



Arizona Supreme Court Dependent Children's Services

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Volunteers needed to review foster care cases During Child Foster Care Awareness Month volunteers are encouraged to get involved

(Phoenix, AZ—April 21, 2016) May is National Foster Care Awareness Month and communities across the nation will be rallying around abused and neglected children. In Arizona, there are more than 18,000 children in foster care and while finding forever homes for those children is the top priority, there are other ways to help. As the number of children in care continues to rise, so does the need for more community support. The Arizona Supreme Court oversees two volunteer programs that ask everyday volunteers to keep an eye on children in the foster care system.

Volunteers who join a Foster Care Review Board meet once a month to review cases before they are heard by a judge. All parties to the case are welcome to attend the review and update the board on their progress and challenges. The board makes recommendations to the court based on the information they review and the information that is presented to them in the review. The board also advises the court on the adequacy of efforts and progress toward placing the child in a permanent home; encourage the return of each child when possible; promote stability in the child's placement; and assists in informing parents and others of their rights. By law, each case must be reviewed by the Foster Care Review Board every six months. More than 100 new volunteers are needed to help accomplish this goal.

Volunteers are also needed to join the Court Appointed Special Advocate Program, or CASA. CASA advocates are assigned to one case at a time and become experts on that case. They meet with the child at least twice a month and have access to all the records in the case. Before each court hearing, the CASA writes a report that goes directly to the judge, advising him/her on how the case is proceeding and what could be done to improve the outcome for the child. Not every child is assigned a CASA volunteer. There are currently only 1,000 CASA volunteers in Arizona serving about one in ten children.

"The volunteers in our programs are some of the most dedicated individuals out there," said Caroline Lutt-Owens, division director for the Arizona Supreme Court's Dependent Children's Services. "Our programs don't require volunteers to take a child home but they do require them to open up their hearts and be willing to help change lives. We're so grateful for the volunteers we have and welcome more to help us with our mission to make sure no children fall through the cracks while in the foster care system."

Each program requires volunteers to be 21 years old and complete a thorough background check and pre-service training. FCRB volunteers commit to dedicating their time once a month on a week day from about 8 to 5. CASA volunteers usually spend about 15 hours per month working on their case and are asked to stick with the case for its duration. Volunteers are needed statewide. For more information on these programs or to speak with a current volunteer visit azfcrb.org, casaofarizona.org or contact Allison Hurtado at ahurtado@courts.az.gov or 602-452-3683.