

Kids Count Data Statistics

- 667,738 children are confirmed victims of child abuse nationally.
- 6,496 WV children are confirmed victims of child abuse.
- 437,465 children are separated from their families.
- 6,358 WV children are in foster care.
- 111,820 children in foster care are waiting for adoption nationally.
- 1,988 WV children in foster care are waiting for adoption.



In Foster Care

- Too often a child can be placed in a different home than his siblings.
- Too often a child can experience three to five different foster placements in a year.
- Too often children can wait for years without finding a stable home, only to age out of the system.
- Too often children believe they are at fault.

What is a CASA?

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) is a trained citizen who is appointed by a judge to represent the best interests of a child in court. All of the children are victims of abuse and neglect, and have been removed from their homes. Children helped by CASAs include those for whom placement is being determined in circuit court.

What is the CASA volunteer's role?

CASA volunteers research the child's circumstances, determine relevant facts in a child's case and report this information to the court. Their work helps to support the court's decision concerning the child's future. A CASA volunteer focuses his or her recommendations and actions to ensure the best interests of the child are being met. A CASA will also monitor a case—making sure that the services ordered are actually provided and that the court is informed of any new developments. Every case is unique, but a CASA often must recommend to the court whether or not a child should be reunified with his or her biological parents, be placed in foster care, or be available for adoption with another family. Though the final decision always rests with the judge, a CASA volunteer does his or her best to inform the court as an independent and objective voice for the child. The CASA is the child's voice in the courtroom.

How does a CASA gather information to establish recommendations to the court?

To prepare recommendations, a CASA volunteer talks with the child, parents, family members, caseworkers, school officials, health providers and others who have knowledge of the child's history. A CASA volunteer observes interactions between the child and parent, visits the parent's home, and

reviews documents and case-related material (i.e. school records, medical records, children services records, etc.) pertaining to the child. Collectively, the information gathered is analyzed in order to form a recommendation. In other words, a CASA talks with people that may have a "piece" of information that helps give the Judge the "big picture" so he or she has a better understanding of the child and his or her life to make more informed decisions for the child's best interest on obtaining safe, permanent homes, as quickly as possible.

How does the role of a CASA volunteer differ from a social worker?

In West Virginia, social workers are generally employed by the county government's Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR). They sometimes are responsible for as many as 30 or more cases at a time, which limits the time they have to spend with each child. The CASA works with only one child or 2-3 siblings at a time and therefore, has more time to research each child's individual needs. The CASA volunteer does not replace a social worker on a case; he or she is an independent appointee of the court assigned to thoroughly research the child's case, explore community resources, and make a recommendation to the court, independent of agency restrictions.

How does the role of a CASA volunteer differ from an attorney?

The CASA volunteer does not provide legal representation in the courtroom. That is the role of the attorney. However, the CASA volunteer does provide crucial background information that assists attorneys in presenting their cases.

continued on the other side



CASA of Marion County

112 Adams Street, Rm. 205, Fairmont WV 26554

• Phone: 304-366-4198 • Fax: 304-366-4695 • casaofmarion@frontier.com

Is there a “typical” CASA volunteer?

CASA volunteers come from all walks of life, with a variety of professional, educational, and ethnic backgrounds. Volunteers are both male and female. We have volunteers who work full or part time jobs, some are students, and other volunteers are retired. Because the children served by CASA volunteers are diverse in background and need, we strive to recruit volunteers diverse in skill.

How does the CASA volunteer relate to the child he or she represents?

CASA volunteers offer children trust and advocacy during complex legal proceedings. They explain to the child the events that are happening, the reason they are in court, and the roles the judge, lawyers, and social workers play. CASA volunteers also encourage the child to express his or her own opinion and hopes, while remaining objective observers.

How much time does it require to be a CASA volunteer?

Each case is different. When a case is initially assigned, a CASA may spend five to ten hours per week researching the case history and conducting interviews. Volunteers spend anywhere from five to fifteen hours a month thereafter. Some cases may continue for two years or longer and volunteers are asked to commit until a case has been closed. Because caseworker and service provider turnover is very high, often the CASA volunteer is the only consistent presence in the child’s life.

How are CASA volunteers screened?

Prospective volunteers undergo a rigorous screening process that involves personal interviews, reference checks, state and federal criminal background checks, Child Abuse Registry checks, and a local Child Protective Services background check. Only volunteers who have the time, interest, ability, and commitment to serve as a CASA are selected.

Do CASA volunteers receive training?

Yes, CASA volunteers receive thorough training. The pre-service training takes a minimum of 30 hours. Through this training volunteers learn about courtroom procedure from those in the profession—judges, lawyers, social workers and

court personnel. Volunteers also learn effective advocacy techniques for children and are educated about specific topics ranging from child sexual abuse to how to give a report in court. The culmination of the pre-service training is the swearing-in ceremony by the local circuit court judge. Volunteers also have opportunities during the course of the year to attend in-service trainings, which focus on relevant and timely topics. In addition, CASA volunteers are required to complete 12 hours of in-service training annually.

On average, how many cases does a CASA carry at any given time?

Although the number may vary, the average is one or two cases. Keeping a low caseload is important because it allows the CASA volunteer to have a thorough knowledge of the case and time necessary to provide quality advocacy. In overburdened child welfare and court systems, this one-on-one attention helps keep vulnerable children from slipping through the cracks.

Are there any other agencies or groups that provide the same service?

No. There are other child advocacy organizations, but CASA is the only program where volunteers are appointed by the court to represent a child’s best interests.

Are CASA volunteer programs effective?

The US Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General (OIG) conducted an audit of the National CASA Association and found the following:

- Children with a CASA volunteer are substantially less likely to spend time in long-term foster care, defined as more than 3 years in care: 13.3% for CASA cases versus 27.0% of all children in foster care.
- When a CASA volunteer was involved, both children and their parents were ordered by the courts to receive more services.
- Cases involving a CASA volunteer are more likely to be “permanently closed” (i.e., the children are less likely to reenter the child welfare system) than cases where a CASA volunteer is not involved.

One person can make the difference for the life of a child in foster care—a CASA volunteer. Since 1997, CASA volunteers from Marion County have done just that for over 500 children who came into the system because of abuse and neglect. They made sure these children found their way to a safe home. More children enter the child welfare system every month.

Help us create new beginnings for more children who yearn to grow up in the safety and love of family.

CASA volunteer opportunities are always available, please contact us:

CASA of Marion County • 304-366-4198 • casaofmarion@frontier.com

I am for the child™

