UNDERSTANDING THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES: A TRAINING FOR COMMUNITY PROFESSIONALS

By

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES: A TRAINING FOR COMMUNITY PROFESSIONALS

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This project sought to lay the groundwork for an outreach effort by CASA of Humboldt to better communicate with community professionals (care providers, teachers and school staff, medical and mental health providers, social workers, probation officers, and other court personnel.) Through a community survey it was discovered that both electronic training materials such as a YouTube video and the option of in person trainings were preferred by community professionals. Additionally the survey revealed that community professionals did not fully understand the role of a CASA advocate and were not fully comfortable working with a CASA advocate.

This project makes recommendations to CASA of Humboldt to improve their outreach to community professionals and makes recommendations to future MSW students who may want to continue working on this issue.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to my education and this project. A special thank you goes to my Grandmother, Betty Lou Denmon, for the endless support she has provided me over the years ranging from paying for my undergraduate education to proofreading almost every major paper I have written since I was a middle school student. I would also like to extend my appreciation to my mother, Rhonda Mitchell, who has given me countless rides to campus when I could not get there and spent countless hours babysitting my many foster children who have been with me during my time in college.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the many foster children I have had over the past four years and to my former CASA child who have all taught me more about what social work means than any class I can take. I especially would like to thank my very first foster child who I am now a guardian for, Adam Armes, for showing me the importance of helping children in need and for ensuring that my life has been anything but boring for the past four years.

I would like to acknowledge my project committee members César G. Abarca, Ph.D., MSW, Yvonne Doble, MSW, and Steve Volow for their support, encouragement, and ideas through this process. Steve and Yvonne have been a wonderful support to me since I first became involved with CASA in July 2008 with Steve serving as the Executive Director and Yvonne training me to become an advocate. Their support is a large part of the reason that I am earning a Social Work graduate degree. Additionally I
extend my appreciation to my cohort for their support over the past two years and especially my cohort “accountability partner” Christine Gannon who has been a tremendous help throughout this project and a true friend for the two years we have been in school together.

Finally I would like to make a special acknowledgement to my father, Richard Mitchell, who suffered a severe stroke last December. You have shown me the meaning of being brave in the face of adversity and taught me many important lessons over the years. Many of my clinical skills are thanks to the modeling you did for me throughout my life.
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INTRODUCTION

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) provide advocacy services for a very vulnerable population in our community: children in the juvenile dependency (foster care) and juvenile delinquency (probation) systems. Often the voices, desires, and even basic needs of the children can become lost in the complicated world of courts and social service agencies, which prompts the need for someone to advocate for the child in a complicated system. The Juvenile Dependency and Delinquency systems can be a scary place for children, but those children who are lucky enough to have a CASA have a dedicated person in their life that is there to help them through their time in the systems.

Children find themselves in the Juvenile Dependency system for a variety of reasons including allegations of physical abuse, mental abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. Children have done nothing wrong when they end up in the Juvenile Dependency system, yet the system can, in some observers’ opinions, treat them like they are nothing more than a case number that lacks individuality and is certainly not client centered.

Often children in the Juvenile Delinquency system have also been subjected to various forms of abuse or neglect by their parents. While these children have made mistakes and have broken laws thus bringing them into the delinquency system, often their upbringing and childhood trauma contributed to their delinquent behaviors. Because of the mistakes that these children have made in the past they are often treated as “bad apples” by a system that is often overworked and understaffed. When families of children in the Juvenile Delinquency system are dysfunctional, children are often faced
with entering a probation foster home or staying in juvenile hall because their home is not
a safe environment for them to return to and thus their delinquent behavior would be
more likely to reoccur.

Nationally, the CASA Program first appeared in January, 1977 in Seattle, WA and
a local CASA program first appeared in Humboldt County in 1991 (CASA of Humboldt,
n.d.). The idea behind the CASA program was that Judges did not have the time to get to
know the circumstances of the cases that they were presiding over so volunteer advocates
would help to ensure that relevant information made it into the courtroom so the best
decisions could be made. CASA advocates come from a variety of fields and educational
backgrounds and are not attorneys, though some attorneys volunteer to CASA advocates
for cases they are not involved in. The CASA programs provide training for the required
skills to be an advocate.

In Humboldt County there were 281 children in out of home care on July 1, 2013,
up from the July 1, 2012 count of 255, out of a total county juvenile population of 26,025
(Needell et al., 2014). With over one percent of the juvenile population in out of home
care in Humboldt County the services of CASA of Humboldt are vital to the needs of a
significant number of Humboldt County youth.

A CASA advocate is a stable person in the life of a child. Children in the Juvenile
Dependency and Juvenile Delinquency system may have moved between multiple foster
homes, have multiple social workers working with them, and multiple attorneys
representing them all while being separated from their biological family, friends, and
possibly geographically separated from their community and school. Through all these
changes a CASA can be the one consistent person in the life of a child in the Juvenile Dependency or Juvenile Delinquency system that does not change. A CASA advocate is someone who advocates for what is best for a child in their personal layperson’s opinion. They help to give a voiceless child a voice in court, and can be both a mentor and friend to a child who is experiencing a frightening and unsettling time in their life.

