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CASA Advocates Virtual Activities Capstone

Ana Guadalupe Borrayo-Garcia
California State University, Monterey Bay

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Bilingual Advocate Awareness

Ana Guadalupe Borrayo Garcia

CASA of Santa Cruz County and Cita Rasul

Collaborative Health & Human Services

Department of Health Human Services and Public Policy

California State University Monterey Bay

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Author Note

Ana Borrayo, Department of Health Human Services and Public Policy, California State University Monterey Bay. This research was supported by AGENCY. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Ana Borrayo, California State University Monterey Bay, 100 Campus Center, Seaside, CA, 93955. Contact: Aborrayo@csumb.edu.

Abstract

CASA of Santa Cruz County's mission is to provide court-appointed volunteers and for every foster youth to receive the love and care that they deserve. The majority of the foster youth being served are Hispanic, but there are not enough bilingual volunteers, and this is a problem. One Contributing factors include a lack of awareness to become volunteers, cultural understanding of the role of a CASA volunteer, and that bilingual advocates need relevant outreach material to understand. Consequences include foster youth being on a waitlist, not enough advocates to serve the population in need, and a lack of support for bilingual advocates. The barrier to service is advocates not having enough time for required training, feeling overwhelmed, and due to COVID, advocates can't do in-person visits. My project is designed to help advocates have fun and education resources and to help advocates maintain a close connection virtually with their CASA youth. As a result, not every advocate participated in the survey, which makes it hard to determine whether it was successful or not. I would recommend sending the PowerPoint with the activities first; then a week later send out the survey to every CASA advocate.

Keywords :*Advocate, CASA of Santa Cruz County, CASA youth, Foster, Mentoring, Virtual activities*

Agency & Communities Served

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) of Santa Cruz County is a nonprofit 501(c) organization that was established in 1992. CASA is part of a network of 951 community-based programs that help guide volunteers to become great advocates for foster youth who have gone through abuse or neglect. The advocate's priority is to make sure the child's needs are being met. Advocates are required to attend training and go to court meetings every six months. Casa's goal is to find safe, permanent homes for foster youth in the system. CASAs mission is "CASA of Santa Cruz County advocates for children, providing court-appointed volunteers, so each child in the dependency court system feels cared for and connected with the people, families, and resources they need to heal and flourish into adulthood." (CASA of Santa Cruz County, 2019) The program provides an Advocate/Mentor for youth that are put into the foster care system. These advocates make sure that the youths' voice is being heard in court. To accomplish this goal, CASA provides training and a supervisor to help support advocates.

CASA of Santa Cruz County serves 270 foster youth ages birth until 21. They recently started to take infants. Every advocate gets to have a connection with their CASA child since they spend time during the week. Advocates are required to see their CASA kid at least once a week for 2-4 hours. The agency provides resources and helps youth who are placed in the foster system and have suffered through neglect or risk of harm. CASA provides a specialist that focuses on birth to five for youth who are put into the dependency system. There is also a transition-age youth specialist who focuses on the needs of their youth. CASA offers support for foster youth that have been put into the foster care system. CASA is partnered up with the

County of Santa Cruz, United Way, Friends at CASA, and the workforce of Santa Cruz. CASA vision is “that all children are nurtured in the hearts and homes of safe and loving families” (CASA of Santa Cruz County, 2019).

Problem Description

Foster youth go through a lot of trauma in their life related to neglect and abuse. CASA helps provide amazing volunteer advocates who help advocate for foster youth in court. The problem is there are not enough bilingual advocates. The waitlist for foster youth in need of bilingual advocates continues to increase. Between 2010 and 2018, CASA has increased the number of advocates at 43%, and during the same time frame, there was an increase of 31% foster youth being served (CASA of Santa Cruz County, 2019). Even though the number of advocates continues to increase, the number of foster youth in need of an advocate rises as well. In Santa Cruz County, the population served by ethnic groups in care is 2 Black, 60 white, 93 Latino, 1 Asian, 2 Native American, and 0 multi-race (California Child Welfare Indicators Project, 2019). This is a problem because the community served is mainly Hispanic foster youth, and there are not enough bilingual CASA advocates.

