



CASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

ILLINOIS

FY24

ILLINOIS CASA **ANNUAL REPORT**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LETTER FROM THE CEO AND BOARD CHAIR	1
ABOUT ILLINOIS CASA	2
ILLINOIS CASA LOCAL PROGRAMS	3
ILLINOIS CASA IMPACT	4
ILLINOIS CASA EXPANSION PLAN	5
ILLINOIS CASA BY THE NUMBERS	6
PROGRAM DATA	7
PROGRAM DATA	8
FINANCIALS	9
VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT	10
2024 STATE CONFERENCE	11
FY24 IMPACT STORIES	12
NETWORK TRAINING	13
THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS	14





MARI CHRISTOPHERSON
CEO



MISSY GREATHOUSE
BOARD CHAIR



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

ILLINOIS

A WORD FROM THE CEO AND BOARD CHAIR

Dear Friends and Partners,

I want to begin this message by conveying my deep gratitude to all the volunteers, staff and friends of the Illinois Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) network. Whenever I feel the pressures and responsibility of leading our network, I often think back to what a volunteer said to me at this year's annual conference in Springfield. When I handed her a token of appreciation for her exceptional tenure of service, she whispered in my ear that she believed her act of service as a 20+ year volunteer advocate benefited her at least as much as what her advocacy had done for the children and families she worked with. I feel that same sense of gratitude for the opportunity I have had to build and grow the reach of Illinois CASA.

Studies tell us that volunteering provides many benefits to both mental and even physical health. Volunteering helps counteract the effects of stress, anger and anxiety. The social contact aspect of helping and working with others can have a profound effect on your overall psychological well-being. Nothing relieves stress better than a meaningful connection to another person. Volunteering as a CASA is the ultimate two-way street: the experience benefits our cadre of over 3,500 volunteers just as much as the children and families throughout Illinois who have been fortunate to have a CASA by their side. I like to believe that the impact of Illinois CASA reaches deep into our core searching for the good right in front of us – in our compassion, commitment and even love for each other. Supporting programs such as CASA is good for our collective neighborhoods, towns and cities as it builds community through personal connection, mutual respect and understanding.

Last year, 3,193 volunteers advocated for 9,960 children and their families. Illinois CASA welcomed 568 new volunteers and assisted 2,823 children to end their time in foster care, most often in reunification with their families of origin. While we are incredibly proud of our reach, our goal is to ensure that every child who has experienced abuse and/or neglect has access to a CASA volunteer. Therefore, we have crafted a growth plan to service all 102 Illinois counties by the end of this decade.

To achieve our growth plan, we know we must increase our volunteer base. We understand the importance of accelerating our strategy to serve more Illinois children. We need to recruit and train hundreds of dependable and trusted advocates who offer hope and stability at a time when a child and their families life hang in uncertainty. We are offering more volunteer training opportunities that address the challenges of trauma, inequity and economic disparity. We have an aggressive marketing campaign underway to attract new volunteers. Please help us in our efforts -share this report with your friends and neighbors who you believe might be willing to step up to enjoy the most incredible volunteer opportunity I have seen change lives for the better.

Mari Christopherson

Mari Christopherson
CEO

Missy Greathouse

Missy Greathouse
Board Chair



ABOUT ILLINOIS CASA

VISION

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

MISSION

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

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.

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.

WHAT IS A COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE?

When a family is experiencing 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 volunteer will advocate for the child's safety, permanency and well-being while in foster care.



