



**CASA**

Court Appointed Special Advocates  
**FOR CHILDREN**

ILLINOIS



ILLINOIS CASA

# 2022 Annual Report

Dear Stakeholders,

The cornerstone of the CASA mission is providing best-interest advocacy for the children we serve. From the moment the child welfare system intervenes in a child's life due to allegations of abuse or neglect, everything is at stake; their bond with parents and siblings, their home, education, community and belongings. In summary, their future. CASA volunteers provide a meaningful voice in the processes that shape the rest of their lives. We believe that children grow and develop best with their family of origin if that can be safely achieved.

The focus of our work is providing the Illinois CASA network with the necessary resources to support their work and advance our collective mission. This includes training resources, data collection and analysis, governance, leadership and management tools, and pass-through funding. Recently, we have seen a rise in the number of children who need someone by their side advocating for their best interests. We are driven by our mission and fueled by our vision to provide a CASA volunteer to every child that needs one. It is a lofty goal, but one that we are committed to fulfilling as we continuously focus on expanding our capacity to serve more children.

In 2022, we made great strides toward that goal. The number of CASA/ GAL volunteers across Illinois increased by nearly **17 percent, to 3,422**, allowing our 31 programs to serve a collective **9,532** children. You can read more about how our volunteers are making an impact in the stories included in this report.

Through the generosity of our donors and public funding partners, we continue to invest in the network with pass-through grants that help the programs advance their work. Illinois CASA distributed over \$3 million to our programs, and this funding enabled more children and families to have the benefit of best-interest advocacy in the courts and the community. Looking ahead, we are excited about the strategy we have established and look forward to continuing to build on our momentum and capacity to serve more children with support from you—our partners, donors and friends.

Thank you for the ongoing support that makes this growth possible. CASA/GAL programs are essential to our communities and the children they serve. With your partnership, we will continue to grow until every child who needs an advocate has one.

And most importantly, thank you to our volunteers who are the heart and soul of our Association. We are forever thankful for their selfless commitment to changing a child's story.

Our very best,



Mari Christopherson  
CEO



Lynn Harvey  
Board Chair



**Mari Christopherson**  
CEO



**Lynn Harvey**  
Board Chair

# 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.

## 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 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 55 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.

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.

# ILLINOIS CASA LOCAL PROGRAMS



## **Advocacy Network for Children**

Adams, Brown, Cass, Hancock,  
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**

