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For Immediate Release:

National CASA Association awards grant to local Court Appointed Special Advocates

A grant to expand staff and reach out to more children in foster care has been awarded to Court Appointed Special Advocates of Santa Cruz County by the National CASA Association.

The one-year grant will fund a 32-hour/week Case Supervisor position to focus on the special needs of teens and older youth transitioning from the foster care system into adulthood.

"We are thrilled to receive this resource and the vote of confidence from our national organization for our work here in Santa Cruz County, says CASA Executive Director Nancy Sherrod. The 'expansion grant' was one of 40 awarded among the nationwide network of over 900 independent Court Appointed Special Advocate organizations. The local CASA receives some support from local government and the judicial council, but more than 70% of its operating budget still comes from individual donations and community fundraising, Sherrod says.

The new position of Older Youth Specialist has been filled by Lois Keiser, a former social worker experienced with older children in the dependency system. Keiser joins four other CASA Case Supervisors who train and support more than 125 volunteers working with children who have been abused or neglected and placed in the foster care system for their protection. CASA's Advocates are appointed by the court to help support the children and to speak up for their needs until they are no longer dependents of the court.

There are currently more than 30 children on the waiting list for a CASA volunteer, Sherrod says. With the help of this grant, CASA hopes to serve more than 200 children next year through targeted recruitment of new volunteers.

"There is a real urgency in our community for more children to be served immediately" Sherrod says. "Now that we have more staff resources, we need for more adults to step up for these children."

Becoming a sworn CASA Advocate requires 35 hours of training and the ability to spend several hours with a child once a week. The Advocate will communicate with foster parents and social service professionals, write periodic court reports to the judge and attend court hearings to speak up for the child. Visit casaofsantacruz.org to learn more.

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