At-Risk Youth: Substance Use Policy Issues and Modeling Positive Behaviors

by

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Abstract
Court Appointed Special Advocates of San Mateo County (CASA) recruits and trains community members to serve as mentors and advocates to abused and neglected children who have been placed in foster care. CASA has consistently maintained a zero-tolerance drug and alcohol policy for its volunteers, including the use of marijuana. Since the passing of Proposition 64, a new California marijuana law that legalizes specific personal use and cultivation of marijuana for adults 21 years of age or older, CASA has begun to experience an increase in the disclosure of marijuana use amongst prospective volunteers. Because of this, CASA’s current Executive Director, has been forced to reevaluate the current drug and alcohol policy. The purpose of this project is to provide CASA of San Mateo County with research based information that will help them define their Volunteer Drug and Alcohol policy post Prop 64 and will subsequently allow them to enhance their current Volunteer Training program.
Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to CASA of San Mateo County not only for allowing me the privilege of working on this project but for the important work that they continue to do. I would also like to thank my husband and family for their love, support, and motivation during this time. And to the staff/professors, faculty, and colleagues of USF, I too express an immense gratitude. This academic experience has made me a better person in both my professional and personal life. Applying to this program has been one of the best decisions in my life.
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Section 1. Introduction

At-risk youth are often defined as a youth who are less likely to transition into adulthood successfully. Success is often defined as the ability to avoid crime, achieve academic success, and gain financial independence. Nonprofit organizations that serve this population in a mentorship capacity must understand the importance of volunteers modeling positive behavior. This includes the attitude that a volunteer conveys to their mentee regarding drugs and alcohol. To further ensure that Volunteers hold themselves to the highest standards, nonprofit organizations should have clear Volunteer Drug and Alcohol Policies in place.

Court Appointed Special Advocates of San Mateo County (CASA) recruits and trains community members to serve as mentors and advocates to abused and neglected children who have been placed in foster care. CASA volunteers are sworn officers of the courts and are appointed by judges to ensure that foster children do not get lost in the legal and social service system. CASA volunteers remain in a child’s life until the case is closed and the child is placed in a safe and permanent home. (CASAofSanMateo.org, n.d.) CASA of San Mateo County is part of a national network. In California alone there are 44 programs operating in 52 out of the 58 counties. (californiacasa.org, n.d.)

CASA of San Mateo county has held a presence in San Mateo County for almost 20 years. It is a highly regarded program in the community and is fully supported by the
Juvenile Court, the department of children and family services, county supervisors, and the residents of San Mateo County. This is largely due to the caliber of service that CASA volunteers provide to their mentees. CASA does this by clearly conveying their high expectations to prospective and active volunteers.

Although CASA volunteers are well intended, most have not been exposed to the types of challenges that foster youth face. This sometimes results in volunteers taking a relaxed attitude towards drugs and alcohol when working with their mentees. A relaxed attitude of this sort has the potential to further create conflict for a foster child since they do not have the luxury of engaging in typical teen risk-taking behavior. A typical youth that experiments with drugs or alcohol might suffer traditional consequences such as having privileges removed, receiving a serious lecture, or being grounded. Foster youth have so much more to lose. For a foster youth, engaging in such behavior can potentially result in the loss of a home, being removed from the comfort of a familiar community, losing all of their belongings, and/or involvement with juvenile probation.

To convey the seriousness of this topic CASA has consistently maintained a zero-tolerance drug and alcohol policy for its volunteers, including the use of marijuana. Since the passing of Proposition 64, a new California marijuana law that legalizes specific personal use and cultivation of marijuana for adults 21 years of age or older, CASA has seen an increase in the disclosure of marijuana use amongst prospective volunteers. Because of this, CASA’s current Executive Director, has been forced to reevaluate the
current drug and alcohol policy. Unfortunately, California CASA has not prepared for this change and is not in a position to advice its programs on how to move forward.

This purpose of this project is to provide CASA of San Mateo County with research based information that will help define their Volunteer Drug and Alcohol policy post Prop 64. In addition to that the data collected will allow CASA to enhance their current Volunteer Training program. This will be done through a mixed methods approach. The first piece is a literature review that will: define at-risk youth, explain the impact of drugs and alcohol on adolescents, and address the importance of mentorship programs. The literature review will culminate with a conclusion. Second, will be a data analysis that will include an evaluation of CASA’s current policy, 3 expert interviews, and a review of the new marijuana law, Prop 64. In the end, this project will make recommendations to CASA on how to move forward with a new Volunteer Drug and Alcohol policy.

Section 2: Literature Review

Defining at-risk youth.

An at-risk youth is typically defined as adolescent that is less likely to transition into adulthood successfully. Success is primarily defined as the ability to avoid crime, achieve academic success, and achieve financial independence. 30% of kids are at risk of
failure in school and life. (Larry E. Decker, 2003) At-risk youth become or are considered at-risk for a number of reasons.

These reasons may include:

- Homeless or transient
- Involved in drugs or alcohol
- Abused sexually, physically or emotionally
- Challenges with mental health
- Neglected at home or live in stressful family environments
- Lacking social or emotional supports
- Involved with delinquent peers

At-risk youth are often identified after engaging in dangerous or “risky” behaviors. These behaviors are seen as a forerunner to dropping out of school, only being able to obtain low paying jobs or being unemployed, and engaging in adult criminal behavior.