CASAs work as members of a multidisciplinary team of professionals that include foster parents, Non-Relative Extended Family Members (NREFMs), family or kinship care providers, doctors and other medical professionals, social workers, probation officers, teachers, court personnel, mental health providers, and various other direct service providers (community professionals). For many individuals who work with children in the dependency and delinquency process there is a lack of understanding of what a CASA does and how they fit into the team working on behalf of a child. There is similarity and some overlap between the work that CASAs, child welfare social workers, and juvenile dependency attorneys do leading many individuals to be confused about who is responsible for certain tasks and responsibilities. One example of this is a teacher who believes that a student in their class, who is in foster care, is being abused by their foster parent. The teacher might try to communicate this information to the child’s CASA or attorney without realizing that this information needs to go to Child Welfare Service to be investigated further. While the allegations would ultimately make its way to the correct people in the child welfare system, the delay caused by the teacher's misunderstanding could cause a crucial delay in action to occur. Another example is a foster parent who
becomes concerned that a child’s social worker has not been visiting the child on a monthly basis, they may be unclear as to who they should bring this concern to.

As a former CASA Advocate, a foster parent, the guardian of a child who came to me through the foster care system, a *De Facto* Parent for a child currently in dependency, and a social worker I have seen a great misunderstanding about the roles and responsibilities of Court Appointed Special Advocates in every field that I have held a position in. This confusion has, in many cases, led to decreased professional cooperation possibly leading to poorer outcomes for system involved children.

CASA of Humboldt has attempted to reach out to professional communities in the past through various means. A CASA speakers’ bureau was created to have volunteers go out and speak to various groups. CASA staff members have held trainings with new child welfare social workers in the past; though Humboldt County Children & Family Services has not been receptive to having CASA staff talk to their new employees recently. CASA has also sent letters explaining the work of CASA advocates to substitute care providers (Foster Parents, NREFMs, or Kinship Care Providers) when children in their care are assigned an advocate. Even with these efforts I have observed that many care providers and educators were unaware of the role of Court Appointed Special Advocates.

This project’s research utilized a short survey to measure the attitudes of members of the professional community toward CASA advocates and their willingness to work with CASA advocates in their professional roles. Additionally this research evaluated what training modalities would be of greatest convenience to members of the professional
community when learning about the roles and responsibilities of CASA advocates. For the sake of this project “members of the professional community” are defined as people who work with the child including foster parents, Non-Relative Extended Family Members (NREFMs), family or kinship care providers, doctors and other medical professionals, social workers, probation officers, teachers, court personnel, mental health providers, and various other direct service providers.

The aim of this project is to create a framework and recommendations for CASA of Humboldt to implement a training curriculum through various modalities that teaches community professionals about the roles and responsibilities of Court Appointed Special Advocates. Ultimately it is hoped that improving community professionals’ understanding of the roles and responsibilities of CASA advocates will improve their willingness to work with Advocates thus improving the outcomes for children in the Juvenile Dependency and Juvenile Delinquency systems.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Upon an initial review of the current literature regarding CASA one main theme is immediately clear. Many researchers and graduate students have examined the efficacy of CASA programs in relation to the outcomes of children in foster care. The reoccurring theme in these studies is that the CASA program is effective in helping children in the juvenile dependency and juvenile delinquency cases.

Weisz and Thai (2003) compared the cases of children with a CASA to those without and found that children in the Juvenile Dependency and Delinquency system had higher quality information presented to the court when they had a Court Appointed Special Advocate. Conducting an independent investigation into the facts of a child’s case and providing this information to the courts is at the core of what a CASA does and was the driving force behind the initial creation of the Court Appointed Special Advocate program.

In addition to finding that breadth and quality of the information presented to the court improved with a Court Appointed Special Advocate on the case Weisz and Thai (2003) found that there was a drawback to having a CASA: guardian ad litem's (the juvenile’s attorney under California law) would statistically decrease their involvement in a child’s case. In this study, the guardian ad litem’s role was different, though similar to that of the role of a minor’s attorney in California Juvenile Courts. One of Weisz and Thai findings was that a guardian ad litem’s involvement statistically decreases when
there is a Court Appointed Special Advocate on a case, but is not necessarily applicable to California cases where the rules of court are different.

Litzelfelner (2000) also looked at the differences between children who had a Court Appointed Special Advocate and those who did not. Litzelfelner could find no statistical difference between the amount of time a child with a CASA remained in the Dependency System when compared to that of a child without a CASA. The sample of children without a CASA spent less time in the system, but not to a statistically significant level. Litzelfelner did find that there were a statistically significantly lower number of placement changes for a child in the child welfare system with a CASA when compared to children without a CASA. The children with a CASA averaged 3.9 placements compared to an average of 6.6 placements for children without a CASA.

