



**Nebraska CASA Association**  
**CASA Fund Final Report FY 2015/16**  
**July 29, 2016**

As required by LB463, Nebraska CASA issues this report to the Supreme Court, State Court Administrator, Clerk of the Legislature, and the Governor regarding the Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Fund. The CASA Fund was established by the 2011 Nebraska Legislature to recruit and train CASA volunteers, to develop new CASA programs or expand current CASA programs into areas not currently served and to create new and innovative programming for CASA.

Twenty-two local CASA programs in 43 Nebraska counties recruit, screen, train and supervise volunteers who are appointed by Judges to speak in court for the safety and well-being of children who have been abused or neglected. The Nebraska CASA Association partners with those local CASA programs, providing leadership, quality assurance, training, technical assistance and funding. The information in this report pertains to fiscal year July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016.

The CASA Fund has succeeded in its goal toward assisting the network of CASA programs in Nebraska to provide a CASA volunteer for every child who needs one by the year 2020. Nebraska State Statutes and the National CASA Standards for Local CASA Programs require a minimum of 30 hours of pre-service training before a volunteer is assigned to a case. In addition, State Statutes require a minimum of 10 and National CASA Standards 12 annual hours of continuing education for volunteers.

Volunteers were involved in 28,807 hours of training, projects, office volunteering, board meetings, support groups, travel, and other meetings and trainings. Volunteers had 7,668 contacts with the children served and logged 190,942 miles. There were 770 volunteers who participated in new or continuing training. For the fifth fiscal year, there is a marked increase in the number of active volunteers. The end of FY 11/12 there were 421 active volunteers, 480 volunteers for FY 12/13, 663 volunteers for FY 13/14, 726 volunteers for FY 14/15, and 770 volunteers for FY 15/16. That is an average growth rate of 17% per year.

Not all volunteers who are recruited are able to complete the training and/or be assigned cases. Prospective volunteers discontinue initial training for any number of reasons, including schedule changes, moving from the area or the discovery that this is not the appropriate volunteer match. In addition, local

CASA programs use this 30 hours of training as part of the screening process to ensure volunteers are appropriate for the job of serving as an advocate for abused and neglected children. Of the more than 350 volunteers recruited during the year, 226 completed initial training and were assigned to cases. This is 48 more than in the previous fiscal year.

The cost for training the 226 new volunteers and continuing education for active volunteers in 2014-15 was \$311 per volunteer.

Recruitment is vital to local CASA programs. New volunteers need to be recruited to serve additional cases and to replace retiring or redirected volunteers. Volunteers are asked to serve for at least one year after completing training and to remain with a child until her or his court case is closed. Almost all volunteers fulfill both of those obligations and more. This is an intense volunteer obligation, in this fiscal year 118 volunteers left the program in Nebraska, which is a much higher number than previous years.

### **New and Expanding Programs**

Southeast Nebraska CASA - This program, formerly known as Seward County CASA, has now expanded into Jefferson, Saline, Gage and Saunders Counties. Each County has committed to providing funding and support to the program and the communities are supportive. Volunteers have been recruited, screened and trained in each county. The program has been working on challenges of distance for staff and volunteers to travel and funding.

Prairie Plains CASA - In addition to Red Willow, Furnas and Hitchcock this program is now serving Frontier, Hayes and Dundee Counties. In this fiscal year, Memorandums of Understanding were signed by judges; county boards were presented with information on the program; and new volunteers were recruited and trained in these counties. Two experienced volunteers attended new volunteer facilitator training and have begun providing the required 30 hours of training to new volunteers.

CASA served 41 courts during the year. Local CASA programs served the county courts in the following counties:

Adams	*Gage	Madison
*Arthur	Garden	Merrick
Buffalo	Gosper	Nuckolls
Cass	Hall	Otoe
*Chase	Hamilton	Platte
Cheyenne	Harlan	Red Willow
Clay	*Hayes	Saline
Colfax	Hitchcock	Saunders
Dawson	Howard	Scotts Bluff
Dodge	Jefferson	Seward
*Dundee	Kearney	Webster
Fillmore	Keith	
Furnas	Lincoln	

\* New or re-served counties

Local CASA programs also serve the separate juvenile courts in the following counties:

Douglas    Lancaster    Sarpy

**1900 children were served by CASA volunteers during the fiscal year.** Nebraska CASA programs continue to move toward our goal of serving every child who needs a CASA by serving **292 more children** than in the previous fiscal year.

### **New and Innovative Programming**

In addition to Prairie Plains CASA training experienced volunteers to provide new volunteer training, other programs have increased efficiencies through the expanded utilization of volunteers. CASA for Douglas County continues to use the Peer Coordinator Model. This model trains experienced volunteers to supervise up to 11 new volunteers. Paid staff then supervise the Peer Coordinators. In the past fiscal year, CASA for Lancaster County has trained new Peer Coordinators and are now using this model.

