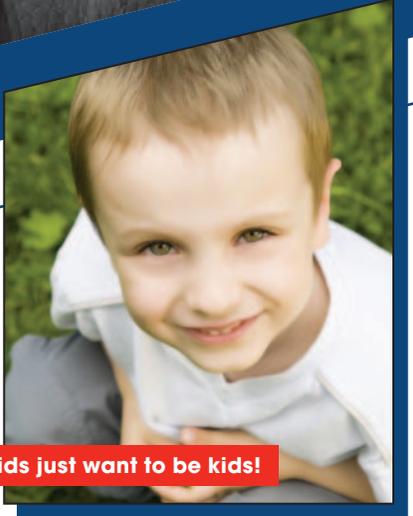




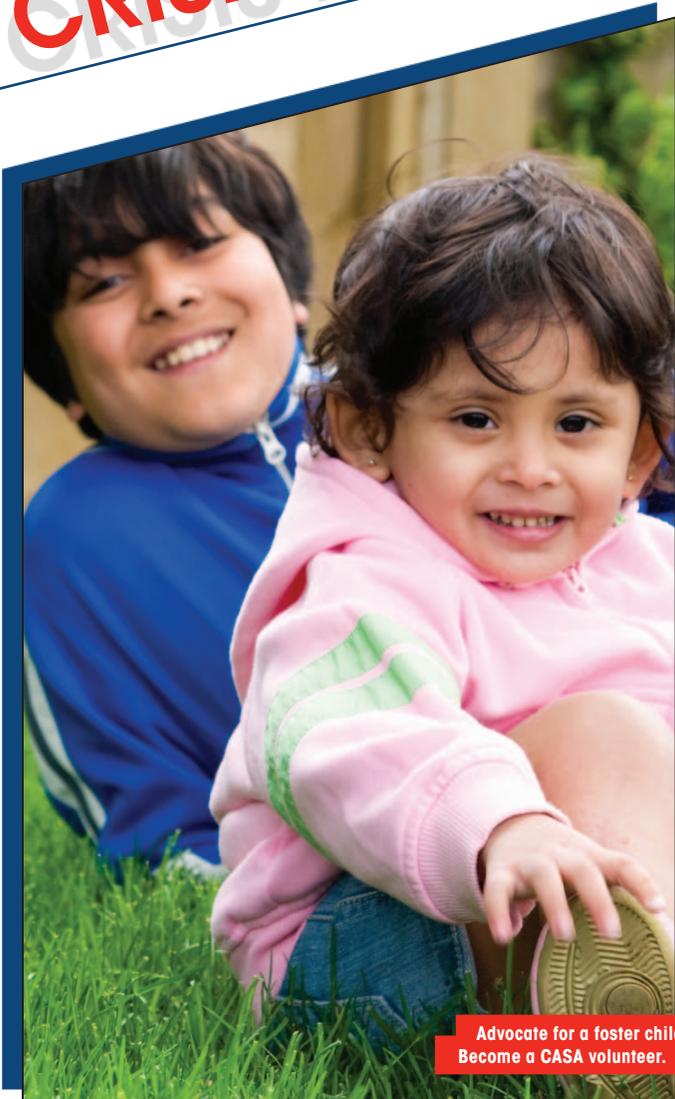
CASA OF YUMA COUNTY

CRISIS IN THE DESERT SOUTHWEST

**FOR MORE INFO, OR TO VOLUNTEER VISIT
WWW.CASAOFYUMACOUNTY.ORG
OR CALL 928-314-1830**



Kids just want to be kids!



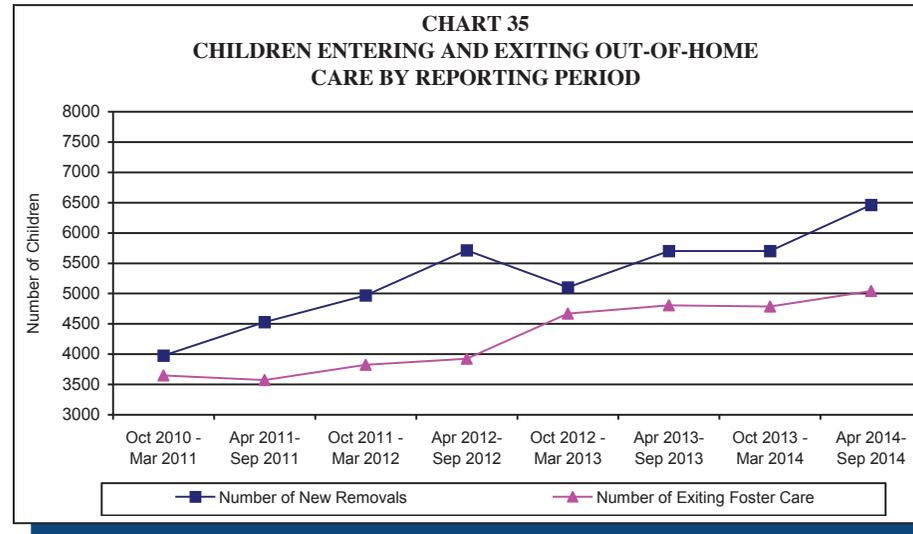
**Advocate for a foster child.
Become a CASA volunteer.**

