



®

CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates

FOR CHILDREN

CASA MINNESOTA

Agenda

- **CASA/GAL Volunteer Model**
- **Fact-Based Knowledge Outcomes**
- **Cost-Benefit Analysis**
- **Recommendations in the Best Interest of the Child**

A National Model That Works

National CASA

- Supports and promotes court-appointed volunteer advocacy
- 93,000+ volunteer CASA/GALs
- 950 state and local organizations in 49 states + DC
- At least 22 states have created statutes supporting volunteer GALs
- Monitors nationwide trends and issues to advocate for state/national legislation and funding
- Volunteer CASA/GALs are the predominant national model

CASA Minnesota

- Nonprofit GAL organization with proven history of engaging the community
- Board is diverse, experienced and voice of foster youth
- Recruit and recognize volunteers while building community awareness
- Fundraising - \$120,000 in direct grants to kids since 2016
- 120 current volunteer GALs, down from 250 average
- State paused new volunteers after 2019

Volunteer Impact: Grounded in Data

- Judges report the greatest impact of CASA/GAL volunteers as:
 - “Promoting long-term well-being” (92.2%)
 - “Appropriate services to child and family” (83%)
 - “Psychological well-being” (79.9%)
- CASA/GAL volunteers are highly effective in court. **In four out of five cases, all or almost all CASA/GAL volunteer recommendations are accepted.**
- Over 93% of judges report a very positive overall experience with the volunteer CASA/GAL program.

Sources: Independent academic studies, see appendix.

Volunteer Impact: Long-Term Benefits

Reaching Permanent Homes

A child with a CASA/GAL volunteer is:

- **50% less likely to reenter the child welfare system**
- Have 1/3 fewer placements and are more likely to achieve permanency
- 14% less likely to spend time in long-term foster care, defined as more than three years in care

Sources: Independent academic studies, see appendix.

Volunteer Impact: Long-Term Benefits

Enabling Well-Being

A child with a CASA/GAL volunteer:

- Will receive significantly higher number of services
- Is more likely to perform better academically and behaviorally in school
- Will report significantly higher levels of hope associated with positive outcomes such as increases in self-control, and positive social relationships

Sources: Independent academic studies, see appendix.

Volunteer Impact: Making a Difference in the Community

“The Peris Hill project would not exist without my experience as a volunteer GAL.”

- *Denise Graves, The Graves Foundation,
former volunteer GAL for 15 years*

- Peris Hill is a \$12.3 million innovative affordable housing community in the historical Lowry Hill neighborhood of Minneapolis.
- First of its kind, Peris Hill will include 45 units of affordable housing with 15 units designated for youth aging out of foster care.

There have been thousands of Minnesota volunteer GALs since the 1980s, each with their own story and the ability to impact one child at a time and sometimes go on to have a huge impact on a more community wide or systemic basis.

Volunteer Benefits

Fewer Cases, More Support

- Volunteers serve 1-2 cases at a time consistent with the CASA national average
 - Many volunteers take on 3+ cases
 - Fewer cases per volunteer can enable more frequent child visits
 - **Volunteers have the flexibility to travel further distances often investing in full day trips to visit one child**
- Volunteers can ease employee workload
 - Employees expected to take 30 cases, serving ~115 children on average
 - 3.83 child contacts per case in the 4th District
 - Case volumes can can impact child visits

Sources: CASA MN. State of MN.

Volunteer Benefits

More Trained GALs

- Critical need for more GAL resources, not fewer, given children who experience maltreatment investigations by age 18 are more common than previously recognized.
 - 53% of African American children
 - 37% of all children
- Robust and well-trained volunteer GAL program ensures stability for both kids and employees.
- Maintaining a robust volunteer GAL program mitigates risk against fluctuations in government budgets and appropriations.
- Volunteer GALs are strong advocates for the State GAL program and as citizens they get listened to by legislators.

Sources: Brown School of Social Work and Public Health, Washington University and the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect at Cornell University, American Journal of Public Health

**“You’re the only person
in my life that doesn’t
get paid to help me”**

Children know when people are paid to help them.
An all-employee model can create an institutionalizing effect
upon children – volunteers add balance.

Volunteer Value: Cost Effectiveness

- As a partner, CASA MN is willing to discuss allocating current budgets and/or increased fundraising towards volunteer efforts such as:
 - Recruitment
 - Retention
 - Training
 - Ongoing management
 - Communications
- Reported volunteer costs
 - \$13,868 in state funds to train 249 volunteers spread over several years – 4th District
 - \$83,501 for annual training conference attended by volunteers and employees – Statewide

Sources: State of MN.

