

CHILD ADVOCATES OF SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY: FORGING A PATH FORWARD

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Trisha Hendricksen had been with Child Advocates of San Bernardino County (also called C.A.S.A. of San Bernardino) for over 15 years. Trisha had received both her bachelor's and master's degrees in criminal justice at California State University, San Bernardino. She had started as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (C.A.S.A.) volunteer in 2007. She was subsequently hired as an Advocate Supervisor in 2008 and promoted to Program Manager in 2012. In 2020, she was named the Program Director and in 2025 had been appointed as the acting Interim Executive Director role (in addition to her program director duties). When asked why she had chosen C.A.S.A. so many years ago, and why she had continued to work there, she said,

"I could honestly say I worked for an organization that made a difference. Every day, I got to witness how one person could have such a positive, life-changing effect on another, and that was truly rewarding. Who would not want to be a part of an organization like that?" (Hendricksen 2016).

While Trisha Hendricksen agreed to serve as the Interim Executive Director, her preference would have been to stay as the Program Director. For the second time in two years, she had been asked to assume a role she did not want but was willing to do so for the good of the organization. Trisha reflected:

“It was a rushed decision. It felt like we kept moving on. No problem. But I really should have thought about that more than I did when I said ‘yes,’ because it involved more than I thought. There was a lot of anxiety. When you wake up, something’s bothering you. And it takes your brain a minute to register. And it was, oh, yes, that was what it was, and every day. What fire did I have to put out today? Just worked until I was done, until all the fires were out. And then, by that point, I was exhausted, there was no more left in me to be, how was your day?” (Hendricksen 2024).

Exhibit 1. Trisha Hendricksen of C.A.S.A. of San Bernardino County

Photo courtesy of Child Advocates of San Bernardino County



C.A.S.A. of San Bernardino

Child Advocates of San Bernardino County recruited, screened, and trained volunteers to serve as Court Appointed Special Advocates (C.A.S.A.) for youth living in the foster care system in the county. C.A.S.A. of SBC provided service to over 150 youths through the support of over 80 C.A.S.A. volunteers, with an operating budget of \$1.5 million. Oversight was provided by an eight-person volunteer Board of Directors to whom Trisha reported, and as a C.A.S.A. program, was jointly responsible to the SBC Judge Advocate (the presiding judge of the Juvenile Dependency Court).

In fall 2023, Trisha was preparing for a critical Board of Directors meetings, where the future leadership of C.A.S.A. of SBC was to be decided. Having gone through two Executive Directors in the last two years, the Board needed to decide whether to continue the search for a third Executive Director (in so many years) or consider an alternative path forward. The options for C.A.S.A. of SBC included: (1) Hire another Executive Director; (2) Build leadership capacity within the current organizational staff; (3) Look to merge with (or be acquired by) another non-profit entity; or (4) Bring on an external Interim Executive Director to buy more time to make a final decision.

The decision, what path to forge, would be heavily influenced by Trisha's recommendation, as not only was she the current Interim Executive Director, but she was also the voice of the 13-person full-time staff and the foster youth in the program. Moreover, Trisha had the respect of the Board and the Judge Advocate.

To complicate matters, there were several challenges for C.A.S.A. of SBC that made the decision more difficult. First, there was a potential budget shortfall (despite significant investments from several key stakeholders). Second, the numbers of retained volunteers and youth served had flatlined over the last couple of years. Third, the staff had to take on additional administrative responsibilities to support operations during the changes in leadership, which was not sustainable. And fourth, different key stakeholders preferred different leadership paths to pursue.

As the Interim Executive Director, Trisha wanted to help navigate the leadership challenge by providing a comprehensive recommendation to the Board that best served the foster youth of SBC, was financially sustainable, aligned with stakeholders' interests, and honored the contributions and commitment of the current staff.