These dangerous and risky behaviors can include:

- Running away
- Truancy
- Substance abuse
- Unsafe sexual behavior
- Fighting
- Engaging in criminal behavior

(schoolengagement.org,2018)

It is important to note that it is not necessarily a youth’s behaviors or attitude that contributes to the youth being at-risk. Studies typically focus on fixing a youth’s behavior and tend to ignore the environmental factors in a youth’s life. It is unrealistic
to believe that changing or addressing only a youth’s behavior and not the environment will be fully successful.

Though the previous behaviors mentioned seem to predict poor adult achievement and in some cases even incarceration, there is a belief that these poor outcomes can be prevented. Although early intervention is preferred, turning youth around at any age will yield positive results. (Kronick, 2013)

**The impact of drugs and alcohol on the adolescent brain.** The human brain continues to significantly develop during the adolescent years. Scientific studies show that the human brain takes about 25 years to fully form. During the teen years the adolescent brain develops in an uneven manner. The first parts of the adolescent brain to develop are in the back of the brain and are referred to as the Cerebellum, Amygdala, and the Nucleus Accumbens. These parts control emotions, motivation, and physical activity. (By Ken C. Winters, 2011)

However, the frontal part of the brain known as the prefrontal cortex, which is tasked with the job of controlling reasoning and impulses, develops last. Not only does this part of the brain develop last, it also does not fully finish developing until the age of 25. This uneven development of the adolescent brain creates a recipe for an increase in risk taking and unpredictable behavior, especially by young teenagers. Risk taking and trying out new experiences is functionally adaptive as it is a necessary part of growing up and gaining independence from adults. Unfortunately, this makes adolescents
particularly prone to initiate in drug use. (Brain Development, Teen Behavior and Preventing Drug Use, 2018)

When an adolescent takes drugs in order to obtain pleasure, it interferes with the body’s natural ability let us know things feel good. The human brain uses neurotransmitters to send messages throughout our bodies. Included in these messages are neurotransmitters called dopamine. Dopamine is what influences us to seek things that gives us feelings of pleasure or satisfaction.

Because adolescent impulses seek pleasure without considering consequences, more so than at any other age, they are extremely vulnerable to the temptations of drug and alcohol. Since the adolescent brain is still developing, a teen’s ability to bounce back after drug use is compromised. Studies also show that the earlier the onset of drug use, the greater the likelihood of a person developing a drug problem. Thus a teen who begins drinking at the age of 13 has a higher chance of developing an alcohol addiction in their adult life, than a person who waits until the age of 21 to start drinking. (Brain Development, Teen Behavior and Preventing Drug Use, 2018)

The benefits of youth mentorship in at-risk youth. Mentorship has the potential to promote resilience among at-risk children and youth. Adults who serves as mentors can provide:

- Reliable support
- Communicate moral values
- Teach skills
• Inspire
• Motivate
• Model positive interpersonal behavior
• Foster self esteem

The most successful programs and mentors are the those who genuinely invest time and energy into the children and youth they serve over frequent and prolonged periods of time. It is apparent that the supportive role of a mentor is particularly important for at-risk children. In a study of adult survivors of child abuse, Zimrin (1986) found that well-adjusted survivors described at least one long-term stable relationship with a supportive non-parental mentor, while poorly adjusted survivors rarely mentioned such a relationship.

Mentors expose their mentees to a broader world by and introducing them to new and stimulating environments and experiences. The social support that mentors give their mentees acts as a buffer against the development of trauma-related psychopathology and as a protective factor in those who are considered to be stress resilient. (Steven M. Southwick M.D., 2010)

Studies show that mentors can enhance resilience in the lives of children, this is particularly true for at-risk youth. For an at-risk youth this type of support can potentially be lifesaving. Youth with mentors are less likely to engage in risky behavior with drugs and alcohol, and are more likely to engage in positive adult and peer relationships. Thus growing up to be positive members of society.
Youth with mentors benefit from:

- Increased high school graduation rates
- Lower high school dropout rates
- Healthier relationships and lifestyle choices.
- Better attitudes about school
- Higher college enrollment rates and higher educational aspirations
- Enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence
- Improved behavior, both at home and at school
- Stronger relationships with parents, teachers, and peers
- Improved interpersonal skills
- Decreased likelihood of engaging in drug and alcohol use

(Benefits for Young People, n.d.)

Conclusion. By definition, at-risk youth face many life challenges. Too often, the challenges that these youth face are due to no fault of their own. At-risk youth do not ask to be born at-risk. At such young ages, some of these youths have experienced multiple traumas and disruptive events. Still, they are expected to transition into adulthood, a stage in life where success is dependent on well-developed self-esteem and self-efficiency. For at-risk youth these childhood adversities can create additional problems in life such as mental health problems and substance abuse problems.

Children and youth with mentors have better chances at “beating the odds.”

There are many benefits associated with consistent long-term mentorship. Volunteers in the role of mentors need to understand that at-risk youth are highly exposed to negative behaviors, including engaging in drugs and alcohol. And since their brain is in a state of development, it makes them highly intrigued with risky behavior, the last thing
that an adolescent needs is to have a mentor that sends messages of positivity towards unhealthy behaviors such as engaging in drugs and alcohol.

Often times at-risk youth do not have the luxury of engaging in such behaviors. They do not experience the more traditional consequences such as getting grounded or losing privileges. At-risk youth can potentially have more to lose, and in some cases this can include losing their lives. Mentorship programs are intended to engage adolescents in ways that they would not otherwise have the chance to. The last thing an at-risk youth needs is to be re-exposed to life challenges or risk factors by someone who is there to provide alternative solutions or lifestyles.

Section 3: Methods and Approaches

Background information and context.

