

ILLINOIS CASA

2021 Annual Report



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

ILLINOIS

About Illinois CASA

MISSION

Illinois CASA, together with its local member programs, supports and promotes court appointed volunteer advocacy for children who have experienced abuse or neglect.

VISION

Our vision is an Illinois in which all children thrive in a safe, permanent and loving home.

PURPOSE

Illinois CASA provides statewide advocacy, technical assistance, quality assurance, training and resources for the network of Illinois Court Appointed Special Advocate Local Programs, builds capacity and plans for the growth of the CASA network, and advocates for reform and improvement in the child welfare sector in Illinois.

WHAT IS A COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE?

When a family is in crisis and becomes involved in the child welfare system, a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer may be appointed by a judge to advocate for the best interests of the child. This highly trained volunteer is someone from the child's community. Their responsibility is to get to know the child, their parents, their family and everyone else involved in the case. A CASA volunteer will advocate for the child's safety, permanency and well-being while in foster care.

At the local level, the 31 local programs in 53 of 102 Illinois counties do the hands-on work of recruiting, training and supervising these dedicated volunteers. At the state level, Illinois CASA partners with the programs to provide training, coaching and other resources.

VALUES

As an organization we believe:

- All children have the right to grow and thrive in a safe, secure environment.
- It is in a child's best interest to live in a safe, permanent home.
- Every child deserves a consistent, caring adult connection.
- All individuals should be treated with respect.
- In maintaining the highest standards of ethics and confidentiality.
- In serving as leaders for positive change through advocacy and collaboration.



As the statewide membership organization, we work to connect each part of the CASA community and empower the local programs to perform at their highest level. Illinois CASA also works to improve the child protection system through legislation and positive public policy changes.



Mari Christopherson
CEO



Lynn Harvey
Board Chair

Dear Stakeholders,

We are honored to present the Illinois CASA 2021 Impact Report. Although this is our first such virtual report, our Association’s commitment to supporting children and families in Illinois goes back more than two decades. Our network of over 3,500 volunteers, governing body members and staff partners take great pride in the fact that in FY21 (7/1–6/30) we have provided best interest advocacy to 9,203 children who have experienced abuse and or neglect.

Illinois CASA, together with its local member programs, supports and promotes court appointed volunteer advocacy for children who have experienced abuse or neglect. To do this, Illinois CASA provides advocacy, technical assistance, quality assurance, training and resources for the network of 31 Illinois Court Appointed Special Advocate Local Programs. We are focused on building the programmatic and financial capacity of the CASA network to grow our reach, ensuring children have access to a specially trained volunteer advocate. Everything we do at Illinois CASA is driven by our vision of an Illinois in which all children thrive in a safe, permanent and loving home.

Solving critical community challenges requires collective action. CASA volunteers are just one player in the larger child welfare system. We believe in a collaborative, holistic approach to support children and their families and work to support reunification whenever possible. We train our volunteers that all individuals deserve respect and cultural competency matters.

Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has made for a challenging year, especially for families and children already struggling. Since March of 2019, the number of children assigned to the Illinois CASA Association increased by 28%—from 7,249 to 9,293. Judges relied on CASA volunteers more than ever to keep up with the influx and fill gaps in the child welfare safety net. Our work ahead is to recruit enough new volunteers to meet this need, and we have an ambitious plan to recruit 2,022 new volunteers in 2022.

This report features data from our impact in 2021. It also highlights some of the ways in which the work we do benefits the child welfare system we work with and, most importantly, the children and families involved.

We approach the work we do with a deep regard and humble appreciation for our volunteers. The impact one caring committed adult can make is infinite as is our regard for the CASA community in Illinois.

