

Focusing Philanthropy FY2022 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. In fiscal year 2022, CASA/LA served 1,308 children. Focusing Philanthropy's \$900,000 in campaign funds last year supported the 10 CASA/LA personnel who trained, supported and organized CASA volunteers (1 Training Specialist and 9 Advocate Supervisors). Of the children served in FY2022, 585 were funded directly by Focusing Philanthropy.

In FY2022, CASAs continued to provide vital advocacy services in a hybrid format. The children served by CASA/LA, because of their systems-involvement, had an especially difficult time with virtual learning over the past few years and now must work harder than their peers not in care to catch up. CASAs are continuing to step in to combat the critical mental health and educational obstacles that arose during the pandemic. Last year, this included liaising between caregivers and child's school; connecting youth and caregivers directly to high quality academic, behavioral, and social-emotional services; and helping caregivers define their own roles in the child's learning. Many CASAs advocated for the young people matched to them to remain in their school of origin, even if they moved to a new zip code, which prevented further isolation and educational disruption. Now, after schools have transitioned back to in-person, CASAs are helping children re-engage with the in-person supportive services identified in their IEPs, and are continuing to provide critical individualized support (in a hybrid format) so that youth are not further left behind. CASAs are also continuing to connect the youth they serve to vital, non-punitive prosocial activities that promote healing.

The Edmund D. Edelman Children Court in Monterey Park and the McCourtney Juvenile Justice Center in Lancaster, where our two offices are located, remain 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. Our fundraising events, however, have all returned to an in-person model.

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 FY2022, and will remain virtual for the foreseeable future. From July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022, the Volunteer Services team provided the following 36 virtual in-service trainings: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder; Early Education; Hillsides; Regional Center 101; Court Report Writing; Coalition for Responsible Community Development; Multidisciplinary Assessment Team (MAT); AB12 and Working with Transition Aged Youth; Early Childhood Mental Health; LADL: Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers; Super Special Education; First Star Academy; A Home Within/CASA Therapy Project; Psychological Assessments; General Education; Harm Reduction; Strengths Based Advocacy; LACOE: Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program; Organizational Strategies and Tips for CASAs; Adoption; ICWA: Indian Child Welfare Act; Advocacy for Youth Who Are Expecting; Family Urgent Response Team (FURS); Educational Advocacy and School Discipline; Occupational Therapy; Child Care: A protective factor for young children and their families; CSEC: Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children; Macro Effects of Microaggressions; Essential History Case Writing; Special Education; Concrete Food Resources for Young Children and Families;

Supporting CASA Youth who are Parents; Supporting Grieving Children; Introduction to Juvenile Justice; Introduction to the Youth Justice System; Efforts to Outcomes; and A Place Called Home. 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 FY2022 and FY2023-to-date, CASA/LA continues to tackle pandemic-related obstacles to growth. We have experienced a lag in child referrals received from the court for all the age groups served by CASA/LA. The Children's Law Center (CLC – our partner that refers the majority of children to our program) has hesitated to refer more young people with our waitlist for all children/youth continuing to hover near 150. Some of the barriers to reducing the waitlist include the need for bilingual CASAs, male CASAs, and CASAs who can serve sibling sets who reside in different areas of Los Angeles County. We have also experienced new challenges in volunteer recruitment. At the start of the pandemic, CASA/LA's initial pivot to an entirely remote recruitment model actually resulted in a surge of volunteer interest for some time. However, now that the pandemic restrictions have lifted and Angelenos have returned to work and their busy schedules, we face new challenges in engaging with prospective volunteers. (This issue is actually not unique to CASA/LA – nationwide, the number of unique people volunteering is down 19% compared to pre-pandemic, despite a significant increase in volunteerism mid-pandemic in 2021.) Despite these challenges, we are confident that investing in our marketing and recruitment infrastructure (including recently contracting an external marketing agency) will allow CASA/LA to recruit more dedicated Angelenos than ever before to show up for children and families in LA County. In addition, our newly launched PEI Program (described in our renewal application) was designed to serve incoming referred youth, as well as waitlisted youth, faster and regardless of the current volatility of volunteer recruitment.

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. In FY2022, CASA volunteers closed advocacy cases for 387 of the 1,308 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. FY22 advocacy program outcomes included:

- 69% of CASA youth were in permanent placement at case closure
- 27% of CASA youth were placed with parents and/or family members at case closure
- 66% of youth with educational goals experienced improved educational outcomes at case closure
- 66% of CASA youth experienced improved mental health outcomes at case closure
- 90% of CASA youth maintained or improved physical health at case closure

CASA of Los Angeles' FY2022 Advocacy Outcomes Report is attached, beginning on page 4.

