

# 2016 Annual Report



**CASA**

Court Appointed Special Advocates  
**FOR CHILDREN**

**LAKE COUNTY**





# About CASA

When things like substance abuse, mental illness, joblessness, and poverty strike families, children become vulnerable. Too often the stress of those events contributes to child neglect, and in more dire situations, abuse. Such circumstances require court intervention, which in turn can send children into foster care. That's where CASA Lake County comes in.

CASA is a unique, volunteer-based child advocacy organization dedicated to improving the lives of abused and neglected children in Lake County foster care. CASA Lake County works exclusively on their behalf, our primary mission to ensure that they do not spend needless time in foster care, are returned to rehabilitated and loving parents, freed for adoption, or prepared to leave foster care and live successfully on their own. CASA provides hope, trust and stability for our clients—all so important in these difficult economic times.

More specifically, we help these vulnerable children by moving them out of foster care and into safe, permanent homes, and ensuring that they receive the medical, social and educational services they need in order to flourish. For those who are aging out of the foster care system, we provide the ongoing support needed to integrate them into a stable and viable, adult life. Studies have shown that children in the foster care system who have a CASA advocate spend fewer years in care and are less likely to re-enter the system once they leave it. ***This is a cost savings in itself.***



## A Message from Executive Director, *Terri Greenberg*

Dear Friends:

This year has been a good one, as CASA celebrates its 22nd year of advocating on behalf of children and youth caught in the maze of foster care. CASA gives a face to each child in court, and simultaneously humanizes the system for those struggling within it. Our diverse team of citizen volunteers ensures that children who have been removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect receive the critical services they need, and do not languish for years in care, bouncing from home to home. Each year, approximately 300 CASA volunteers come together for the unique purpose of speaking up for abused and neglected children in Lake County foster care. In 2016 alone, these civic minded, compassionate individuals served over 1000 children and gave over 33,000 hours of service. Our volunteers truly are the heart of CASA. Thank you. I would also like to extend our sincerest thanks to our amazing group of donors: Your generous support of CASA's work each year allows us to continue serving our County's most vulnerable children, without compromising their voices or CASA's quality of service. I am grateful to all of you – our volunteers and our donors – who give so much each year to move CASA's work forward while remaining true to our mission. Without your dedication to this effort, none of it would be possible.

Sincerely,



terri zenner greenberg



Terri Zenner Greenberg  
Executive Director



Bob Silverstein  
Board President

# Outcomes of Children Served by CASA in 2016

**32%**

Reunited with their families

**24%**

Permanently adopted

**16%**

Placed with a relative

**15%**

Aged out

**13%** Other

**509**

children were served by...

**275** CASA Volunteers  
(**44** of which were new)

**131**

New children were assigned to  
CASA

**106**

Children's cases closed with the  
help of a CASA volunteer

# How CASA Works

The CASA program is unique in that it offers a citizen-volunteer solution to the plight of abused and neglected children in Lake County foster care. No other organization performs exactly the same service in the same way: we provide individualized attention to each child and are involved in every aspect of Juvenile Court proceedings with children in foster care. CASA's team of ten program staff who are educators, social workers and attorneys recruit, train and supervise volunteer advocates—on whom we rely—to build the bridges between children and the services and support they require. Our objective advocates take the time to assess a child's needs and to work with the courts, agencies and caregivers to meet them. Ultimately, CASA Lake County promotes better judicial decision-making and enhances the safety, wellbeing, and positive outcomes for children in care. Our advocates provide judges with detailed, fact-based court reports that include a holistic picture of the needs and life-circumstances of these children to ensure that each family's situation is truly evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Each year in Lake County, the juvenile protection system seems to become more strained, as social services are slashed, DCFS staff eliminated and with only 2 staff attorney's to represent more than 500 children. CASA involvement offsets this predicament by providing critical pieces of updated information during time-sensitive hearings that often irreversibly chart the course of a child's path toward permanency. CASA provides one-on-one attention for foster children and youth in care, protecting them from further abuse and neglect, and striving for their timely discharge into safe, permanent homes where they can thrive.

- In 2016, CASA volunteers gave over 33,000 hours of service helping more than 500 children during the year.
- There were 823 petitions filed by CASA

## **Volunteer Training**

CASA Lake County provided six 40-hour core training sessions developed in compliance with the National CASA organization. CASA provided XX hours of additional in-service training offering staff, volunteers, and interns more comprehensive knowledge on complex issues and services, such as:

- Educational Advocacy / School Stability
- Medical Advocacy
- Navigating the Special Education Programs
- Secondary Trauma for Volunteers
- Transition Planning: Helping Youth in Care
- Strengths Based Advocacy CASA



# The Children We Serve

**In 2016....**

**509** children were served

**Male 55 %**

**Female 45%**

**African American= 49%**

**Caucasian= 28%**

**Hispanic/Latino=13%**

**Multi-Racial= 5%**

**Other= 5%**

**0-5 years= 45%**

**6-11 years= 30%**

**12-17 years=16%**

**18+ years= 9%**



# Program Highlights

**CASA Lake County's technology** continues to grow and evolve as the organization itself moves forward. The new Optima database allows volunteers and staff to input all of their activities into one interactive format, greatly reducing the time and paperwork needed to properly monitor cases. The system also creates very accurate analytics to measure CASA's efficacy. More than ...hours were devoted to training staff and volunteers in Optima.