Placement changes can be highly disruptive to a child’s life when they are already experiencing the trauma of being away from their biological family. In the past, children often spent years in the system moving from placement to placement, a phenomenon called “foster care drift”. This foster care drift caused increased negative outcomes for youth in the system, especially youth that aged out of the system, resulting in a new emphasis on avoiding unnecessary removals, providing support to biological families to strengthen family unification, and reducing the number of placements a child has while in the system. The fact that a child with a Court Appointed Special Advocate will experience fewer placement changes is significant because we can then determine that having a CASA correlates with more positive outcomes in their life.
One additional important finding by Litzelfelner (2000) is that children with a CASA were less likely to have their court cases continued than those children without a CASA. Court continuances can happen for a variety of reasons ranging from dramatic changes to the circumstances of a case that occurs a short time before a court hearing, to a party of the case not filing a required report or a court document in a timely manner. No matter what the cause of a court continuance this delay can be hard on a child in the system. A court continuance at the very least means more waiting for a child; waiting for a decision regarding their future including reunification with their biological families, or even waiting to find permanency in the form of guardianship or adoption.

There are countless other studies in the literature that echo similar findings to these: Court Appointed Special Advocates statistically improve some of the factors that contribute to positive outcomes for a child involved in the system. The fact that there are so many questions regarding the efficacy of Court Appointed Special Advocates suggests that there might be some question as to if there is efficacy at all. Litzelfelner (2008) looked at the satisfaction levels different groups had with Court Appointed Special Advocates and found that court personnel (Judges and Attorneys) had the highest overall opinions of the work of CASAs. Social Workers and Parents (Biological, Foster, and Adoptive) tended to rate CASAs lower on average than court personnel.

One of the areas whereCASAs were rated the lowest by Child Welfare social workers was for the statement that, “The volunteer CASA/GAL understands the child welfare system (Litzelfelner, 2008).” This lower rating perhaps suggests that social workers feel that volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates should have a high level
of knowledge regarding the child welfare system, while in reality someone providing a layperson’s opinion does not need nearly the same level of knowledge as a trained Child Welfare social worker. This misunderstanding regarding the roles and responsibilities of a CASA might be directly attributed to a lower level of satisfaction on the part of child welfare workers who need to work as part of a team with CASAs for the betterment of children in the child welfare system. One interesting note is that all groups of respondents in this study rated highly the statement, “I understand the role of the CASA/GAL volunteer” (Litzelfelner, 2008, p. 178). This finding seemingly suggests that all professional groups, including Child Welfare social workers feel that they know what a CASA’s role is, but this measured what the respondent thinks that they know, not their actual understanding of the role of the CASA.

Throughout my review of relevant literature it became clear that there was little or no literature available regarding the CASA participating as part of a multidisciplinary team that helps children and families in the system. Darlington and Feeney (2008) looked at the relationship between multidisciplinary team members and found that communication and understanding, or lack thereof, played a large role in the collaborative relationship between different groups of professionals. Unfortunately, Darlington and Feeney looked at the relationship between child welfare workers and mental health professionals, but not any sort of advocate such as a Court Appointed Special Advocate.

My project is, on a local level, looking to clarify the roles and responsibilities of a Court Appointed Special Advocate and then see if this understanding correlates with an
increase in other professionals’ willingness to work with CASAs as part of the multidisciplinary team that serves children. This study will be a small first step into a research realm that could benefit from much more attention in the future.

Selecting a video as the training method was not my initial idea. Originally, I had envisioned a training that was going to be conducted in person at the CASA office, but the Executive Director of CASA of Humboldt expressed interest in making the trainings available on video to reach more community professionals. The logic behind this decision is that professionals will be able to view this video at their convenience whenever and wherever they are. Because Humboldt County is a rural and widespread community, the mere requirement to travel to a training session could prove difficult for professionals, and be a barrier to the efficacy of this training. An addition barrier would be in the case of care providers finding child care in order to attend an in person training.

The technological landscape is changing. Feil, Baggett, Davis, Sheeber, Landry, Carta, and Buzhardt (2008) looked at internet based video technology as a means of improving mental health services to poor rural families via a parent education program. Their study identified technology as a way of reaching rural families at a time that there was less funding for training and interventions.

Irvine, Billow, Gates, Fitzwater, Seeley, and Bourgeois (2012) looked at internet based trainings as a method of teaching professionals new skills. In this study Nursing Aides were trained how to respond to nursing home residents’ aggressive behaviors in a manner that helped to keep both the residents and staff safe. Of relevance to this project
is the fact that improved knowledge was retained when evaluated two months after the training.

Of great note is the research done by Pacifici, Delaney, White, Nelson, and Cummings (2006) looking at web based trainings for foster, kinship, and adoptive parents in California. Their study found that care providers were overall very satisfied with using the web trainings made available to them. Additionally, the study found that the care providers were more satisfied with the web based training when compared to watching a DVD because more web based material could be linked into the training and they were able to communicate with others utilizing the same training via an online discussion board.
METHOD

Thirty-nine individuals were invited to participate in this study utilizing the approved voice script (see Appendix A) and email script (see Appendix B). Eventually 19 individuals agreed to participate with 15 usable responses obtained. The intent was to have a larger pool of respondents, but time limitations made this impossible.

Participants who agreed to participate were provided with a copy of the informed consent form to sign (see Appendix C) and were provided with an additional copy of the informed consent form to keep for their records. The participants selected where and when they wanted to meet to participate in the study, and were provided with an additional copy of the informed consent form before their participation to help ensure that they had time to read it completely. After participants read and signed the informed consent form they were presented with the survey instrument (see Appendix D). After the participants completed the survey, they could seal it in an envelope to maintain the confidentiality of their answers.