As previously mentioned, CASA of San Mateo County is a mentorship and advocacy program for children in foster care. The ages of the children and youth they serve ranges from 0-21 years of age. Although there are several programs statewide and nationally, CASA of San Mateo County is a pioneer amongst many. Understanding the importance of having the program reflect the population being served, CASA was the first, and continues to be the only program to offer a training for volunteers fully in Spanish. In addition to that, they were one of the first, and continue to be one of the very few programs, to expand their mentorship services to juvenile probation youth. For these
accomplishments, CASA is often highlighted amongst its sister programs statewide and nationally.

Patricia Miljanich is the Executive Director and co-founder of CASA of San Mateo County. She has served the program in this capacity for the past 18 years. Patricia’s professional life has always been devoted to serving youth. She stands by Garrison Keller’s quote, “Nothing you do for a child is ever wasted.” I had the honor and privilege to work alongside this kind, caring, and intelligent individual for six years, 2012-2018. I know first-hand that her dedication to the children that CASA serves has no bounds. As former Program Director of CASA of San Mateo County I can attest to the high quality of staff and their extreme dedication to the CASA mission. Because of this, CASA of San Mateo County has held and maintained a high level of support, acceptance, and partnerships with the: San Mateo County Juvenile Court, San Mateo County’s Department of Children and Family Services (CPS), and various community programs.

CASA carries out its services through its volunteers. In order for a CASA volunteer and youth relationship to be successful, volunteers need to understand the importance of At-risk youths’ needs for stable and caring adult relationships in their lives. To ensure that the program is the right fit for a volunteer, CASA requires an extensive background check. A prospective volunteer must first attend an Orientation and fill out a Volunteer Application. Once the application is received the prospective volunteer must come in for a First Interview where they are asked intense and personal questions. These can
include: What are some of your memories as a child? Have you ever been abused as a child or adult? Do you engage in the use of recreational drugs? (See appendix A). If the volunteer advances from this step then he or she is allowed to attend the CASA Volunteer Training, a 30 hour 5-week course. During this time volunteers continue to be observed and screened. The training ends with one of the juvenile court judges swearing the trainees in as Officers of the Court.

The youth that CASA serves do not have the luxury of engaging in normal risk-taking teen behavior. Unfortunately, life circumstances have stolen this privilege from them. For the youth that CASA serves engaging in what is considered ‘normal risk-taking teen behavior’ can result in a foster youth losing a home and since they are typically abruptly removed from homes, often times they lose many of their personal belongings. Being removed from your home is extremely traumatic and the only consolation to an unfamiliar home, family, and house rules is being able to stay in your community and school. Foster homes are limited in the county of San Mateo thus engaging in risky-behavior can result in moving out of county and in some cases even out of state. Not only are foster homes and parents less tolerant of this behavior but are extremely unacceptable of instances involving drugs and alcohol.

Therefore, CASA of San Mateo needs to ensure that their volunteers model positive behaviors and attitudes towards drug and alcohol. Historically, CASA has exercised a zero-tolerance policy towards the use of drugs and alcohol while in the
presence of their CASA child. In addition to that, prospective volunteers that disclosed the use of Marijuana were rejected from the CASA program. Once a volunteer has completed the new volunteer training they are asked to sign a Volunteer Contract of Expectations, where they are asked to refrain from the use of alcohol while in the presence of their CASA child. (See appendix B). Once the new California marijuana law passed, Proposition 64, CASA saw an increase in the disclosure of marijuana use among prospective volunteers. CASA became conflicted and unsure on how to proceed because: the drug is still an illegally federally, the public’s increased relaxed views and concerns on the effects of the drug, and the fact that even authorities are unsure of how to regulate and enforce marijuana related incidents. The Executive Director felt that until authorities have developed processes for marijuana use, such in the case of alcohol/DUIs, CASA should continue to uphold a zero-tolerance towards the use of marijuana. The questions here were: Could CASA continue to do so and under what provisions? In order to do so, would the organization need to change its language or policies, etc.?

**Methodology and Approaches.** To answer these questions this project took a mixed method approach. The first step was a literature review that supported CASA’s stance and attitude towards drugs and alcohol. Secondly, CASA of San Mateo’s current Volunteer Drug and Alcohol Policy was examined and compared to the policies and practices of other programs. To further collect some of this data 3 expert interviews
were conducted. Two of which included staff from Bay Area mentorship programs. Other Californian CASA programs were consulted along with staff of California CASA. The third approach included a review of Prop 64 to obtain a better understanding of what, or if any, were the implications of this new law, specifically for CASA.

**Primary Data and Collection Process.** The primary data was collected from three expert interviews with significant experience with youth mentorship programs. As she is the point person for this project, the first interview was conducted with CASA of San Mateo’s Executive Director, Patricia Miljanich. This interview was done in person and over a span of about two hours. The second interview was conducted via phone with Volunteer Coordinator at the Boys and Girls Club San Francisco. The third interview, also conduct via phone, was with an Enrollment and Match Specialist with Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Bay Area.

The questions to the interviews were presented to each individual in advance along with background and contextual information of the proposed project. The first question asked was: How important is a volunteer’s attitude towards drugs and alcohol when in a mentorship role? This was intended to elicit more thought-out responses for the following questions which typically only receive general responses. The questionnaire was used to gage other program’s attitude towards drugs, alcohol, and the use of marijuana among its volunteers. (See appendix C.)
The results from the interviews were:

- Used to gage were CASA of San Mateo stands among its sister program and other youth mentorship programs regarding alcohol and marijuana use
- Obtain leads on areas of further research
- Analyzed to support conclusions and recommendations

In addition to the 3 expert interviews. Other California CASA programs and California CASA personnel were contacted. These communications were sporadic and used for the purpose of one off questions or questions that only required yes or no answers.

