

## **Focusing Philanthropy 2021 Campaign CASA of Los Angeles Report**

For over 40 years, CASA of Los Angeles has remained the only organization in LA County that provides one-to-one court appointed advocates to children who have open cases in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Given the continued uncertainty of the pandemic last year, we were dedicated to guaranteeing that none of our programs or the vital support we provide were cut or suspended. We are proud of our staff and volunteers who ensured that we not only met, but exceeded our goals for the number of children served. In FY2021, CASA/LA served 1,360 children, an increase of 5% from FY2020. Our initial pivot to an entirely virtual recruitment and training model actually resulted in a surge of volunteer interest. We swore in 324 new volunteers between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021, and we are continuing to support new and current CASAs with online trainings, webinars and remote professional support. In the future we will utilize a hybrid model of in-person and virtual services to continue encouraging increased volunteer interest and participation. The \$750,000 in campaign funds last year supported the 10 CASA/LA personnel who trained, supported and organized CASA volunteers. Of the children served in FY2021, 658 were funded directly by Focusing Philanthropy.

At the start of FY2021, CASAs were able to continue their crucial advocacy work remotely by attending virtual court hearings alongside their young people, securing laptops, headphones, hotspots and other supplies for homeschooling, finding safe living placements, helping their young people cope with fear and isolation, advocating for mental health supports, and remaining a caring, consistent adult their CASA youth could count on. CASAs are continuing to provide these services in a hybrid format as COVID restrictions are lifted, based on protocol as well as each CASA's own comfort level.

The Edmund D. Edelman Children Court in Monterey Park and the McCourtney Juvenile Justice Center in Lancaster, where our two offices are located, have not fully opened to the public. Most court hearings are continuing to operate virtually via WebEx, with only a handful of hearings conducted in person. CASA/LA is currently operating on a hybrid model, though in-person activities remain rare. All CASA/LA employees are working from home but are able to utilize the office if they need or would like to. This year, we hosted our annual Wine+Art fundraising event on November 5, 2021 in person in Leimert Park, which was our first live-event since the onset of Covid-19. We followed all safety guidelines and required vaccination or proof of negative Covid test to attend.

### **Volunteer Services Program**

In addition to the mandatory pre-service training required of all volunteers, CASAs are also required to participate in 12 hours of continuing education per year, including attending trainings held by CASA/LA (in-services) and in the community. Our in-house trainings continued to operate online throughout FY2021, and will remain virtual for the foreseeable future. From July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021, the Volunteer Services team provided the following 41 virtual in-service trainings: AB12 and Housing Options for Transition Age Youth; Advocacy for Dually Involved Youth: Understanding the 241.1 Process; African American Infant and Maternal Mortality Prevention Initiative; Benefits: Funding and Fostering Rates; Child Care: A Protective Factor for Young Children and Their Families; Court Report Writing; CSEC (Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children); DCFS 101; Disability Rights Center; Early Education; Educational Advocacy for Crossover Youth; Fatherhood Engagement; Gangs: Myths, Reality, and the Best Way to Advocate for Youth Involved; General Education; Harm Reduction; Healthcare for Foster Youth; Independent Living Program; Introduction to DCFS' Core Practice Model; Introduction to the Juvenile Justice System; Kidsave; LAEP Early Head Start Program; LGBTQ 101; Mandatory Reporting; Medical Advocacy for Early Childhood;

New Opportunities Organization; Obtaining a Legal Name and Gender Marker Change in Dependency Court; Pregnant and Parenting Youth; Recognizing and Interrupting Bias; Regional Center 101; Regional Center 201; Special Education; Substance Use; Suicide Prevention; Super Special Education; Supporting the Healthy Sexual Development of Youth in Foster Care; Supporting the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Youth; Supporting Transitions for Kids in Out of Home Care; Teen Dating Violence; The Basics of Juvenile Competency; Transyouth: their Health and Safety; and Understanding Mental Health. In addition, the team administered 3 sessions of the Early Childhood module and offered the Transition Age Youth module to staff and volunteers to view in their own time and at their own pace.