Table 1. C.A.S.A. of SB Operating Budget

Source: Child Advocates of San Bernardino County

	AMOUNT
Executive Staff	\$ 205,088.00
Executive Director and Program Director	
Administrative Staff	\$ 162,227.20
Office Administrator, Donor Relations Manager, Donor Relations Coordinator	
Outreach Staff	\$ 225,659.20
Community Outreach Manager, Training & Education Specialist, Outreach Assistant, Case Liaison	
Program Staff	\$ 326,372.80
Advocacy Manager, Advocate Supervisor II, Four (4) Advocate Supervisors I	
Salary Sub-Total	\$ 919,347.20
Benefits Sub-Total	\$ 168,267.02
Compensation Total	\$ 1,087,614.22
Consulting Expenses	\$ 95,766.00
Grants, Bookkeeping, and Development	
Operating Expenses	\$ 325,810.00
Offices, IT, Marketing, Volunteer, Youth Services	
TOTAL	\$ 1,509,190.22

Table 2. C.A.S.A. of SB Projected Revenue

Source: Child Advocates of San Bernardino County

Funding Sources	Amount
Foundations	\$ 607,900.00
Government Contracts	\$ 615,548.00
Fundraising	\$ 180,000.00
TOTAL	\$ 1,403,448.00

Table 3. C.A.S.A. of SB Volunteer and Youth Pairs

Source: Child Advocates of San Bernardino County

Year	Volunteer and Youth Pairs
2019	107
2020	104
2021	105
2022	92
2023	93
2024	97

Court Appointed Special Advocates

In reflecting on her upcoming recommendation, Trisha considered what C.A.S.A. meant (the history, mission, and vision of the organization), as well as the current staff and organizational climate.

C.A.S.A.

Court Appointed Special Advocates (C.A.S.A.), a national volunteer movement, began in 1976. Its founder, Seattle Superior Court Judge David Soukup, decided he could not endure any more sleepless nights worrying about the lifelong impact of his decisions on abused and neglected children. At that time, children in foster care did not receive the same representation in court as parents did. In an *LA Times* interview, Judge Soukup said,

“I was consumed by the fact that I didn’t have enough information about each child, and I just didn’t know if I had done the very best job I could.”

Judge Soukup set out to right this wrong. He thought well-trained volunteers could ensure children’s voices were heard and provide judges with the necessary insight to make the best possible decisions. In 1977, Judge Soukup formed the first C.A.S.A. program to recruit, train, and supervise everyday people who volunteered to build meaningful relationships and advocate for abused and neglected children in juvenile dependency court. The first 50 volunteers became Court Appointed Special Advocates. In 2025, there were more than 1,000 C.A.S.A. programs in all fifty states with more than 70,000 volunteers (National C.A.S.A. 2023).

Exhibit 2. A Kid Like Me Video

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2asKWHpO6g>



C.A.S.A. Volunteers

A C.A.S.A. volunteer provided a judge with recommendations that helped the court make a sound decision about that child's future. Each case was as unique as the child involved. C.A.S.A. volunteers came from all walks of life with a variety of professional, educational, and ethnic backgrounds. Aside from their C.A.S.A. volunteer work, 85% were employed in regular full-time jobs. Two-thirds of the volunteers nationwide were women. A C.A.S.A. volunteer usually spent about 10-15 hours per month with her or his assigned foster youth.

Social workers were employed by state or county governments. Social workers sometimes worked on 40 to 50 cases at a time and were frequently unable to investigate each case comprehensively. The C.A.S.A. volunteer, however, had a small caseload: on average 1-2 youths. The volunteer did not replace the social worker on a case; he/she was a separate, independent appointee of the court. Although there were other child service organizations, C.A.S.A. was the only program where volunteers were officially appointed by the court to have the specific responsibility of looking after the child's best interests. In addition, C.A.S.A. was the only agency that required extensive pre-service training, continuing education, and an 18-month program commitment from volunteers.

To become an advocate, volunteers needed to complete 30 hours of training. The training included a mix of synchronous and asynchronous online instruction through C.A.S.A. University, often conducted on evenings and weekends. Volunteers also had to pass a comprehensive background check. Once training was successfully completed, volunteers were sworn in by the court and matched with 1 or 2 foster youths. Volunteers submitted monthly time logs to their staff Advocate Supervisor and completed 10 hours of continuing education each year. The relationship with the youth focused on advocacy, mentorship, and guidance for school, life, and work. Volunteers also collaborated closely with their Advocate Supervisor, especially when court cases or significant issues were pending, for example, placement instability, mental health, or substance abuse. (C.A.S.A. of San Bernardino 2023).

