

**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS RESPONSE TO
GRAND JURY REPORT NO. 1006:
CFS and CASA: Their Common Focus – Foster Children**

Acronyms used in this report include:

CPS – Child Protective Services

CFS – Children and Family Services

CASA – Court Appointed Special Advocates

FINDINGS

1. In 2008-2009, there were approximately 1,100 foster care children served by CPS.

Response: Respondent agrees with finding

2. In 2008-2009, 179 of the foster care children in CFS were being served by 157 trained CASA volunteers.

Response: Respondent agrees with finding

3. Approximately 50 children are on a waiting list for a CASA volunteer assignment.

Response: Respondent agrees with finding

4. In 2008-2009, of the 119 positions eliminated in CFS, 65 were social workers responsible for foster children.

Response: Respondent agrees with finding

5. In the same year, CASA volunteers provided 20,477 case hours of advocacy services to foster care children of Contra Costa County.

Response: Respondent agrees with finding

6. At least forty-six (46) new CASA volunteers must be recruited, selected and trained each year to maintain the current level of volunteer services.

Response: Respondent is not aware of the CASA requirements and is unable to agree or disagree with findings.

7. The Fall 2009 CASA training cycle was eliminated due to budgetary constraints.

Response: Respondent is not aware of the CASA training schedule and is unable to agree or disagree with findings.

8. In 2008-2009, approximately 70% of foster children in CPS assigned to a CASA volunteer were Latino or children of color.

Response: Respondent agrees with finding

9. Representatives of CPS and CASA staff expressed the need for more ethnically diverse volunteers since 80% of CASA volunteers are Caucasian.

Response: Respondent is unable to agree or disagree with finding in that the respondent is not aware of what representatives have said. The respondent would say that CASA Volunteers should be ethnically and culturally diverse and reflect the population that they serve.

10. Of the foster care children served by CASA, 55% are from East and West County while only 16% of CASA volunteers were from East and West County.

Response: Respondent is not aware of the parts of the county where CASA volunteers reside and is unable to agree or disagree with findings.

11. Representatives of CFS and CASA suggested that team effectiveness can be improved by addressing the differences in understanding or appreciation of their respective roles and responsibilities.

Response: Respondent agrees with finding. Most working relationships are enhanced when representatives' of different agencies have enhanced understanding of the role of their partners. The CASA program, CFS and other legal representatives meet on a bi-monthly basis. CFS staff volunteer their time to provide training to CASA staff when resources allow. Additionally CFS encourages their social workers to meet with CASA representatives regarding the children they represent.

12. CPS can be instrumental in supporting additional training of CASA volunteers in the areas of juvenile court procedures, dependency law and standards of care.

Response: Respondent agrees with finding. There are many parties in the juvenile dependency arena. In addition to CFS, the Bench and Bench Officers are critical towards helping CASA staff in training.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. CPS shall assist CASA in its recruitment efforts to broaden the diversity of its Volunteers' ethnicity and gender.

Response: This recommendation has already been implemented as resources allow. CASA is responsible for recruitment of volunteers but the County promotes the opportunity at all events, fairs, etc. When contacted by individuals wishing to volunteer, CFS refers them to the CASA program. Additionally, CFS provides a brochure on the CASA program to all foster parents.

2. CFS shall assist CASA in expanding recruitment and orientation sessions into East and West County.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable. CFS has no resources to support an expansion of the recruitment and orientation sessions provided by CASA to volunteers. Recruitment and orientation of volunteers is the responsibility of CASA and CFS provides what assistance it can within resources. CFS will continue to inform those who interact with them of the need for more CASA volunteers and continue referring those interest in volunteering to CASA.

3. CPS and CASA shall explore methods for improving their team effectiveness.

Response: This recommendation has already been implemented as Children and Family Services and CASA has an open door where each is comfortable addressing issues. CFS also meets with CASA and the Bench on a bi-monthly basis to discuss issues and provide program updates. Additionally, Social Workers and CASA volunteers meet on a regular basis to address individual case issues. CFS will continue to encourage case specific communication to assist the youth who are served jointly by the CASA program.

4. CPS shall support additional CASA volunteer training in the areas of juvenile court procedures, dependency law and standards of care.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented as it is not reasonable. CFS staff have been reduced due to budget constraints and have no resources to support this recommendation. CFS will continue to support the program in the areas as stated above based on available resources.