

CASA of Orange County Family Connections Program

The Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Family Connections Program was created to identify and engage family members in the lives of CASA children in the foster care system. Our program focuses on connecting children who have few or no relationships with their extended family members. There is compelling evidence that children who have some connection with members of their birth family have improved behavior, improved school performance and more hopefulness in their lives. Our goal is to connect these children with as many appropriate family members as possible.

Fully trained CASA volunteers were recruited and given additional specialized training to engage in this program. Using a process adapted from the model originated by Catholic Community Services of Western Washington, the volunteers make use of all hard copy records, information received from the child and other involved parties, and Internet search tools. Following the identification of potential family members, contact is made to determine interest and appropriateness of further contact. If family members are interested in contact with the child and are deemed to be beneficial contacts for the child, arrangements are made for: telephone calls, e-mails, letters, and/or in-person visits. Each step of the way, the Family Connections CASA and the social worker are in contact to concur on whom the appropriate relatives are to contact, what level of contact is appropriate, and how to proceed with each step in planning and implementing the process.

In cases where there is a long term CASA assigned to a child, the long term CASA will share with the Family Connections CASA all available information known to him or her about the child's family. In addition, as the long term CASA meets with his or her child, he or she will subtly inquire about connections the child remembers or wishes were still intact and will share this information with the Family Connections CASA. The Family Connections team (social worker, Family Connections CASA, CASA, family members, and other involved parties) will decide together when it is appropriate to share the information with the child and who will share the information. The team will also work toward creating a plan to ensure the success of the family connections (preparing the child, preparing the family, support services, etc). Once successful family connections have been made and stabilized, the long term CASA will become engaged in the sustaining of those connections through their ongoing relationship with the child.

In some cases the family members found through the Family Connections program may become a permanent placement for a child. In these cases, the team will work together to ensure the permanency of that placement. Some cases will not result in a permanent placement, but at the very least the goal is to establish a permanent emotional connection for the child and his or her family. In those cases, the team will also work toward making sure those connections are permanent.

CASA of Orange County and other programs providing services to children in the foster care system conducted family search pilot projects with successful results. We feel that the Family Connections Program is both beneficial and necessary in the lives of many of our children. If you have any questions regarding this program, please contact the CASA Family Connections Coordinator, Allison Carroll, at 714-619-5143, or Director of Programs, Lynda Perring, at 714-619-5150.