## **Challenges & Opportunities**

In FY2021, the pandemic continued to be the greatest challenge for CASA of Los Angeles, both programmatically and financially. Like many other nonprofit organizations, we experienced some financial tumult in light of the pandemic and shutdown. This was only exacerbated by the pandemic's effect on our court partners, the young people and families we serve, and the subsequent increased need for CASA/LA's vital advocacy services. Our fundraising events, which typically bring in a third of CASA/LA's annual revenue, were all held online (prior to November 2021) and our volunteer recruitment, outreach and support programs are continuing to operate online. Though these virtual events and programs proved more successful than expected of online only programming, they required difficult infrastructure changes, unplanned investments, and increased time commitments from the CASA/LA team, and resulted in reduced overall financial support for program activities. In addition to this, some of our traditional foundation partners were unable to give last year or paused funding to our program in order to support more immediate COVID-related relief. We are grateful to the donors and partners who maintained or increased their support in light of the pandemic's impact on the youth we serve, Focusing Philanthropy included, but the changed priorities of those formerly reliable funders meant that we were obliged to continue to seek out new funders and funding sources in order to grow our program, support the stream of incoming CASAs, and, most importantly, continue to serve more young people during this critical time.

Moving forward we are confident that we have the tools in place to overcome the financial obstacles presented by the pandemic. Our August 2021 revenue exceeded budget by over \$300,000 and continues to outpace our expense line by a significant amount. CASA/LA recently onboarded a director of contracts to support the finance and development teams with locating and managing government funding opportunities. In FY2021, we also launched the public phase of Three to 3,000 – an integrated marketing and fundraising campaign designed to help us reach 3,000 children served in Los Angeles County's child welfare and juvenile justice systems within three years (more info below). Three to 3,000 has already been successful to-date in securing multi-year funding, including several 6-figure gifts.

## **Evaluation**

CASA/LA assesses outcomes measurement through our monitoring database Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) Social Solutions. When a case is assigned, both the Advocate Supervisor and the CASA volunteer examine the case and rate the status and level of risk of the child on a baseline scale along the three core dimensions of safety, permanency and wellbeing. Of the cases that closed in FY2021 (370 cases), 68% resulted in a permanent placement for the child or youth. Of CASA youth experiencing risk to safety, 79% experienced improved safety outcomes, 62% of CASA youth with educational goals experienced improved educational outcomes, 68% of all CASA youth experienced improved mental health from assessment to case closure. CASA of Los Angeles' FY2021 Advocacy Outcomes Report is attached, beginning on page 4.

## **Sustainability**

In FY2021, CASA of Los Angeles managed to achieve a fifth consecutive year of financial surpluses, the most recent in the amount of \$1,062,200. Although more than half was due to forgiveness of the organization's PPP loan, CASA/LA still managed a surplus from operating activities of over \$300,000. Cash operating reserves were unchanged at \$332,000, as the organization safeguards its liquid assets. In the past decade, CASA/LA vastly expanded its philanthropic revenue, increasing annual donations from \$544,000 to \$5.4 million in FY2021. CASA/LA has been fortunate to receive funding from many foundations and continues to develop its relationships and secure renewal and new funding. Of funding received last year, 38% was from private foundations and corporations, 17% from special events, 33% individual donors, 12% government contracts, and 0% (an immaterial amount) from other sources.

## **Next Steps**

In 2019, CASA/LA completed a detailed strategic plan, wherein we determined there are 12,000 children in the child welfare system in Los Angeles County who have an immediate need for a CASA. Three to 3,000, designed to help us reach 3,000 children served by FY2024, emerged from this strategic plan to help us exponentially grow and is the first step towards serving all 12,000 children in need within 10 years. We plan to scale operations, expand our reach, partner with more community organizations supporting youth in care, and increase the community's responsiveness to the needs of systems-involved young people. As we work toward these goals, we are also actively organizing new volunteers who better reflect the child welfare and juvenile justice populations, including those who (1) identify as BIPOC, (2) have lived experience in the child welfare and/or juvenile justice systems, 3) identify as LGBTQIA+ and 4) are bilingual English/Spanish speakers. We are also working towards reducing risks and increasing positive outcomes for over 75% of the children we serve.

