CASA Minnesota

2024 Annual Report

CASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN
CASA MINNESOTA

Dear friends and supporters,

As I reflect on our work over the past year, I am filled with pride and gratitude for the remarkable progress we have made together at CASA MN. This momentum has solidified our commitment to serving the most vulnerable children in our community.

This year, one of our greatest achievements was preserving the volunteer Guardian ad Litem (GAL) program. Our community rallied in support, reinforcing the vital role volunteers play in giving foster children a voice in the court system. While defending the program, we continued serving kids, providing them with the advocacy they need to navigate foster care. Through our CASA Cares program, we provide direct enrichment grants allowing children to enjoy new bikes, summer camps, extracurricular activities, and cultural experiences.

More than ever, we recognize that collaboration is key to building bright futures for children in foster and kinship care. CASA MN is committed to working closely with community members and state GAL employees to meet the needs of children in foster care. By fostering strong partnerships and open communication, we can create a more effective and supportive system for the children we serve.

The combined efforts of our dedicated volunteers and generous donors are leaving a lasting impact on the lives of children. The stories in our annual report showcase how our diverse community offers hope, stability, and opportunities for children to thrive.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to expanding our reach and services, confident that with your continued partnership, we will achieve even greater milestones next year.

Thank you for being a vital part of the CASA MN team—your support transforms lives and creates brighter futures.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Gerard Bodell
Board President, CASA MN

MISSION

The mission of CASA MN is to support and promote court-appointed volunteers who advocate for abused and neglected children so that they can be safe, establish permanency, and have the opportunity to thrive.

At CASA MN, we are motivated to create an environment where every child in foster care feels supported, heard, and valued. We are dedicated to empowering our volunteers and ensuring they have the tools and support needed to make a meaningful impact for children and families.

We also believe that all children deserve equal opportunity to move, connect, and learn, through essential childhood experiences. Through our CASA Cares program, we fulfill enrichment grants so that the spark of childhood can come to life.

NATIONAL RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

As part of a national network, CASA MN benefits from extensive resources and shared expertise. This connection empowers us with best practices and innovative approaches, enhancing our local efforts and ensuring the highest level of advocacy and support for children in foster care right here in Minnesota.

941
state organizations and local programs

49
states with CASA/GAL programs

88,000
national volunteers

GUARDIANS AD LITEM

What Is A Guardian Ad Litem?

A guardian ad litem (GAL) is a trained professional who advocates solely for the best interests of a child in foster care. Acting as the "center of the wheel," the GAL coordinates with various professionals and stakeholders—lawyers, therapists, doctors, teachers, foster parents, and biological parents—to connect all parties involved in the child's life.

The goal of the GAL is to ensure that the child's needs and best interests are prioritized in the legal process, particularly during court hearings where decisions related to educational and medical needs, family visits, and living arrangements are made on the child's behalf. Once assigned to a child, the GAL works to build rapport and trust with the child, monitors their well-being, performs home visits, and advocates for the services and living arrangements that best support the child's healing and development.

The ultimate objective is to move children out of the foster care system and into a safe, permanent, and nurturing home—whether through reunification with biological parents, placement with relatives, or adoption. **GALs ensure that in the often overburdened system, the child's voice and best interests are never overlooked.**

How do volunteer GALs fit into the child welfare system?

A volunteer has the same role and responsibility as a state-employed GAL, but their involvement is voluntary. CASA volunteers receive extensive training before being assigned to a child's case and must complete annual continuing education.

Volunteers typically take on just 1-2 cases at a time, allowing them to connect deeply with the children they serve. Small caseloads enable CASA volunteers to be a consistent and stable presence in the child's life, following the case from start to finish.

GUARDIANS AD LITEM

Preserving The Volunteer Program

Minnesota has a long history of CASA volunteers advocating for foster children in Hennepin and Ramsey counties. However, volunteer recruitment was paused by the state in 2020 leading to a decline in volunteers. In January, the State Guardian ad Litem Board considered ending the program, but the motion did not pass. Fortunately, volunteer recruitment was reinstated this August, marking a fresh start for the program.

Children Need And Deserve More Resources, Not Fewer

We are committed to working in partnership with state-employed GALs to provide the best possible services for children. CASA volunteers are additional resources who can contribute to and amplify the great work of employed advocates, while also being able to shift and adapt to meet changing needs within the system.

CASA volunteers come from diverse backgrounds and have diverse lived and professional experiences. This diversity becomes a significant asset when a CASA volunteer shares a common culture with the child or has experiences that resonate with the child's circumstances. This connection helps the volunteer advocate effectively on the child's behalf. It is well documented that children with a CASA volunteer have fewer placements, have more services ordered on their behalf, and report significantly higher levels of hope.

CASA CARES

CASA Cares is our flagship, statewide grant program that provides children in foster and kinship care with opportunities for enrichment that are too often missing from the lives of kids who are in the child welfare system.

Whether it is a new bike, a week at summer camp, or joining the dance team, the experiences that CASA Cares supports are not only fun and joyful, but they also play a crucial role in shaping who a child will become.

YOU make it possible for kids to engage with their community, build confidence, learn new skills and simply enjoy being kids and this year. Your generosity helped make this our biggest year ever.

123
Children supported through CASA Cares grants

1 - 18
Ages of grant recipients

45%
Increase in number of grants awarded from last year

81%
grant recipients that are children of color

A CASA Cares grant helps to lay the foundation for a child's future by building confidence, keeping them active, and allowing them to explore their interests.

We are committed to supporting children across Minnesota with enrichment opportunities that help them **MOVE**, **CONNECT**, and **LEARN**

FY24 Finances

As a small nonprofit with a volunteer working board, we are committed to being strong financial stewards of the investment we receive from the community. CASA MN is also committed to sustainably growing our program because every child in foster care deserves to feel supported, heard, and valued.

$45,400
raised from community champions and dedicated partners

77%
of dollars went directly to serving kids and supporting volunteers

$245
average donation

PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

It takes a community to ensure all of our children are supported.

Bunce Performing Arts tells stories of hope and encouragement to the Twin Cities community and offers access to theatrical opportunities to people of all ages through affordable, high-quality theatre productions.

Bunce Performing Arts donates 50% of the proceeds from their annual summer theater productions to local nonprofit partners. CASA MN is grateful to be the recipient of proceeds from their production of The Little Mermaid in 2024.

CASA MN BOARD

CASA MN is run by a dedicated volunteer working board who are committed to advocating for children, recruiting volunteers, and ensuring that every child feels valued.

Gerard Bodell
President

Kristen McKittrick
Vice President

Maurice Harris
Secretary

Megan Schnackenberg
Treasurer

Kayla Payeur

Emily Rogers

Mike Tikkanen

Sarah Washington

GET INVOLVED

Donate

Make a gift today to ensure every child is able to experience the magic of childhood and that we continue to have an active and diverse volunteer GAL force serving the best interests of kids and families.

Become a volunteer GAL

If you are ready to play a unique and meaningful role in the life of a child, become a volunteer Guardian ad Litem and help ensure their voice is heard.

Volunteer

Your time and talent could make a meaningful difference in our work and our ability to serve more kids and families.

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Minnesota is a member of the National Court Appointed Special Advocates Association (National CASA).

Learn more at casamn.org or reach out to us at info@casamn.org.

CASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN
CASA MINNESOTA