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CHILD ADVOCATES OF SILICON VALLEY SEEKS VOLUNTEERS TO SERVE AS MENTORS, FRIENDS AND ADVOCATES FOR FOSTER CHILDREN

Milpitas, CA – February 9, 2016 – [Child Advocates of Silicon Valley](http://www.cadvocates.org) is looking for a few good men and women to volunteer and serve as friends, mentors and advocates for foster children in Santa Clara County. The non-profit organization is holding monthly Open Houses/Volunteer Orientations in February and March to recruit volunteers for its April training class.

Child Advocates recruits, trains and supports Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) to work one-on-one with children in foster care. CASAs provide critical emotional and educational support, ensuring that each child's needs are met and their voice is heard while they navigate the court dependency system.

"We know CASAs make a tremendous difference in a foster child's life," says Karen Scussel, executive director of Child Advocates. Scussel notes that only 58% of all foster youth in California complete high school but with the support of a CASA, foster teens fare much better. Last year, 93% of Child Advocates' teens completed their high school requirements and planned to continue their education at a community college or vocational program.

Child Advocates has an ambitious five-year strategic plan to provide a CASA for every child in the Santa Clara County foster care system by year-end 2018. Currently, there are more than 1,600 children in the Santa Clara County dependency system, 1,000 of which could benefit from a CASA. This year, Child Advocates hopes to serve 780 children with a CASA volunteer.

George Ochoa, a Child Advocates' employee who has been a CASA volunteer to several young boys, says the organization is particularly interested in recruiting male advocates and Latino advocates.

"Half the children in foster care are boys and 62% are Latino." Ochoa explains. "It's important that these children have role models and mentors that reflect their cultural background," Ochoa says. "Teenage boys, in particular, need male role models."

Griselda Ramos who has been a CASA volunteer to two children says, "Being a CASA is so rewarding. I really feel like I'm making a difference in the child's life and the Child



Advocates' staff is always there to answer my questions and help guide me when I represent my child's best interests in court. I highly recommend people consider becoming a CASA."

Aileen Tokuda has been a CASA volunteer since September 2010 and has worked with the same child, Amanda, for the past 5 years. "It's so essential for children to have a stable adult presence in their lives. By being a CASA, I can help to provide that stability and give children, like Amanda, who have experienced abuse and neglect the support to create a better future for themselves."

Currently Child Advocates has more than 200 foster children waiting to be matched with a CASA. No legal experience is necessary — just a willingness to reach out to a child when he/she is feeling most vulnerable. The time commitment is 10-12 hours per month, and volunteers must be 21 years or older to become a Court Appointed Special Advocate.

Individuals interested in becoming a CASA volunteer can visit Child Advocates' website (www.bemyadvocate.org) to [sign up to attend a Volunteer Open House/Orientation](#) session to learn more about the role and requirements of becoming a CASA volunteer in Santa Clara County.

About Child Advocates of Silicon Valley

Child Advocates is the only agency in Santa Clara County that provides Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) to foster youth. Because our volunteers are court-appointed, they can thoroughly research every aspect of a child's case, including meeting teachers, doctors, social workers, counselors, biological family members and foster parents, thereby gaining a comprehensive perspective on what the child needs in order to thrive. CASAs assist their child in accessing needed resources, follow their school progress, and speak up for their child's best interests in court. They maintain complete records about the case, submit reports and attend court hearings. CASA volunteers stay with their case until their child has a safe, loving home. Find out more about our CASA program at www.BeMyAdvocate.org.

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