Exhibit 3. California C.A.S.A.'s Mission and Vision

Source: California CASA (<https://www.californiacasa.org/mission-vision>)

The mission of California C.A.S.A. “is to ensure that children and youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems have both a voice and the services they need to thrive. We achieve this by strengthening and empowering California’s network of local C.A.S.A. programs and advocating for effective child welfare policies and practices.”

Vision. “Every child in the California child welfare and juvenile justice systems who needs advocacy will have the transformative support of a C.A.S.A. volunteer.”

In California, there were 46 programs. Local C.A.S.A. directors who ran county-wide programs recognized the need for a state office that could grow and strengthen the C.A.S.A. network. Together, they formed the California C.A.S.A. Association in 1987. At its founding, only 17% of California Superior Courts had access to C.A.S.A. volunteers. Through persistence, partnership, and passion, the network of C.A.S.A. programs had grown to serve children and courts in 51 counties in California, where 99% of foster youth lived (California C.A.S.A. Association 2023). By 2025, close to 1,000 C.A.S.A. programs served children in 49 states.

Exhibit 4. C.A.S.A. of San Bernardino's Mission and Vision

Source: CASA of San Bernardino County (<https://www.casaofsb.org/who-we-are/>)

Mission. "C.A.S.A. of San Bernardino County improves the quality of life for youth in foster care, juvenile justice care, and foster care alumni with stable and consistent mentoring, advocacy, and supportive services."

Vision. "To advocate on behalf of all abused and neglected children and youth throughout San Bernardino County."

In 1984, the benefits of the program reached Judge Patrick Morris with the San Bernardino County Juvenile Dependency Court, who established Child Advocates of San Bernardino County as an official C.A.S.A. program to serve the growing numbers of children entering the County's child welfare system. Since then, advocacy services had expanded to include advocacy for both healthcare and education systems.

San Bernardino County (SBC) had over 5,000 children and youths living in foster care (Kidsdata.org, 2023 Population Reference Bureau, <https://www.kidsdata.org/>). They were victims of abuse and neglect and, as a result, had been removed from their homes and families and placed into foster care. These children desperately needed guidance on how to survive and navigate the complicated and overburdened child welfare system.

C.A.S.A. of SBC improved the quality of life for youth in foster care, juvenile justice care, and foster care alumni with stable and consistent mentoring, advocacy, and supportive services to advocate on behalf of abused and neglected children and youth throughout SBC. Every day, C.A.S.A. volunteers mentored and advocated for the best interests of abused and neglected children in the courtroom, classroom, and health care system. Volunteer advocates—empowered directly by the courts—offered judges the critical information they needed to ensure that each child's rights and needs were met while in foster care. SBC had a waitlist of over 250 young people who needed help.

C.A.S.A. of SBC volunteers had positively affected the lives of thousands of at-risk youths since its founding – assuring that children’s voices were heard in the courtroom, that decisions made about them included their input, that their physical and mental health were top priorities, and that their educational rights were at the heart of their school experience.

Exhibit 5. Role and Impact of a C.A.S.A. Volunteer

Source: Katz et al. 2020; Waxman et al. 2009; Brocius, Trawver & Griffin 2021; Katz & Geiger 2023.

Role of a C.A.S.A. Volunteer:

- Establishes a strong and stable relationship with a child.
- Gathers information, writes reports, and makes recommendations in the best interest of the child.
- Advocates to ensure the child receives the appropriate resources that he or she deserves.

Impact of a C.A.S.A. Volunteer:

- Children who are appointed C.A.S.A./GAL volunteers or staff have higher rates of case monitoring and service referrals compared to those who are not appointed C.A.S.A./GAL volunteers or staff.
- Compared to children without a C.A.S.A./GAL volunteer or staff, those who have one tend to achieve better outcomes, as reflected in their academic and behavioral performance in school. Specifically, they are more likely to pass all their courses, avoid expulsion, and have better conduct performance.
- Transition-age youth refer to their C.A.S.A./GAL volunteers or staff as “fierce advocates” who are relentless in sharing information, helping youth acquire benefits, and building relationships with other professionals (such as attorneys, social workers, and mentors).
- C.A.S.A./GAL volunteers or staff play a crucial role in the lives of the children they serve by providing assistance that other professionals involved in the case may be unable to provide.

