

Another advocate for foster children (printed Bergen Record 7/11/11)

Regarding "Give kids a voice, group says" (Page A-4, July 6):

I applaud the efforts of Advocates for Children to help foster children 10 and older fully participate in family court proceedings.

For eight years, I have been the executive director of Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for Children of [Bergen County](#), a non-profit organization that advocates for children living in foster care. I have worked closely with the Bergen County family court system. I have observed that family court Judge Bonnie Mizdol and the other judges hearing this docket truly do want to hear from the children on their caseloads and have made themselves available to do so when it is more convenient for the children.

However, children who wish to speak for themselves need support, and the sad fact is that resources to provide this support are scarce.

CASA recruits, screens, trains and then supervises volunteers from the community to advocate for the best interest of children in foster care. We routinely ask the children we are assigned if they are interested in attending court or if there is anything they would like us to tell the judge on their behalf.

CASA advocates make sure that attorneys, Division of Youth and Family Services workers and others in the court know when a child wants to appear in court. When, for any number of reasons, children are not comfortable going to court, CASA encourages them to write the judge a letter to express their thoughts and feelings. In addition, CASA advocates ensure a child's voice is heard through reports that detail to the court conversations with the child.

Unfortunately, due to continued budget cuts across all our funding sources, CASA is only able to assign volunteers to about one-third of the children in need of this kind of advocacy in [Bergen County](#).

Jennifer Murrin

[Hackensack](#), July 9

For more information on helping CASA, call 201-336-7520 or go to www.bergencasa.org