Volunteer Value: Meeting Critical Needs

Need for Efficient and Effective Operations

- Achieved through proper oversight, training and accountability
- National CASA provides best methods and training for integrating and supervising volunteer models
- Volunteer and staff models are not mutually exclusive
- Many states have models that integrate both – child’s best interest
- Volunteers stay an average of 39 months nationally
- Volunteers can mitigate the “Great Resignation”

Need For More Diversity

- **Backlog of ~200 applications of qualified, committed volunteers**
- Applicants represent African-American, Hispanic, Asian and Indigenous American backgrounds
- CASA MN has invested time and money into building a diversity outreach program
- As a partner, CASA MN is willing to focus on volunteer recruitment, leveraging strong corporate and legal employee base in the metro to expand diversity

In the Best Interest of the Child

- Support the well-established CASA/GAL volunteer program and a Minnesota nonprofit with decades of positive child advocacy contributions and immense philanthropic contributions.
- Leverage new partnership between CASA Minnesota and the Minnesota GAL Board to deliver new initiatives and build a stronger volunteer GAL program.
 - Restart a highly selective volunteer recruiting process
 - Training and Supervision contributions
 - Diversity strategies
- Support developing a 3-year road map to fully implement, measure and evaluate key improvements in partnership with Program Administrator.

APPENDIX

Judicial and Court Support

- The Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators has consistently supported the use of CASA/GAL volunteers in dependency proceedings.
- The CASA/GAL program and the work of its volunteers has long been supported by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) that:
 - Helped facilitate the founding of the National CASA/GAL Association
 - Strongly supports the use of CASA/GAL volunteers through its Enhanced Resource Guidelines for practice in child abuse and neglect proceedings

"It is our goal that every child in the dependency system has a trained CASA or GAL volunteer. We will continue our work to create and expand these critical programs because we have seen firsthand that these volunteer advocates make a positive difference in children's lives."

– Statement by 15 past presidents of NCJFCJ

APPENDIX

Minnesota's National Impact

- Fourth Judicial District GAL Program played a significant role in the advancement of the volunteer CASA/GAL movement nationwide including joining judges, attorneys and child advocates from across the country in the formation of the National CASA/GAL Association in 1982
- Former Supreme Court Chief Justice Kathleen Blatz was a strong leader in support of the volunteer CASA/GAL mission and advancing it in Minnesota and beyond and was recognized as the National CASA/GAL Judge of the Year in 2005
- Suzanne Smith, former administrator of the Fourth Judicial District GAL Program was:
 - Instrumental in the development of the first national training curriculum for CASA/GAL volunteers
 - Integral to the development and implementation of national *Standards for Local CASA/GAL Programs*
 - The National CASA/GAL Association/Kappa Alpha Theta Program Director of the Year
- Linda McKeehan, volunteer with the Fourth Judicial District GAL Program was the National CASA/GAL Association Volunteer of the Year

APPENDIX

States with Statutes supporting Volunteer GALs

States with statutes allowing the CASA/GAL to be a volunteer, this list may not be all inclusive:

1. Alaska
2. California
3. Florida
4. Georgia
5. Hawaii
6. Idaho
7. Illinois
8. Indiana
9. Iowa
10. Maine
11. Mississippi
12. Montana
13. New Hampshire
14. North Carolina
15. Ohio
16. Oklahoma
17. Rhode Island
18. South Carolina
19. South Dakota
20. Texas
21. Washington
22. Wisconsin

APPENDIX

Relevant Research Studies

Abramson, Shareen. *Use of court-appointed advocates to assist in permanency planning for minority children.* Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program. 1991.

Describes the Fresno Program, a program of volunteer, court-appointed advocates who assist in cases of abuse and neglect involving minority families. Also describes an outcome study of the program. In the amicus group, **significantly fewer children were placed in long-term foster care** than in the comparison group. Significantly more children were placed in adoptive families.

Caliber Associates. *National CASA Association Evaluation Project,* Caliber Associates; Fairfax, Virginia. 2004.

The study combines data collected through the National CASA Association's management information system with national data on the well-being of children in the child welfare system. It provides a rare glimpse into the characteristics of CASA volunteers and their training and activities. The study also compares the services received by children with and without a CASA volunteer and describes how often CASA volunteers' recommendations are followed by the court. Finally, the study compares the well-being of children in the child welfare system with and without a CASA volunteer.