Our very best,

Mari Christopherson
CEO

Lynn Harvey
Board Chair

Illinois CASA Local Programs

Advocacy Network for Children

Adams, Brown, Cass, Morgan, Pike, Schuyler

Boone County CASA

Boone

Champaign County CASA

Champaign

CASA of East Central Illinois

Cumberland, Coles

CASA of Cook County

Cook

CASA DeKalb County

DeKalb

CASA of DuPage County

DuPage

CASA of Effingham County

Effingham

CASA of Franklin & Hamilton Counties

Franklin, Hamilton

CASA of Jefferson County

Jefferson

Jersey County CASA

Jersey

CASA Kane County

Kane

CASA of Kankakee County

Kankakee

CASA Kendall County

Kendall

CASA of West Central Illinois

Henderson, Knox, McDonough, Warren

CASA Lake County

Lake

LaSalle County CASA

LaSalle

CASA of the 15th Judicial Circuit

Carroll, Lee, Ogle

Macon County CASA

Macon

CASA of Southwestern Illinois

Madison, Monroe, Randolph, St. Clair

CASA of Marion County

Marion

CASA of McHenry County

McHenry

CASA of McLean County

McLean

CASA of the 10th Judicial Circuit

Marshall, Peoria, Putnam, Stark, Tazewell

Child Abuse Council/CASA for Children

Rock Island

CASA of Saline County

Saline

Sangamon County Child Advocacy Center/CASA of Sangamon County

Sangamon

CASA of Vermillion and Edgar Counties

Edgar, Vermillion

CASA of River Valley

Grundy, Will

CASA of Williamson County

Williamson

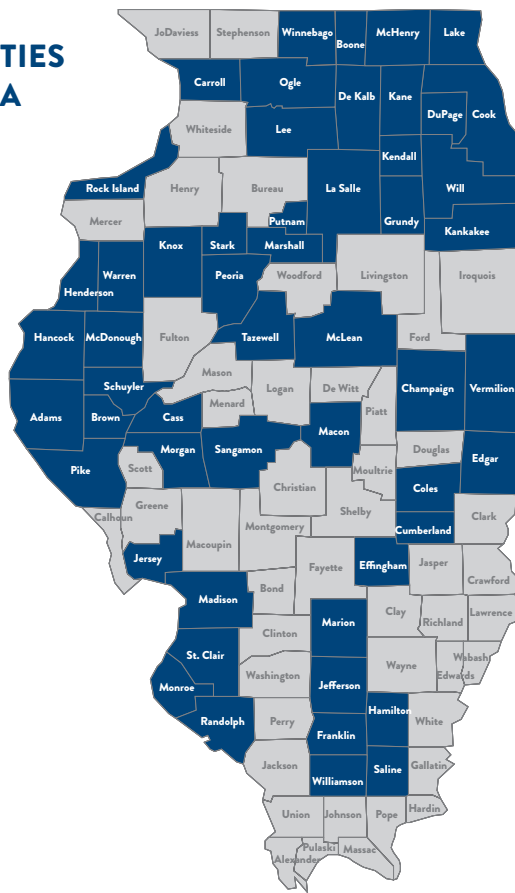
Winnebago County CASA

Winnebago

55% of children with a CASA advocate were reunified with their family of origin.



ILLINOIS COUNTIES SERVED BY CASA



- Counties with CASA
- Counties without CASA

CASA'S IMPACT IN ILLINOIS IN FY21

31
LOCAL
PROGRAMS

3,175
ACTIVE CASA
VOLUNTEERS

932
NEW CASAs
TRAINED

9,349
CHILDREN
SERVED

CASA Best-Interest Advocacy



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

As an organization, we believe that Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are central to our commitment to carrying out our mission of best interests advocacy for children in Illinois who have experienced abuse and/or neglect. We commit to ensuring that our mission aligns with our core values, and that every aspect of our organization incorporates DEI principles.

SPECIFIC AREAS OF CONCENTRATION:

1. Purposefully strive to foster diverse Board of Directors and Staff that reflect the diverse population of children we serve throughout the state of Illinois.
2. Intentionally build a systemic culture of inclusion and equity that is reflected in our language, actions, policies, and trainings.
3. Empower the Illinois CASA network by providing resources that allow for implementation of DEI principles at the local program level.
4. Actively empower CASA volunteers to bring awareness to discrimination and implicit bias as it is encountered in our daily advocacy work with children.

By focusing on the above, we strive to ensure equity for all children who have experienced abuse and/or neglect in Illinois regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or socio-economic status.

The Illinois CASA board of directors adopted a DEI statement in 2021 to ensure that it actively embodies the qualities of an inclusive organization. Illinois CASA has an active Equity Task Force that was also renamed in 2021 from its previous name of Diversity Task Force. In 2021, the Equity Task Force has focused on assessing the network, establishing goals, and incorporating DEI training and concepts throughout the network. The task force also embarked on anti-racism training in late 2020 through a partnership with Crossroads.



“The support of a CASA advocate reduces the trauma children experience through their commitment to be that proverbial “friend in need” always the same person, there when needed, and diligently advocating for their best interest.”

RETIRED HONORABLE JUDGE
MILTON WHARTON

Accountability

We report on our activities and decisions to local programs, stakeholders, donors, grantors, and community partners. We accept responsibility for our activities and decisions. We report and disclose the result of activities and decisions in a transparent manner.