CASA'S IMPACT IN ILLINOIS IN FY24

ACTIVE CASA
VOLUNTEERS

3,193

TOTAL CHILDREN
SERVED

9,960

NEW CHILDREN
SERVED

2,790

STATEWIDE REACH

31 LOCAL PROGRAMS

59 COUNTIES

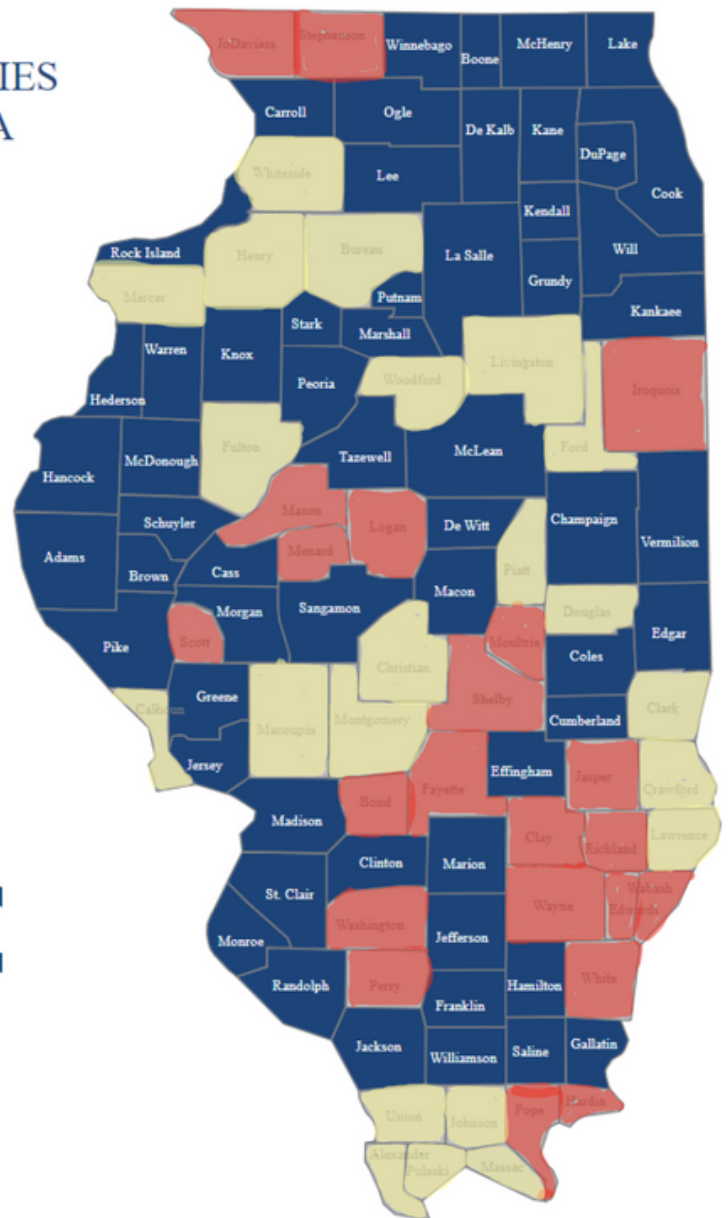
ILLINOIS CASA EXPANSION PLAN

Illinois CASA, with the support of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, plans to expand into all 102 counties in Illinois by the end of 2030! Illinois CASA and its local programs have established a plan for a multi-layered phase approach that includes expanding existing programs and newly established CASA programs. After FY26, the Illinois CASA Network expects to serve an additional 1,735 new children bringing the total number of children served to over 12,000 and their families in Illinois. The process entails the collaboration of Illinois CASA with multiple entities including National CASA/GAL, Local CASA programs, and community stakeholders. We can't wait to expand the CASA program to all corners of Illinois!