DeWitt, Macon

## **CASA of Southwestern Illinois**

Madison, Monroe, Randolph, St. Clair

## **CASA of South Central Illinois**

Clinton, Marion

## **CASA of McHenry County**

McHenry

## **McLean County CASA**

McLean

## **CASA of the 10th Judicial Circuit**

Marshall, Peoria, Putnam, Stark, Tazewell

## **CASA of Rock Island County/ EveryChild**

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**

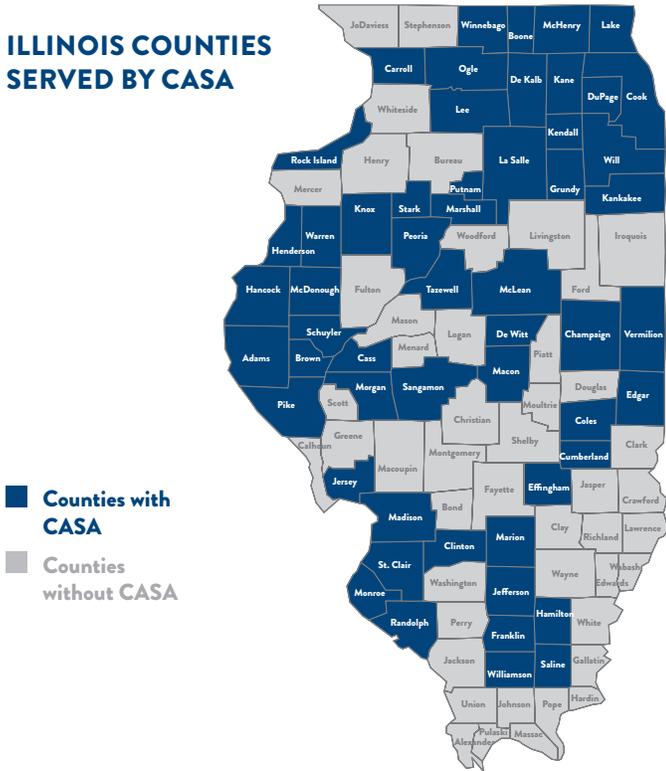
Williamson

## **Winnebago County CASA**

Winnebago

# ILLINOIS CASA IMPACT

## ILLINOIS COUNTIES SERVED BY CASA



## CASA'S IMPACT IN ILLINOIS IN FY22



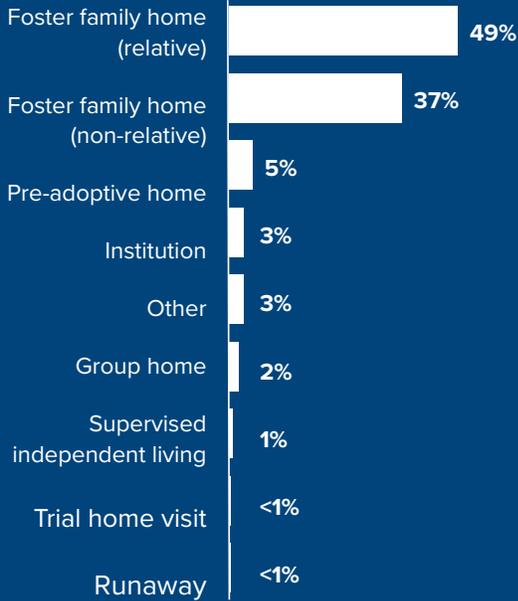
## CASA Best-Interest Advocacy



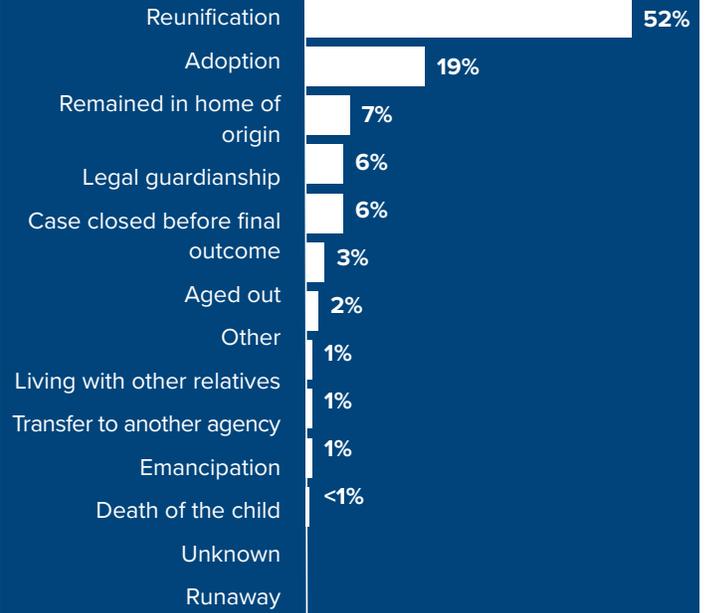
# ILLINOIS CASA BY THE NUMBERS

from National CASA/GAL Association 2021 Annual Local Program Survey Report released October 2022