The study highlights a number of strengths in the characteristics and activities of CASA volunteers. These volunteers are well-educated and likely to be employed; their recommendations to the court are very often accepted. A key strength of this study was its comparison of well-being of children in the child welfare system who had and had not been assigned a CASA. The findings of this study suggest that **children who were assigned a CASA volunteer had more severe cases and a more substantial history of prior contact with the child welfare system.**

Calkins, C.; Millar, M. *The Effectiveness of Court Appointed Special Advocates to Assist in Permanency Planning.* Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal. 1999.

Calkins and Millar reviewed case records of children who were assigned a CASA volunteer and children who were not. It was found that CASA involvement was associated with "approximately" one-third less placements as well as statistically significant **reductions in time children spent in care.** These results align with previous case file studies that find that children with CASA volunteers tend to spend less time in the wardship of the court and receive fewer placements. Researchers also claim that CASA involvement lead to higher permanency achievement rates as well as higher rates of reunification with parents, however this result was not statistically significant.

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Relevant Research Studies

Gershun, Martha, and Claire Terrebonne. *Child welfare system interventions on behalf of children and families: Highlighting the role of court appointed special advocates.* Current problems in pediatric and adolescent health care, Volume 9. 2018.

This article describes the scope of the problem in child welfare and explains how the child welfare system intervenes, including how cases are reported, how Child Protective Services (CPS) assesses the risk, how CPS determines when in-home services are appropriate or if a child should be removed from the home, how ongoing cases are managed, and the options for permanency for children in the system. The authors document how **outcomes for child victims of abuse and neglect are greatly improved when their representation includes the appointment of a CASA volunteer** to advocate for their best interests.

Leung, P. *Is the Court-Appointed Special Advocate Program Effective? A Longitudinal Analysis of Time Involvement and Case Outcomes.* Child Welfare League of America. 1996

The study aimed to determine the extent to which the CASA program contributes to positive outcomes and to “asses at which point during the court process CASA intervention is most effective”. Leung examined cases from a single Midwestern city between 1987 and 1990 in three different groups; those with an assigned CASA volunteer, those without a CASA volunteer, and those referred to a CASA volunteer by the court but not assigned a CASA volunteer. The study outcomes support the consensus that **CASA volunteers tend to both reduce the length of out-of-home placement and minimize the number of placements.** The study also determines that **CASA volunteers tend to be most effective when assigned as early as possible in a child’s case** when they are able to collect and provide valuable information to the court.

Litzelfelner, P. *The Effectiveness of CASAs in Achieving Positive Outcomes for Children.* Child Welfare League of America. 2000.

The study collected data from case files on 200 children over the two year period. Findings indicate that CASA best interest advocacy led to positive outcomes across all three process-related variables of interest compared to children not appointed a CASA volunteer; (1) **reduced the number of placements children received,** (2) **reduced the number of court continuances children experienced,** and (3) **increased the number of services provided to children.** However, the study found no difference in the permanency outcomes between CASA and non-CASA-assigned children. The study controlled for differences in program sites, but could not use random assignment of cases to CASA—therefore it is unlikely that CASA volunteer and non-CASA groups are otherwise equal. The sample size of 200 was also lower than the estimated amount needed for statistically significant results (n=600).

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Relevant Research Studies

Office of the Inspector General Report, US Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General. *Audit Report Results for CASA Advocacy.* Washington, DC. January, 2007.

In 2005, the US Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General (OIG) conducted an audit of the National CASA/GAL Association, as required by Congress. The objectives of this audit report were to determine the types of activities funded by National CASA/GAL and to assess local CASA programs' performance against four outcome measures for cases involving CASA volunteers as compared with non-CASA cases.

Findings of effectiveness included: **cases assigned to a CASA/GAL volunteer tend to involve the most serious cases of maltreatment**, in which the children were more at risk; **children with a CASA/GAL volunteer are substantially less likely to spend time in long-term foster care**, defined as more than three years in care: 13.3% for CASA/GAL cases versus 27.0% of all children in foster care. Additionally, when a CASA/GAL volunteer was involved, **both children and their parents were ordered by the courts to receive more services**. The audit concluded that this was an indication that "CASA is effective in identifying the needs of children and parents." Lastly, cases involving a CASA/GAL volunteer are **more likely to be "permanently closed"** (i.e., the children are less likely to reenter the CWS) than cases where a CASA volunteer is not involved. Lastly, children with a CASA volunteer/GAL are more likely to be adopted and less likely to be reunified with their parents than children not assigned a CASA volunteer. The audit explains this finding as the result of **CASA volunteers serving on typically the most serious cases of maltreatment** and therefore cases where children are less likely to be reunified with their parents.

