



FOSTERING THE FUTURE

For the Kids

Peninsula nonprofit CASA seeks to provide one-on-one support for local foster children.

What do Babe Ruth, Marilyn Monroe, and John Lennon have in common? The ball player, the blonde bombshell, and the ballad writer were all foster kids. Each year in America, hundreds of thousands of youth spend time in the foster care system. In this, the season of giving, your generous tax-deductible donation to one worthy Redwood City 501(c)(3) nonprofit agency can immeasurably improve the lives of such children.

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of San Mateo County is an organization that meticulously matches adult volunteers with children who find themselves under the protection of the juvenile court due to their parents being either unable or unwilling to provide care. The nationwide CASA system was established in 1977 and its reach now extends to almost 1,000 county programs throughout the country.

In tandem with its national program, CASA of San Mateo County supports and promotes court-appointed volunteer advocacy so that every abused or neglected child in the community can be safe, have a permanent home, and be given the opportunity to thrive. The group has been independently run since 2006, and its

advocates often travel outside of San Mateo County and throughout the San Francisco Bay Area.

CASA of San Mateo County relies on a network of more than 350 volunteers who provide foster children with crucial one-on-one support. It currently costs \$2,500 per year to pair a child with a CASA volunteer. Donations help to train the additional volunteers who are desperately needed to serve additional children on the organization's ever-expanding waitlist.

In an overburdened foster care system, local government programs are often insufficient to meet the needs of the children they serve. As a result, dedicated CASA-trained volunteers can ensure that the community's most vulnerable children will have someone speaking up on their behalf. Board member Sarah Sherwood tells *Gentry* that, "CASA provides strong support for the needs of foster and abused children. We help to teach life skills and, unlike some similar organizations, stay with them

through to the age of 21, not simply while they are going through the court system."

In 2017 - 2018 alone, CASA San Mateo provided potentially life-altering assistance for some 298 local children, dedicating an average of 10 to 14 hours per month to each one. Fully 30% of CASA's services feature Spanish speakers, enabling it to provide culturally sensitive offerings.

The annual *Garden Party* is the organization's biggest fundraising event. Hosted by the Auxiliary of CASA of San Mateo County, a group of two-dozen prominent Bay Area women, it typically attracts over 300 guests. Government officials, industry leaders, and area educators are among those in attendance for an occasion that raises \$250,000 each year.

Summing up, Sherwood says, "It's a myth that foster kids are difficult. Nothing is further from the truth. For children who've been abused or neglected, CASA means having a home instead of feeling lost, and being seen instead of feeling invisible. For volunteers, CASA can be a life-changing experience that makes our community a better place." www.casaofsanmateo.org ♦ —KAREN SALAMA