

State Representatives Conference Call, hosted by National CASA
CASA Role in Serving Older Youth

Discussion facilitated by Sonia Valladares, FL State GAL Program; Anthony Petrarca, NCASA Training Director; and Carmela Welte, NCASA Deputy CEO

More than 20 state representatives participated, including:

Beth Dessem (MO), Leeanne Reese (MO), Libby McCullum (ME), Liza Kirschenbaum (NJ), Theresa Lyles (IN), Wendy Spence (TN), Brian Brinkerhoff (CO), Erin Moore (OR), Ed Kilcullen (MD), Ryan Murrey (WA), Barbara Benedict (NY), Kyleen Gee (MI), Mary Hayden (VT), Melissa O'Neill (VA), Connie Ricketts and 3 other MA directors, Doug Stephens (OH), Marion Hallum (AK), Sonia Valladares (FL)

Carmela explained that several states provided support for youth to remain in care beyond age 18 even before passage of the Fostering Connections to Success Act (2008). However, the Act enables states to now receive federal IV E funds to support the youth, up to age 21. If using IV E funds, support must be extended to all foster youth who meet the eligibility requirements, and annual judicial review is required.

Carmela queried participants to identify if their state supports youth to remain in care beyond age 18, and to identify if they are accessing IV E funding for support. 14 states indicated that youth are able to remain in care until 21, with 4 of these states accessing IV E funds (though most state representatives were not sure how support is funded). VA is considering extending support to age 21, and what the role for the CASA volunteer will be. Ohio is also looking at extending support to age 21. Judicial review is not mandated in Vermont, and in Maine, the CASA or GAL is discharged, unless there is a specific request for the advocate to remain on the case.

Sonia discussed volunteer GAL support for older youth in Miami, and how valuable the [Fostering Futures curriculum](#) of National CASA is for training volunteers. She stressed that even just the [e-learning portion of the training](#) is phenomenal for volunteers working with older youth (4 hours of in service). It is very interactive, provides tools for volunteers to have conversations with youth, and to engage them in planning, and setting short- and long-term goals.

Can CASA/GAL programs use IV-E dollars to train volunteers to serve older youth? This would certainly seem reasonable, since it is training to serve foster youth. Ultimately, it is the decision of each state IV-E agency to determine what training it is willing to support for IV-E reimbursement, and state organizations should try to negotiate with their state agency to request reimbursement of training expenses beyond the core volunteer training curriculum.

Discussion then evolved to what is the volunteer's role in serving older youth. Most agreed that the role evolves from one of advocacy only, to that of mentor, guide, as well as advocate. Brian asked what are the outcomes expected for volunteers working with older youth? Programs in Colorado firmly believe that permanency must be their core mission and goal, and that well-being outcomes may be beyond their control. Others felt that volunteers can certainly influence well-being outcomes, such as education, health, family finding, by providing courts with a clear picture of what is going on in the child's life. It was suggested that "best interests" should be the focus, and that looks different for every child. For older youth, it means helping youth to see and understand their options, which also includes their well-being.

Another issue that arose is what age is appropriate for kids to appear in court. Age 16 and older is simpler to understand, but what about children age 8 – 12? [The ABA Center on Children and the Law has developed a [series of papers](#) to help judges and advocates involve children in an age appropriate way in their court hearing.] Older youth should definitely have the opportunity to attend court hearings – this is their life. “No decisions without us”.

In some states the CASA/GAL volunteer may be discharged from the case when a youth reaches age 18, even though the youth remains in care. It is suggested that the court and/or youth specifically request that the CASA remains involved. As long as the volunteer remains as a court appointment, s/he is immune from liability. A release may also be needed to allow the CASA to access information.

Is the peer coordinator model appropriate supervision for volunteers serving older youth? Florida does use this model, with some changes, and it works well.

Carmela agreed to post resources that participants mentioned, that have been particularly helpful in serving older youth in care:

Indiana uses a [Collaborative Care Agreement](#), which parties agree upon. The DCS is still involved, but the youth directs his or her case, and can request that the CASA volunteer remain on the case.

Florida uses a [Significant Adult Mentoring MOU](#), for the youth to request that the volunteer advocate remain on the case.

FosterClub has developed a [Permanency Pact](#), which is very useful for youth to explain to adults how they would like them to be connected in their life. There are 45 ways an adult can be connected, and the pact clarifies what the adult role can be, so that they are both more comfortable and clear about expectations.

Resources on what permanency means for older youth:

[Enhancing Permanency for Older Youth](#) , Administration for Children and Families, US Dept of HHS

[Achieving Permanence for Older Youth](#) , an extensive resource list from Minnesota Courts

[Youth Perspectives on Permanency](#), California Youth Connection