Contributing Factors

A contributing factor for the need for bilingual advocates for foster youth is there is a lack of awareness. There is not enough awareness for people to know how to become a volunteer advocate. “Research has shown that while over 90% of us want to volunteer, only 1 out of 4 Americans actually do”(Stanford Center of Longevity, 2020). When people aren't aware of everything that CASA provides, they may feel unready to help a youth in need. For example, CASA includes training to help prepare advocates to be able to give great resources for foster

youth and help them succeed. As Stanford Center of Longevity (2020) "Advocates say a lack of awareness is the main reason for the shortfall in volunteers." People need to be mindful of all the positive changes that can be made by simply spending time with foster youth and advocating for them in court.

Cultural understanding of the role of a volunteer is another contributing factor. For example, every family has different traditions in their life, so it can seem complicated to understand, but people need to stay open minded to learn from others. (Understanding a Different Culture, 2020). Everyone is raised differently, so it can be challenging to understand the foster youth system when a person has different beliefs and no clue how the system works. Immigrant families are often shocked that the government has the right to take custody of their children (National Resources Center for Healthy Marriages and Families, 2012). It can be tough to see a kid taken away from their families just because the court ordered it. There is much more than the court sending an order to make sure the kid is in a safe place.

The third contributing factor to bilingual advocates in need is the relevant outreach material that the agency provides. For example, the website has not been updated nor has the brochures about the agency's information. The website's Spanish section is very brief and needs crucial information for Spanish speakers to understand. The relevant outreach material can cause a person to show no interest. It varies on how the organization will accommodate outreach to the Latino population, and the mission must be as a whole (Latino Volunteers, 2000). People want to be able to understand the information about the agency properly. If people are accommodated with a Spanish section, they will be more likely to volunteer.

Consequences

There are currently 270 foster youth in Santa Cruz County, but some of them are unfortunately on a waitlist to receive a CASA advocate. Foster youth wait twice as long to get a bilingual volunteer that can understand them (CASA of Santa Cruz County Annual Report states, 2018). If foster youth are being put on the waitlist, they are not receiving any support from advocates to help guide them through the right path. As a CASA youth shares, she was hoping to get a younger advocate, someone who better understands the way she felt (CASA of Santa Cruz County, 2018). At times youth can feel like they are alone; they need consistent support to feel appreciated and valued. It can be challenging for foster youth to manage everything that is going in their lives when they are isolated.

Another consequence the agency faces is not having enough volunteer advocates to serve the population in need. Majority youth in foster care live in Watsonville, and 25 % need a Spanish speaking advocate (CASA of Santa Cruz County, 2019). There is not enough diversity on the volunteers that are advocates for foster youth in the system. They encourage everyone to have an opportunity to become a volunteer advocate, no matter their background (CASA of Santa Cruz County, 2019). Diversity is essential for an organization to grow and learn from different cultural experiences. Foster youth need someone they can communicate about their needs and any concerns that they may have. When a child only speaks Spanish, it can become difficult to communicate with a person who only speaks English and doesn't understand what they have to say.

The last consequence is not having enough support for bilingual volunteer advocates . Once the agency has volunteers, it is essential to create a supportive environment, which means updating policies, current data, and practices and making any changes as needed (Latino Volunteers, 2000). Not having updated data causes volunteers to feel like no one can help them. Most of the advocates navigate the website section, and it is mainly in English. This means people who only understand Spanish can't look for resources online. Also, they can't look at the website for activities that they can do with their CASA child. Most of the booklets and brochures are also written in English, which doesn't make it accessible for them.

