

## **Amended 2015 Economic Impact: CASA of Kern County (of 2014 efforts)**

CASA volunteers are assigned to the abused children they serve at various stages in the juvenile dependency process. Judges in Kern County typically assign a CASA to a child at one of three stages:

1) **Family Maintenance:** The children are returning home to the parent(s) who initially abused the children, and the parents have completed the majority of their case plan. CASAs are assigned by the judge in these cases on a regular basis. The judge wants extra “eyes and ears” to visit the children weekly, and to ascertain the condition of the house and caregivers, while visiting announced and unannounced into the home.

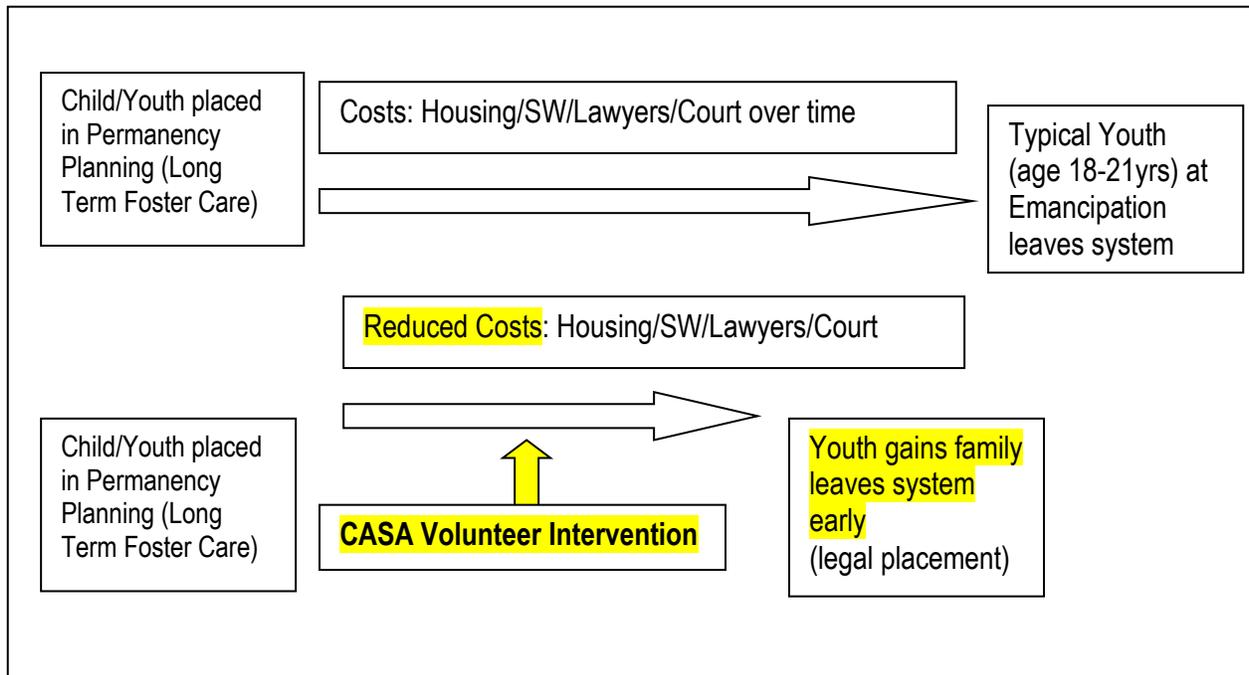
2) **Family Reunification:** The children are hoping to go home in the next six to twelve months, and the judge wants additional information about the services the children need, and the progress of the case plans of the parents, and the children. CASAs are assigned to a large number of these cases, and as we visit weekly, we observe the patterns of the family and how the separation is affecting the parties.

3) **Permanency Plan:** The children are in **long term foster care**, and will be in foster care until they turn 18-21. In these cases, the judge wants the CASA to advocate for any needs identified, and to give annual reports to the court about the child/youth’s progress and status. Although the new term for long term foster care in the State of California has been changed to “planned permanent living arrangement”, we prefer to use the more easily recognizable term of “long term foster care”.

This impact report deals with the cases CASA was assigned by the juvenile court in which the CASA made the significant difference in the child achieving a permanent outcome. The majority of these children were in Long Term Foster Care. The CASA Program of Kern County is committed to finding a permanent, “forever” family for each child we reach. CASA cannot do this work alone, and we rely on our collaborative work with the Department of Human Services. However, we believe that having a CASA work with these particular children has a direct and identifiable value and a cost savings to our community. When a child or youth finds a family, and leaves this system, there is a huge benefit to the community. Minimally, the community is saved hundreds of thousands of dollars in housing costs.

Once the court orders a child into the Permanent Plan of Long Term Foster Care, the County of Kern, and the community has committed to house this child/youth until their emancipation. The Causal Model below demonstrates the basis of this report. We believe that a CASA volunteer assigned to a child assists in the child leaving the system earlier than the court plan, thus saving housing costs. Children and youth are assigned to one of three types of placements, the Family Foster Home, a Foster Family Agency, or a Group Home. The actual housing costs per child vary according to the age of the child. This 2014 Report documents the current rate of housing, and we have **not adjusted for the bi-annual housing increases** which occur as each child ages. Youth can now stay until the **age of 21**, however the data set we use **stops** at their eighteenth birthday. Truly these are **very conservative** housing costs.

## CASA Causal Model



In 2014 year, CASA volunteers served a total of 273 children, of the 2100 dependent children of Kern County. Each year a number of our cases are dismissed from the court. In 2014, 106 cases closed with a CASA assigned. On average, over **87% of these children achieved legal permanency**. Legal permanency for this report is defined as return to safe family, adoption, legal guardianship or “supported” emancipation. Supported emancipation means a youth has a robust plan in place for work/housing/school along with all proper documentation.

CASA can demonstrate that we **saved the county over \$208,000** in housing costs in **this year alone**. Sixteen children\* were in long term foster care prior to receiving their CASAs or had so many placement changes that the input and stability of the CASA-child relationship enabled the children to successfully exit the foster care system. These children would have cost **over \$2 million** to house them during their **143 additional years of foster care**. Truly CASA is worth your support, even in these very challenging economic times. The sixteen children that qualify for this report are identified as children in which the CASA intervention made a unique and vital intervention into the child gaining their permanent success in a family.

It is interesting to note that these sixteen children had **65 placement changes** during the time they were served by their CASA. Typically children that have numerous placement changes gain permanency less frequently as they can be labeled as “emotionally challenging” or “emotionally damaged” after so many moves. When we provide the consistent presence of weekly CASA contact in the life of one of these children, the CASA child can regain the possibility of permanency.

\*See Attachment