

Community Comment – Humboldt CASA

This is Chelsea Barto from Humboldt CASA on Community Comment. CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocates. We're a non-profit organization that was founded by a Seattle Judge who wanted to find a way to get more complete information about children in an overworked and underfunded child welfare system, in order to help him make better decisions about what is in their best interest. CASA trains and supports volunteer Advocates who work one on one with children in the foster care system. Volunteers get to know the child they're matched with through regular visits and interviews with teachers and medical professionals. Then they advocate for the needs and wishes of that child in court to the judge. Children in the foster care system have endured terrible circumstances of abuse and neglect to get there. For many of them, their CASA volunteer is the first consistent and dependable adult they have ever had in their lives and many of them have a hard time believing that someone would be kind enough to actually *volunteer* their time to help them. Just last week one of our CASA volunteers told me a really touching story – A few weeks ago, while she was eating ice cream with the two sisters she is matched with, they asked her if she gets paid to spend time with them, even though she's explained to them how CASA works many times. She told them no, she doesn't and explained that she loves kids and that some very special people had helped her when she was going through hard times in her childhood and that it makes her feel really good paying that forward, just like sometimes giving a gift feels even better than receiving one. They both looked at her with wide eyes and couldn't believe it. One said, "wow, you're a really nice person!". The other sister said, "when I grow up I'm going to pay it forward, too. I promise" At CASA we hear stories like this all the time about how children can't wait for their weekly outing with their CASA and how important having that consistent person can be when everything else in their lives is continually changing. In Humboldt County the rate of child abuse and neglect is 150% of the state average, and almost all of these cases are related to drug or alcohol abuse. In 2012, CASA of Humboldt served 150 children, with 116 volunteer advocates, but there were over 300 children who could have benefited from having a CASA. Our goal is to have an Advocate for every child who needs one because we believe that every child deserves to live in a safe and loving home. If anyone has ever told you that one person can't make a difference, I'm here to tell you that they were wrong. If you have a few hours a week to make a HUGE difference in the life of a child in need, consider becoming a CASA. We have a training coming up starting October 15th through November 14th on Tuesday & Thursday evenings from 6-9 pm. If that training doesn't work for your schedule, we do 4 trainings per year at different times. For more information visit humboldtcasa.org or call 443-3197. On behalf of the children, thank you for joining me today on Community Comment, I'm Chelsea Barto from Humboldt CASA.