Barriers

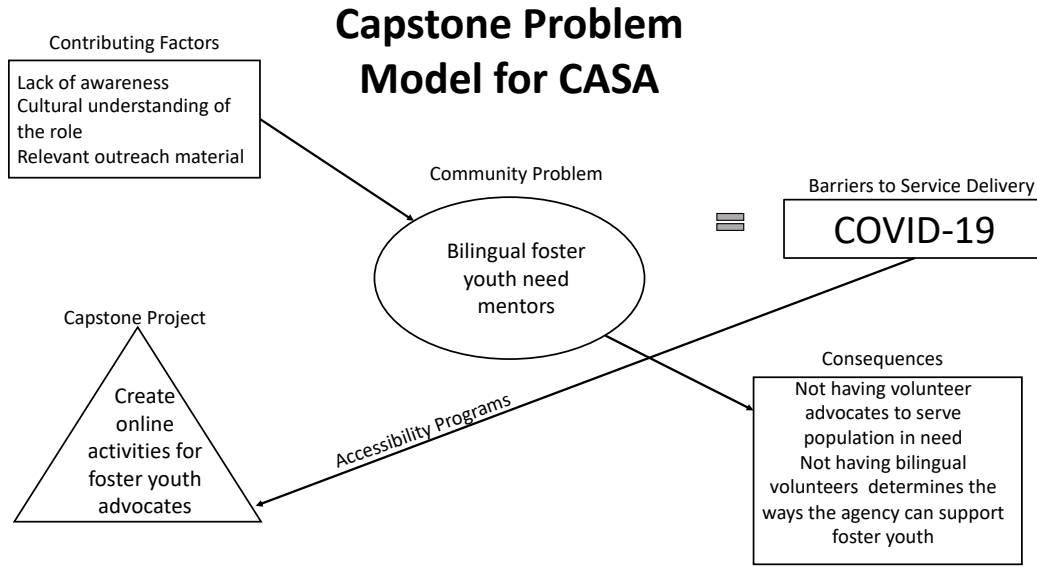
Possible barriers for advocates can be having enough time for training and availability to meet with a child 2-4 hours every week. There are 35-hour service training volunteer advocates required to complete in about four weeks before becoming an advocate. Due to COVID-19 the training can be done virtually. People tend to have difficulties managing their own time because they have jobs and take up a lot of their foster child's time (CASA of Tarrant County, 2019). Some people work full-time jobs and have families. It can become hard to manage their own personal time and time for foster youth.

Another barrier volunteer advocates can face is feeling like their case is too overwhelming emotionally. CASA advocate volunteers can find it challenging to know about the traumatic things that have occurred in a foster youth lives (CASA of Tarrant County, 2019). For example, there may be a lot of trauma going on in their foster youth cases. Volunteers are not allowed to talk to anyone outside of the agency about the CASA kid; the case must remain

confidential. This can be hard for some people with cultural backgrounds that are used to talking to family members about everything.

A barrier that the agency currently faces due to COVID-19 is advocates no longer seeing their foster youth in person. Due to COVID-19, advocates can only contact their foster youth virtually since child visitations in person are not permitted. It can be challenging for advocates to stay connected virtually. Advocates are required to meet with their foster youth 2-4 hours a week. Before quarantine, time would go by fast for advocates because they could have in-person interaction and go to different places, but now that visits are only done virtually, advocates mainly have check in calls. As of right now, CASA doesn't have virtual activities for advocates. In a CASA to CASA staff meeting, advocates mentioned it would be useful to have resources for virtual check-ins with their CASA kid since most advocates are 65+ years old (CASA Advocate personal communication, 2020). Many advocates have spoken to their supervisors, asking for support and ways to stay in contact with CASA children.

Problem Model



Capstone Project Description and Justification

Capstone Project

CASA of Santa Cruz County serves 270 foster youth. All CASA staff is now working remotely due to COVID-19. This means that CASA advocates can only stay in contact with their CASA kid virtual through a phone call or video call. Many of the foster youth go through a lot, and they sometimes need someone to talk to. CASA of Santa Cruz County can focus on finding activities for CASA advocates to enjoy doing virtually with their foster youth. The purpose of my capstone project is to support the agency and help CASA advocates stay connected with their CASA kid.

Project Purpose

My project will address the barrier to service delivery. CASA currently faces difficult situations due to COVID-19. CASA advocates can't meet with their foster youth in person nor visit fun places because there are no in-person services available due to the pandemic. Advocates currently have short phone calls with their CASA kids. Advocates need ideas to help them have options on activities that they can do virtually. Having a video shared to all CASA advocates about a PowerPoint with activities would help the advocates stay connected with their CASA kid. Having the virtual activities PowerPoint shared to advocate will allow all advocates to see the video on their own time. This can help advocates stay connected and help them stay prepared when they need to write a report they had activities to add that the child enjoyed doing.

