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JOINT COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

MEMORANDUM

To: Members
Joint Committee on Finance

From: Senator Howard Marklein
Representative Mark Born

Date: April 27, 2021

Re: CASA Report to JFC

Attached is the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) 2020 annual report to JFC, pursuant to 2017 Wisconsin Act 255.

This report is being provided for your information only. No action by the Committee is required. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Attachments

HM:MB:jm



APR 27 2021

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Wisconsin CASA Association

Joint Finance Committee Testimony – April 21, 2021

Good morning! I am Sue Schwartz, State Director for Wisconsin CASA Association or CASA.

Thank you for giving me your TIME this morning!

Time....imagine yourself as an 8 year old child,

Time spent laughing and playing...

Now imagine the last 6 years living away from your family,

And moved 6 times by 4 caseworkers.

Time...in comes the time of a dedicated CASA volunteer.

For 6 years, she is giving her time for one hour weekly visits.

Due to a recent move, the CASA is driving 176 miles round trip to visit him.

This 8 year old boy is real. His CASA's dedicated time is real.

In his words, she is "my best friend who is always there."

CASA impact! THIS is CASA impact!

CASA's are citizen volunteers who provide best interest advocacy for abused children.

Kids with a CASA generally spend less time in the system, are less likely to return to out of home care, perform better academically and enjoy resilience with the benefit of one consistent, caring adult.

AND the cost savings to the counties!

During the pandemic, 545 dedicated advocates served 935 children, only a 6.5% decrease over 2019.

Currently, CASA has 9 local programs serving 12 counties.

We are scheduled to start serving children in Sheboygan, St. Croix and Marathon counties this year!

This means we have more than 6,000 kids and 57 counties not served.

Our need is additional resources to build capacity in existing local programs and to start new programs.

Judge Smith says it best: "Advocates are the one constant in a child's life. Being removed from one's home is traumatizing for a child and CASA fills the void when a friendly face is needed. My job as the judge would be so much more gratifying if I had access to a CASA report as it offers another view into the child's life."

Thank you for your TIME and your continued support of the CASA mission.

April 26, 2021



Dear Wisconsin Legislators,

Thank you! You are making a difference in the lives of thousands of Wisconsin children! Thank you for your continued support of Wisconsin Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Association. Our trained advocates work hand in hand with the legal and child welfare system to ensure children under a CHIPS (child in need of protection and/or services) order are safe while their needs and wishes are represented during the legal process.

A growing statewide reach

In 2020, nine local CASA programs served 935 children in twelve Wisconsin counties. While that's a 30% increase since 2017, there are more than 6,000 Wisconsin children waiting for quality advocacy. We are working diligently to serve the waiting children.

Thanks to the increased state funding from Assembly Bill 786, in 2020, we established our ninth local CASA program serving children in Barron County.

Your increased funding set us on course in 2021 to establish programs in Sheboygan, St. Croix and Marathon Counties as well as children in Lac Courte Oreilles projecting to greatly increase the current number of children served. While this track is promising, 60 of Wisconsin's 72 counties do not have a CASA program.

Fiscal responsibility

Wisconsin CASA developed a cost-effective regional model, which serves more children in an efficient and fiscally responsible way. The regional model consists of one 501c3 CASA program serving children in multiple counties. This creates less overhead for operations while providing quality advocacy to more children for less money.

Wisconsin CASA expensed approximately 1/3 of its \$250,000 allocation for direct support to the growth of local CASA programs. Additional funding was used for training, state office overhead, statewide awareness campaigns and travel.

The state organization overhead remains low, with a small office and a three person staff. In order to keep building capacity to support our growth and serve the state CASA network, we need your continued support and financial assistance.

Cost savings

CASA advocacy costs approximately \$1,400 per child per year. A child served by a CASA is in out-of-home placement approximately one month less per year versus a child without a CASA. The decreased time in out-of-home placement saves each county approximately one month of out-of-home placement cost per year, or an average of \$3,405 - \$1,400 = **\$2005** per child.

\$2005 saved per child X 935 children served = \$1,874,675 total savings.

Impact

Not only is there cost savings to the county, but also more importantly is the impact on the children served by a CASA advocate. CASA advocacy benefits abused and neglected children:

- Added layer of safety
 - In addition to the social workers' once a month visits, CASA's visit their assigned child once a week providing a vital layer of safety for at risk children.
- Less likely to re-enter out-of-home placement
 - According to National CASA, a child with a CASA is less likely to re-enter foster care decreasing incidents of child trauma and saving counties thousands of dollars per child.
- Less time in out-of-home placement
 - A child served by a CASA averages one less month in out-of-home placement per year again diminishing trauma to the child while saving thousands.
- Children with a CASA are more likely to improve academically.
- Children with a CASA prove to be more resilient.
 - CASA's become the consistent adult in their lives.
 - Advocates give one on one attention to a child in need that they may not otherwise receive.
- CASA's are truly a champion for children.