**CASA Lake County expanded partnerships with public and private stakeholders to advocate for systemic improvements in the protective care system.** CASA staff has participated over the last year in helping implement a new Dually Involved Youth pilot program to provide close monitoring and wraparound services for DCFS youth in care who become involved in the juvenile justice system. The program is designed to help maintain stable placements and to stop recidivism in this youth population. CASA staff met with numerous state legislators to advocate for support of the CASA program and staff participate in the Lake County Alliance Advocacy committee, working to improve public awareness of both issues specific to CASA's mission and the betterment of Lake County's non-profit community.

**Fostering Futures Program Expansion** Older youth in care rarely have opportunities for reunification, adoption or other permanent placement and frequently face discharge from foster care, and thus young adulthood, alone. It is incredibly challenging for anyone 18-21 to live independently, let alone an at-risk youth with no family support. As a result, when these youth sign themselves out of foster care at 18, or "age out" at 21, they are often ill equipped to succeed. CASA Lake County is strongly committed to helping prepare youth to meet the challenges of young adulthood. Advocate Manager Debby Parry and CASA volunteer Debby Perry created a teen training program to help our volunteers who work with adolescents to prepare them for independent living by identifying healthy social supports and encouraging them to develop those relationships. They provide role-modeling, training to identify life goals and a viable plan with clearly outlined steps for success. We teach youth how to organize their appointments and manage their time, to prepare résumés, financial aid forms, college, GED, and job training program applications. Most children receive this type of support from their parents; for foster youth, however, it is often CASA that gives them the guidance, training and encouragement necessary to promote their own follow-through and success.



# CASA Makes A Difference—Stories of Our Children



## When no one else was there, a CASA was

From the beginning of her involvement in the system, Danielle has had a CASA advocate by her side. This CASA has been a consistent presence in her life, when everyone else in her young life has left her. The CASA has worked at schools with teachers to monitor progress and behavior concerns. She has been present for each of Danielle's moves from foster placements. She has attended doctor's appointments. When Danielle was psychiatrically hospitalized for six weeks, her CASA visited her every day. Danielle said her CASA was the only person who ever visited her in the hospital, even including her caseworker and her foster family. When she had trouble opening up in therapy at the hospital she asked her CASA to join her for therapy sessions, she was able to feel safe enough to move forward with her treatment.

## A Team of CASAs Problem Solve

A CASA played a tremendous role in helping one family problem solve. Lack of transportation was a big issue, especially regarding school. The CASA obtained donated bicycles for them. He then walked the children to the library and practiced the route to school, so that the children could confidently get themselves to school on time. On another occasion, the CASA arrived at the home, and, all of the smoke detectors were disabled. He helped the mother get connected to the fire department who installed new smoke detectors. Later, the CASA, together with a partner, worked hard to provide advocacy in the schools. The children's attendance had been inconsistent, so there were gaps in learning. The CASA team spent countless hours to help the children achieve academic success: from advocating for the children in school meetings, helping the mother take on the advocacy role, and finding a donated computer so that one child could practice math at home through the school's online program, to simply checking grades and keeping the children accountable for handing in homework and going to class.