Sustainability

In FY2022, CASA/LA continued to build on its successes of recent years, with annual revenue increasing to \$5,769,102. With this steady increase in revenue, the organization holds an operating reserve account totaling \$1,001,857 as of FY2022 year end. (Through June 2022, revenues were over \$678K favorable to budget; the operating surplus was -\$113K versus a budget of -\$274K. The operating deficit includes the payment of unbudgeted 10% CASA staff bonus which, including additional payroll taxes, was slightly over \$400K. Accordingly, excluding this non-recurring item, the net surplus would have been over \$287K as of June 30, 2022.)

CASA/LA's budget goals for the current and upcoming year remain ambitious but necessary as we launch a new program (Prevention & Early Intervention), grow and improve upon our existing programs, and strive to reach all 12,000 children in need of individualized support within 10 years. In FY2022, CASA/LA onboarded a Director of Contracts to support the finance and development teams with locating and managing new government funding opportunities. Since onboarding Jennifer Gjurashaj to fill this role, CASA/LA has secured 5 new government contracts in addition to renewing our long-term contract with the Administrative Office of the Court and two existing contracts funded by the Victims of Crime Act. In addition, earlier this year, the California CASA Association received an appropriation of \$60,000,000 in AB 178 funding to be paid over three years. Of the total appropriation, \$48,000,000 will provide funding to California's local CASA programs (including CASA of Los Angeles) to expand capacity, recruitment, and training and to stabilize local budgets and staffing. All California state CASA programs are currently awaiting a response regarding exact funding allocations. Our current year and upcoming year budgets were written with this additional funding in mind, though we remain focused on sustainable growth and continue to invest in our fundraising infrastructure in order to continue funding CASA/LA for the next decade.

Next Steps

Organization-wide current year (FY2023) goals include:

- Serving 1500-1700 children with one-to-one advocacy.
- Recruiting 400-600 new CASA volunteers to support children (including a higher percentage of BIPOC volunteers, volunteers who identify as LGBTQIA+, volunteers with lived experience, and bilingual English/Spanish speakers).
- Reducing risks and increasing positive outcomes for over 75% of the children we serve.
- Partnering with new community organizations to increase child referrals to our programs, increase volunteer applications, increase educational opportunities for CASA volunteers, and link CASA youth to more life-affirming services that support their overall well-being.

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. 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 recently secured funding to support these diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.

CASA of Los Angeles remains incredibly grateful to Focusing Philanthropy for its continued support and belief in our work. We look forward to partnering again in the coming year.



CASA STORIES

CASA of Los Angeles

Meet Jeremy Black

CASA/LA Volunteer

At the age of 15 years old, Michael was removed from his grandmother's home. He struggled with school and his group home placements while often hospitalized for the risk of self-harm. When Jeremy entered the picture, he was able to identify that the source of Michael's pain was a lack of support for his LGBTQ+ identity.



Jeremy actively worked to connect Michael with services like a therapist he could identify with, joint counseling with Michael's grandmother to increase her understanding of his identity and strengthen the path towards reunification, online support groups, and resources through the Los Angeles LGBT Center.

By recognizing Michael's desire to belong, Jeremy helped Michael make great strides in his life including a more stable group home life, improved grades, and no hospitalizations in the past few months! During this journey, Jeremy has made sure to provide Michael with the structure and emotional support he needed to thrive and gain confidence in his identity.

Here's what Jeremy had to say about his experience:

"I feel like CASA volunteers can do an amazing service to the system and kids individually. Michael and I have shared similar experiences, growing up gay and not being supported. To feel that you are making a difference in a person's life is so fulfilling and that's great motivation for learning more. I recently finished Oprah's book on trauma and that helped me understand my youth better and how his brain chemistry affects his body's response to triggers. I want to encourage more men to become CASA volunteers. I've grown a lot from this experience. It has been trying times. There's a lot of work needed to build a relationship, trust, and set boundaries...but it's a child's life. I've been so happy to be a part of CASA/LA."



CASA STORIES

CASA of Los Angeles

Meet Ash Bhave

CASA/LA Volunteer

When Ash became a CASA in 2012 she met Marcus who, at the age of 12, already had dealt with a great deal of hardship in his life. Ash worked hard to earn Marcus' trust. They worked on issues related to his past trauma, mental health support, establishing an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) with his teacher and school, stable housing, and supported Marcus with staying connected with his family. When Marcus turned 18, he felt confident and relatively stable so he decided to close his case in dependency court.



Like all of us, the transition to adulthood is a monumental shift in life. It is a time of growth, transformation, and oftentimes mistakes. For young people in foster care, this transition can be exponentially more difficult without the safety net that other children with active support systems have. For Marcus, living independently from the system meant that he did not have all of the resources he needed to succeed just yet. When Marcus fell on hard times, even though their case was closed, Ash continued to be there for him. She encouraged Marcus to enroll back in the system as a non-minor-dependent youth, meaning that he would have supports and resources at his disposal to help him continue his journey to adulthood.

Recently, Marcus turned 21 years old and his case was officially closed. With the additional years of support, Marcus is now in a much better position to pursue all of his hopes and dreams in life...and we know that Ash will continue to be cheering Marcus on throughout all of it.