

CASA Fund Year-End Report July 29, 2019

Nebraska CASA issues this report to the Supreme Court, State Court Administrator, Clerk of the Legislature, and the Governor regarding the Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Fund. The CASA Fund was established by the 2011 Nebraska Legislature to recruit and train CASA volunteers, to develop new CASA programs or expand current CASA programs into areas not currently served and to create new and innovative programming for CASA.

Twenty-one local CASA programs in 49 Nebraska counties recruit, screen, train and supervise volunteers who are appointed by Judges to speak in court for the safety and well-being of children who have been abused or neglected. The Nebraska CASA Association partners with these local CASA programs providing leadership, quality assurance, training, technical assistance, and funding. The information in this report pertains to fiscal year July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019.

The CASA Fund continues to move toward its goal to provide a CASA volunteer for every Nebraska child who needs one. Nebraska State Statutes and the National CASA Standards for Local CASA Programs require a minimum of 30 hours of pre-service training before a volunteer is assigned to a case. In addition, State Statutes require a minimum of 10, and National CASA Standards 12, annual hours of continuing education for volunteers.

The state association has run a statewide media campaign to recruit new volunteers. Local programs continue to use advertising, public events, community presentations, posters, local media stories, websites, social media, newsletters, and word of mouth to recruit volunteers. There were 255 new volunteers who were trained and sworn in as CASA advocates.

For the seventh fiscal year (FY), there is a marked increase in the number of active volunteer advocates. A 110% growth:

- 421 volunteers in FY 2011/12
- 480 volunteers in FY 12/13
- 663 volunteers for FY 13/14
- 726 volunteers for FY 14/15
- 770 volunteers for FY 15/16

- 815 volunteers for 2016/17
- 820 volunteers for 2017/18
- 886 volunteers for 2018/19

Not all volunteers who are recruited are able to complete the training and/or be assigned cases. In addition to background criminal screening and reference checks, local CASA programs use our 30 hours of training as part of the screening process to ensure volunteers are appropriate for the job of serving as an advocate for abused and neglected children.

Recruitment is vital to local CASA programs. New volunteers need to be recruited to serve additional cases and to replace retiring or redirected volunteers. Volunteers are asked to serve for at least one year after completing training and to remain with a child until her or his court case is closed. Almost all volunteers fulfill both of those obligations and more. This is an intense volunteer obligation.

In this fiscal year, 125 volunteers left the program. CASA's focus on retention includes training for CASA staff in Reflective Practice. The goal of the program is to increase communication and the effectiveness of communication with staff and volunteers to increase retention rates. Results after training three local CASA staff members show that our staff's communication with volunteers and ability to resolve issues stressing volunteers has improved.

New and Expanding Programs

Southeast Nebraska CASA - This program, formerly known as Seward County CASA, has now expanded into Jefferson, Saline, Gage, Saunders, and Thayer Counties. Volunteers have been recruited, screened and trained in each county. Challenges of staff and volunteer retention in Gage County are being addressed through additional fundraising to hire a program director in this county.

PlainsWest CASA - This program, formerly Cheyenne County CASA, expanded Morrill and Deuel Counties. Challenges experienced with Cheyenne County's largest employer's corporate sale and downsizing is affecting the ability of local community members to commit to CASA's long-term volunteer job and staff turnover. The newest director has been in place for one year and has made significant strides recruiting enough volunteers to serve all children and significantly raising the profile of the program.

SENCA CASA– Formerly known as Otoe County CASA, this program is now housed under Southeast Nebraska Community Action. This partnership was created to determine if non-profit programs such as a community action agency could serve as a home for programs in counties that have few children in care. Two years ago SENCA CASA expanded into Nemaha County. Richardson county will be served in the 1019-20 fiscal year.