ILLINOIS CASA SERVICES TO LOCAL CASA PROGRAMS

Illinois CASA supports the development, growth, and continuation of local CASA programs. Each year, local programs provide feedback about their satisfaction of the services that Illinois CASA provides. Results from the member survey for FY21 indicated very high satisfaction with the services provided.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Illinois CASA also helps support local programs to ensure they are following National CASA's Standards for Local Programs and working to achieve the best

interest for the children they serve. This complex process includes document review, and stakeholder and staff interviews and participation in a board meeting. Begun in the final quarter of the fiscal year, 18 will be completed by 2022.

NETWORK TRAININGS

Illinois CASA facilitated 60 network-wide virtual in-service trainings aimed at trauma informed and best practice advocacy, virtual book clubs, Pre-Service training and Training of the Facilitator trainings with 4,792 combined participants. Illinois CASA has a robust, on demand recorded webinar library that was accessed over 700 times in FY21.

ILLINOIS CASA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

In March of 2021, Illinois CASA hosted its annual conference virtually. **"Closing the Gap: Equity in Advocacy"** attracted 300+ attendees.



The keynote speaker, Kelly Hurst from Crossroads Anti-Racism Training, facilitated the morning presentation.

Afternoon sessions included Dr. Alyssa Dunn who presented her work on advancing equity in Education and LaDonna Wattley, a former CASA staff partner in Indiana, delivered her

training: "Big Momma's House" on bias and diversity concepts within the child welfare system.

The conference culminated with an awards celebration recognizing CASA Judge of the Year, The Honorable Jonathon Braden from Illinois' 5th Circuit for his no nonsense and compassionate support of children and families.

Charlotte Meier, Executive Director of CASA of Boone County, was named Staff Partner of the Year. Under Director Meier's leadership, CASA of Boone County has significantly increased the number of children served during the pandemic.

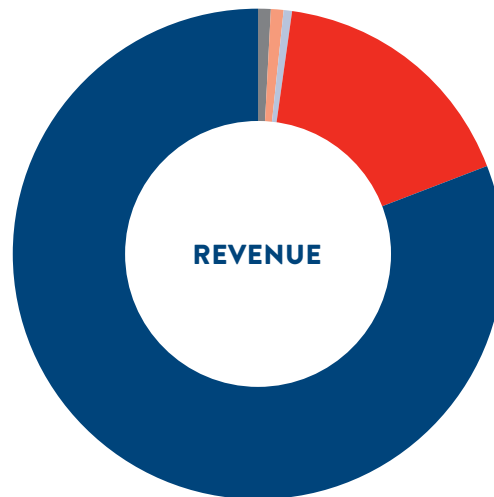
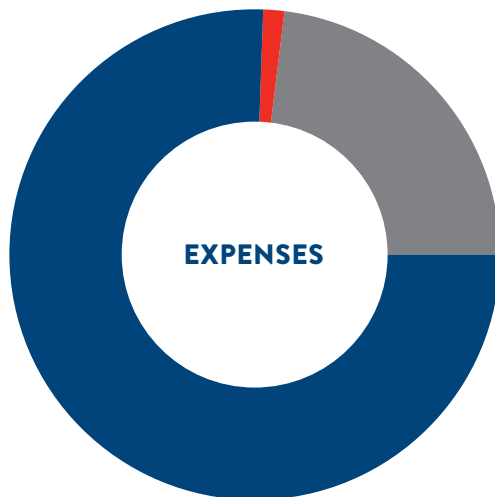
The final two awardees both came from CASA of Southwestern Illinois. Darlene Roy, was recognized for 20 years of service as a Board Member and Betty Page was named Volunteer of the Year.



ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF CASA STATEMENT OF ACTIVITY

JULY 2020 – JUNE 2021

EXPENSES	
Grants to Local Programs	\$2,659,061
Administration	\$58,244
Direct Services Training & Volunteer Recruitment, Network Program Support	\$801,919
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$3,519,224.65
REVENUE	
Illinois DCFS Grant–State Appropriation	\$2,841,753
Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA)	\$586,805
Other Public Funding	\$23,500
Donations	\$32,554
Program Service Income	\$21,865
TOTAL REVENUE	\$3,506,477.45
NET OPERATING REVENUE	–\$12,747.20



- Grants to Local Programs
- Administration
- Direct Services

- Illinois DCFS Grant–State Appropriation
- Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA)
- Donations
- Other Public Funding
- Program Service Income

Program Data

OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN SERVED BY CASA IN FY21

Research shows that reunification with their parents, when safe and possible, is the best outcome for children. CASA volunteers stay by a child's side throughout the case, advocating first for reunification when safe and possible. If reunification is not safe or possible, CASA volunteers will advocate for the child to be adopted by or live with other relatives or family friends. If that is also not an option, CASA volunteers will work towards adoption by a non-relative.