**Secondary Data Collection and Process.** Secondary data collected to make the case for the recommendations consisted of reviewing CASA’s volunteer training and onboarding materials and the materials of other mentorship programs (see appendix D & F). This data revealed whether the current materials were appropriate for the current change in law and what changes could or should be made.

To support CASA’s stance towards marijuana, additional secondary data was collected regarding the Proposition 64.

The data collected revealed:

- The definition the law
- What it means for youth
- Definition under Federal law
- Law enforcement struggles
The analysis of Proposition 64 revealed:

- Proposition 64 legalizes specified personal use and cultivation of marijuana for adults 21 years of age or older
- Proposition 64 does not decriminalize marijuana related offenses for minors
- Under federal law, cannabis is treated like every other controlled substance, such as cocaine and heroin.
- Enforcing drug violations involving marijuana related offenses has been significantly tougher for all law enforcement agencies in the state.
- Unlike alcohol, where one can be charged with DUI if their blood alcohol content (BAC) is .08 percent or higher, there are no such standards for marijuana.

**Section 4. Data Analysis**

**Table 1: At-Risk Youth with Mentors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At - Risk Youth with Mentors Exhibit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fewer Problem Behaviors</td>
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<tr>
<td>More Positive Attitude Towards School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Drug Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Nonviolent Delinquency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Levels of Anxiety and Depression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The literature revealed that there are many benefits to mentorship programs. The most significant ones are stated in the table above.
Figure 1: How a Youth Becomes At-Risk

Source: Author’s creation. Elaborated from Vanessa Merino, 2018.

This figure displays the contributing factors to what constitutes an at-risk youth. To be considered at-risk a child’s life needs not to include all of these factors. It could be a combination of any one or more of these factors.
Figure 2: Drug use and Teen Brain Development

Source: http://learn.genetics.utah.edu/content/addiction/adolescent/

This figure depicts the effects of drug use on the teen brain. This further supports the belief that teens should be encouraged by their mentors to not engage in drug use.
It shows that:

- The prefrontal cortex, which handles reasoning, grows during the pre-teen years.
- If you can keep teens drug-free during adolescence, teens will more than likely stay drug-free for life.
- Teens who start drinking by age 13 have a 43% chance of becoming alcoholics.
- Those who start drinking at 21 have only a 10% chance.

**Inquiring About Drug Use.** The expert interviews and the analysis of program policies revealed that although youth mentorship programs are well intentioned, they do not give the topic of drugs and alcohol much thought. When it comes mentor and mentee relationships this subject is often discussed on a circumstantial basis. Such as in the case of Brett Carr from Boys and Girls Club San Francisco, he explains, “People are still people. You do the background. Sometimes adults try to be cool. Unfortunately, drugs and alcohol are trying to be cool.” Evidence also showed that there is some discomfort in asking volunteers about their use of marijuana. After developing a new First Interview questionnaire, the Executive Director of a Santa Clara CASA program states, “After several discussions with our Systems partners and among staff, here is where we have landed. Makes me quite uncomfortable, but . . . .”

**Drug and Alcohol Policies.** Policies existing in the two program evaluated, Boys and Girls Club San Francisco and Big Brother Big Sisters of the Bay Area, are only
quickly referenced in their Volunteer Manuals. In the case of Boys and Girls Club San Francisco, they also inform prospective volunteers of their preferences during the orientation process. Thanks to this project, both of the mentioned programs have expressed an interest in revisiting their own policies and appreciate being asked to view this topic through a different lens. One that takes the stance of having the same life expectations for at-risk youth that one would have for any important child in their own lives.

**Section 5: Implications and Recommendations**

**Limited Literature Review.**

Literature on the importance of volunteer attitudes towards drugs and alcohol does not exist. To support the recommendations, the topic needed to be broken into 3 sections: at-risk youth, drugs and brain development, and the importance of youth mentorship. When built upon each other, the findings prove that: At-risk youth by definition are predisposed to risky and dangerous behavior. The challenges that they face are through no fault of their own. Although risk-taking behavior is part of teen brain development, at-risk youth often times lack the proper guidance to develop this in a positive way. This is why mentorship programs are extremely important. Mentors have the ability to teach positive alternatives to life challenges and have the potential to
encourage and reinforce positive behavior. However, this can only be achieved through genuine, consistent, and long-term relationships.

**CASA is in a Category of Its Own.** Although most mentorship programs do not pay much attention to their volunteer policies, it is extremely important that CASA of San Mateo does. CASA’s volunteers are held to a much higher standard than the typical mentorship program because they are sworn officers of the court. In this capacity they have access to a foster child or probation youth’s personal information and access to the professionals involved in a child’s life such as: social workers, attorneys, probation officers, school personnel, etc. As officers of the court they are also expected to speak up and/or advocate on a youth’s behalf in court. This is done through the submittal of court reports and by speaking up during a child’s hearing. CASA’s volunteer need to demonstrate that they can be trusted to carry out such duties. They can do this by exemplifying healthy and positive behaviors. They are not just showing their mentees how to properly behave, they are leading by example. Additionally, they are demonstrating to the court that they are responsible enough to make proper, objective, and fact based recommendations to the court.

**Recommendations.** The literature review, data analysis and implications of this project support the following recommendations made for CASA of San Mateo County.
1. **Follow Federal Law:** The use of marijuana is still a federal crime, therefore, if CASA of San Mateo County wishes to adopt a zero-tolerance attitude towards marijuana use among its volunteers, they can. The nature of the volunteer work also allows them to adopt a policy that reflects federal law.