GROWTH PLAN MAP

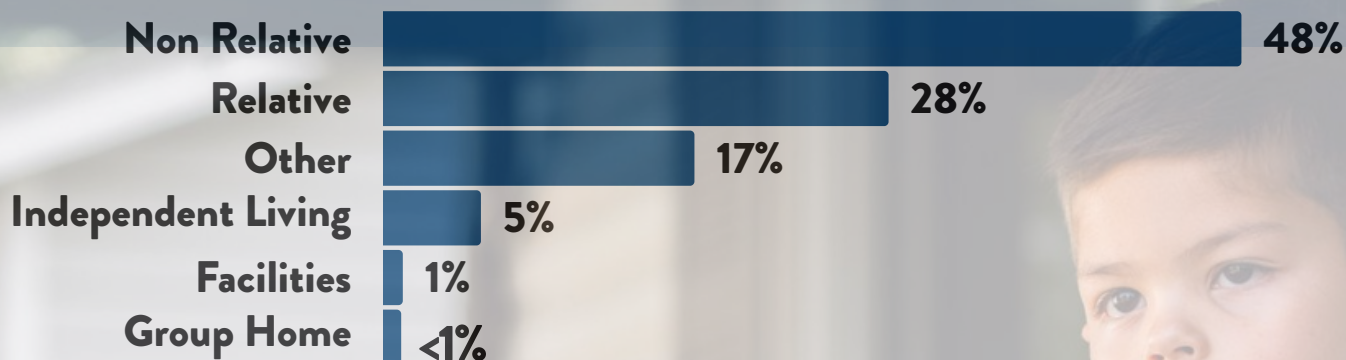
ILLINOIS COUNTIES SERVED BY CASA

- Counties with CASA
- FY25 GROWTH PLAN
- FY26 GROWTH PLAN

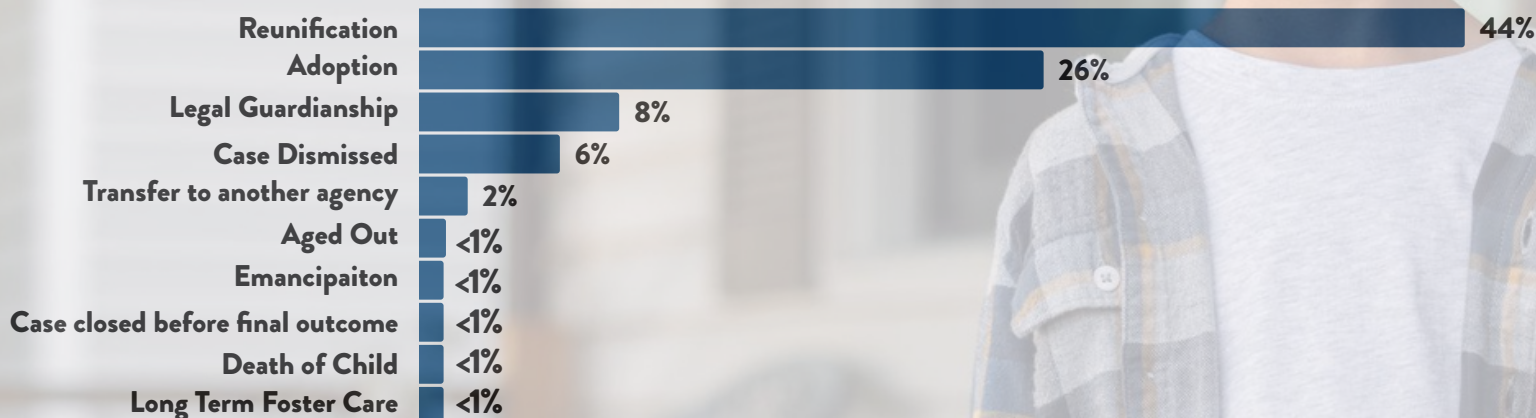


ILLINOIS CASA BY THE NUMBERS

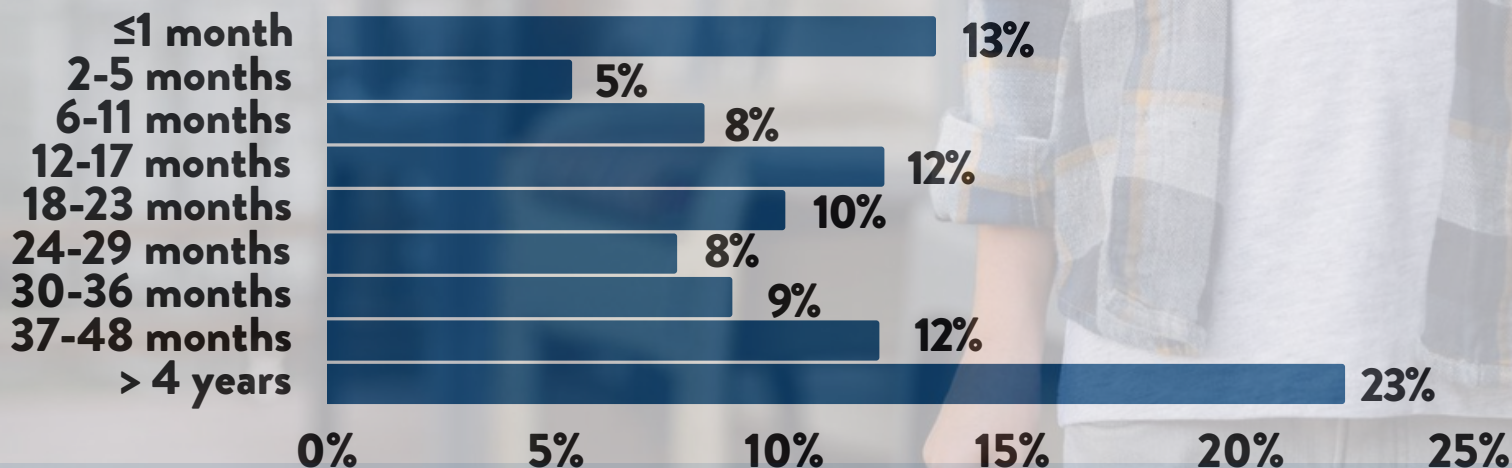
OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT TYPES



REASON FOR CASE CLOSURE



TIME IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE FOR CASES CLOSED



PROGRAM DATA

OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN SERVED BY CASA IN FY24

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 conditions allow for it. If reunification is not an option, 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.