Project Justification

CASA of Santa Cruz County has offered in-person outreach for 28 years, but CASA is now only working remotely due to COVID-19. Having a PowerPoint video shared to all advocates will allow them to have better ideas on staying in contact with other CASA kids virtually. Advocates need to stay connected with their advocates because foster youth see their advocates as mentors to someone that helps them in difficult situations. A study showed that mentors could make a significant difference in a foster youth's life by helping enhance social and school behaviors and reduce traumatic stress (Johnson et al., 2011). As we know, mentoring these foster youth is essential since they have gone through either neglect or abuse. Researchers studied foster children with a mentor and non-mentor, and they concluded mentors have helped foster youth improve from trauma experiences (Johnson & Pryce, 2013). Foster youth sometimes need to have someone to talk to them. This is different for everyone, but finding advocates' activities can help them interact with their CASA kids while having fun doing something differently virtually. Weather Advocates want to play fun games or educational activities with foster youth. Research shows that online technology can make a child feel significantly connected (Panorama Education, 2020). Finding something that the CASA kids enjoy doing during virtual check-ins can be good, so that they have something to look forward to.

Implementation

This project will start by looking into possible solutions for advocates to feel supported. As an intern, I will need to create a PowerPoint that includes activities that can help advocates be more informed about engaging activities. I have to do some research on fun activities that can be done virtually. The PowerPoint must be pre-approved by my mentor before being shared with all active advocates. The PowerPoint will be pre-recorded and posted on youtube. Once I have the link, I will be sending the video to every advocate. I will also have it linked onto CASA of Santa Cruz County website. When the advocates see the PowerPoint video, I can post-test measures for the video's stratification by seeing how many thumbs up I get and thumbs down. I will also ask the advocates to leave comments on the youtube video weather they found the information helpful. The data will be collected from all advocates, whether the PowerPoint presentation was helpful. I will also be sending a survey to see whether it was useful to find fun activities. I will then analyze my project results and the feedback that may be recommended for the organization. A detailed implementation plan and timeline can be seen in the Scope of Work in Appendix A.

Expected Outcomes

The project will help the CASA organization by assisting advocates in staying connected to their CASA kid. This project will be great for advocates to add in their court report the fun activities they did virtually. Advocates need to build a relationship with their CASA kids so that they are comfortable to speak about themselves and their personal experiences. By sharing my PowerPoint with activities, this will help advocates find fun activities to do with their CASA kid. With the PowerPoint, advocates can look over it at their own time. The project is intended to help advocates feel supported and find activities that their CASA kids will enjoy. I expect to see most participants spend more time with their CASA youth.

Assessment Plan

The project plan will be measured by looking at the number of advocates who view the PowerPoint video from the start day of until the end. I will compare measures of success to see if the PowerPoint with activities was helpful. I will also have an online survey for advocates who participate. The survey will include 1 question to add a short response and 6 that are multiple choice for the participants to fill out. The first question is How old is your CASA child/youth? The second section states that the PowerPoint provided was helpful. The third section states I am satisfied with the variety of activities provided. The fourth section states the activities were age appropriate for my CASA child/youth. The fifth section states I utilized the activities with my CASA child/youth. The sixth section states the activities helped me have a better connection with my CASA child/youth. The seventh section states the activities helped me spend more time with my CASA child/youth. The multiple choices options to answer are strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, and disagree. The surveys will be conducted at the end once every advocate

has had time to view the video. This survey will include questions to understand whether the video was useful for advocates. This project is intended to help advocates stay connected with their foster youth by providing activities they can do virtually and feel supported.

Project Findings/Results

My project's outcome was measured by the advocates that participated in the survey. In total, 32 advocates viewed my video, but only six participated in the survey I sent. In the first statement, 83% of the participants agreed that the PowerPoint provided was helpful, while 16% disagree. In the second statement, 83% of the participants agreed that they are satisfied with the variety of activities provided, while 16% disagree. In the third statement, 50% agreed that the activities were age appropriate for their CASA child/youth, 33% strongly disagree, and 16% disagree. In the fourth statement, 33% agreed that they could utilize the activities with their CASA child/youth, 33% strongly disagreed, and 33% disagreed. Some participants might have disagreed because there weren't many activities for their foster youth according to their age. In the fifth statement, 33% agreed that the activities helped them better connect with their CASA child/youth, 33% strongly disagreed, and 33% disagreed. In the sixth statement, 50% disagreed that the activities helped them spend more time with their CASA child/youth, while 33% strongly disagree, and 16% agreed. Many of the participants mentioned they had just viewed the video, so that is why they disagreed with some statements. The project did not achieve the expected outcomes because many of the advocates did not participate. The survey was also sent right away, so it didn't give the participants enough time to try the activities. It would have been best to send the video first then wait for a few weeks for advocates to have enough time to view the video and try the activities. Since more than half of the advocates did not participate, it unfair to decide whether it was successful.