CASA served 49 courts during the year. Local CASA programs served the county courts in the following counties:

Adams	Furnas	Madison
Arthur	Gage	Merrick
Buffalo	Garden	Nemaha
Cass	Gosper	Nuckolls
Chase	Hall	Otoe
Cheyenne	Hamilton	Perkins
Clay	Harlan	Phelps
Colfax	Hayes	Platte
Dawson	Hitchcock	Red Willow
Deuel	Howard	Richardson
Dodge	Jefferson	Saline
Dundy	Kearney	Scotts Bluff
Fillmore	Keith	Seward
Franklin	Kimball	Thayer
Frontier	Lincoln	Webster
		York

Local CASA programs also serve the separate juvenile courts in the following counties:

Douglas Lancaster Sarpy

2,002 children were served by CASA volunteers during the fiscal year. Nebraska CASA programs have increased the number of abused and neglected children served by nearly 61% since the 2011/12 Fiscal Year.

A brief overview of some successes during fiscal year 2018-2019

Nebraska CASA focuses on expansion of programs in current counties serving many children in foster care. Douglas and Sarpy Counties have nearly one-half of all foster care children served in their Juvenile Court. A successful recruitment campaign continues in this geographic area. Since the CASA Fund began in 2011-12, these programs have grown the

infrastructure to support additional volunteers serving more abused and neglected children.

As we work toward expansion into unserved counties, Douglas, Sarpy, and Lancaster Counties are working diligently to serve all of the children in these large juvenile courts. Sixteen classes of new volunteers graduated in these three programs this year.

The need for a visitation center for families to complete parenting education and supervised visitation with their children has led to Prairie Plains, PlainsWest, Sarpy, and Douglas County programs to provide these spaces. This allows families to complete their required activities moving toward reunification with their children.

Nebraska CASA Association has hired a training coordinator to provide curriculum training to local program staff. The National CASA Association released a new 30 hour curriculum for new volunteers last year. This curriculum has posed numerous challenges for local programs. This training coordinator is providing training to address these challenges and to train new staff members as turnover occurs.

The April 13th Nebraska CASA volunteer conference in Kearney involved a presentation from Judge Michael Burns. Youth Thrive was also presented providing information on adolescent brain trauma and the effects of trauma. The workshop also provided information on supporting foster youth and reducing the impacts of trauma including how social connections impact our youth.

A) FINANCIAL REPORTS: A narrative report detailing the expenditures of your CASA Fund Recruitment and Retention and (if applicable) New or Expansion Grant. *An additional \$24,595.38 was provided by Nebraska State Court in addition to the General Fund Appropriation of \$300,000.

1. Program, award amount and target program area

Program Name	Recruitment and Training	New & Expanding	Innovative	Total
CASA Connection	\$7,920.00			\$7,920.00
CASA for Douglas County	\$36,000.00			\$36,000.00
CASA for Lancaster County	\$22,320.00			\$22,320.00
CASA for York County	\$6,480.00			\$6,480.00
CASA of Northeast Nebraska	\$6,480.00			\$6,480.00

CASA of Scotts Bluff County	\$9,180.00			\$9,180.00
CASA of South Central NE	\$10,440.00	\$4,600.00		\$15,040.00
Cass County CASA	\$7,750.00			\$7,750.00
Dawson/Gosper County CASA	\$10,698.00			\$10,698.00
Dodge County CASA	\$5,760			\$5,760.00
Fillmore County CASA	\$4,540.00			\$4,540.00
Heartland CASA	\$7,380.00			\$7,380.00
Kearney/Buffalo County CASA	\$14,220.00			\$14,220.00
Lincoln County CASA	\$7,569.00			\$7,569.00
Phelps/Harlan County CASA	\$7,870.00			\$7,870.00
PlainsWest CASA	\$5,774.00	\$4,600.00		\$10,374.00
Prairie Plains CASA	\$7,193.00			\$7,193.00
Sarpy County CASA	\$25,380.00			\$25,380.00
SENCA CASA	\$4,860.00	\$4,600.00		\$9,460.00
Southeast Nebraska CASA	\$8,640.00	\$4,600.00		\$13,240.00
Trails West CASA	\$6,480.00			\$6,480.00
CasaManager & Basecamp Software			\$16,907.00	\$16,907.00
Local Program Staff & Volunteer Screening & Training			\$42,884.15	\$42,884.15
Contract for Outcomes Study			\$18,750.00	\$18,750.00
NE CASA Travel to local programs			\$4,720.23	\$4,720.23
Total	\$222,934.00	\$18,400.00	\$83,261.38	\$324,595.38

B) STORIES: Stories of a volunteer affecting the life of a child served by CASA.