After all surveys were completed, the envelopes containing all the completed surveys were opened at the same time and the answers were recorded into Microsoft Excel for basic mathematical analysis. After recording the data the survey forms were collected and stored in a sealed envelope with the author’s other files in a locked safe behind double lock and key at a facility that is neither the home nor the office of the researcher. Survey forms will remain stored for three years from the publication date of this project and will then be shredded. The completed informed consent forms were
taken to the HSU Social Work department where they were placed in a locked cabinet to
be kept for 3 years, and will then be shredded.
RESULTS

Because of time constraints with the research phase of this project only 15 valid responses were received. Three participants were unable to complete the survey because they were either current or former volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates, Guardian Ad Litems, or personally involved within the juvenile dependency or juvenile delinquency system. The first two questions in the survey were designed to remove these participants from the study because it was believed that their responses would be biased and may have skewed the results. A fourth participant began participation in the study while on a break at their workplace, but a workplace situation prevented the participant from completing the survey when they were forced to return to work early. All materials for the four participants who were unable to complete their participation with this survey were destroyed by means of shredding the documents. Their data has not been included in the results of this study.

A convenience sample was utilized for this survey, and the pool was skewed towards the author’s professional group, school professionals and substitute care providers. The breakdown of respondent professional groups is included (see Table 1).

Table 1: Respondent Professional Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Social Worker or Probation Officer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Other Social Services Provider</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Mental Health Provider</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Substitute Care Provider</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Teacher or School Staff</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Other</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>
Because of the fact that the respondents were heavily represented by school personnel and substitute care providers the results may be skewed. If there had been more social workers and probation officers represented in the responses the results may have been different. Because of the small size of the respondent pool it is impossible to determine if there were differences between the responses of different professional groups.

Question four asked the respondents, “Rate on a scale of 1 – 10 how well do you think you understand the roles and responsibilities of a Court Appointed Special Advocate. A rating of 1 means you know absolutely nothing and 10 means you feel that you have complete knowledge.” The average score from the 15 participants was 6.06667 with the mode of the responses being 8 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Distribution of Responses

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<th>Score</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Question five asked the respondents, “How comfortable do you feel working with a Court Appointed Special Advocate. If you do not work with a CASA, rate how you think you would feel. A rating of 1 means not comfortable and a rating of 10 means completely comfortable.” The average score from the 15 participants was 6 with the mode of the responses being 8 (see Table 3).
Table 3: Distribution of Responses

<table>
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<th>Score</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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Of the 15 respondents answering question six, 13 or 86.667% responded that they felt it would be beneficial for CASA of Humboldt to offer trainings or outreach material regarding the roles and responsibilities of Court Appointed Special Advocates to their professional group. Question seven then asked participants what trainings or outreach materials would be most useful to them (see Table 4).

Table 4: Training Methods and Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Method</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. In Person Training</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Pamphlet</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. YouTube Video</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Website</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most popular training method selected was a YouTube video with 11 of the 13 respondents or 84.62% indicating that this method of training would be beneficial to them. Nine of the 13 respondents or 69.23% indicated that a training website would be beneficial to them. Eight respondents or 61.54% indicated that an in person training would be beneficial. The least popular response was a training pamphlet with only three of the 13 respondents or 23.08% indicating that it would be beneficial to them.
DISCUSSION

I first became aware of the need for more professionals to know about the roles and responsibilities of Court Appointed Special Advocates when I became a CASA advocate for a young boy in August, 2008. In working with the professionals who surrounded this boy, I quickly found information that should have been shared with me often was not, and information that was the responsibility of other professionals was brought to me. Even the county child welfare social worker and the state adoption social worker were not clear regarding what I did and did not do as a CASA. Because of the relative complexity of the case, this role confusion caused some delays with the boy’s juvenile dependency case that ended up lasting almost four years from the time of removal to adoption. The process was far too long of a time period for a young boy to be in the juvenile dependency system when he was in a foster home who ultimately adopted him for his whole time in the Juvenile Dependency system. My CASA client’s time in dependency could have been reduced by half with better collaboration between all the professionals in his life that could have been aided by the other professionals having a clearer understanding of what I did as a CASA.

After I left CASA and became a foster parent other foster parents frequently contacted me whenever they were encountering a CASA Advocate for the first time. Many foster parents did not understand the role that the CASA played within the juvenile dependency process and some, especially those who were looking to adopt a child, feared the CASA because they did not understand the work that they did. In addition, as a foster
parent I would see information that should have been brought to the attention of the children’s CASAs, but was not because other professionals did not know what they should be communicating to the CASA about and they did not understand that the CASA could be of great assistance to them by helping to ensure that the information that they held reached others, especially the court.

Additionally, during my time as a foster parent I was shocked to find a great deal of misinformation given regarding the roles and responsibilities of CASA advocates, at trainings for foster parents. Some misinformation provided includes, but is not limited to the following:

- CASA advocates always hold educational rights for their clients.
- Care providers should not contact the child’s attorney; all communications should go through the CASA advocate.
- CASA advocates reports and recommendations to the court are not really considered by the judges, it is merely a formality.
- Care providers should only provide CASA advocates with factual information. They should not share their opinions regarding the best interests of the child or the child’s case plan with a CASA advocate.
- You have to be careful what you say to a CASA advocate because they will report everything you say to the court to make care providers look bad.