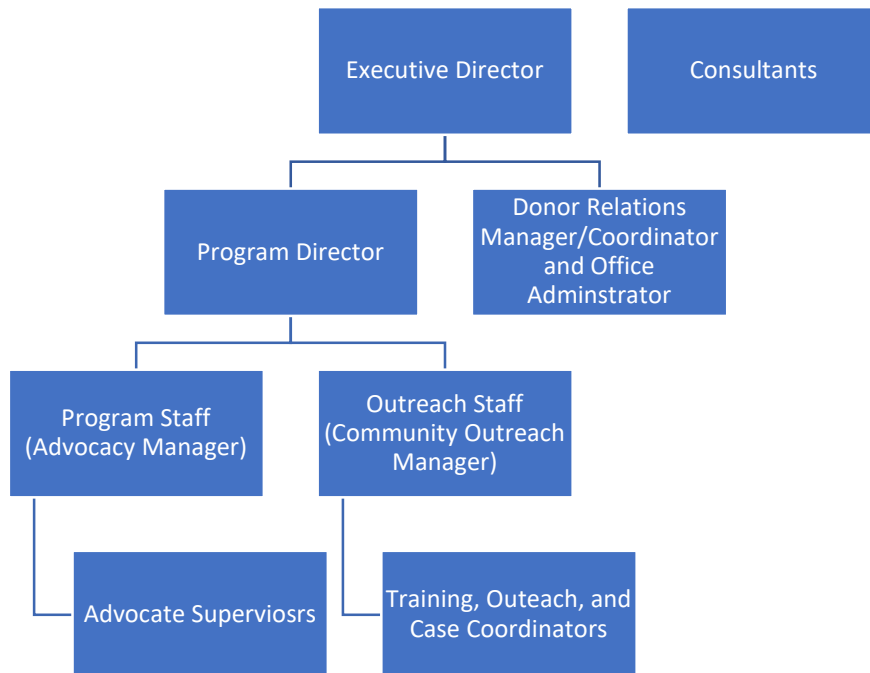
Child Advocates of San Bernardino County had a staff of 13 full-time employees and a \$1.5 million operating budget. Staff were organized into three distinct units: **(1) Community Outreach and Training**, which focused on sourcing and training volunteers and placing them with youth; **(2) Advocacy**, which supported the volunteers in their placement with foster youth;

and **(3) Administration**, which included the Executive Director, Donor Relations, Office Administrator, and Consultants.

For Community Outreach and Training, there was a Community Outreach Coordinator who supervised the Training & Education Specialist, Case Liaison, and Outreach Assistant. For Advocacy, there were an Advocacy Program Manager, an Advocate Supervisor II, and four Advocate Supervisors I. For Administration, there was a Donor Relations Coordinator and an Operations Administrator. In addition, C.A.S.A. had three Consultants, independent contractors, who collaborated with the Executive Director and Board providing support for budget, development, and grants.

Exhibit 6. C.A.S.A. of SBC Organization Chart

Source: Child Advocates of San Bernardino County



Community Outreach focused on recruiting, screening, and training community volunteers to serve as Court Appointed Special Advocates.

- The **Community Outreach & Training Manager** was part of the leadership team and oversaw the Community Outreach and Training Department.
- The **Case Liaison** was responsible for processing all new referrals, monitoring, supervising, and managing C.A.S.A.'s eligibility/waitlist, providing eligible youth with pre-advocacy and services to meet their immediate needs as they waited for their C.A.S.A. appointment.
- The **Training and Education Specialist** ensured that all C.A.S.A. volunteers, staff, and Board of Directors received the highest quality training, served as trainer/facilitator for all in-person, virtual, and hybrid trainings, participated in training new employees and board members, and assisted in the organization and management of advocate training, including continuing education so that the needs of the organization and volunteers were met.
- The **Outreach Assistant** was responsible for ensuring that C.A.S.A. had a continuous pool of qualified community volunteers participating in and completing the recruitment, screening, and training process to become Court Appointed Special Advocates for youth in foster care, and maintaining current volunteer files.

Advocate Supervisors matched, supervised, and supported trained volunteers to provide mentorship and advocacy for the youth they were assigned to, and functioned as an intermediary between social workers, attorneys, and the courts.