2. **Explain Policy Upfront:** Perspective volunteers should be made aware of drug and alcohol policy at first contact, at orientation. The screening and training process is quite extensive therefore prospective volunteers would appreciate knowing upfront whether this is a program that they can participate in.

3. **Reinforce Positive Role Modeling:** Training around the importance of positive role modeling with regard to the topic of drugs and alcohol should continue throughout the Volunteer Training and not only conducted on a situational basis.

4. **Add said training to the CASA Volunteer Training curriculum.** Training for new volunteers is done over the course of 30 hours. It is suggested that a full hour be added to the training. With help from the findings of the literature review, the training should cover: the life challenges if at-risk youth, how their brain development is impacted by the use of drugs, what mentors can
do to help, and examples of foster youth and probation youth that have lost more than the average teen because of engaging in risky drug behavior.

5. **Ask for a commitment.** Ask a volunteer that admits to the use of marijuana if they would be willing to refrain from smoking marijuana for the duration of their volunteer work. If a prospective volunteer agrees to do so, ask them to write and submit a statement that while they are active CASA volunteers they will refrain from smoking marijuana. Should an incident happen, this would prove that CASA did their due diligence.

**Section 6: Conclusions**

After the passing of the California marijuana law, Prop 64, CASA of San Mateo County saw an increase in the disclosure of marijuana use. The Executive Director did not feel comfortable allowing prospective volunteers that admitted to smoking marijuana to participate in the program due to the fact that authorities have not found ways to monitor and regulate laws around the usage of marijuana, such as in the case of alcohol and DUIs. Thus the Executive Director requested guidance and recommendations based on research based data that could support the final decisions. This project concluded that CASA could indeed continue with their zero-tolerance marijuana stance until the proper authorities/legal provisions came into existence. Not only did the research of this project provided research based information to reinforce
their stance, it also gave CASA materials to further explain and teach their
perspective volunteers throughout the training process, therefore further improving an
already impressive program.

It is also hoped that this project further inspires the individuals and
organizations that came across this project to continue to pay attention to the effects
and implications of their youth programs. Although well intentioned, compassion
fatigue is often experienced and every once in while we all could use a reminder of why
we do what we do. At a minimum I hope that this project does that. For those working
in the field of youth mentorship remember that anything you do for a child is never
wasted and that every child deserves to have someone that cares.
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Appendix A: Casa of San Mateo County First Interview Packet.

Name: ___________________________ Date: _________ Staff: ________

1. How did you hear about CASA?

2. Why do you want to become a CASA Volunteer?

3. Tell me about your memories of your life growing up?

   Parents:
   Married?
   Still Living?
   Divorced?
   If divorced, how old were you?

   How did the divorce impact your life growing up?

   Did your parents work outside the home?

   Siblings /family constellation

   Education/Extra-Curricular Activities

4. How were you disciplined as a child?

   How did you feel about it then, and what would you do differently?

   If a parent, how did you discipline your own children?

5. Were you ever abused as a child:
Physically
Sexually
Emotionally
Were you ever neglected?

6. Was anyone else in your family ever abused?

Has there ever been a child abuse report filed about you or anyone else in your family?
If so, what happened?

7. Was there any drug abuse in your family?

Any alcohol abuse?

8. Are you close to your family?
Tell me about your contact with family members.

9. Is there anything that you wish your parents had done/given you?

10. Employment (if less than 2 years, ask about past employment).

11. Have you ever been married (or had significant relationships)?
If any divorces – what happened?
Any children?
How would you describe your current relationship with your children?
12. What is your current living situation?  
Any pets?

13. Have you ever been abused as an adult?

14. Have you ever been involved in domestic violence?

15. Have you ever abused a child?  
   Physically  
   Emotionally  
   Sexually, or had sexual fantasies about children?

16. How do you feel when you hear about child abuse?

17. Do you use recreational drugs?

18. Tell me about your own alcohol usage. What is the frequency and quantity of current use, if any?

19. Have you ever had a problem with drugs or alcohol use?  
   Been in a treatment program?

20. Have you ever been diagnosed with a mental illness?  
   Hospitalised for mental breakdown?  
   Attempted suicide?
21. Have you ever been in therapy? (If in current or recent therapy, need letter of recommendation or general letter from therapist saying if it’s OK to be part of program.)

22. Are you taking any mood altering medications?

23. Have you ever been arrested? Describe the circumstances:

24. Have you ever been asked to leave a place of employment or volunteer position because of misconduct? Please explain.

25. DMV record?/DUI’s/Excessive citations?

26. What is your knowledge/experience of the child welfare system or juvenile probation court?

27. Do you currently have contact with children?

28. What volunteer experiences have you had?

29. Are you involved in any church or religious activities? (Explain policy.)

30. We live in a very diverse community. How do you keep an open mind about others with different backgrounds, ethnicities, sexual orientation, religion, etc.?

31. How do you normally deal with people you disagree with?

32. How do you handle disappointments and/or frustrations in your life?
33. With so many demands, especially with this type of volunteer work, how do you maintain and respect personal boundaries?

