



Virginia Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Programs

Introduction

CASA history

Even in the mid 1970's there was a recognition that the child welfare system, as designed, could not provide the courts with all the important insights to rule on the comprehensive needs of children; thus CASA was born. Currently, there are 939 programs operating across 49 states encompassing almost 98,000 volunteers.

In Virginia

27 CASA programs serve children across the Commonwealth. By design, these programs operate independently but are regulated by the Department of Criminal Justice Services. Each CASA program meets National CASA standards.



Programs in Virginia

Multi-Jurisdictional Programs

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ 28th Judicial District CASA | ■ Colonial CASA |
| ■ 29th Judicial District CASA | ■ FOCUS on Youth CASA |
| ■ Alexandria/Arlington CASA | ■ Franklin County/Pittsylvania County CASA |
| ■ CASA Child Intervention Services | ■ Hanover CASA |
| ■ Blue Ridge CASA for Children | ■ LPOY CASA |
| ■ CASA of the New River Valley | ■ Northern Neck CASA |
| ■ Central Virginia CASA | ■ Piedmont CASA |
| ■ Chesterfield CASA | ■ Rappahannock CASA |
| ■ Children's Trust CASA | ■ Voices for Kids CASA |

Single Jurisdiction Programs

- Chesapeake CASA
- Fairfax CASA
- Goochland CASA
- Henrico CASA
- Newport News CASA
- Norfolk CASA
- Portsmouth CASA
- Richmond CASA
- Virginia Beach CASA



CASAs are...

- Members of the community (ages 21+), who are thoroughly screened and vetted.
- They complete 30+ hours of training utilizing specialized curriculum on topics relevant to child welfare and the court process. Initial training includes court observations and presentations on community resources. On-going training is required of all established volunteers.
- They come from diverse backgrounds, with a range of life experiences, but all share a desire to better the life of a child.
- They remain on their cases until a final disposition is made.
- They are supported by professional program staff.



What do CASAs do:

Pursuant to Virginia Code § 9.1-153, CASAs:

1. Investigate
2. Report to the Court
3. Monitor
4. Assist GAL
5. Mandated reporter

CASAs also...

- Become the constant in the child's case. In Virginia, some cases have remained open before the Court **as long as 10 years**, during which time the children have experienced dozens of placements, multiple schools, changes in social workers, new therapists, and even judges. Their CASA becomes the **steward of their story**. They research their histories, investigate their current situations (family, academic, physical health, mental health, safety, and permanency) and recommend options for optimal futures. As independent, consistent, objective fact finders, they ensure that their child's story is told **accurately and thoroughly**.
- Provide a valuable service to the court. CASA volunteers typically serve one child (or one sibling group) at a time. CASA volunteers offer a unique and **independent perspective** to cases, offering a voice for children impacted by abuse and neglect.



CASAs also...(continued)

- Ensure that their children **receive immediate and dedicated attention**, more **specialized services**, and achieve **better outcomes** than their peers in the child welfare system without a CASA. CASAs take part in their children's **IEP and disciplinary meetings** within the schools, ensuring they have a dedicated voice at the table.
- Provide a connection to the community for older youth (18-21)





Impact on the Commonwealth FY23

- Children Served: **3,235**
- Active Volunteers on Cases: **1,324**
- Hours donated by CASA volunteers serving Children: **124,355**
- Value of Hours: **\$3,830,134.00**
- Percentage of Recommendations accepted by the Court: **85%**
- Percent of closed cases with one volunteer appointed for the life of the case: **81%**

Abuse and Neglect in Virginia in FY23

- 38,199 children involved in Child Protective Services Family Assessments
- 5,169 abused and neglected children in founded Child Protective Services Investigations
- 54 children died as a result of abuse or neglect as of December 2022
- At the close of FY23, 5,079 children were in foster care, of which:
 - 31% were ages 0 thru 6
 - 21.5% were ages 7 thru 12
 - 31.5% were ages 13 thru 17
 - 16% were 18 and over



Children in Foster Care on October 1st*

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Children in Foster Care on October 1st	5,378	5,288	5,076	5,009

Nationally, a child with a CASA Volunteer is more likely to find a safe, permanent home and **spends 7.5 months less time** in foster care than children without.

In Virginia, the cost of one year of foster care ranges from \$5,952 to \$8,820 (base payment only).
One year of CASA Advocacy costs, on average, \$2,110

3,235 children in Virginia were served by a CASA volunteer in FY23.
($\$5,952/12 = \496 $\$496 \times 7.5 = \$3,720$ **$\$3,720 \times 3,235 = \$12,034,200$**)

*Virginia Department of Social Services Reports and Studies

Young People Aging Out of Foster Care

CASA programs are dedicated to improving outcomes for older youth through continuous, youth centered advocacy until age 21. CASA volunteers begin to shift advocacy efforts for those older youth who may age out of the system to create successful independence if other permanency efforts are not achieved. Without support, research that shows that, when compared with their peers, young people aging out of care are, on average:

- Less likely to have a high school diploma
- Less likely to be pursuing higher education
- More likely to experience unemployment
- Less likely to be earning a living wage
- More likely to experience homelessness
- More likely to have had a child without being married
- More likely to become involved with the criminal justice system

(Barth, 1990; Cook, 1991; Courtney & Barth, 1996; Courtney & Piliavin, 1995, 1998; McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt & Piliavin, 1996)



CASA is cost effective.

- In FY22 the Virginia General Assembly appropriated \$1,615,000 to CASA.
- Virginia CASA programs secured over \$6,600,000 in additional funding in FY22.
- Value of CASA advocacy hours to the Commonwealth in FY23: \$3,581,239.



Why CASA?

CASA is an effective, fiscally-sound program that promotes better outcomes for our most vulnerable children and families.

The CASA model promotes collaboration and coordination with community partners, such as state agencies, local governments, and other service providers.

By building relationships rooted in respect and partnership, CASA programs keep the focus on the child.

CASA programs strive to ensure the volunteer pool is reflective of the communities they serve.

The Virginia CASA network is strong, dedicated and committed to the youth of the Commonwealth. Through education initiatives that are timely and relevant, CASAs are prepared, knowledgeable and useful to the Court.

Concerns for FY25

- Individual donations are trending downward.
- Grant funding is reduced with more organizations seeking assistance.
- Pending VOCA reductions will significantly impact programs.
 - One advocate supervisor can supervise up to 30 volunteers.
 - 30 volunteers average 75 children.
- Department of Family Services vacancy rates as high as 40%
 - New, inexperienced workers
 - Less eyes on the children/families
- Systems are overwhelmed and backed up—less services available for those in critical need
- Without CASA, children and families will receive less advocacy, less targeted services, fewer check-ins and observations. Risks go up and positive outcomes will decrease.
- **We are requesting legislative support to ensure CASA programs can continue to serve Virginia's most vulnerable children, taking into consideration the anticipated loss of VOCA funding.**

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