, Director of Juvenile Justice Programs
 - Impact Launch Consultants
- Our Community Council
- Impact Launch, strategic plan consultants