Now in my current work as a school social worker I have been faced with educational professionals who do not understand what a CASA advocate does. Many of
the people who I have worked with assumed that CASAs were like a second social worker and assumed that if they provided information to a social worker that the CASA would also be provided with this information. I have observed that there also seems to be uneasiness among educational professionals when it comes to being interviewed for a CASA’s court report. Teachers I have worked with have feared what the results of their involvement. As a CASA, I experienced teachers who were hesitant to speak with me on the record. Furthermore, as a school social worker I have experienced administrators who were nervous about potential repercussions when I spoke on the record with CASA advocates working with students that were my clients.

Originally, this project was envisioned as a training curriculum that would be utilized by CASA volunteers going out on speaking engagements to groups of community professionals to train them regarding the roles and responsibilities of CASA advocates. After discussion with the Executive Director of CASA of Humboldt it was determined that a training curriculum would not be as useful as a complete product, such as a video, that would take no additional volunteer effort and would be available all the time in any location.

The plan for this project was to test the efficacy of the completed training video that was being created by a CASA volunteer that tentatively features a former foster youth, a current CASA advocate, and a CASA Case Supervisor discussing the work of CASA volunteers. This video is currently in development and will be utilized by CASA of Humboldt to introduce the services of CASA to community professionals who are new
to working with CASA advocates or who want to have a clearer understanding about what CASA advocates do.

Due to the video production process taking longer than anticipated, and the very short time-line of this project, it was modified to look at the existing attitudes of community professionals towards CASA advocates. It also measures community professionals’ willingness to work with CASA advocates, and evaluate what training modality they would be most open to utilizing to learn about the roles and responsibilities of Court Appointed Special Advocates.

The results indicated that while a YouTube video would indeed be the most popular training method, as predicted, but there is still a strong demand for in person trainings.
RECOMMENDATIONS

My personal work within many different aspects of the Juvenile Dependency system and the research that I have done for this project have allowed me to develop recommendations to improve the understanding of the roles and responsibilities of Court Appointed Special Advocates.

To CASA of Humboldt

From the research phase of this project it has become clear that both electronic and in person trainings are needed to reach the broadest audience of community professionals working with children in the Juvenile Dependency and Juvenile Delinquency process. The following specific recommendations are made to CASA of Humboldt:

1. Continue to have a speakers’ bureau that speaks about CASA of Humboldt to interested groups and expand it to have specific speakers who can specifically speak about the roles and responsibilities of Court Appointed Special Advocates to professional groups working with children in the Juvenile Dependency and Juvenile Delinquency Systems.

2. Continue sending introductory letters to care providers when a child in their care is assigned a CASA advocate for the first time, or the child moves into a new home. These introductory letters could include information about how to learn more about CASA (see recommendation 7).
3. Select a person who will outreach to various professional groups throughout the year to seek the ability to speak with them regarding CASA and the roles and responsibility of advocates.

4. Have speakers go to meetings of professionals such as New Directions (the local foster parents’ association), school staff meetings, the local Beyond the Bench conference, and Child Welfare all employee quarterly meetings to teach professionals about the roles and responsibilities of CASA advocates. It is understood that one of the limitations of this recommendation is the willingness of the groups to invite a representative from CASA of Humboldt to come and speak to them.

5. Continue the process of developing a YouTube video that will introduce community professionals to the work of CASA of Humboldt and CASA advocates through interviews with former CASA client(s), CASA advocate(s), and staff from CASA of Humboldt.

6. Produce YouTube videos that are specifically targeted to professional groups such as foster parents / care providers, teachers / school staff, and social workers / probation officers. These videos could include interviews with members of the target professional group to explain how to work most effectively with Court Appointed Special Advocates.

7. Put all completed outreach videos and other outreach and training materials on the CASA of Humboldt website in an easy to locate “professionals” or “resources”
section that can have a link on the homepage of http://humboldtcasa.org/ so that little searching will be required to locate the material.

8. An additional training component could be developed in cooperation with groups of community professionals to improve the cooperative work of the multidisciplinary teams that work with children in the Juvenile Dependency and Juvenile Delinquency systems. This could prove challenging as it will require “buy in” from other groups of professionals, but it would be worth the effort of attempting to create a collaborative effort. This could be a good project for an intern at CASA.

To Future MSW Students

This project is the initial work on improving the knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of Court Appointed Special Advocates by community professionals and the even larger goal of improving the cooperative efforts of the multidisciplinary teams that work with children in the Juvenile Dependency and Juvenile Delinquency systems. It is hoped that an improved understanding of the roles and responsibilities of Court Appointed Special Advocates will improve the working relationship of professionals and thus improve the outcomes for children in the Juvenile Dependency and Juvenile Delinquency Systems. The process of continuing to improve the knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of CASAs and thus potentially improving the working relationships among professionals can be the basis of future MSW students’ projects. Improving collaborative efforts among people working to create change within their community is a
core of social work practice and would be an excellent opportunity for future students. The following are some potential projects that will continue the aim of this project:

1. Develop a project that will measure the efficacy of the training videos and in person trainings to change the community professionals’ understanding of the roles and responsibilities of Court Appointed Special Advocates and their willingness to work with CASA advocates. Initially this project was intended to measure the efficacy of the training video currently being developed, but delays in production of the video made this impossible this semester. I strongly believe that if the first video is demonstrated to be effective in improving community professionals’ understandings of the roles and responsibilities of Court Appointed Special Advocates as well as their willingness to work with CASA advocates then more videos will be produced and other CASA programs can replicate the success of the outreach videos. For the reference of future students the initial survey instrument is included (see Appendix E). The research design was for respondents to answer the first part of the survey, pause to watch the training video, and then to complete the second part of the survey once they have completed viewing the video.