34. Who is your support system?

35. Tell me about your friendships. (Long-term & short-term)

36. What do you do for fun or recreation?

37. What skills, characteristics, or interests do you possess that will make you effective as a CASA volunteer?

38. What do you want for yourself to get from the experience of being a CASA Volunteer?

39. Do you have any concerns or questions about being a CASA volunteer?

40. What else would you like us to know about you?

Please review the following with the applicant:

By completing this screening interview, you are being accepted into our training program. The sensitive nature of this work is not for everyone. Therefore, CASA of San Mateo County closely evaluates each CASA Trainee throughout the application and training processes. We encourage open and frequent communication about any issues or feelings of discomfort that may arise during this time. While we appreciate your interest in our program, we reserve the right to make the final determination as to whether or not you will be accepted as an Advocate until after the training process is complete.

Do you have any questions regarding this policy?

What Happens Next

Hand applicant copy of training schedule.
Review training schedule with the applicant. There are only 10 sessions and it is important that trainees attend all classes. Any missed classes must be approved by Program Director and may involve having to make up classes with the next training session. Review Reference Letters with applicant.

We will explain Livescan requirements and procedure on the first night of class. We also order your DMV record. Court visit sign up will be available during training. We observe court for an afternoon session from 2 – 5 PM. At graduation, you will be sworn in whether or not all requirements have been met. However, your second interview and case selection cannot occur until ALL requirements have been met.
Appendix B: Volunteer Contract of Expectations

Volunteer Contract of Expectations

As a CASA Volunteer for CASA of San Mateo County, I agree to comply with the following mandates of the CASA of San Mateo County as stipulated by the National and State CASA Associations, the Judicial Council of California, and Rule 5.655 of the Court:

1. I will observe confidentiality of information regarding my CASA child’s case information, case records, and any information pertaining to the children and their families.
2. I understand that I am a mandated reporter of any suspected incidence of child abuse or serious neglect. I will follow protocols for reporting as outlined by CASA of San Mateo County.
3. Once assigned a case, I will check in by telephone, in writing or email, or in person with my Advocate Supervisor, at least once a month.
4. I will supervise my child at all times when he/she is with me. I will always make sure the child’s caretaker or responsible adult knows when I pick up the child, and I will always return the child directly to the care of a designated responsible adult.
5. I will not take my child(ren) to my home or to the homes of any friends or family members.
6. I will not take my child outside the following counties - San Mateo, Santa Clara, San Francisco, Alameda, Contra Costa, Santa Cruz, Monterey or Marin without first getting the permission of my Supervisor and the Social Worker.
7. **If my child is on Probation, I will not take the child outside San Mateo County without the permission of the child’s Probation Officer.**
8. I will not give any medication – prescription or over-the-counter – to a child, unless instructed by the social worker or therapist.
9. **As a CASA Volunteer and role model, I will not drink alcohol in the presence of my child.**
10. I agree to notify the CASA of San Mateo County program if convicted of any criminal activities while an active CASA.
11. I will submit monthly reporting forms by the 5th of each month. Forms may be mailed, faxed, or emailed directly to your supervisor or the office.
12. I will submit my court report to my supervisor at least 10 days prior to any court hearing on my case.
13. Monthly and court reports are to be sent directly to my supervisor. I understand Monthly Reports are internal documents only and not to be shared with others and that Program Manager will distribute my court reports to all necessary parties.

14. I will not transport my CASA child without a valid driver’s license and car insurance. I will notify the CASA of San Mateo County office in the event that my license or insurance is suspended, terminated, or revoked. I will complete and return CASA’s Additional Insured Memo so that my automobile insurance provider will notify CASA of termination of my coverage.

15. I will notify the CASA of San Mateo County office within 24 hours of any accident or injury that occurs during the time I am supervising my child.

16. Children under the age of 8 must be secured in a car seat or booster seat in the back seat. Children under the age of 8 who are 4’ 9” or taller may be secured by a safety belt in the back seat. Children who are 8 years and over shall be properly secured in an appropriate child passenger restraint system or safety belt. If I have a passenger seat air bag, I will not allow a child under 8 years old to ride in that seat.

17. I will complete 12 hours of continuing education each fiscal year (July 1-June 30).

18. I will not impose my religious, personal, or moral standards on my child or his/her parents or caretakers. I will respect the beliefs and cultural values of the various persons involved in the child’s life.

19. I will not act as an official spokesperson or representative of CASA of San Mateo County in any public forum (including the Internet), or speak to the press regarding CASA of San Mateo County, without authorization from the CASA of San Mateo County office.

20. I understand the importance of remaining objective. I will consult my Advocate Supervisor when or if I need direction on maintaining objectivity; avoiding or resolving conflicts with other individuals in the child’s life; defining the child’s best interest; and/or developing recommendations to the Court.

21. I will not give money or expensive gifts to the child or family.

22. I will not give legal or therapeutic advice.

23. I understand that the Executive Director reserves the right to terminate a CASA volunteer from the program. Consequently, after termination, I may not have any contact with the child or anyone else associated with the case. I have a right to appeal the decision according to the program’s grievance procedure.

I acknowledge the above terms and agreements included within the role of being a Child Advocate.

Name (Please print):_________________________________

Signature:________________________________________

Date:_____________________________________________
Appendix C: Expert Interview Questions and Answers

Interview Details

Name: Patricia Miljanich  Date: 4/13/18  Time: 7:00p
Organization: CASA of San Mateo County
Title: Executive Director  Phone Number: 650-517-5842
Email: patricia@casaofsanmateo.org

Questions to Ask Interviewer

Question #1: How important is a volunteer’s attitude towards drugs and alcohol when in a mentorship role?

Answer: A volunteer’s attitude toward drugs and alcohol is critical in a mentorship role generally and even more so in an organization such as ours. Our youth/children almost always have exposure to parents and caregivers who are suffering from addiction.

Question #2: Do you have a specific drug/alcohol policy for volunteers?