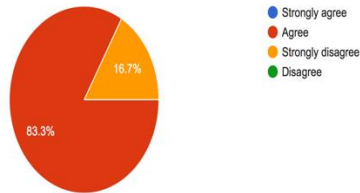
How old is your CASA child/youth

6 responses

2
3
5
16
7
6

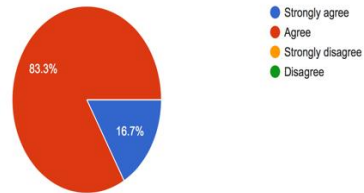
The powerpoint provided was helpful

6 responses



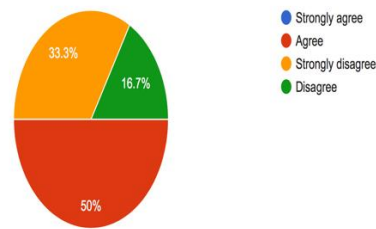
I am satisfied with the variety of activities provided

6 responses



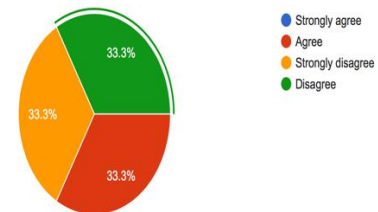
The activities were age appropriate for my CASA child/youth

6 responses



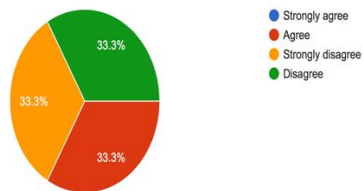
I can utilize the activities with my CASA child/youth

6 responses



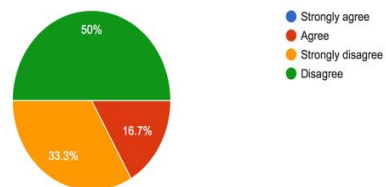
The activities helped me have a better connection with my CASA child/youth

6 responses



The activities helped me spend more time with my CASA child/youth

6 responses



Conclusion & Recommendations

CASA of Santa Cruz County is a great agency, and they provide many excellent services for foster youth. However, they need to find ways to help advocates keep a close connection with their foster youth; they should provide a PowerPoint similar to the one I created to help advocates feel supported during this pandemic. Having a PowerPoint with resources can help advocates have ideas of activities they can do virtually with their CASA youth. As of right now, CASA does not have any resources to support advocates. The agency should provide resources that would help advocates. Based on the results, more than half of the advocates did not participate in the survey. Even though not many advocates participated in a future project, I would recommend having gift card giveaways to increase the participant's rate. Another challenge would be getting more information from the advocates that participates and discovering why they disagreed that the activities were useful. A recommendation would be to add open-ended questions after each rating question to get everyone's response. If more advocates participate, it would be easier to see their feedback and accurate responses. As my supervisor mentioned, not many advocates respond to emails or surveys.

Personal Reflection

This capstone project was created to help advocates find fun virtual activities to share with their CASA youth. Also, to help advocates keep close connections virtually throughout these difficult times since Advocates can't have in-person visits due to COVID. At my internship, I learned a lot about the agency and had a great experience being a CASA Advocate. When COVID happened, advocates didn't have enough support. It was something different for everyone, so I decided to make a PowerPoint with virtual resources.

My project's strength was that I was able to create a PowerPoint with resources to help advocates. This is a strength because CASA of Santa Cruz County did not have any resources to support advocates now that everything transitioned to online. Now advocates can be more informed about activities they can do with their CASA youth. A challenge that occurred was increasing the participation rate for advocates to view the video and participate in the survey sent to them. This became a challenge because I could not see if the video was helpful since only six persons participated. To address this problem, I feel like the agency should provide gift card giveaways to increase the participant's rate in surveys and encourage advocates to give feedback.

At the beginning of my internship, I had no idea what I wanted to do for my capstone. I just knew I wanted to learn as much about the agency and help people find resources. Looking back, I have gained many professional skills at CASA, and I'm glad I could do something to help others even if the results weren't as expected. Advice that I would give for future capstone students is always to ask your agency questions when you are unsure about something. Your mentor will become your best support system. Also, I know it may feel like it's impossible to find a good capstone project, but think about what you are passionate about and talk to your mentor to see what can be done

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