2. An assessment to measure if an improved understanding of the roles and responsibilities of Court Appointed Special Advocates will lead to professionals to work more closely with CASA advocates. This has been an assumption during this initial phase of professional outreach, but has not been tested to see if the assumption is true.
3. After CASA of Humboldt has implemented new in person trainings, web based information, and YouTube videos for community professionals a study could be conducted to look at the outcomes for CASA clients to measure if implementing the trainings correlated with an improvement in client outcomes. Ultimately improving the outcomes for CASA clients is the goal of the CASA program and the advocates that volunteer for the program. If it can be demonstrated that implementing new trainings will improve the outcomes for clients other CASA programs could implement similar training programs that outreach to community professionals with the aim of improving the client outcomes of their program.

4. Create trainings in cooperation with groups of community professionals to improve the cooperative work of the multidisciplinary teams that work with children in the Juvenile Dependency and Juvenile Delinquency systems (See Recommendation 8 to CASA of Humboldt). Further, a Multidisciplinary Team Guidebook, much like the one created by the Wyoming Supreme Court Children’s Justice Publication Project can be created for local multidisciplinary teams. An example of the Wyoming publication can be found at the following address: http://www.courts.state.wy.us/CJP/MDT_Guidebook-FINAL.pdf as of April 14, 2014.

Many local CASA programs, California CASA (http://californiacasa.org/), and National CASA (http://www.casaforchildren.org/) are wonderful resources for developing training materials making programmatic improvements to the local CASA
program. Future students working on projects are highly encouraged to seek out resources from other CASA programs at the beginning of any future projects.
CONCLUSION

The roles and responsibilities of Court Appointed Special Advocates who volunteer for CASA of Humboldt are not well understood by community professionals and these professionals are currently not very comfortable working with CASA advocates even though CASA of Humboldt has made a good faith effort to address this over the years. Much work can be done to increase the community professionals’ understanding of the roles and responsibilities of CASA advocates and it is hoped that an increased understanding will improve the willingness of community professionals to work with Court Appointed Special Advocates.

CASA advocates play a vital role in the lives of children who are in the Juvenile Dependency and Juvenile Delinquency systems. Having a CASA can mean that a child’s time in the Juvenile Dependency or Juvenile Delinquency system is reduced and their outcomes improved. For the children that I have cared for having a CASA has always made a positive difference in their lives.

This project is merely the first step in a process to improve professional groups’ understanding of and willingness to work with Court Appointed Special Advocates. Changing system dynamics is not a simple change, but the potential reward for improving the outcomes for CASA clients will reap dividends for years to come.
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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INVITATION-VOICE SCRIPT

Voice script for in person invitation:

As a social work graduate student I am currently conducting a small study to assess community professionals' awareness and perceptions of Court Appointed Special Advocates. I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Participation involves filling out a short survey about your knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of a CASA volunteer. The total time commitment for this study is approximately five minutes and we can meet at a location that is convenient to you.

Are you willing to participate in this study or do you have any questions?

If the perspective participant is willing to participate then the date, time, and location of the meeting to complete the study will be set. Willing participants will be given a copy of the informed consent at this time to give them time to read it before the time of the study.
APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INVITATION-EMAIL SCRIPT

Dear (Name),

My name is Tristan Mitchell and I am a social work graduate student at Humboldt State University. As part of fulfilling the requirements of a Masters of Social Work degree I am currently conducting a study that assesses community professionals' awareness and perceptions of Court Appointed Special Advocates. As someone who works with children in the juvenile dependency or juvenile delinquency system I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Participation in this study involves filling out a short survey about your knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of a CASA volunteer. The total time commitment for this study is approximately five minutes and we can meet at a location that is convenient to you.

If you are interested in participating please email me back at tmitchell@humboldt.edu or contact me via telephone at 707-599-6092 along with information about times and places that would work well for you to meet to participate in this study. If you have any questions feel free to contact me as well. Thank you for your consideration!

Yours truly,
Tristan Tyler Mitchell
Graduate Student, Social Work
Humboldt State University

If the perspective participant is willing to participate then the date, time, and location of the meeting to complete the study will be set via email or phone contact. Willing participants will be sent a copy of the informed consent via email or USPS first class mail before their participation date to give them time to read it before the time of the study.
APPENDIX C: CONSENT TO ACT AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Who is conducting research and why:

Tristan Tyler Mitchell, a Social Work Graduate Student at Humboldt State University is conducting research into the effectiveness of a training curriculum designed to teach professionals working with children in the Juvenile Dependency (foster care) and Juvenile Delinquency (probation) systems about the roles and responsibilities of Court Appointed Special Advocates.

Description of the research:

Tristan is conducting a study that assesses community professionals' awareness and perceptions of Court Appointed Special Advocates. It is the intention of the researcher and CASA of Humboldt to create training materials based upon this research for professionals working with children in the foster care or probation systems so that they will better be able to work with CASA advocates therefore improving outcome opportunities for the children and young adults that CASA serves.

Individuals participating in the research will be given a brief survey lasting approximately five minutes assessing the individuals' perceptions and willingness to work with court appointed special advocates and determine what training, if any, would be utilized by the participant.

Location and time commitment:

Participants agreeing to participate in this research will be able to participate at locations convenient to their needs by communicating their ideal participation location with the student researcher, Tristan Mitchell. Participants will meet in person with Tristan who will provide them with a copy of the survey after they have signed their informed consent form. It is anticipated that the total time commitment for the in person portion of this study will not exceed five minutes of time. Participants will not be compensated for their time or participation.

Anonymity and Confidentiality:

Surveys do not request the name of participants and participants are advised to not place their name or any identifying information on the survey forms. Completed surveys will be sealed in an envelope by the participant and will not be viewed by Tristan until all surveys have been completed. Nobody other than Tristan Mitchell will see the actual surveys though summary data of all surveys will be published.
Original copies of the surveys will be maintained by Tristan Mitchell in a locked safe behind double locks at a private facility (not the home or office of Tristan Mitchell) where other confidential files are maintained. All materials will be destroyed in a paper shredder three years after this study is published. All electronic data will be stored on a USB flash drive in the same location as the paper records. At the time of record destruction the data on the flash drive will be destroyed using a data destruction program such as CCleaner.

Completed informed consent forms (this form) will be maintained securely in the offices of the Social Work Department at Humboldt State University for a period of three years before destruction.

Risks and Benefits:

The study involves no more than minimal risk to participants (i.e., the level of risk encountered in daily life). Risks of participation in this study include: discomfort or uncertainty regarding participation in this study, triggering an emotional response from individuals who were or are close to individuals who were in the juvenile dependency or delinquency systems, and further uncertainty regarding the roles and responsibilities of Court Appointed Special Advocates.

To minimize these risks participants are advised of the following information:

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may elect to not participate in this study without any penalty even if you have previously agreed to participate or have already started your participation. Participants are urged to NOT participate in this study if they feel that hearing about the Juvenile Dependency (foster care), Juvenile Delinquency (probation) systems, and/or Court Appointed Special Advocates would be upsetting to them. Furthermore participants who have personally been in the Juvenile Dependency (foster care), Juvenile Delinquency (probation) systems, and/or volunteered as a Court Appointed Special Advocate may not participate in this study.

If you feel uncomfortable at any time during your participation you may choose to stop participating.

If you have any questions regarding Court Appointed Special Advocates after your participation you may contact CASA of Humboldt at 707-443-3197

The potential benefits of participation include learning more about the roles and responsibilities of Court Appointed Special Advocates. Participants will not receive any
compensation for their participation.

Contact Information:
If you have any questions about this research you may contact Tristan Tyler Mitchell at 707-599-6092 or by emailing tmitchell@humboldt.edu. You may also contact César G. Abarca, Ph.D., MSW, Assistant Professor of Social Work who is supervising this research at 707-826-4558 or by email at cesar.abarca@humboldt.edu.

If you have any concerns with this study, contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Dr. Ethan Gahtan, at eg51@humboldt.edu or 707-826-4545. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, report them to the Humboldt State University Dean of Research, Dr. Rhea Williamson, at rhea.williamson@humboldt.edu or 707-826-5169.

Informed Consent Statement:

I understand that the Investigator will answer any questions I have about this study. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may stop at any time.

If you have any concerns with this study, contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Dr. Ethan Gahtan, at eg51@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-4545.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, report them to the Humboldt State University Dean of Research, Dr. Rhea Williamson, at Rhea.Williamson@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-5169.

I give my informed consent to participate in this study.

Printed name__________________________________________
Signature______________________________________ Date______________________
APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT SURVEY BOOKLET

Instructions:

Thank you for agreeing to provide your valuable time to this study. I greatly appreciate your willingness to help with this project. Please read all the information contained on this cover page before proceeding to the next page. If you have any questions please feel free to ask them at any time! For anonymity please do not record your name or other identifying information in this booklet.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may elect to not participate in this study without any penalty even if you have previously agreed to participate or have already started your participation. Participants are urged to NOT participate in this study if they feel that hearing about the Juvenile Dependency (foster care), Juvenile Delinquency (probation) systems, and / or Court Appointed Special Advocates would be upsetting to them. Furthermore participants who have personally been in the Juvenile Dependency (foster care), Juvenile Delinquency (probation) systems, and / or volunteered as a Court Appointed Special Advocate may not participate in this study.

If you feel uncomfortable at any time during your participation you may choose to stop participating.

