

## Meet Cassie the CASA Dog



One of the most recognizable faces at the Bernalillo County Juvenile Justice Center belongs to Cassie, a 4-year-old Labrador retriever.

Cassie interacts with families, especially those with children, who need her friendship. When a girl is called to testify about traumatic abuse or neglect, Cassie might sit at her feet to provide solace. Or Cassie might stay with a sobbing boy who has just been separated from his parents after being placed into protective custody.

"Cassie provides great comfort in the courtroom and gets smiles from everyone she meets when she is in the building," Children's Court Judge Marie Ward said. "She is a silent companion who has a way of removing the edge from very difficult situations."

Cassie has been a presence at the Juvenile Justice Center since late 2013. She is a specially-trained Courthouse CASA dog, a name that is derived from the acronym for Court Appointed Special Advocates.

Cassie was purchased using a grant by New Mexico Kids Matter, the CASA program in Albuquerque. CASA believes that every child who has been abused, neglected or is in foster care deserves to have a dedicated volunteer advocate speaking up for them in court.

"We are very fortunate to have Cassie, both as a resource and as a friend," Judge Ward said. "She brings a lift to everyone she meets and she is especially valuable to the children who need her most."

Cassie was trained by Assistance Dogs of the West, a Santa Fe-based accredited service dog organization that also provides service dogs for the Veterans Court program. Courthouse dogs have been used around the country since 2003.

For more information about CASA please visit [www.nmkidsmatter.org](http://www.nmkidsmatter.org).

*Many thanks to Judge Marie C. Ward for giving us permission to repost this article, the original article can be found on the [Court's website](#).*