



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

CASA OF TRAVIS COUNTY, INC.

DEEPENING OUR ADVOCACY

2022 ANNUAL REPORT

TOGETHER WE SHOW UP FOR CHILDREN

IN 2022, with support from this community, CASA of Travis County showed up for nearly 1,100 children experiencing abuse, neglect, and the trauma inherent in the child welfare system.

Thanks to a community that volunteered, that donated, that believed, CASA has accepted automatic appointment to **every new case** of child abuse or neglect from the Court for the last 12 months.

CASA has shown up for infants, for teens, for toddlers, for children of all ages who are just hoping for some stability and security in their lives. We saw in 2022 that stability and security are harder to come by, as the situations facing children and their families have become ever more challenging.

As social supports and the child welfare system itself continue to fray, we have deepened our advocacy to try to meet the more serious needs we are seeing. CASA is a creature of its community, and our advocacy depends on this community speaking up for the children we serve.

Together, we can show up for children, lighting the way through very dark times. Each of us has a part to play in enhancing the future of children in Travis County.

Thank you for standing with CASA to show up for children.



Laura D. Wolf
Chief Executive Officer

How You Can Help

Become a CASA volunteer, help us find new volunteers, or donate to support CASA's transformative advocacy.

+ casatexas.org/volunteer

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Our Model

CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) of Travis County believes every child who's experienced abuse or neglect deserves to have a dedicated advocate speaking up for their best interest in court, at school, and in our community.

To accomplish this, CASA educates and empowers diverse community volunteers who ensure each child's needs remain a priority in an overburdened child welfare system.

When the state steps in to protect a child's safety, a judge appoints a trained volunteer advocate to make independent and informed recommendations and help the judge decide what's best for the child.



17 New CASA volunteers after being sworn in by Judge Aurora Martinez Jones (center).

2022 PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

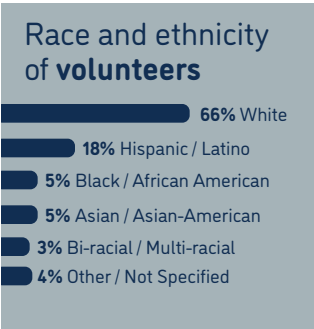
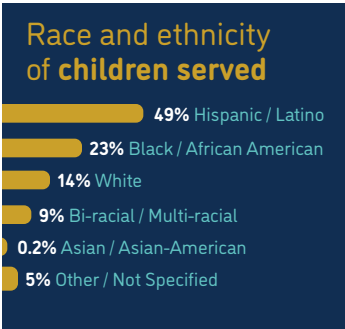
CASA of Travis County served **1090** children in 2022. **95%** of children were served by long-term volunteer advocates. **527** children's cases closed with the help of CASA. **639** volunteers were assigned to cases.



of CASA's **recommendations** were ordered by the **judge** or agreed to by the parties.



of children whose cases closed **were reunited with family** or permanently placed with relatives.



of youth had at least **3 safe healthy adult connections** at case closure.



of school aged children had a diploma or GED or were on track to receive one at case closure.





Strengthening our advocacy

STANDING IN THE GAPS

As many CASA volunteers have observed, CASA is here to “stand in the gaps”. And unfortunately, they are getting wider. So many of those gaps have implications for children’s safety that we have strengthened our advocacy by supplementing the work of traditional CASA volunteers and their supervisors on the professional staff with a dedicated Child Safety Team, ensuring that we can focus on the safety of children and youth while they are in the State’s care.

Not long ago our Child Safety Specialist reconnected with David, a youth whom she’d previously met a couple of years before. David had run away from a placement and had told CASA that he was being physically abused in that placement. At the time he ran away, our Child Safety Team found him, provided him with a meal and urged Child Protective Services (CPS) to find a safe and appropriate placement for him. Despite CASA’s firm advocacy and David’s own outcry of abuse, this youth was returned to the original placement.

Through the entirety of David’s time in the child welfare system, he has had CASA by his side, believing him and advocating for his best interest. He has been through many placements and circumstances, and CASA’s been there to speak

up for what he needs. He’s now a young adult and preparing for adulthood on his own. Not long ago, our Child Safety Specialist visited with him and told him that the placement from which he had run away, where he had experienced abuse, had since been closed.

He knew. He was angry that others responsible for his care couldn’t even say “I’m sorry we didn’t believe you and sent you back there.” He remembered how hard his CASA advocates tried, and he shared that CASA is truly the only help he received for many years.

Now David wants to go to college and study in a field that will enable him to help other youth in foster care. As he said to CASA, “You kept me going when I wanted to give up.”

FINDING MULTIPLE PATHS

Children’s circumstances are complex and can change quickly. Because CASA volunteers work only with one child or sibling group at a time, they are uniquely situated to offer advocacy that is individualized, resourceful and nimble. A CASA volunteer named Sarah advocated for a thirteen-year-old girl whose mother was suffering from mental illness and whose father’s whereabouts were unknown. Sarah’s first order of business was

Bridge to Permanency

CASA'S FIRST GOAL, whenever it is safe, is to help keep children with their families. Many times, however, financial obstacles to safety and permanency can seem overwhelming. Additionally, more and more frequently, we see cases of serious domestic violence, in which mothers are trying to keep their kids safe but struggling to escape abusive partners.