CASA of Los Angeles is incredibly grateful to Focusing Philanthropy for your support of and deep belief in our work.

# CASA/LA Advocacy Outcomes FY2021

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer provides **intensive advocacy** for children/youth, through a unique one-on-one relationship. CASA volunteers get to know the children/youth and their circumstances, show them that someone cares, advocate for their best interests (including making recommendations to the Court), encourage them to grow to their fullest potential, and become involved in key issues in their life, especially permanent placement, education, and their mental and physical health.

## CASA Volunteer Advocacy Activities:

- Provide one-on-one advocacy that is responsive to a child's individualized needs
- Spend a minimum of 15 hours a month:
  - Advocating for a child and maintaining regular contact with that child
  - Communicating with case parties
  - Writing court reports and attending court hearings as needed
  - Updating advocacy documentation on CASA/LA's online case management system
- CASA volunteers are required to complete a minimum of 12 hours of continuing education training each calendar year in order to stay abreast of new information, services, policies, and legislation.

## CASA Volunteer Advocacy Model



## CASA Volunteer Advocacy Efforts

In FY2021, CASAs **donated thousands of hours** in order to advocate on behalf of children in the dependency system. Their time was dedicated to various activities, including child visits, court hearing attendance, speaking and meeting with case parties including social workers, attorneys, caregivers, and others to ensure each child's unique needs were met. The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting closure of schools, courts, and service agencies, heightened the already critical need for CASA advocacy.

**39,440** hours donated by CASA volunteers in FY21

# 1,360 Children Served with 1-on-1 Advocacy

FY2021 was a record-breaking year for CASA of Los Angeles, despite the pandemic. CASA/LA served more children than ever before. In FY2021, CASA/LA appointed 1,360 children to 1,119 CASAs (5% more children served than in FY2020 and 20% more children served than in FY2018). It was also a year of continued change and growth, including the growth of three new advocacy programs (Early Childhood, Juvenile Justice and Essential History). CASA/LA also completed its 7th year of utilization of its cloud-based data management software, Efforts to Outcomes (ETO). ETO is more useful than ever, enabling CASA/LA to better track our advocacy efforts and measure the impact our dedicated volunteers have on the children we serve.

## 3.5 years

Average time youth spent in dependency system before CASA advocacy

## 41%

CASA volunteers held educational rights

## 64%

Cases involved advocacy for education & learning developmental supports

## 70%

Cases involved advocacy for adult long-term connections

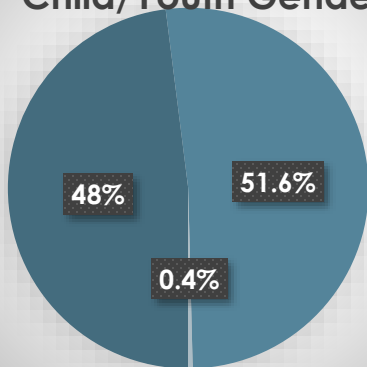
## 59%

Cases involved advocacy for mental health resources & support

## 30%

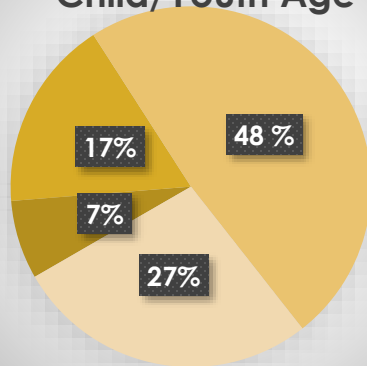
Cases involved working with sibling groups.