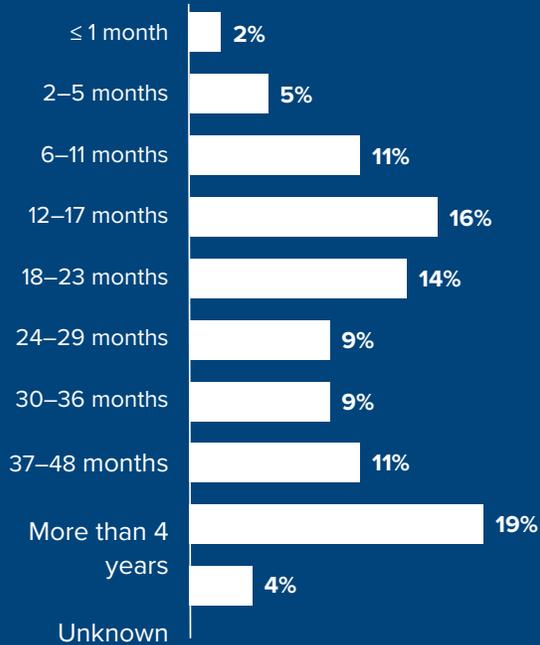
## OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT TYPES



## REASON FOR CASE CLOSURE



## TIME IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE FOR CASES CLOSED



# DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

The Illinois CASA Equity taskforce continued to make strides in FY22. The Illinois CASA board adopted a DEI statement in FY22 after recommendation by the Equity Task Force:

**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.

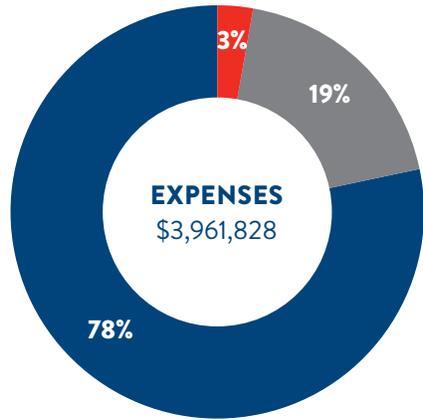
The Equity taskforce is pleased that the Illinois CASA board is modeling this behavior for the CASA network. In FY22, the Equity Task Force also began working with Crossroads—an antiracism organization, that provided coaching for the taskforce in carrying out its role of being change agents within the CASA network. A revamping of goals and strategies was the main priority of the task force in FY22 that will continue into FY23.

**At Illinois CASA we are working hard to ensure best interests advocacy for children who have experienced abuse and neglect is interwoven with a trauma informed approach and a diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility and belonging lens.**

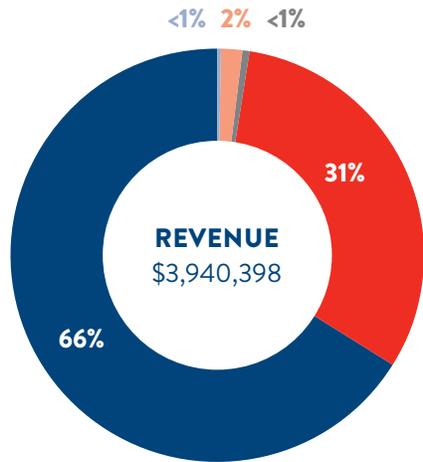


# FINANCIALS

## ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF CASA STATEMENT OF ACTIVITY JULY 2021 – JUNE 2022



- **Grants to Local Programs**  
\$3,907,138
- **Administration**  
\$117,456
- **Direct Services**  
\$747,234



- **Illinois DCFS Grant–State Appropriation**  
\$2,599,061
- **Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA)**  
\$1,236,906
- **Donations**  
\$21,163
- **Other Public Funding**  
\$63,210
- **Program Service Income**  
\$20,058

CASA OF WEST CENTRAL ILLINOIS, SERVING HENDERSON, KNOX, MCDONOUGH AND WARREN COUNTIES

Because of **VOLUNTEER ADVOCATE JAN'S** vigilance on one of her current cases, two children were removed from an unsafe foster home and relocated to a much more appropriate placement. Jan is an expert in communication with children, and she has established wonderful connections with the children in her care. We can't express how lucky we are to have her on our team!

