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Child Advocates, CASA of Silicon Valley Receives National Grant to Benefit More Children in Santa Clara County

MILPITAS, CA, OCT. 25, 2018 – Child Advocates, CASA of Silicon Valley, has been awarded a \$35,000 growth grant from the National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association. Funds will be used to recruit, train and support more CASA volunteers from our community to work one-on-one with children in the foster care system. CASAs provide critical emotional and educational support to children who have experienced abuse or neglect, ensuring that each child’s needs are met and their voice is heard as they navigate the dependency court system.

Nationally, a child enters the foster care system every two minutes, and currently there are not enough CASA volunteers to serve every child. In Santa Clara County, there are approximately 1,300 children in the foster care. This past year Child Advocates provided CASAs to 905 foster children. The nonprofit agency has a three-year strategic plan to serve 1,200 children with a CASA by 2021.

According to the 2018 California Children’s Report Card, 50 percent of children in foster care have endured four or more adverse childhood experiences, which include abuse, neglect, household substance abuse, household mental illness, and household violence.

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“Every child in foster care deserves the support of a consistent, caring adult,” says Karen Scussel, executive director of Child Advocates, CASA of Silicon Valley.

CASAs use a trauma-informed approach, providing stability and guidance to children through changes of social workers, attorneys, placements, schools and service providers. Just as importantly, CASAs are friends and mentors, awakening potential and resiliency in the children they serve.

“We know CASAs make a tremendous difference in a foster child’s life,” Scussel explains, noting that only 47% of all foster youth in Santa Clara County complete high school, but with the support of a CASA, foster teens fare much better. Last year, 95% of Child Advocates’ teens completed their high school requirements and 80% planned to continue their education at a community college or vocational program.

Currently, Child Advocates has more than 150 foster children waiting to be matched with a CASA. No legal experience is necessary — just a willingness to spend time with a child when they are feeling most vulnerable. The time commitment is just 10-12 hours per month.

Volunteers must pass a background check and be 21 years or older to become a Court Appointed Special Advocate. Individuals interested in becoming a CASA can sign up at www.BeMyAdvocate.org/volunteer to attend a Volunteer Information Session to learn more about the role and requirements of becoming a CASA volunteer in Santa Clara County. Two Information Sessions will be held in November: one on Saturday, Nov. 3 at 10:00 am, and one on Monday, Nov. 5 at 5:45 pm. Both Information Sessions will be held at the Sobrato Center for Nonprofits, 1400 Parkmoor Avenue, San Jose. For more information, contact Bryan Wilson at Bryan@cadvocates.org or at 408.573.5602.

The federal grant funds distributed through the National CASA Association are provided by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, US Department of Justice, as authorized under the Victims of Child Abuse Act of 1990. They are awarded through a competitive process. In 2018, National CASA was awarded over \$10 million in federal grants.

About Child Advocates of Silicon Valley

Child Advocates was founded in 1986 and has served more than 16,000 foster children with a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). Child Advocates is the only agency in Santa Clara County that provides CASAs to foster youth. Because our volunteers are court-appointed, they can thoroughly research every aspect of a child's case, including meeting teachers, doctors, social workers, counselors, biological family members and foster parents, thereby gaining a comprehensive perspective on what the child needs in order to thrive. CASAs assist their child in accessing needed resources, follow their school progress, and speak up for their child's best interests in court. They maintain records about the case, submit reports and attend court hearings. CASA volunteers stay with their case until their child has a safe, loving home. Find out more about our CASA program at www.BeMyAdvocate.org.

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