No matter the outcome, CASA volunteers will keep in contact with the child's support network until the case closes so that everyone continues to put the child's best interests first.

CASA involvement reduces the time a child spends in foster care by an average of 6 months.

(DCFS CFSR REPORT, OPTIMA DATA)

ILLINOIS CASA LOCAL PROGRAMS	Children Served in FY21	New Assignments in FY21	CASA Volunteers in FY21
Advocacy Network for Children	421	157	125
Boone County CASA	99	41	17
Champaign County CASA	630	243	142
CASA of Cook County	651	77	328
CASA DeKalb County	229	105	63
CASA of DuPage County	339	176	178
CASA of East Central Illinois	243	88	39
CASA of Effingham County	131	21	62
CASA of Franklin & Hamilton Counties	107	26	38
CASA of Jefferson County	195	45	34
Jersey County CASA	88	20	30
CASA Kane County	609	294	266
CASA of Kankakee County	94	22	17
CASA Kendall County	136	72	44
CASA of West Central Illinois	189	7	44
CASA Lake County	688	230	319
LaSalle County CASA	53	27	26
CASA of the 15th Judicial Circuit	167	74	21
Macon County CASA	419	141	256
CASA of Southwestern Illinois	972	319	173
CASA of Marion County	78	78	31
CASA of McHenry County	167	52	142
CASA of McLean County	134	67	91
CASA of the 10th Judicial Circuit	756	106	208
Child Abuse Council/CASA of Rock Island	33	8	20
CASA of Saline County	99	27	21
Sangamon County Child Advocacy Center/ CASA of Sangamon County	175	94	74
CASA of Vermillion and Edgar Counties	485	146	48
CASA of River Valley	372	124	140
CASA of Williamson County	206	90	76
Winnebago County CASA	384	141	103

Network Engagement

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Illinois CASA provides the network with technical support for all major areas of operation. During FY21 Illinois CASA provided technical assistance in the areas of grants, data collection, social media, education, program operations, recruitment, case support, legislation and policies and procedures.

COVID-19 related technical assistance continued to be an ongoing need for the network. To address this need Illinois CASA brought in a human resource expert to provide guidance to the local programs on office re-opening plans. The Illinois CASA staff has a wealth of information in all areas relating to the effective operations of CASA programs. Illinois CASA ensures that the network is apprised of pertinent information impacting the network and the youth in care in Illinois.

Illinois CASA established three new task forces and work groups that meet on a regular basis allowing members from the network the opportunity to voice their opinion and creativity. The task forces help establish goals in various areas of the CASA network and build a sense of community across the network. Some of the groups have emerged organically within the network.

ILLINOIS CASA EQUITY TASK FORCE

Illinois CASA has an active Equity Task Force composed of 11 members of the CASA Network. These members include Board Members, Illinois CASA staff, Program Directors, and Program Staff. The group has focused on assessment of the network and creating measurable goals for the task force. The task force meets on a regular basis at least quarterly to discuss progress. In FY21, the task force was focused on assessment of the network to help drive training. As part of FY21 goals, the task force met its goal of adopting a DEI statement.

ILLINOIS CASA DATA TASK FORCE

Illinois CASA has an active Data Task Force composed of members of the Illinois CASA staff, Program Directors and Program Staff. The work has focused on standardizing the utilization of Optima, CASA specific data management system used throughout the state. The task force is also working on creating a guide for the network on data entry. The goal of the network is to make the data collection and entry process uniform throughout the state.

ILLINOIS CASA RECRUITMENT TASK FORCE

In FY21, Illinois CASA established a recruitment task force to address the critical need to attract new volunteers to serve the increased number of children assigned to the Illinois CASA network during the pandemic. This increase, coupled with complications of recruiting, training and supervising volunteers virtually, forced Local Programs to brainstorm new virtual strategies. Each Local Program received funding from Illinois CASA earmarked for recruitment in their service area. The task force continues to meet quarterly and is open to any staff partner across the network engaged in recruitment efforts at the local level.



Education Advocacy

Children in foster care face many obstacles throughout their lives, one of them being educational attainment. Many of children CASA provides advocacy for experience low-grade completion rates, increased absenteeism, are more likely to be disciplined and suspended from school, are 50% less likely to complete high school education, and less than 3% pursue and attain post-secondary education. Covid-19 further increased the education gap due to remote learning.



