



INFANTS & TODDLERS PROGRAM

THE PROJECT:

Tragically, abused and neglected children from newborns to five years old—our Infants & Toddlers—are the largest age group represented in San Diego County foster care. When children are maltreated during their earliest and formative years, they are at risk for permanent damage in their physical and mental health. Voices for Children’s Infants & Toddlers Program (ITP) is an innovative program that trains Court Appointed Special Advocates (or CASAs) to help the youngest foster children in the system get the services they need. The goal is that permanency in their living situations will allow them to grow up without the negative consequences that can be the result of entire childhoods spent in foster care.

The demographics of the foster children we serve is diverse: they are 30% Hispanic, 17% African American, 16% Caucasian, 9% multi-racial, and the balance is comprised of Asian Americans, Native Americans, and other ethnicities. In gender, 49% are boys and 51% are girls.

One of the most troubling statistics, as noted, is that infants and toddlers are the largest age group within foster care (representing 40% of the total 5,000 children in foster care last year—a total of 2,000 children). Sadly, this is also the fastest-growing group in the foster care system. The majority of cases occur because of substance abuse by the parents, physical or emotional abuse, or, with newborns, when they are born to drug-addicted mothers. Every infant and toddler in foster care can benefit from the support and advocacy of a CASA volunteer, who can help get the children needed services and eventual permanent placement into a loving “forever family.”

Every month, hundreds of children enter the foster care system, a great many of them aged newborn to five years old. Voices for Children’s objectives with this program are to make this journey as easy as possible for the children, by assigning a CASA volunteer and supporting their advocacy that will hopefully result in a permanent placement as soon as possible.

Voices for Children began the Infants and Toddlers Program in 2011 as a small pilot initiative, and it has developed rapidly since then, in the last few years becoming a model for other CASA programs. The ITP curriculum is now included within the 35 hours of specialized training completed by all CASA volunteers at Advocate University, so every CASA is prepared to take a young child if necessary.

USE OF FUNDS:

Focusing Philanthropy’s \$100,000 challenge gift was used to support Voices for Children’s Infants & Toddlers program. The matching \$200,000 from private donors helped to support the broader work of Voices for Children, which provided advocacy services to more than 3,000 children as of June 30, 2017.

<i>CASAs for Infants and Toddlers</i>	
<i>Voices for Children</i>	
EXPENSES	Amount
<u>Personnel Expenses</u>	
Salaries for Voices for Children’s professional staff (Program Manager/ITP, 5 Advocacy Supervisors, support and admin staff)	\$322,000
Taxes and Benefits for Personnel @ 18%	\$57,960
SUBTOTAL PERSONNEL COSTS	<u>\$379,960</u>
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<u>Operational Expenses</u>	
Other Expenses for ITP: (operational costs including specialized CASA training and expenses, allocated space, supplies, CASA Manager, program evaluation)	\$34,000
Specialized CASA Recruitment program for ITP volunteers	\$5,000
Marketing and related costs	<u>\$2,500</u>
SUBTOTAL OPERATIONAL EXPENSES	<u>\$41,500</u>
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SUBTOTAL, personnel + operational	<u>\$421,460</u>
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Indirect Costs (at 12%)	\$50,575
TOTAL ANNUAL BUDGET INFANTS & TODDLERS PROGRAM	<u>\$472,035</u>

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES: These are the activities that the Infants & Toddlers Program follows each year:

Weekly:

- ITP Program Manager meets with senior management to review ITP’s overall progress as well as specific case issues.
- ITP Program Manager meets weekly with each ITP Advocacy Supervisor.
- CASAs advocate for infants and toddlers with whom they have been matched (this work is ongoing and occurs through the year—it is the core activity of the Infants & Toddlers Program).

Monthly:

- Voices for Children internally distributes reports generated through CASA Manager Database, providing updated details about the assigned ITP children, closed cases, training CASAs, the number of children per CASA, etc. Program adjustment as needed.

Quarterly:

- Program review of goals and progress of CASA assignments and advocacy; interim review of outcomes.

Annually:

- Review and analysis of ITP statistics and case outcomes; meetings with CASAs and other stakeholders.
- Set goals for next year.