## CASAs Help the Entire Family

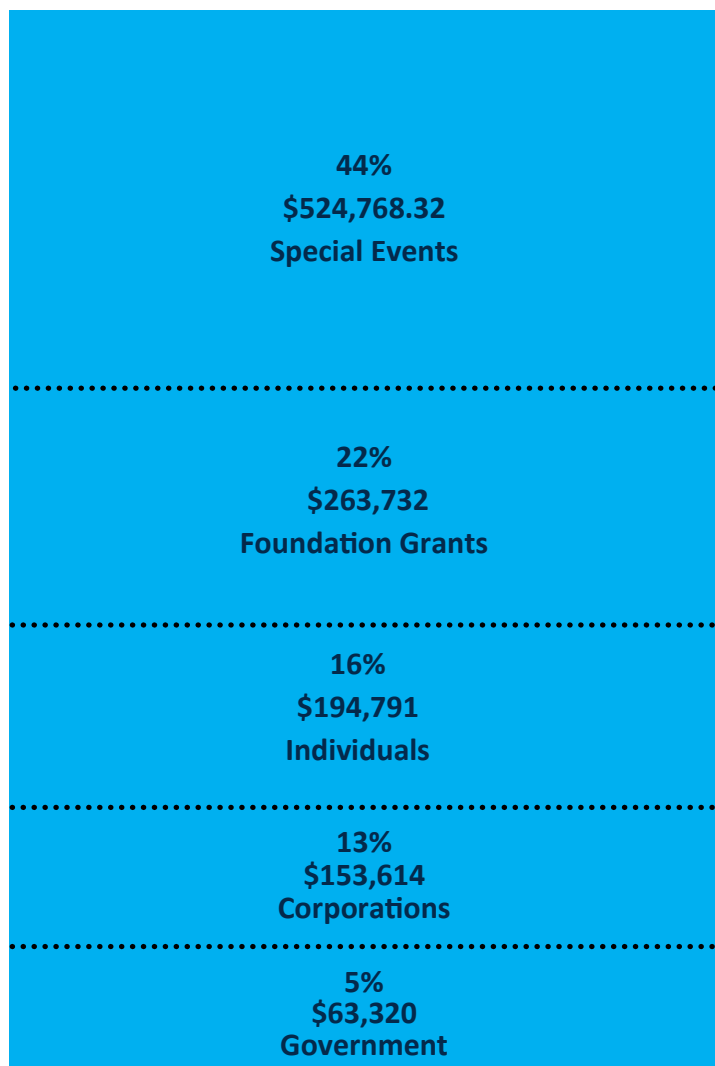
In 2009 a case opened involving four children, all under the age of 10, who came into the system after their father was found dead in their apartment from a drug overdose. The living conditions the children were found in were not sanitary, and the apartment did not have working heat; the oven was being used as the primary heat source. At the time, the natural mother was also using cocaine, heroin, and methadone regularly. One CASA was assigned to this case. Once on the case, the CASA immediately got to know all four children. At times, she visited them weekly. She read to them, provided help with homework, and advocated for homework help/tutoring when the home was too hectic for the children to do schoolwork. She visited school and talked with all of the teachers and social worker, and even attended parent teacher conferences. She also advocated for an IEP for one of the children and met regularly with his IEP team. Aside from everything she did for the children, she was also a huge source of support for the children's mother.



# Statement of Activities

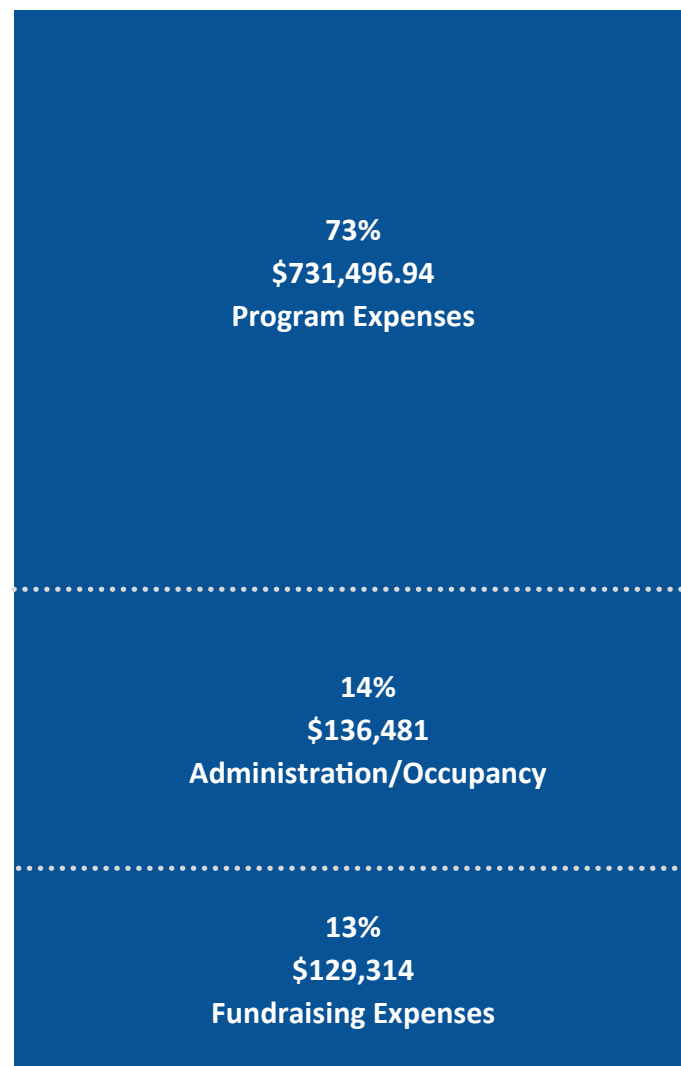
## Revenue

Total: 1,200,224.32



## Expenses

Total: \$997,291.94



# Major Donors

## **\$50,000 +**

Takeda Pharmaceuticals USA, Inc.  
Russell V. Ray and Mary Rose Ray  
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## **\$30,000+**

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Healthcare Foundation of Highland Park  
Jacopo Leonardi

## **\$20,000-\$29,999**

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Heidi Sparacino  
Hyde Perce  
Joel and Stacey Friedland  
John Mennie  
John and Valerie Marion  
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