The funding Wisconsin CASA has already received has been incredibly helpful in moving the needle on caring for Wisconsin's abused children. We respectfully ask for your continued financial support to move it even faster.

Sincerely,

Susan Schwartz

Susan Schwartz

State Director of Wisconsin CASA Association

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Attached: 2020 Impact Report

CASA in Wisconsin

2020 IMPACT

Who We Are



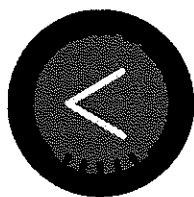
545 Advocates

gave a voice and
hopeful future to

935 Children



Benefits of CASA



Children spend less time in the child welfare system

Children do better in school

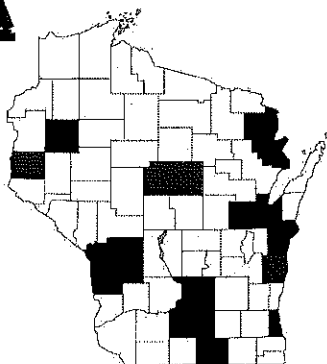


Children are less likely to re-enter out of
home care

Need for CASA



6,000+
Wisconsin
children
are waiting for a
CASA Advocate



60 of
Wisconsin's 72
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CASA program

Wisconsin CASA Association

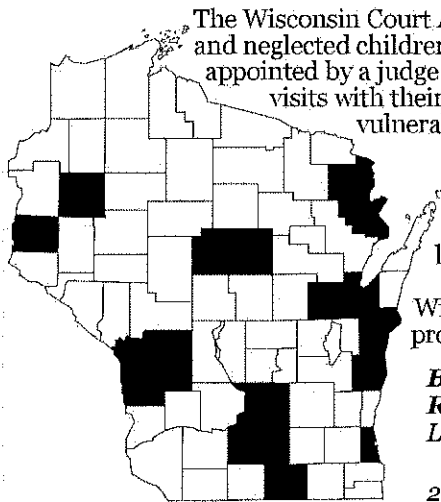
PO Box 11412 | Green Bay WI 54307 | wisconsin-casa.org | 920-493-4856

CASA Impact Report

2020 edition



The Need for CASA



The Wisconsin Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Association champions and gives a voice to abused and neglected children by supporting and growing local CASA programs. CASA's are trained citizen volunteers appointed by a judge to advocate for the best interest of children in the child welfare system. Through weekly visits with their assigned child, CASA's provide an additional layer of safety while amplifying the voice of vulnerable children.

The need for CASA programs is clear. In 2020, more than 7,000 Wisconsin children were eligible for a CASA. Statewide, 545 Advocates volunteered more than 20,000 hours to serve 935 children. Local CASA programs serve 12 of the 72 Wisconsin counties, leaving great opportunities for growth.

Wisconsin CASA Association is working diligently to support current and future local programs so the 6,000 unserved children receive an Advocate.

Blue counties have existing CASA programs.

Red counties are projected to have programs in 2021 or 2022, including the Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe.

2020 data

What Sets CASA Apart

How is CASA different? Here's what sets us apart:

- ◇ CASA requires volunteers to receive **specialized training** before they are appointed by a judge. The initial training is 30 hours. Each year CASA's participate in 12 hours of continued education to ensure up to date access to trending issues and resources.
- ◇ CASA Advocates are **supervised by professional staff**.
- ◇ Trained Advocates are **sworn by the court**, reporting to the judge presiding over the child's case. The Advocate continues to share the child's wishes until the CHIPS order concludes.
- ◇ While social workers, foster parents and kinship may change, an **Advocate's consistent presence** leaves a positive, lasting impact on the child.
- ◇ **CASA works**. Studies show that children with a CASA do better in school, spend less time in the child welfare system and are less likely to return to out of home placement.

How We Support Local Programs

The Wisconsin CASA Association supports and expands local CASA programs throughout the state, ensuring all local programs have an efficient model to recruit volunteers and serve as many children as possible.

Among the many resources provided to local programs are:

- **Wisconsin CASA portal:** an online system for network communication, data collection, sharing best practices and monthly newsletters.
- **20th anniversary webinar series:** continued education for Advocates and staff on trending topics.
- **Bi-Monthly Trainings:** network collaboration to share ideas and best practices.
- **Specialized education** opportunities for Advocate trainers.
- On-going **statewide awareness campaign**.
- Wisconsin CASA meets with local, state and federal legislators to educate them on the CASA mission; and facilitates interagency collaborations.

