



To apply for this Fellowship complete the Individual Application on Stoneleigh's website. Send the application and any requests for further information on this project to Allison Modica, Associate Director at 610-608-6262 or Allison.modica@casaphiladelphia.org

The mission of Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Philadelphia is to train and support community volunteers to advocate for the health, safety, stability and well-being of abused and neglected children.

In Philadelphia, there are over 5,000 children in foster care and another 1,500 children receiving in-home protective services. Approximately 40% of these children are represented by private court-appointed attorneys, who have neither the resources nor the time to conduct thorough investigations of their child clients' needs, attend planning meetings and meet with the child prior to the court hearing. As "friends of the court", CASA carefully recruits volunteers from the community – people who want to make a difference in a child's life. CASA provides thirty hours of pre-service training and supplies each volunteer with on-going supervision and support. CASA volunteers often become the only constant in a child's otherwise turbulent world.

Since its inception in 2005, CASA has advocated for over 150 children, increased its volunteer base and worked to solidify its place in the child welfare system of Philadelphia. By building relationships with our child clients, their families and the professionals involved with them, be it judges, attorneys, social workers and/or foster parents, CASA has made an impact on children's lives and has made recommendations on behalf of their best interests.

CASA is interested in assessing the extent to which a child is positively influenced by having a CASA volunteer assigned to him/her. Anecdotally, CASA's impact provides a layer of support to the lives of the children it serves. However, we do not have data to support this. In fact, according to a Harris Poll commissioned by the National CASA Association, "83% of adults know little or nothing about the experiences of children in foster care and nearly half (42%) know nothing at all about these children." Most often coverage of the foster care system leaves people with images of foster children who are poorly treated and facing unsuccessful futures; positive stories are told rarely. However, talking to youth often paints an entirely different picture. A national focus group study of 50 current and former foster youth, also commissioned by the National CASA Association, found "these youth see themselves as uniquely empowered by overcoming adversity, determined not to repeat the mistakes of their birth parents and optimistic about their futures."

These are the stories we want to capture and tell. The Stoneleigh Junior Fellow will analyze available CASA data related to health, safety, stability and well-being, gather additional information through surveys, interviews and visits with child clients and their caregivers, produce reports documenting the child clients' experiences and evaluate statewide CASA organizations (there are 21 counties in Pennsylvania with CASA programs) to compare programmatic similarities and differences that have proven to be

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effective. At the end of the year, the Fellow will make recommendations to CASA, which will enhance practice and provide additional advocacy interventions aiming to help child clients have better outcomes in the Philadelphia child welfare system.