- The **Advocacy Program Manager** served as the advocacy program leader and administrator for staff and C.A.S.A. volunteers. In addition, the Advocacy Program Manager represented C.A.S.A. at committee meetings and events as requested by the Program Director,
- The **Advocate Supervisor** provided expert supervision and case management of volunteers (referred to as Advocates) for open dependency and delinquency court

cases to ensure that children received comprehensive advocacy and mentoring for their safety, well-being, and permanency. This was a full-time 40-hour a week position.

Administrative included alumni relations, development, and administrative support for C.A.S.A.

- The **Donor Relations Coordinator** was primarily responsible for leading C.A.S.A.’s individual giving efforts, setting a strategy, and executing fundraising plans for sustainability and growing the number of annual donors through annual campaigns, increasing the size of individual donations, and converting annual donors to major donors.
- The **Marketing and Communications Coordinator** was responsible for helping to build the C.A.S.A. brand and increase awareness and visibility of C.A.S.A. among target audiences.

A survey of staff indicated high levels of organizational commitment and intention to remain, however, there was a decline in job satisfaction, engagement, and perceived management support (see Table 4).

Table 4. Results of C.A.S.A. of SB Staff Survey

Based on 5-point Likert scale (5 = very high, 1= very low)

Source: Child Advocates of San Bernardino County

Survey Questions	Average Score	Average Ranking
Motivation (Intrinsic)	3.8	Moderate-High
Satisfaction (Extrinsic)	3.6	Moderate-High
Organization Commitment	4.8	Very High
Employee Engagement (Trust/Knowledge Sharing)	3.6	Moderate-High
Work-life Balance	4.5	High
Persistence (reduced intention to quit)	4.3	High
Supervision (Management Support)	3.6	Moderate-High
Flexible Work Arrangements	4.7	Very High

The major themes of the survey included needing increased opportunities for career growth, greater communication across departments and levels, balancing compensation with workload, and building relationships with leadership.

Additional Stakeholders

In addition to considering the mission of C.A.S.A. and the current staff and climate, there were stakeholders for Trisha to consider, including programs that were aligned with C.A.S.A. of SBC, and the presiding Judge Advocate.

Voices for Children

“To ensure that children had every opportunity to achieve stability, we matched them with caring volunteers—called C.A.S.A.s—who advocated for their best interests” (Voices for Children 2024).

Founded in San Diego in 1980, Voices for Children (VFC) was a private, nonprofit organization that recruited, trained, and supported Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteers who spoke for the needs and well-being of children in foster care. In 2015, VFC expanded to serve children in Riverside County foster care. As the only agency designated by the courts to provide C.A.S.A. volunteers in San Diego and Riverside Counties, VFC’s C.A.S.A.s played a crucial role in helping judges make the most informed decisions for children’s future. (Voices for Children 2023).

Of note, the current Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of California C.A.S.A., was the former Executive Director of VFC.

Children’s Fund. Children’s Fund was a San Bernardino nonprofit that served communities’ most vulnerable children by funding and equipping agencies and nonprofits that served children who were experiencing poverty, abuse, and neglect (Children’s Fund 2022-2023 Impact Report 2024).

The idea of the Children's Fund (CF) was recommended in 1985 as a better way to deliver services to at-risk children who fell under the responsibility of the respective county departments. Patrick Morris formed a Policy Council, the then presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court, who also founded C.A.S.A. of SBC. After reviewing scenarios, the endorsement was made to add a nonprofit 501(c) (3) component to the Children's Network.

In 1986, Children's Fund (CF) was founded. Jack H. Brown, then the Chairperson and CEO of Stater Bros. Markets, was the Founding Chairperson of the Board of Directors. Realizing that children "*in the system*" were not always getting their needs met, CF was created as a non-profit organization to serve the children in the county who most needed support.

Since its inception in 1986, Children's Fund had assisted more than 1.8 million children, serving the communities' most vulnerable children by funding and equipping agencies and nonprofits that served children who were experiencing poverty, abuse, and neglect. Children's Fund was positioned to leverage donations to help provide essential services to the region's most vulnerable children. CF could meet the immediate needs of children and families who were under case management through partner agencies, preventing families from experiencing an emergency. CF worked collaboratively with over 50 agencies, nonprofits, and school districts across San Bernardino County to ensure that brighter futures were built upon a support system that put children first (Children's Fund 2023).