Peters, C.; Claussen Bell, K.; Zinn, A.; George, R.; Courtney, M. *Continuing in Foster Care Beyond Age 18: How Courts Can Help.* Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. 2008.

The study delineated the factors that influence whether youth stay in foster care beyond the age of 18. Part of this study included examining the role and value of court advocacy in these cases. Researchers analyzed administrative data, conducted a statewide survey of caseworkers, and held focus groups with affected populations, and interviewed court personnel in the state of Illinois. The study found that court advocacy contributes to children remaining in foster care beyond the age of 18 so they can continue to benefit from important supports by (1) **keeping cases open**, (2) **increasing awareness of law/policy**, (3) **increasing adult involvement**, (4) **increasing resource availability**, and (5) **changing attitudes regarding care for youth over 18**.

Poertner, J., & Press, A. *Who best represents the interests of the child in court?* *Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program.* 1990.

Poertner and Press (1991) found very few statistically significant differences in case outcomes between cases represented by a lone staff attorney—the study referred to this as the Staff Attorney Model (SAM)—and those represented by a CASA volunteer not working with, or under the supervision, of an attorney. The authors concluded that **CASA volunteers not working with or under the supervision of an attorney perform "at least as well" as staff attorneys** along measures such as the number of court continuances, the number of placement

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Relevant Research Studies

changes that a child experiences, and the number of services provided to families. This suggests that CASA volunteers working without the supervision of attorneys are no less effective than those who are teamed with an attorney.

Stanley, Jessica, and Chan M. Hellman. *Nurturing Hope Among Children Experiencing Abuse & Neglect: Examining the Effects of CASA Volunteers.* 2019.

A child's hope has been linked to numerous positive outcomes such as academic success, overall wellbeing, increases in self-control, positive social relationships, and optimism. Trauma-informed services understand the role past adversities contribute to distress and poor outcomes for abused children. However, incorporating a focus on hope moves trauma informed practice toward a future orientation of healing.

The purpose of the following program evaluation report is to explore the association between CASA services and hope among abused children in Oklahoma. A total of 280 children representing 21 CASA agencies in Oklahoma responded to a self-report survey. Examination of the correlational analysis found: **The belief (a child's) CASA Volunteer cares about them is associated with higher hope; having a CASA Volunteer (children) can talk to is related with higher hope; having a CASA Volunteer who listens and understands (a child) is associated with higher hope.**

Age group differences: **Older children (12 to 17 years) report significantly higher in hope than younger children (7 to 11 years).** These older children report significantly higher in their ability to identify strategies (pathways) toward their goal.

Waxman, H.; Houston, R.; Proffitt, S.; Sanchez, B. *The Long-Term Effects of the Houston Child Advocates, Inc., Program on Children and Family Outcomes.* Child Welfare. 2009.

The study aimed to determine the longitudinal outcomes of the Houston Child Advocates, Inc. program on participating children. The study took place in the Harris County Court system with a population of 581 children. Findings indicate that children with court appointed special advocates **fared better along several process and outcomes variables;** they tended to **receive more social services** (which aligns with findings from previous studies) and **received fewer placements.** The study also claims that children with court appointed special advocates tended to **perform better academically and behaviorally in school that academic year**—measured by whether or not they passed all of their courses, whether or not they were expelled, and their conduct performance.

Weiner, D., Farrell, A., Gitlow, E., Small, L., Kim, K., Anderson, C., & Goerge, R. *The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program: Judicial Perspectives Survey and the Path to Evidence.* Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago: Chicago, IL. 2020.

Chapin Hall researchers executed a study aimed at understanding and defining the CASA/GAL intervention in local courts and communities. Highlight findings include: judges that use CASA/GAL volunteers tend to want one on every case; **over 93% of judges report a very positive overall experience with the CASA/GAL program; judges report the impact of CASA/GAL volunteers is most pronounced in "promoting long-term well-being" (92.2%), followed by "appropriate services to child and family" (83%) and "psychological well-being" (79.9%), and 79.5% of judges report lack of volunteer/program availability as the reason for not appointing CASA/GAL volunteers to cases.**

Brown School of Social Work and Public Health, Washington University and the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect at Cornell University, *American Journal of Public Health Lifetime Prevalence of Investigating Child Maltreatment Among US Children.*