Program Name	FY24 Children Served	FY24 New Children	FY24 Volunteers
15th Judicial Circuit	183	55	24
Advocacy Network for Children	583	209	114
Boone County CASA	97	19	28
CASA DeKalb County	201	56	65
CASA Kane County	687	206	281
CASA Kendall County	190	57	72
CASA Lake County	630	125	324
CASA of Champaign County	466	95	131
CASA of Cook County	912	245	396
CASA of Dupage County	413	165	190
CASA of East Central Illinois	243	63	23
CASA of Effingham County	98	27	43
CASA of Franklin & Hamilton Counties	182	50	20
CASA of Jefferson County	139	37	26
CASA of South Central Illinois	127	11	39
CASA of McHenry County	350	142	177
CASA of Southeastern Illinois	85	22	27
CASA of Southwestern IL	955	172	155
CASA of the Tenth Judicial Circuit	418	112	157
CASA of Vermilion & Edgar	529	69	57
CASA of West Central Illinois	167	22	61
River Valley	433	175	123
CASA of Southern Illinois	192	96	75
Child Network	148	47	26
CASA of Jersey & Greene Counties	117	62	31
LaSalle County CASA	60	33	35
Macon County CASA	518	129	175
McLean County CASA	188	90	112
Every Child	89	25	33
Sangamon County CASA	237	65	51
Winnebago County CASA	323	109	122

PROGRAM DATA

Volunteer retention is crucial for local CASA programs in Illinois. As CASA volunteers become more familiar with the child's case, their ability to advocate effectively increases, ensuring that the child's needs are met with greater insight and care. Retaining volunteers reduces the disruption in a child's life, fostering trust and stability, which are vital for youth navigating the foster care system.

Moreover, consistent volunteer retention strengthens the overall effectiveness of local CASA programs. Retaining dedicated volunteers reduces the need for constant recruitment and training, allowing resources to be allocated more efficiently toward supporting the children and families in need. When volunteers stay, they help build a more resilient and knowledgeable volunteer community, ultimately enhancing the impact of CASA programs across Illinois.