Child/Youth Gender



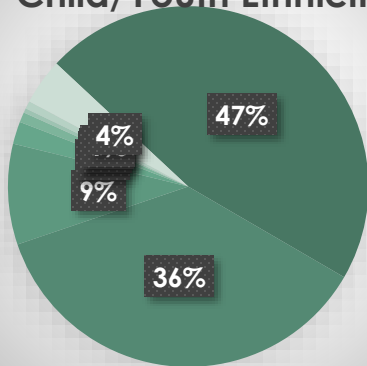
Male	48%
Female	51.6%
Non-binary	0.4%

Child/Youth Age



0-5 years old	7%
6-11 years old	17%
12-17 years old	48%
18+ years old	27%

Child/Youth Ethnicity



Hispanic/ Latino	46.3%
African-American	36.3%
Caucasian	9%
Multi-Racial	2%
Asian	0.9%
Native American	0.4%
Other	0.7%
Unknown	4.1%

## Advocacy Outcomes for Children/Youth

In FY2021, CASA volunteers closed advocacy cases for 370 of the 1,360 children served. In many cases, children experienced positive outcomes including returning to their family home, moving to a less restrictive placement, enrolling in an appropriate educational setting, and receiving vital medical, emotional, educational and other necessary services and resources. **On average, youth were enrolled in advocacy services for 21.6 months.**

### What does advocacy look like around **PERMANENCY**?

CASA volunteers support children/youth in identifying options for a long-term and safe home, whether that be at home with their parents or identifying a legal guardian or adoptive home. CASA volunteers work together with the child/youth's team to ensure that young people have those long-term, loving connections that can help them thrive.

**68%**

of CASA youth in permanent placement at case closure

**67%**

of those in nonpermanent placement at assessment were in permanent placement at case closure

**18%**

of CASA youth in home of parent at case closure

**64%**

of cases identifying permanency risk at baseline reduced risk to permanency at case closure

**31%**

of CASA youth placed with parents and/or family members at case closure

### What does advocacy look like around **SAFETY**?

Young people in care face risks to their safety. They may not have a safe place to live or may have a mental health challenge that puts them in harm's way. A CASA volunteer can work with the team to ensure that a young person has all the support services in place to keep them safe and stable.

**82%** of CASA youth maintained or improved safety outcomes

of those experiencing risk to safety, **79%** experienced improved safety outcomes

## What does advocacy look like around **EDUCATION**?

Education is an important part of any young person's life. When a young person is in care, they may experience disruptions in their education and may not have an adult to oversee their educational planning. CASA volunteers provide assessment, support, and advocacy services that address a young person's specific educational issues and needs – from preschool to college graduation. CASA volunteers frequently hold the educational rights of the youth they serve to ensure that these valuable services are implemented.

**41%**  
CASA volunteers  
held educational rights

**62%**  
of youth with educational goals experienced  
improved educational outcomes

## What does advocacy look like around **MENTAL HEALTH**?

Many young people in care experience the mental health impact of trauma, neglect, and abuse. CASA volunteers assist the child/youth's team by ensuring that young people have access to the mental health services that they need to heal. CASA volunteers are also instrumental in monitoring the use of psychotropic medication among assigned youth and advocating for appropriate and individualized treatment.

**68%**  
of CASA youth experienced improved mental health outcomes at case closure

## What does advocacy look like around **PHYSICAL HEALTH**?

Young people in care comprise some of our most medically at-risk and vulnerable children. In some cases, a young person may not have access to the full medical services or treatments that are needed to live a healthy life. CASA volunteers encourage timely responses for the children they serve, connecting them with vital medical services, and overseeing their preventative, planned, and/or crisis care.

**84%** of CASA youth maintained or improved physical health



To learn more or to support CASA/LA's work please contact Marie Carpenter, Chief Development Officer at [mcarpenter@casala.org](mailto:mcarpenter@casala.org) or Yara Gharib, Grants & Foundations Manager at [ygharib@casala.org](mailto:ygharib@casala.org).

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