The network of CASA programs in Nebraska CASA continues to work toward the long and short term outcomes in our logic model. <sup>1</sup> The University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) completed a pilot project of quantitative data gathering and analysis of the Sarpy County program in the previous fiscal year to assess our ability to measure outcomes on children served. It was

determined that our current data system was insufficient. An update of all data system licenses and additional licenses for programs expanding into new counties were purchased. Training was held October 26-28 for local and statewide staff on the upgrade as well as the specific data that Nebraska CASA programs are targeting to utilize for individual child outcomes.

The other challenge uncovered in our pilot project is that CASA programs are not receiving all of the information regarding children served. Information on placement changes, school information, services to children and families and foster families is not being provided to CASA. Nebraska CASA Association is actively examining avenues available to ensure this information is provided by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services in the next fiscal year.

Previous year's assessments of CASA programming including, *Judges' Perceptions of the Nebraska CASA Program* are available on our web-site <http://www.takethenextsteps.org/casa>.

Funding was provided to programs and contractors as follows:

<b>Program</b>	<b>Recruitment &amp; Training</b>	<b>New &amp; Expanding</b>	<b>Innovative</b>
CASA Connection	7,498.00		
CASA For Douglas County	31,300.00		
CASA for Lancaster County	22,300.00		
CASA for York County	7,300.00		
CASA of Northeast Nebraska	6,084.00		
CASA of Scotts Bluff County	9,533.00		
CASA of South Central Nebraska	11,100.00		
CASA Project of Dodge County	0.00		
Cass County CASA	6,700.00		
Cheyenne County CASA	4,559.00		
Dawson/Gosper County CASA	10,267.00		
Fillmore County CASA	3,939.00		
Heartland CASA	8,491.00		
Kearney/Buffalo County CASA	15,200.00		
Keith/Perkins County CASA	7,557.00		
Lincoln County CASA	7,700.00		
Otoe County CASA	6,700.00		
Phelps/Harlan County CASA	6,959.00		
Prairie Plains CASA	5,291.00	5,081.00	
Sarpy County CASA	26,300.00		
Saunders County CASA	5,709.00		
Southeast Nebraska CASA	7,705.00	5,500.00	
Cost for statewide Conference speakers & supplies		5,304.00	
UNO			4,129.00
CasaManager Licenses		944.00	1,371.00
CasaManager Technical Assistance			12,259.00
CasaManager training costs			5,992.00
Training travel costs for local staff & volunteers		1,341.00	4,335.00
NE CASA	21,808.00	11,830.00	1,914.00
<b>Total Expended</b>	<b>240,000.00</b>	<b>30,000.00</b>	<b>30,000.00</b>

## **A brief overview of some successes during fiscal year 2016-2017**

Nebraska CASA focuses on expansion of programs in current counties serving many children in foster care. Douglas and Sarpy Counties have nearly one-half of all foster care children served in their Juvenile Court. A successful recruitment campaign continues in this geographic area. Since the CASA Fund began in 2011-12, these programs have grown the infrastructure to support additional volunteers serving more abused and neglected children.

In Douglas County a total of 341 inquiries and applications from interested volunteers were made. CASA for Douglas County hosted 8 training sessions, two of these with an afternoon or evening option to attend each training session. As a result 76 new volunteers were sworn in and a CASA Volunteer was assigned to 166 new children, for a total of 385 children served in the grant period.

Sarpy County CASA continues to provide a Visitation Center staffed by 10 volunteers. Thirty families have utilized the Bellevue Visitation Center in this reporting period. Because of increased requests, the center is now open 7 days per week providing safe, secure space for parents to have supervised visits with their children and learn parenting skills. Sarpy County CASA also celebrated their 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in April and is the longest-serving program in the state.

Nebraska CASA Association provided two pre-service volunteer facilitator trainings in central and eastern Nebraska for new CASA staff. These three day trainings were attended by 21 staff members and 2 experienced volunteers from 11 local programs. This expands our capacity to train new child advocates.

Nebraska CASA Association continues to provide "Fostering Futures" training as requested to local programs. This year a training for volunteers serving older foster youth was held in Omaha. Facilitator trainings in eastern and central Nebraska for 14 local staff members were also provided. These local staff can now provide volunteers with additional skills and education to assist youth in aging out of the Foster Care system.

The Nebraska CASA Association State Conference was attended by 100 CASA Volunteers and staff from 20 local programs. Judge Douglas Johnson provided information on Judge's expectations of CASA. Substance abuse and diversity were the other educational topics.

## **Stories of the difference a CASA volunteer made in the lives of children:**

Johnny is a 17 year old boy who entered the system as a toddler. He and his brother were adopted after their parents relinquished custody. He was again abandoned when, 2 years later, the adoptive couple could not handle his behavior. Since 2007, Johnny has lived in 12 placements including 2 institutional facilities. He has attended 6 different schools and had 5 different caseworkers. Through it all, Kelly has been his CASA and the constant caring adult in his life. Kelly's reports were responsible for the court's requirement that a therapist specializing in trauma and attachment disorders treat him. Through the Family Finding program, distant relatives of Johnny were found and he was adopted on April 5, 2016 at 17 years of age.

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As a young child, Abbie reported abuse to several adults. The reports were followed up but were deemed unfounded. Finally in the summer before her junior year in high school, Abbie was removed from the abusive situation.

Abbie was placed in a foster home. The foster mother was extremely controlling. Abbie was forced to quit school activities so she could work two jobs. Finally the CASA volunteer was successful in convincing Abbie's caseworker that the placement was not a healthy environment for Abbie.

At the same time, Abbie turned 18 years old and was able to go into independent living. Her CASA was able to find her a place to live with an older woman who lived alone. This has been the best possible placement for Abbie and the woman she lives with enjoys her company. It has worked well for both of them.

Abbie graduated from high school this spring and will start college in August. She plans to be a nurse. The Bridge to Independence Program will start assisting her on her 19<sup>th</sup> birthday.

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There were three children who came into the system at ages 1, 3, and 4. A report was filed through the Nebraska toll free child abuse hotline that all the children were living in a dirty house with parents who were using drugs. Child Protective services assessed the house was unlivable. There was dog feces on the floor, dirty diapers all over the house, dirty dishes that hadn't been washed in months. The uncovered mattresses for the children were on the floor covered in dead cockroaches. A mouse had made a nest in the baby's mattress. The children were taken to the local hospital and hair follicle tests revealed they all had drugs in their system due to exposure.

The children were made wards of the state and a CASA volunteer was immediately assigned to the case. It took almost four years for the children to find safety and permanency. During these four years, the children lived in six different foster homes, went to three therapists, were assigned five caseworkers, and were placed back into their biological home three times, only to be removed again within months.

Through it all one CASA volunteer kept track of the youth and could communicate the history of the case to each new professional who joined the case. The state was running out of options for placement until the CASA volunteer went to her church and asked if she could put a little article in the bulletin, asking if anyone would be interested in fostering. A family volunteered. All three children were adopted this past November on National Adoption Day finally giving them a safe, loving, stable home.

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A 14 year old youth who was made a state ward in February 2013 was labeled as "unadoptable" due to his lengthy history of non-compliant behaviors and the history of abuse and neglect he had endured at the hands of his father. He was removed from his father in 2010 and had not seen his mother since he was 3 weeks old. He had been in a guardianship with his aunt, but it was dissolved when she could not safely meet his needs.

In November 2013, he was assigned a CASA volunteer couple. They followed him from placement to placement, sometimes involving travel 40 to 100 miles away to include intensive treatment, group home, hospitalizations and foster care.



His CASAs helped him locate extended biological family members providing some family connections in his life. The CASA's have supported him in his recent contacts with his biological mother. He is attending regular high school, has a part-time job, continues to heal in therapy, is getting his driver's permit, and is working with an Independent Living Specialist. In June 2015 a foster family was identified to take placement of him and he is now awaiting upcoming adoption in August 2016.

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### Logic Model for Nebraska CASA Association

**Target population:** Children who have been abused and neglected, and have been appointed to CASA by a juvenile court judge.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff</li> <li>• Funds</li> <li>• Office space</li> <li>• Training materials</li> <li>• Technology and office supplies</li> <li>• Board of Directors</li> <li>• National curriculum</li> <li>• State office</li> <li>• Community support</li> <li>• Access to case information/records</li> <li>• Community referrals</li> </ul>	<p>CASA staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruit, screen, train (pre-service, continuing education), and supervise volunteers</li> <li>• Communicate with systems impacting the child</li> <li>• Complete fundraising and administrative responsibilities</li> <li>• Collaborate with Board of Directors</li> <li>• Engage with the community</li> </ul>	<p>Number of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training sessions completed</li> <li>• Volunteers recruited, screened, trained, and supervised</li> <li>• Continuing education hours completed</li> <li>• Grants and donations received</li> <li>• Community events and contacts</li> </ul>	<p>Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive needed services</li> <li>• Have social supports that are stable and consistent</li> <li>• Have fewer school and placement changes</li> <li>• Have increased independent living skills (older children)</li> <li>• Are not abused/neglected while in out-of-home placement (foster care)</li> </ul> <p>Court:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receives more information on behalf of children</li> <li>• Receives recommendations in best interest of children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase timeliness of permanency for children served</li> <li>• Children have healthy, long-term relationships</li> <li>• Children are safe from child abuse and neglect</li> <li>• Children are thriving</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CASA volunteers</li> </ul>	<p>CASA volunteers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor – facilitate – advocate - investigate</li> <li>• Visit and build relationship with child</li> <li>• Communicate with child’s family, teachers, therapists, foster family, and others</li> <li>• Maintain and review records</li> <li>• Attend court hearings</li> <li>• Write and submit court reports; make recommendations in child’s best interest</li> <li>• Stay with case until child is in a permanent placement</li> </ul>	<p>Number of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children served</li> <li>• Hours volunteered</li> <li>• Miles driven</li> <li>• Contacts with child and others</li> <li>• Court hearings attended</li> <li>• Court reports written, recommendations made and accepted</li> </ul>	<p>Increase in communication and collaboration between systems impacting children</p>	

External factors: racial disparities in child welfare; lack of services available for children and families; presence of poverty, substance abuse, mental health, and domestic violence in families; high incarceration rates; lack of clinical resources for childhood trauma. Collaborating partners: judges, county attorneys, GALs, DHHS, schools, clinical services, foster care system.

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