After a particularly frightening episode in which a mother was assaulted and feared that her partner would harm her three young children, she managed to escape to a neighbor's house and hide there with her kids. Unfortunately, she couldn't stay there long-term, and she had no means of financial support to provide housing or necessities for her family.

CASA knew that this mother had taken big risks to keep her children safe and knew that as long as they were safe from abuse, the children were better off with their mother. So, we used our Bridge to Permanency program to help.

“As a Judge, I need somebody boots on the ground, working with each child and their family. CASA's role is to help the Court understand what is in the best interest of each and every child.”

The Honorable Aurora Martinez Jones,
Judge of the 126th District Court

CASA supplied gift cards so that the mother could purchase essential items, clothing, and food for the month, and even more significantly, CASA was able to provide funding to help her find a temporary apartment for herself and her children while they looked for permanent housing.

CASA created the Bridge to Permanency in 2022 to offer direct financial resources to support family members who are caring for children in the child welfare system and to maintain safe and stable placements for them.

With this initiative, CASA provided a 21% increase in direct financial assistance to children and safe relative caregivers in 2022. We know that if children can be safe with their families, they will be able to leave the child welfare system sooner and permanently.



Family Finding

KNOWING THAT SHE couldn't care for her daughter at that time, Jada's mother gave her to neighbors when she was young. Some years later, Jada was removed from those caregivers after allegations of severe abuse. Jada's CASA volunteer, Terri, worked on the case for four years, advocating for Jada through multiple placement changes, trafficking concerns, abuse allegations in multiple residential treatment centers, and periods where she ran away or was missing.

Terri showed up for Jada as no one else did. She kept up with all her educational needs from one school to the next. Terri also worked to make sure that Jada wouldn't age out of the foster care system with nowhere to go.

With help from CASA's dedicated Family Finding Team, Terri connected with Jada's mother who had been out of touch since Jada was a toddler and learned that Jada's mother was now in a much better, stronger situation herself. Terri, and the rest of Jada's support system, helped Jada and her mom build a relationship. Happily, after years of being in foster care, Jada was finally reunified with her biological mother, now able to provide a safe home for her daughter. ♦

60% increase in **relatives engaged with children** in the foster care system after CASA's family finding efforts in 2022.





to get to know the youth, Maria, and to understand her needs. One thing CASA volunteers always do is to ask children who are the important people in their lives. For Maria, number one on her list was a teacher at her previous school.

Within weeks, Sarah had reached out to Maria's previous school and discovered that the same teacher asked to be considered as a placement. At the court hearing, the judge ordered a home study and visits between Maria and her teacher to reestablish their bond. Knowing that Maria needed all the support she could get, Sarah didn't rest, but also found multiple relatives in another state who wanted to build a relationship with Maria and be considered back-up placements. Sarah will continue exploring these paths to ensure that Maria's ultimate destination is one where she can thrive.

CLEARING UP ROADBLOCKS

CASA's individualized advocacy for children's best interest enables us to help clear roadblocks for kids, especially in helping them to stay with family members who are safe.

Whenever possible, we try to help families stay together. After his father brought him from Mexico to the US against his mother's wishes, Ignacio found himself, at four years old, removed from his father's home due to abuse and neglect.

Julio, Ignacio's CASA volunteer, was one of the only people on the case who spoke Spanish and could connect with Ignacio and his relatives in their native language.

“
Sometimes the CASA volunteer job is not easy. Sometimes it can be heartbreaking. But it also can be life-changing. Watching the kids become what they are meant to be is a very powerful experience.
”

Jack Murray, CASA volunteer for 33 children in 25 years of service

Julio learned that Ignacio's mother was still in Mexico and unable at the time to visit her son. She told Julio that Ignacio's father had a long history of abuse against her and their children.

Julio didn't give up hope of reunifying Ignacio with his mother, though the pandemic and assorted bureaucratic delays made for an uphill climb toward that outcome. In the meantime, Julio advocated relentlessly for Ignacio's needs and built a rapport with him that made Ignacio feel safe.

Thanks in part to the support CASA provided for the family, Ignacio's mother found a way to move to Central Texas with one of her other children. Julio recommended to the Court that Ignacio be returned to her care. When Ignacio was reunited with his mother and the case closed, Julio and CASA were overjoyed to see them together, safe and happy. ♦



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Contact us

Have any questions? Reach out through our website, by email, phone, or mail. Find details at casatravis.org/contact



Give

Support nearly 1,100 children each year as they receive the advocacy they deserve at casatravis.org/donate



Refer

Send information about CASA to friends who might be good volunteers at casatravis.org/refer



Volunteer

Find out what means to be a CASA volunteer and start your application at casatravis.org/volunteer

2022 FISCAL REPORT

\$7,182,712 TOTAL REVENUE



TOTAL EXPENSES **\$6,414,326**



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“ I have wanted to be an advocate for many years and I know right now I do not have the capacity to do that, so I give to support the people who do. ”

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