Of note, the current Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of CF was a former Executive Director of C.A.S.A. of SB and was well-regarded by C.A.S.A. SBC's staff and Board.

Presiding Judge. In addition to the C.A.S.A. of SBC Board of Directors and staff, there was the Presiding Juvenile Court Judge, who was the ultimate overseer of program from the court. As such, the Presiding Judge needed to approve any changes in services to youth, including changes in leadership and/or structure of the organization. The Judge's concern would be how to increase the impact of the program on youth served in SBC. Therefore, any decision to merge with another C.A.S.A. Program (such as VFC) or come under the umbrella of another organization (such as CF) would need to be approved by C.A.S.A. National, Cal C.A.S.A., and the presiding Judge Advocate.

Key Factors

There had been four key factors that Trisha needed to consider in her recommendation for a path forward: (1) the impact on youth served; (2) increasing the number of C.A.S.A. volunteers; (3) being mindful of any budget constraints; and (4) diversifying the board of directors.

First, C.A.S.A. of SBC had served over 150 foster youths each year, but with over 5,000 foster youths in SBC, which was just a 2% service rate. The service rates of other C.A.S.A. programs averaged 16%. The current indicator of 2% of youth served (with over 200 foster youth on the waitlist) was an issue that all stakeholders were concerned about. Whatever decision was made, the most important factor was increasing the number and percentage of foster youths served (California C.A.S.A. Association 2013).

Second, in order to increase the number of youths served, the number of volunteers recruited and retained by the program had to increase. Over the last three years, the program had averaged just under 100 volunteers per year, which was not sufficient to grow the number of youths served.

Third, while C.A.S.A. of SBC had a significant reserve and could easily weather the next year or two, beyond that, unless something significantly changed (in terms of cost or revenue), the organization was in danger of exhausting its reserves and moving into a deficit situation.

Fourth, while C.A.S.A. of SBC had a dedicated Board, its resources and networks were limited and often overlapped. This might imply getting a broader set of Board members with access to large donors, greater skill and experience diversity, and connections to prospective volunteers.

The Decision

As the Interim Executive Director, Trisha was uniquely positioned to recommend a path forward for the organization. Therefore, she would have to recommend that the Board: (1) hire another Executive Director; (2) consider building leadership capacity within the current organizational staff; (3) look to merge with (or be acquired by) another non-profit entity; or (4) hire an external Interim Executive Director.

Any recommendation would require addressing key stakeholder concerns, including staff acceptance and the approval of the Judge Advocate, Cal C.A.S.A., and C.A.S.A. National to be successfully implemented. In addition, based on her own experience, Trisha had her own bias regarding which option might be the most feasible, especially for the current staff who had been sacrificing to help keep the organization moving forward during the transition.

The first option was to hire a new Executive Director. The search for an Executive Director could take 3-6 months, plus an additional 3-6 months for onboarding and evaluation. In addition, given the potential budget shortfall and the limited number of youth served, this would put added pressure to raise more revenue and/or cut costs. As with all new hires, there was no guarantee of success, and the onboarding time for a new Executive Director was a

significant investment in staff and Board time and resources. However, this option allowed the organization to maintain its independence. The option was aligned with past precedence, was favored by the parent organization (Cal C.A.S.A.), and could forge a successful path forward with the right director in place (as has been seen with other county C.A.S.A. programs, such as VFC).

“I could not imagine us doing that all over again. But because I felt like the job duties fell on me, anyway. And I did not think I could keep doing this for another 6 months for this person to get hired and brought on” (Hendricksen 2024).

A second option was to consider existing staff capabilities. Fortunately, the Program Director was willing to fill the interim role in the short term (but was not willing to take the job permanently) and staff members had indicated a willingness to take on more responsibility. However, it was unclear if this was a sustainable model. While it could help to address the budget shortfall and build staff competence, it could also detract from the core mission of serving the youth in the foster care system, might require significant Board and outside consultant support, and vacated positions might need to be backfilled, further reducing the budget benefits and the sustainability of the option.

“I did not feel there was any staff at the time that would be able to take it. I meant, I did not even feel confident that I could take it.” (Hendricksen 2024).