—KELLY CORBIN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



# PROGRAM DATA

## OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN SERVED BY CASA IN FY22

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.



ILLINOIS CASA LOCAL PROGRAMS	Children Served in FY22	New Assignments in FY22	CASA Volunteers in FY22
<b>Advocacy Network for Children</b>	509	199	124
<b>Boone County CASA</b>	108	23	23
<b>CASA Kane County</b>	624	201	282
<b>CASA Kendall County</b>	170	60	71
<b>CASA Lake County</b>	733	210	359
<b>CASA of Champaign County</b>	559	117	147
<b>CASA of Cook County</b>	658	102	456
<b>CASA of DeKalb County</b>	239	58	73
<b>CASA of DuPage County</b>	389	199	170
<b>CASA of East Central Illinois</b>	259	75	40
<b>CASA of Effingham County</b>	112	15	62
<b>CASA of Franklin and Hamilton Counties</b>	173	77	26
<b>CASA of Jefferson County</b>	162	26	36
<b>CASA of Kankakee County</b>	103	35	26
<b>CASA of South Central Illinois</b>	116	40	45
<b>CASA of McHenry County</b>	235	120	164
<b>CASA of River Valley</b>	383	144	134
<b>CASA of Rock Island County/EveryChild</b>	48	20	20
<b>CASA of Saline County</b>	79	19	24
<b>CASA of Southwestern Illinois</b>	1,010	225	189
<b>CASA of the 15th Judicial Circuit</b>	167	36	32
<b>CASA of the Tenth Judicial District</b>	610	117	179
<b>CASA of Vermillion and Edgar Counties</b>	540	144	72
<b>CASA of West Central Illinois</b>	117	34	37
<b>CASA of Williamson County</b>	150	42	73
<b>Jerseyville CASA</b>	96	27	28
<b>LaSalle County CASA</b>	49	22	26
<b>Macon County CASA</b>	459	135	203
<b>McLean County CASA</b>	152	62	99
<b>Sangamon County CASA</b>	214	64	73
<b>Winnebago County CASA</b>	309	52	129

CASA OF FRANKLIN & HAMILTON COUNTIES

Over the past eight years, **VOLUNTEER ADVOCATE CARLA** has dedicated countless hours of her time building rapport and support with the youth she advocates for. Carla has provided numerous court reports and attended court hearings; reviewed 100s of documents; observed family visitations; family team meetings; case meetings; and, most importantly, spent time getting to know each child individually by listening to his/her needs, desires, and wishes.

—**MARIAH HAYES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**



CHAMPAIGN COUNTY CASA

**VOLUNTEER ADVOCATE ARGENTINA** is a thoughtful, compassionate, and steadfast advocate who truly focuses on the children's individual needs. She seeks out all information to make appropriate recommendations to the court. She made sure to remain heavily involved during the pandemic and was creative with her contacts with youth to maintain safety for all.

—**BROOKE ADAMS, PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR**

KANE COUNTY CASA

One example of **VOLUNTEER ADVOCATE ELLEN'S** fierce advocacy includes showing up month after month to visit a youth who is incarcerated and often refused to engage. Ellen does not give up. It's not in her nature. She visits regularly, sometimes more than once a month, and finds ways to work toward connecting with the youth.

—**SANDIE CROSS, DIRECTOR OF TRAINING AND EDUCATION**



# NETWORK CONTINUING EDUCATION

Illinois CASA offers a robust virtual training platform for volunteer advocates and staff partners to participate in live sessions or access our 24/7 on demand library. A myriad of training topics ensure that our people have the knowledge needed to inform the court, support children and families and work in the complex child welfare field. Training topics include: Trauma Informed Practices, Resiliency, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Educational Advocacy, Healthcare and Well-Being, Youth and Technology, and Self-Care. Illinois CASA partners with Illinois Attorney General Office High Tech Crimes Bureau, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Prevent Child Abuse Illinois, Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center, Illinois Family Resource Center 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.