The state of Arizona, and Yuma County in particular, is facing a crisis of epidemic proportions. In a matter of just six months, the number of children who have been removed from their homes for abuse and neglect increased from 15,751 to 16,990 state-wide. In Yuma County alone there are currently 372 children in foster care. This dramatic increase is due in part to a decrease in funding for substance abuse and mental health programs throughout the state. The scariest part of this crisis is that the outcome of these cases lays solely in the hands of a bureaucracy that is perpetually understaffed and under funded. Year after year, the number of children removed from their homes in Arizona outnumbers the number of children exiting the system.

After being removed from their homes, often times with just the clothes on their back, these children spend an average of 24 months in out-of-home care placement such as foster care, group homes, or shelters. Due to a lack of suitable long-term foster homes, the number of placements for these children can range anywhere between one and forty-three before they are either reunified with their families or adopted. This can have a profound outcome on the psyche of a child that follows them into their adult life. Ensuring a positive outcome for these children is vital to the future of Yuma County and the state of Arizona.

The situation is bleak, but there is a ray of sunshine and that is the presence of CASA of Yuma County. CASA, short for Court Appointed Special Advocates, was first developed in 1977 by Seattle Superior Court Judge David Soukup. He was faced with making decisions on behalf of abused and neglected children with only the limited information provided by the state child protective services. Soukup thought there had to be a better way to ensure he was making the best decision possible for these children. He formulated the idea that volunteers could be dedicated to a case and speak for the children's best interests. Fifty volunteers responded to his outcry for help, which started a movement that provides better representation for abused and neglected children throughout the country.

CASA volunteers are appointed by judges to watch over and advocate for abused and neglected children, to be certain they don't get lost in the overburdened legal and social service system or languish in inappropriate group or foster homes. Volunteers get



to know the child by talking with people involved in that child's life: parents and relatives, foster parents, teachers, medical professionals, attorneys, social workers and others. They use the information they gather to inform judges and others of what the child needs and what will be the best permanent home for them. Volunteers stay with each case until it is closed and the child is placed in a safe, permanent home. For many abused children, their CASA volunteer will be the one constant adult presence in their lives.

Since its inception, the results for the program have been staggering! A child with a CASA advocate has far superior outcomes and is:

- More likely to find a safe, permanent home
- More likely to be adopted
- Half as likely to re-enter foster care
- Substantially less likely to spend time in long-term foster care
- More likely to have a plan for permanency, especially minority children

Children with a CASA advocate also do better in school:

- More likely to pass all courses
- Less likely to have poor conduct in school
- Less likely to be expelled

Children with CASA advocates get more help while in the system:

- More services are ordered for the children
- More likely to have a consistent, responsible adult presence
- Volunteer advocates spend significantly more time with the child than a paid guardian ad litem

Children with a CASA volunteer also score better on the top nine protective factors:

- Neighborhood resources
- Interested adults
- Sense of acceptance
- Controls against deviant behavior
- Models of conventional behavior
- Positive attitude towards the future
- Valuing achievement
- Ability to work with others
- Ability to work out conflicts

Studies have shown the outcome for these children is significantly better when a CASA volunteer is appointed. It seems like a no-brainer that every child should have one. Unfortunately, there is a substantial shortage of volunteers in Yuma County. Currently, there are only enough volunteers to service 24% of the cases. If you want to make a significant difference in the future of Yuma County, and enrich your own life as well, now is your opportunity!

You do not have to be a lawyer or social worker to be a volunteer. CASA advocates are people from all walks of life, who simply share a passion for helping children. As a volunteer, you will be thoroughly trained and well supported by a professional coordinator to help you through each case.

You must pass a background check, complete 30-hours of pre-service training, and commit to stay with a case until it is closed (a year and a half on average). For more information about becoming a CASA Volunteer contact: 928-314-1830 or www.CASAOFYUMACOUNTY.ORG