If you have any questions regarding Court Appointed Special Advocates after your participation you may contact CASA of Humboldt at 707-443-3197

After you have read everything on this page please proceed to the next page.
Please answer these questions:

1. Do you currently or have you ever volunteered as a Court Appointed Special Advocate or Guardian Ad Litem through a CASA / GAL program anywhere in the United States?  
   a. Yes  
   b. No

2. Have you ever personally been in the Juvenile Dependency (foster care) or Juvenile Delinquency (probation) systems as a minor or the biological parent of a minor in one of those systems?  
   a. Yes  
   b. No

If you answered “Yes” to either question 1 or 2 we will not be able to utilize you as a part of this study.

3. What is your profession? Please answer the closest response.  
   a. Social Worker or Probation Officer  
   b. Other Social Services provider (Child Welfare or Probation)  
   c. Mental Health Provider  
   d. Substitute Care Provider (Foster Parent, NREFM, or Kinship)  
   e. Teacher or School Staff  
   f. Other

4. Rate on a scale of 1 – 10 how well do you think you understand the roles and responsibilities of a Court Appointed Special Advocate. A rating of 1 means you know absolutely nothing and 10 means you feel that you have complete knowledge.  
   No knowledge 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Full knowledge

5. How comfortable do you feel working with a Court Appointed Special Advocate. If you do not work with a CASA, rate how you think you would feel. A rating of 1 means not comfortable and a rating of 10 means completely comfortable.  
   Not comfortable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely comfortable

6. Do you feel it would be beneficial for CASA of Humboldt to offer trainings or outreach material regarding the roles and responsibilities of Court Appointed Special Advocates to your professional group?  
   a. Yes  
   b. No
7. What type(s) of trainings or outreach materials would be most useful to you? (You may select as many answers as you would like.)
   a. In Person Training  b. Pamphlet
   c. YouTube Video  d. Website

8. If CASA of Humboldt offered any of the above trainings would you utilize any of the materials to learn more about CASA?
   a. Yes  b. No

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated! If you have any questions about CASA of Humboldt you may contact them at 707-443-3197 or visit their website at www.humboldtcasa.org

Please fold this booklet, place it in the provided envelope, and seal the envelope.
APPENDIX E: ORIGINAL PARTICIPANT SURVEY BOOKLET

Instructions:

Thank you for agreeing to provide your valuable time to this study. I greatly appreciate your willingness to help with this project. Please read all the information contained on this cover page before proceeding to the next page. If you have any questions please feel free to ask them at any time! For anonymity please do not record your name or other identifying information in this booklet.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may elect to not participate in this study without any penalty even if you have previously agreed to participate or have already started your participation. Participants are urged to NOT participate in this study if they feel that hearing about the Juvenile Dependency (foster care), Juvenile Delinquency (probation) systems, and/or Court Appointed Special Advocates would be upsetting to them. Furthermore participants who have personally been in the Juvenile Dependency (foster care), Juvenile Delinquency (probation) systems, and/or volunteered as a Court Appointed Special Advocate may not participate in this study.

If you feel uncomfortable at any time during your participation you may choose to stop participating.

If you have any questions regarding Court Appointed Special Advocates after your participation you may contact CASA of Humboldt at 707-443-3197

After you have read everything on this page please proceed to the next page.
Please answer these questions before watching the training video.

1. Do you currently or have you ever volunteered as a Court Appointed Special Advocate or Guardian Ad Litem through a CASA / GAL program anywhere in the United States?
   a. Yes       b. No

2. Have you ever personally been in the Juvenile Dependency (foster care) or Juvenile Delinquency (probation) systems as a minor or the biological parent of a minor in one of those systems?
   a. Yes       b. No

If you answered “Yes” to either question 1 or 2 we will not be able to utilize you as a part of this study.

3. What is your profession? Please answer the closest response.
   a. Social Worker or Probation Officer
   b. Other Social Services provider (Child Welfare or Probation)
   c. Mental Health Provider
   d. Substitute Care Provider (Foster Parent, NREFM, or Kinship)
   e. Teacher or School Staff
   f. Other

4. Rate on a scale of 1 – 10 how well do you think you understand the roles and responsibilities of a Court Appointed Special Advocate. A rating of 1 means you know absolutely nothing and 10 means you feel that you have complete knowledge.

   No knowledge 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Full knowledge

5. How comfortable do you feel working with a Court Appointed Special Advocate. If you do not work with a CASA rate how you think you would feel. A rating of 1 means not comfortable and a rating of 10 means completely comfortable.

   Not comfortable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely comfortable
STOP HERE!

Please view the training video at this time. Once you have completed viewing the video you may continue to the next page. If you have any questions please feel free to ask them at any time!
Please answer these questions after watching the training video.

6. Rate on a scale of 1 – 10 how well do you think you understand the roles and responsibilities of a Court Appointed Special Advocate after watching the video. A rating of 1 means you know absolutely nothing and 10 means you feel that you have complete knowledge.

No knowledge 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Full knowledge

7. How comfortable do you feel working with a Court Appointed Special Advocate after watching the video. If you do not work with a CASA rate how you think you would feel. A rating of 1 means not comfortable and a rating of 10 means completely comfortable.

Not comfortable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely comfortable

Thank you for taking the time to view the training film and participate in this study. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated! If you have any questions about CASA of Humboldt you may contact them at 707-443-3197 or visit their website at www.humboldtcasa.org

Please fold this booklet, place it in the provided envelope, and seal the envelope.