“I feel fortunate that we have access to such a broad selection of webinars.”

—BRENDA, VOLUNTEER ADVOCATE WITH JERSEY COUNTY CASA

Illinois CASA offered a number of new professional development opportunities for the more than 250 staff partners working across Illinois. “Writing Court Reports that Paint a Picture for the Judge” updates and improves upon the court report template judges rely on to make critical decisions affecting the future of a child. The CASA court report session includes a section on sharpening focus on best interest advocacy examining objective and subjective statements. One participant said, “I liked the breakout sessions and being able to speak about court reports in detail. As a coordinator, it was beneficial hearing what the volunteers are struggling with. I feel like I learned something new that I can pass on to my volunteers as well!”

Understanding that CASA program staff wear many hats, we developed a new training for staff: Excellence in Advocacy. This session focuses on the different roles within a CASA program, how staff can connect the dots to other roles, and what best practice looks like in recruitment, training, retention, and supervision.

**Training of Facilitators (TOF)** is required for all people who will be facilitating National CASA/ GAL’s preservice curriculum. In FY22, Illinois CASA offered three sessions to our network. We had over 20 trainers and Executive Directors attend. During this class, participants learn what good facilitation looks like and then they get to practice with the group by presenting an activity from the preservice curriculum. Participants have stated, “I thought the training was great, engaging, and I would love to attend again and of course recommend others to attend as well! Great job!” and “The presentations are a great way to discover new ideas on how to improve training with advocates in the future to keep them interested and engaged.”

# QUALITY ASSURANCE

In January 2021, National CASA/GAL rolled out new standards for local programs. To ensure that local programs are following the new standards and delivering best-interest advocacy, Illinois CASA created a Quality Assurance process. This includes interviews with stakeholders, evaluating policies, and reviewing files. During FY22, 18 programs participated in onsite reviews with Illinois CASA. An added benefit—programs that had onsite reviews and completed the follow up items scored highly on National CASA/GAL’s Quality Assurance/ Membership survey which took place this year. The work done with Illinois CASA helped local programs build a bridge for reporting to National CASA/GAL.



“As an Executive Director, I understand that any process on quality assurance is daunting and sometimes a pain; however, in the case of our Illinois CASA QA process, the activity was truly pain with a purpose. The Illinois CASA offices highly prepared our local state programs to be successful with the National CASA/GAL Local Program Self-Assessment Survey. I felt extremely ready to provide all of the information requested of my program by National CASA and as a result, we saw great success with our outcomes to show that Macon County CASA is operating in alignment with the standards expected by National CASA/GAL Association. Thank you, Illinois CASA, for demanding consistent quality across all of our state programs.”

—**JULIA LIVINGSTON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
MACON COUNTY CASA, SERVING  
DEWITT AND MACON COUNTIES**

## REUNIFICATION

When 8-year-old Lexi and 7-year-old Skylar were removed from their home due to neglect in 2018, the situation looked bleak. Their mother, Chrissy, was struggling with alcohol dependency, and their father was unable to care for the girls. The girls were placed in foster care with their grandmother, Carol, who works full time and is also primary guardian for another of her grandchildren.

That is when **VOLUNTEER ADVOCATE AMY** entered the picture. Amy quickly developed a strong, comfortable relationship with Lexi, Skylar, and Carol. She helped the family navigate the challenging child welfare system, connecting Carol with support systems and resources for the girls. Once it became clear to Amy that Chrissy was determined to reunite her family, Amy worked to support her. Chrissy completed addiction treatment and all other court-mandated requirements.

With CASA Amy's support, Chrissy was finally reunited with her daughters in 2021. Amy maintains a close relationship with the whole family, and she plans to continue to support Lexi and Skylar as a family friend.

—**BRENDAN SIEGFRIED, DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR  
WITH CASA LAKE COUNTY**



## THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS

