CASA Minnesota

2025 Annual Report

CASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN
CASA MINNESOTA

Dear friends and supporters,

This past year has shown what is possible when determination and collaboration come together on behalf of kids. Together, CASA Minnesota and the Minnesota Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Board moved with a renewed sense of urgency to rebuild and strengthen the volunteer GAL program that is essential for children in foster and kinship care.

As the state put in place new volunteer supervisors to provide the leadership and resources our volunteers need to be successful, we at CASA MN focused our efforts on volunteer recruitment. We launched a new messaging campaign and updated our website making it easier than ever for potential volunteers to learn more and complete an application.

This spring, for the first time in more than five years, we welcomed a new class of volunteer GALs.

It was a moment made possible by the passion of the CASA MN community, the leadership of the state GAL program, and the resiliency of our community members. They did not waiver in their commitment to volunteer their time and talents to serve kids in foster care.

At the same time, our CASA Cares program continued to create meaningful opportunities for children throughout the state that encourage them to move, connect, and learn.

The stories in this report reflect what is possible when volunteers, donors, and community partners work together with purpose. With your continued support, we will build on this year's momentum and expand our reach to serve even more children in the year ahead.

Thank you for being an essential part of the CASA Minnesota community.

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 children in foster care. GALs may be employed by the state or serve as volunteers. Volunteer GALs take on smaller caseloads, but relieve pressure on an overburdened system and ensure more kids receive consistent, individualized attention.

Every GAL serves as the “center of the wheel,” coordinating with lawyers, therapists, teachers, medical providers, foster parents, and biological parents to ensure everyone involved understands the child’s needs. GALs build trust with the children they serve, conduct home visits, monitor well-being, and make recommendations in court about services, stability, and safety.

Ultimately, GALs help move children toward safe, permanent homes—whether through reunification, placement with relatives, or adoption—making sure that **in a complex and crowded system, the child’s voice is never overlooked.**

GUARDIANS AD LITEM

Rebuilding a Strong Volunteer Program Through Partnership

For more than five years, volunteer recruitment and training within the Minnesota GAL program were paused. During that time, the number of active volunteer GALs steadily declined, and the effects were felt across the system. With fewer volunteers available to take cases, some children entered foster care without an assigned Guardian ad Litem, someone whose sole responsibility is to speak up for their best interests.

When the pause was lifted at the beginning of 2025, CASA MN moved quickly to help rebuild this critical part of the child protection system. We launched a statewide advertising campaign to educate the public about the role of GALs and the pressing need for more volunteers. Our message reached Minnesotans across digital platforms, calling on community members to step forward for children.

Powering Minnesota's Volunteer Re-launch

National CASA played a pivotal role in rebuilding Minnesota's volunteer GAL program. In addition to awarding a grant that helped fund our statewide advertising campaign, the national organization provided compelling "Change a Child's Story™" content that strengthened our outreach.

Ads like this one seen across Facebook, Instragram, and LinkedIn generated

Over 100,000 Impressions

Almost 40,000 Views

Directly resulting in

68 qualified candidate applications

GUARDIANS AD LITEM

The response has been remarkable. Nearly 100 people submitted applications to become volunteer GALs. Of those, almost 70 advanced in the screening process, and 31 have already completed training and begun advocating for children on their own caseloads. These new volunteers represent an important step toward reducing gaps in service and ensuring that more children receive consistent, individualized advocacy.

100 Applications → **70** Progressing → **31** Trained Volunteers

Building the Infrastructure Volunteers and Kids Deserve

Rebuilding a statewide volunteer program requires more than goodwill. It requires structure, resources, and ongoing support for those dedicating their time to Minnesota's children. CASA Minnesota pursued and secured funding to meet these needs. We are deeply grateful for the support of local foundations which have allowed us to expand outreach, refine training, and invest in volunteer recognition that boosts retention.

Looking Ahead

The partnership between CASA Minnesota and the State GAL Board has laid the foundation for a revitalized volunteer program that is more visible, more accessible, and better supported than ever before. With new processes, communication pathways, and recruitment efforts firmly underway, we are moving closer to our shared goal: ensuring that every child in Minnesota's child protection system has a dedicated advocate who will stand with them, listen to them, and fight for their best interests.

We remain deeply grateful to the Minnesota State Guardian ad Litem Board for their collaboration, and to the funders whose generosity has made this year's progress possible. Together, we are rebuilding a volunteer GAL program capable of serving children across the state with strength, sustainability, and compassion.

New Volunteer Spotlight

Hilary was drawn to the volunteer GAL role through her lifelong commitment to helping children. After a 35 year teaching career, she wanted to continue serving young people in a meaningful way.

While she brought a strong background in child development and direct experience with vulnerable children, she also knew that not all volunteers come from a child-focused profession and that **the role welcomes people from many different backgrounds.** For Hilary, the legal system was new territory, and the opportunity to learn something different was part of the appeal.

From the start, **Hilary felt well supported.** That encouragement made her transition from training to taking on her own case feel both welcoming and manageable.

> *"The veteran GALs, both staff and volunteers, have been incredibly supportive and helpful. They have patiently answered my many questions. I am very grateful for the spirit of helpfulness."*

One of her **most meaningful early moments** came while shadowing a home visit, where she met a baby who had experienced significant trauma at birth. Hearing the foster mother describe the baby's responses and healing process left a deep impression. Hilary recalled being "both shocked at how profoundly important the first few days of life are and amazed at the love and commitment on the part of this baby's foster mom."

Moments like this reaffirm why she felt called to the role. "I feel privileged that I am able to advocate for vulnerable children," Hilary said. The work fits into the rhythm of her life, offering the flexibility she needs to balance other volunteer commitments and family priorities.

Hilary hopes more people will explore the role and discover what it has meant for her: the chance to learn, grow, and make a lasting difference. Above all, Hilary wants people to understand the importance of having an advocate focused solely on the child. As she put it simply and powerfully: **"We are the child's voice."**

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. Your generosity helped make this our biggest year ever.

130+
Children supported through CASA Cares grants

1 - 17
Ages of grant recipients

85%
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.**

FY25 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 through increased investments in CASA Cares grants as well as investing in our volunteer program through increased recruitment, training, support and recognition efforts because every child in foster care deserves to feel supported, heard, and valued.

$66,500

raised from community champions and dedicated partners

81%

of dollars went directly to serving kids and supporting volunteers

Powerful Partnership

CASA MN is deeply grateful for the generous support of our partnering Foundations this year. Their funding strengthened every stage of our volunteer program—recruitment, training, and volunteer recognition—helping us rebuild a strong pipeline of dedicated advocates. Thanks to their partnership, more children in Minnesota's foster care system now have a trained, caring adult focused solely on their best interests.

Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation

Sauer Family Foundation

Minnesota State Bar Foundation

CASA Minnesota fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30

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 workforce 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.

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