IMPORTANCE OF THE INFANT & TODDLERS PROGRAM:

The mission of Voices for Children is to advocate on behalf of foster children who have been abused or neglected. As the only organization authorized by the San Diego courts to provide CASA services, our vision is to *Serve Every Child* in San Diego County foster care who is in crisis and needs a CASA.

Our Infants & Toddlers Program provides critical advocacy to children at the earliest point in their lives, offsetting the potential trauma of spending years in the overburdened foster care system—which just further traumatizes them. If we can continue to serve these children, we believe that ultimately we can impact the number of children living in long-term foster care—the most damaging situations for boys and girls. Our goal is to move these young children out of foster care as soon as possible, and into permanent homes. Thus, we consider ITP one of the most critical initiatives of Voices for Children.

WHY CASAs?

Voices for Children is considered one of the most effective and efficient social service charities in San Diego, with a stellar reputation that extends regionally and nationally. With a 37-year history of service, ours is the only local agency designated by the Superior Court to provide CASAs to foster children in San Diego County (and, as of 2015, also of Riverside County). Voices for Children's CASAs provide hope for abused and neglected children living in foster care. They listen to and advocate for their case children, giving them the support and stability they need to have a hopeful future and a stable life. We must give them thorough and careful training so that they can do the best job for their children, and do it confidently and with the knowledge that they will be supported all the way by their full-time Advocacy Supervisor—their staff “lifeline” and counselor, who is available to them 24/7.

Research shows that children with CASAs are happier and healthier, do better in school, and are as much as 50% more likely to avoid at-risk behaviors such as drugs, alcohol, teen pregnancy, and delinquency. CASAs also have a positive effect on the mental health of their case children. One review of CASA-effectiveness studies shows that children with CASAs scored significantly higher than their non-CASA counterparts in mental health factors such as self-acceptance, self-control against deviant behavior, and a positive attitude for the future.

CASAs are an investment with a broad societal impact. Recruiting, thoroughly training, and supervising a CASA today will offset future taxpayer expense used to maintain a child in foster care, especially given the kinds of physical and mental health issues that arise for the youngest abused children. One County report estimated that for every \$1 invested today in such services, the County saves another \$7 in future expenses—expenses associated with welfare-related situations of a child that grew up in foster care. This might include school services and school failure, delinquency, drug abuse, and the costs to the community of eventual joblessness, homelessness, poverty, and incarceration.

MEASUREMENT OF RESULTS:

We are constantly measuring results in all of our programs, and that is essential in our continual refinement and improvement based on data and analysis. With the Infants & Toddlers Program, we did conduct an initial study as part of the pilot program, and the results showed that not only was their improved well-being for the children served but also—most important—there was almost no recidivism of children back into foster care after the CASA intervention and permanence was found.

In terms of metrics, Voices for Children depends on its database system, CASA Manager, to track information including each child's reasons for entering the system, elapsed time in the foster care system, details on medical and psychological well-being, and reasons for a case termination (reunification, adoption, or guardianship). Voices for Children analyzes this data in multiple ways to evaluate how CASA volunteers impact the infants and toddlers we serve through ITP, as well as the foster children and youth served overall by Voices for Children.

We are very pleased to report that with this Focusing Philanthropy campaign, Voices for Children's staff and volunteer CASAs served more than 1,800 infants and toddlers. Of the 759 children matched with CASAs during this campaign, 257 cases resulted in reunification with families after appropriate services, 37 cases resulted in guardianship, and an incredible 222 boys and girls were adopted. Thus 516 infants and toddlers are now in permanent living situations. These positive outcomes for the youngest and most vulnerable children in San Diego County foster care would not have been possible without Focusing Philanthropy, and Voices for Children is so grateful for this generosity. We are happy to share that ITP is so effective in providing early intervention and support that only a few infants and toddlers have had to return to the foster care system since the program's inception (primarily due to medical conditions of the parent or caregiver); this is in contrast to much higher recidivism in the general foster care population. With the support of Focusing Philanthropy, Voices for Children has completely changed the trajectory of hundreds of young lives.