A CASA volunteer, Peggy, was assigned to the case of a 15 year old boy six months ago. He has been placed in several different facilities and foster homes, but was always moved for his "inappropriate" behavior. His parents relinquished their rights several years ago. In the short time Peggy has been advocating for him, she has made a connection with him that has changed his outlook. He now sees a future and hope for himself and his behavior has improved dramatically. Due to Peggy's recommendation and advocacy, this young man was accepted to Job Corps in Chadron and has dreams of a job and independence. After his acceptance into Job Corps, his case worker was going to put him on a bus to travel from eastern Nebraska to Chadron by himself. Peggy asked for permission to drive him so that he did not move to his new home, where he knew no one, alone. He has adjusted well to his new home training

with a mentor and is enjoying what he is learning he tells Peggy on their frequent calls.

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Phil serves two cases as a CASA volunteer. One of Phil's CASA kids, "Andrew," is challenged with profound developmental, intellectual, and physical conditions. When Phil began advocating for Andrew, the child spent most of the day strapped into a wheelchair. Although Andrew is unable to verbalize his wishes, his foster parent expressed a desire to build a safe and enriching play area for Andrew to spend time out of his wheelchair. Phil initiated a successful application process with Make-a-Wish Foundation to construct a "freedom play area" for Andrew. The play area is completely padded, includes a variety of soft shapes for Andrew to climb, and features an interactive whiteboard/smart TV that will allow Andrew to communicate and view his favorite programs. The space encourages Andrew to play without fear of being harmed and stimulates his intellectual and physical growth. The space was formally dedicated in March 2019. Andrew has become more communicative and active because of the support he has received from caring adults like Phil. Phil was recognized by Make-a-Wish for his tireless advocacy. Phil was also featured in the Omaha World-Herald as part of the Blue Cross Blue Shield "Faces of Fearless" storytelling series, a campaign celebrating people living their very best lives and inspiring others to do the same.

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As a CASA volunteer built a relationship with a little girl to whom she was assigned, this girl began sharing information with the advocate. The child let her volunteer know that she did not like it when her aunt's boyfriend came to the supervised visits. She stated she was scared of him as she had seen him shove her aunt's head into the wall when she stayed with them one night before she came into care. The volunteer provided this information in court. The volunteer had often seen the children on visits and in their foster home as opposed to the case worker who had only seen the children in their foster home once a month. The volunteer was able to describe in great detail how the visits were going and how the little girl was feeling. The judge was then able to order that visits take place at the visitation office and that the aunt's boyfriend was no longer allowed to be

there during the visit. The little girl and her foster mom were very relieved.

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Ten year old "Emily" was sexually assaulted by her mom's boyfriend. Emily had some learning disabilities and a diagnosis of attachment disorder. Her therapist worked with Emily for two years and struggled to develop a relationship. Emily's case worker from Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) couldn't get Emily to speak to her. The CASA volunteer, Cindy, spent significant time with Emily and as a result was the only person Emily would speak to. The therapist, the case worker, and the Judge all relied on the CASA volunteer to tell them what Emily was thinking. The case was recommended for dismissal because mom had "kicked out the boyfriend". However, Emily disclosed to Cindy that mom was sneaking out to secretly meet him. Emily stated that mom would leave in the evening when she knew department of health and human service workers went home. Emily's mom made her swear not to tell anyone. Cindy visited the house at 7 pm the following night and confirmed Emily's report. This resulted in the court case not closing with Emily returning to her mom's custody, and the likelihood of Emily's continued abuse by her mom's boyfriend. Currently the mom has disappeared, but Emily has a strong relationship with her CASA and is placed in home that is willing to adopt.