“At a time when children do not have adequate access to their caseworkers, resources or even basic human necessities, the presence of a CASA in a child’s life is the physical embodiment of a guardian angel. Now more than ever, CASAs are a vital and necessary factor in the healing of traumatized children. CASAs are a gift for which we are so very grateful.”

HONORABLE JUDGE ERICKA SANDERS

With \$886,198.00 in Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, Illinois CASA committed to providing educational advocacy support to children by providing financial support, technical assistance, training, and leadership guidance to the 31 local programs, staff partners, and CASA volunteers. Each Local Program received \$25,961.00 and allocated the funding in a manner most suited to their service area. As a result, CASA volunteers:

- Collaborate with foster parents, social workers, and educational personnel
- Advocate for children to remain in their home school when changing foster homes
- Ensure timely academic record transfer when a child is placed in a new foster home
- Advocate for timely and consistent developmental screening
- Advocate for special education services as needed and ensure yearly reviews
- Identify and assist with inappropriate suspensions and expulsions
- Assist youth in securing tutors as needed
- Ensure graduation requirements are on track
- Support youth with post-secondary education planning

Legislative Update

Illinois' Juvenile Court Act of 1987 was written when the Illinois CASA network was newly established. So, while the Act includes basic provisions regarding the roles and responsibilities for CASA, the State Office worked with judges, members of the General Assembly and other involved parties to draft updated language more reflective the Association's current capacities. HB 3277, sponsored by Senator Christopher Belt and Representative Terra Costa-Howard clearly defines the role and responsibilities of advocates and was passed by the 102nd General Assembly and goes into law January 1, 2022.

APPOINTMENT TIMING

The revision calls for CASA appointment upon the filing of the petition or at any time during the life of a case if special advocates are available. The word "may" is replaced with "shall" regarding appointment of CASA in all counties except Cook at the request of the Public Guardian's Office who acts as the Guardian ad Litem and attorney for the child in that county. Having a caring, consistent adult to listen and place a child's best interests at the forefront of a case +can make all the difference. After receiving approved specialized training, CASA and GAL volunteers get to know the child intimately. They listen. They communicate with the parties involved in the child's life to determine the needs necessary for them to heal and thrive. They ensure the child is safe and provide critical information which aids the court in making crucial legal decisions that may have long lasting effects for children and families. In a system riddled with high turnover and large caseloads, CASA and GAL volunteers are caring, consistent adults who form a one-on-one relationship with a child facing an uncertain future.

PROVIDES CLEAR DEFINITIONS OF THE CASA ROLE

A 'court appointed special advocate' is a community volunteer who must receive approved training in compliance with state and nationally developed standards, has been thoroughly screened and is actively being supervised by a court appointed special advocate program in good standing with the Illinois Association of Court Appointed Special Advocates and the National CASA/GAL Association. Additionally, the revision outlines eligibility criteria for volunteer candidates.

PROMOTES CULTURAL COMPETENCY

The proposed revision requires training regarding cultural competency. Defines cultural competency. Calls for court appointed special advocate programs to promote policies, practices and procedures that are culturally competent. Ensures all volunteers have the training necessary to appreciate, understand, and appropriately interact with members of diverse populations within the local communities they serve.



"CASA has been an incredible asset to our court system and the families CASA has been appointed to. I have worked closely with several advocates and they have made such a difference in the lives of children and families. It is a truly phenomenal program."

WHITNEY KAMPWERTH LUEBBERS, ATTORNEY

Recruitment in FY21

Illinois CASA committed \$131,925 to support local recruitment efforts across the state. Local programs received money to enhance awareness and recruitment utilizing billboards, television, newspaper, radio and yard signs.



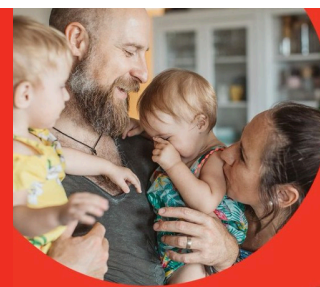
**YOU DID IT!
CONGRATULATIONS**



Join us in congratulating our summer training class on being sworn in! These new CASA Volunteers will begin their journey advocating for children in foster care in our community!

Illinois CASA crossed a major threshold in June 2021 with over 3,000 volunteers now serving throughout Illinois. 932 advocates were trained last year—no easy feat during a pandemic.

Illinois CASA worked to increase social media presence across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn.



Reunited families are an **inspiration**—they've **overcome difficulties** and are **equipped with tools** to address future challenges





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