A third option was to consider being acquired by another non-profit, with the C.A.S.A. program coming under an ‘umbrella’ organization. Currently, two organizations were considered. Joining Voices for Children (VFC) or becoming part of the San Diego and Riverside C.A.S.A. organizations. An acquisition would allow C.A.S.A. of SBC to leverage its resources and expertise and provide greater symmetry and impact for SBC and Riverside counties. The downside was that the Board would lose control of the organization (and might not have a role in the new entity). There was no guarantee that staff would be retained; there were potential concerns regarding the cultural fit with the larger organization; and concerns that the county program would not be a priority for the larger parent organization. Of note, while Cal C.A.S.A.

preferred that C.A.S.A. of SB remained independent, it would be Cal C.A.S.A.'s second preference that C.A.S.A. were acquired.

"I never liked that option. Because I felt the thing that really made us unique, and work was that we were very connected to our community. And I felt San Diego coming in it just did not seem like it was going to be a good fit; maybe over time it would have been, and who knew, but it would have been the last option for me. When Riverside had to go under San Diego, they ended up letting go of all their staff. So, that was just a no-go for us" (Hendricksen 2024).

Moving under the Children's Fund (CF) umbrella would provide staff continuity, solve the budget issue, allow the team to focus on growth, provide an opportunity for the Board to stay engaged, and provide access to a larger (well-resourced, connected, and diverse) Board moving forward. The downside was losing potential control (as the C.A.S.A. of SBC Board would be a minority in the new organization), merging the culture of the two organizations, and while there was support in the CF's current CEO, if there was ever a change in the CF's leadership, then C.A.S.A. of SBC could be vulnerable. In addition, this was not a preference of Cal C.A.S.A., given its experience with umbrella organizations that were not C.A.S.A.s. Cal C.A.S.A. might reconsider its financial support (which was a significant part of the current operating budget).

"It was appealing, because he (the former C.A.S.A. of SBC Director who was now the CFO of CF) never really left, he was still helping us; it felt like a natural fit. It made sense for him to continue to be the leader for us to merge with; all the staff collaborated well with him. They trusted him; they wanted to work for him. So, there was some comfort in that. And we did really great things when we were together. The only thing at that time that I felt like we were lacking was financial resources. It was like our dream to have these departments and not just one person doing all these things. It felt like a natural fit to be able to merge into them and be able to do this work at a bigger, larger scale and serve more kids" (Hendricksen 2024).

Of note, there was a lengthy process to merge or be acquired, requiring multiple levels of approval, including from the local county Judicial Council, Cal C.A.S.A., and National C.A.S.A. as the organization had to transition from one 503(c) organization to another, with all the requisite contracts, grants, foundations, and approval processes.

Finally, another option was to hire a temporary, external Interim Executive Director, ideally someone who had supported another C.A.S.A. program and/or who had turned around a non-profit program that was struggling. This would provide a longer runway to make a final decision, and appease Cal C.A.S.A. (as their preferred option) and other funding organizations. It would not require a lengthy reorganization process and would allow current staff to focus on their core responsibilities. However, there were concerns regarding how quickly the person could get up to speed, what support he or she might need, how the staff would respond, what decisions the person could implement, and whether C.A.S.A. was just delaying the inevitable and costing more time and money.

Whatever the recommendation, the organization was in a critical stage with its budget, staff, and program, and the importance of making the 'right choice' had never been more apparent.

"We were being forced to decide. And it was not a decision that we wanted to make" (Hendricksen 2024).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Child Advocates of San Bernardino County stood at a crossroads, facing a leadership transition amidst challenges in funding, volunteer recruitment and retention, and service impact. The Interim Executive Director's recommendation, whether to hire a new Executive Director, build internal leadership capacity, merge with another nonprofits, or appoint an interim director, would significantly affect the organization's ability to fulfill its core mission. To navigate this critical juncture successfully, C.A.S.A. of SBC had to prioritize the best

interests of the young people served, ensuring their voices were heard and their needs were met. The chosen path forward should be grounded in comprehensive management theories, fostered collaboration among stakeholders, and accompanied by a clear and actionable plan addressing recruitment, financial sustainability, and program effectiveness. By making a strategic, well-informed recommendation, C.A.S.A. of SBC could continue making a meaningful difference in the lives of vulnerable children, ensuring they had the support and advocacy they needed for a brighter future.





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