National Average Volunteer
Retention Rate

65%



F2Y3 Illinois CASA
Volunteer retention rate

72%



**F2Y4 Illinois CASA
Volunteer retention rate**

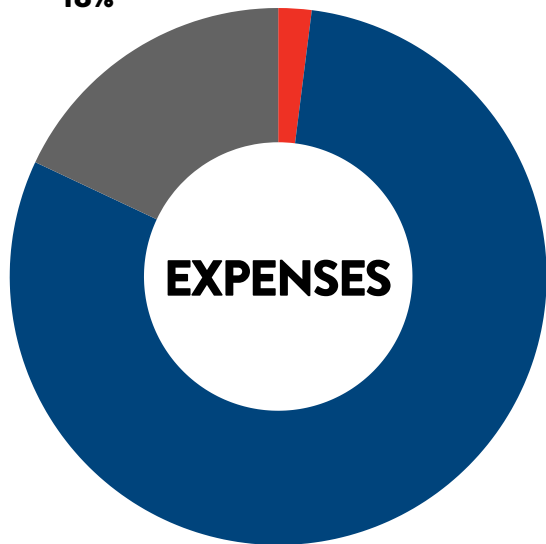
79%

FINANCIALS



Direct Services
18%

Administration
2%



Grants to Local Programs
80%

Grants to Local Programs
\$4,305,384

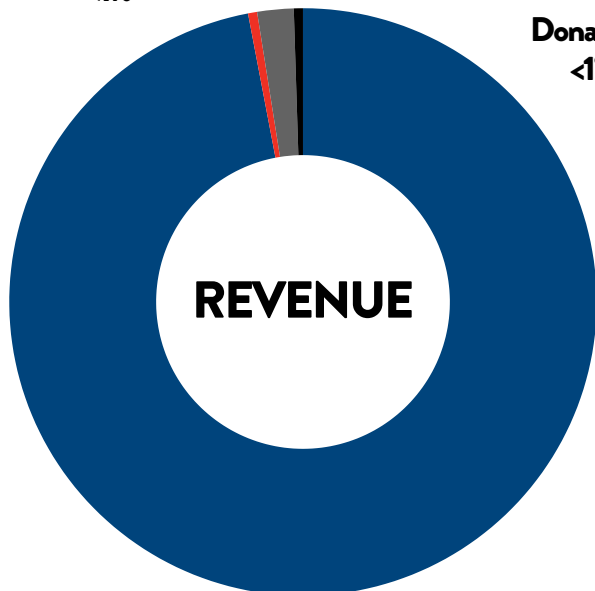
Administration
\$116,067

Direct Services
\$939,354

Program Service Income
<1%

Other Public Funding
<2%

Donations
<1%



Illinois DCFS Program - Contracted Services
97%

Illinois DCFS Program - Contracted Services

5,229,049

Donations
\$20,015

Other Public Funding
\$99,636

Program Service Income
\$46,076

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



Jennifer Diehl , CASA Kane County - Silver Awardee

“Jen really embodies the CASA mission and has been a fierce advocate for all six children she advocates for, and really pours her heart and soul into her cases. She is thorough in her notes and reports. She makes herself available each day to take phone calls from biological parents, foster parents, caseworkers, service providers, and more. Jen has been a fantastic advocate and a pleasure to work with. We are so lucky to have her on our CASA team.”

-Ellen Pudlik - Advocate Supervisor

Beth Griffin, CASA of River Valley - Silver Awardee

“Beth is proactive and needs very little direction as she is very knowledgeable of the child welfare system- she has several adopted children of her own. Because Beth has been such a rock star, she is taking on a mentor role in a case, providing a new advocate with extra guidance. Beth consistently maintains excellent communication with staff and knows to reach out and ask for guidance when needed.”

-Rebecca Howey - Volunteer Training Coordinator



Tom Hynes, CASA Lake County - Silver Awardee

“Throughout the past five years, Tom has consistently demonstrated his belief that every child deserves a safe and nurturing home environment. During hearings, the judge frequently requested information and input directly from Tom and deemed Tom ‘essential to this case.’ The DCFS attorney described Tom as “almost familial” and stated that he was ‘a lifeline for this family.’ The caseworker stated that Tom was ‘the glue that holds this case together.’”

-Laura Lieberman - Advocate Manager

Theresa Casey, Winnebago County CASA - Bronze Awardee

“Theresa goes beyond her role as a volunteer advocate to make sure all parties are seen, heard, and appreciated. She attends sporting events, tutors and provides knowledge for the individuals positive life path going forward. Theresa has been commended by judges of her exceptional work, her advocacy on her cases as well as her eye for details on each and every report.”

-Renee Pierce - Advocate Supervisor



Deborah Kordick, CASA of South Central Illinois - Bronze Awardee

“Since 2022, Deborah has spent 430.40 volunteer hours advocating for and providing support for the three teenage boys and their family. Deborah has worked closely with Wraparound service individuals, caseworkers, medical providers, school staff, and legal teams! Deborah has corresponded with professional contractors and laborers to receive financial quotes for home repairs in order to provide to the agency for DCFS funding,. She has been praised by all parties involved in this case on numerous occasions, especially by the caseworker.

-Tavan Hiestand - Program Director

ILLINOIS CASA 2024 ANNUAL STATE CONFERENCE

Our Annual Conference, “Forever Families” held in April, was a tremendous success! Staff and Board members joined us for a full day on Thursday. Our day was focused on recruitment, retention, and networking. On Friday, we were joined by volunteers and professionals in the child welfare system. Our emcee, Paul Hamann from Impact NPS LLC began our day and we ended the day with our keynote speaker, Justin Tutt, The Man in the Black Chucks. Participants were able to select from 12 interactive breakout sessions on various topics that increased participants’ knowledge and growth. After lunch, we celebrated Executive Director, Jill Olson from DeKalb County as Staff Partner of the Year, Kale Booher from CASA of Southwestern Illinois as board member of the year, and The Honorable Brian Goldrick from McLean County as judge of the year. We also honored 28 volunteers with a Presidential Volunteer Service Award. The conference facilitated numerous connections, with attendees making valuable new contacts and rekindling old relationships in our bustling networking areas. The event created a truly memorable experience for everyone involved.