Answer: We let them know preferences and policy during the interview. We don’t have them posted anywhere else. They are informed throughout the entire training.
Question #3: Do you anticipate that the new CA marijuana law will impact your services or volunteer laws?

Notes: I don’t think ultimately that the new CA marijuana laws will impact our services. CASA programs provide services to children/youth who are often exposed to substance abuse that has led to neglect or abuse by parents or other adults in their lives. As a result, CASA programs generally. I will be fine with it once they can test for it. That will not be an issue.

Question #4: Have you ever had a volunteer intentionally or unintentionally expose a youth/child to drugs or alcohol? If so did you need to enforce the policy?

Answer: In 19 years with CASA, I am not aware of an incident in which a volunteer intentionally or unintentionally exposed a youth/child to drugs or alcohol.

Additional Notes

Have you seen the statistics of vaping?

Marijuana use in young teenagers has been shown to dramatically affect teenagers. We are in a position to where we want to encourage them not to do bad things to their bodies.

They have to see alternatives. People who can go on positively through life without them.

We need to promote a healthy lifestyle.
Questions to Ask Interviewer

Question #1: How important is a volunteer’s attitude towards drugs and alcohol when in a mentorship role?

Answer: Attitudes and beliefs regarding anything are important in any mentorship role, as young people are observant and often looking to emulate the adults around them. In some situations, these can offer a young person a new point of view, yet, in other situations, can be transmitted in a way that inappropriately misplaces a volunteer’s paternalism. The ladder is particularly important, in situations where volunteers may not be clear on how to sustain appropriate boundaries with a mentee. Even more so, when a mentee is particularly impressionable and is paired with a mentor who seems close in age to a mentee. In these scenarios, young people often forget that their mentors are indeed an adult who should report any concerns for welfare and safety. Therefore, it is important for mentors to execute good judgment that includes an understanding of a child’s circumstances, life experiences, and nonjudgment for any histories of substance abuse in a child’s home.
Question #2: Do you have a specific drug/alcohol policy for volunteers?

Answer: In the presence of their mentees, a volunteer is prohibited from purchasing or consuming alcohol, drugs, and tobacco. A volunteer must be at least three years sober, if they have a history of substance abuse. A volunteer cannot have a DUI within three years if seeking to become a mentor. Upon intake, if a volunteer discloses alcohol or drug usage, we are trained to follow up to gain more specificity on the usage. Typically, applicant will admit to social and/or medicinal use of substances.

Question #3: Do you anticipate that the new CA marijuana law will impact your services or volunteer laws?

Answer: I am hopeful that legislation will exonerate incarcerated people with marijuana related offenses, doing so, would likely increase the number of two parent homes enrolled in our program, and perhaps reduce the number of boys without any male figures presently in their lives. As for volunteer laws, I don’t imagine that any drastic change in policy will take place by the end of the current fiscal year. Typically, if a volunteer discloses marijuana usage, it does not necessarily disqualify the volunteer for mentoring. Unless, if enrollment staff suspect that their usage causes an inability to become a sustainable and suitable mentor for a young person.

Question #4: Have you ever had a volunteer intentionally or unintentionally expose a youth/child to drugs or alcohol? If so did you need to enforce the policy?
Answer: I can’t point to any specific instance as a point of reference. I will say that for our annual fundraising gala, there are usually 1-5 mentees who attend, each usually accompanied by their mentors. At this event, alcohol is served and noticeably used. I have no knowledge of whether a volunteer has drank in front of their mentees at this event.

Additional Notes: None

Interview Details

Name: Bret Carr
Organization: Boys and Girls Club San Francisco
Title: Volunteer Coordinator
Email: BCarr@kidsclub.org

Questions to Ask Interviewer

Question #1: How important is a volunteer’s attitude towards drugs and alcohol when in a mentorship role?

Answer: Helping them academically or with some school application process. It is not directly impacting the youth. Coming in and not directly talking about drugs and alcohol to the youth. Not even bringing that into the conversation. Important but takes a little less priority than the task at hand. It is important but not the highest priority.
Question #2: Do you have a specific drug/alcohol policy for volunteers?

Answer: Two different ways to on-board volunteers. Screening backgrounds checks for volunteers and also go through a volunteer orientation. Watched throughout the orientation. Staff are looking for red-flags.

We talk about it. Club House Rules and guidelines but we don’t give them any training. Here is what we expect you to do. Can’t come in intoxicated or talk about drug.

Question #3: Do you anticipate that the new CA marijuana law will impact your services or volunteer laws?

Notes: We don’t ask anything that asks volunteers to disclose that. Disused it at different meetings and training. More awareness and signs. More vigilant. Change with the times.

Question #4: Have you ever had a volunteer intentionally or unintentionally expose a youth/child to drugs or alcohol? If so did you need to inforce the policy?
Answer: I have not heard of any directly. Not that I know of. However, it is supper important. People are still people. You do the background. Sometimes adults try to be cool. Unfortunate drugs and alcohol are trying to be cool. Volunteers are awkward with youth staff intervention. Staff interviews with specific tasks.