What the Judge has to say



"Advocates are the one constant in a child's life during the time they are involved in a Minor in Need of Care case. Being removed from one's home is especially traumatizing for a child and CASA often fills the void when a friendly face is needed."

"My job as the Tribal Judge would be so much more gratifying if I had access to a well written CASA report as it offers another view into the child's life while placed out of the home. As a former CASA in Texas, it was my honor to serve the children and to know that my voice was important to the Judge."

- Judge Elaine Smith,
Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe

Expansion into nine new counties is projected through 2023.

Find us @WisconsinCASA



Challenges to Serving More Children

While there's promise that these numbers can change quickly (as there was a 30% increase in children served from 2017 to 2019), there are existing challenges and barriers to providing high quality advocacy to all eligible children throughout the state.

They include:

- Children in out-of-home placements for longer periods of time due to **addiction epidemic** (opioid, heroin, etc.).
- **Lack of funding** to build capacity in existing local programs as well as funding to launch new local programs in unserved counties.
- **Time constraints:** It takes about 18 months to start a new CASA program.
- **Need for additional staff** to supervise additional Advocates, causing waiting lists for children.
- Right now, **9 counties and the Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe are waiting** to develop new local programs.

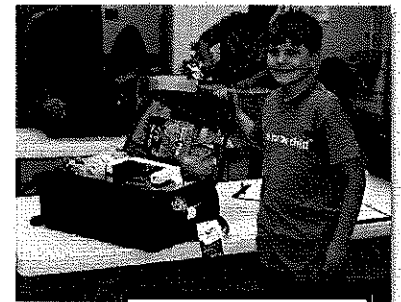
Additional funding provides more resources, decreasing the timeline to develop more programs and serve more children.



My Stuff, My Bag

Imagine being a child in foster care, moving from home to home with just a few possessions. Many of these children carry their possessions in a garbage bag. Wisconsin CASA is changing that with the My Stuff, My Bag (MSMB) initiative.

MSMB provides CASA children with a suitcase filled with comfort items and necessities, including a pillow, blanket, stuffed animal, pajamas, socks, underwear, toothbrush/paste, shampoo and conditioner. The suitcases provide a way to carry their belongings while offering a sense of ownership and pride.



2020 packing event

The program began in June 2019 with support from the Green Bay Packers Give Back Celebrity Bowling Event. To date, thousands of items have been donated by Wisconsinans for the suitcases.

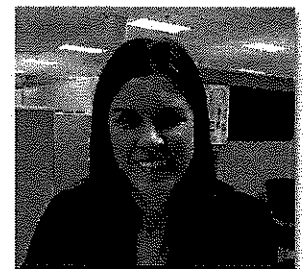
Wisconsin CASA hopes to bring this positivity to every Wisconsin child removed from their family of origin. To learn more about the initiative and how to donate, visit: www.wisconsin-casa.org.

Advocate Answers

Fascinating, fun, frustrating, hopeful, inspiring and joyful. That's how Jennifer from Manitowoc would describe her first eight years as a Court Appointed Special Advocate.

In 2013, Jennifer's own children were in high school and becoming more independent, allowing her time to explore volunteer opportunities in her community. She saw a flyer for CASA at work and began researching the child advocacy organization, instantly intrigued by spending time with and helping children in need while receiving the formal training and report-writing.

"I really enjoyed the initial training, learning about child protective services and foster care systems, and hearing from social workers, law enforcement, judges and Advocates who shared their knowledge and experiences with CASA," said Jennifer.



Jennifer, CASA of East Central WI Advocate

An Advocate for CASA of East Central Wisconsin, Jennifer has served six CASA cases to-date, working with boys and girls from 11 months to 9 years old. She's let the children lead which activities they do together during their weekly visits, sometimes playing with Play Doh or Legos, blowing bubbles or creating their own game.

While she loves spending time with the children and making a difference in their lives, what's surprised Jennifer the most over the years is the impact she's left on the child's caregivers, lending an ear and listening to their concerns.

"That's what makes CASA unique; volunteering while providing a service to an entire family," she added. "On paper that might sound intimidating, but once you've gone through the training and become an Advocate, it's not as difficult or time-consuming as you might have thought. There's a lot of flexibility as an Advocate...you don't need to be a social butterfly or expert report writer. You just need to be YOU!"



Wisconsin CASA Association
Member of the National CASA Association

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