



**2018**



**IMPACT**



**REPORT**



Dear Friends:

2019 will mark a significant milestone for CASA Lake County – our 25th anniversary. Over the past 25 years, our CASAs have been passionate, unwavering champions for the children of our county. At joyful adoptions, our CASAs were there. At the unlikelyst of graduations, our CASAs were there. At tearful reunifications with rehabilitated parents, our CASAs were there – and so much of their success is thanks to you – our board members, volunteers, donors, and supporters. Community is central to what a CASA program can accomplish. Our incredible staff draw from the seemingly bottomless giving spirit of our citizens to improve outcomes for children involved in the foster care system due to abuse or neglect. Over the course of our history, we have strengthened longtime partnerships and cultivated new relationships with the belief that through cooperation between government, agencies, and individuals we can do more together. Starting from a humble beginning with a small Board of 4 volunteers, we have grown into a team of 22 Board Members overseeing a staff of 16, which supports 270 volunteers serving over 500 children each year. In 2018 that included nearly every single youth-in-care in Lake County, Illinois. Throughout the next year, we will celebrate our past while continuing to look to the future. For the last 25 years, our goal has been to protect every child's right to grow up in a safe and nurturing home. With your help, we will continue to do that.

We are proud of the impact we have collectively made in our first 25 years. Imagine what we can do together over the next 25!



*Brent Arnold*

Brent Arnold  
Board President



*Terri Zenner Greenberg*

Terri Zenner Greenberg  
Executive Director

## Mission Statement

CASA Lake County is a nonprofit agency that advocates for the best interests of abused and neglected children within the juvenile court system. Based on the belief that every child is entitled to a safe and permanent home, thoroughly trained CASA volunteers work in collaboration with key agencies, legal counsel and community resources to serve as the child's advocate and represent the child's best interest in juvenile court.

## The Power of One

According to Harvard's Center on the Developing Child "The single most common factor for children and teens who develop the capacity to overcome serious hardship is having at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult." A CASA volunteer is often the most consistent, stable presence in the lives of children in foster care, and that can make all the difference.

## How CASA Works

The experience of a child entering protective care is hard to imagine for those who have never experienced it. Pulled from the only life they have known, they are dropped into an unfamiliar home with unfamiliar faces and unfamiliar rules. Case workers can change frequently, children can be shuffled from one home to the next, and they often have trouble understanding who can be trusted. Add to all of this the challenges caused by the traumatic circumstances that brought the children into care, and it is easy to see how harrowing the experience can become.

### A CASA Volunteer can mean hope.

CASA, Court Appointed Special Advocates, is a volunteer-based program dedicated to improving the lives of abused and neglected children in Lake County foster care. CASA

volunteers represent consistency and stability through the chaos and confusion of the foster care system. After thorough training by professional staff, they are assigned to children by the courts and develop long-term relationships with the family they serve. This familiarity with a child's case enables them to make tailored recommendations to support the child's needs with the goal of finding a safe, permanent home as expeditiously as possible.

Every child, family, and circumstance is different, and CASAs are uniquely positioned to provide advocacy based on personal relationships and knowledge of the parties involved in each case. It is for this reason that we believe that every child in protective care deserves an advocate by their side.



## CASA Program Facts

Children served:

**513**

Children with cases closed:

**131**

Children with cases ending in permanent homes:

**95%**

Number of closed cases that re-opened:

**0**



## Child Age Stats %

**36%** 0-4 Years

**29%** 5-9 Years

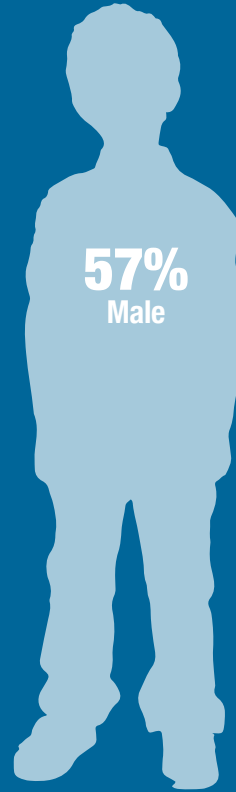
**16%** 10-13 Years

**12%** 14-17 Years

**7%** 18+ Years

**43%**  
Female

**57%**  
Male



## Child Race Stats %

**47%** African American

**23%** White/Caucasian

**21%** Hispanic/Latino

**9%** Other/Multi-Racial

**5%** Asian/Pacific Islander



**CASA**

Court Appointed Special Advocates  
FOR CHILDREN

LAKE COUNTY

## Case Closure Reasons

Adoption

**49%**

Safe, Permanent  
Homes Reunification

**33%**

Guardianship

**11%**

Emancipated

**5%**

Other

**2%**

**NUMBER OF CLOSED  
CASES RE-OPENED**

**0**

## Revenue:

**\$1,293,701**

Events **\$437,613**

Contributions **\$670,907**

Government **\$125,661**

Other **\$59,520**

## Expenses:

**\$978,801**

Program: **\$820,421**

Management: **\$52,937**

Fundraising: **\$108,732**

## Net Assets:

**\$1,328,023**

## Placement Type



Group Home  
**4.9%**

Remain  
w/Parent  
**5.6%**

Independent  
Living Program  
**1.3%**

Traditional  
Foster Home  
**46%**

Relative  
Foster home  
**34%**

Runaway/Where-  
abouts unknown  
**1.2%**

Specialized  
Foster Home  
**5%**

Other  
**0.6%**

## Program Activities

### Surge in New Cases

A very sad trend is developing in Lake County. New children are entering protective care in staggering numbers. During the 2018 fiscal year, 144 new children became eligible for assignment to a CASA volunteer—an increase of 32% from the 109 children in 2017. This surge in new cases represents the highest number seen since 2013. The current trend does not appear to be slowing down, and more than ever the Lake County CASA program needs new volunteers and financial support from our community to ensure that those volunteers are properly trained and receive the mentorship and supervision necessary to provide the highest quality of advocacy to our CASA children.

### Promise of a Healthier Future

In December of 2017 CASA Lake County received a funding commitment from the Healthcare Foundation of Northern Lake County to build a new program component to improve the health and wellness advocacy provided to our CASA children. Deemed Healthy Promises, the new program includes enhancements to training for new CASAs, expanded health advocacy education for current CASAs, and improvements to health outcome tracking for children.

### Mimi's Story

Mimi first encountered the foster care system at just five days old. Born to a mother with schizophrenia, Mimi lived with four different foster families before the age of five. It was at this age that Mimi first met Suzanne, her CASA. Mimi could tell that Suzanne was different than the rotating cast of three guardians ad litem and eight social workers that she encountered. Through it all, Suzanne was a pillar of consistency, stability, and hope.

As Mimi entered her senior year of high school, she began the process of extracting herself from the toxic situation with her guardians. The challenges that she faced would be daunting to any 17 year old, let alone one in Mimi's position. Luckily she wasn't alone. Suzanne worked with Mimi during her transition to independence by assisting her, to find an apartment, navigate the maze of college financial assistance, and even taught her how to change a car tire! Now Mimi is a student at U of I in Urbana-Champaign, and she still has weekly calls with Suzanne for advice, to vent her frustrations, or just for a dose of encouragement.

CASA has also developed a partnership with the Lake County Health Department to offer workshops to CASAs detailing tools and services available to children in protective care. There are substantial wellness resources available to foster families at free or discounted rates, but the system can be complicated, confusing, and difficult to navigate. Well-informed CASAs can help connect caregivers to relevant programs and providers, ensuring better care for a population of children that faces disproportionately higher rates of health challenges.

### Continuing Education

When children live in a chaotic home, school can often be a sanctuary. Sadly, for children who have already fallen behind their peers educationally, it can simply add to the stress, anxiety, and self-esteem issues they were already facing.

In partnership with the Illinois Department of Education, CASA began a series of workshops for educational advocacy on behalf of our CASA kids. Led by an expert in educational programs, the workshop content focused on awareness of education programs and protocol. Ranging from special education resources to details on educational surrogacy, the curriculum was designed to equip CASAs with the information to improve outcomes for the children they serve.



Mimi and CASA Suzanne

### Steven's Story

When CASA Volunteers Jean Jacques and Elsa first entered Steven's life they met an outgoing, playful, funny, but insecure child. Steven was failing the 4th grade and was at-risk of repeating the grade or being moved into a special education class. Struggles with social cues as well as problems processing information led Steven's CASAs to recognize that he possessed some developmental challenges.

Elsa and Jean-Jacques nurtured a powerful partnership with Steven's foster mother, Tonya. With a caring spirit, Tonya has fostered over 60 children and adopted 6 over a 30-year period. Recognizing the importance of bonding and parenting time between Steven and Tonya, the CASAs jumped in to support in other ways. On one occasion, Tonya requested assistance providing Christmas gifts for all of her foster children, the CASAs sourced everything on the family wish list. Assisting Tonya, not only to support Steven but the entire family, allowed her time to be spent where it was needed most.

Elsa and Jean-Jacques also encouraged and nurtured his love for music by securing a saxophone for Steven, having him practice during visits, talking about his favorite pieces of music, and going to a concert with him to watch his band director perform. It was heartwarming to see him flourish with their encouragement. Tonya adopted Steven in July. As a freshman in high school, Steven is now an honor student, becoming an excellent musician, and working on an Eagle Scout project to help other CASA children.



Steven, Tonya, and CASA Elsa

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## **The Unlucky Children**

The lucky children always have fun in the sun  
The unlucky children have no parents, none  
The lucky children get presents on their birthday  
The unlucky children get beat and have no say  
The lucky children live at least until adulthood  
The unlucky children die sooner than they should  
The lucky children grow up to complete great feats  
Unlucky children grow up to live on the streets

### **A CASA child A. J. age 17**

Every child served by our volunteers has been unlucky, but a CASA can give a child a voice in court and help begin to turn that luck around.