Next year we will hold our conference in Bloomington-Normal on April 3 & 4, 2025. We hope to see you there for a great time of learning and networking.

“

The variety of sessions/speakers provided was great though and the actual conference portion; conference rooms, timing, food, etc.. flowed really well. All seamless with plenty of time to take a break or chat with other CASAs and such in between.

”

“

The conference was excellent - kudos to the Illinois CASA staff for putting together interesting content and smooth execution

”



CASA IMPACT STORIES



"In the summer of 2023 a one year old came into protective custody due to methamphetamine use by her parents. From the very start of the case the parents worked closely with CASA and reached out for resources on services in our community and support. Our program continued to work closely with the child and the parents through the case and both parents took measures to reunify their family by being forthcoming and cooperative. The worker commended the parents for continuing domestic violence classes when the agency was not requiring this service. Both parents showed persistence and dedication to the return of their daughter to their home and within three months she was placed back in her home, with DCFS still monitoring the case. The parents had completed all portions of their service plan ahead of schedule. This case closed with reunification of the family in the spring of 2024, making it the fastest and most successful cases this CASA has experienced, closing in 9 months."

"A sibling group was placed with a relative who was willing to adopt. The relative foster parent is very young to be adopting these children and struggled with boundaries, consistency and managing expectations. The CASA worked with the foster parent and DCFS to arrange parenting classes for the foster parent. The classes focused on setting boundaries and being consistent, budgeting, communication and more. The foster parent is better equipped to take on the challenge of raising these children because of the efforts of CASA!"



"An advocate began serving on a case back in 2022, the youth was hesitant of new people, refused to go near anyone besides foster mom, and continued to struggle developmentally. The advocate got with the GAL and case worker who all agreed testing was necessary to determine why this child was delayed. This child was diagnosed with a sensory processing disorder which put him on the autism spectrum. This can make it difficult to form attachments with anyone, or relate via touch. This year, while attending a home visit, the advocate had sat in the recliner that he normally sits in, a good distance from the youth to avoid upsetting him. As the advocate was sitting and conversing with the foster mom, the child walked over on his own and crawled into the advocate's lap. He wanted the advocate to hold him. This was major progress! Ever since then, every time the advocate attends a visit, the child greets the advocate at the door, walks him to his chair, and wants to sit and communicate (to the best of his ability) with the advocate. The child just began preschool and got an IEP to help him succeed. He is doing so much better and continues to progress."



TRAINING UPDATE



NETWORK CONTINUOUS EDUCATION

Each staff partner and volunteer is required to complete 12 hours of continuing education annually to meet National CASA/GAL standards. Illinois CASA is proud to have offered a robust training schedule that includes virtual and in-person trainings, workshops, and webinars. Our training platform hosts virtual webinars that can be accessed 24/7. This allows our volunteers to meet the requirements when it is most convenient for them. Topics included: Excellence in Advocacy, Identifying and Responding to Cases of Human Trafficking in Youth, Court Reports that Paint a Picture for the Judge, Legislation 101, Challenging Relationships with Food, All About IEPs, and many more.

Illinois CASA partners with Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Prevent Child Abuse Illinois, Mercy Home for Boys and Girls, Illinois Family Resource, The University of Illinois, as well as local program staff that excel at best practices in their own program's advocacy work and share their experience with fellow program staff and advocates.

TRAINING FEEDBACK

Keeping Children Safe Online

"Excellent, knowledgeable, organized and engaged speaker!!! Gave a lot of information but kept things moving while also responding to questions. Great job!"

Independent Nation: Empowering Teens to be Successful After Transitioning Out of Foster Care

"This was a really great eye opening training session. I want to do a deep dive into this subject. I can hardly believe what a challenge these children face. I must know more!"

Understanding and Advocating for Children Impacted by Trauma and Hidden Disabilities

"Excellent presentation! The presenter was very informative in the subject and presented it well. I thought her power point was well put together as well. She did a good job of connecting the link in the brain to behaviors for me. I love the quote "Get Curious Not Furious". This makes total sense when we are trying to understand the trauma we are dealing with in our advocacy. Good tools to my tool box."

THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS



*Illinois
Children's Justice
Task Force*

Illinois Department of
DCFS
Children & Family Services



ILLINOIS COURTS
Audi Alteram Partem - Hear the Other Side

ICJIA

**ILLINOIS CASA
FRIENDS AND
DONORS**



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

ILLINOIS