Additional Notes

Teen Services Programs. Programs deal with real issues that teens are facing so we are being very aware that youth are exposed to these things. We tow the line of we are here for you but you can’t come in intoxicated. IT is a touchy subject. Awesome that we are working on this subject.
Appendix D: Santa Clara County CASA Program, First Interview Questions
Relating to Drugs

For the First Interview:

1. Have you ever experimented with or used drugs or abused prescription drugs? If yes, please explain. Yes No

Explain if applicable: Volunteers must have at least 2 years of sobriety from the use of any illegal drug. NA

2. Do you use medical or recreational marijuana? If yes, how much and how often? (How frequently per week or month? Ingested? Smoked?) Yes No

Explain policy: We have a zero tolerance policy when it comes to marijuana use while performing duties as a Child Advocate. CASAs must be unimpaired when in the presence of a CASA child. Marijuana use is associated with abuse; the smell or sight of marijuana may trigger traumatic memories for the children with whom we work. CASAs are expected to be mindful, use good judgment, and be aware of surroundings. There are potential safety/liability issues if a CASA is under the influence when with a CASA child.

3. Do you drink alcohol? If yes, how much and how often? (About how many drinks per week or month?) Yes No
Explain policy: We have a zero tolerance policy when it comes to alcohol use while performing duties as a Child Advocate. CASAs are not allowed to consume alcohol when in the presence of a CASA child. As with marijuana, alcohol use is associated with abuse. The smell or sight of alcoholic drinks may trigger traumatic memories for the children. CASAs are expected to be mindful, use good judgment, and be aware of surroundings at all times when with CASA children. There are potential safety/liability issues if a CASA consumes alcohol when with a CASA child.

4. Do you smoke cigarettes? If yes, where and how often? *In the car that you would use to transport the child?*

Yes  No

Explain policy: The state of California bans smoking inside foster care facilities (foster/resource family homes, residential homes, transitional housing providers, etc.), on the grounds of homes when a child is present, and cars that regularly transport foster children. (AB 352)
2. **ELIGIBILITY:** Volunteers must meet the requirements below:

**No discrimination.** Volunteers of all racial, cultural, ethnic, disability, sexual, and religious background are eligible.

a. **Geographic Residence.** Volunteers must reside or work in Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, San Mateo, or Santa Clara County, and have resided or worked here for a minimum of three months before being matched.

b. **Age, Community-Based Program.** Volunteers in the BBBSBA Community-Based Program must be at least 18 years old.

c. **Age, School-Based Program.** Volunteers in the BBBSBA School-based program must be at least 16 years old.

d. **Clear Record.** A criminal background check and a Department of Motor Vehicles check will be conducted on all prospective volunteers.
   1. Anyone found to have been charged or convicted of child abuse or molestation will be automatically disqualified.
   2. Anyone found to have been charged or convicted of criminal offenses involving weapons or the use of violence against others, including but not limited to, armed robbery, rape, homicide or domestic violence will be automatically disqualified.
   3. Volunteers who have been convicted of a felony, a violent crime, or a crime of moral turpitude will be automatically disqualified.

e. **No chemical dependency.** Volunteers must not use illicit drugs, alcohol, or controlled substances in a habitual and/or dependent manner. Volunteers who have a history of alcohol or substance abuse may be considered eligible provided that at least three (3) years have passed since the abuse and/or court ordered termination of court ordered treatment. There must be no current indications of alcohol or substance abuse.

f. **Driving Requirements, Community-Based Program.** In order to use an automobile with their Little, Volunteers in the Community-based Program must:
   1. Possess a valid driver’s license.
   2. Have a safe driving record free of felonies, DUls, and reckless driving traffic violations for the past 5 years prior to making an application. A history of significant moving violations or chargeable accidents in the 12 months prior to making an application, multiple at-fault, personal injury or property damage accidents, or a repetitive pattern of moving violations may disqualify the applicant at the discretion of the Program Director. EMS staff will submit the application to the Program Director for approval.
Appendix F: CASA Volunteer Policy as Described in Training Manual

1. Any DUI (driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol) in a person's driving record is serious and requires special scrutiny. If the DUI is over five years old, they can become a CASA volunteer providing there are no other red flags in the interview, the trainee has proof of insurance, and you have no reason to suspect the trainee will drive again while under the influence. The trainee needs to demonstrate that they are stable and not becoming a CASA volunteer in order to work a 12 Step program.

   **Grounds for Automatically Rejecting a Prospective Volunteer**
   - has had a DUI within the last five years
   - has evidence of past substance abuse problems and has less than two years of sobriety

**Areas of Special Concern**
Has any history of substance abuse.

**Policy on Applicants with DUIs**
In order to ensure the safety of CASA children while they are with their CASA volunteer, we must be concerned about any issue that could impact a person's judgment while driving. One such concern would be arrests for driving under the influence (DUI). The following is our policy on acceptance of applicants who have a DUI in their background.

A DUI within the last five years automatically excludes a person from becoming a CASA volunteer. If the DUI occurred over five years ago, to be accepted as a CASA volunteer, the applicant must meet all of the following criteria:

1. Must have completed the sentence including paying all fines, attending classes, etc. and their driver's license must be reinstated.
2. May not be on probation.
3. Must show evidence of recovery.
Author’s Bio

Vanessa Merino is currently a Conservator Representative with the Good Shepherd Fund, a nonprofit dedicated to conservatorship and administration of Special Needs Trusts. Prior to this position, Vanessa served the Program Director at Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of San Mateo County, a mentorship and advocacy program for children in foster care and juvenile probation youth. As Program Director, Vanessa provided professional support to program staff ensuring that all, approximately, 250 Volunteer Advocates, involved with the program receive excellent support and sound guidance. Prior to being promoted to Program Director, Vanessa held the position of Senior Program Manager, a key position in the organization, where she was responsible for the management of the Embracing Our Community Program, the only CASA program in the country with a training of volunteers conducted fully in Spanish. Vanessa spent the last six years of her career at CASA, achieving promotional advancements from earlier positions.